

ANALYZING LITERARY EMPTINESS AND SUBSTANCE: A PERSPECTIVE INFORMED BY TANG JUNYI'S NEO-CONFUCIAN PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract: The objective of this study is to thoroughly analyze and interpret Tang Junyi's ideas about emptiness and substance in literature and art in a systematic manner. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of Tang Junyi's viewpoints, we initially employed the "close reading method" to carefully examine all of his works. Additionally, we utilized the "conceptual analysis method" to focus on identifying and explaining key concepts in his literary ideas. At the same time, we compared Tang Junyi's ideas with other scholars' research findings, using the "literature comparison method". After conducting a thorough examination, the author concludes that Tang Junyi's perspective on emptiness and substance in literature and art is not an independent intellectual construct, but rather a unique viewpoint formed within the backdrop of traditional Chinese culture and philosophy. This concept is central to his literary theory and serves as a prominent element within his philosophical framework. By exploring the realm of "emptiness and substance" within Tang Junyi's literary ideas, we can gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for his impact on literature and philosophy. This exploration also presents fresh perspectives and conceptual structures for the examination of Chinese literary theory and culture.

Keywords: Tang Junyi. Literary thought. Chinese philosophy. Emptiness and substance. Modern Neo-Confucianism

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Resumen: Este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar e interpretar sistemáticamente los pensamientos de Tang Junyi sobre el vacío y la sustancia en la literatura y el arte. Para garantizar una comprensión profunda y completa de las opiniones de Tang Junyi durante el proceso de investigación, primero adoptamos un enfoque de "lectura detallada" para estudiar sus obras recopiladas. Además, empleamos un "método de análisis conceptual", centrándonos en refinar y elucidar conceptos clave dentro de sus pensamientos literarios. Al mismo tiempo, utilizando un "método de revisión de literatura", comparamos las ideas de Tang Junyi con los hallazgos de investigación relacionados de otros académicos. A través de un análisis sistemático, el autor cree que la perspectiva de Tang Junyi sobre el vacío y la sustancia en literatura y arte no es una construcción conceptual aislada, sino una perspectiva única formada contra la cultura y filosofía tradicional china. Este concepto está en el corazón de su teoría literaria y es un nodo brillante en su sistema filosófico. Al profundizar en el "vacío y sustancia" dentro de los pensamientos literarios de Tang Junyi, podemos comprender mejor sus contribuciones a la literatura y la filosofía, proporcionando una nueva perspectiva de investigación y marco para estudiar la teoría y cultura literaria china.

Palabras clave: Tang Junyi. El pensamiento literario. Filosofía China. Vacío y realidad. Neoconfucianismo Moderno.

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ANALYZING LITERARY EMPTINESS AND SUBSTANCE: A PERSPECTIVE INFORMED BY TANG JUNYI'S NEO-CONFUCIAN PHILOSOPHY

Yu Hongqin¹

Abstract: The objective of this study is to thoroughly analyze and interpret Tang Junyi's ideas about emptiness and substance in literature and art in a systematic manner. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of Tang Junyi's viewpoints, we initially employed the "close reading method" to carefully examine all of his works. Additionally, we utilized the "conceptual analysis method" to focus on identifying and explaining key concepts in his literary ideas. At the same time, we compared Tang Junyi's ideas with other scholars' research findings, using the "literature comparison method". After conducting a thorough examination, the author concludes that Tang Junyi's perspective on emptiness and substance in literature and art is not an independent intellectual construct, but rather a unique viewpoint formed within the backdrop of traditional Chinese culture and philosophy. This concept is central to his literary theory and serves as a prominent element within his philosophical framework. By exploring the realm of "emptiness and substance" within Tang Junyi's literary ideas, we can gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for his impact on literature and philosophy. This exploration also presents fresh perspectives and conceptual structures for the examination of Chinese literary theory and culture.

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INTRODUCTION

Modern Neo-Confucianism, a notable intellectual movement of the 20th century, signifies the revival and adaptation of present-day Confucian ideology. The progression of this movement is not solely influenced by the historical context and cultural demands, but also owes a great deal to the endeavors and contributions of Neo-Confucian scholars' successive generations. Among these scholars, Tang Junyi emerged as a pivotal representative of the Neo-Confucians' second generation, owing to his profound philosophical ruminations and distinctive humanistic perspectives. Mou Zongsan praised him as a "[...] giant in the universe of cultural consciousness" (Mou, 2003, p. 301). Throughout his lifetime, Tang Junyi was ardently committed to elevating the spirit of Chinese traditional culture and fostering a meaningful discourse between Eastern and Western cultural paradigms. His works, including "Experiences of Life", "Continuation of Experiences of Life" and "Establishment of the Moral Self", provide a rich and nuanced exploration of the human experience. His six-volume series "Foundational Discourse on Chinese Philosophy" offers a meticulous and

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systematic exposition of traditional Chinese philosophy. Published in 1976, his magnum opus “Existence of Life and the Realm of Spirit” encapsulates the culmination of his lifelong scholarly pursuits, marking the completion of his philosophical framework. Tang’s deep-seated philosophical insights and humanistic reflections not only infused contemporary Confucian thought with renewed vitality, but also garnered widespread attention and respect from scholars.

However, in relation to the extensive attention that his philosophical ideas garnered, it is regrettable that Tang’s thoughts on literature and art were not given more recognition. This oversight is unfortunate because not only did he possess a profound fondness for literature and art, but also frequently offered unique interpretations from a philosophical standpoint. Classical Chinese philosophy had a profound impact on his theory of art theory and was intricately connected to his personal philosophical framework—particularly his proposal of the “Nine Realms of the Spirit”. Upon delving into his works, the author discovered that the theme of “emptiness and substance” pervaded his discourse on art and literature. As a result, a comprehensive examination of the concept of “emptiness and substance” in Tang Junyi’s artistic thoughts is crucial in order to comprehend and assess his overall academic framework, while also providing a novel perspective and approach to the interdisciplinary study of Neo-Confucianism and the arts. This particular research has the capacity to not only unveil the distinctive allure of Tang Junyi’s artistic ideologies, but also provide a valuable perspective into the theoretical construction of contemporary literary studies.

1 THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION OF TANG JUNYI’S “VIEW OF EMPTINESS AND SUBSTANCE” IN ART AND LITERATURE

Through an examination of Tang Junyi’s writings, we are able to tentatively identify two primary sources that contribute to his perspective on “emptiness and substance” in literature and art: one is firmly grounded in classical Chinese philosophical thought, and the other is derived from Tang Junyi’s comprehension and elucidation of Chinese philosophical concepts. The former encompasses the interpretations of “existence and non-existence” as well as “emptiness and substance” found in Daoist and Buddhist philosophy. The latter encompasses Tang Junyi’s original concept known as one of the “Nine Realms of the Spirit,” the “perspective of observing within the realm of emptiness,” as well as his articulation of the characteristic of the Chinese philosophical cosmology, where “the universe observes within itself while embracing both emptiness and substance.” These concepts have significantly influenced Tang Junyi’s perspective on “emptiness and substance” in literature and art, establishing the philosophical basis of his viewpoint on literature and art.

1.1 ORIGINS OF “THE VIEW OF EMPTINESS AND SUBSTANCE” IN CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

Taoist philosophical thinking greatly inspired Tang Junyi’s view of literary reality. Laozi regarded the “Dao” as the world’s root and governing principle, with “existence” and “emptiness” representing the characteristics of the “Dao” in the *Dao De Jing*. “Existence” equates to “substance,” signifying entities with the physical form and names, concrete objects of human experience and contemplation. “Emptiness,” conversely, denotes a realm without form or name, forming the foundation for the realm of “substance” with form and name. Chapter 40 of the “Laozi” provides perspective on the cosmogony of all things in the universe: “All things under heaven originate from those with form and name, and those with form and name, in turn, originate from those without form and name” (Chen, 2016, p. 208). The “Dao”, being formless and nameless, gives birth to tangible beings, emphasizing the significance of “emptiness” or “non-being” as a transcendent concept capable of describing the inherent commonality of all things.

Chapter 11 of the “Laozi” illustrates the importance of balancing “existence” and “non-existence” in the world of experience. Tang Junyi valued Laozi’s presentation of these concepts, particularly the emphasis on the “formless and nameless” as attributes of the “Dao.” Drawing from his understanding of Chinese art, Tang Junyi incorporated the “view of emptiness and substance” as a core principle in art discourse. He advocated for the “utility of emptiness,” transforming substance into emptiness, and stressed that “emphasizing ethereality and serenity” is a critical characteristic of Chinese art (Tang, 2016, p. 287).

Moving from the foundational principles set by Laozi, the Wei-Jin period brought about a new wave of metaphysical interpretations. When examining the relationship between Wei-Jin metaphysics and literature, Tang Junyi believed a profound interconnection existed between the two. Both domains required a “reflective contemplation” process to develop their respective realms. Although these domains lacked tangible or utilitarian values to human life, they could cleanse and elevate one’s spiritual world (Tang, 2016, p. 338).

Wei-Jin metaphysicians, exemplified by individuals, such as He Yan and Wang Bi, embraced an ontological perspective that placed great emphasis on “non-being as the foundation.” They considered “non-being” to be the fundamental source and the primordial unity from which all things in the world originate. The “existence” of anything could only be possible by relying on “non-being” as its ontological basis. This profound veneration for emptiness in metaphysical thought, influenced by Laozi’s and Zhuangzi’s philosophies, has had a significant impact on the aesthetic sensibilities in literary creation. It implores authors to cleanse their minds of any clutter, eliminate the distractions of material desires and liberate themselves from any preconceived notions. It is only through accomplishing these actions that can truly welcome and embrace creative inspiration subsequently enabling them to produce exceptional works of art.

Tang Junyi's perspective on the relationship between reality and art finds philosophical grounding in the Buddhist philosophy of the Prajñāpāramitā (Perfection of Wisdom) school, exemplified by individuals like Sengzhao. Sengzhao, an Eastern Jin Dynasty monk who initially presented Laozi and Zhuangzi's teachings before turning to Buddhism, presented the objective cognitive concept of "the self-emptiness of all things" in his work "Non-True Void Discourse." He suggested that everything is void, devoid of substantiality and that all phenomena are illusory and deceptive. Things only exist in different moments, arising and ceasing in an instant, unaffected by the time's passage. Movement and change lack a subject. Interconnected appearances are mere human illusions. Sengzhao's concept of "the emptiness of all phenomena" significantly enriched Tang Junyi's understanding of the aesthetic state of "emptiness and tranquility" in artistic creation.

Tang Junyi emphasized that "emptiness and tranquility" entails the complete elimination of various distractions and desires. It involves freeing oneself from base emotions, material cravings and restless thoughts. When perceiving aesthetic objects, maintaining a sense of "emptiness" is essential to liberate them from utilitarian perspectives. This aesthetic disposition of "emptiness and tranquility" allows individuals to apprehend the innate purity and natural essence of all things, facilitating a pure and aesthetic contemplation of external objects (Tang, 2016, p. 17).

1.2 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN "THE VIEW OF EMPTINESS AND SUBSTANCE" AND TANG JUNYI'S PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT

Tang Junyi's later philosophical ideas influenced his perspective on substance and emptiness in literature and art. Firstly, the "realm of observing the void", in Tang Junyi's original "Nine Realms of the Spirit", serves as one of the philosophical origins and foundations of his artistic view on emptiness and substance. These "Nine Realms of the Spirit" are derived from Tang Junyi's later work titled "Life Existence and the Realm of the Mind". He emphasized the connection between spiritual realms and real life, seeing it as an embodiment of both emptiness and substance, making them essential characteristics of these realms. Tang Junyi proposed that the original meaning of the Chinese term "境界" (realm) encompasses both emptiness and substance, with emptiness being akin to the "Horizon" in Western culture, and substance being closer to the "World" in Western culture. Furthermore, "境" (realm) has a broader meaning than "物" (thing). While "物" represents the state of tangible existence, "境界" (realm) includes both aspects of emptiness and substance (Tang, 2016, p. 2). After a comprehensive examination of Tang Junyi's concept of the "Nine Realms of the Spirit," it becomes evident that the "realm of observing the void" is the realm most harmonious with literature and art among all these realms.

Tang Junyi explains that the “realm of observing the void” refers to an intrinsic and subjective aesthetic realm. Within this context, Tang Junyi emphasized that art forms, like music and painting, express emotions and convey meanings through sounds or lines. The world presented by these artworks entirely depends on a soaring empty spirit for observation and perception. Without the spirit being in a state of emptiness and tranquility, a genuine understanding of the meaning of art and an appreciation of its aesthetic beauty are unattainable (Tang, 2016, p. 31). The genesis of the “realm of observing the void” lies in the human capacity for abstract thinking and boundless imagination. Human thoughts exist independently of their physical bodies, which are cumbersome and substantial. In contrast, thoughts possess a state of emptiness and lightness, leading individuals into a pure and abstract spiritual world (Tang, 2016, p. 30). The “realm of observing the void” provides individuals with an intuitive understanding of the meanings of things and a comprehensive cognition of their pure forms. This realm is essential for achieving various goals, whether it involves deciphering the meaning of the text, deeply appreciating the beauty of literature, art and nature, correctly comprehending relationships in geometry and mathematics, recognizing truth and falsity in logic, or seeking the philosophical meaning of the universe and the life’s one (Tang, 2016, p. 31).

In conclusion, humans can inhabit the “realm of observing the void” due to their exceptional cognitive capacity to represent and comprehend the world through linguistic symbols. It is in this realm that the world of arts and literature operates, and therefore, the world of arts and literature can be considered the “realm of observing the void.” On the one hand, literature is the art of language, allowing individuals to wander freely within its linguistic realm. On the other hand, this artistic world encapsulates the real world, embodying the characteristic where emptiness and substance coexist. This underscores the close connection between Tang Junyi’s “realm of observing the void” and his view on the emptiness and substance in arts and literature. When viewed holistically, the “realm of observing the void” serves as a philosophical worldview and an outlook on life, encompassing the realm of arts and literature. Consequently, it can be considered one of the foundations of Tang Junyi’s philosophical understanding of the emptiness and substance in arts and literature.

Furthermore, Tang Junyi summarized the characteristic cosmological view in Chinese philosophy, known as the belief that the “universe encompasses emptiness and substance.” This perspective forms the philosophical foundation of Tang Junyi’s view on emptiness and substance in arts and literature. In his essay titled “Characteristics of Natural Cosmology in Chinese Philosophy,” Tang Junyi identified twelve traits of Chinese philosophical views on natural cosmology. Among these traits, the concept that the “universe encompasses emptiness and substance” is ranked first and is considered by Tang Junyi as the most fundamental and core characteristic of the Chinese philosophical cosmological view.

After comparing the views on “emptiness and substance” in Chinese, Western and Indian philosophies, Tang Junyi concluded:

Chinese philosophy neither perceives the current universe as an illusory existence, as Indian philosophy does, nor does it regard the current universe as an authentic existence, as Western philosophy does. From the perspective of Chinese philosophy, our universe exists in an empty state without being absurd and substantial without being fixed (Tang, 2016, p. 77).

Tang Junyi believed that the “middle-ground”, thinking embodied in Chinese philosophy, represents a more sophisticated dialectical thought. To support this, he provided evidence from Chinese philosophy. In Chinese philosophy, nouns describing essence, such as “li” (principle), “qi” (energy or vital force) and “yin-yang,” do not solely indicate substantiality or serve as mere illusory concepts. For instance, “li” is described as “vast and endless”, emphasizing its infinite nature, yet it is also referred to as “eternal and unceasing”, highlighting its unchanging aspect. Similarly, “qi” is considered to be “constantly flowing”, representing its ever-changing state, but it is also described as “filling the universe”, implying its omnipresence. Likewise, “Yi” (change or I Ching) is said to be “constantly changing without a fixed pattern,”, indicating its mutable nature. However, at the same time, it is “pervading heaven and earth”, signifying its universal presence and importance (Tang, 2016, p. 78).

Tang Junyi used the concept of “li” (principle), “qi” (energy or vital force) and “Yi” (change or I Ching) to illustrate that the fundamental cosmology of Chinese philosophy lies in the concept of “embracing substance with emptiness.” Consequently, according to Tang Junyi’s philosophical standpoint, his perspective on literature and art fundamentally encompasses his cosmological conviction of “embracing substance with emptiness.”

2 TANG JUNYI’S CONCRETE MANIFESTATION OF “EMPTINESS AND SUBSTANCE” IN LITERATURE AND ART

Tang Junyi’s numerous treatises include chapters on “Emptiness and Substance” in literature and art. In these chapters, he primarily focuses on three aspects. First, he summarizes the qualities and spirit of Chinese art as “emphasizing etherealness and serenity” and highlighting how “emptiness and substance interpenetrate.” Second, he explores the characteristics and practices of the artistic universe, which are embodied in the view of space-time and the use of emptiness. Lastly, he delves into the concept of “emptiness and substance” in literature, discussing how it applies to various types of literary works.

Tang Junyi's argument demonstrates that he approaches specific art from a cosmic perspective, reflecting the philosopher's acute understanding of the universality and particularity of Chinese art.

2.1 THE CHARACTER AND SPIRIT OF CHINESE ART: "EMPHASIZING ETHEREALNESS AND SERENITY" AND "EMPTINESS AND SUBSTANCE INTERPENETRATE"

"The Characteristics of Chinese Art" by Tang Junyi is included in "Comparative Essays on Chinese and Western Philosophical Thought". The article describes seven aspects of Chinese art:

First, pure formal beauty.

Second, implicit inexhaustibility.

Third, emphasizing etherealness and serenity, avoiding detailed and exhaustive content as well as explicit and intense emotional expressions.

Fourth, artwork can ingeniously depict the states of all things in nature, capture the changes of nature, and represent them in a complete and harmonious artistic form.

Fifth, to symbolize the most significance with the fewest mediums.

Sixth, the flow of naturalness.

Seventh, various artistic spirits can communicate and resonate with each other.

These seven fundamental attributes concisely encapsulate the core essence of Chinese artistic expression. Among these, the exploration of "emphasizing etherealness and serenity" showcases Tang Junyi's profound comprehension of the distinctive features of Chinese art through the lens of his emptiness and substance perspective within the realm of literature and art. In order to elucidate this particular attribute, Tang Junyi provided examples from Chinese calligraphy, Chinese music and Chinese nature literature:

Paintings and calligraphy possess a nuanced and mysterious aesthetic style, similar to individuals who avoid worldly pleasures and live unaffected by earthly smoke and fire. Consequently, the most exquisite artworks exhibit an innocent, natural, transcendent and otherworldly character. The exceptional caliber of their graceful character results from the author's pure, muck-free thinking; hence, those capable of the nature's vitality with a clear and open heart, creating ethereal and infinitely charming works (Tang, 2016, p. 176).

Similar to the cave xiao, a seven-stringed instrument, Chinese music possesses a crisp and delicate quality when heard in the seclusion of the evening, beneath the luminous moon surrounded by majestic mountains and flowing rivers. It evokes a feeling of being in

the moment, with elusive thoughts that are difficult to grasp. Chinese music produces a very tranquil and ethereal ambiance (Tang, 2016, p. 176).

Most of the natural literature in China consists of compositions that emphasize tranquility and ethereality. Renowned poets, such as Tao Yuanming, Xie Lingyun, Wang Wei and Meng Haoran, along with writers Liu Zongyuan and Li Daoyuan in their work “Water Classic,” all employ exquisite and organic imagery that is devoid of any hint of intentional carving. The artistic conception is calm and remote, while the language employed is truly magnificent. (Tang, 2016, p. 176).

From a philosophical perspective, the pursuit of “emptiness and tranquility” stands as a paramount spiritual goal within the realm of Chinese arts. It is crucial to note, however, that this genre does not solely focused on “emphasizing ethereality and serenity” and contains realistic works. Additionally, Tang Junyi’s fundamental understanding of the very essence of Chinese art centers around the concept of “the interpenetration of emptiness and substance”.

The examination of the spirit of Chinese art is justified by Tang Junyi on the grounds that art and literature serve to enhance the understanding of Chinese culture. Chinese art reflects the Chinese people’s souls. The question arises as to why Chinese art embodies the concept of “emptiness and substance interpenetrate.” Tang Junyi attributes this phenomenon to the influence of “purely ornamental attitude” of Taoism, which gave rise to the concept of the Dao, where “emptiness and substance interpenetrate,” allowing individuals to freely navigate the “realm of observing the void.” This observational attitude of the Dao represents an authentic and genuine comprehension of aesthetic expression. Taoism, which asserts that “the Dao is omnipresent, leveling all things,” diligently seeks to explore the Dao even in the minutest entities, such as ants and rice grains, thereby reflecting its distinct aesthetic viewpoint. Zhuangzi utilizes melodies and heavenly music to further symbolize the realization of the Dao (Tang, 2016, p. 75). The profound impact of this essence, which originates from truth and emptiness, exerted a significant sway over subsequent calligraphy and painting literature. The mere contemplation of the pleasurable disposition has the potential to infuse the creator’s spiritual essence into the artwork, rendering it ethereal. Taoism endorses aligning right and wrong and ignoring profit and loss so that the heart may ascend ten thousand feet and witness the heaven and earth’s immense majesty, and that the Tao is one. Consequently, the amalgamation of Taoist and philosophical influences engenders the spiritual milieu that characterizes Chinese art.

2.2 “SPATIOTEMPORAL INTERVAL VIEW” AND “THE UTILITY OF EMPTINESS” IN ART

In his “spatiotemporal view” of literature and art, Tang Junyi emphasizes the concepts of “isolation” and the “independence of isolation.” According to Tang Junyi, “In terms of time,

the events depicted in literature should be isolated from periods before and after the depicted time. In terms of space, the space representing the depicted elements should be isolated from the surrounding space” (Tang, 2016, p. 267). In other words, the events portrayed in literature occur in a fictional and real-time setting, transcending any specific historical period or physical existence. The imaginative and self-contained space, created by literature, exists independently of real-life physical spaces. In summary, literature has the capacity to generate an isolated and district spatiotemporal environment separate from reality.

Tang Junyi summarized the characteristics of the spatiotemporal interval view in literature, using the terms “unprecedented in history” and “isolating the external to expand the internal.” He illustrates his point by referring to the “Grand View Garden” in “Dream of the Red Chamber” and the “Peach Blossom Garden” in Tao Yuanming’s “Tales of the Peach Blossom Spring.” He also noted that various other Chinese arts, including architecture, calligraphy, carvings, dance, gardens, music, paintings and theater, share these qualities: “In discussing the universe of the arts, we can say it also possesses the two qualities that literature has” (Tang, 2016, p. 269).

However, mere “isolation” is insufficient. A masterpiece also requires “openness and accessibility” to expand its domain and connect with the external world. Tang Junyi explained, “This universe of art must have an inner openness to reach the outer cosmos! A work of excellence must be expressed in this domain” (Tang, 2016, p. 270). For example, in the literary world, while the “Peach Blossom Spring” is isolated from the outside, it still maintains an opening that connects it to the external environment. Similarly, in Chinese architecture, bamboo and beaded curtains act as doors for division, but there are also various decorative windows that connect with the external world. Chinese painting often captures vast landscapes, spanning thousands of miles on hand-sized paper, creating a profound and distant ambiance, while maintaining a connection with the external world. All these examples illustrate the characteristic of having an internal division while also sustaining external connectivity.

Tang Junyi, in his numerous literary works, recognized and illustrated the phenomenon and perspective at hand. However, the writer deemed it necessary to provide further clarification as to why works possessing these two characteristics can be regarded as top-tier. In line with Tang Junyi’s artistic view on emptiness and substance, the concept of “inner interval independence” can be viewed as a form of “emptiness” and create a virtual time in the art world that stands apart from reality. This notion of “emptiness” can be employed to construct artistic fiction, thereby allowing the author’s imagination and skill to roam freely. However, authors cannot entirely detach from reality to fabricate their artworks. The vitality of art resides in its audience. Supposing that the audience is unable to establish a suitable connection between the artistic realm and the world it inhabits, the art becomes but

a castle in the sky, devoid of any enlightening value to life. Therefore, artworks must possess “substance.” The optimal artistic expression must seamlessly blend “emptiness is precious” with the “Emptiness and substance interpenetrate” characteristic.

When discussing the spatiotemporal interval characteristics of Chinese gardens in comparison to Western fortresses, Tang Junyi stated:

A fortress of solid stone construction has four solid sides, creating an independent world. On the other hand, Chinese gardens establish both external “emptiness” and internal spaces, transforming “nothingness” into “existence.” For this reason, the architectural art of gardens surpasses that of fortresses: they skillfully combine substance and emptiness (Tang, 2016, p. 271).

Tang Junyi’s notion of artistic emptiness and substance continues to underpin the concepts behind these two significant qualities of art. Tang Junyi believes the Chinese excel at weaving emptiness into reality, transforming the intangible into the tangible, allowing the significance of “the utility of emptiness” to manifest in objects or realms of beauty (Tang, 2016, p. 283). Chinese art attains a sublime aesthetic realm through this integration of emptiness and substance.

2.3 THE IDEA OF “EMPTINESS AND SUBSTANCE” IN LITERARY GENRES

Since his early years, Tang Junyi has displayed a strong inclination towards writing, and as he progressed in age, his contemplation of philosophical matters expanded, resulting in a multitude of innovative discoveries scattered throughout his literary works. Tang Junyi’s understanding of literature is deeply ingrained in his personal experience, enlightening revelations about life and the human intellect, and his insightful philosophical analysis of literary works. Upon a thorough examination of his writings, it becomes apparent that the notions of substance and emptiness are consistently interwoven within his literary discussions. His philosophical contemplation is firmly grounded in the “emptiness and substance” approach, which exerts a significant influence on his perspective towards literature.

Tang Junyi believed that Chinese literature, with its typology and characteristics, can be divided into two main categories: “Confucian-style literature” and “Taoist-style literature.” Confucian-style literature primarily focuses on morality, music and rites, emphasizing the literary subject’s moral virtues. In contrast, Taoist-style literature primarily seeks the nature’s beauty and its transformations, highlighting the generative capacity of literature towards the life’s essence. Tang Junyi esteemed the latter significantly owing to its adeptness in illustrating the fluctuations in the natural world and its capacity to reveal an ethereal spirit and expansive breadth. (Tang, 2016, p. 247).

Tang Junyi's appreciation for literature in the Taoist style is influenced by his mentor, Fang Dongmei, who is also a philosopher of Neo-Confucianism. Fang believed that Chinese aesthetics embodies the beauty of "incessant creation," referring to the charm of the vitality seen in the natural world's birth, transformation and innovation. The essence of the mood, portrayed in literary and artistic expressions, lies in the perpetual and creative vitality of existence. Taoist philosophy places emphasis on the role of the "Dao's" in creating and shaping the core of all life forms within the universe. In this particular context, literature serves as an external manifestation of this unending creative life force (Fang, 2005, p. 152).

Tang Junyi classified "Taoist-style literature" into four categories based on its distinctive characteristics. The first category transcends the worldly pursuits of recognition and financial gain, deriving pleasure from the natural world. The second category employs a tangible natural landscape to portray a domain that emphasizes the ethereal and serene. The third category incorporates the aesthetically pleasing elements found in nature and human characters into literary works. Lastly, the fourth category narrates significant historical events in a relaxed and composed tone. It is worth noting that in the second category, where sentiments are communicated through natural scenery, there exists a dynamic interplay between emptiness and substance, which vividly illustrates Tang Junyi's profound interpretation of these literary concepts. Tang Junyi believed that Chinese nature poetry best exemplifies the realm where "Emptiness and substance interpenetrate" in "Taoist-style literature."

From a comparative perspective, Tang Junyi posits that Chinese nature poetry differs significantly in its origin and spiritual ambiance from Western nature poetry. Chinese nature poetry finds its origins in the spirits of Taoism and Confucianism, while Western nature poetry is deeply suffused with religious sentiments, often aiming to convey the divine will. Chinese nature literature evokes a sense of religious devotion and encompasses a philosophical fascination that is deeply embedded in the concept of "Emptiness and substance interpenetrate," a subtle element that is noticeably absent in Western literature. This unique quality emphasizes the distinctive nature of Chinese nature poetry.

Tang Junyi supports this argument with numerous examples from Tang Dynasty compositions. For instance, he references the poem "The Deer Enclosure", which belongs to the Tang Dynasty poet Wang Wei, which reads: In pathless hills, no man's in sight, But I still hear echoing sound. In gloomy forest peeps no light. But sunbeams slant on mossy ground. Similarly, another Tang Dynasty poet, Zhang Xu, wrote, The hazy mist reveals the faint shape of a raised bridge, I enquire of the fisherman standing west at the crag of an edge. As the peach blossoms drift daily with the running water, where can I find the source of the creek, I wonder? The former poem possesses a lively charm, while the latter conveys a profound and remote allure. Tang Junyi remarked, "Such realms in Chinese art and literature all contain the religious spirit of liberation, which enables one to forget the shackles of the flesh, dispel

the turmoil and troubles of the spirit, and attain spiritual freedom and ease” (Tang, 2016, p. 222). This unique realm of Chinese nature poetry concretely embodies the traditional Chinese artistic perspective on “emptiness and substance”.

Moreover, when it comes to the art of tragedy, Tang Junyi initially examined the cognitive logic behind Western tragedies. He proposed the notion that the Chinese perception of tragedy primarily manifests in the transitory nature of existence, as illustrated in works, such as “Dream of the Red Chamber” (Tang, 2016, p. 241). Tang Junyi also referenced Yang Shen’s “Linjiang Immortal”, Kong Shangren’s “Lament for the South” and Xiong Kaiyuan’s “Eternal Melody of Sorrow” in order to demonstrate that traditional Chinese operatic literature also conveys a sense of life’s impermanence.

In addition to this sense of life’s impermanence, Chinese literary tragedies also manifest a sense of “illusoriness” born from the influence of both Buddhist and Taoist philosophies. As Tang Junyi explains “The Chinese sense of tragedy [...] relies on the ethereal state of mind of forgetfulness and transcendental wisdom that comes from the spirit of Taoism and Buddhism, and understands that all human characters and causes are in the ‘karmic’ and ‘illusory in reality’ of the vast universe” (Tang, 2016, p. 242). This “sense of life’s impermanence” alternates with this “illusory nature” in Chinese tragedy, and Chinese literary tragedy is characterized by gloom and despair. However, as Tang Junyi notes, it can also “[...] return to the virtual to the real, and from the sad to the strong, it can be transformed into a greater love for the earth and a sense of responsibility for life” (Tang, 2016, p. 242-243). Tang Junyi argues that Du Fu is the Sage of Poetry and the History of Poetry in Chinese literature because he often uses “darkness and tragedy” to inspire a love for the environment and life.

The interpretation provided by Tang Junyi, regarding the Chinese artistic concept of “returning from emptiness to substance”, bears similar to another Chinese aesthetician’s one, Zong Baihua. In his work entitled “Strolling in Aesthetics”, Zong Baihua articulates that Chinese art and literature have made extensive efforts in both etherealness and fulfillment, resulting in remarkable achievements. “Hence, it is no wonder that Chinese poets, in particular, take pleasure in projecting the numerous pictures against the vast cosmos, thereby creating realms that are abundant in ethereal and substance, reminiscent of a glorious starry sky” (Zong, 2005, p. 51).

3 THE SPIRITUALITY AND VALUE OF TANG JUNYI’S “VIEW OF EMPTINESS AND SUBSTANCE” IN LITERATURE AND ART

Tang Junyi’s concept of emptiness and substance in literature and art not only actively expounds the essence of ancient creative philosophy, but also highly affirms the humanistic character of Chinese culture. Throughout his life, Tang Junyi dedicated himself

to comparing Chinese and Western civilizations and promoting the authentic humanism of Chinese culture. He posited that Western culture is inclined toward “consciously seeking expression”, emphasizing the actual and the external. In contrast, Chinese culture tends to “consciously seek realization”, favoring the internal and the virtual, which, according to Tang Junyi, is more effective at nurturing the human spirit and wisdom.

Tang Junyi believed that Chinese culture embodies the characteristics of “emptiness and substance interpenetrate.” It calls for individuals to comprehend and embrace the life’s and the nature’s profound truths, and the ones of the universe through introspection and self-reflection. This elevated spiritual culture is then applied to real life’s all aspects, resulting in the individual and collective lives’ elevation and transcendence.

Chinese culture embodies a humanistic spirit known as “consciously seeking realization,” which is a life’s fundamental spirit. When reflected in specific literature and art, it exhibits a dual spiritual connotation encompassing aesthetics and morality.

Firstly, from an aesthetic perspective, Tang Junyi believes that this “consciously seeking realization” embodies a continuous, dynamic and interactive spiritual activity both internally and externally. As Tang Junyi expressed,

Aesthetic activities signify a spiritual quest that transcends materiality; they result from the interaction between the spirit of life and the material world. On one hand, the aesthetic subject desires its essence to permeate the material realm. Conversely, this spirit is expected to experience elevation and enrichment upon uniting with the material domain. Maintaining a tangible connection with the material world is vital throughout this process. Through active engagement with it, one can more profoundly contemplate and comprehend the hidden significance of their existence (Tang, 2016, p. 113).

This aesthetic activity represents a humanistic state where the life’s spirit (emptiness) harmoniously interacts with the material world (substance).

Secondly, from a moral perspective, Tang Junyi believes that “Art can elevate one beyond the mundane, merging harmoniously with nature. Doing so calms one’s vitality, brings harmony to body and mind, and cultivates one’s virtue” (Tang, 2016, p. 36-37). The traditional Chinese arts emphasize the union of “beauty and goodness” and “ritual and music.” Artistic works, serving as tools for artists to express their aspirations and emotions, also bear the responsibility of moral education and influencing societal customs. They refine an individual’s sentiments, fostering equilibrium and tranquility, guiding the soul from unrest to a harmonious state, and inspiring the pursuit of “goodness.” Therefore, Chinese art is not merely concerned with artistic form and techniques. It also embodies the essence of ritual. Its impact on elevating one’s spiritual life and virtue plays a significant role.

From both aesthetic and moral perspectives, traditional Chinese artistic thought is closely intertwined with Chinese culture, affirming the vital spirit of Chinese culture. According to Tang Junyi, “If people can appreciate the value of this Chinese art, they will also come to understand the value of other aspects of Chinese culture, as well as the value of Chinese culture as a whole” (Tang, 2016, p. 302). Tang Junyi’s appreciation for Chinese literature and art is deeply rooted in his profound respect for Chinese culture. Therefore, his conception of “emptiness and substance”, as the central concept in Chinese literature and art, is built upon a profound understanding of Chinese culture and its high cultural value.

CONCLUSION

Tang Junyi’s perspective on “emptiness and substance” in literature and art has its origins in his profound philosophical foundation and acute insight into art. Within his theoretical framework, art is not merely a medium for showcasing beauty. It serves as a vessel for deep exploration, delving into the intricate interplay between illusion and reality, the material and the spiritual, and the actual and the ideal. Thus, art becomes more than a sensory delight. It becomes a convergence of thought and a reflection on philosophy.

A comprehensive study of Tang Junyi’s perspective on “emptiness and substance” reveals his quest to transcend spatiotemporal constraint through art. His aim to reach an elevated “realm of observing the void” and achieve a deeper understanding of life’s essence. His contemplations go beyond surface-level analysis and delve into the nexus of art, philosophy and human existence. His theory underscores the intimate connections between art and philosophy, reminding us to appreciate both the superficial allure of art and its underlying philosophical profundity and humanistic connotations.

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