

Historicity in Thinking

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In this essay we consider how indispensable history is for thinking. (A) First, we go the negative route and see how, deprived of memory — historical awareness — we cannot think. (B) Then, we go our positive route, and see how we think only *in* the tradition. (C) But then how should our thinking, which is by nature, universal operate? The question is best tackled by considering concrete universals. And we find, to our surprise, that thinking by concrete universals is thinking that is in history after all, as instantiated by Chinese historical thinking.

A. First we go the sad *negative* route, and see how tragically lost *we* are, how we lose our very identity, become disoriented, de-souled, when we lose our memory, history-awareness — being afflicted with what the psychologist calls Korsakov's syndrome, "a profound and permanent, but 'pure,' devastation of memory."

For movement bespeaks something that moves; self-movement bespeaks the self that lives on, claiming that that whole series of movements is his, or rather he himself who has undergone it, and is now undergoing it, which constitutes *he*. Thus the self is self-movement, which is a history of the self, a biography that is aware of itself, an unspoken (and ever ready to speak) autobiography. The self is an autobiography — a self-conscious story of a life that coheres into a subject, one coherent history. To lose part or whole of it (in a loss of memory, loss of history) is to lose oneself, partly or totally. To lose memory is to lose part or the whole of that history which we call the self. This is the first point.

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Secondly, Thinking is an activity of connection, which takes place in time; thinking is time-activity, time-rationality. To think is to connect, and connecting needs both a recognition (remembrance) of things to be connected and of an anchorage of connecting, the connector that connects, the self. Connection requires the connecting subject who connects the connected objects. Both the subject and the object need to be recognized and claimed as such, before connecting is obtained. Loss of memory is loss of history, and losing history loses recognition of both the things to be connected and the self who connects; losing history loses thinking. This is the second point.

Both points above — to lose memory is to lose the self and thinking — point inescapably to the conclusion that thinking needs history. To be deprived of memory or continuity is to be without a past or future, isolated in a constantly changing, meaningless moment. Life without connection is Hume's "bundle of different sensations, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in perpetual flux and movement." No, there cannot even be "a bundle"; there is only meaningless flux of isolated impressions.

To lose history is to be radically lost. He who is in this radical loss can recognize *nothing*; he cannot recognize anyone, does not know his way around anywhere, and cannot think in depth, for "depth" has meaning only in terms of what is at hand, and "in terms of" is possible only when one has memory to compare (connect) one thing with another. Socrates wondered aloud in the *Theaetetus* how one can find and know anything if one does not know what it is that one is supposed to find. To lose memory is to be in that bottomless pit of "one does not know," despite one's preservation of feeling, willing, intelligence, sensibilities.

No, it cuts deeper; losing history loses the *self*, the anchorage of thinking. Dr. Oliver Sacks (a neuropsychologist teaching at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine) said, "If a man has lost a leg or an eye, he knows he has lost

a leg or an eye; but if he has lost a self, himself, he cannot know it, because he is no longer there to know it.”¹ Zazetsky in A. R. Luria’s famous *The Man with a Shattered World*² is passionately conscious of his state, and always fighting with “the tenacity of the damned” to recover the use of his damaged brain. The man who has lost memory has erased himself (partly or totally), and is so damned he does not know he is damned. This is amnesia for the amnesia, forgetting that there is one who has forgotten, a radical loss of the *self*. Dr Sacks describes Jimmie the man this way:

“He had originally professed bewilderment at finding himself amid patients, when, as he said, he himself didn’t feel ill. But what, we wondered, did he feel? He was . . . fit and (yet) . . . had a strange inertia and . . . ‘unconcern’ . . . ‘How do you feel?’ ‘How do I feel,’ he repeated, and scratched his head. ‘I cannot say I feel ill. But I cannot say I feel I feel well. I cannot say I feel anything at all.’ ‘Are you miserable?’ ‘Can’t say I am.’ ‘Do you enjoy life?’ ‘I cannot say I do . . .’ ‘How *do* you feel about life?’ ‘I cannot say that I feel anything at all.’ ‘You feel alive though?’ ‘Feel alive? Not really. I haven’t felt alive for a very long time.’ His face wore a look of infinite sadness and resignation.”³

Thus one way of being a man who has lost memory, history, and so himself, is a bottomlessly resigned, pensive calm. Another manner of being such a man is to constantly invent stories about himself. Sacks said:

“If we wish to know about a man, we ask ‘what is his story — . . .?’ — for each of us *is* a biography, a story. Each of us *is* a singular narrative, which is constructed, continually, unconsciously, by, through, and in us — through our perceptions, our feelings, our thoughts, our actions; and, not least, our discourse, our spoken narrations. Biologically, physiologically, we are not so different from each other; historically, as narratives — we are each of us unique.

To be ourselves we must *have* ourselves — possess, if need be re-possess,

our life-stories. We must 'recollect' ourselves, recollect the inner drama, the narrative, of ourselves. A man *needs* such a narrative, a continuous inner narrative, to maintain his identity, his self.

This narrative need, perhaps, is the clue to Mr Thompson's desperate tale-telling, his verbosity. Deprived of continuity, of a quiet, continuous, inner narrative (by loss of memory, of history), he is driven to a sort of narrational frenzy — hence his ceaseless tales, his confabulations, his mythomania. Unable to maintain a genuine narrative or (inner) continuity, . . . he is driven to the proliferation of pseudo-narratives, in a pseudo-continuity, pseudo-worlds peopled by . . . phantoms. . . . The world keeps . . . losing meaning, vanishing — and he must seek meaning, *make* meaning, in a desperate way, continually inventing, throwing bridges of meaning over abysses of meaninglessness, the chaos that yawns continually beneath him. . . . And indeed he can never stop running, for the breach in memory, in existence, in meaning, is never healed, but has to be bridged, to be 'patched,' every second. And the bridges, the patches, for all their brilliance, fail to work — because they *are* confabulations, fictions, which cannot do service for reality, while also failing to correspond with reality. . . . And with this, no feeling *that* he has lost feeling (for the feeling he has lost), no feeling *that* he has lost the depths, that unfathomable, . . . myriad-levelled depth which somehow defines identity or reality. This strikes everyone who has (met) him . . . — that under his fluency . . . is a strange loss of feeling . . . which distinguishes between 'real' and 'unreal,' 'true' and 'untrue' . . . important and trivial, relevant or irrelevant. What comes out . . . in his confabulations, has, finally, a peculiar . . . indifference . . . as if it didn't really matter what he said, or what anyone else did or said; as if nothing really mattered any more."⁴

To be oneself is repeatedly, i.e., historically, to re-collect oneself, with a quiet power of historical recollection. One who has lost one's historical

ability to recollect stops collecting and re-collecting oneself; such a one constantly loses oneself. This explains Mr. Thompson's frenzied tale-telling; he tries to thereby recapture the self, for he can no longer claim himself otherwise, now that he has lost his historical ability to re-collect the self, to recollect himself.

And so, whether in a pensive resignation or a frenzied mythomania, when we lose our memory, we lose our connecting identity, the self that *thinks*; history is indispensable to thinking. This negative point is also about the past and its connection with and support of the present — and all this constitutes the self, that autobiography constantly, consciously, collected into a coherent history. The self is history. Without history the self cannot exist, much less think.

B. Now we come to the *positive* point, that thinking is imbued with history; thinking is itself history. First (1) we see how historical our thinking process is; then (2) we see how thinking something novel requires tradition.

(1) First, we look into how historical our thinking process is. According to a Plato scholar, Stanley Rosen, the paradigm of philosophical method is a dialectic — division and collection (according to kinds) — in Plato's *Phaedrus* and the *Sophist*, them-selves governed by this method of counting the eidetic elements as divided forth from the initial compound and them reassembled into a final compound. An element is a 'number'; a compound is a sum of 'numbers.' Dialectic is then a sort of arithmetic; to explain is to take apart and exhibit the structure of, the compound. (And the arithmetic operation is, as Kant said, a synthetic a priori operation, which is historical, as we shall see soon.)

This dialectico-arithmetical attitude continues to our present day. A thing is a compound, whose discursive account is a dividing according to kinds; further division determines what counts as a kind. Division determines predicates; running through the steps in the division demonstrates the

validity of our determination of that set of predicates for that sort of thing. To explain what we perceive as a unity, we analyze (divide); to say something about something is to predicate. And so predication is linked to arithmetic counting-dividing-analyzing.

But analysis is not the final word in thinking. Synthetic (collective) perceiving of a compound starts analysis, and certifies the appropriate measure of analysis, the elements not being homogeneous. And at “some point we must see that we are finished ((and) . . . see an articulated structure as a unity, whole, . . .) There has to be some reason for our *not* adding another number to a given sum, and the reason is our . . . perception that we now have *enough*.”⁵

Here Rosen gave us two points: (a) Western philosophy is basically patterned after arithmetical operation — division and collection, counting and summing up, analysis and synthesis. (b) Both the start and the finish of this arithmetic is a “perception” of totality, and this concrete total perception bespeaks a connection to the historical world. How about the *process* of this arithmetic? We can say that the same story holds.

It belongs to Kant’s genius to find that $7+5=12$ is a synthetic a priori judgment (in the First *Critique*, B15-17). The operation is purely formal, “a priori,” and necessary, with no help from our concrete experience. Yet the operation is “synthetic,” related to the world of experience in the following three ways (one of which Kant saw also).

First, as Kant said, the notion of “12” is not logically implied in any of the notions that go before “12” — neither in “7,” nor in “5,” “+,” or “=.” $7+5=12$ obtains only by actually going through the operation of addition. Addition is a priori; its *operation* and its result are synthetic. Thus this synthetic operation, though a priori, has a logical connection to the historicity of the world.

Secondly, as we operate it, $7+5=12$ comes to click in on us (synthetic) as logically valid (a priori). We are convinced, clicked into mathematical understanding, *as we go* from “7” and “5” through “+” to “12.” Thus this synthetic operation, with all its quality of the a priori, has a subjective connection to the historicity of the world.

Finally, $7+5=12$ applies to pens and apples; something mathematical (a priori) applies procedurally to actual *objects* (synthetic). We can do mathematics abstractly; we can also do mathematics by actually adding and subtracting things, and things do actually get counted. Thus this synthetic operation, though a priori, has an objective connection to the historicity of the world. (Similarly, causal relationship is logically understandable, and is designed to describe the historical connections among objects and events.)

And here comes the crunch: Operationally, subjectively, and objectively, $7+5=12$ is perceived to be valid and significant. This perception is an actual ongoing, an understanding — a historical process. All the operational, subjective, and objective significance is none other than significance *in* and *of* the ongoing experience of the world, a *historical* significance. $7+5=12$ is a historical operation.

“Synthetic” is a cipher for “historical”; “a priori” is a cipher for “thinking.” Kant said that our thinking — our metaphysical thinking — is synthetic a priori, which we now see describes no other than historical thinking itself. The thinking process is historical or it is nothing.

(2) Furthermore, we must see how much steeped in tradition thinking is. This is also about the connection of the past with the future, the new creation. For to think is to think something new. Even to think of the old is to reaffirm the old, and reaffirmation is a new affirmation. We must think about how thinking, that is, new creation is made possible by steeping in the tradition.

To describe thinking *is* to trace what has been going on throughout the history of thinking — we cannot avoid citing Socrates, Plato, Confucius, Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, and they are without exception historical greats. To describe thinking at all is to engage in a review of, a retrospective look-again at, the historical traditions of humankind. And thinking itself operates in the light of the frame of reference (the universe of discourse) set up by those great thinkers of our past. Even to oppose that frame set by our previous thinkers, we need that frame. This raises an important question of what it means to inherit the tradition. Three points can be raised: The tradition as part of us, as our root, and as our future. The tradition envelops us in our present activities, at our experienced past, and toward our creative future.

First, cultural life is an embodiment of the tradition. All our thinking is couched in dialogues with the historical greats — the notorious as well as the famous. All our thinking, our way of life is shaped in terms of tradition. We understand something new by reference to what we already know; and our very frame of reference for understanding — our language, convention, and thinking pattern — is the legacy of history, without which we cannot live as humans. Besides, in the gripping of the pen, in the manner of our comportment, we live (our cultural life) in the tradition. We are human by virtue of culture, an accumulation of our past experience in us that we care to preserve, consciously or unconsciously. We breathe physically in the air; we breathe humanly in the air of tradition. We cannot survive in a historical vacuum. Tradition is, when used well, our “tacit dimension” (Polanyi), our blood and muscle to go on in *our* own thinking and our own culture-formation.

Secondly, to trace ourselves back to this cultural root, the tradition, is to partake of the original-originating root power, without which neither Chuang Tzu’s “spring power of life” (*chi* 機) nor Mencius’s “(rose) buds of

our original nature'' (*tuan* 端) is thinkable. To tap this primal vitality is to be renewed at the root. To become like the child is to partake of the primal vitality of the child; here the child is father to the man.

This is not to revert to infantilism. Although the child participates in the primal, to stay being a child is to be primitive and childish. The so-called "primitive culture," if there be any, is not something before culture but a full-grown *culture*, grown ossified in the childhood stage; the mature sophisticated culture would seek its normative vitality in the primordial and formative power within itself — its own tradition. Primitive culture is an infantile *culture*; mature culture is one that returns again and again to its "heart of the child" (Mencius), so as to become the "great Wise (who is) like a fool" (Lao Tzu).

Thus artless art is natural; uncultured casualness is not. Dadaism, for instance, is anything but the uncouth's scribbles. Dadaism makes sense only among those so much steeped in the tradition as to be numb; dadaism shocks them into cultured appreciation. No wonder philosophical archeology has been proposed again and again, especially among the cultural iconoclasts such as Nietzsche, Marx, and M. Foucault.⁶ Confucius "transmitted, not innovated," and thereby effected an epoch-making revolution in culture and morality.

The cultural iconoclasts bring us to the third point; the tradition is futuristic. We must study the past to be creative and novel. The expert creates novelty; the expert is literally one who is experienced, in the know about the past. We must go through our (past) experience to create something new.

Thus creation of novelty must be rooted in the tradition. But creation is not imitation. Having one's root in the tradition is one thing; blindly repeating the tradition is quite another. To try and capture the fresh gust of present actuality in the box of past convention is one thing — a

traditionalism. To express the freshness of actuality, even create a new sort of freshness, with the tradition as *tool*, that is, by creatively mobilizing what we embody — the language, the experience, and the thinking that we inherit — is quite another. But what is the difference? With this question, we initiate the problem of inheriting the tradition: How can returning to the tradition not be a blind repetition, but a precondition for creativity and novelty?

Tradition is what is handed down from the past. And what is handed down through the ages must have been what is worth preserving, the best that is, most deserving of our learning from it in the past. And the past excellence here means what excels of those that existed before.

In addition, tradition is alive in the present. Tradition introduces our present to the *best* in the generations of our common past, which penetrates and ennobles us at the core of our present. For the present emerges not in a vacuum but by transcending the past — destroying the past excellence into a decadence, or destroying the past dross into a renaissance, improving on the past excellence into the dawn of a new age. And transcendence assumes inheritance; only by first accepting the past can transcend it.

Finally, what is best throughout the ages, the tradition, is the best in the past which is the root out of which we came. Therefore the tradition as the best of our root, the root of our reality, is best at introducing us to the root of the real, the really real both in ourselves and in present actuality. Our tradition is the root of ourselves now; it connects both ourselves and actuality inside out. This is tradition truly so called. To promote this reality-connection is to inherit and live in the tradition.

Since reality is alive, ever renewing, rebirthing itself (*sheng sheng pu hsi* 生生不息), to be connected to reality is to engage in continual self-renewals, to partake of the historical elan of self-transcendence at the heart of reality. We owe our very existence to our tradition, that connectedness to the self-birthing reality. To inherit the tradition is to inherit reality's

life-elan of self-transcendence. To see what all this means, we must go to actual historical examples.

For such was what happened in the *Fu-ku* movement, the movement to "restore the past" by attacking the then current florid parallel-style writings (*p'ien wen* 駢文), hollow and out of touch with actuality. The movement began in the pre-T'ang periods and flourished in the T'ang dynasty, especially in the late eighth and early ninth centuries. There Han Yu (韓愈) said that when things are "not even, then (deep words and thoughts) sound forth" (*pu p'ing tse ming* 不平則鳴), and Ou-yang Hsiu (歐陽修) said that "the more straitened (the situation), the finer-crafted (the accomplishment)" (*yu ch'iuung tse yu kung* 愈窮則愈工). All this amounts to bringing us back to the actual exigencies that goad us to excellence.

The *Fu-ku* movement was relatively less important than the Confucian and the Neo-Confucian movements. The *Fu-ku* was chosen to instantlate the grand ongoing pattern and tradition throughout history of attacking the encroaching falsifications of our root identity by reverting to the tradition of authenticity. The Confucians (Confucius, Mencius, Hsun-Tzu) saw in the collapse of Chou Dynasty, and the moral cultural dignity it represented, the radical falsification of human nature; the Confucians fought it with "warming up the old." The Neo-Confucians (Chou Tun-i, two Ch'eng Brothers, Chu Hsi, Wang Yang-ming) similarly saw the acid of degenerating influences in the rise of Buddhism and Taoism, and countered them with a re-turn to, a re-thinking of, the Confucian tradition.

Unfortunately the movements which attacked false pretence to go back to the actual *and* to the ancient, never considered why and how going back to things themselves amounts to going back to the past, to the tradition. They did not bring out what they insisted on: The core of the tradition is its concrete bloody grapplings with the recalcitrant actualities of the lived

present, thereby coming out with fresh insights for (and in) *those* present moments. The connection would have clarified the equation — to go back to reality is to go forward to novel authenticity, to go back to authentic actuality is to go back to the past experience; therefore, to go back to the past is to go forward to the novelty of the present.⁷

Against the then current trend of literary ornaments and artificiality the *Fu-ku* movement advocated a return to the ancient tradition of reverting to the Tao of things itself. Similarly, against the then current trend of subservience to the Divine and to church orthodoxy, the Renaissance movement advocated the revival of the ancient Greek tradition of free striving humanism. Chinese *Fu-ku* was for the restoration of the Tao of *actuality* (against all-too-human ornamentation); the Western Renaissance was for the rebirth of authentic *humanity* (against inhuman authority).

But why didn't they *go* straight to actuality and humanity; why go back to the ancient tradition? Perhaps because we humans instinctively realize that these "goings," whether past or present, are anything but sporadic and abnormal; they belong to the very historical roots of ourselves, the tradition which is the practice of the self-birthing reality. Digging deep into our own past, we find our authentic roots there, the fountain that has produced us and ever nourishes us at the core of our being. It is this historical root that has thus produced us, that urges and leads our ways, from within us, to the genuine goings toward ourselves and toward actuality. And actuality is a verb; it is ever going-actual, ever self-actualizing. To go back to the practice of past goings into actuality, is the only radical veritable way to go forward into fresh actuality.

But then, the *Fu-ku* movement vividly illustrates a paradox. In letting actuality transparently (without artificialities) express itself in our sentences, *as the ancients used to do*, the *Fu-ku* purposely went back to the tradition to revolt against the tradition. To restore the (ancient) past of simplicity

is to revolt against the (immediate) past of artificiality. To live in the tradition is to revolt against living in the dead past.

For living in the tradition is not living in the past, in traditionalism. The past is what we came *from*, our root; we live only by growing out of whatever has passed (away). Otherwise, our root will replace our own living, and we live no longer. Living in the past is simply to linger in it, a living dragging death; then a shameful past makes for living in guilt, and a glorious past makes for living anachronism. None of these is living the present.

It is a mistake to say that history is about bygone things and events. History takes away the oldness of things and brings them back *alive* — to us now. In history the pastness of the past is gone; the past is present-ed. To live in the tradition is to let history be present in us.

An example of this attempt at living in history is of course that *Fu-kuk* movement mentioned above. Another example is the tendency to treat classical Chinese when thinking about Chinese language. Why do we not treat only the modern colloquial Chinese when thinking about the Chinese language?

To begin with, being versed in the classical Chinese, that language of vigor and economy, shapes the *manner*, the beauty, of the colloquial Chinese. Although few common folks in the West read Shakespeare and the Bible as their “steady diet,” Shakespeare and the Bible continue to shape their thought world. Likewise, Chinese Classics (the *Book of Changes* the *Book of Poetry*, etc.) and their language continue to provide the atmosphere — the thought-pattern and language-pattern — of the Chinese people. Because archaic classical Chinese shapes the contemporary mode of thinking in China, one must read classical Chinese both to write in beautiful colloquial Chinese, and to understand the Chinese language and thinking.

The Japanese writer of cosmopolitan vigor, Natsume Soseki (夏目漱石, 1867-1916), was reported to have re-perused the “Songs of Ch’u”

(*Ch'u Ts'u* 楚辭), before beginning to write that celebrated long poetic essay, *Kusamakura* (草枕 the Grass Pillow).⁸ The famous literary critic and commentator, Chin Sheng-t'an (金聖嘆, 1610-1661), was reported to have said that the methodological framework of the vernacular novel, *Chui-hu Chuan* (水滸傳 translated by Pearl Buck as "All Men Are Brothers"), was taken over from the classic of *Shih-chi* (史記 translated by Burton Watson as "Records of the Grand Historian").⁹ All these are examples of how tradition lives on as part and parcel of present creativity. This has nothing to do with merely living in the past.

Both the *Fu-ku* movement and the Renaissance recoiled from living in the past. The Renaissance was a revolt against living under the authority of dross of past glories; the *Fu-ku* movement was a revolt against the trend drifting into a hollow beauty of expression. They remind one of Chuang Tzu's old wheelwright who warned his lord against *merely* revering the dead letters of the forefathers.

Thus both the *Fu-ku* and the Renaissance swing us back to the living power of our root, to what we came *from*, embodying that pristine virile actuality, that power to actualize life and sustain freshness, to live in the present. This is the best, the genius, of tradition; to inherit the tradition is to embody this genius of the past vigor worth handing down to us, so as to go forward to the novel future.

Not to live in tradition is to be cut off from the rootpower of our present; it is to sap the origin of life, to die. To live in the past is to cut off our living (present); it is to die as well. Thus to live in the tradition is to revolt against living the past. We must revolt against living in the past to discernfully live out the tradition. To inherit the tradition is to destroy traditionalism. It is to live afresh in the present and continually produce (draw forth) actuality, in the same manner *as* the tradition used to produce ourselves, our actuality.

Here, however, we inadvertently, yet inevitably, face a dilemma. On the one hand, we noted that raw contacts with present actuality cannot be had by reading books of mere words, a depository of past (passed) experience. We should not let words and works of the past, tradition, impose themselves on our present actuality. On the other hand, we also noted that to go back to the tradition is to be inspired by our root fountain into present novelty. Only by following the tradition against the tyranny of past inauthenticity can we advance to the heart of ourselves and of actuality. We thus protest the tyranny of traditionalism by inheriting the tradition which propels us into novel actuality, against the arbitrary whims of the day to day present. But both tradition and traditionalism belong to the past. Thus we are told both that we must kick the past for present freshness, and that we must inherit the tradition (past experience) for present freshness.

We answer the dilemma by noting the following: Since present actuality changes every minute, and each person is different, the connection of the heart of changing actuality with the heart of each changing person, also changes. And so to inherit the tradition, so as to connect the heart of actuality with the heart of the person, cannot be ossified in set formulae and embalmed in books. Each phase of the tradition leads the way to novel authenticity by showing us the past examples, each time in a fresh manner. To kick the past is to kick set formulae of this connection; to inherit the tradition is to be *shown* afresh our connection to the past each time we are confronted with present actuality.

C. The rub lies in this "showing." What is this leading life by showing? This leads us straight into the question of universals.

The best of the past is tradition truly so called, we noted. The best of the past are the raw contacts with actuality in those past moments. Those past raw contacts with actuality are both the same as and different from

the present raw contact with actuality. They are the *same* raw contacts; they differ because each moment is the fresh unique present. They can be described by the *same* word, “fresh,” which yet means that each moment differs from others. This sameness of being “fresh” everywhere is everywhere different by virtue of its freshness.

Sameness-everywhere is what has been called “universals,” what make things as they are, as things. This is the sameness of the vitality of a fish as fish (in the water), for instance. Yet this fish-vitality expresses itself differently at each moment in each fish. This is the familiar problem of universals in the West, on how to capture the same chairness in so many different chairs, or what to make of the greenness of this fresh leaf, which differs from others, having the same greenness with that of others, or what to make of this particular ball sharing the same roundness with that different ball, and so on.

And this problem makes us aware of the three ways of thinking, which give us three different answers to the problem. Cognitive argumentative thinking says that there are immutable logical universals that render things and events rational, under-standable, thinkable. Explanatory thinking tries to explain how this is the case, even explains how inexplicable this face is. Evocative thinking stands aside to evoke what cannot be expressed, what is discernible as “usual” and “reasonable,” yet only in the unexpressed experience. And both explanatory and evocative thinkings use more metaphors than universals to understand *actual* things, where universals go hidden. We call this universal-hidden-in-actuality, “concrete universal.” What does it look like?

Some historians may doubt the factual existence of a person called Lao Tzu, but no one doubts that of Chuang Tzu. And yet, we know practically nothing about Chuang Tzu’s life. This strange *fact* about Chuang Tzu perhaps indicates, *instatantiates*, if you wish, a concrete universal — one concrete

individual whose factual details are blank, to be filled in by anyone's own life if they care to, to become as carefree, as composed, as roaming, as he. This is a concrete universal, to be taken with more seriousness than being dismissed as a mere "existential interpretation of Chuang Tzu."

It is in this manner perhaps that the varied problems kicked up by abstract universals are dissolved. Universals should be left alone, hidden in the concrete; whatever universal sameness made explicit turns false and restrictive.

Thinkers in China expressed universals only concretely. Perhaps they intuitively felt falsehood in our artificial labors to express the universals. Thinkers in the West also felt the imposing restrictive tendency of the sameness made explicit-external. All the so-called "problems of the universals" are symbolic of this feeling. And then more universals are used to "solve" them, as if to fear that universals would be dissolved in the solutions. Yet universals left alone, unearthed, are still universals; they are embodied, unnoticed, in our actual living. The tradition in us, and the metaphors we use, hint at universals; the tradition and metaphors can suggest, can be used, but cannot be made into an orthodoxy of/and literalism.

Universals are like the ways things go, the Tao of things and thinking. As "the Tao that can be tao-ed (identified as such) is not the usual-constant Tao," so the universals that can be argued about, and explicitly identified as such, are not the usual-real ones — indescribable, much less arguable.

As all we see in the sentences are letters, not the meaning for which we *read*, so all we see are things, and all we read about are events, not things' nature and their historical trends, *for* which we "read, that is, experience, things. Thinking in China is literary and historical thinking. The Tao, the road, is formed by walking (as Chuang Tzu said, 2/33); all we see for the moment is the walking — events and their expressions. The universals and thinking are what Luther called "*hidden gods*" (whom we want) in this world.

We can say T'ai Chi (太極), Li (理), Ch'i (氣), and the like, as the Neo-Confucians did. We can say that all nouns are universals, that proper noun like "Socrates" is a universal with one member whose identity is one and stays the same, that common noun like "a man" is a universal with one member whose identity is one and can change, and "two" is a universal with two members whose identities can change, and the like. But note how strange and foreign such descriptions are. They are anything but the way in which we *usually* and constantly practice universals. They appear (as they are) only hidden in this world, as Luther's God is.

What does "hidden" in the concrete flow of events mean here? Consider music. As the same score of classical music is performed forth over and over, each time differently into a different "music," so the birth-senescence-illness-death of our life (in Buddha's "score" of the music of life) is lived over and over, each life differently from the other. The fourfold cycle of human life we know, yet our knowledge remains vacuous (unreal, hollow, "false") until filled in with actuality; the filling makes birth and death *real*, even when life is boring, for boredom makes no sense without life-as-lived. And life is life-as-lived; life is living, or nothing, of course.

"Filled in with actuality" above means "lived through in *that* (human) way, by each per-former, to his or her fullest." To know the score (of music or of life), one must live it, flow with it, taking time staying in it — in short, living through it. One comes out (ex-ist) by living it, each one differently from all others.

Chinese poems are powerful because they are lived-through. They are born of and lived in actuality. Things are not at peace, out of balance, and the writings sound forth (as Han Yu said); daily living constrained, and poems are crafted forth (as Ou-yang Hsiu said). They are actuality-filled, actuality-mirrored. The writings and the poems are the "what must be" revolting against what actually is; they are scores lived compressedly, expressed, by oppressed lives.

As each performer makes different music out of the same musical score, so each of us makes his or her own life-music of common human integrity, either patterned after our Confucian paragons of virtues, or inspired by the music of no music, the “heavenly piping,” the musicality of being natural, as pointed to by our historical Taoists. This thought joins music to history, thereby universals to tradition. The score of humanness is a hidden universal, lived throughout history, handed down from life to life, generation to generation.

Aren't these hidden universals, because they are “hidden,” too vague and muddled for such precise thinking as philosophy? But “muddled” is not “ambiguous”; “imprecise” is not “subtle.” Bad writing is muddled and imprecise; actual life is subtle and ambiguous. Being precise is supposed to ban being muddled-imprecise; but precisely by doing so, being precise can also ban subtlety-ambiguity of actual living, thereby becomes being muddled-imprecise *about life*, and heads for a mechanical way of being. Not accidentally, technology developed in the West. Western philosophy has this danger — to become inaccurate (about life) by being fastidiously precise (about words and thinking).

Boredom is born of striving for precision without expressing the subtle ambiguity of actual living. This is why the assemblyline worker is as bored as proofreading is boring; both require precision and suppress creative expression that strikes out in a new direction (which no one can pin down precisely, and so is synonymous with subtle ambiguity) — as one's living requires. Precision without freedom (to do justice to actual living) is boring, approaching machines. Logic makes for precision, and so the West developed technology. Metaphor requires accuracy, and so China has thoughts on humanism.

On surface, however, being subtle-ambiguous looks like being muddled-imprecise. It takes poetic-historical discernment to tell them apart, and

to avoid being muddled, so as to express life's subtlety. A poem is a compression of a life story, a history of life, and its expression. A bad poem is muddled and imprecise; a good poem is subtle and ambiguous. Poetry criticism consists in such poetic-historical discernment, which *is* after all the essence of good poetry and philosophy — to which Chinese historical thinking can contribute.

Oxford English Dictionary says that "precise" means to cut off (in front), to cut short, abridge; "analysis" means to loosen up, break up something complex into its various simple components; "exact" is to drive or force out, to demand, require; "accurate" is to apply care to, be careful; "care" is to be concerned, even to be anxious; "correct" is to set right. "Nice" is interesting. Originally it meant "not to know," that is, being foolish, strange, slothful, but somehow it came to mean refined, sensitive, subtle, delicate, tactful, attentive, discriminative, minutely or carefully accurate, finely poised, agreeable, considerate, pleasant.

Perhaps (in my opinion) fine discrimination of delicate aptness is not to be exactly known — hence, we have combinations such as "nice-conscienced," "nice-eared," "nice-fingered," "nice-discerning," "nice-hearted."

We can say, then, that the West has precise and exact analysis of the matter in question, whereas China is careful in being accurate, correct, and nice-discerning about historical events. The West tends to be inaccurate (in historical actuality) in its precise analysis; China tends to be imprecise and inexact in its lived, historically involved, accuracy.

In short, the West may tend to be precise and inaccurate; China may tend to be accurate and imprecise — about the stories of life, historical actuality. The two modes of thinking should "marry" and interpenetrate to fine-tune our thinking into nice-eared nice-fingered nice-discernment, unawares. Being precise can then be used to expand-express the ambiguous

(walk-around in meaning, peripatetic in experience) subtlety (under-woven in meaning, tacitly understood) of actual process of living. To be precise is to cut it right, to be concise; to be accurate is to hit it right, taking care that every word tell. They now join to tailor our expressions rightly to hit actuality rightly; words are used precisely (appropriately) to express historical actuality (subtle, ambiguous) accurately.

It is time to take stock. Universals are what are common among us; the tradition is what is best in our common past. What is common among us resides in facts, which are literally what have been done, history; what is best is beyond facts, even counterfactual, and what is yet to be done. But since what is best is also in the tradition (what has been done well enough to be handed down to us), what is counterfactually best includes the factual (what has been done), the tradition. Thus our counterfactual Utopia is rooted in the tradition to revolutionize the tradition; Utopia goes through the tradition to break through it into the future.

And that is what happened in many descriptions of Utopia. Many fantastic myths are often couched in "once upon a time," and are said to originate in poetic license. But they are actually smashings, arisen out of constrained situations, of our common sense categories, that is, universals and traditions. The Sermon on the Mount wants us to fulfill the laws and the prophets by going beyond them; it wants us to live in the Mount of Utopia, that perfection of our Heavenly Father's who gave us the laws and the prophets. St. Paul went beyond our usual categories of the negative sanctions of the moral law, to allude to that Perfection, love, which is at the heart of the laws. The childish categories are the mirror in which we dimly see the Utopia of adulthood.

Chuang Tzu has a Utopia beyond all judgments. Hsi Fifth Chapter taunts the traditional universals of comeliness; his Sixth Chapter taunts those of life and death; his Seventh Chapter taunts those of happiness and fates

of life. These three chapters taunt traditional universals, keep haunting and hinting at what is inexpressible, for expressions couch themselves in universals and trapped in traditions.

All this is summed up in his terse descriptions of Utopia (the Nowhere Land) — wryly nicknamed the “World-Age of Ultimate Virtues.” One of its descriptions was casually tossed out in an imagined casual conversation with an emperor, the epitome of worldly power and ideal. In that Utopia deeds have no traces of historicity, events have no precedents of the tradition; that Nowhere Land has nothing in common with even our past best.

And yet, intimating what Utopia is not is to show what it is. Chuang Tzu went over the list of our best in the morals we treasure, our common best, our traditions of morality — and then went beyond them. He left us with the tradition that smashes the tradition.

“In the World-Age of Ultimate Virtues (至德之世) the worthy are not honored, the talented not employed. Rulers are like the high branches of a tree, the people like the deer of the fields. They do what is right but do not know that this is righteousness, love one another but do not know that this is benevolence, truehearted but do not know that this is loyalty, trustworthy but do not know that this is good faith. They wriggle around like insects to serve one another, but do not know that they are being kind. They move without traces; their events are not handed down.”¹⁰

Here, following the tradition is to go beyond it. The universals are picked, only to be negated to envisage the never never Land of what had better obtain, what we would rather have beyond all the best we have, have been,

and have seen. Traditions and universals are used negatively, evocatively, in a *hidden* manner. Chuang Tzu himself thereby becomes the legend, the tradition (literary, philosophical) which refuses to be embalmed in the temple of tradition.

Jean-Paul Sartre, the anti-traditionalist, was nonetheless sensible enough to see in Bach's music (such as *The Well-Tempered Clavier*) "an open tradition"—finding originality within an established discipline," demonstrating "the play of moral freedom within the confines of a . . . monarchical absolutism," depicted "the proud dignity of the subject who obeys his king," constrained himself to respect the postulates so that his successors can change them, and at once exalted obedience and judged and transcended it, by continuously reworking worn-out customs.

Similarly, Beethoven gives us "the musical image of the Assemblies of the French Revolution," and more; "without shattering the rules of his own art . . . he went beyond the triumphs of the Revolution, beyond even his own failure." "And if the musician has shared the range and hopes of the oppressed, is it impossible that he might be transported beyond himself by so much hope and so much rage that he could sing today of this world with the voice of the future?"¹¹

We can say, then, that all sincere poets, artists, and thinkers produce an "open tradition," the tradition that kicks itself in obeying it (as metaphor for fresh actuality), and by doing so create tomorrow today. The Chinese mind does so, not by logical-analytical thinking or descriptive-explanatory thinking, but by evocative-metaphorical thinking, a historical thinking.

For Chinese thinking tends toward actuality, to whose alive suppleness it con-forms. And the suppleness and the shape of conforming we call "history." Chinese historical thinking usually expresses itself in literature and historiography, which is a soft packaging; Western conceptual thinking has secure ropes of logic and universals. Comparative philosophy stands

beside both, showing the West how not to hurt, maim and even kill what Chinese thinking produces, namely, life history itself. At the same time, comparative philosophy warns Chinese thinking that it needs a clear Western manner of packaging to find its own genius, and to tacitly point to that thinking that is supple, alive, powerful — our own life history. Chinese thinking of history also needs the Western clarity to correct, revise, and present itself.

Chinese thinking has four ways of discerning and describing actuality, a beautiful example of how history in-forms thinking:

(1) Stories of past actuality (history) are told to intimate novel present actuality. In the West, since Aristotle despised Herodotus, history is history and philosophy, philosophy; in China, philosophers think in terms of history, using historical events and personage as paradigms that embody arguments and provide powerful demonstrations. And the so-called historiography (such as the *Ch'un Ch'iu*, the *Shih Chi*) is no objective chronicling of events, but a more or less explicit argument, in terms of history, for a point.

(2) Compressed history (aphorisms) produced out of our past experience are told to allude to novel present actuality. Once classical writings express such experience, later writings compress them into aphorisms; every Chinese writing is studded with them.

(3) Counterfactuals extrapolated from past actuality are told to admonish the present power the be. Practically all writings from the great Classics down to the most recent literature are full of them; Chuang Tzu is especially built on this ploy.

(4) Generalized (not abstracted) summaries of the past ways of life are told to guide the present living. The so-called moral and metaphysical notions belong here. Thus Jen is variously instantiated in the *Analects*; Jen I is variously embodied in the *Mencius*; Li (禮 decorum) and Te are as variously manifest in the Five Classics, as Li (理 principle) is in Neo-Confucianism

and Wu Hsing the Five Elementary Ways are in the Book of Changes.

These descriptions of actuality show how the Chinese thinking is dominated by stories, either to admonish (as in histories and counterfactuals) or to clarify (as in aphorisms and summary notions of experience). They all lead us from past actuality to the present and to the future — allusively, metaphorically.

All this is the primordial — historical, concrete — dynamo of thinking; without this root, thinking turns desiccated, insipid, technical, irrelevant, lifeless, abstract — in a word, rootless.

Notes

1. Oliver Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, NY: Summit Books, 1970, 1981, 1983, 1984, 1985, p.31
2. A. R. Luria, *The Man with a Shattered World*, NY, 1972.
3. Sacks, op. cit., pp. 34-35.
4. Ibid., pp. 106-7.
5. Stanley Rosen, *The Limits of Analysis*, Yale University Press, 1985 (Basic Books, 1980), pp. 7-9.
6. That both Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl Marx are great critics of existing culture via their philosophical archaeology of culture is well known. That Michel Foucault also has engaged in a similar task is seen in his *Madness and Civilization: A history of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (Pantheon, 1965), *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Pantheon, 1972), *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Science* (Vintage, 1973), *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (Vintage, 1975 (c1973)), *Discipline and Punish: The Archaeology of Prison* (Pantheon, 1977), and *The History of Sex* (Pantheon, 1978).
7. The Fu-Ku (復古) or Ku-Wen (古文) Movement is well summed up by Niu, Pao-t'ung in his introduction to Niu, Pao-t'ong, ed., *T'ang-Sung*

- Eight Great Literati — Their Selected Essays, Kan Su: Jenmin Ch'u-pan She, 1987, pp.1-15, and Liu, Ta-chieh's *Chung-kuo Wen-hsueh Fa-ta Shih*, Taiwan: Chung Hwa Shu-chu, 1968, Chapter 12, Section 4, pp.334-342. That famed Kuo Shao-yu devoted to the Movement most of his *Chung-kuo Wen-hsueh P'i-p'ing Shih*, Tainan: P'ing-P'ing Ch'u-pan She, 1974, pp.174-652. See also William H. Nien-hauser, Jr.'s detailed but loosely descriptive article, "Ku-wen," in *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*, ed. by William H. Nienhauser, Jr, et al., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986, pp.494-500.
8. See the editorial epilogue in Natsume Soseki, *Kusamakura*, Tokyo Shincho Bunko, 1981, p.172.
 9. Hsu Li (徐立) & Ch'en Hsin (陳新), *What the Ancients Talked About Writing Essays* (古人談文章寫作). Kuang-tung Jen-min Ch'u Pan She, 1985, p.1.
 10. 12/80 = Watson 138 (modified).
 11. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations*, tr. Benita Eisler, Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publications, 1965, pp.153-54.

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思考的歷史性

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摘要

本文論證歷史性是人類思考中不可或缺的重要因素。

全文論述共分三大段：作者首先指出，人一旦去失記憶力，就去失方向感而無法思考，迷失「自我」。這是從消極方面論證歷史意識對思考的重要性；其次，作者指出人的思考只能浸淫在傳統裡始得進行。這是得積極面觀察歷史在思考裡的重要地位。最後作者論證思考的周遍性與歷史的特殊性。這兩者如何合一成為歷史性的思考呢？要解決這問題，就必須分析「具體的共相」(concrete universals)，本文的分析指出，具體的共相本身就是在歷史裡的思考中。中國思想模式就是這種思考的最古老而最具代表性的傳統。