Journal of East Asian Studies **18** (2018), 267–276

Book Reviews

Expressing the Heart's Intent: Explorations in Chinese Aesthetics. By Marthe Atwater Chandler. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017. 284 pp. 90$ (hardcover).

Reviewed by Manuel Sassmann, Institute of Chinese Studies and Heidelberg Center for Transcultural Studies, Heidelberg University
doi:10.1017/jea.2018.9

Chandler's book is the outcome of her lifelong dedication to philosophy and her fascination with Chinese culture. Both she finds ingeniously brought together in the aesthetics of Li Zehou (born 1930). In view of the growing interest in Li's thought, Chandler's *Explorations in Chinese Aesthetics* appears as a timely token of esteem for Li's legacy. Only recently, members of the World Consortium for Research in Confucian Cultures reinforced Li's eminent status. After their inaugural meeting in 2014, they dedicated a conference solely to Li, which resulted in special issues on Li in *Philosophy East and West*; an edited volume and several translations are forthcoming. Chandler acknowledges that her monograph is, "in a deep sense, … modeled on Li Zehou's historical introduction to Chinese Aesthetics," *The Path of Beauty* (1981), and an "attempt to mirror and elaborate" (p. 20) it.

In her first chapter, Chandler explicates some topics in pre-modern Chinese aesthetics, ranging from the Neolithic to the Ming Dynasty, that are important to understand as the problems Li is trying to address when he revives the tradition of art as "expressing the heart's intent." She presents Chinese traditional philosophy as fundamentally aesthetic and Western philosophy as driven by science. Furthermore, it is Li who can be credited to have recognized both modes of thinking as being ultimately of equal importance in philosophy. While there might be some truth in this interpretation, presenting such general claims on traditional modes of thinking without critical comments bears the danger that non-specialists unaware of recent scholarship continue old habits of fetishizing differences and reinforcing artificial binaries.

The second chapter is a summary of Li's aesthetic theory. Li mainly works with arguments derived from Marx' early writings, emphasizing problems of the "humanization of nature" and the molding of the mind as a result of the use of tools. Here Li diverges from the mainstream of voluntarist Chinese Marxism, where the ideological problems of class struggle and revolution prevailed. He develops an aesthetic theory, which allows him to (re-)construct the identity of Chinese culture by a succession of "sedimentations," substituting the Kantian *a priori* forms of experience with historically changing "cultural-psychological structures." The "subjectivity" of social agents culminates in an aesthetic sensitivity that materializes in the production of artworks where it is perceivable in its condensed form.

Due to the constraints of being based entirely on English translations, which are inevitably interpretative in nature, Chandler characterizes her account as "an interpretation of interpretations" (p. 24). Thus, intellectual historians interested in a contextualization of Li's Chinese originals and the conceptual shifts involved in his appropriation of Western thinkers might profit from consulting the numerous earlier publications by Karl-Heinz Pohl or Liu Kang's monograph *Aesthetics and Marxism: Chinese Aesthetics and their Western Counterparts* (2008).

The remaining three chapters are case studies that illustrate the mechanism of Li's "sense of beauty." They deal with the issues of aesthetic and religious experience, Buddhist sculpture in

the Northern Wei (386–534), horse paintings from the eighth to twentieth century as art or propaganda, and the unity of the personal and political in the philosophy of the poet Su Shi (1037–1101), respectively. Based on a thorough reading of English secondary literature, Chandler summarizes how broader issues of a certain time translate into concrete artistic practices. One example is the sinicization of Buddhism that becomes visible in the style of garments of early Chinese Buddhist sculpture.

An important question of the book concerns the haunting smile of the two Buddhas on its cover, to which Chandler repeatedly draws the reader's' attention (pp. 64–68, 75, 96–99). Assisted by Li's theory she tries to understand why they are smiling and why we like their smiles. According to Li, material and formal properties of an artwork trigger an initial *aesthetic attitude*. The next step, *aesthetic attention*, "involves more serious consideration of the object" as the acquisition of contextual knowledge. The final *aesthetic experience* establishes a connection between both pervious steps. (pp. 45–46) However, contrary to Li, who "accuses these gently smiling faces of lacking 'any love, kindness, or concern for the world'" (p. 65), Chandler believes to have supplied sufficient historical evidence for the second step to demonstrate that the "religious emotion of the time remains in their smiles" (p. 97).

Be that as it may, by virtue of this statement the Buddhas' beauty appears to be an epiphany of Chandler's own making. Much like them, with similar "concerns for compassion and love" (p. 196) she aims at showing how "aesthetic experience … is transforming" (p. 195) the viewer to an extent that "one feels part of a greater harmony, a larger community, in a way that is anything but joyless" (p. 195).

While for her the desirability of these ideals seem to be out of question, Li's fiercest opponent, Liu Xiaobo (1955–2017), in his *Critique of Choice: A Dialogue with Li Zehou* (1988), already attacked him on this very point. He argued that harmony and communitarianism are an ideological choice, and for him beauty is the opposite, defined by conflict, quarrel, and dispute.

Inspired by Liu, I would like to propose another line of inquiry. Helmuth Plessner (1892–1985), in his general analysis of *The Smile* (1950), accounted precisely for the enigmatic character of this facial expression, as it preserves distance from expression in expression. It is thus representative of the exclusively human capability to reflect on the boundary between the inner and outer world, which they desire to bridge with cultural means. Smiles and artworks are both the result of this fundamental anthropological constitution.

In *The Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism* (1924, transl. 1988) Plessner legitimizes force in the widest sense as necessary for social interactions in a public sphere. In his critique, he argues for "the possibility of a spiritualization and refinement of the means of force, means to which in any event mankind is compelled by virtue of its physical existence" (p. 62). Plessner shows us with a smile that "the thorough transformation of the societal life relations that are based on force into communal life relations that are based on nonviolence—is … a lie" (ibid.).

Paper Tigers, Hidden Dragons: Firms and the Political Economy of China's Technological Development. By Douglas B. Fuller. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 304 pp. $95 (cloth).

Reviewed by Abigail E. Coplin, Department of Sociology and Council on East Asian Studies, Yale University
doi:10.1017/jea.2018.10

Technological innovation is simultaneously globalizing and localizing. While ambitious scientists, entrepreneurs, and investors operate in a transnational environment, national leaders perceive