

Ethical Intercultural Communication between the Western World and China

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ABSTRACT

Culture is the cumulative deposit of knowledge, traditions, beliefs acquired by a human community in the course of generations: ethics is one of the most important of such beliefs. As for the intercultural communication, the discipline which studies a cultural dialogue about various issues across different communities, since the eighties of the last century it has been the object of various theories, based on experimental data collections: among them the 'Values Orientation Theory' by F.R. Kluckhohn and F. Strodtbeck, the 'Cultural Dimensions Theory' by G. Hofstede and the 'Theory of Basic Values' by S.H. Schwartz. One of the goals of this paper is to give a closer look at those theories. In the same period of time an 'ethical turn' manifested itself in western literary studies, after a long period of post-modernist disengagement, by initiative of J. Gardner, M. C. Nussbaum and J. Habermas, among others: the same happened in China in the eve of the new millennium, owing to the studies on comparative literature by Nie Zhenzhao. Literary works constitute an important vehicle of ethical intercultural communication. A second goal of the present paper is that of suggesting a 'constructivist approach' in the cultural dialogue between the western world and China, combining the results of those theoretical models with a comparative analysis of literary works chosen ad hoc, as recently done by Xu Zhilin in her comparative study of female images in 'A leaf in the storm', by Lin Yutang, and 'Gone with the wind', by Margareth Mitchell, from the perspective of Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory.

INTRODUCTION

Culture can be defined in various ways: the Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede defined it as 'the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one category of people from those of another' (Hofstede, 1991). The author of this paper prefers to define it as the cumulative deposit of knowledge, traditions, beliefs, acquired by a human community in the course of generations. As for the intercultural communication between different cultures and social groups, in the course of last century various models have been developed: let us recall the 'Values Orientation Theory' by F. R. Kluckhohn and F. Strodtbeck, the 'Cultural Dimensions Theory' by G. Hofstede and the 'Theory of Basic Values' by S. H. Schwartz (Thomas, 2008). Literary works constitute an important vehicle of intercultural dialogue, where ethical values play an essential role. In the words of the American sociologist Stella Ting-Toomey, 'Ethics is a set of standards that uphold the community's expectations concerning right and wrong conducts ... For each ethical case study, there are multiple perspectives, viewpoints and layered contexts that frame the interpretation of an ethical dilemma case' (Ting-Toomey, 2011). After a period of disengagement under the banner of Post-modernism in the last quarter of last century an ethical turn has been registered among western writers and literary critics. Since the

first years of this millennium a similar orientation has been taking place in China.

Faced with a request for an ethical dialogue between world communities possessing a vast cultural heritage, a second goal of this paper is to suggest a constructivist approach in intercultural communication, utilizing a comparative analysis of their literary works which takes into account the theoretical results obtained so far.

The paper is subdivided into the following parts: Section 1 (Introduction), Section 2 (Western Intercultural Communication Models: 2.1 Values Orientation Theory, 2.2 Cultural Dimension Theory, 2.3 Theory of Basic Values), Section 3 (Ethics and literary criticism: 3.1 Western ethical values 3.2 Confucian ethics and Chinese literary criticism), Section 4 (Conclusions). An Appendix (Cultural distance according to Hofstede's Theory of Basic Values) and a References section conclude the paper.

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION MODELS

'Values Orientation Theory'

The American anthropologist and social theorist Clyde Kluckhohn published in 1951 an essay entitled "Values and value orientation in the Theory of Action" (Kluckhohn, 1951). His 'Values Orientation Method' was further

developed by his wife Florence Rockwood Kluckhohn and her colleague Fred Strodtbeck, who interviewed members of five different cultural groups (itinerant Navajos, Mexican-Americans, Texan settlers, Mormon villagers and Zuni pueblo dwellers) and finally published the results of their investigations in a book entitled "Variations in values orientations" (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961). They argued that the human ethical framework consists of a bounded number of 'existential universals'. More precisely, human intentional acts of consciousness can be grouped according to the following three basic assumptions:

- 'there is a limited number of common human problems, for which all humans must at all times find some solution';
- 'while there is a great variability in solutions of those problems, the set of those solutions is neither limitless nor random, but it varies within a limited range of possible choices';
- 'those alternative solutions are present in all societies at all times, but are differentially preferred'.

There are the following basic types of problems to be solved by every society, and there are three alternative solutions to each problem:

- Beliefs about human nature: "How is human nature: good, bad or a mixture of both?"
- Motivation of human activity: "Which is the primary motivation for behavior: to express oneself ('being'), to grow ('being in becoming'), or to achieve ('doing')?"
- Relationships among humans: "How should individuals relate to others: hierarchically ('lineal'), as equals ('collateral'), or depending on individual merits ('individualism')?"
- Human relationship to nature: "Which should be the relationship between humans and nature: dominating, submissive or harmonious?"
- Time Orientation: "Which aspect of time should people primarily focus: past, present or future?"

A sixth one was later added:

- Conception of space: "Here, There or Far Away?"

These six 'value orientations' are not mutually exclusive: a higher preference for a choice does not necessarily imply the absence of the other two alternatives. There is a rank order of preferred alternatives.

To develop this model, a total of 106 subjects from five communities of Southwestern United States were chosen as a part of this study. The culture groups represented in this research were Navaho Indians, Pueblo Indians, Spanish-Americans, Mormons, and Texan/Oklahoman homesteaders. Previous studies and anthropological observations were used to offer predictions about value orientations, to be obtained from the answers to 'Value Schedules', consisting of 22 items presented in an interview format. The 'Value Schedule' questions were represented as inquiries about hypothetical, general-life situations or ways of living and the respondent was to choose a resolution for that particular situation. Statistical procedures were performed to determine within-culture regularities and between-culture differences.

Concerning their research, F. R. Kluckhohn and F. Strodtbeck wrote the following: 'Our most basic assumption is that there is a systematic variation in the realm of cultural phenomena which is both as definite and as essential as the demonstrated systematic variation in physical and biological phenomena ... Value orientations were defined as complex but definitely patterned (rank-ordered) principles, resulting from the transactional interplay of three analytically distinguishable elements of the evaluative process - the cognitive, the affective, and the directive elements - which give order and direction to the ever-flowing stream of human acts and thoughts as these relate to the solution of common human problems'.

On the occasion of the 10th Congress of the International Association of Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACP), held in Nara, Japan, in 1990, the Chinese social psychologists Chen Zhigang, Wang Yulang and Wang Junzheng (Chen et al, 1990) linked each one of these types of values to one of the major religious influences active in Chinese culture: 'Societal Harmony' (social order, social justice, environment's protection) should be related to *Taoism*, 'Virtuous Interpersonal Behavior' (honesty, loyalty, self-discipline) to *Confucianism*, and 'Personal and interpersonal harmony' (family security, honoring parents and elders) to *Buddhism*.

'Cultural Dimension Theory'

During the period 1967-1991 the Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede, assuming that each nation has a distinctive, influential and describable culture, developed a 'Cultural Dimension Theory', quantitatively describing the effects of the culture of a 'national state' on the 'values' of its members, on the base of five factors, which he numerically evaluated on a scale ranging from 0 to 100. In his research Hofstede utilized data referring to around 117,000 IBM employees working in various branches of the corporation, distributed in different parts of the world. In a later research, published in 2011, a 6th factor was added, the 'Indulgence versus Restraint Index' (IVR) (Hofstede, 1980, 1984, 2001, 2011). Hofstede's scores were the average scores of all participants in each country.

Let's examine in detail the various 'factors':

- 1) 'Power Distance Index' (PDI). Hofstede gave two different definitions of this Index. The first one was the following: 'PDI is the power distance between a boss B and a subordinate S in a hierarchy in the difference between the extent to which B can determine the behavior of S and the extent to which S can determine the behavior of B. The 'Power Distance' so defined, that is accepted by both B and S and supported by their social environment is to be determined by their national culture.' He later gave this new definition: 'PDI is the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally'.

A higher numerical value of PDI indicates that the people have a high degree of recognition of the 'power structure', while a lower PDI indicates that the people have a weak hierarchy orientation. A high PDI can be found in family, school and corporations. In the com-

parison performed by Hofstede, the scores of *PDI* were 18 for Denmark, 35 for Germany, 40 for U.S.A., 69 for Brazil, 80 for China, 104 for Malaysia.

- 2) '*Uncertainty Avoidance Index*' (*UAI*): it indicates the degree of confidence by the people towards their future wellbeing, not feeling threatened by uncertainty. In the '*uncertainty accepting societies*' people accept social changes easily because they are not afraid of change: their *UAI* is relatively low. The opposite happens in '*uncertainty avoiding societies*', where individuals suffer high social pressure and anxiety. The scores were 30 for China, 46 for U.S.A. 67 for Germany and 76 for Brazil.
- 3) '*Individualism Index*' (*IDV*): it is an indicator of the degree of individual independence. A higher numerical value of *IDV* indicates a higher level of self-esteem, even in defiance with the ruling system. The opposite is true with lower values of *IDV*. The scores were 20 for China, 38 for Brazil, 67 for Germany and 91 for U.S.A., respectively.
- 4) '*Masculinity Index*' (*MAS*): it is an indicator of the '*masculine*' or '*feminine*' quality of a society. In a '*masculine*' society (i.e. with higher values of *MAS*) its members are oriented toward career, money and social status, while in a '*feminine*' one (i.e. with lower values of *MAS*) people tend to be more gentle, tolerant and modest. The scores were 49 for Brazil, 62 for U.S.A. and 66 for China and Germany.
- 5) '*Long Term Orientation versus Short Term Orientation Index*' (*LTO*), initially called by Hofstede '*Confucian Dynamism*': it is an indicator of the acceptance of social changes. In societies with a higher value of *LTO* its members tend to trade today's hardships for tomorrow's happiness, with pragmatism toward their society's traditions. In short-term oriented cultures (i.e. with low *LTO* scores) people attach importance to short-term goals and tend to maintain old traditions during periods of social changes. The scores were 26 for U.S.A., 44 for Brazil, 83 for Germany and 87 for China.
- 6) '*Indulgence versus Restraint Index*' (*IVR*): it measures the sense of '*indulgence*' toward themselves by the members of the groups (high *IVR* values), as opposite to a '*sense of social responsibility*' (low *IVR* values). The scores were 24 for China, 40 for Germany, 54 for Brazil and 68 for U.S.A.

Hofstede maintains that these cultural dimensions broadly characterize a national culture in terms of its '*average pattern of beliefs and values*' (Hofstede, 1983), but his model received several critics: among others, there were those expressed by B. Mc Sweeney (2002), T. Fang (2003) and A. Ly (2012).

Mc Sweeney criticized Hofstede's model from a methodological point of view, declaring that his assertions were too restrictive, starting with his definition of culture as '*software of the mind*', which precluded any consideration of '*interplay between macroscopic and microscopic cultural levels and between the cultural and the non-cultural ones*'. Another critic concerned Hofstede's '*one company approach*', in the sense that a single company cannot possibly provide

information on the entire cultural system of a country: Hofstede answered that the use of a single multinational employer eliminates the variability induced by the diversity of corporate policies, leaving only '*national culture*' to explain cultural differences. Another critic concerned the fact that Hofstede cited 117,000 surveys, but the number of surveys actually used were much less: of the 66 countries covered by the surveys, only 40 were used in the final analysis and, of those 40, only 6 had sample sizes of more than 1,000, and 15 had samples of less than 200. Hofstede also ignored the impact of other cultures upon the responses in the surveys and added that Hofstede tends to ignore the importance of '*communities*'¹: he assumed indeed that a country constitutes a homogeneous whole, but most nations contain several distinct '*ethnic units*'.

As for Tony Fang, he conducted a research in 23 countries according to Hofstede's methodology. His critique concerns Hofstede's '*Fifth National Culture Dimension*', namely the '*Long Term versus Short Term Orientation Index*', which he initially called '*Confucian Dynamism*'. These were Hofstede's words on the matter: '*We have called this dimension 'Confucian Dynamism' [儒家动力 Rújiā dònglì] to show that it deals with a choice from Confucius' ideas and that its "positive pole" reflects a dynamic, future oriented mentality, whereas its "negative pole" reflects a more static, tradition-oriented mentality*' (Hofstede & Bond, 1988).

Fang found contradictory the fact that, according to Hofstede, '*Long-term Orientation*' referred to a positive, dynamic and future oriented culture, linked with four positive Confucian values ('*persistence*', '*the ordering of relationships by status*', '*thrift*' and, finally, '*having a sense of shame*'), while the '*Short-Term Orientation*' was associated with four negative Confucian values ('*personal steadiness and stability*', '*protecting your face*', '*respect for tradition*' and, finally, '*reciprocation of greetings, favors and gifts*'): on the contrary, it is clear that '*personal steadiness and stability*' are positive Confucian values.

Hofstede's '*Cultural Dimension Theory*' has been fruitfully utilized in *comparative literature* studies in China. Let us consider the following example, offered by the Guangzhou University's student Xu Zhi Ling (Xu, 2019), who compared the female characters in Margaret Mitchell's "*Gone with the wind*" and Lin Yutang's "*A leaf in the storm*". The main characters of the novels are two female figure, *Scarlett* living in the American *Southern Belt* at the time of the '*Civil War*' (1861-1865) and *Tanni*, living in Shanghai at the time of the *Sino-Japanese war* (1937-1945). Both female characters show a similar "*Power Distance*": at *Scarlett*'s times social inequality among '*rich white people*' and '*black slaves*', was the rule, as in *Tanni*'s China, with reference to rich city dwellers and poor immigrant farmers. In addition to that, both women were living in '*masculine*' societies and both had to live in '*uncertainty accepting*' conditions, because of the war. They strongly differed in what referred to the '*collectivism versus individualism*' antinomy, because *Scarlett* was a member of a very *individualistic* society while *Tanni* shared Confucian *collectivistic* values. They also strongly differed in what refers to the antinomy between *restraint* and

indulgence: Scarlett was a hedonistic person, while *Tanni* restrained herself in her love feelings and her life. As for the ‘*Long Term Orientation*’, Scarlett was a realist: she cared about her *present* and *future* but not about the *past*, thinking that ‘*After all, tomorrow is another day*’, while *Tanni* often recalled her past and in the present she devoted herself to public welfare, taking care of homeless people.

‘Universal Values Theory’

Professor Shalom H. Schwartz, from the Department of Psychology of the Hebrew University, enunciated in 1987, in cooperation with his colleague Wolfgang Bilsky, a research project aimed at developing a ‘*theory of the universal content and structure of values*’, where the importance of values in a wide variety of contexts was taken into consideration (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987, 1990). A team of social psychologists interviewed teachers and students and 5 occupationally heterogeneous samples of adults, from 20 countries (Australia, Brazil, P.R. China, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Israel, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Taiwan, United States, Venezuela, Zimbabwe). In Schwartz’s project, all samples had at least a High School education. The results of that research were published in two papers (Schwartz, 1992, 2012).

Two broad questions were addressed to the interviewed people:

- “Which are your value priorities, in relation to your social experiences?” and
- “How do those value priorities affect your behavioral orientations and choices?”

Thereafter the project team faced the question of national cross-cultural differences in *value priorities*, seeking to identify some of their causes and effects. The team hypothesized the existence of 10 primary motivational types of values:

- 1) *Self-Direction* (independent thought and action);
- 2) *Stimulation* (the need for a varied stimulation to maintain an optimal level of activation);
- 3) *Hedonism* (the pleasure associated with satisfying organism’s needs);
- 4) *Achievement* (personal success through competence, according to social standards);
- 5) *Power* (status differentiation, dominance/submission dimension);
- 6) *Security* (harmony and stability of society and interpersonal relationships);
- 7) *Conformity* (restraint from actions and impulses to harm others and violate social norms);
- 8) *Tradition* (symbols and practices);
- 9) *Benevolence* (concern for the welfare of close others in everyday interaction);
- 10) *Universalism* (understanding, appreciation, tolerance and concern for the welfare of all people in all settings).

The analysis of the answers evidenced the existence of the following nine sets of ‘*Compatible Pursuit of Values*’: ‘*Power & Achievement*’, ‘*Achievement & Hedonism*’, ‘*Hedonism & Stimulation*’, ‘*Stimulation & Self-direction*’, ‘*Self-direction & Universalism*’, ‘*Universalism & Benevolence*’, ‘*Tradition & Conformity*’, ‘*Conformity & Security*’,

‘*Security & Power*’. The collected data confirmed that people in a large number of cultures distinguish nine types of values when assessing the importance of guiding principles in their lives; *Stimulation*, *Power* and *Tradition* emerged in distinct regions in more than 75% of samples, while the remaining value types were also consistently found in the analyses.

The data evidenced also the existence of the following sets of ‘*Conflicting Values*’:

- *Self-Direction & Stimulation*, versus *Conformity, Tradition & Security*;
- *Universalism & Benevolence*, versus *Achievement & Power*;
- *Hedonism* versus *Conformity & Tradition*;
- *Spirituality* versus *Hedonism, Power & Achievement*: the most likely location for *Spirituality* is between *Benevolence* and *Tradition*.

An additional semi-universal value, *Spirituality*, failed to evidence universality to a substantial degree: firm evidence for a distinct ‘*Spirituality*’ region was obtained in only 8 samples and weaker evidence was detected in another 17 samples. In the words of Schwartz’s, ‘the data give no support to the idea that there are additional, motivational types of values still missing from the theory. Specific additional values that collaborators from different countries suggested as necessary to cover concepts important in their cultures, pointed to no new, potentially universal types... Hedonism, Self-direction, Universalism and Security types were found in 95% of countries, and the Stimulation, Benevolence and Conformity types were found in 90% of countries... Given the diversity of countries studied, these findings suggest that all 10 motivation types of values [besides *Spirituality*] may be quite close to universals... The data suggest two alternative ways in which the need of answering the question of the “ultimate meaning of reality” may be expressed other than a universal spirituality type. People may find meaning through the pursuit of other types of values (as *Benevolence* and *Universalism*) or, rather than a single, universal “*Spirituality*” type, there may be a number of distinct types of *Spirituality*, each consisting of a different set of specific values.’

ETHICAL LITERARY CRITICISM

Western Ethical Values

In the course of the last two thousand years the western world has seen the birth of a plurality of ethical systems, all are based in an ‘*individual*’ and its ‘*rights*’. Let us recall some of them, starting with the Ancient Greek philosophers *Socrates* (469-399 BC), *Plato* (428-347 BC), *Aristotles* (384-322 BC) and *Zeno of Citium* (334-262 BC). The first declared that ‘*absolute truth*’ exists and can be discovered through the use of reason: morally bad deeds are due to ignorance. Of *Plato*’s doctrine, let us recall the profound dualism between ‘*things*’ (the sensitive world) and ‘*ideas*’ (the intelligible world): the body is mortal and a source of illusion and error, due to our senses, while the soul is immortal and allows us to know the truth because it was originally, before being united with the body, a participant in the ‘*world of ideas*’ (*Hyperuranium*).

As for *Aristotle*, he was the first who explicitly introduced the word ‘*Ethics*’ in the West. In his “*Nicomachean Ethics*” (326 BC) he defined it as a set of principles that govern a person’s behavior ‘*to achieve his highest good*’. *Zeno of Citium* was the founder of the ‘*Stoic*’ school, which laid great emphasis on goodness and peace of mind gained from living in accordance with Nature (Clark, 2012).

The subsequent ‘*Christian Ethics*’ brought to the West Jesus’ message of ‘*unrestricted love for the neighbor*’ as the pre-condition for the enjoyment of ‘*God’s beatitude*’ in after-life: from this altruistic love descend all ethical norms (Cardman, 2008). In medieval times, the philosophical movement of ‘*Scholastics*’ integrated the Christian message with the teaching of *Aristotle*, while underlining the active role of the Church as a mediator between God and the believers. The theologian St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and the great poet Dante Alighieri (1260-1321) are two illustrious interpreters of this philosophy (Cantor, 1992).

The religious reforms of the German *Martin Luther* and the French *John Calvin*, during the 16th century, introduced the message of individual responsibility in front of God, without the intermediation of the Church (Armstrong, 2002). The subsequent cultural movement of ‘*Enlightenment*’, in the 18th century, abandoned any reference to a religious thought in the building up of an ethical system (Bristow, 2017). The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), wrote three monumental works on moral philosophy: “*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*” (published in 1785), “*Critique of Practical Reason*” (published in 1788) and “*Metaphysics of Morals*” (published in 1797) Starting from the ‘*common sense morality*’, he analyzed concepts such as ‘*the good*’, ‘*duty*’, and ‘*moral worth*’, to arrive to the definition of the supreme principle of morality: the ‘*categorical imperative*’. It sounds like that: “*I ought never act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law.*” (Kuehn, 2011).

With his works, Kant seemed to have completed all possible philosophical reflections on *Ethics*, but Philosophy never stops. Soon after him another giant, the German philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) (founder of the philosophical movement of ‘*Idealism*’) took Kant’s place on the stage (Beiser, 2005). In his work “*The Phenomenology of Spirit*”, published in 1807, he described the evolution of consciousness from ‘*physical perception*’ to ‘*absolute knowledge*’, utilizing the method of ‘*dialectics*’ (which consists of a debate between two opposed points of view; it was first used by Plato 2,000 years before), to present his thoughts. Hegel’s *dialectic system* is subdivided into three stages: *thesis*, *antithesis* and *synthesis* (somehow, a compromise between the two). In another work “*Elements of the Philosophy of Right*”, published in 1820, he presented his ethical system, utilizing the method of ‘*dialectics*’: *good* is such only in relation to *evil* (who does not know *evil* does not even know *good*). The *synthesis* between *good* and *evil* is offered by the ‘*ethical state*’ (the *ruler*), which dominates the opposing interests of the individuals. Hegel’s philosophical system was followed by the pessimistic philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860). According to him, *compassion*

is the basis of morality: what is relevant for ethics are the single individuals, who can act against their own self-interest (Cartwright, 2010). One of the last great thinkers of the 19th century in Western Europe was the German Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), who denied the possible existence of universal ethical principles, in his works “*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*” (1883) and “*Beyond Good and Evil* (1886)” (Leiter, 1997).

The 20th century was characterized by an enormous scientific advancement and by the explosion of two bloody world wars. ‘*Logical Positivism*’, a philosophical movement that arose in Vienna in the 1920s and was characterized by the view that scientific knowledge is the only kind of factual knowledge, became the ethical guide of western intellectuals (Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2015). After the second world war French philosophers dominated the western European scene: at first there was the appeal to ‘*moral engagement*’ by the philosopher and playwright Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), a great supporter of the decolonization movements in Asia and Africa. He was followed, in the sixties, by the philosophers of Post-Modernism: Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998) and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), among others, announced the era of ‘*disengagement*’, as the consequence of a denial of any universal ethical system (Felluga, 2013). In America ‘*New Criticism*’ dominated the scene: it was a formalist movement concerned with the aesthetic qualities of a work (Searle, 2008).

In the seventies an ‘*ethical turn*’ took place. In the words of the literary critic M. W. Gregory (2011), ‘*for roughly 2500 years, ethical references constituted the starting point (and often the ending point) for most literary commentary. From Plato’s attack on tragedy up through the Victorians’ scandalized indignation over the work of Oscar Wilde and the Pre-Raphaelite poets, ethical criticism was the default position for most critics of literary art. However, like many long-lived positions not kept intellectually honest by ongoing criticism, ethical criticism over the centuries got fat, lazy, repetitive, shallow, doctrinaire, self-indulgent, platitudinous, and sometimes mean spirited... Throughout the entire 20th century, the higher the prestige of other modes of criticism ascended – first, New Criticism, and, second, Postmodernism – the lower the prestige of ethical criticism descended.*’

In 1978 John Gardner published an essay entitled “*On moral fiction*”, where he argued that ‘*contemporary literature suffers first and foremost from a basic failure of the test of morality*’ (Gardner, 1979). Other critics and philosophers joined in that appeal for ethical responsibility. Among them there were the philosopher and literary critic Martha Craven Nussbaum, who in 1988 published “*The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*” (Nussbaum, 2001), followed in 1990 by “*Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*”. In the first work she confronts the ethical dilemma that individuals strongly committed to justice are nevertheless vulnerable to external factors that may deeply compromise or even negate their moral stand. In the second work Nussbaum champions ‘*multiculturalism*’ and ‘*ethical universalism*’, and further

develops the role of literature as narrative imagination into ethical questions.

About in the same years, the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (born in 1929) published a philosophical essay entitled “*Theory of Communicative Action*” (Habermas, 1990), where he established the bases of a ‘*Theory of Morality, Democracy, and Law*’, with a renewed message of moral commitment to build up a society based on social justice and democracy. He wrote that ‘*human actions and understanding can be fruitfully analyzed as having a linguistic structure*’, what is equivalent to saying that ‘*language*’ is the foundational component of society. In Habermas’ view, the ‘*ethics of discourse*’ is an ‘*ethic of responsibility*’: it is composed of a ‘*cognitive ethics*’, which rationally founds ethical norms valid for a single individual, and a ‘*universalistic ethics*’, valid for all human beings endowed with reason.

The following are the universal ethical principles that, according to Habermas, should be assumed in a communication between free people, not subject to any conditioning authority or interests:

- ‘*Rightness*’: every dialogist must respect the rules of the argumentative situation (for example, listen to the theses of others or withdraw their own, if they have proved false);
- ‘*Truthfulness*’: every dialogist must be sincere and convinced of his own statements;
- ‘*Comprehensibility*’: each dialogist must speak in a manner consistent with the sense and grammatical rules.

If anyone of the pre-requisites is not satisfied, then the possibility of an agreement between the conversation partners collapses. When all the claims are satisfied, we have the ‘*ideal discursive situation*’, that is, a model of just society centered on the equality of the dialogists. Such a society coincides with the model of a democratic community composed of equal men, free and dialoguing on collective issues in an attempt to rationally resolve their conflicts of interest.

Confucian Values and Chinese Literary Criticism

The Chinese word for ‘*Ethics*’, 伦理 (*Lúnli*), might be better translated as ‘*Rules to maintain a harmonious society*’, i.e. a society where people have a balanced relationship with each other.

In China the first religious- philosophical teaching about *Ethics* came from Lao zi (老子) (6th century BC), author of “*Dao De Jing*” (道德经 *Great Book of the Way and Virtue*). Another fundamental text of *Taoism* is the “*Zhuāngzi*” (庄子 *The book of Master Zhuang*), written by *Master Zhuang* during the 3rd century BC. *Taoism* requires human beings to be humble and adopt a ‘*responsible non-action*’ (无为 *wú wéi*), because acting in a way that is out of the cyclical rhythm of nature, an individual disrupts the harmony of the universe. To attain naturality he must free himself from selfishness and desire, appreciating simplicity, according to the principle of ‘*self so*’ (自然 *Zìrán*), meaning: ‘*adopt spontaneity and creativity*’ (Fowler, 2005).

Taoist teachings were resumed by Confucius (孔子 *Kǒng zǐ*) (551-479 BC), who wrote about *Ethics* in his “*论语*” (*Lúnyǔ* = *Analects*) (Confucius, 1997), and by his followers

Mencius (孟子 *Mèngzǐ*) (372-289 BC), Xúnzi (荀子) (310-285 BC) and Zhū Xī (朱熹) (1130-1200 AD).

Confucian ethics is based on ‘*five constant virtues*’: ‘*Benevolence*’ (仁 *Rén*), ‘*Righteousness*’ (义 *Yì*), ‘*Ritual*’ (礼 *Lǐ*), ‘*Wisdom*’ (智 *Zhì*) and ‘*Trustworthiness*’ (信 *Xìn*) (Cheng, 1993). While the Confucian principles of *Rén* (Benevolence), *Zhì* (Wisdom) and *Xìn* (Trustworthiness) are in tuning with the western ethical vision, the *Lǐ* (礼 *ritual*) principle requires some explanation, which is offered by the scholarly paper “*Confucian Ethics and the Critique of Ideology*”, of Alan K.L. Chan (2000). He observes that “*Confucius can be described as a ‘conservative’ thinker, in the technical sense that he regarded certain values and insights derived from the tradition to be of normative significance and which must therefore be carefully conserved.*” As for the principle of *Lǐ*, it originally denoted a type of ritual implement and, by extension, religious rituals in general. In Confucian “*Analects*” (论语 *Lúnyǔ*) *Lǐ* denotes ritual discipline and propriety. In Alan Chan’s words “*Lǐ serves to rein the raw and rough, transforming the uncultured into polished exemplars and acts as a key element in the socialization process. From simple bowing to elaborate rituals, Lǐ delineates the set of acceptable behavior, bind the community together, and in so doing gives shape to the Confucian conception of culture.*” But careful observance of ritual forms is necessary but not sufficient to proper *Lǐ* performance: “*If a person is not Rén, he would lack the basic moral capital which endows the Lǐ acts with ethical significance.*”

From *Lǐ* descend the five ‘*cardinal relationships*’: between ‘*ruler and subject*’, ‘*husband and wife*’, ‘*father and son*’, ‘*elder and younger brother*’, and ‘*friend to friend*’. To these ethical principles must be added the principle of the ‘*Golden mean*’ (中庸 *zhōngyōng*), which recommends to pay attention to the interests of the whole, trying to keep balance and avoiding being extreme (Chen et al, 1990).

A third *School of Ethical Teaching* is constituted by the *Mahayana Buddhism*, which developed in China during the 2nd century AD by initiative of the Buddhist monk *Lokaksema* (支娄迦讖 *Zhīlóujiāchèn*), from the Kingdom of Gandhara, during the period 147-189 AD, at the time of the Han Dynasty (Williams, 1989). The basic ethical teaching of *Buddhism* is summarized in the “*Five precepts*” (五戒律 *Wǔ jièlǜ*), which are common to all Buddhist schools (Edelglass, 2013):

- ‘*abstain from taking life*’,
- ‘*abstain from taking what is not given*’,
- ‘*abstain from sensual misconduct*’,
- ‘*abstain from false speech*’,
- ‘*abstain from liquors, wines, and other intoxicants, which are the basis for heedlessness*’.

Even though differing in many respects, *Taoism*, *Confucianism* and *Mahayana Buddhism* agree in building up the collectivistic *Chinese Ethics* of personal responsibility toward the family and the country in creating and maintaining a well-ordered, harmonious society. In the words of David Wong (2018), ‘*the tradition of Chinese ethical thought is centrally concerned with questions about how one ought to live: what goes into a worthwhile life, how to weigh duties to*

ward family versus duties toward strangers, whether human nature is predisposed to be morally good or bad, how one ought to relate to the non-human world, the extent to which one ought to become involved in reforming the larger social and political structures of one's society, and how one ought to conduct oneself when in a position of influence or power. The personal, social and political are often inter-wined in Chinese approaches to the subject.

As for the Chinese literary world, during the first part of the 20th century the writer and literary critic Lu Xun (鲁迅) (1881-1936) and other colleagues of the 'New Culture Movement' (新文化运动 *Xīn wénhuà yùndòng*), as Zhou Zuoren (周作人) (1885-1967) and Hu Shi (胡适) (1891-1962) among others, were fighting against *Confucianism*, with the purpose of contributing to the cultural modernization of their country. They engaged themselves in promoting the adoption of a Chinese vernacular language in literature, Lu Xun utilized the Peking's dialect, the '*Báihuà*' (白话) in his novels, replacing the '*Wényán*' (文言 *classical language*), not accessible to the common people; they also performed an intense translational activity of western literary works, into Chinese (Ha, 2019).

With the advent of the People's Republic of China, the political approach of *Socialist Realism* became the norm, but other voices were also present, as those of the writer Mao Dun (茅盾) (1896-1981), who promoted the idea of individual life in literature, and of the poet Feng Xuefeng (冯雪峰) (1903-1976), who argued that '*the spirit of Realism was embedded in classical works*' and traced it to Chinese classics such as "*The book of songs*" (诗经 *Shījīng*) and "*Songs of the Chu country*" (楚辞 *Chǔ cí*), '*thus succeeding in differentiating Chinese Realism from Soviet Marxist Socialist Realism*'. During the '*Cultural Revolution*' (1966-1976) the political interference in literature greatly worsened, until in 1980s occurred the impact with Western literary theories: '*New Criticism*', '*Existentialism*', '*Structuralism*', Derrida's '*De-constructionism*'. (Chen & Sheng, 2013). The western '*Ethical Turn*' stimulated the re-birth of Chinese literary theorization and other themes, as '*Postcolonialism*', '*Feminism*', '*Ecocriticism*', came to the fore. In the words of the literary critic Junwu Tian (Tian, 2019), '*the Chinese ethics, with Confucianism, had influenced the Chinese culture for more than 2000 years and had helped to maintain the unity and stability of the country. However, because of the Cultural Revolution and the utilitarianism resulting from the opening to the outside world, the Chinese traditional culture decayed... In order to redress this deteriorating ethical anomaly, both the Chinese government and Chinese intellectuals called for the return of the tradition of Chinese ethic, particularly Confucianism.*'

In 2004 Zhen Zhao Nie, professor of Comparative Literature at Peking's Central Chinese Normal University, promoted the birth of the Chinese '*Ethical Literary Criticism*'. He declared that his ethical criticism followed the tradition of Cambridge Criticism (Leavis, 1948), who focused on moral and political significance of literary works. Nie's approach consisted of the analysis of the actions of the characters of a literary work on the base of the moral principles dominating

in the epoch and place where the story evolves. He wrote: '*moral criticism aims at evaluation and judgement of the actions of literary characters and the results of their actions, while ethical criticism aims at the analysis, interpretation and understanding of the ethical causes behind the actions*' (Nie, 2004; Nie & Shang, 2014; Liang, 2014).

He utilized this approach to analyze the 16th century AD classical Chinese novel "*Journey to the West*" (西游记 *Xī Yóu Jì*), as well as the works of the British writer Thomas Hardy (Nie & Liu, 2014; Liang, 2014).

CONCLUSIONS

There are three alternative approaches to the problem of how an '*intercultural dialogue*' can be effectively conducted among people who embrace different cultural beliefs and values:

- a '*universalist approach*', contending that it is possible to formulate a set of norms which apply to all cultures equally;
- a '*relativist approach*', based on the idea that each culture has its own particular values and norms, which are incommensurable with those of other cultures;
- a '*constructivist approach*' which, starting from the finding that the rules necessary to govern inter-cultural interactions do not yet exist, believes that is necessary to create them through a dialogical process in which the participants attempt to arrive at an adequate set of norms, capable of resolving the specific problems they face.

In Author's opinion a '*constructivist approach*' is best suited for an ethical intercultural communication between countries possessing a rich literary heritage, owing to the fact that literary works constitute an effective way to illustrate the ethical norms ruling a community in a certain epoch. A comparative analysis of relevant works from the two countries, utilizing the theoretical results of significant intercultural communication studies, as those mentioned in Section 2 or other ones, as well the approach of Nie's '*ethical literary criticism*', could form the basis of a constructive cultural dialog among the two worlds.

END NOTES

1. The word "*Communities*" has been used in the English language since the 14th century to refer to groups of people within a district who share characteristics and a sense of identity. The concept of *community* was expanded in the 19th century to describe the relationships of people within larger societies, as '*geographic communities*', whose members share the same physical space, '*communities of interest*', whose members are united by a certain belief or goal and '*virtual communities*', defined as groups of people who interact via communication media rather than face-to-face (Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition, 2019).
2. Ethical taboo is an implicit prohibition based on culture, religion or custom. Such prohibitions are present in virtually all societies.

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APPENDIX

'Cultural Distance' according to Hofstede's model

Hofstede's theory offers the possibility to measure the 'Cultural distance' $C(1,2)$ between the two human communities C_1 and C_2 , under the assumption of 'equal variance' V_k with reference to the k -th factor (with k varying from 1 to 6). The 'Cultural Distance' $C(1,2)$ between the two communities is obtained through a summation over the 6 factors of the quantities $D_k(1,2)$, defined as $C(1,2) = \sum_k [D_k(1,2)] = \sum_k [I_1(k) - I_2(k)]^2 / V_k$ where \sum_k is the symbol of summation, over the 6 factors, of the quantities $D_k(1,2)$.