

*Equivalences of Symbolization-Experience in China ? Responses to Papers by Kai*

*Marchal, Hans-Rudolf Kantor, and S. Barret Dolph*

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I too want to commend our presenters for bringing this wonderful, challenging world of thought to the Eric Voegelin Society and the American Political Science Association. I want to commend them also for taking the theme of this year's APSA Convention, *Political Science and Beyond*, seriously. All three papers are as much studies in linguistics as in political science or philosophy. Also, as all here know well, Eric Voegelin was deeply concerned with the use and abuse of language.

We have two papers on what I would call the use of language, on how language is used, the papers by Kai Marchal and Hans-Rudolf Kantor, and one paper on what I would call problems of translation, by S. Barret Dolph. And I would like to comment on them in that order.

First, however, a comment on the panel's theme. The title of our panel comes of course from Voegelin's article on "Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History" which one can find as the fifth essay in Vol. 12 of the *Collected Works*. There Voegelin writes that "what is permanent in the history of mankind is not the symbols but man himself in search of his humanity and its order. Though the issue can be stated clearly and simply its implications are vast. And among the biggest implications is that as scholars we must take seriously the countless symbolic forms in numerous languages always mindful that languages are both spoken and written, that poets, philosophers, saints, and scholars, use languages, both spoken and written, for different purposes, and that it is not always possible to translate from one language to

another with any confidence of precision. On this last point, two examples come to mind from my recent studies. Probably the most famous work by Japanese literary artist Natsume Soseki is the novel entitled *Kokoro*. When it was translated to English no attempt was made to translate the title as nothing suitable came to mind. This is, of course, the Chinese *xin* (*shin*) which Professor Kantor tells us is "bound up" in all of the important doctrines in Chinese Buddhist schools and traditions.

The other example in my recent experience refers to a paper I prepared for the APSA conference in Philadelphia a year ago. I was examining a work, also by Soseki, entitled *Kusa Makura*, which literally translates as *Grass Pillow*. But for very legitimate reasons given in the Introduction the translators decided to call the work *The Three Cornered World*, a phrase taken from an important scene in the novel.

And these problems of differences between the spoken and written word, the uses to which languages are put, and translation are all explored in the three papers we have here.

Professor Marchal takes us into the world of Confucius, Confucianism, and how language is understood and used in that world. And he wants us to understand that language in that world of thought, in contrast to the West, is more a "tool for ordering the world." He wants us to understand also that there has always been a "gap" between written and spoken Chinese, that the "canonical documents" of the Confucian world "originally probably came very close to the colloquial language of the times" and that "characters . . . always were secondary to the spoken language." This seems to be an especially important point for Professor Marchal and he underscores in a footnote that specialists in Chinese linguistics "now generally share a logographic

conception of Chinese characters. Characters stand for pronunciations of morphemes and only secondarily have autonomous dimensions of their own.❖

I think that this is a very important claim particularly rich with those "implications❖ mentioned by Voegelin and so I want to explore this a bit and raise a question or two. In my studies of Japanese literary artists I observe a rather dramatic reverse situation. Artists like Soseki and Dazai Osamu mine in their works the symbolic messages that emanate, or seem to emanate, from *kanji* (Chinese characters). In fact, there was a movement in late Meiji Japan , early 20<sup>th</sup> century, to base the written language on the spoken language, a movement called *genbunitchi*. This was resisted by a number of literary artists, including Soseki, precisely because to do so would be to destroy, or at least erode, what might be called the "faded mythologies❖ imbedded in many, not all, Chinese characters. One example is the well known Japanese term *sensei*. Most say it means "teacher.❖ Yet, it means a great deal more. It refers to a person of authority who deserves respect by virtue of his or her place in and contribution to society. Physicians, public servants, famous writers, as well as teachers, are called *sensei*. If we look at the Chinese characters for *sensei* we see two characters. *Sei* means "life.❖ *Sen* means "before.❖ But most *kanji* have multiple meanings. *Sen* can mean "before❖ as in *sengetsu* (last month) or *senrei* (precedent). But the same character can also be *saki* meaning future. If you leave ahead of someone in an *onsen* (hot spring), you say "*o saki ni*❖ ("I will go ahead❖). Similarly, *sakimono* means "futures❖ and *sakigake* means to charge ahead and is the name of a recent political party in the Diet bent on reform. In other words, there is in the *sen* character in *sensei* a creative tension which suggests *sensei* as one who has both lived before, and one who is ahead of his/her times. Perhaps, in the spirit of looking for equivalences of experience and symbolization, there is a kinship between the Japanese *sensei* and the Aristotelian *spoudaios*, the

mature person. Perhaps *sensei* is one conscious of both beginnings and beyond, of both history and transcendence. Natsume Soseki's masterpiece, as mentioned, is *Kokoro*. The main character in it is *Sensei*. He will take his own life at the end of the novel. The deeper, nuanced meanings of *sensei* are not suggested by the spoken word, but by the written characters. What I see here is the artist Soseki seeing the engendering experiences that come to be symbolized in the written characters for *sensei* and the implications for a society whose members, otherwise literate, can no longer see them. So, are we looking at a cultural difference here where written characters tend to be primary in Japanese tradition, or at least artistic traditions, and the spoken language tends to be primary in the Chinese, or at least Confucian tradition? Is it just a coincidence that the *kanji*, Chinese character, for *shiki* in *joushiki* (common sense) ♦ I believe the Chinese is *chang shi*, so the *shi* in *chang shi* ♦ contains four of what could be separate characters and that these characters stand, respectively, in Japanese, for *kotoba* (words) or *iu* (to speak); *tatsu* (to stand); *hi* (sun); and *hoko* (tasseled spear), characters which, with a little imagination, are symbolic of the fourfold reality that defines the "community of being" ♦ in Voegelin's search for order in history?

In other words, do not these four characters suggest, at least, the experiences of place (*tatsu*, to stand), meaning the "world; ♦ of humanness, "man, ♦ the speaking creature (*iu*, to speak); of divinity, "god, ♦ the gods, transcendence (*hi*, the sun); and "society ♦ (*hoko*, not a spear, a tasseled spear)? So, the "sense ♦ in "common sense ♦, in both Japanese and Chinese, is the "sense ♦ of god, man, the world and society. Yes, perhaps this is reading too much into one character. Then again, we might be looking at something like a symbolic DNA code which Western languages cannot give us. Though these might seem like questions and issues for linguists and Sinologists, I suspect that Eric Voegelin would say they are questions and issues for all scholars in search of our humanity and its order.

Professor Marchal's comments on the "subtle nature of the Master's Speech," on the notion of political language in the Confucian tradition, on the relation between Sagehood and language, and on the important role of Zhu Xi in the transformation of traditional Confucianism into a Neo-Confucianism are elegantly written and persuasive. Of particular importance here is Zhu Xi's interest in how ordinary people can learn to become sages creating the prospect at least of a "tightly knotted community of moral actors." Whether this tradition of Sagehood as "spiritual rhetoric" has any place in either China's future or our collective, global future is a question we are left with but it is a worthy one to reflect on.

I cannot help but see a continuity between Professor Marchal's paper and Professor Kantor's. Professor Kantor's paper is on the Chinese Buddhist tradition but here too we have language as a tool for ordering the world. Here we have a more complex world where language is used in a deliberately ambiguous way drawing, it seems, on natural ambiguities in the Chinese language. In terms of experience and symbolization Buddhist scholars in the Mahayana, Tiantai, Huayan, Sanlun, and Yogacara schools apparently share a common belief that the human "existential habitat" is mostly one of illusion reinforced by habitual tendencies, especially linguistic tendencies, and the only way out of these webs of illusion in our symbolic forms, the only way to "transformation," is through an awareness of "emptiness," a very elusive concept to be sure. I make no claim to have followed all of the leaps and turns in Professor Kantor's noble effort to explain this dimension of the Buddhist tradition in China. The most succinct expression, to this reader, is that emptiness is ultimately inexpressible but can be "approached" through "provisional verbalization incessantly exemplified." Ultimately, however, as with the Confucian tradition, the goal of all linguistic expression is to transform individual character, not to reveal aspects of reality.

In the spirit of this panel's theme I would like to ask Professor Kantor what the Chinese expressions, characters, are for what he calls "emptiness" and "transformation." Is the experience of "transformation," in particular, the same as "*satori*," which is a Japanese term roughly equivalent to *nirvana*? Also, would he deconstruct for us the character for *satori* which is a compound of heart (*kokoro*), the number 5 ( *go*), and mouth (*kuchi*)? Somehow I am wondering if this character does not somehow provisionally express the "three-fold truth" to which he refers in his paper.

I think the important point in Barret Dolph's paper is his observation, and illustration, of how it "is in the very nature of language itself to objectify that which cannot be objectified." His illustration with the two characters that can be either "right" and "wrong" or "this one" and "not this one" dramatizes the hard reality that all symbolic forms, linguistic and artistic, are somewhat faded expressions of primary or engendering experiences, and this is especially true of translated symbols, what might be called second echoes. Y.P. Mei, in an article on "The Basis of Social, Ethical, and Spiritual Values in Chinese Philosophy," published in the 1960s, points out that the concept of *jen*, central to Confucius and the Confucian tradition, has been variously translated as "magnanimity," "benevolence," "perfect virtue," "moral life," "moral character," "true manhood," "compassion," "human heartedness," and "man to manness." Eric Voegelin translates it as "goodness" in *Ecumenic Age*.

Yesterday morning, at the session on Voegelin's *Hitler and the Germans*, both Thomas Hollweck and Peter von Sivers, who were at the original lectures in Munich, agreed that the real drama and the deepest part of the message was in the performance. In a similar spirit Brendan Purcell, also on the panel, delicately but elegantly suggested that Voegelin was a prophetic

witness to the truth and was among those who have that rare gift whereby some among us help mightily to contribute to the "construction" of a "community of existential concern." If I understand Professor Purcell correctly Eric Voegelin's life and work place him among classic philosophic witnesses and prophets who make possible a common *homonoia*, like-mindedness, and the prospect at least of a new generation of *spoudaioi* with "inner dignity and external civic virtue."

My question for the panel is: do the experiences and symbolizations, the lives and works of Chinese sages, monks, philosophers in the Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist traditions explored here also bear witness to the truth such that we can remove the question mark from our panel's title, or, is Voegelin correct in *Ecumenic Age* when he says that in China there was "an incomplete breakthrough?"