“Ni-Hua”: Another Way to Posthuman

WEI Shiyi

Abstract
Anthropomorphism (“Ni-Ren-Hua” in Chinese) is not only an ancient habit, but also a new posthuman problem. On the one hand, with the development of modern scientific discourse and technical precision, anthropomorphism has gradually been devalued and regarded as the psychology and cognition of being primitive and irrational; on the other hand, anthropomorphism has also permeated into various artistic images and future conception. The concept of human has undergone drastic changes under the influence of modern scientific progress and globalization. Posthuman has shocked the anthropocentric positions in anthropomorphism, signifying the end of the subject forms that have taken shape since the Enlightenment. “Ni-Hua” removes “human” from the center of “anthropomorphism”, and opens new possibilities to posthuman subject becoming. “Ni-Hua” stresses the becoming of its communication and symbiotic ability while hinting the boundary as its cautious awareness and atmosphere. This is also an attempt to respond to the situation of posthuman with the application of Chinese discourse.

Keywords
posthuman; anthropomorphism; Ni-Hua; becoming; subject

DOI: 10.12184/wsppplWSP.2515-470210.20200402

About the author
Wei Shiyi, a doctoral candidate in Theory of Literature and Art at East China Normal University and a visiting scholar at Virtual Humanities Lab (VHL) and the Italian Studies at Brown University in 2020. Research interest lies in posthumanism, film and media, game studies, etc.
In the preface of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Law*, what has been constantly quoted by people later is: “Die Eule der Minerva beginnt erst mit der einbrechenden Dämmerung ihren Flug.” ¹ Hegel believes that as the reflection of philosophy in the time, both feet are standing on the Rhodes Island. It is impossible to escape from its age and can only understand and describe the world with grey paint. At the boundary of dim dusk (Dämmerung) when the owl (Eule) takes off, it can observe everything that is taking place during the day and therefore reflection begins. What are scattered are the story on the wisdom of the Minerva and the theory on the owl’s symbol of reason and thoughts, however, the road sign on “dusk” offers us some hints while we still fail to obtain its gist. However, for Kunio Yanagita, Japanese folklorist, “dusk” is connected with “Youkai”, which means demons and monsters in Japanese, in a surprising manner. In ancient Japanese, dusk is called “who others are (彼は誰)” or “who he is (誰ぞ彼)”. In modern Japanese dialect, Nishiyatsushiro of Koshu calls dusk “the moment of being absent-minded (マジマジゴロ)”, and uses “Fen” (confused) in “Xi Fen” (nightfall) in waka and stories. Kunio Yanagita believes that they all “contain the warnings against Youkai” ², because in that era with ill-fitting linen clothes, when dusk arrives, people cannot see each other’s face, therefore, people would pass one another without figuring out who the other person is. They can only determine their identity by saying hello. If they were not answered, they may have met Youkai or suspicious people. Dusk is the boundary between day and night. The significance of everything is drifting within and its subjectivity melts within as well. This is like Anthropocene as “boundary events” ³.

Anthropocene was first proposed as a geological concept to name a brand-new geological age. It was officially put forward in the paper *The Anthropocene* ⁴ in 2000 and started to be widely discussed. As one of its authors, Paul Crutzen has further explained this word in his later paper and believed the origin could date back to 1784 when Watt invented steamer, because during which human

---

activities became the most important cause to influence the earth’s environment and surface configuration. No matter whether Anthropocene is a standard sub-stage of geological age, it has undoubtedly reminded us that the relationship between human, nature, and technology has become even more complicated and everything within have become more blurred and harder to distinguish. The owls of Minerva can hardly control its urge to fly and try to name this era. But at this moment when we standard on the boundary of Anthropocene, faced with the approaching of posthuman, could we distinguish it smartly? Or we merely ignore it and pass with it in a haste?

1. Anthropomorphic: universal cognitive means of human beings

You can imagine a daily scene like this: On an afternoon in 2019, you sat at home, turned on the TV, and played your daughter’s favorite Peppa Pig. Peppa and her little brother George were preparing to ride on a bicycle. They were politely saying good-bye to their parents. Next, when you pressed the remote controller, you could play the high-definition film Ex Machina in the film channel on demand. After conducting the Turing test on artificial intelligence Ava, the male protagonist Caleb started to question whether he himself was a human being. Therefore, at this moment, he was standing in front of the mirror, checking the skin on his waist, dragging his own mouth, and then holding a knife to slash his own wrist. The bloody scene would make you feel somehow sad and you would switch the channel to a newly released film entitled Ghost in the Shell. In the film, the heroine has taken down the charging plug on her back neck, and indulged herself into the memory segments before she possessed this artificial human body. You put down the controller and started to think whether these three films were telling a story that seems familiar but virtually indistinguishable. Pigs were animals, but they had their own names and family members in films and even could talk. Faced with an AI that was able to pass the Turing Test, “I” could hardly distinguished whether the AI was a human being or “I” was an AI as well. After losing the biological human body, was “I” still a human being? These three films are all cases of anthropomorphism.

Anthropomorphic/anthropomorphism is composed of the Greek words Anthropos and Morphe. Theologian Xenophanes attacked the Homeric for its anthropomorphic conception of the gods, who are created based on the image of human oneself. Anthropomorphism can also be found in ancient mythologies of China: The almighty Pan Gu (creator of the universe in Chinese mythology) turns his body into components of the earth with his breath becoming wind and cloud, his sound, thunder and storm; eyes, the sun and moon; bodies, mountains, and blood, rivers. In Zhou Yi · Xi Ci, “learning from those near the body and imitating all kinds of creatures in the universe” serves as the Eight Diagrams (eight combinations of three whole or broken lines formerly used in divination), thoroughly masters the morality of god, resembles the emotion of all creatures, which means that we should start from ourselves and observe all creatures in the universe. In later critics of Chinese traditional calligraphy and paintings, we can normally see this anthropomorphic criticism, such as comments on Chinese traditional landscape paintings by Guo Xi, “If you draw the whole mountain, then the mountain would not seem tall, but if you draw the mists surrounding the waist of the mountain, it would seem tall.” Also, “Mountains take water as the blood, grass and wood as the hairs, and cloud and mist as the expression. Water takes mountains as the face, pavilions as the eyebrows and eyes, and fishing as the spirit.” Since the primitive worship and sacrifice in the early stage of civilizations, anthropomorphism has been closely intertwined with the growth of human cognition. From animals, natural power, religious, machine, and electronic equipment, human beings can understand or express other things through anthropomorphism while rediscovering their own life state again. But not until Lakoff and Johnson regarded personification as a kind of ontological metaphors in conceptual metaphors through reflection did anthropomorphism free itself from pure rhetoric and texts and start to be recognized as a kind of mode of human thinking. They believe that anthropomorphism “allows us to comprehend a wide variety of experiences with nonhuman entities in terms of human motivations, characteristics, and ac-

7 Bryan L. Moore, 46.
9 Pan Yungao, 22.
Therefore, it can be understood that as a common cognitive means of human beings, anthropomorphism is rooted deep in the heart of human beings, but how on earth has anthropomorphism exerted its effect? When we practice anthropomorphism, what are we doing actually?

1.1 Conceptual cognition

In 1970, Gombrich delivered a speech Personification and the content was about personification/anthropomorphism of ideas. He recalled Austria in his childhood, “for the personifications which crowd the ceiling of countless baroque churches and staterooms, perched in gay profusion on radiant clouds, look anything but bloodless.” 11 He also cited the example of Rubens’ painting Horror of War, in which Mars is the personification of “war” while Venice is the personification of “love”. As for this kind of habit of anthropomorphism for abstract concepts, Gombrich traced it back to Platonism. Since abstract concepts are mostly feminine nouns, “so the way is open for the world of ideas being peopled by personified abstractions” 12. When we mention Victoria, the image summoned in our mind is that two-winged goddess.

On the basis of this cognition of abstract concept, anthropomorphism has also become a way of identity. For the British, the beautiful goddess Britannia is the anthropomorphism of the nation. The changes in the image of Britannia can reflect the historical development of British people’s national identity and ethnic narration. Initially, England and Wales were designated as provinces of the Roman Empire, or Britannia in Latin. After the Roman empire disintegrated and as England and Scotland were not unified, Britannia was portrayed as a young woman. She usually sat on a throne above the rocks or on a sphere above waves, wore an ancient Roman centurion helmet and a white ancient Roman toga, exposed her right breast, and held a spear and shield in hand symbolizing the land in turbulence. When the Great Britain was reunified and the British empire started to actively compete in the Age of Wind, Britannia also grew into a mature woman from a native little girl, symbolizing the rise of the empire. In the Victorian era and at the peak of the British Empire, Britannia reproduced the classical Greek

12 E.H. Gombrich, 125.
style relevantly. She held a trident of Poseidon, the God of Sea in Greek mythology, and olive branch, sat on a male lion representing the strength of the UK, and was right beside the Greek wooden shield painted with the British Union Flag. The ancient roman toga she used to wear was no longer exposed owing to the social atmosphere at that time. In 2008, designer Matthew Dent redesigned a new set of coins with the concept of “combined shield emblem” to replace Britannia that had been printed on the back of the 50-penny coins since 1672, arousing a huge controversy in the UK. The universal recognition of this anthropomorphic goddess for the British people has therefore become evident.

On the one hand, anthropomorphism positively helps human beings imagine the identity of concepts. Meanwhile, it also serves as a means to insulate themselves from others. For example, in politics and sociological research, in the age of ancient Greek city-state period, slaves were not regarded as “human”; in the research of feminism, we could see that women were usually constructed as others or be symbolically castrated.

1.2 Emotional cognition

Anthropomorphism is also the emotional cognitive means for human beings to connect everything. In the research of environmentalism and ecologism, it is believed that anthropomorphism can bring about pro-environmental behaviors. By imagining the pain and situation of plants, animals and the environment, human beings can stimulate higher sense of moral responsibilities through higher levels of empathy and arouse care about the environment and other people’s needs, enhancing pro-environmental behaviors in behavioral decision-making. The idea that people always sympathize with others and cannot bear to see other people’s sufferings mentioned by Mencius is a kind of empathy. The “sympathy”, composed of sym (with) and pathy (passion), in the sense of Hume also transfers one’s own experiences to other things through the emotional power of anthropomorphism.

But the Japanese robotics expert Masahiro Mori believes that such anthropomorphic emotion is limited, which shows the Uncanny Valley Theory. He discovered in research that when a “human-like robot” becomes increasingly identical with human beings, people will increasingly like the robot, but once it exceeds a certain point and becomes hard to distinguish whether it’s “human-like robots” or “robot-like human”, they will plunge into the Uncanny Valley. For instance, in Iron Man 2, the protagonist Tony has a robot assistant. Since the assistant is
always clumsy, it is named Dummy. Its appearance is totally mechanized, but it offers a feeling of being cute because of its clumsiness and loveliness; when we look back at the *Ex Machina* mentioned previously, an AI passed the Turing Test has pushed anthropomorphism to the extreme, which makes “I” extremely horrified. In other words, when a non-human entity is not so anthropomorphic, its anthropomorphic characteristics will be conspicuous and easily identified, producing empathy. When it is extremely anthropomorphic, its non-human characteristics will become more conspicuous, making people feeling anxious. From this perspective, anthropomorphism is a means for human beings to exclude non-human entities through incorporation. The empathetic effects of anthropomorphism still categorize non-human entities into “a non-human category”.

1.3 Technical cognition

“The Extensions of Man” is the subtitle for Marshall McLuhan’s most famous book entitled *Understanding Media*, including the extension of body organs, of certain sensory organs and of the central nervous system. Such an idea that “media is the extension of people” can be traced back to Ernst Kapp, founder of technical philosophy. In the book *Grundlinien einer Philosophie der Technik* (1877), Kapp has put forward the concept, Organ Projection, to summarize the fundamental paths for the technical development of human society, namely the adoption of simulation, expansion, or enhancement of human being’s own organ functions to realize technical progress. For example, the composition of fists with arms can be projected as hammers to present the similarity between the instruments produced by human beings and the structures or functions of the human body. Meanwhile Kapp has also added by saying that, the inner relationship to be revealed and emphasized between instruments and organs is the constant creation of human oneself through instrument though it is more like a kind of unconscious discovery compared with conscious inventions. In the eyes of Kapp, we can see the anthropomorphic laws of technology is virtually a kind of anthropomorphic


“Es soll die innere, mehr in unbewusstem Finden, als in beabsichtigtem Erfinden hervortretende Verwandtschaft des Werkzeugs mit dem Organ betont und gezeigt werden, dass der Mensch in dem Werkzeug stets nur sich selbst producirt. Da das Organ, dessen Gebrauchsfähigkeit und Kraft potenzirt werden soll, maassgebend ist, so kann auch nur von ihm die ihm entsprechende Werkzeugsform geliefert werden.”
cognitive means in terms of thinking and behavioral pattern. In a deeper sense, this organ projection theory is both the projection of technology of the human body and that of cognitive and behavioral means of the whole human race. It can be said that the development of technology has not only shown the “law on science and technology’s assistance to people” 14, but has reflected the “law on anthropomorphism” 15, which refers to the process of constant self-discovery and self-creation through science and technology anthropomorphism.

The development of technology has enabled human beings to find a new starting point for themselves aside from religion and the world has become the copy of human ego by following human will. In Norbert Wiener’s Cybernetics, we can see a new way to view human, namely the view to regard human as information processing entities by nature similar to smart robots. The conversion of this perspective does not aim to prove that human beings are robots, but to prove that machines can work just like human beings. We only need to take a look at the fact that today we still use the word Master to name AI and it remains to be a kind of means to expand anthropocentrism through the anthropomorphic cognitive means. Therefore, in terms of the significance of Cybernetics, when the anthropomorphism of technology has been deducted to the extreme, human beings will lose the control over machines and technology, which means that human beings have lost control over themselves at the same time.

As a kind of anthropocentrism cognitive means, anthropomorphism puts people on the endpoints of segments. Just as the famous sentence of Protagoras goes: “Man is the measure of all things.” Under such narration, anthropomorphism is tantamount to throwing a “two-dimensional foil” 16 to the world, which shrinks the world with only the dimension of human. The humanism in the painting of Da Vinci’s Homo Vitruvianus regards human as those with endless abilities to make themselves and their collectives perfect. On the one hand, the purification of humanity could be constantly increased. On the other hand, it’s seems generous to transfer human attributes to non-human entities through anthropomorphism, which in fact, has not only enhanced the dualistic opposition of human and non-human entities covertly and unnoticeably, but regarded non-hu-

---

15 Zhong Yixin, 16.
16 This concept comes from Liu Cixin's science fiction The Three-Body Problem.
human entities as others for synesthesia and empathy. Such anthropocentrism has folded the world into a portable fan that is easy to master, but no one has ever thought about the *pli*. Human beings regard themselves as an exceptional case outside the world and different from all creatures. In a certain sense, we can say that anthropomorphism is the last, softest, but coldest story we have ever told. When the concept of “human” starts to totter, are we going to be able to practice anthropomorphism?

2. Posthuman challenges: tottering the concept of “human”

In 2016, the 4:1 battle between AlphaGo Lee and Li Shishi shocked the whole world. On the one hand, people were amazed by how fast AlphaGo Lee’s speed of calculation was. On the other hand, it had been arrogantly commented that AI could not have the emotional capacity as human beings did. But why does AI have to resemble human beings? Does AI have to be in conformity with anthropomorphism? What if some human characteristics have obstructed the realization of objectives and the efficiency of completing missions? In 2017, AlphaGo Zero did not use human characteristics any more. In the process of training, it did not conduct supervised learning based on the chess manual of human beings. Instead, it started a 72-hour training based on the random chess-playing methods. Later, with the score of 100:00, AlphaGo Zero won a perfect victory against AlphaGo Lee which had beaten a human chess master once. When AlphaGo Zero no longer conducted anthropomorphism, it started to bring new anxieties and horror to human.

Since the proposition of Turing Test by Alan Turing in 1950, the R&D of artificial intelligence has been inextricably linked to anthropomorphism. Body is an essential part of AI development. The anthropomorphic body of AI can help itself better acquire same experience system and body language, and embodiment helps AI understand and work better. However, the total anthropomorphic AI is not an economical practice, because if it is, we have to increase the burden of recognition in actions and society will also face a huge ethic challenge. But why can we still see so many expressions of anthropomorphic impulse in science fictions and films? For instance, in the film *Blade Runner 2049*, replicants pursue the pregnant miracle. In the film *Her*, the accompanying program Samantha closely examines
“ego”. When we cast aside the bubble theory and let AI obtain the human nature, is this the need of AI or the need of human? The science fiction film *Ex Machina* derived its name from Latin Deus *Ex Machina* or “a god from machine”. In Ancient Greek drama, when the plot becomes intense and is unable to press ahead, a god will descend to help solve the difficult problems while the actor playing the role of the god usually descends the arena from an elevator or a crane, which is the origin of “a god from machine”. In the film, after Caleb saw Ava, the AI created by Nathan, called Nathan God in an exciting manner. Just as God has created human beings, Nathan has also solved the difficulties of AI like “Deus Ex-Machina”, created mechanic robots, ended the history of human beings, and started a brand-new mechanical era. Perhaps, Caleb has exactly expressed the origin of this kind of anthropomorphic impulse: providing robots with humanity in anthropomorphism is regarded as the top honor, which is in fact the self-worship of human beings.

However, the concept and boundaries of human keep changing all the time. Rosi Braidotti wrote this at the beginning of *The Posthuman*, a posthumanism monograph with summative significance:

Not if by “human” we mean that creature familiar to us from the Enlightenment and its legacy: The Cartesian “subject of the cogito”, the Kantian “community of reasonable beings”, or, in more sociological terms, the subject as citizen, rights-holder, property-owner, and so on. And yet the term enjoys widespread consensus and it maintains the re-assuring familiarity of common sense.

... the concept of the human has exploded under the double pressure of contemporary scientific advances and global economic concerns. After the postmodern, the post-colonial, the post-industrial, the post-communist and even the much contested post-feminist conditions, we seem to have entered the post-human predicament.17

Indeed, in recent years, humanism’s imagination about “man” as Hamlet said, “What a piece of work is a man - how noble in reason; how infinite in faculties, in form and moving; how express and admirable in action; how like an angel in apprehension; how like a god; the beauty of the world; the paragon of animals” 18, has been broken. Foucault declared the “death of man”. In his eyes,

“man” is just a modern invention that can be easily seen through in the archeology of knowledge. In particular, with the development of NBIC (nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science) technology, we are clearly aware that not simply the development of life characteristics for pro-machine human, but also human society, perception, and narration all have gradually approached machines. Nowadays, under the dual pressure of globalization and technology, both human body and psychology have been practically changed: heart stents are placed in human bodies, though which is still far away from the Cyborg image in science fiction movies; human beings have realized that they are a kind of information in new ways. Especially when we look back at history, we can see countless clues. For example, the invention of clocks has offered us the cognition of time; the invention of steamers has changed our feelings toward space, speed, and distance.

We can say that it is not posthumanism that has loosened “human”, but the concept of “human” has not been firm all the time. In face of the posthuman plight, three different dimensions of thoughts have cropped up in the new human existing condition.

First of all, the humanism position was represented by Francis Fukuyama. He believes that “human nature is the sum of the behavior and characteristics that are typical of the human species, arising from genetic rather than environmental factors.” 19 But modern biotechnology can modify this “nature” in gene, thus pushing human beings to the historical era of “posthuman”. In his view, the debate about whether natural and genetic factors or cultural and social factors determine human nature has never ceased since ancient Greece and Rome. But when it comes to the era of enlightenment, Hume, Rousseau, and Kant all proposed in their theories that it is the task of human to change or even conquer nature and natural laws. Since then, science and technology, and culture try to control human and human nature in an overwhelming manner. Therefore, Fukuyama reminds us that while reflecting on the ethical and political issues brought by modern science and technology, human nature is the principle and bottom line that we must adhere to.

Secondly, contrary to Fukuyama’s description of posthuman into a land-

scape of doomsday, some people are also willing to share this earth, even themselves, with other life forms. For example, N. Katherine Hayles expresses that “we have always been posthuman” 20. She stresses the role of narration and believes that literature and science are “a way of understanding ourselves as embodied creatures living within and through embodied worlds and embodied words.” 21 These two can help us deeply observe the world we live in. In Descartes’ narration on “cogito” - “I think, therefore I am” - has established the mind-body dualism while Hayles has added reflectivity into the thinking of cybernetics, and believed that human body and mind, human and technology (instrument), self and others cannot actually be completely insulated. To distinguish from the “human” in the narration of Descartes, Hayles uses “posthuman” to refer to “material-informational entity” not only without the priori and free “thinking”, but also without stable and limited “presence”. Posthuman is continuously constructing its own boundaries and life during constant interaction with the environment. It is not that human has become posthuman at a certain moment, but that once you have accepted the posthuman point of view to remove the distinction between human and machine, human and animals, and living entities and non-living entities, you will discover that human has always been posthuman.

Donna Haraway is more radical than Hayles. In the A Manifesto for Cyborgs published in 1985, she reminded us that “human” itself is technical life. She put forward Chthulucene to distinguish from such names as Anthropocene, Plantationocene, and Capitalocene and believed that Chthulucene indicates that “the dynamic ongoing symbiotic forces and powers of which people are a part” 22, requires making kin between living beings and non-living beings symbiotically and sym-poetically. To her, “kin is an assembling sort of word. All critters share a common ‘flesh’, laterally, semiotically, and genealogically. Ancestors turn out to be very interesting strangers; kin are unfamiliar (outside what we thought was family or gens), uncanny, haunting, active.” 23 Regarding the significance of pan-vitalism theory, Haraway has pushed the posthuman “narration” of Hayles to

21 N. Katherine Hayles, 24.
23 Donna J. Haraway, Staying with the Trouble, 103.
the mythological posthuman that connects all things from the perspective of life.

Finally, the proponent of accelerationism in the futurist movement emerging in the early 20th century holds the view that the human civilization is finally accelerating toward the ultimate catastrophe. Thus, it bears a strong Messiah color, reflected in the technical fascination and worship of accelerationism. Different from the uniform motion color born by speed, “accelerated speed” can bring discomfort. Accelerationists do not criticize the development of technology (productive relations). Instead, they stress the current use and control over technology (production relations), which exactly impedes technical progress. In 2013, the paper entitled *Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics* has proposed multiple political assumptions and organizational forms around accelerationism. Isn’t this kind of acceleration leading to nothingness a negative dimension of mythological posthuman by Haraway?

Posthuman signifies the attempt of subject forms that have taken shape since the Enlightenment, among which various imagination and discussions have not been unified. When we want to cross the boundaries, we must remember the warnings mentioned in the legend about Youkai: when you cannot see clearly, please “open your eyes wide (シケシケ)”. Posthuman is the Archimedean point to pry the anthropocentrism. After the removal of the dimension of the “man” in capital form, “Ni-Hua” may bring us new inspirations. Instead of closely examining “what posthuman is”, it is better to change a way of thinking and reflect on the posthuman condition. In the dusk of Anthropocene, it not only guards against subjective boundaries and stimulates our new imagination for us to run in Mobius band, but also actively describes and practices posthuman subject.

3. “Ni-Hua”: Posthuman subject becoming

“Ni-Hua” (拟 - 化) is a Chinese discourse in which human in the center is removed from “anthropomorphism” (拟人化). From “anthropomorphism” as a cognitive means to “Ni-Hua” as a way of Posthuman subject becoming, the forms of the subject has changed. The posthuman subject of “Ni-Hua” attempts to re-understand “human” in a changing world full of crisis.

3.1 “Hua”

In *Concerning Landscape*, Rainer Maria Rilke uses extremely poetic words
to describe the growth of “the art of landscape” as a process of “landscaping of the world”:

Man is no longer the social entity, moving with poise amongst his like, nor is he any longer one for whom evening and morning, for whom proximity and distance exist. It tells us, that he is placed amongst things like a thing, infinitely alone, and that all which is common to them both has withdrawn from things and men into the common depth, where the roots of all growth drink.  

Man no longer perceive the significance of landscape (nature and all things) materially and considere these for man only. On the contrary, they return to all things and the shared “roots”. Here, when Rilke describes the “Hua” (landscaping of the world) in the western landscape paintings, it is connected to the traditional Chinese cosmology of “correlative”. As Chuang Tzu goes, “There mounting aloft, the bird saw the moving white mists of spring, the dust-clouds, and the living things blowing their breaths among them”.

When discussing ancient Chinese landscape paintings, Francois Jullien focuses more on the differences between Chinese and western thoughts from the perspective of “Hua”. He believes that the western paintings’ mimetic theories always proceed from the metaphysical perspective of ontology loss. In Plato’s view point that from the bed of Idea, and the bed of carpenters, to the bed of art, it is merely the “shadow of the shadow” and the “copy of the copy”. However, what Jullien has seen in ancient Chinese landscape paintings is “It does not require the other world, and even does not mean rupture. On the contrary, through the world, it helps generate communications inside the world.”

There is no ontological philosophy in ancient Chinese thoughts, which is unlike the pursuit of “Being” or “Idea” in the west. It cares about the explanation of “affect” (moralizing) shared by various realities from the most minute and the stage of inability to be perceived, to the most obvious stage and this ability enables the world to continuously update and life unceasingly unfolds.” At this moment, what Jullien proposes is exactly “Ni-Hua”. Unlike “anthropomorphism”, it is not the eternal

---

imitation and consumption of “human”. Instead, it is a kind of communication and symbiotic ability.

When discussing “Hua” put forward by British sinologist Roel Sterckx in *The Animal and the Daemon in Early China*, Jiang Yuhui points to the mutual conversion between human and animals and combines Deleuze and Guattari’s “territorialization/ deterritorialization/reterritorialization” in *A Thousand Plateaus* with the “Hua” in the context of ancient China. The “Hua” of animal bodies is ontological metamorphosis which has reflected the tendency of “Tao” that transcends the boundaries, which is exactly the correlative of the universe.

### 3.2 “Ni”

String figures is the core metaphor used by Haraway in *Staying with the Trouble*. It means weaving/net, which is also the major image of pan-ecology/life/vitality theory in the posthumanism of Deleuzian. Latour’s Actor-Network-Theory advocates connection and translation. Actors and Actants are all symbiotic elements of the network. No element takes precedence. All elements constitute the whole network. ANT puts aside the ontology of human and non-human so that “actors” can serve as intermediaries. In *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, Latour has pointed out that we should define critical posthuman subjects in the context of ecological philosophy with multiple attributions, because compared with modernization, ecologization has restored the world with interdependence between human and non-human. Human is in it while being composed of it.

But when we use two hands to play string figures in weaving and transforming the network ropes, we may encounter new difficulties and confusion: after decentralization, such weaving should not simply be simple weaving only. The more you weave, the tighter the network becomes. But each weaving requires cautiousness. However, no such sense of “cautiousness” can be found in either the Deleuzian explanations of “Hua” by Jullien, Haraway, or Latour, or the meaning of “Hua” in the context of Chinese tradition. But “Ni” can offer “Hua” with a subjective threshold/limit. The subjectivity manifests itself here as caution and reflection.

In the Eastern Han Dynasty, “Ni” was explained in *Shuowen Jiezi* by Xu Shen as “Ni is measurement”. The conjecture and measurement contained in “Ni”

---

are carried out within a certain range or under certain rules, so “Ni” is a process of contextualization. In *A Happy Excursion*, through “Hua”, Kun (an enormous legendary fish) changes into a bird, called Peng (roc). But in the posthuman context, people cannot turn into other species or machines through “Hua”, but respond summoned or simulated by others. Human is neither a starting point of “anthropomorphism”, nor a result produced under the discipline of Foucauldian. Just like the *Experimental Futures*, the subtitle of *Staying with the Trouble*, if “human” is an experiment, then “Ni” experimentally makes attempt on the boundary between human and objects and constantly maintains the boundary in the process of continuous trial, thus generating subjectivity. Thorough conversion into an object is neither possible nor meaningful. “Ni” can offer “Hua” with a boundary. It requires us to pay more attention to boundaries in weaving or network.

### 3.3 “Ni-Hua”

Aside from adhering to Anthropocene, aspiring for Chthulucene, and embracing “Accelerationism”, “Ni-Hua” tries de-anthropocentrism. In the life network or the overall atmosphere, posthuman subjects are open to the world. Respecting the difference of posthuman subjects also implies that the sense of responsibilities should be the ethical undertakings of posthuman subjects. With the deepening of science and expansion of cognitive scope, we can wear a diving suit to simulate a deep-sea fish, but we cannot experience that totally heterogeneous world. The significance of the difference between different species, like carbon-based life and silicon-based life, is that it is not a problem that needs to be solved, but a productive location rich in vitality. Regarding both the relationship between human and animals and that between human and technology, we should firstly surpass the tendency of metaphorical impulse or anthropomorphism, engage in estrangement practices, and adopt different ways of thinking. In *When Species Meet*[^28], Haraway has shared “seen from above” different from anthropomorphism. It is a kind of “encounter” and courageous and tireless beginning power. In face of the helpless attitude toward the “rupture” between different species by Derrida in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Haraway feels that this heterogeneous rupture is a meaningful location in the flow of relations with multiple others. This location can generate situated knowledge, which can revise the

objective and rational traditional science history. Such a scientific cognition usually understands objects of knowledge through concept, thus generating objective knowledge. But with Situated knowledge, human can conduct research in the identity of a modest witness and in a non-violent cognition means while reflecting on their own limitations. “Ni-Hua” helps realize emotion and ethical responsibilities in the encounter of species, constituting mutual symbiosis.

The posthuman subject becoming contains the concrete encounter and meeting between human and all things as well as the “affect” emerging thereof. “Ni-Hua” does not aim at imitation or being, but is endless becoming-, com-, and with-. “Ni-Hua” continually tries to cross over limits, borders, and frontiers, which echoes Chuang Tzu’s words “Wu (ancient Chinese character of I) loses I”. “Wu” and “I” both refer to subject, but “Wu” still differs from “I”. “I” is the “I” detained by purpose or preconceived idea. The action of “lose” can, however, enable “Wu” to cast aside “I”. It is also different from the “aloof forgetfulness”. “Lose” is the action while the “new Wu” has emerged constantly from “losing I”. “Ni-Hua” is similar to this. As a possible path for the posthuman subject becoming, “Ni-Hua” no longer imitates life. Rather, it takes actions as life and is created for life.

Conclusion

Posthuman has figured out different research fields and knowledge structures, which urges us to conduct a complicated thinking and stimulates our new desire, confusion, and imagination. Our reflection of posthuman problem is triggering the subject becoming. Posthuman subject is a becoming process that is incessantly defined. Therefore, it is expected that this can shoulder positive significance and active guidance. “No species, not even our own arrogant one pretending to be good individuals in so-called modern Western scripts, acts alone” 29, in particular, in the privacy-assignment environment with pervasive big data, advertisement marketing’s precise delivery, virtual reality and augmented reality game interface, and facial recognition, we can even more distinguish the “Ni-Hua”, posthuman subject becoming. Because life is not a metaphysical concept,

29 Donna J. Haraway, Staying with the Trouble, 100.
but just means practice and action.

Just as Braidotti holds the same position on the posthuman subject becoming, which “works across differences and is also internally differentiated, but still grounded and accountable. Posthuman subjectivity expresses an embodied and embedded and hence partial form of accountability, based on a strong sense of collectivity, relationality and hence community building.” 30 If we merely regard posthuman subject as a part of the human world, that would be too meagre. The diversity and interactive relationship of “Ni-Hua” for the posthuman subject becoming have been lost in such understandings. Meanwhile, posthuman subject becoming is not simply a matter of mutual benefit. Or else, we would lose the emotional factors and ethical responsibilities overflowing in “Ni-Hua”.

Let’s get back to the topic of “dusk” at the very beginning. For this two beauty ancient Chinese poems, “The setting sun appears sublime, but it is near its dying time” and “Westward declines the sun; Far, far from home is the heartbroken one”, dusk has become a kind of sad mood. The initially included dangerous atmosphere and vigilance have already faded away. Today, on the boundary of posthuman and in our daily routine, the “words from the old” about the “dusk” can still remind us and keenly ask comers “Who’s that coming?”.

Works Cited


-------. 2013. “Facing Gaia: Six lectures on the political theology of nature.”

Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Edinburgh, 18th-28th of February 2013. Pdf circulated by the author for discussion.


