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Dariusz Klejnowski-Różycki 柯達理
University of Opole
ORCID 0000-0001-8388-702X

Maria Bernat 马林娜
The Poland-China Cooperation Center "Confucius Institute"
at Opole University of Technology
ORCID 0000-0003-4520-662X

THE ECHO OF THE PERSON IN THE HARMONY OF THE COSMOS: MAN IN CHINESE PHILOSOPHY[1]

Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist culture in China profoundly influences the entirety of East and Southeast Asia, including countries such as Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Mongolia, Singapore, Indonesia, and increasingly, Australia. Taoism and Buddhism hold dimensions that are not merely philosophical but also deeply religious. The Chinese philosophical tradition is exceptionally rich, and its diversity was celebrated even in antiquity under the banner of the "Hundred Schools of Thought."

Among the questions addressed by philosophies and religions of all eras and cultures, the triad of man, cosmos, and divinity emerges as preeminent. This triad is an inquiry into fundamental questions:

[1] The article is the result of a research internship carried out at the Poland-China Cooperation Center "Confucius Institute" at the Opole University of Technology (Opole, 1.01.2024–31.03.2024), as well as at the Institute of Theological Sciences of the University of Opole and the Institute for Research on Theology and Spirituality of the Far East (Opole, 1.10.2023–31.12.2023), within the framework of the research project "Religion – Culture – Money: Connections between Religion, Culture, and Economy."

Who is man? What constitutes the world, the cosmos? Do deities, the supernatural, or something transcending visible reality exist?

It is impossible to speak of a unified "European philosophy" or "Chinese philosophy," as each of these traditions encompasses multiple schools, concepts, and intellectual currents. Nevertheless, certain general tendencies characteristic of the West (Europe) and the Far East (the cultural sphere under Chinese influence) can be discerned.

In this discussion, we examine responses to the question of human nature, contrasting classical Chinese thought with European and Western culture. Reflections on the essence of man bear not only anthropological implications but also shape the broader contours of culture, encompassing politics, economics, art, and other spheres. Each civilization has developed unique visions of humanity, but the most characteristic ones can generally be reduced to Western, Semitic, and Chinese (Asian) perspectives[2]. The comparison of Western and Eastern philosophical traditions acquires particular relevance in the context of globalization, which demands the construction of intercultural dialogue, an understanding of divergent perspectives on man, and the integration of values such as individualism and relationality to address contemporary social, ecological, and ethical challenges.

1. THE PERSON IN THE EUROPEAN PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

European culture, shaped by Greek philosophy and mythology, Roman law, and later profoundly influenced by the Bible and the Quran, accorded humanity a central, preeminent place within the fabric of reality. However, what may appear self-evident today, even in colloquial discourse, is the result of a lengthy journey: the development of the concept of the human being into the philosophical notion of the person unfolded over centuries of intellectual evolution.[3]

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[2] Piotr Sękowski, *Chrześcijańska Teologia Islamu Louisa Massignona* [*Louis Massignon's Christian Theology of Islam*] (Gliwice-Rome: SEKO, 2024).

[3] Czesław Bartnik, *Personalizm* (Lublin: "O.K." Tomasz Wiater, 2000).

In the formation of ancient Christian European thought—what we now recognize as theology—an enduring challenge, and the source of misunderstandings and doctrinal errors (heresies), was the lack of precise terminology. Ultimately, after much refinement, equivalence was established between Greek and Latin terms: φύσις (*physis*) = οὐσία (*ousia*) = *essentia* = *natura* = *substantia* = "essence," and πρόσωπον (*prosopon*) = ὑπόστασις (*hypostasis*) = *persona* = "person."

In Greek, πρόσωπον (*prosopon*), like its Latin counterpart *persona*, originally referred to a mask or theatrical role. Christianity appropriated this terminology to signify that which lies "beneath the mask," denoting a deeper identity—one that uniquely defines an individual (*individuality*) while simultaneously embodying relationality and the capacity for communion (*relationality*).[4]

The articulation of a personalist terminology emerged under the influence of Christian culture. Philosophies of other civilizations (e.g., Chinese) did not develop an analogous concept. For Christians, the notion of the person was indispensable, primarily for articulating the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. They sought terminology that could encapsulate each subject of the Trinity, distinct from the others yet united with them in profound, interpenetrative oneness, relationship, and communion.

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boëthius (c. 480–525) provided the first comprehensive definition of the person, which, after various refinements, is expressed as: *Persona est naturae rationalis (rationabilis) individua substantia*—a person is an individual substance of a rational nature (capable of becoming rational)[5]. The essential component of this definition is rationality, which excludes, for instance, animals from being persons because they lack reason. Rational beings—persons—are also characterized by will, a function of reason. Consequently, terms like

[4] Olivier Clément, *La Révolte de l'Esprit: Repères Pour La Situation Spirituelle d'aujourd'hui*, Le Monde Ouvert (Paris: Stock, 1979), 139–200.

[5] *Rationabilis* is a later modification of Boethius' definition, addressing problems that did not exist in his time, such as human embryos, which have the potential to become rational, or sick people, whose humanity includes rationality as a potentiality that, in a given case, for some reason could not be actualized. Bartnik, *Personalizm*, 84.

"person," "nature," and "substance" continue to hold currency in Western philosophical tradition, even though their meanings have significantly evolved.

The Bible explicitly conveys that man is created in the image of God (*imago Dei*)[6]. Patristic tradition identified this likeness with reason and free will (freedom). Furthermore, man's resemblance to God lies in being a person, which signifies, on the one hand, individuality—distinctiveness and an unrepeatable identity—and, on the other, relationality, the ability to form bonds, deep communion, and unity with others. Consequently, Christian eschatology has always opposed notions such as the "dissolution of man into the cosmos," the „loss of identity," nirvana, or the illusory nature of the self. Eternal happiness is mine, albeit in union with others, yet it is I who am happy, I who endure.

This likeness to God also underpins the concept of the "dignity of the human person" as a self-evident axiom in the West. Human dignity is intrinsic and non-negotiable, simply by virtue of being man. A related historical issue emerged in addressing the questions: Who is a man? What constitutes a man? When does humanity begin, and when does it end?[7]

From the Christian perspective, the category of "person" is broader than humanity; it encompasses divine persons (*hypostases*) as well as angels, for they too possess reason and freedom. In the aspect of being persons, angels also resemble God. However, the "superiority" of man in this likeness—and thus in dignity—rests on the Incarnation: God became incarnate, assuming human nature in His second hypostasis (person).

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[6] Janusz Czerski, *Ikona w Nowym Testamencie: studium semantyczno-egzegetyczne pojęcia εἰκών [The Icon in the New Testament: A Semantic and Exegetical Study of the Concept of εἰκών]* (Wrocław: Tum Wydawnictwo Wrocławskiej Księgarni Archidiecezjalnej, 2011).

[7] Piotr Sękowski and Dariusz Klejnowski-Różycki, "Osoba [Person]," in *Definicje katechetyczne [Catechetical definitions]*, 1st ed., Scholastica (Gliwice: SEKO, 2020), 46–47, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DKIWuf46vM1Sqy3LgSs_70DJX2BD6UxZ/view.

No other culture or civilization, apart from the Christian-influenced European tradition, has equated man with personhood or endowed man with the supreme dignity corresponding to God[8].

2. THE MAN IN CHINESE PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

The concept of the "person" was never a necessary construct in Chinese philosophy; it did not address any specific "problem" nor provide answers to particular questions. In Confucianism, man is at the center of social relationships (including political and economic systems), resembling the structure of a hive—an intricately organized, hierarchical, and cohesive system where each individual fulfills a role for the benefit of the collective whole[9]. In Taoism, man occupies the center of cosmic relations, existing as one element among countless within an interconnected web. Far from being privileged, man is a fragment of the cosmos, contributing to the harmony of the entire world of things. There is no division between the world of persons and the world of things, as no distinct category of "person" emerges in this worldview. In Buddhism, man gains a "supernatural" dimension, transcending visible reality in the pursuit of enlightenment.

Several terms in the Chinese language articulate various aspects of man, each emphasizing a different dimension of human existence. In the context of contemporary sinicization, understanding these terms is not only timely but also offers an expanded perspective to those shaped by the Atlantic cultural tradition.

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[8] Dariusz Klejnowski-Różycki 柯達理, 中国的神学。 *Teologia chińska. Uwarunkowania kulturowe pojęć trynitarnych [Chinese theology. Cultural determinants of the Trinity concepts]*, Ekumenizm i Integracja 27 (Opole: Redakcja Wydawnictw Wydziału Teologicznego Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2012).

[9] Maria Bernat, "Cultural Circumstances of the Chinese Transition," in *Chinese Management Culture*, ed. Maria Bernat et al., Studia i Monografie / Politechnika Opolska, z. 554 (Opole: Publishing House of Opole University of Technology, 2021), 43–63.

2.1. 人 (rén)

2.1.1. In Classical Chinese Thought

Prior to the introduction of Buddhism (i.e., before the 1st century CE), the concept of "person" (*persona*) as understood in the West did not exist in Chinese thought. Notably, the term *persona* in Europe emerged under the influence of theological inquiries into the nature of the Holy Trinity—a "problem" absent in China. The character *rén* (人) denoted man in a concrete and self-evident sense. Chinese philosophers primarily focused on exploring how to achieve the fullness of being human, directing their reflections toward ethics and the cultivation of virtues.

With the introduction of Buddhism (from the 1st century CE) and later Western thought (from the 16th century CE), abstract concepts such as *wèigè* (位個) and *réngé* (人格) began to appear in Chinese philosophy, referring to personality and character, which started to convey the notion of "person." Concurrently, there emerged a tendency to distinguish between subject and object—a novel phenomenon in Chinese philosophical reflection.

In Confucianism and Taoism, the concept of man as an individual possessing a unique identity is far less central than in Western philosophical traditions. In Confucianism, *gèrén* (个人) gains significance primarily through relationships and obligations toward others rather than as an independent entity. In Taoism, individuality is emphasized through naturalness and authenticity in relation to *dao* (道).

In modern Chinese, the term *gèrén* has acquired additional meanings, especially under the influence of the concept of individualism. However, in classical Confucian and Taoist thought, the notion of personhood remains inseparably linked to the context of social relationships and the surrounding world.

2.1.2.Relationality Versus Substantiality

In contrast to the European understanding of man, rooted in the concept of *individua substantia*—a self-contained, rational substance—Chinese

thought focuses on relationality. In the European tradition, the essence of personhood lies in internal substantiality and rationality, which guarantee autonomy and individualism. By contrast, in Chinese thought, particularly in Confucianism, man is understood as a relational node within a social network, with individuality defined by ethical obligations to others[10].

Taoism diverges from the idea of man as a rational substance, emphasizing spontaneity and harmony with nature. Man in the Taoist sense is someone who follows the *dao*, freeing themselves from rigid identities. Chinese philosophy thus places relatively little emphasis on the concept of *individua substantia*, distinguishing it markedly from Western thought, where individuality and self-awareness are central.

2.2. 关系 (guānxì)

In Confucianism, the concept of man is intrinsically linked to the establishment and cultivation of relationships, known as *guanxi* (关系), which can be translated as a network of social and personal connections. Through these relationships, an individual acquires their identity and defines their ethical and social value. In the Confucian model, emphasis is not placed on individuality as such but rather on fulfilling appropriate social and familial roles and adhering to the moral norms derived from these roles.

In Confucian thought, it can be said that the more relationships, obligations, and mutual commitments one assumes, the more one becomes a man in the fullest sense of the term. Relationships with family, friends, teachers, and superiors shape an individual both socially

[10] Feng Youlan, *Krótka historia filozofii chińskiej [A Short History of Chineses Philosophy. A Systematic Account of Chinese Thought. From Its Origins to the Present Day]*, ed. Derk Bodde, trans. Michał Zagrodzki (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2001), 31–36; Anna Iwona Wójcik, *Wolność i władza: filozoficzne idee cywilizacji liberalnej i konfucjańskiej w próbie międzykulturowego porównania [Freedom and Authority: Philosophical Ideas of Liberal and Confucian Civilizations in an Attempt at Intercultural Comparison]*, Biblioteka tradycji literackich Seria 2 17 (Kraków: Collegium Columbinum, 2002), 23–35.

and morally. For Confucianism, a man without relationships is perceived as "incomplete"—an individual who becomes a full man only through responsible participation within the framework of *guanxi* and thereby achieves their legitimacy as a member of the community[11].

These relationships, however, are hierarchical and ethically defined—for instance, through filial piety (*xiao*, 孝) toward parents or loyalty (*zhong*, 忠) toward rulers. In Confucianism, being a man is a process of acquiring and nurturing *guanxi*, which creates a coherent ethical model for functioning in the world.

In the Confucian framework, no one is born a man in the fullest sense of the word—one becomes a man gradually through the development and cultivation of social relationships. This process can be compared to socialization, in which an individual progressively fulfills their social roles and ethical obligations toward others. A man matures into their full identity by living in accordance with the norms and values of the community, particularly by fulfilling responsibilities toward family, friends, society, and the state.

This approach underscores the importance of relational ethics: an individual becomes a man by cultivating virtues such as filial piety (*xiao*), loyalty (*zhong*), and respect for hierarchy. In Confucianism, the fullness of a man's identity and dignity exists only within the context of a social network and the fulfillment of assigned roles.

2.3. 位個 (wèigè)

The combination of the characters *wèi* (位) and *gè* (個) in the Chinese language pertains to the individuality of a man in a social context, emphasizing their position and status. The character *wèi* (位) signifies "position," "place," or "status" and is often used as an honorific classifier, as in the phrase 一位 (*yī wèi*), meaning "one man." It highlights

[11] Leszek Niewdana, "Osobowe Relacje (Guanxi) w Chińskim Biznesie [Personal Relationships (Guanxi) in Chinese Business]," in *Zrozumieć Chińczyków: Kulturowe Kody Społeczności Chińskich [Understanding the Chinese: Cultural Codes of Chinese Communities]*, ed. Ewa Zajdler (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie Dialog, 2011), 205–36.

an individual's social position, underscoring their role within the social structure. Meanwhile, the character *gè* (個), one of the most frequently used classifiers in Chinese, refers to units, men, or things, depending on the context.

Together, *wèigè* (位個) can be understood as an expression that underscores respect and individuality, taking into account a man's social role and significance. In practice, this term rarely functions as an independent concept; rather, *wèi* commonly serves as a classifier in expressions such as 位人 (*wèi rén*), meaning "respected man."

In the social context, *wèigè* conveys the idea that an individual is viewed through the lens of their position and role within society. However, it does not imply a "man in themselves" or "for themselves" in the European sense, which is grounded in the notion of substantiality. Chinese philosophy emphasizes the relationality of the individual as part of a larger whole—whether that be the community or the social structure. This approach distinctly contrasts with the European perspective, which often defines a man as a distinct, autonomous substance.

2.4. 人格 (réngé)

The character *rén* (人) signifies "man" and is one of the fundamental elements of Chinese script. It refers to man in a general sense, without particular reference to social roles, status, or position. The second character, *gé* (格), denotes "standard," "norm," "character," or "personality." This character conveys the notions of quality and principles, imparting a structured meaning aligned with specific norms.

The combination of these two characters in *réngé* (人格) refers to the personality or character of an individual. The term highlights the distinctive traits of a man, their internal moral framework, as well as the standards and principles by which they live. *Réngé* may also signify "personal dignity" or "integrity," imbuing the concept with strong ethical and moral dimensions.

In the philosophical context, *réngé* underscores the values, principles, and traits that define a man as a moral and ethical being. Within Confucian thought, the term signifies an individual guided by virtues and standards,

endowing them with a unique character and dignity. A man identified as possessing *réngé* is not merely a human but also someone who lives in alignment with values esteemed by society. It is these qualities that render the individual respected and recognized within the social context.

2.5. Comparison of 位個 (wèigè) and 人格 (réngé)

The concepts of *wèigè* (位個) and *réngé* (人格) differ in meaning and scope, emphasizing distinct aspects of man's identity within Chinese philosophy. *Wèigè* focuses on the social position of a man, taking into account their role and relationships within the social structure. It highlights the respect owed to a man based on their place within the social hierarchy, making this concept strongly associated with the external aspects of a man's functioning within society.

In contrast, *réngé* emphasizes the internal character of a man, their moral dignity, and virtues. This concept pertains to the quality of the man, their values, and integrity, underscoring the ethical foundations that define a man as a moral and respected entity.

In summary, *wèigè* primarily pertains to the external position of a man and the respect accorded to them as a member of society, while *réngé* underscores the internal virtues and moral integrity of the man. These two terms reveal different dimensions of man within the relational and moral perspective of Chinese philosophical thought.

2.6. Anthropological Themes in Chinese Philosophy

What is man? What constitutes their essence, and what is their place in the world? Is man a simple entity, or rather a complex structure in which diverse elements intertwine? These questions have intrigued both Chinese and European philosophers, though their approaches differ significantly. Chinese thinkers, focused on the practical dimensions of life, prioritized questions pertinent to social harmony and personal development. Ontological inquiries such as "What constitutes the essence of man?" were secondary to the question of how man can refine their life and relationships with others.

This pragmatic approach is exemplified in Zhang Dainian's contemporary work, *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy*, where the author delves deeply into anthropological categories inherent in Chinese philosophical thought[12]. Zhang highlights *xìng* (性), which defines the fundamental characteristics of man, and *qìzhí* (氣質), reflecting individual differences among people. Chinese philosophy also explored human emotions, referred to as *qíng* (情), which significantly influence social relationships. Other critical elements included reflections on human talents and capabilities (*cái*, 才) and the heart and mind (*xīn*, 心), which serve as the center of human consciousness.

Chinese philosophy did not neglect concepts such as intention (*zhì*, 意) and will (*yìzhì*, 意志), which determine individual actions. Key notions included innate morality, expressed through *liáng xīn* (良心), and intuitive moral knowledge, known as *liáng zhī* (良知). These considerations demonstrate that for Chinese thinkers, the central question was not "Who is man?" but rather "How can man live in harmony with nature and others?"

Another significant area of reflection was moral philosophy, which shaped the ideals man ought to strive for. Central to Chinese thought was benevolence and righteousness (*rényì*, 仁義) as principles of social harmony, as well as justice, which regulated interpersonal relationships. Public engagement (*gōng*, 公) was seen as an expression of responsibility for the community. Social relationships were defined within the framework of the five cardinal bonds, *wǔlún* (五倫), encompassing relationships between parents and children, rulers and subjects, and friends.

A significant moral ideal was universal love, known as *jiān'ài* (兼愛), which emphasized non-discrimination and openness toward others. The guiding value of human life was the golden mean, *zhōngyōng* (中庸), a path toward balance and harmony. Chinese philosophy also developed categories such as virtue (*dé*, 德), morality (*dàodé*, 道德), and moral obligation (*dāngrán*, 當然), which defined man's role in society.

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[12] Dainian Zhang, *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy*, trans. Edmund Ryden, Culture & Civilization of China (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2002).

Equally important were concepts of value (*guì*, 貴) and authority or power (*quán*, 權), which in Chinese thought stemmed from ethical leadership.

While Europe asked about the essence of man, their purpose, and their place in the cosmos, Chinese thought focused on practical guidelines for how to fully embody humanity. The West, starting from observable human phenomena and behaviors, sought to uncover the inner essence of man as a unique and unparalleled entity. In contrast, China asked what man should do and what virtues they should cultivate to live in harmony with the surrounding world.

These differences are rooted not only in the essentialist worldview characteristic of the West but also in the belief in the exceptional nature of man, created as *imago Dei*—the image of God. In Chinese thought, man remains part of a greater whole, immersed in social relationships and the natural order. Their value arises not from individual distinctiveness but from harmonious coexistence with others and the surrounding reality.

2.7. Man in Chinese Art

Chinese art, much like its philosophy, reflects the diversity of approaches to man and their place in the world. Artistic works resonate with Taoist harmony with nature, Confucian emphasis on man's role within the community, and Buddhist transcendence of the material realm. Each tradition, rooted in its foundational principles, portrays man in relation to the world and the cosmos in a profoundly symbolic manner, offering visual interpretations of anthropological and philosophical ideas[13].

2.7.1. Taoist Immersion of Man in Nature

From the Taoist perspective, man is an inseparable part of nature. Art inspired by Taoism portrays man as a small element within a greater whole, harmoniously coexisting with mountains, rivers, trees, and

[13] Dariusz Klejnowski-Różycki, *Filozofia sztuki chińskiej.* 中國藝術哲學 *[The philosophy of Chinese art]*, Extreme Orient (Warszawa-Zabrze: Stowarzyszenie Sinicum im. Michała Boyma SJ, Śląska Szkoła Ikonograficzna, 2015).

mist-laden landscapes. In such works, man does not dominate the world but merges with it, embracing their role within an ever-changing cosmos.

A striking example of this vision is the painting *Sitting Alone by a Stream* by Fan Kuan, housed in the National Palace Museum (fig. 1)[14]. This masterpiece depicts a solitary figure set within a vast, majestic landscape. The human form, barely discernible amidst the dense natural environment, appears to be contemplating the beauty of the surrounding world, reflecting the Taoist aspiration for harmony with the *dao*. Here, nature is not merely a backdrop but the central protagonist, with man as its quiet observer[15].

2.7.2. Confucian Presence in the Community

In the Confucian worldview, man is primarily a social entity, and his value derives from relationships with others. Art inspired by Confucianism often portrays people in interaction, fulfilling their roles within the family, community, or state. These relationships embody hierarchy and responsibilities, serving as a foundation for harmony and order.

A notable example of this approach is the painting *Ting Qin Tu* (*Listening to the Qin*), attributed to Emperor Huizong of the Song dynasty (fig. 2)[16]. This artwork depicts individuals gathered around the *qin*, a traditional instrument that symbolizes social and spiritual harmony. In Chinese culture, the *qin* holds a unique position as a medium connecting man with the cosmos and the community. The focused

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[14] 范寬 [Fàn Kuān], 臨流獨坐 *[Sitting Alone by a Stream]*, 11th century, 絹本淺設 [Hanging scroll – light color on silk], height: 156.1 cm (61.4 in); width: 106.3 cm (41.8 in), 11th century, 國立故宮博物院 [National Palace Museum, Taibei], https://digitalarchive.npm.gov.tw/Collection/Detail/45?dep=P.

[15] Fabienne Verdier, *Pasażerka ciszy: dziesięć lat w Chinach*, trans. Krystyna Arustowicz (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo W.A.B., 2007), 57–58.

[16] 宋徽宗 [Emperor Huizong of Song], 聽琴圖 *[Listening to the Qin]*, 1135 1082, Hanging scroll, ink and color painting, height: 147.2 cm (57.9 in); width: 51.3 cm (20.1 in), 1135 1082, 故宮博物院 [The Palace Museum], https://digicol.dpm.org.cn/cultural/details?id=90148.

demeanor of the figures in the painting underscores the Confucian emphasis on community and unity as essential elements of its philosophy.

2.7.3. Buddhist Transcendence of Reality

Buddhism introduced elements of contemplation, meditation, and transcendence into Chinese art. In the Buddhist perspective, man is viewed as one who surpasses earthly limitations in the pursuit of enlightenment. Art influenced by Buddhism often features monasteries, temples, or figures set within mystical landscapes, encouraging meditation and reflection on the nature of life.

An exemplary work in this tradition is Li Cheng's *Buddhist Temple in the Mountains*, housed in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (fig. 3)[17]. The painting depicts a temple seamlessly integrated into a rugged mountainous landscape. This composition symbolizes not only spiritual isolation but also the aspiration for harmony between man and the divine. The temple, set against the backdrop of majestic mountains, embodies the transcendental dimension of human existence.

2.7.4. Balance in Chinese Landscape Painting

Chinese landscape painting, regardless of its philosophical underpinning, often portrays man as an element harmonizing with the natural world. An example of this approach can be seen in the work of Dai Jin, housed in the National Palace Museum. His paintings, while drawing inspiration from Confucian and Taoist traditions, emphasize the coherence and equilibrium between man and the natural world (fig. 4)[18].

In such compositions, human figures are small and often barely discernible, symbolizing their subordination to the greater order

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[17] 李成 [Lǐ Chéng], 晴峦萧寺 *[A Solitary Temple Amid Clearing Peaks]*, between and 1127 960, Ink and light color on silk, 111.76 × 55.88 cm, between and 1127 960, Nelson--Atkins Museum of Art, https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/wd/XQHcnUGWbnlmuA.

[18] 戴進 [Dài Jìn], 畫山水 *[Landscape]*, 1462 1388, Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk, height: 184.5 cm (72.6 in); width: 109.4 cm (43 in), 1462 1388, 國立故宮博物院 [National Palace Museum, Taibei], https://digitalarchive.npm.gov.tw/Collection/Detail/3626?dep=P.

of the universe. Yet their presence is pivotal—they imbue the landscape with meaning, introducing elements of life and spirit that animate the scene.

CONCLUSION

The reflections presented in this article highlight the fundamental differences in the understanding of man between the philosophical traditions of the West and the Far East, particularly within Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist thought. The concept of the "person," which in European culture evolved under the influence of Christianity as a philosophical and theological category, finds no direct equivalent in classical Chinese philosophy. Instead, Chinese thought focuses on practical aspects of human existence, such as relationality, social harmony[19], and balance with nature[20].

In Western tradition, the person is conceived as an autonomous, individual being endowed with reason and will, whose dignity derives from being created in the image and likeness of God. Conversely, in Chinese philosophy, man is not viewed as a distinct substance but as an integral part of a larger order—social, cosmic, or spiritual—whose value emerges from fulfilling roles, developing relationships (*guanxi*), and adhering to moral norms. Philosophical-theological anthropology is—of course—reflected in the historical sources of legal systems across various civilizations, which is a crucial element for understanding

[19] Dariusz Klejnowski-Różycki, "Ideały świata konfucjańskiego na przykładzie 'Cesarzowej' Zhanga Yimou [Ideals of the Confucian world on the example of 'Empress' by Zhang Yimou]," in *[Chinese Catecheses] Chińskie katechezy*, ed. Dariusz Klejnowski-Różycki, 神学 SHENXUE (Warszawa-Zabrze: Śląska Szkoła Ikonograficzna, Stowarzyszenie Sinicum im. Michała Boyma SJ, 2012), 269–76, https://www.sinicum.pl/materialy/ksiazki/129-chinskie-katechezy.

[20] Dariusz Klejnowski-Różycki, "Elementy taoistyczne obecne w „Hero" Zhanga Yimou [Taoist elements present in 'Hero' by Zhang Yimou]," in *[Chinese Catecheses] Chińskie katechezy*, ed. Dariusz Klejnowski-Różycki, 神学 SHENXUE (Warszawa-Zabrze: Śląska Szkoła Ikonograficzna, Stowarzyszenie Sinicum im. Michała Boyma SJ, 2012), 277–84, https://www.sinicum.pl/materialy/ksiazki/129-chinskie-katechezy.

the contemporary diversity in the practice of politics, law[21], economics[22], morality[23], art[24], and more. This is an underestimated field of research.

Chinese art complements this vision by portraying man as deeply integrated with nature and the surrounding reality. Examples such as Fan Kuan's *Sitting Alone by a Stream* or Li Cheng's *Buddhist Temple in the Mountains* reflect the Taoist harmony with the cosmos, Confucian social relationships, and Buddhist transcendence of earthly realities.

Both Chinese philosophy and art emphasize harmony—between man and nature, between the individual and the community, and between the material and spiritual worlds. In contrast, Western thought prioritizes individuality, the essential identity of the person, and independence from the surrounding world.

Examining these differences not only helps to understand distinct approaches to man but also opens avenues for intercultural dialogue. Both the European concept of the person and the Chinese emphasis on relationality offer unique perspectives on the nature of man, a question that remains universal and ever relevant. In the contemporary world, faced with the challenges of globalization and the coexistence of diverse cultural traditions, inspiration can be drawn from both approaches,

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[21] Antoni Kość, *Prawo a etyka konfucjańska w historii myśli prawnej Chin [Law and Confucian Ethics in the History of Legal Thought in China]* (Lublin: Pracownia Poligraficzna przy Prywatnym Liceum Ogólnokształcącym, 1998); Antoni Kość, "Chrześcijaństwo a Kultura Koreańska [Christianity and Korean Culture]," *Studia Nauk Teologicznych* 5 (2010): 133–52; Antoni Kość, "Chrześcijaństwo a Kultura Japońska [Christianity and Japanese Culture]," *Studia Nauk Teologicznych PAN* 5 (2010): 153–72, https://doi.org/10.24425/snt.2010.112722.

[22] Wójcik, *Wolność i władza*.

[23] Jacques Gernet, *Inteligencja Chin: społeczeństwo i mentalność [L'intelligence de la Chine : société et mentalité]* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Fu Kang, 2008).

[24] Mieczysław Jerzy Künstler, *Sztuka Chin* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1991); Adina Zemanek, ed., *Estetyka chińska: antologia [Chinese Aesthetics: An Anthology]* (Kraków: Universitas, 2007); Anna Iwona Wójcik, *Filozoficzne podstawy sztuki kręgu konfucjańskiego: źródła klasyczne okresu przedhanowskiego [Philosophical Foundations of Art in the Confucian Cultural Sphere: Classical Sources from the Pre-Han Period]* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2010); Miklós Pál, *Malarstwo chińskie: wstęp do ikonografii malarstwa chińskiego [Chinese Painting: An Introduction to the Iconography of Chinese Art]*, trans. Mieczysław Jerzy Künstler (Warszawa; Budapest: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe Corvina, 1987).

blending individuality with relational harmony in the pursuit of human fulfillment.

Fig. 1. – *Sitting Alone by a Stream* by Fan Kuan

Fig. 2. – *Ting Qin Tu* (*Listening to the Qin*) by Emperor Huizong of the Song dynasty

Fig. 3. – ***Buddhist Temple in the Mountains*** **by Li Cheng**

Fig. 4. – ***Landscape*** **by Dai Jin**

Abstract

Man in Chinese philosophical and artistic traditions is presented as deeply embedded within social, cosmic, and spiritual orders. Unlike the Western notion of the autonomous „person," rooted in individuality and substantiality, Chinese thought focuses on relationality and harmony. Confucianism views man as a social being whose identity emerges through fulfilling relationships and roles within the community. Taoism emphasizes man's unity with nature, portraying him as a small element in the larger cosmos, striving for harmony with dao. Buddhism transcends earthly existence, presenting man as a seeker of enlightenment and spiritual liberation. Chinese art complements these philosophical insights. Taoist-inspired works depict man as a part of majestic natural landscapes, blending into their surroundings. Confucian art reflects man's social interactions, symbolizing community and spiritual unity. Buddhist representations focus on the transcendental, with temples and mystical imagery underscoring spiritual aspirations. These perspectives highlight fundamental differences between Western individualism and Eastern relationality, offering complementary insights into humanity's nature.

Keywords: Man, Person, Chinese Philosophy, Relationality, Cosmic Harmony, Personalism, Chinese Art

Streszczenie

W tradycji zachodniej człowiek definiowany jest jako autonomiczna jednostka obdarzona rozumem i wolą, stworzona na obraz i podobieństwo Boga, co stanowi fundament pojęcia osoby. W chińskiej filozofii, obejmującej konfucjanizm, taoizm i buddyzm, człowiek jest integralną częścią większego porządku – społecznego, kosmicznego lub duchowego – którego wartość wynika z pełnienia ról, rozwijania relacji (guanxi) i przestrzegania norm moralnych. Kluczowe pojęcia, takie jak renge (moralna godność) i weige (pozycja społeczna), odzwierciedlają różnorodne aspekty chińskiego rozumienia człowieka. W sztuce chińskiej człowiek przedstawiany jest w harmonii z naturą, we wspólnocie oraz w dążeniu do transcendencji. Harmonia między człowiekiem a światem materialnym i duchowym jest centralnym elementem zarówno filozofii, jak i sztuki chińskiej, co kontrastuje z indywidualizmem zachodnim.

Słowa kluczowe: człowiek, osoba, filozofia chińska, relacyjność, harmonia kosmiczna, personalizm, sztuka chińska

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