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Force of Psyche: Electricity or Void?

Re-examination of the Hermeneutics of the Force of Psyche in Late Qing China

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to discuss the contrasting hermeneutics concerning the concept of psyche among the late Qing intellectuals. Late Qing intellectuals developed a mode of hermeneutics that viewed *xin li*, or "psyche force," as utilizable, tamable, self-adaptable (in the manner of electricity) and capable of evolving. Also, the "weak mind" has to be exercised as a muscle and all so-called "vile thoughts" must be erased. This Christianized version of the psyche descends, at least in part, from some of the vast range of western knowledge which was introduced into China during the modernization movement, mostly through second-hand translations (based on Japanese translations), as well as through translations by the missionaries in China. John Fryer's *Zhixin mianbingfa* (治心免病法 A Method for the Avoidance of Illness by Controlling the Mind), published in Shanghai in 1896, was the first text that introduced the term *xin li* (心力) into the Chinese contexts and represented the emblematic text of this trend of hermeneutics. Liang Qichao fully absorbed this mode of interpretation and elaborated the concept of *xin li* in such a way that this utilizable and tamable force of psyche could be governed and exercised so as to save the nation and to create a new people. Tan Sitong, though a close friend to Liang Qichao and a member of the Hundred Days' Reform in 1898 and died as a martyr, held a totally different concept of *xin li*. In his Buddhist-inspired vision of the *xin li*, the force of psyche was presented as void, a site for "micro-appearing-disappearing," that was possible of subverting any fixed nominal system. This paper discusses the political implications in Tan's anarchistic vision of *xin li*. This paper argues that Lacan's topological formulation of the psyche and ex-sistenceas well as Alain Badiou's concept of void and the force of subtraction can help us explicate the radicality of Tan's notions of the psyche.

Keywords

psyche politics, psyche force, topology, ethics, Badiou, Lacan,
Tan Sitong, late Qing intellectuals

Foreword

The aim of this paper is to discuss the concept of psyche in the writings by Tan Sitong, a late Qing intellectual, who died in 1898 after the failure of the Hundred Days' Reform. In Tan Sitong's concept of psyche as void, we see a sharp contrast with the "psycho-physical parallelism" that was popular in late nineteenth-century China. Late Qing intellectuals developed a mode of hermeneutics that, using the metaphor of electricity, viewed *xin li* (心力) or "psyche force" as a force that is tamable, utilizable, and controllable. Through modification of the psyche force, *xin* (the psyche) can evolve into a strong and healthy condition so that it becomes the foundation from which the nation might be saved and a new people created. Liang Qichao's essay on "*xinmin*" (新民) or the New People is a typical example. In this mode of thinking, the mind has to be exercised like a muscle and the "vile" and "backward" thoughts have to be cleansed and erased. This clearly very westernized and even Christianized version of the psyche developed partly from the vast range of knowledge introduced into China during the modernization movement, through the second-hand translations from Japanese translations and through the translations by the missionaries in China.¹

Tan Sitong, though familiar with a great deal of the newly imported western and Meiji thought, including chemistry, physics, mathematics and politics, offered a radically different interpretation of psyche force (*xin li*), suggesting that *xin* (psyche) is both void and a space of "micro-appearing-disappearing," and its force could subvert the fixed nominal system and power relations. The proximity and yet radical difference between Tan's version of *xin li* and that of Liang Qichao point to a significant question concerning the conceptualization of the psyche in the Chinese context. Tan's version of *xin li*, with its roots from Buddhist thought, in my view shows a complex topological understanding of the human psyche and of human discourse—one that is worth our engaging with. What is more, Tan's concept of psyche bears an interesting relation to both Badiou's concept of void and Lacan's formulation of the compact space of the libido. In this paper, I will attempt to probe into these affinities so that the concept of a dynamic topology in Tan's concept of

¹ The Meiji Restoration (*Meiji Ishin*) started from 1868. The large amount of Japanese translations was re-translated into Chinese by late Qing intellectuals. Besides the channel from the Japanese sources, many of missionaries in China were also deeply involved in the introduction and translation of modern western knowledge, including physics, chemistry, optics, agriculture, medicine, mathematics, psychology and sociology. For example, William A. P. Martin (1827-1916), Young J. Allen (1836-1907), Richard Timothy (1845-1919), and John Fryer (1839-1928).

xin li, as well as its political and ethical implications, might thereby become thinkable to us.

I. Force of Psyche: Electricity and the New Thought Movement

At the end of the nineteenth century, in the wave of agitated and confused struggles toward the new age of modernity, there emerged a peculiar mode of hermeneutics of psyche in late Qing China. *xin li* (心力), literally meaning psyche force, is a term that was highly used and invested, as a cathected token, an *objet a*, that reveals the strong desire for a rejuvenated nation. Liang Qichao (梁啟超) and his contemporaries used "*xin li*" in their writings to indicate the force of psyche as something that can be tamed, cured, cultivated, regulated and utilized. More explicitly, psyche force is equated in their writings to something like electricity. They believed that by summoning up the people's psychic force and putting it to use they could cure what they saw as a stagnant and diseased old China. Starting from Liang Qichao's theory of "*xinmin*" (新民 New People), the primacy of a concentrated and powerful force of psyche, *xin li*, was stressed. Sun Yatsen in his theory of revolution also insisted that the mind of the people must be cured and governed before the nation can be saved (*jiuguo bixian zhixin* 救國必先治心). Chiang Kaishek, likewise, elaborated his theory of the "Law of the Heart for Revolution" (*geming xinfa* 革命心法) in his program of the New Life Movement (新生活運動) in 1934, a movement of total education and militarization of the entire nation. Mao Zedong also confessed that he was very much influenced by Tan Sitong's essay on *Xin li Shuo* (心力說), "Essay on the Psyche Force."² This discourse of the education of "*xin*," in the mode of the utilization of electricity, paradoxically prepared the path for the governmentality practiced by later governments, throughout almost the entire twentieth century in China and Taiwan, in the educational and cultural policies of thought control, thought reform, thought censorship, and total mobilization of the spirits and minds of all national subjects. This mode of discourse is what I would term the discourse of "psyche governmentality" or "psyche-politics," a powerful technique in the process of subjectivation.

The term *xin li* first appeared in a small book translated by John Fryer (傅蘭雅 1839-1928), entitled *Zhixin mianbingfa* (治心免病法 A Method for the Avoidance of Illness by Controlling the Mind), published in Shanghai in 1896. John

² Mao's revolutionary slogan "chong-jue wang-luo" (衝決網羅), breaking through all trapping nets, was borrowed from Tan Sitong's book *Renxue* (仁學 A Book on Love).

Fryer, who coined this phrase into Chinese, lived in China for thirty five years and played a very significant role in the transmission of the Western world view and disciplinary episteme into late Qing intellectual milieu.³ John Fryer was involved in the translation of more than 130 books, mostly scientific textbooks, such as biology, mathematics, chemistry, physics, medical sciences, and sociology. He was very much disturbed by Qing's defeat in the first Sino-Japan war in 1895, and started actively to promote moral education in China. One thing he did was to invite submissions for publication in the newspaper *Shenbao* (申報), a popular and widely distributed newspaper, as a public contest for "the New Novel" (新小說) to carry out the mission to criticize the backward customs of opium-smoking, the examination systems, foot-binding, and to offer proposals for solutions. This activity was later supported and continued eagerly by Liang Qichao. Liang, in many of his articles, elaborated upon the importance of a moral education through the use of the New Novel. Liang also edited a journal *Xinxiaoshuo* (the New Novel) and call for contributions. The invitation of the New Novel was very effective and attracted a large number of educational novels.⁴

John Fryer's *Zhixin mianbingfa* was emblematic of the discursive economy in late Qing China. Fryer's translation was based on Henry Wood's small book, *Ideal Suggestion through Mental Photography*, which had been published originally in 1893. Fryer started his translation after China's defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895, and his translation reflected his enthusiasm and anxious engagement in the contemporary political and social conditions of the late Qing period. He deliberately extended Wood's preface and inserted three pages of his own personal comments on the opium houses, crimes, wars, disasters and famine in the scenes of the late Qing society to stress the importance of the education of the mind and heart of man. John Fryer also inserted a long passage from David Ames Wells' (1828-98) textbook *Principles and Applications of Chemistry* (1862), translated by Fryer himself, into his explanatory translation of Wood's notion of "ether." According to Wells, the ether fills the space and it is the reason why sound and electricity can be

³ Fryer was a missionary from England. He lived in China for thirty-five years, from 1861 to 1896. After he left the church, he joined the Translation Offices in Shanghai and Beijing and was then in charge of the business. Fryer worked as translator of western new knowledge first in Shanghai and then in Beijing. He had translated, with the cooperation of other Chinese translators, more than one hundred and thirty texts, mostly scientific textbooks. Please consult Yangzong Wang, *Fulanya yu Jindai Zhongguo de Kexue Qimeng* (John Fryer and Modern Chinese Scientific Enlightenment) (Beijing: kexue publisher, 2000).

⁴ Cf. Patrick Hanan, "The New Novel before the New Novel—John Fryer's Fiction Contest." *Chinese Fiction of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Columbia UP, 2004) 125.

transmitted through space.⁵ This notion of ether was shared by Wood and he used ether and electricity in this book to explain the power of thought. Fryer translated several different concepts of the power or the procedure of thought as *xin li*. The phrase “zhixin” (治心) used by Fryer in the title of his translation conveyed explicitly the meaning of “mind-cure” and “mind-governmentality,” both concepts being highly welcomed by late Qing intellectuals.

We now know that through Fryer’s translation of Wood’s *Ideal Suggestion through Mental Photography*, late Qing intellectuals were introduced to the New Thought Movement, a movement that attracted a large population in America from the mid-nineteenth century up until the first quarter of the twentieth century (Satter 5).⁶ Wood was considered by Horatio Dresser as one of the precursors of the New Thought Movement.⁷ In his *History of the New Thought Movement*, Dresser wrote that Wood was the first person who sought to spread new ideas through publicity. According to Dresser, “New Thought” was a science that promoted the ideas that thought is power, and that positive thinking and thought control could fundamentally correct people’s mode of thinking.⁸ Mary Baker Eddy, one of the founders of the New Thought Movement, explained in a speech in 1888 that sin, sickness, and death had no absolute reality, but were mere errors, that is, false conceptions caused by our faulty senses. Her view was that true science could destroy all errors (Satter 1).

⁵ See David Wright. *Translating Science, The Transmission of Western Chemistry into Late Imperial China, 1840-1900* (Brill, 2000) 381.

⁶ According to Beryl Satter, in the first serious study on the New Thought Movement in the United States, there were only 26 members in the Congress of New Thought Movement in 1879, while there were 86,000 members in 1906, 202,000 members in 1926, and 269,000 members in 1936.

⁷ Wood was a successful businessman from Boston before his retirement. He wrote *Natural Law in the Business World* in 1887 when he was fifty-three years old. Afterwards, he suffered a long period of depression, chronic neurasthenia, insomnia and dyspepsia. In order to seek mental equilibrium, he started to write extensively on the concept of New Thought. His *Ideal Suggestion through Mental Photography* was one of the many writings that he wrote during this time. His writings were very popular at the time, and some of them were published up to fourteen editions. Cf. Henry Wood (1834-1908), *An Early Mentor of the New Thought Movement*, <<http://henrywood.wwwhubs.com>>. His writings include: *God’s Image in Man*, *Studies in the New Thought World*, *The New Old Healing*, *The New Thought Simplified*, and *Ideal Suggestion Through Mental Photography*, and a pamphlet, *Has Mental Healing a Valid Scientific and Religious Basis?*

⁸ Horatio W. Dresser, *A History of the New Thought Movement*, first published by Thomas Y. Crowell Co., New York, 1919. Electronic Edition Published by Cornerstone Publishing, July 2001, <<http://website.lineone.net/~newthought/ahotntinx.htm>>.

Wood's *Ideal Suggestion through Mental Photography* clearly demonstrated the conviction that mental evolution through self-adaptation and thought control was a possibility. The central argument in this book was that thought discipline and control were the keys to unlock "spiritual storehouses of strength" and that human mind can be "gradually changed, by means of a stream of changed conscious thinking" (Wood 50-51). In Wood's conception, the force of thought was like electricity, and therefore thought could also be transmitted through "ether," and be tamed and utilized. He wrote:

We find that the great force called thought has scientific relations, correlations, and transmutations; that its vibrations project themselves in waves through the ether, regardless of distance and other sensuous limitations; that they strike unisons in other minds and make them vibrant; that they relate themselves to like and are repelled by the unlike; that their silent though forceful impact makes a distinct impression; in fact that they are substantial entities, in comparison with which gold, silver, and iron are as evanescent as the morning dew. (52)

Wood further developed the notion that thought might be controlled and utilized for good purposes:

When we learn the laws which govern any force, we tame and harness it for service. Electricity has been waiting to serve us since the days of the pre-Adamites, but until now it has waited in vain, because of the entire lack of the scientific application of law. Every conceivable force and phenomenon, when traced back, has for its original basis, Mind in operation; and this activity is regular, orderly, and to be relied upon. (53)

He suggested that thought could be tamed and harnessed for utility as long as we learned the laws that govern the force of thought.

The control of thought, according to Wood, was measured according to the distinction of good and evil. Man was a "cosmos in miniature; an epitome of the natural universe." All creations by God were good, and the substance of man had to be good. "All impurity exists only in the perverted human consciousness" (Wood 32). What then are the impure and the perverted? Wood explicitly distinguished between two forces of human consciousness: one force was idealism (optimism and "the within"), and the other force realism (pessimism and "the without"). The

optimistic was good while the pessimistic was evil. As he put it:

Optimism is of God, and it stimulates and attracts its possessor along the upward road towards the ideal and the perfect. Pessimism creates and multiplies unwholesome conditions, and galvanizes them into apparent life. (58)

Wood then advised people to think no evil, and have eyes only for the good. We can see clearly that, following the line of argument proposed by Wood, the pessimistic, dark and heterogeneous thoughts are to be averted. Such thought taboo and censorship can easily be manipulated in the thought control practiced in any modern Nation-State, for example, in the martial law era in Taiwan under the KMT government beginning from 1950, or the cultural revolution in PRC in the 1960s.

According to Wood's formulation, the human body was a "grand composite photograph of previous thinking and mental states" (Wood 34); human thoughts, consequently, could be examined basing on the external physical forms. The weak form of human body was a mirror and the proof of the diseased human mind. Therefore, dissipated behaviors were not allowed either, and the disturbing or sensational information from the external world also should be avoided. "The mental photography of crime, evil, and disease presented in bold headlines by the sensational press should receive a discriminating and righteous condemnation" (Wood 58). Wood even suggested that people should constantly meditate over good thoughts by means of focusing their eyes on the enlarged letters of the good thoughts. He explained:

Do not merely look upon it [the capitalized letters of the good thought], but wholly GIVE YOURSELF UP TO IT, until it fills and overflows the entire consciousness. . . . Close the eyes for twenty or thirty minutes more; behold it with the mind's eye, and let it permeate the whole organism. (108)

By casting the external images upon the mental field, Wood believed, the "deeper or trans-conscious mind" could gradually be altered (Wood 51).

We can see clearly that Wood's method of mental therapy not only used the rhetoric of the inverted thought-photography but also assumed the principle of mental hygiene. The mental operations of the healthy and pure thoughts were distinguished from those of the unhealthy and unclean ones. Passivity, pessimism,

hesitation, doubtfulness, weakness and gloominess would all be regarded as vile forms of mind and would displease God. Negative thoughts are untouchable. Negative feelings were even worse. The sanitary rules for the thoughts must be strictly observed. Furthermore, Wood believed that the unconscious mind can be corrected through the intervention of a thought-molding process. The binary opposition between the external physical body and the internal mental state, with an assumption that a parallel correspondence existed between the two, made the bio-psyche governmentality function effectively.

This stored-up mental reservoir is a submerged personality which thinks, reasons, loves, fears, believes, accepts, and draws conclusions beneath and independent of consciousness. It is this, and not the matter of the body, that takes disease or contagion when the conscious ego is unaware of exposure. (Wood 50)

In this course of reasoning, the unconscious is a dangerous zone and the thought must be controlled so that the body would not become ill. The body's negative or decadent behaviors must also be corrected because they indicate the degenerate state of the mind. Consequently, the mind had to be exposed, monitored, controlled, educated and modified so that it could be improved and evolved into a better state. Here, we see that the *bio* (life) and the *psyche* were discursively formulated in such a way that the ethical subjects of the nation-state could adapt themselves to the ruling governments of later generations in the Chinese context.

William James had rightly pointed out that the New Thought Movement, as represented by Wood and Dresser, was actually a "mind-cure movement" that linked both social evolutionism and religious mysticism (James 83-84, 93-94).⁹ Henry Wood's theory of mental therapy demonstrated the discursive mode of mental evolution that was popular in the late nineteenth century episteme in the West. The concepts of mental evolution and social control through education, self-adaptability and self-adjustment were widely shared by the nineteenth-century intellectuals. Education was then viewed as the tool for the manufacturer of social individuation.¹⁰

⁹ James pointed out that the doctrinal sources of mind-cure are the four Gospels, Emersonianism or New England transcendentalism, Berkeleyan idealism, spiritism, and Hinduism. James also pointed out the similarity between the mind-cure movement and the Lutheran and Wesleyan movement.

¹⁰ In some of the writings that were often cited by Chinese intellectuals from the late

It is clear that the equation between physical and mental hygiene suggested by Wood placed the mental sphere under the surveillance and control by social institution in the name of a healthy State, while the working logic behind it is actually an unuttered historical *a priori*, or the rule of value and truth. The useful and the utilizable turn out to be veridical and desirable. Through the reasoning of personal interest and the welfare of the society, the government can manage everything that exists for it, as Foucault puts it, "in the form of individuals, actions, words, wealth, resources, property, rights and so forth" (*The Birth of Biopolitics* 45). The entire strategy of governmentality therefore relies not on the total control, but on the law of life, that is, the rules for a game "in which each remains master regarding himself and his part, then the judicial, instead of being reduced to the simple function of applying the law, acquires a new autonomy and importance" (*The Birth of Biopolitics* 175). The autonomy of the individual is essential in the self-governmentality of the regime of ethics as well as the regime of truth (Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* 223-30).

Wood's *Ideal Suggestion through Mental Photography* was listed as one of the series of books on hygiene education in Chinese and was widely read as the introduction to the knowledge of modern hygiene. Ding Fubao (丁福保 1873-1950), the famous scholar of Buddhism and medical science, discussed Wood's concept of mind-cure in his book, *Questions and Answers Concerning Hygiene* (衛生學問答 Weishengxue Wenda), published in 1902, and he suggested the importance of *xin-li* in the therapeutic practice of mental diseases.¹¹ In Wood's writing and Fryer's translation, the "psyche force" is linked directly to the tamable and controllable force of the mind. Pushed to the extreme, their arguments would lead to thought control and thought censorship, as what we have seen in the martial law era in Taiwan and the Cultural Revolution of PRC. This mode of psyche-governmentality worked persuasively for the Chinese because "*xin*" in classical

nineteenth-century to the early twentieth-century, such as works by Herbert Spencer, Johann Friedrich Herbart, Henry Sidgwick, Friedrich Paulsen, James Mark Baldwin, and Lester F. Ward, we notice a similar argument in favor of mental evolution and self-adaptation through education. I've discussed the discursive map of mental evolution that was introduced into early twentieth-century China. Please see Joyce C. H. Liu, "Psyche Governmentality and the Biological Ethical Subject: the Case of Du Yaquan of *Dongfang Magazine* 1911-1923," *Chungguo Wenzhe Yanjiu Jikan* 29 (Sept. 2006): 85-121. Taipei: Academia Sinica.

¹¹ In Chapter Seven, "On the Therapy of the Mind" (Lun Zhi-xin), in *Questions and Answers Concerning Hygiene* (衛生學問答 Weishengxue Wenda), the first set of Q & A posed by Ding Fubao, citing Wood's *Zhixin mianbingfa* (治心免病法 A Method for the Avoidance of Illness by Controlling the Mind), was to elaborate on the significance of "*xin li*" in curing the diseases of the mind (Ding 46).

Chinese philosophy is a powerful notion with shifting connotations, indicating the mind, the heart, the volition, the affects, the will or the spirit. It is at the site of *xin*, I would like to suggest, that the process of subjectivation, in the Chinese discourse, begins and the modern ethical subject is situated.

Wood and Fryer were obscure figures and their writings were merely examples among hundreds and thousands of like minds, but they were representative and symptomatic of the dominant framework of the nineteenth-century discourse. Through them, and writers like them, Chinese intellectuals had incorporated the evolutionist and utilitarian hermeneutics of what became known as *xin* into their views of the world. Liang, for example, following Wood and Fryer's mode of discourse, viewed the force of psyche as the ground to strengthen, accumulate, combine, unite, consolidate and expand the forces of the people. It can also be examined, monitored and altered from the outside through the institutions. The theories of "New People," "New Thought" and "New Youth" were advocated, and Liang called it "the moral revolution" (*Xinmin Lun* 662). Liang's entire project for the new people is based on the molding and shaping, through cultivation and education, of the people into the ethical subject of the modern China. Liang's repeated emphasis of the threat of the invasion by the foreign countries had already successfully depicted a picture of danger. The self-interest and self-preservation, viewed with the interest and preservation of the nation, is the anchorage for subjective moral action. Partaking in the act of the production/preservation in the name of national interest then is rationalized as a moral imperative for the new ethical subject.

Foucault pointed out that the subject constituted by the form of reflexivity specific to a certain type of care of the self, the mastery of *tekhne* over *bios*, will be the "ethical subject of truth that appears and is experienced" (*The Hermeneutics of the Subject* 487). However, this ethical subject thus appeared and experienced was formed through the knowledge, education and the particular *tekhne* over *bios* at different moments in history. Liang and his contemporaries shared the discourse which linked the evolution of the mind with the tasks of the nation-saving project. It is against such historical and discursive background that I shall proceed to analyze Tan Sitong's conceptualization of "psyche force" as "void" and as "mirco-appearing-disappearing" and discuss the radical and critical force in Tan's thinking.

II. Tan Sitong and the Concept of Psyche Force as Void

Liang and Tan were contemporaries, and were both involved in the Reform

movement. Tan was arrested and executed after the event of the short-lived "Hundred Days' Reform" in 1898.¹² All reformer-intellectuals were deeply shocked and pained by Tan's death. In the preface that Liang wrote for the new edition of Tan's book *Renxue* (仁學) that "in other countries, countless of people died for the revolutionary cause. Tan is the first among us who shed blood for our revolution" (Liang, "Preface" 373). After that, Tan was regarded as a martyr by his contemporaries, and the path of blood toward revolution began.

The reason that I believe it is important to re-think and re-treat Tan Sitong's case is that it is with this highly cathected token—*xin li*, or psyche force—that Tan's thought departed drastically and radically from the mainstream of the late Qing discourse. I would like to suggest that Tan's concept of *xin li*, psyche force, offered for us a glimpse to the key that could disentangle the will and desire to tame, utilize, control and to normalize the psyche of other people.

Tan came across Fryer's manuscript of *Zhixin mianbingfa* at about the same time as his contemporaries and was also inspired by it ("Letter" 461).¹³ He picked up this term *xin li* and developed his theories of psyche force in his *Renxue* (仁學), published in 1897.¹⁴ *Ren* (仁) has been translated into various terms, such as humanity or benevolence. *Renxue* therefore is the study of humanity or benevolence. But, in his book, Tan offered several levels of definition for the concept of "ren" and linked it first and foremost to "tong" (通), passage or communication, which is the first step to true equality and sympathy. For Tan, *xin li* is the key to reaching the stage of *ren*. In his view, the psyche force is a force that triggers the instant appearing and disappearing in the sphere of psyche, renewable on the daily basis, which is not to be subjugated to the power relations of the ideological nominal systems. For Tan, the ground of psyche is nothingness (心所本無也). He borrowed the term "yitai" (以太) from *Zhixin mianbingfa* to explain this notion of nothingness. "Yitai" is a phrase used by Fryer and other contemporary translators to render the concept of "ether" in modern physics. But, Tan shifted the notion of "yitai" to a semiotic level. He said that both "yitai" and "dian" (electricity) are merely

¹² Hundred Days' Reform, a failed 104-day national cultural, political and educational reform movement from 11 June to 21 September 1898, was undertaken by the young Guangxu Emperor and his reform-minded supporters led by Kang Youwei. The movement proved to be short-lived, ending in a *coup d'état* (戊戌政變 "The Coup of 1898") by powerful conservative opponents led by Empress Dowager Cixi. Retrieved from *Wikipedia* on the 22nd of March, 2008, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hundred_Days%27_Reform>.

¹³ In a letter to his teacher, Tan said that *Zhixin mianbingfa* is "a book of wonder."

¹⁴ Tan, Sitong. *Renxue* in *Tan Sitong Quanji* (Complete Works by Tan Sitong) (Beijing: Zhonghua Publisher, 1998).

“borrowed nominal vehicles” employed to inquire into the nature of the force of psyche (以太也，電也，粗淺之具也，借其名以質心力) (*Renxue* 291).

David Wright points out that, for Tan, *yitai* and ether are not equivalent and interchangeable terms. For Tan, Wright suggests, it was not the materialistic notion of ether, but the mysterious qualities which allowed him to posit the universality of the concept of *ren* (379). Wright examines the intellectual current of the later half of the nineteenth century, represented by Joseph John Thomson, Oliver Lodge, and William Crookes, who shared the mysticism and religiosity in their explanation of ether. Wright suggests that Tan saw in these contemporary scientific thoughts a connection with traditional Chinese thought, and he viewed *yitai* in a similar way as those spiritually-minded Western scientists of the day (374-78).

I believe Wright is correct in separating Tan's use of *yitai* from the ether in modern physics but that Wright is mistaken in taking Tan as one of the religious mystics. In Tan's work, “*yitai*” is neither the concrete materialistic substance of ether, nor the spiritual or mystical force from beyond; rather, it is the generic motive (動機) or the love force (愛力) that fills the universe, unites elements and forms the body, joins the limbs and flesh, and is manifested in psyche, mercy, love, and nature. “*Yitai*” holds the relations among families and friends, links the household, the state and the world, constitutes our senses, and moves the world as well as the natural phenomena. The reason why Tan states that the ground of psyche is nothingness (心所本無也) is because that, for him, psyche is constituted by *yitai*, its minutest unit.¹⁵ This nothingness, or void, or *sūnyatā*, is not absolutely nothingness or emptiness itself. *Yitai* brings forth what he calls the “micro-appearing-disappearing” (微生滅) of material. In this groundless psyche, the thoughts rise and fall in one instant (即生即滅), triggered by chance and also implicated by various situations (心之生也，必有所緣。緣與所緣，相續不斷) (*Renxue* 330). In this context, *yitai* is always local, imbedded in and interacting with the mutating situations. Psyche is not exterior or interior, but exists in the encounters and mutual implications between the beings and external bodies in the phenomenal world (互相容納，非內非外) (*Renxue* 330-31).

Since there is no fixed entity of the psyche, therefore there is no fixed identity of the “I,” nor the dualism between body and mind, or subject and object.

How do I know that I am myself? The consciousness of me is already a past one. There are infinite parts in me, and each part has infinite

¹⁵ 更小之又小以致於無，其中莫不有微生物，浮寄於空氣之中，曰為以太 (Tan, *Renxue* 295).

elements. Suppose that one of these infinite elements is me and the rest are non-mes, then I'm definitely split. Suppose that these elements are all me, then there are millions of mes, and I'm also split. (*Renxue* 314)

今夫我又何以知有我？比于非我而知之。然而非我既已非我矣，又何以之有我？迨乎知有我，則固已逝之我也。(Renxue, 314)

我之各部分之質點……各有無數之分，各分之質點，又各有無數之分，窮其數可由一而萬萬也。今試言某者是我，為有一是我，餘皆非我，則我當分裂。謂皆是我，則有萬萬我，而我又當分裂。(Renxue 314-15)

Following this line of thought, Tan decided that "I" am in the appearing and also in the disappearing. To insist on the knowledge of "I," then this knowledge is merely a fixation, and the "I" has already gone.

It was on the basis of this concept of *yitai* as instant-appearing-disappearing that Tan proposed the idea that the world and the "I" are mutually implicated and contained. The "I" is a temporary configuration of *yitai*, undergoing the process of constant transmutation in every instant because the external phenomenal world is disappearing and appearing all the time.

The world is in me, and I am in the world.

一切入一，一入一切。(Renxue 313)

Tan therefore suggested the concept of the "mutual containment of One and Multiple" (一多相容) (*Renxue* 316). In this sense, "one" is not the concept of totalizing and homogenizing One, nor the one that is counted and measured in proportion to the whole. Instead, both One and Multiple are concepts of multiplicity and infinity, and together they form a topological space through endless dialectic movements.

Tan said that different modes of physical forces, such as constant force, opposite force, incorporating force, resisting force, totalizing force, twisting force, bending force, should be conceived in the domain of *ren*. For him, *ren* is "tong" (通), that is, immediate sympathy and communication between one and the other. If there is no sympathy and communication, these forces would be fixated, and violence would then ensue. With more knowledge, the conflicts created by these forces could be even more severe. *Ren*, or the state of mutual sympathy and communication, is made possible by the lively movements of *yitai*. "If thoughts are not propelled by illusions, then the force of psyche can truly demonstrate itself. It is also the moment of *ren*" (腦氣所由不妄動，而心力所由顯。仁矣夫！) (*Renxue* 365). To Tan,

only when there is no differentiation of the subject and the object, no dualism, no opposition, can there be true equality (*Renxue* 291).

人我通，無人相，無我相……仁一而已，凡對待之詞，皆當破之……無對待，然後平等。(Renxue 291)

He also said, "Opposition is derived from the dichotomy between subject and object. The illusive subject-object opposition is caused by the fixed position of the 'I'" (Tan, *Renxue* 316).

對待生於彼此，彼此生於有我。(Renxue 316).

If there is immediate mutual communication, or sympathy and empathy, then there is no boundary of any kind; the force of psyche is the mediation for the immediate communication. Without the capacity for sympathy and communication, one would always be in an alien space; with the sympathy and communication, however, one could be communicated with foreign spaces.

不仁則一身如異域，是仁必異域如一身。(Renxue 296)

The crucial issue here is the problem of force, or rather, the fixation or the fluidity of psyche force. For Tan, it is not "force" that causes exclusion and violence, but the fixation of forces established at the subjective position through the accumulation of power and through the custom established in the nominal system; the construction of the nominal system is nothing but the fixation and accumulation of powers.

名忽彼而忽此，視權勢之所積；名時重而時輕，視習俗之所尚。
(Renxue 299)

Tan said, in Buddhist thought, psyche force is instant appearing and disappearing. Movement and rest are in the same moment. If one sees only the stillness of the process, it is because he is trapped by obstinate illusions (頑空). One needs the force of psyche to remove oneself from the fixed structure or from the "I," to break loose the dichotomy established by the nominal system, and to remain constantly open to mutations, so that the renewal of being and the communication with the phenomenal world can be possible.

凡對待之詞，皆當破之。(Renxue 292)

非一非異，非斷非常。旋生旋滅，即滅即生。生與滅相授之際，
微之又微。(Tan, Renxue 314)

日新烏乎本？曰：以太之動機而已矣。(Renxue 319)

To me, Tan's notion of the constant movement of *yitai* as psyche force indicates a mobile state of being through the pure negativity of appearing and disappearing in an open dialectic way. The power of Tan's thought lies in his trenchant critique of the nominal system of Confucianism. The most striking concept brought up by Tan, to my mind, is what he said about the nominal system:

The construction [of the naming system] is so gigantic that it conceals everything and people see only darkness in daytime.

丰其蔀，日中見斗。(Renxue 300)

The gigantic nominal construction is concealing and deceptive, but it can set up the law and determine the order of things and human relations. Tan's famous phrase "*chongjue wangluo*" (衝決網羅) (Renxue 290), breaking loose of all confining [nominal] nets, is then a radical confrontation with the nominal system (名教). Tan was fully aware of the fact that borders were created by the nominal system and that such borders exist between families, genders, classes, groups, parties, nations and religions. For Tan, the normative laws of the Confucian Religion (孔教) regulating the hierarchical relations in society could only form differentiating territories:

The differences and the territories are all conceived through illusive fixation. It is all self-centered, with no understanding of others.

妄分彼此，妄見畛域，但求利己，不恤其他。(Renxue 296)

Tan saw clearly that the ideological and differentiating barriers and frictions caused by the conceptual frameworks were almost irremediable: "It is sad that the distinctions and gaps created by people's illusive thoughts are as wide as deep furrows and cannot be bridged anymore" (Tan, Renxue 298). Such nominal apparatus, in Tan's analysis, built up a whole system of distinctions, allocated the oppositions between the good and the bad, and designed the laws of punishment in a self-serving cause.

All penal system is based on this law, the core of it is self-serving cause.
一切刑律制度皆以此爲率，取便己故也。(Renxue 349)

Tan Sitong pointed out that evil was named only by those people who shared the "common nominal system" (共名) against the outsiders. He questioned: "What is evil? It is only a name to designate the ones who do not follow the rules set up by those who occupy the site of the good. It is the wrong done by the ones who appropriate the naming system. There is actually no evil outside of the realm of the good" (Renxue 301).

惡者，即其不循善之條理而名之。用善者之過也，而豈善外別有所謂惡哉？(Renxue 301)

Tan pointed out sharply that the concealing power of this nominal construct could blind people's reason and judgment. People who follow the nominal system do not question the Law at all. They faithfully follow the Law, execute the Law, exclude the outsiders, expel and even murder the law-breakers. Nobody would ever suspect anything wrong about the foundation of such consensus, and would only agree that "those who transgressed the nominal system should be set right by the Law in this way" (得罪名教，法宜至此) (Renxue 296).

The critical and political power in Tan's thought, his idea of *yitai* as the constant force of micro-appearing-disappearing, his theories of the psyché as a groundless void, of the mutual-containment between one and multiple, and his criticism against the Confucian ideological construction of the world of the Good, offers us not only an understanding of the generic existence of the void and the theory of ontological multiplicity, but also of the critique of the discursive operation of the nominal system that determines what is good based on the principle of the same and the idea that what is bad and outside the good is to be expelled and punished.

I find that Tan's radical approach to the being as void and his critique of the nominal system of the good can be best illuminated through some of the writings on the political philosophy developed by the contemporary French philosophy Alain Badiou, especially his concept of the political force of the thought-to-come. In the following section, I shall tackle the concept of the pure multiple and the infinite local dialectic developed by Badiou so that we can better understand the radical force in Tan's thinking.

III. Badiou's Void and Set Theory: A political Force of Thought-to-Come

Tan's *yitai* as instant appearing and disappearing (即生即滅), and his concept of mutual containment of the one and the multiple (一多相容), touches on the question of "the ontological law of being-multiple" addressed by Badiou (Badiou, "Eight Theses on the Universal" 151). For Badiou, the void is a concept of "being-here" and of "existence" that is not defined by the concepts such as consciousness, experience, or human being. This concept of existence, through pure negativity, is for him the question of the void, or the question of the empty set ("Towards a New Concept of Existence" 64). Badiou declares:

It's obvious that the phenomenon, as the non-subsisting of essence, is nothing but "the being and the vanishing," the appearing and the disappearing. But it nonetheless supports the permanence of the essence of which it is existence, as its internal other. . . . Not simply essence, but the essence that has become the law of the phenomenon, and thereby the positivity of appearing-disappearing. ("Hegel and the Whole" 229)

This phenomenon's ontological constant appearing and disappearing constitutes Badiou's concept of pure multiple, the multiple-without-oneness.

The multiple 'without-one'—every multiple being in its turn nothing other than a multiple of multiples—is the law of being. . . . In fact, every situation, inasmuch as it is, is a multiple composed of an infinity of elements, each one of which is itself a multiple. (*Ethics* 25)

In Badiou's formulation of the pure multiple, the dialectic is not between the one and the other, the subject and the object, but between the localized subject and the infinite thought movement, a process of infinite appearing and disappearing.

Thus the central dialectic at work in the universal is that of the local, as subject, and the global, as infinite procedure. This dialectic is constitutive of thought as such. ("Eight Theses on the Universal" 143)

The body, gathered under the trace of the vanished event, sets out point by point, and organically, the thought-subject of a yet unknown eternal truth. (Badiou, *Logics of the World* 479)

The infinite local dialectic maintains an open process of appearing and disappearing and thus makes the infinite immanence possible. It is from this angle that we see the meaning of Tan's nothingness as pure negativity and the open dialectic, his view of the mutual implication of being and the phenomenal world, and his axiom of the renewability of being at every moment, or the renewability of being at every point, as Badiou would put it.

Tan's proposed breaking up the nominal barriers, therefore, is not the act of destroying the entire state, but, again, in Badiou's vocabulary, the rise of the "yet unknown eternal truth" that is to come, that is departed and subtracted from the fixed subject position within the system of the One. For Badiou, truth is not the powerful One, but the half-said truth, the singular truth, the truth of powerlessness. Badiou used the concept of "forcing" to speak of a "power of the true, a power required in order to found the concept of its eventual powerlessness" ("Truth: Forcing and the Unnamable" 127). Badiou writes,

To love truth is to love the generic as such and this is why, as in all love, we have here something that goes astray, something that evades the order of language, something that is maintained in the errancy of an excess through the power of the forcings it permits. ("Truth: Forcing and the Unnamable" 127)

This forcing of powerlessness is a subtraction, a retreat from the One. Forcing of the powerlessness, or the force of unbinding, is essential for the the torsion of thought or *clinamen* to emerge. The process of forcing and subtracting constitutes an open and incompletable singularity (Badiou, "Eight Theses on the Universal" 151).

But, the temptation the subject faces is to exert this forcing to name the unnamable completely. This forcing to name the unnamable, to Badiou, is where evil starts.

It is in this very desire, which every truth puts on the agenda, that I perceive the figure of evil as such. To force a naming of the unnameable is to deny singularity as such; it is the moment in which, in the name of a truth's infinitely generic character, the resistance of what is absolutely singular in singularity, of the share of the proper which is

subtracted from naming, appears as an obstacle to the deployment of a truth seeking to ensure its dominion over the situation. ("On Subtraction" 115)

Tan's critique of the ideological nominal system as the construction that conceals the world (丰其蔀) and differentiates the wrong from the right, the bad from the good, points to the "ideological framework of ethics" discussed by Badiou (*Badiou, Ethics* 16). For Tan, the division of the good and the bad is conceivable only in the naming system. Those who share the common naming system (共名) share the same position justified as the good and the just. They would justify the rule of the Law without any suspicion: "those who transgressed the nominal system should be set right by the Law in this way" (得罪名教，法宜至此) (Tan, *Renxue* 296).

Badiou in his book on ethics sharply pointed out that evil belongs to the category of the subject, and the unnamable is unnamable for the subject language. "Every attempt 'politically' to name a community induces a disastrous Evil. . . . Evil in this case is to want, at all costs and under condition of a truth, to force the naming of the unnamable" (*Ethics* 86). Earlier, he writes:

If the ethical "consensus" is founded on the recognition of Evil, it follows that every effort to unite people around a positive idea of the Good, let alone to identify Man with projects of this kind, becomes in fact the real source of evil itself. (*Ethics* 13)

The community and the collective are the unnamable of political truth: every attempt "politically" to name a community would lead to a disastrous Evil (*Ethics* 86).

Badiou related the concept of "subtraction" to Saint Paul's discourse, the discourse of mystic and subjective weakness. He pointed out that the most radical statement Paul declared was that "God is not the god of Being, is not Being" (*Saint Paul* 47). For Paul, Badiou suggested, the Christ-event only testifies something that is to come, that is to happen to us, and one does not know it until one experiences it.

For Paul, [Christ is not a mediating figure], just as for those who think a revolution is a self-sufficient sequence of political truth, Christ is a coming [une venue]; he is what interrupts the previous regime of discourses. Christ is, in himself and for himself, what happens to us. (*Saint Paul* 48)

To declare such truth, Badiou said, it required a force of subtraction. Paul subtracted himself both from the previous regimes of the prophetic and miraculous Jewish discourse and from the philosophical wisdom of the Greek discourse (*Saint Paul* 50). This discourse of subjective weakness and of subtraction, with silent and mystical intimacy, requires “militant force” (*Saint Paul* 53). This declaration of truth depends on a subjective weakness that has to be maintained “day after day.”

Whether or not this truth, so precarious, continues to deploy itself depends solely on his subjective weakness. Thus, one may justifiably say that he bears it only in an earthen vessel, day after day enduring the imperative—delicacy and subtle thought—to ensure that nothing shatters it. (*Saint Paul* 54)

The imperative to ensure that nothing shatters the weakness of the subjective position through “delicacy and subtle thought” is the imperative to maintain the forcing of the half-said truth. It is exactly what Tan would say about the force of *ren*, i.e., the force of *tung*, the force of passage and immediate communication. It is not the force fixated or fortified on any subjective position of the naming system, but the constant force to break up the subject-object opposition, the micro-appearing-disappearing of thought, and to maintain the position of immediate mutual communication between one and the other. For Tan, in order to maintain the living state of being, the constant flow of mutation, and to prevent one from constructing a huge concealing naming system on the basis of a fixed subject position, it is necessary to exercise this constant force of *yitai*, of “micro-appearing-disappearing.”

IV. Lacan's Void: Not *nothing*, but Void as Being

Back to our central issue of the psyche as void. We still need to move a step further and ask the question: Why could this concept of psyche as void serve as the radical force of being, or of the existence of the new being to come? What is the fundamental link between Tan's concept of psyche as void and Badiou's concept of the void? I would like to suggest that through examining Lacan's interpretation of being as void we could obtain a better appraisal of Tan's and Badiou's concept of the void.

Badiou's philosophy of the void is fundamentally akin to Lacan, especially to Lacan's concept of the topology and the set theory. Badiou once said that he is

always faithfully a Lacanian.¹⁶ By that he meant that Lacan's study of matheme, of topological knot, and of set theory are close to his axiom that mathematic is philosophy. He has devoted many sections of his books to Lacan, partly as elaborations and partly as critique, such as *Theory of Subject, Being and Event, Conditions, Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II*. In a recent article, "The Formulas of *l'Étourdit*," Badiou clearly explained that Lacan is anti-philosophical because philosophy in general, in defining what the One is, often breaks up the truth-knowledge-Real triplet into pairs, while for Lacan the triplet is inseparable. "I believe this is the most important and novel thesis in *l'Étourdit*, the triplet knowledge-truth-Real cannot be segmented" ("The Formulas of *l'Étourdit*" 89). Badiou pointed out that what Lacan wants to show is the statement that "there is Oneness" (*il y a de l'Un*). For Lacan, "the Real is not known, it is demonstrated" ("The Formulas of *l'Étourdit*" 90). How does the Real pass through, from impotence, to its demonstration? Between the pure being as unbound multiplicity and the formalization of being, there is an impasse. This impasse and the demonstration of the Real is our question.

To Badiou, the formalization of being, is related to "the localization of the void," or the concept of subject (*Being and Event* 432). Badiou writes, "the 'there is' of the subject is the coming-to-being of the event, via the ideal occurrence of a truth, in its finite modalities" (*Being and Event* 434). Lacan still keeps the idea that there are always some subjects. But, Badiou would insist that, if we want to think the subject not merely as "structural recurrence" identifiable within the uniform networks of experience, but as a rare subject that "suspends its occurrence from the event, from the intervention, and from the generic paths of fidelity, both returning the void to, and reinsuring it within, a function of suture to being," we need mathematics (*Being and Event* 432). It is here that Badiou and Lacan agree.

To Lacan, the moment of the formalization of being, or the moment of articulation, is "orientated in the fundamental topology of language" (*Seminar XI* 244). That is to say, the "subjective position of being" takes place at the moment of articulation (*Seminar XI* 247). In *Encore*, Lacan explained this subjective position of being as a topological locus which connects heterogeneous spaces:

A formulation is given to us by the topology I qualified as the most recent that takes as its point of departure a logic constructed on the

¹⁶ "We are steadfastly Lacanian with regard to the theme of the subsumption of bodies and languages by the exception of truths—even though Lacan himself would limit their impact, stopping at the threshold of their eternal power" (Badiou, *Logics of Worlds* 479).

investigation of numbers and that leads to the institution of a locus, which is not that of a homogeneous space. Let us take the same limited, closed, supposedly instituted space—the equivalent of what I earlier posited as an intersection extending to the infinity. If we assume it to be covered with open sets, in other words, sets that exclude their own limits—the limit is that which is defined as greater than one point and less than another, but in no case equal either to the point of departure or the point of arrival. . . . it can be shown that it is equivalent to say that *the set of these open spaces always allows of a subcovering of open spaces, constituting a finity, namely, that the series of elements constitutes a finite series.* (*Seminar XX 9-10*, italics mine)

Here, I think Lacan has touched upon the most important question within ontology, that is, the being of appearing and disappearing is a finite set that opens to infinite subsets, and being that leads to beings to come. Each moment of articulation, or formalization of being, appears as a topological point that is traversed by heterogeneous spaces.¹⁷

Lacan used the concept of Democritian void to speak of the “being.” He insisted that if we need to use the term “being,” it is “a being of signifierness” (*Seminar XX 71*).

In fact, the atom is simply an element of flying signifierness, quite simply a στοιχείο [cell]. Except that it is extremely difficult to make it work out right when one retains only what makes the element an element, namely, the fact that it is unique, whereas one should introduce the other a little bit, namely, difference. (*Seminar XX 71*)

Στοιχείο can be understood as a cell, an element, a letter, or a part of speech. Lacan here was using Democritian model of microcosm to explain his concept of “being of signifierness”: the ontological constituent of being is the signifiers, or what he calls the “flying signifiers.” It is clear that for Lacan, the void is “not zero,” “not *nothing*.” Instead, the void is the microcosm of being itself, filled with flying atoms

¹⁷ The notion of set theory is so central to Lacan’s concept of topology that Jacques-Alain Miller has concluded that Lacan’s concept of topology links his theories from the early stage down to his works of mathemes, and this topology may be integrally reduced to a set (Jacques-Alain Miller 35).

of sense perception (*Seminar XI* 64).¹⁸ Badiou also pointed out that, for Lacan, the subject's presence is constituted "by the signifier more than by the body," the body that has already been affected by the structure. But, Badiou clarified, in Lacan's context, it is a body that thinks, "the body-thought" (*Logics of Worlds* 478). For Badiou himself, what he concerned with was how the body, "gathered under the trace of the vanished event, sets out point by point, and organically, the thought-subject of a yet unknown eternal truth" (*Logics of Worlds* 479). In this aspect, Badiou said that he and Lacan are not too far apart. The flying atoms of signifiers discussed by Lacan are to be understood as the sense perception of sight, smell and everything that follows. By introducing the concept of being as being of signifierness, with flying signifiers, Lacan has defined being as body-thought, an ever mutating microcosm of flying signifiers.

Lacan once used the metaphor of the extra-flat surface of the lamella to elaborate the concept of being as the void.¹⁹ The lamella, Lacan said, is a surface that takes no space: "lamella is something extra-flat, which moves like the amoeba . . . [and] survives any division, any scissiparous intervention" (*Seminar XI* 197). The metaphor of the lamella or amoeba is apparently derived from Freud's notion of the amoeba-shaped "ego" or "I" (*Iche*). Freud said that it is hard to say anything of the behavior of the libido in the id or that in the super-ego. All that we know about is what is related to the "I." It is in the "I" that the entire available quota of libido is stored up.

It lasts until the *Iche* [I] begins to cathect the ideas of objects with libido, to transform narcissistic libido into object-libido. Throughout the whole of life the *Iche* [I] remains the great reservoir, from which libidinal cathexes are sent out to objects and into which they are also once more withdrawn, just as an amoeba behaves with its pseudopodia.²⁰
(Freud, *Outline*)

¹⁸ "Nothing, perhaps?—not perhaps nothing, but not nothing" (*Seminar XI* 64).

¹⁹ Regarding this concept of the lamella-shaped space, Slavoj Žižek has suggested that it is this negative logic of the lamella, the logic of a "not-all," that forces being to appear in one of the either-or situations, through the process of the *vel*. The "either-or" situation is a moment of the cut that separates but also bridges the ambivalent values in a topological mode. Žižek further suggested that the lamella functions both as the "flayed, skinned body" of the Lacanian real and as the "political factor" in Milan Kundera's writing (215).

²⁰ Freud used the same metaphor of amoeba in various articles: "On Narcissism" (1914), lecture XXVI of the "Introductory Lectures" (1916-17), "The Ego and the Id" (1923), Lecture XXXII of the "New Introductory Lectures" (1933a), and "An Outline of Psycho-Analysis" (1940a).

In these few lines by Freud, we see that the "I" for Freud is a mutating form of cathexes, constantly reaching out to and withdrawing from the ideas of the objects. Ontologically, the "I" understood here is the transmuting reservoir of the cathexes. Libido is the constant force of cathecting with and severing from the objects in the external world.

Lacan also explained that the libido was the "pure life instinct," the "immortal life, or irrepressible life, life that has need of no organ, simplified, indestructible life" (*Seminar XI* 198). Lacan stressed that libido could not be viewed as "a field of forces," but as "constant force," because he took *Trieb*, following Freud, as "a constant force" (*konstante Kraft*). It was not the "life force" or "kinetic energy" to be "regulated with movement" (*Seminar XI* 164-65). To Lacan, the libido was an "unreal organ" that is the intersection of articulation (*Seminar XI* 205). The libido is "incarnated" through the cathexes, "a series of *object a*" (*Seminar XI* 206). The libido, or the constant force of cathecting and withdrawing, is situated at the surface of articulation, the intersection that cuts and links the two spaces.

I have placed the libido at the point at which the lobe defined as field of the development of the unconscious covers and conceals the other lobe, that of sexual reality. The libido, then, would be that which belongs to both—the point of intersection, as one says in logic. But this is precisely what it does not mean. For this sector at which the field appears to overlap is, if you see the true profile of the surface, a void (*Seminar XI* 156).

The lamella-shaped libido was then described as a flat surface, a "void," a "compact space," the point where heterogeneous and multidimensional spaces intersect.

This surface belongs to another whose topology I have described to my pupils at various times, and which is called the cross-cap, in other words, the mitre. . . . This surface is a Moebius surface, and its outside continues its inside. (*Seminar XI* 156)

Here, we see that Lacan had already developed his idea of the Moebius surface as a topological point of appearing and disappearing, that is, the space of the pure being of multiplicities.

In associating the pure being of multiplicities to the Democritian concept of void, Lacan also introduced the concept of *clinamen*, or the torsion of thought. Lacan explained that when Democritus introduced thought into being, his theory of *clinamen* also indicated "the adversary of a pure function of negativity." The

clinamen, or pure negativity of thought, brings in an “other” or “difference in being” (*Seminar XI* 63). The libido then is not only the constant force of cathexis and binding, but also the constant force of the withdrawal of cathexes and of unbinding. It is the force that introduces the *clinamen* that deviates or subtracts from the given frame and leaves a space for the advent of a “new being.”

Except that that doesn't happen without meiosis, a thorough obvious subtraction, at least for one of the two, just before the very moment at which the conjunction occurs, a subtraction of certain elements that are not superfluous in the final operation. (*Seminar XX* 66)

This meiosis or subtraction, on the level of thought, is the subtraction and unbinding from the One, from the phallic position in the given system, and from the whole saying. It is this unbinding, or subtraction, that makes the renewal and repetition of representation possible, not the repetition of the structural recurrence, but the repetition of the appearing of new being. The act of unbinding and subtraction requires force, as Tan and Badiou would say, so that the fixed subject position could be untied.

This constant play of appearance and disappearance, binding and unbinding, explains how the being as thought, in Lacan's sense, is the being of *ex-sistence* and of *jouissance* (*Seminar XX* 70-71).

Doesn't this *jouissance* once experiences and yet knows nothing about put us on the path of *ex-sistence*? And why not interpret one face of the Other, the God face, as based on feminine *jouissance*? (*Seminar XX* 77)

This feminine *jouissance* is the *jouissance* of *savoir* and, Lacan insisted, can only be experienced and retained through “half-telling” (*mi-dire*), and not to be claimed to be whole (*Seminar XX* 93).

To retain a congruous truth—not the truth that claims to be whole, but that of the half-telling (*mi-dire*), the truth that is borne out by guarding against going as far as avowal. (*Seminar XX* 93)

The reason Lacan suggested that the avowal is deceiving and concealing was because existence cannot be claimed as a whole truth. Badiou has pointed out that

the Real, for Lacan, can be defined as "ab-sence." Badiou said, "He is asserting that an opening onto the Real cannot be breached save through the presupposition that it is an absence in sense, an ab-sense, or a subtracting of something from, or out of, sense" (Badiou, "The Formulas of *l'Étourdit*" 83).

What Lacan and Badiou were addressing was that the nominal system has its own limit. The invisible and the unthinkable cannot be accessed within the nominal system that excludes them. The invisible and the unthinkable, or the absence, could only be experienced through the demonstration of the Real, with an ab-sence. To question the given system of knowledge, to test the limits, to subtract something from sense, out of sense, is the first step to try to challenge the claimed whole truth. Tan and Badiou shared their task in this regard. This questioning, however, is not to attempt another whole truth, but to exercise the force in the process of thought, and to enjoy the *jouissance* of thought, the *jouissance* of *savoir*. This truth as half-said constantly requires a logic of subtraction, a play between *eros* and *thanatos* that are not two distinct forces, but one constant force, a force of binding-unbinding, appearing-disappearing, on the path of ex-sistence. The path of ex-sistence is therefore the process of thought to come, and the path both Tan and Badiou try to elaborate in their work.

V. Conclusion: Force of Psyche— Force of Unbinding and Ex-sistence

To conclude. We are faced here, through the long discussion in this paper, with the question of the political implication behind the difference between the two modes of hermeneutic of the late Qing China, i.e., the psyche force as electricity as opposed to the psyche force as void.

The former hermeneutic assumes psyche force as utilizable and tamable forces, and assumes, too, that through the process of cultivation, regulation and governmentality the mind and spirit of the people would be bettered, leading to an improvement in the welfare of the people as a whole. This concept of mental evolution, the progress of the mind, is homologous to the concept of "psycho-physical parallelism" as we have observed it in the writings of Wood, Fryer, Liang and their contemporaries. The individuals are counted as countable parts of the whole. The One, either the God or the State, that defines the parts of the whole is the dominant logos that determines the order of the law and also differentiates the good and the just from the bad and the evil. The subject is thus subjected to the given regime of discourse and of the sensible, even of existence. Happiness is

measured according to the common denominator of the majority of the people. The society is therefore governed by the laws of the happiness for the greatest number and also by the principles of self-adaptation while the *telos* behind such calculation is often unknown to the individuals.

The other hermeneutics of psyche force as we have seen it in Tan's writings, on the contrary, suggests that psyche space is a void, a dynamic topological continuum, of infinite movement of local dialectic. The concept of psyche force as pure dialectic and negativity allows us to view each body as a singular being, renewable on a daily basis, through the force of instant appearing and disappearing of thoughts. This "constant force" is the key that leads us back to Freud's criticism of the "psycho-physical parallelism" that was popular in the nineteenth century. For Freud, the conventional parallelism between the psychological and the physical, or between psychical and the conscious, would disrupt "psychical continuity" ("Unconscious" 168). This constant movement of the psyche force keeps the psyche space as an open system, alterable according to the encounters of the external bodies in the phenomenal world. Each one is a multiple and opens to yet another multiple, as set opens to multiple subsets. A sense of radical equality between singular beings is suggested by this notion of ontological multiple.

Lacan's topological formulation of ex-sistence, and Badiou's conceptualization of the truth of powerlessness and of subtraction, have helped us to explain how Tan's *yitai*, and his psyche force as micro-appearing-disappearing, could work to unsettle the consolidation of the utilitarian psyche-electricity discourse of his time, and to challenge the nominal system of the ideological construction of Confucianism. Furthermore, through this dynamic topological perception of being, or the onto-logy, we see the possibility for the force of infinite questioning, the immanent singularity of the thought-to-come. In Tan's thinking, we see not only a radical political view of the equality of beings, but also a radical view of the ethics that is freed from any fixed nominal ideology of ethics. It is through Lacan's concept of the void as the microcosm of thought, of appearing and disappearing signifiers, as a set that opens to subsets and the process of thought to come, that we see the affinity between Tan and Badiou.

Tan once suggested that the ideal universality would be the state where no dichotomy between subject and object are posed, no hierarchy erected, and no empire, no national boundary and no religion. There would be ultimate equality among mankind (仁一而已，凡對待之詞，皆當破之。無對待，然後平等). The social unit envisioned by Tan was an anarchical form of flexible local communities, a form of multitude, based on an ancient Chinese vision of *jing-tian* (井田) that the

social affairs are managed together by the people of the neighborhood. Tan's vision was one of radical equality, not subjecting to the ideological hierarchy of any political order. This anarchical vision by Tan was soon given up by late Qing intellectuals and the revolutionaries of his time because the epoch demanded a more unified and substantiated nation-state. Tan's path was not pursued. Instead, the road of revolution was ensued after his martyrdom. It is the biggest irony that we've observed on the eve of modern China.

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