

What Is an Author? A Comparative Study of Søren Kierkegaard and Liu Xie on the Meanings of Writing

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This study analyzes Kierkegaard's theory of authorship from a comparative perspective, by using Liu Xie's 劉勰 Chinese literary criticism in *Wenxin Diaolong* 《文心雕龍》 as a comparative model. It examines the meaning of an author's literature writing, the spiritual, the aesthetic dimensions, and the creative force of compositional literary writing, and finally the goal of writing, as elaborated by these two authors. In Kierkegaard's sense, the quality of writing is mainly tied up with the religious mind of a person, while to Liu, the quality of writing is related to the moral quality of a person. The following examination demonstrates how Kierkegaard and Liu complement and enrich each other in the understanding of authorship and writing.

2.1 Introduction

There is a significant religious depth in Søren Kierkegaard's articulation of authorship in his work, *The Point of View on My Work as an Author*, in which he states (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 23):

What I in truth am as an author, that I am and was a religious author, that my whole authorship pertains to Christianity, to the issue: becoming a Christian, with direct and indirect polemical aims, at that enormous illusion, Christendom, or the illusion that in such a country all are Christian of Sorts.

Yet, Kierkegaard also pays attention to the aesthetic sense in writing, and contrasted it with the religious dimension. It should be very revealing to read into the meaning of his creative literary writing, as this is a way to reach the essential Kierkegaard and his philosophical peculiarities; a comparative approach will also enhance the comprehension of his understanding of authorship itself, which should be discovered at the very core of his existentialist philosophy.

Seeing the value of this approach, this chapter is a comparative study of the accounts of the nature of writing in Kierkegaard and Liu Xie. Liu is the author of a major Chinese work in literary criticism, *Wenxin Diaolong*, published in the seventeenth century in China. It examines the meaning of authorship, the religious and aesthetic dimensions of writing, the origin of writing and finally, the differences within solitarily writing and social writing as illustrated in the works of these two authors, which reveal the purposes or ends of writing.

2.2 What Is an Author?

Kierkegaard seems to have emphasized writing in a purely religious sense by saying that, since he is a religious author, it is on the whole a matter of indifference to him whether a so-called aesthetic public has found, or would be able to find, some enjoyment through reading the aesthetics in his works. He described it as a deception in the service of Christianity (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 23). Writing accordingly is something he would do by means of every sacrifice and effort in the service of (Christian) truth (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 24). Writing is also based on Christian humility and self-denial, which to Kierkegaard means denial of his personality, as someone who is caught up in self-love, pride, eccentricity, madness, and so on. It is through the way of Christian self-denial that one's writing can come close to the truth (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 25).

Yet for Kierkegaard there are also paradoxes in writing. As a Christian, he could not make his God-relationship public, since he believed it should be expressed by human inwardness; he could not intend to press upon anyone something that pertains solely to his private character (Kierkegaard 1998, pp. 25–26). It is this contradiction¹ where

This chapter was originally published in *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, Maiden, MA: Wiley, volume 40, Issue 1, (March 2013), pp. 123–142.

¹This is mentioned in Chapter B of “The Explanation: That the Author Is and Was a Religious Author,” in Kierkegaard 1998, pp. 25–26.

he claims that he is not able to declare the need for “lyrical satisfaction,” which is not demanded by religious duty (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 33):

In other words, *qua* human being I may be justified in making a declaration, and from the religious point of view it may be my duty to make a declaration. But this must not be confused with the authorship—*qua* author it does not help very much that I *qua* human being declare that I have intended this and that.

Kierkegaard therefore declares that he, the author, is a religious author in the end and, moreover, that such writings should be “in fear and much trembling,” given this religious responsibility (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 36). In a word, the quality of writing is mainly tied with the religious quality of the author (as a Christian in Kierkegaard’s case).

Liu Xie obviously does not present writing as possessing such a paradoxical tension, nor does there exist for him a differentiation between writing *qua* human being and writing *qua* a religious being.

According to Liu Xie, an author refers to the writing subject, or the subject in writing, who produces all the writing and originates both the ideas and the feelings of the writing from the internal self. Moreover, the author should be rather an empirical self, rather than a saint who does not write. As he suggests in *Wenxin Diaolong*:

[By “literary mind,” I mean] the mental exertion in writing. (Liu 2003, p. 711)

Thus the obscure becomes manifest and the internal is externalized. (Liu 2003, p. 388)

[The ideal author should] arrive at judgments as impartial as the equipoise of weighing scales and come to an understanding as clear as the reflection from a mirror. (Liu 2003, p. 693)

One should eradicate bias and personal likes and dislikes... Writings are never too profound, except when understanding is shallow. (Liu 2003, p. 693).

Liu Xie elaborates his ideas of an author through his discussion of how to nurture the qualities of one’s writing. While Kierkegaard considers religious keenness as the desired quality of an author, Liu presents the aesthetical principles of the writing process in detail that include the stage of imagination, choice and control of writing forms, language practices, articulation of meaning, and the nature of inspiration. He attributes the common qualities and capacities of all authors to seven categories, which all originated from one’s heart; these include (i) talents; (ii) *qi* 氣; (iii) learning; (iv) practice; (v) thinking; (vi) emotion; and (vii) will (Liu 2003, p. 695).

In contrast, we should ask further: why is there a tension between aesthetic writing and religious writing in Kierkegaard’s work? Liu portrays the relation of the aesthetical and spiritual dimensions as being in harmony, because both originate from the author’s heart. To answer, we should begin by elaborating how Kierkegaard distinguishes between an aesthetic author and a religious author. In fact, these are

well reflected in his act of adopting pseudonyms in his writings from 1843 to 1847.

2.3 Aesthetic Authors and Religious Authors

Kierkegaard does take the form/presentation of writing into consideration, though he emphasizes that he is in the end, a religious author who writes for the sake of Christianity. Yet such form or presentation of writing can be justified when he says, “such and such a phenomenon cannot be explained in any other way, and that on the other hand it can in this way be explained at every point, or that this explanation fits at every point, then the correctness of this explanation is substantiated” (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 33).

Because the presentation of writing Kierkegaard mentions is a deliberate duplexity from beginning to end, there is something the author knows that his audience does not. This duplexity refers to his saying that the author was always first an aesthetic author, and then in the course of years *changed* and became a religious author (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 30). Nevertheless, the religious dimension is in fact present from the very beginning, and the aesthetic dimension is also present even in the last moment. As Kierkegaard suggests, the only thing inexplicable is how it ever occurred to a religious author to use the aesthetic in this way, while the main thought throughout the entire work for such an author is to become a Christian (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 41). This is explained by the fact that the religious author must begin with an aesthetic piece to be connected to his readers. In order to guard against aesthetic excess, Kierkegaard says writing cannot be practiced without “fear and trembling”; it is at the same time a process of self-denial, in the sense that one should not be distracted or overwhelmed by beautiful words or sensations, for being a religious author is the key aim (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 44).

One should notice that Kierkegaard has adopted pseudonyms in his writings from 1843 to 1847, and these writings are referred by him as his “aesthetic writings.” In *Kierkegaard: An Introduction*, Stephen Evans reminds readers that Kierkegaard acknowledged in 1846 at the end of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* that he was the author of all those pseudonymous works. Yet his explanation is that pseudonymous “authors” have their own perspectives, just as characters in a novel have views that may differ much from the author of the novel (Evans 2009, p. 25). Evans admits that by the time he wrote *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* in 1846, Kierkegaard’s primary goals were religious. Still, in contrast to the nominal Christian faith that dominated his country and his society at that time, Kierkegaard provides critical reflections on the nature of genuine Christian faith. As Kirmmse comments, Kierkegaard calls for a return to what he refers to as “the Christianity of the New

Testament,” with its unconditional requirement to imitate Christ that involves dying away from the world and an unqualified willingness to suffer (Kirmmse 1990, p. 397). This form of Christianity is compared to the Christianity of established Christendom, with its “admiration,” its concern with objective doctrines, and its fascination with the world historical mediation of the truth and the historical triumph of Christianity. It is said that in Kierkegaard’s view, the aim of Christianity is total personal transformation and that if one is to live, he is not to live naturally, but for “the eternal” (Kirmmse 1990, pp. 466–467). In this sense, one must come to a total break with Christendom and the old absolutist State Church, which is unaware of the existence of the higher mode of being, and desires nothing more than to stop up the mouths of authentic “inward” individuals (Kirmmse 1990, p. 492). In this way, he proposes what Evans confirms as a form of “indirect communication”; he argues that communication which is ethical in nature or serves ethical-religious ends must have the character of being “indirect.” This explains and justifies his pseudonymity (Evans 2009, pp. 26–27).

According to Jamie Ferreira, Kierkegaard wrote parallel sets of aesthetic and religious writings throughout his career, and published them alongside each other. One set of texts was written under a variety of pseudonyms, while the other set was written in his own name (“Søren Kierkegaard”), including the series of “upbuilding” or Christian writings in twenty-one edifying discourses. The former is basically an aesthetic set of writing, which was generally described as an “attack on Christendom” (Ferreira 2009, pp. 4–6). Examples are the publication of *Either/Or* under the pseudonym of Judge William in February 1843 (Kierkegaard 1992), followed by separate volumes entitled *Repetition*, (Kierkegaard 2009) and *Fear and Trembling* (Kierkegaard 2006). Besides being aesthetical, these writings are regarded as taking up the status of the “exception” in society (Hannay and Marino 1998, p. 5). This is related to the political changes in Denmark at that time, which included the establishment of a constitutional monarchy and of a people’s church (Cross 1998, p. 135). Kierkegaard’s aesthetic writings echo his suggestion of “an individual,” who should keep a distance from the crowd, thinking and speaking as a genuine individual. Critics said this form of writing was truer and more poignant than attempts of contemporary theologians and philosophers, whose systematic reconstructions ignored the significance and attractions of the poly-pseudonymity and stylistic variety of Kierkegaard (Cross 1998, p. 135). George Pattison, for example, argues in his article, “Art in an Age of Reflection,” that no theme recurs more consistently and problematically in Kierkegaard than “the aesthetic.” He mentions that Kierkegaard has diagnosed his time “as a reflective age, an age without passion, in which [has] been lost not only the immediacy required of great art, but also the

conditions for a religious understanding that allows us to see that what currently counts as Christianity is a form of aestheticism” (Pattison 1998, p. 76).

There are several reasons for Kierkegaard’s adoption of pseudonymity, the aesthetic form of writing being its form and most significant justification. Andrew Cross said that this starts from Kierkegaard’s master’s thesis, *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates* written in 1843, in which he finds in Socrates’ verbal irony the contradiction between internal and external, a sense of detachment, and an ironist’s air of superiority (Cross 1998, p. 135). Cross points out that, among Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms, Johannes Climacus of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, agrees with Socrates’ irony, arguing that irony is a transitional phase between the aesthetic and ethical modes of existence (Cross 1998, p. 135). Facing the existential indifference and inauthentic claims of Christian living among the People’s Church in Denmark of his time, Cross interprets Kierkegaard’s playful use of irony as follows (Cross 1998, p. 135):

[T]he expression of [his pseudonymous authorship is] the radical nature of his repudiation of human activity; to try to change his world or simply to inveigh against it or even to withdraw from it into some desert wilderness would be to attach some importance to his outward, observable mode of life, and to attach some importance to others’ understanding him, or at least recognizing him to be different from them.... The ironist, being truly independent, simply plays along, indifferent as to whether anybody suspects that that is all he is doing.

In his thesis, Kierkegaard offers the best reasons for his choice of writing aesthetically; he explains how it hides him from the masses, and in this sense he identifies his writing totally with the living attitude of Socrates toward his own society (Cross 1998, p. 135)²:

In a certain sense, [Socrates] was revolutionary, yet not so much by doing something as by not doing something; but a partisan or leader of a conspiracy he was not. His irony saved him from that, for just as it deprived him of due civic sympathy for the state, due civic pathos, it also freed him from being a partisan. On the whole, his position was far too personally isolated, and every relationship he contracted was too loosely joined to result in anything.... [He] stood ironically above every relationship.... His connection with the single individual was only momentary, and he himself was suspended high above all this in ironic contentment.

Similarly, Kierkegaard’s aesthetic writing is a reflection of his beliefs as an individual and a genuine Christian. As Cross insightfully points out, Kierkegaard lives a life opposite to those who claimed themselves to be Christians, but whose purposes in life were determined by given desires and ideals, by the norms of his society, without considering

²Cited from Kierkegaard’s master thesis entitled, *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*, as quoted in Cross 1998, p. 135.

whether his society's norms had any genuine authority over them (Cross 1998, p. 137). His employment of aesthetic writing also reflected the significance of the famous dictum, "Subjectivity is truth." Stated under the pseudonym, Johannes Climacus, themes of subjectivity, inward-ness, and what could loosely be referred to as the emotional life were emphasized (Hannay and Marino 1998, p. 9). Ferreira further relates this form of writing to the image of the religious leap that Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms make generous use of, laying the road all through the entire author-ship, including the passion and imagination in Kierkegaard's account of religious transformation (Ferreira 1998, p. 207).

While Kierkegaard saw the need to communicate indirectly on ethico-religious phenomena, especially while facing pressures and accusations from the public at the time, he also attacked deceptive public messages and hated the media persons who produced those messages. These aspects of Kierkegaard's work can be found all throughout *The Point of View on My Work as an Author*. He had no regrets in producing his aesthetic writings. "[Some say] shame on me if I was not willing to do [this writing] more courteously.... I was very aware of what I was doing, that I was acting responsibly, that not to do it would have been irresponsible, I did it" (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 114). Kierkegaard explains that in his later writings "the entire aesthetic production was taken into custody by the religious; the religious put up with this emptying out of the poetic;... the author was living in decisive religious categories" (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 86). Yet there are other meanings of the term "aesthetics" to which Kierkegaard refers besides this style of writing and his pseudonymous works. Stephen Evans points out that there should be at least three meanings of the term "aesthetic" implied in Kierkegaard's writings; these refer to a particular stage of existence, a characterization of art, and a dimension of human life. Therefore, a person who lives ethically or religiously does not leave the aesthetic behind, because it is also a universal dimension of human life (Evans 2009, p. 69).

Liu Xie's account of aesthetic writing refers to the art of writing in general. He proposes to strike a balance between pretention and authenticity when he suggests that there are "six services" (*liu yi* 六義) in writing compositions (Liu 2003, p. 33):

To take the classics as models of composition renders six services: the feeling will be deep, not affected; the style clear, not mixed; the facts truthful, not false; the meaning straight, not crooked; the form concise, not overgrown; the language beautiful, not profuse.

Liu emphasized that language can be adorned by art, but the most profound force and beauty of any writing spring from an authentic mind (Liu 2003, p. 443). The beautiful and the profound, which are the sources of all great writings, are the result of the cultivation of the human mind and nature (Liu 2003, p. 35). In the chapter entitled "Style and Natural

Endowments," he writes that "If a writer excels in one of these different styles, it is due to his learning" (Liu 2003, p. 393). He then applied this understanding to his literary reading and criticism of the Chinese classics, elaborating them in "eight styles" (*ba ti* 八體), which are the elegant, the recondite, the concise, the plain, the ornate, the sublime, the exotic, and the frivolous. He elaborates (Liu 2003, p. 391):

Modeled on the classics, the elegant style is Confucian, while the recondite with its abstruse diction and ornaments is Daoist. Frugal with words and sentences, the concise style is characterized by precision of analysis; straightforward in language and clear in meaning, the plain style is cogent and to the point. The ornate style is rich in metaphors and resplendent with ornaments; the sublime, expressing lofty ideas in grand designs, dazzles with splendor. The exotic style renounces the old to embrace the new and in so doing treads on strange and dangerous bypaths; the frivolous, ostentatious in language but feeble in thought, merely pursues the modish.

The evaluation of compositions is based on one's genuine feeling, which defines writing as succinct and truthful, and is opposed to writings of mere artistry that are "flowery and extravagant" (Liu 2003, p. 445). Liu criticized those writings as being merely word plays and meaning-less (Liu 2003, p. 425). Therefore, an aesthetic author should be an authentic author, who may not be a religious author in Kierkegaard's sense. So questions arise: what defines authenticity in writing? What is its origin?

2.4 The Creative Force of Writing

Kierkegaard regards the Christian God as the creative force of his writing; he claimed that he had incessantly needed God's assistance in order to be able to do a simple work or assignment. His religious fervor is strong and understandable when he states (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 74):

I have been as if under arrest and at every moment sensed that it was not I who played the master but that it was someone else who was the master, sensed it with fear and trembling when he let me perceive his omnipotence and my nothingness, sensed it with indescribable bliss when I related myself to him and the work in unconditional obedience.

He insists that it is authentic Christianity which is the origin of writing and claims that to nurture the life of writing, authors must be cautious of both the aesthetic way and speculative reasoning (Kierkegaard 1998, pp. 77–78). In a word, aesthetic play as a style of writing is never the end of writing, but something extra; it is something in tune with his writing which has added "an extra string on my instrument" (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 89). In a word, the origin of writing to Kierkegaard is an authentic faith in Christ. Authenticity here refers to the inwardness of an individual.

Liu Xie also agrees that the origin of art is at a meta-physical level, but he puts it in Confucian terms. When it

comes to the origin of writing, it is *qi* which is the drive. Liu says that nourishing *qi*, as the basic physical energy, will follow one's nature without conscious effort. It travels by means of unobstructed thoughts and smooth feelings. One, therefore, should not over-exert oneself in writing, or the spirit will be exhausted and the vital energy will dissipate (Liu 2003, p. 585). How does he describe this important process? (Liu 2003, p. 595).

[W]hile writing, one must regulate and discharge his vitality and keep his mind tranquil and his vitality unimpeded. If vexed, he should stop working in order to avoid clogging his mind. Once inspired, he can apply his writing brush. Otherwise he may as well put his writing brush away. Use leisure to relieve labor and conversation to divert tension. Spare time to sharpen the mind, and always maintain enough energy in writing. Thus your mind will be as keen as a newly sharpened knife, and your bodily pneuma (*qi*) will flow without obstruction.

Talent in writing also depends on vitality, as vitality nourishes thoughts and thought shapes language (Liu 2003, p. 377). Liu also claims that words and speech control the hub of the physical world, which greets the ears and the eyes and forms a circle of vitality or *qi* (Liu 2003, p. 375). Liu consequently attributes the origin of writing to physical-and-spiritual *qi* and its quality, which needs to be nourished, cultivated, reformed, and expressed (Liu 2003, p. 377):

[M]ental void and emotional tranquility are essential for cultivating literary thought. Dredge the heart, purify the spirit. Use diligence to accumulate knowledge, judgment to enrich talent, experience to achieve thorough understanding, taste to select language. Then thorough understanding, one can start writing in according with the rules of prosody with a mind of unique perception, one can wield the writing-brush to capture the images in one's vision.

He concludes that experience, learning, and a sense of unity can together assist the working of the mind. When he elaborates the mental or spiritual part of *qi*, he emphasizes a physical perspective, saying that young men are more vigorous than experienced and elderly men, having strong powers of judgment, but being weak in writing. It takes both youthfulness and maturity to produce good writing. This is why Liu says that the mystery of imagination lies in the merging of the spirit with the physical world (Liu 2003, p. 375). Besides the physical state, writing is also promoted by knowledge, diligence, and learning. In this context, he also mentions natural gifts or talents (Liu 2003, p. 527):

Talent is inborn; learning is attained. Some are learned, but not talented; some are talented, but have no learning. A man weak in learning is inept at using allusions; a man poor in talent has difficulty in handling language and feeling. That is the difference between learning and talent. Therefore, in organizing ideas into compositions, in the conspiracy of the hearth with the writing brush, talent plays the leading role, while learning assists. When talent is joined with learning, outstanding compositions will be produced. If one is shallow in learning or poor in talent, his works will not be real achievements, however pretty they may appear.

Liu then proposes a classification of the talents of men, something Kierkegaard did not do. In contrast with Kierkegaard's authentic Christianity—where writing springs from one's faith in God and authentic religious experiences—Liu traces the origin of writing to the spiritual experience of the metaphysical Dao (Liu 2003, p. 3):

[When earthly patterns and heavenly images take shape], inferior and superior places are established, and the two primal powers of heaven and earth are born. Yet only when humans join in does the Great Triad form. Endowed with the divine spark of consciousness, humans are the quintessence of the five elements, the mind of heaven and earth. When the mind is born, speech appears. When speech appears, writing comes forth. This is the way of Dao.

It is in the realm of the Dao that *qi* comes and goes. *Qi* can be too overwhelming sometimes for the choice of words. Under these circumstances, Liu says that ideas may rush in like miracles; in those settings, words cannot easily be made ingenious. Ideas come from the mind, but the choice of words is guided by ideas; those two are closely knitted together (Liu 2003, p. 379).

Besides stressing on metaphysical and religious experiences, both Kierkegaard and Liu also emphasize the authenticity of an author. They criticize writers who cherish worldly ambitions in the disguise of words, and those who actually pursue vain success, but write about unworldly joy. The way to maintain authenticity for Liu is to abandon the excessive forms that correspond to a mind full of desires. "Only then can [the author] be considered to have integrated ornament and substance and accomplished himself as a writer" (Liu 2003, p. 499). Kierkegaard discusses authenticity mainly in Christian terms, regarding writing as "something [achieved] by means of every sacrifice and effort in the service of the truth" (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 24). His way to be authentic is to begin with self-denial—that is denying choices based on self-love, pride, eccentricity, and madness—since only God alone can allow him as an author to understand the truth (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 25).

So, when an author decides on what should be written, he will judge the topic's suitability, to see if its explanations fit at every point (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 33). Aesthetic judgment corresponds to the religious mind governed by God; Kierkegaard maintains that his entire aesthetic production was taken into custody by this religious awareness (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 85).

2.5 The Goals of Writing

Kierkegaard insisted that the author is "an individual human being, no more and no less" (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 57). The personal existence of an author must be in a close relationship with God, one of self-denial and self-evacuation, allowing

God's governance to nurture the author, so that it is reflected throughout the whole process of writing (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 77). An author is always divided between being oneself and not being oneself. He or she is never just himself or herself in writing, since the true author is God. In addition, the author is always situated in an existential context; Kierkegaard holds that one's existential conditions would change in "altogether accurate correspondence" with shifts in one's writing (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 70). Therefore, one should also change one's existential conditions in order to improve one's writing. If one fails in doing so, the crowd, which Kierkegaard always condemned, would take over and twist the truth. One of Kierkegaard's famous proverbs states that "the crowd" is untruth; he quoted the Apostle Paul in saying that "only one reaches the goal" (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 106).

Kierkegaard confers a special meaning to the notion of "that single individual." The single individual is someone every human being is or can be. It is also a category through which, the age, history, and the human race must proceed in order to become authentically religious (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 115). Here one can read the multifaceted nature of a personal being, one who is not just himself; but also a religious person who should glorify God and promote the Christian faith among people. Therefore, Kierkegaard states that the religious author must first try to establish an affinity with the people through the aesthetic form of writing. Yet in order not to be taken over by the aesthetics form or pleasure one creates for the crowd through writing, Kierkegaard required the author to be certain of himself; this meant that the author must relate to God "in fear and trembling" (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 118).

How did Kierkegaard practice these principles in his own Danish context? Describing his contemporaries ("the present age") as an age "devoid of passion, flaring up in superficial, short-lived enthusiasm and prudentially relaxing in indolence," (Kierkegaard 1978–2000, Vol. 7, p. 65) Kierkegaard was obviously provoked by their lethargy. It was also an age of publicity flooded by miscellaneous announcements through which no one could acquire any profound and capacious learning. Instead, Kierkegaard was looking for "consistent and well-grounded ethical views, sacrificial unselfishness, and high-born nobility that renounce the moment" (Kierkegaard 1978–2000, Vol. 8, p. 67). All these seemed hardly possible to realize in his own time (Kierkegaard 1978–2000, Vol. 8, pp. 70–76).

[The age] lets everything remain; but subtly drains the meaning out of it.... [I]t exhausts the inner actuality of relations in a tension of reflection that lets everything remain, and yet has transformed the whole of existence into... its facticity... a passionless and very reflective age.

This explains the reason of his adoption of pseudonyms in many writings: it is to express his criticisms in an indirect

and ironic manner. In *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard said that habit and boredom have gained the upper hand, typical of "a passionless and very reflective age"; but he also hoped that "the present age" would become "the condition for a higher form [of living] if a corresponding intensity takes over" (Kierkegaard 1987, p. 258). That higher form of living is to be supported by the author who has the humility and courage to be aesthetically transformed (Kierkegaard 1987, Vol. 2, p. 125).

[Such an author] feels as a character in a drama the deity is writing, in which the poet and the prompter are not different persons, in which the individual, as the experienced actor who has lived into his character and his lines is not disturbed by the prompter, but feels that he himself wants to say what is being whispered to him... he who in the most profound sense feels himself creating and created, who in the moment he feels himself creating has the original pathos of the lines,... he and he alone has brought into actual existence the highest in aesthetics.

Kierkegaard tactfully responds to questions highlighting the differences between aesthetic and ethical forms of life by saying that "the aesthetic in a person is that by which he spontaneously and immediately is what he is; the ethical is that by which he becomes what he becomes. The person who lives in and by and from and for the aesthetic that is in him, that person lives aesthetically" (Kierkegaard 1987, Vol. 2, p. 187).

What is this "higher form" of life? How does it affect one's own writing? The former question deals with being an authentic self, a life filled with passion. The purpose of writing for Kierkegaard is to bring passion and truth to religious people by aesthetic means; this is the aesthetic state of existence in a positive sense. Writing is personal, but its purpose is for the meaning of religious self and the religious faith of others. To exist religiously is to be concerned with how to interpret such things as "self-denial" and "humility"; these should not be isolated from aesthetic and ethical forms of life. This explains his claim that writing is a true Christian invention; its worth is determined by what it achieves (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 44).

Liu has a different mundane agenda clearly spelled out regarding the purpose of writing. In the postscript of *Wenxin Diaolong* he clearly describes the function of literary writings: "[Through writing] the five rites are enacted, the six government functions are performed, the sovereigns and ministers are distinguished, and the army and the state are glorified" (Liu 2003, p. 713). To achieve these purposes in writing, the author should have impartial judgment, eradicate his bias and personal likes and dislikes, and not be emotionally stirred (Liu 2003, p. 695). Instead of attributing religious sentiments to an author, Liu asserts a Confucian way of life to regulate the physical nature and the temperament of an author. He states that an author is an advisor on state affairs, who should take up heavy responsibilities and

be a pillar of the state; when in office, he should use the opportunity to bring about political achievements (Liu 2003, p. 371). The purpose of writing is to make constructive contributions to society. From a Confucian perspective, this is grounded in the practice of self-cultivation. In sum, Liu Xie prefers direct engagement in one's present time and society, contrasting significantly with Kierkegaard's indirect and ironic writing style. Consequently, Liu proposes a less reflective or critical set of attitudes for a writer. Liu's ideal author seems to lead a life echoing ethical values, which Kierkegaard described in *Either/Or, Part II* (Kierkegaard 1987, Vol. 2, p. 232):

The person who lives ethically has seen himself, knows himself, penetrates his whole concretion with his consciousness, does not allow vague thoughts to rustle around inside him or let tempting possibilities distract him with their juggling; he is not like a 'magic' picture that shifts from one thing to another.... He knows himself.

2.6 Revelations Through Comparison: On the Meaning of Authorship

One can also study Kierkegaard's ideas about writing in reference to Christian art. According to Thomas Aquinas, religious art is a "thrust toward Transcendence" (Clarke 1983, pp. 301–314). Similarly, Kierkegaard's portrayal of writing reaches beyond the ordinary; it moves from within the limitations of human life toward an ultimate dimension of reality, as Aquinas also suggests (Aquinas 1944, Vol. 1, pp. 808–810). Writing as a form of art is a matter of reaching out from the finite toward the infinite, even though it is expressed in finite sensible symbols.

Aquinas emphasizes the deeper metaphysical union of soul and body in aesthetic expression. The point of departure for the imagination and the resulting image used in human artistic expressions are the sensitive and corporeal parts united in one body. This is what individual writing means: (Aquinas 1944, Vol. 1, pp. 808–810)

[T]he proper object of the human intellect, which is united to a body, is the quiddity or nature existing in corporeal matter; and it is through these natures of visible things that it rises to a certain knowledge of things invisible. Now it belongs to such a nature to exist in some individual, and this cannot be apart from corporeal matter;...

Now we apprehend the individual through the sense and the imagination.

The author must always begin with knowledge of the sensible world and then be "led by the hand (of God)" to the invisible through the visible (Clarke 1983, p. 310). Kierkegaard's Christian writing, as revealed in his discussions about

aesthetic and religious writing, is a matter of self-denial and a final leap beyond the sensuous; it is a personal and religious journey to be devoted to God.

It is said that the most mysterious aspect of a work of religious art is where the individual genius of the artist comes most to the fore; in the same way, the ends of writing are to stimulate readers' minds, hearts, and feelings so that they will be spontaneously inspired to leave mundane interests, and reach out toward the transcendent mystery of the divine. In a word, religious writings should enable a comparison between the sensible things of our experience and a negation or denial of them in their present limited state in the face of the transcendent (Clarke 1983, pp. 306–308).

Kierkegaard, in this sense, shares with Aquinas similar ideas on religious writing. He justifies the presentation of writing as a religious leap built upon the "duplexity" of first being an aesthetic author and then becoming a religious writer (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 30). Religious writing must begin with an aesthetic theme in order to connect with readers. Kierkegaard's notion of self-denial is the concrete expression of the religious leap; in this way self-love is abandoned and subsequently the author's heart-mind is filled with the divine source for writing. But what seems to be lacking in Kierkegaard's discourse is that religious art's initial reference to the world is the author's sense and imagination, since the human act of knowledge is the act of the whole human being, soul, and body (Clarke 1983, p. 303). For Aquinas, writing is a springboard that goes beyond the sensuous world to the formal essence of the sensible thing itself or to its cause. Kierkegaard's self-denial accords with the negation of all self-imperfections and limits, yet he does not elaborate the forms of religious writing that employ symbolic expression. Religious art should, as Norris Clarke puts it, "put forth a positive symbolic expression of some similitude with the Transcendent, then partially negates this similitude, by introducing some elements of strangeness or dissimilitude with our ordinary experience on a finite material level" (Clarke 1983, p. 313). Kierkegaard does ask for self-denial and self-emptiness to let the Divine to take over in writing. The author is like an empty vessel who, once guided by the Divine, will find the appropriate form for his religious writing. Kierkegaard says the only thing inexplicable is how it ever occurred to a religious author to use the aesthetic style in such an ironic way (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 34).

What is hidden here is the material, sensuous, or physical dimension of Kierkegaard's writing on authorial discourse. This is a dimension that has been discussed in detail within *Wenxin Diaolong*. However, discussion on physicality in writing in *The Point of View on My Work as an Author* is not clearly articulated (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 78).

2.7 Somatic Sensibilities Informing Writing

How should writing be rooted in sensible realms? What role does the body play in “existing” and in writing?

Liu provides a good discussion and some examples about writing and bodily existence in *Wenxin Diaolong*.

Human beings are born with seven emotions. They are stirred in response to the environment. It is natural that people will express themselves when their emotions are stirred. (Liu 2003, p. 63)

The mystery of imagination lies in the merging of the spirit with the physical world. Vital energy (*qi* 氣) holds the key to the spirit, which resides in the heart. Words and speech control the hub of the physical world, which greets the ears and the eyes. When the hub works smoothly, no forms of the world can be hidden. When the key is clogged, the spirit wants to flee. (Liu 2003, p. 375)

One must regulate and discharge his vitality, and keeping his mind tranquil and his vitality unimpeded. If vexed, he should stop working in order to avoid clogging his mind. Once inspired, he can apply his writing brush. Otherwise he may well put his writing brush away. Use leisure to relieve labor and conversation to divert tension. Then your mind will be as keen as a newly sharpened knife and your bodily pneuma (*qi* 氣) will flow without obstruction. (Liu 2003, p. 595)

One can easily relate Liu’s discussion to Mencius’ theory of the body, which we will not elaborate here (Mencius 2A.2, 6A: 14 and 15; 6B: 15 and 7A: 38. See Van Norden’s (2015)).

Still, it should be understood that the Confucian heaven (*tian* 天) is the cosmological ground of everything in nature (including human beings); humans’ essential characteristics are endowed by heaven as the moral heart-mind (oftentimes simply rendered as “mind”). Therefore, as Mencius elaborates, the heart-mind is the noblest and the greatest component of the body; it is more than simply physical because of its moral consciousness or innate knowledge of goodness. Smaller components in the human body are the physical ones that have basic functions, like hearing and vision. Physical needs or desires of the smaller components have to be subordinated to the control of “thinking greatest-component,” which constitutes the center of moral principles and will. Moral knowledge and its capability need to be developed and pre-served in self-cultivation in order to transform the physical human subject into the virtue of a “great person” or sage.

Chung-ying Cheng points out that both moral psychology and moral metaphysics are involved in this transformation, providing a basis for understanding what a person should do in one’s personal life and in one’s social intercourse with others. According to traditional Confucianism, this process is the central and ultimate concern of human activity (Cheng 1991, p. 188–195). Mencius’ discussion, which has shaped the related discourses in *Wenxin Diaolong*, demonstrates the significant exercise of the mind in dominating and repressing the smaller components of the body. For it is only through

the stimulation of the mind and the hardening of the body, that a person is able to fulfill any great responsibility bestowed on them by heaven (Mencius 6B:15). The vital point in creative writing is not to lose control of one’s mind or let the mind lose the focus on moral education and knowledge. This is thoroughly discussed in the chapter on “Style and Natural Endowments” in *Wenxin Diaolong*. These principles contribute to the nourishment of the flood like *qi* (*hao ran zhi qi* 浩然之氣) that Mencius emphasizes (Mencius 2A:2). As Cheng correctly puts it, this is not contrived and artificial, but is based on righteousness (Cheng 1991, pp. 386–387). On this basis, in Liu Xie’s discussion, one can also formulate a moral theory on creative writing.

2.8 Comparative Religious Insights and the Meaning of Writing

When one appreciates the similarities and the differences between Confucianism and Christianity, one can also identify them in the following writings of Liu and Kierkegaard. The Christian ideal of doing everything for the glory of God, resulting in the growth and maturing of human beings toward spiritual perfection, was promoted by Kierkegaard. The highest ideal of Confucianism is that human beings reach moral perfection, and so accomplish the full development of their heaven-given nature (Pan 2001). This is also part of the main agenda in Liu’s discussion on writing. Both thinkers relate writing to their existential world, believing it will contribute to the transformation of the mundane world. Both also inquire into the creative source or origin of writing: Kierkegaard attributes it to God, while Liu stresses Confucian ideals of humanity and the moral self and his cosmological ground is based on the idea of heaven. Liu’s source of inspiration is therefore cosmological *qi* immanent in one’s heart, mind, and body. The main endeavor in the goal of an author is to discover and bring to realization one’s nature that is granted by heaven (Pan 2001).

In these ways, both Kierkegaard and Liu complement and enrich each other in each of their distinctive understanding of authorship. Summarily speaking, in the Christian tradition “saints” are persons distinguished for their practice of virtues, which are manifested in their writings. Kierkegaard claimed that a saintly author lives in decisive religious categories (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 86). They are persons who do not act as masters, but sense with “fear and trembling” how the Christian God is writing through their works; they perceive God’s omnipotence and authors’ own nothingness (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 74). What Kierkegaard stresses, then, are religious writers whose concerns are focused on the “single individual,” and who stands in contrast to “the public” (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 37). This is very different from Liu’s Confucian emphasis on writing for the state and

humanity at large. From his Confucians perspective, it is a virtuous person in excellence who understands the decree of heaven, knows what is morally right and what should be doing in life, and does it (Liu 2003, p. 15). In his chapter on “Moral Integrity,” Liu states that a man of virtues maintains his abilities and rises to the occasion to express himself. He nourishes his nature, builds up his moral integrity, and displays his literary talent to establish his name. An author goes beyond his individuality, becoming an advisor on state affairs, taking up heavy responsibilities. Even when frustrated, he will cultivate his character and immortalize himself through his written influences on others (Liu 2003, p. 707). In this way, a Confucian author extends his reflections and whole person cultivation into the public sphere by means of writing.³ From a cosmological perspective, Confucian human beings seek to realize the full development of their corporeal and moral natures, so that they may finally enter into communion with heaven.

2.9 Epilogue: A Contemporary Appropriation of Kierkegaard’s Authorship

Michel Foucault suggests that the coming into being of the notion of an “author” constitutes the privileged moment of individualization in the history of knowledge, literature, philosophy, and sciences (Foucault 1984, p. 101). What Kierkegaard has demonstrated is a proof of Foucault’s above point of view, in the nineteenth century during his life from 1813 to 1855. One can detect the social tension he instigated as an author during this period when he claims that, “The single individual is the category through which, in a religious sense, the age, history, the human race must go” (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 118). In his days, newspapers paid no regard to whether what was published was true or false, which alarmed Kierkegaard (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 57). He consequently stressed the need for individuals to be wary of the “crowd,” being troubled by the impact of living contemporaneously with such a demoralized public (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 66). He summarizes his situation as follows (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 70):

³As Liu said, the function of literary writings is such that they really constitute a branch in the study of the classics and through the use of writing, the five rites are enacted, the six government functions are performed, the sovereigns and ministers are distinguished, and the army and the state are glorified. (Chapter of *My Intention, or Postscript*, Liu 2003, p. 713). On literary criticism, Liu said, “six aspects should be examined. The first is the choice of style, the second is diction, the third is issues of continuity and change, the fourth is the use of new and traditional techniques, the fifth is the use of allusions, and the sixth concerns rhythms and prosody. When these things are considered, good writing will be distinguished from poor writing” (Chapter on “An Appreciative Critic,” *ibid.*, 693).

My existence-relations turned around in altogether accurate correspondence to the change in my writing. If I had not had an eye or the courage for that and had changed the writing but not my existence-relations, then the relation would have become undialectical and confused.

His words seem to have answered the question that thinkers like Foucault have raised: “How does one characterize a discourse containing the author function?” Kierkegaard identified this authorial function as a characteristic of one’s mode of existence, which affected the functioning of certain discourses within a society (Foucault 1984, p. 108). We can say that Kierkegaard, having produced the category of “individual religious authors,” promoted authors who wrote differently from those who wrote to please the crowd.

Acknowledgments The author would like to acknowledge Professor Lauren Pfister, who provided editorial advice and helped in editing the English in this content. Special thanks are also offered to Professor Chung-ying Cheng and Dr. Linyu Gu. Dr. Gu has granted her very careful reading and detailed advice to this study. She kindly shared her view on the ground of Chinese aesthetics through correspondence. It was due to the generous support of these scholars that I worked out this project and I have learned so much from them and in the writing of it.

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Issues of Contemporary Art and Aesthetics in Chinese
Context

Man, E.K.W.

2015, XI, 103 p. 9 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-662-46509-7