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On Homeless Philosophy and Homesick Confucianism

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Abstract

The philosophy of family is increasingly treated as an unquestioned concept. Zhang Xianglong criticizes Western civilization for its philosophical “homelessness,” which is to say traditional Western philosophy does not take into account the traditional role of the family. He criticizes this trait’s influence on modern China, proposing a revival of Confucianism as a path to redemption. Heidegger’s and Otto’s accounts of human “uncanniness” show that philosophy and faith, in their original senses, are indeed without home. Zhang regards Heidegger as an important interlocutor for the Confucian revival, yet the fundamental orientation of Heidegger’s philosophy of *Dasein* diverges from—and even contradicts—Confucian thought. The contemporary Confucian revival, taken as a whole, is strong on theoretical construction, ethical argument, and emotional warmth, but gives insufficient attention to the family’s hierarchical structure, institutional repression, and intergenerational conflict. Freud’s psychoanalysis offers the opposite perspective, analyzing the role of paternal authority and family institutions in social regulation and civilizational repression. In its analysis of social institutions and economics, however, the revival remains weak.

Keywords

philosophy of family – Confucianism – homelessness – Heidegger – the uncanny – Freud – institutional repression – Zhang Xianglong

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In recent years, the philosophy of family (*jia zhexue* 家哲學) has become one of the most important topics in Chinese-language scholarship—increasingly treated, it seems, as a concept beyond question. In an earlier essay, “How Should We Understand the Contemporary Revival of Confucian Thought on Family?”¹ I argued that the contemporary movement to revive the Confucian ideal of family tends to privilege the warmth of human relations over the analysis of social institutions. Zhang Xianglong’s 張祥龍 (1949–2022) account of the Confucian concept of family represents, to a considerable degree, an idealization and sentimentalization of kinship affection (*qinqin* 親親) and the parent-child (*qinzi* 親子) relationship. His work also seeks to correct the tendency, prevalent since the May Fourth Movement, to disparage the family in the name of individual freedom and national rejuvenation. Sun Xiangchen 孫向晨 takes a somewhat different approach, seeking to resolve the tension between individuality and kinship affection by proposing a dual ontology. Zhang, by contrast, stands more resolutely on the side of kinship affection against individualist thinking. In their shared ethical commitment to a warm vision of family, however, Sun and Zhang are of one mind. What the contemporary Confucian family revival has produced is an idealized ethical family.

Zhang regards the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) as a starting point for bridging Western philosophy and Confucian thought on family. Yet Heidegger’s philosophy, in its fundamental orientation, diverges from—and even contradicts—Confucian thought on family. It does not constitute a suitable bridge for dialogue. In reviving Confucian family thought, Zhang emphasizes ethical significance and emotional warmth, but largely neglects the family’s differential order, institutional repression, and intergenerational conflict. By contrast, Sigmund Freud’s (1856–1939) psychoanalysis examines the role of paternal authority and family institutions in social regulation and civilizational repression. The contemporary revival of the Confucian family, however, remains weak in its analysis of social institutions.

1 Zhang Xianglong: the Homelessness of Western Civilization

According to Zhang, “the history of Western philosophy is a history without family, and modern Chinese philosophical research that follows in the wake

1 Chen Jianhong 陳建洪, “Ruhe lijie Ru ‘jia’ de dangdai fuxing?” 如何理解儒“家”的當代復興?, *Zhongshan daxue xuebao shehui kexue ban* 中山大學學報 (社會科學版), no. 3 (2021): 120–27.

of Western philosophy shows scarcely a trace of family.”² In this statement, Zhang critiques the homelessness of Western philosophy from the standpoint of Confucianism—that is, from the standpoint of its concept of family. By claiming that Western philosophy “has no family,” he means above all that Western philosophy has neglected the significance of family for human life. For more than two millennia, Zhang argues, Western philosophy neglected family as “the first experience of human life,” until the appearance of philosophers such as Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995), who “began to attend to the problem of family.”³ Zhang levels the charge of homelessness against not only the philosophical tradition but also the Christian dimension of Western civilization. Whether in Plato (ca. 428–348 BCE) or in the Bible, he contends, there is a fundamental depreciation of family. Christianity, Zhang argues, “is deeply unfavorable to the earthly image of the father and to the family, because the actual family relationships and paternal authority of human life have been leveled by the relationship between God and humanity.”⁴ This critique is comparable in force to Mengzi’s 孟子 (ca. 372–289 BCE) charge that Mozi 墨子 (ca. 470–391 BCE) was “without father.” Zhang’s critique of Western philosophy’s homelessness also finds an echo in Sun Xiangchen’s *Lun jia* 論家. His critique of Christianity as being without home, however, is considerably more radical than Sun’s.

I agree with Zhang’s claim that Western philosophy and Christian faith are without home, but for different reasons. Consider Socrates (ca. 470–399 BCE), the exemplary philosopher. He spent his final hours not with his family but with friends and students. In his last moments on earth, Socrates concerned himself with the question of the soul, not the body. He was drawn not to the here and now but to what lies beyond this world. In this world, philosophy has no home—it is homeless. A philosopher may have a home, but philosophy itself does not. Yet the homelessness inherent in Greek philosophy does not mean that Greek *society* was a society without home. The homeless spirit that philosophy pursues is not the same as actual homelessness in social life. Fustel de Coulanges’s (1830–1889) *The Ancient City* demonstrates that family held fundamental significance for both ancient Greek and Roman society. Greek philosophy, however, was grounded not in family but in the soul.

2 Zhang Xianglong 張祥龍, *Jia yu xiao: cong xianxiangxue shiye kan* 家與孝：從現象學視野看, vol. 13 of *Zhang Xianglong wenji* 張祥龍文集 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2022), 4.

3 Ibid., 5.

4 Ibid., 195.

The cultivation and care of the individual soul took precedence over concern for the sanctity of family and the hearth fire.⁵

Beyond his critique of Western civilization's homelessness, Zhang also laments the overall decline of the family in the contemporary world. The human family as a whole, he argues, is "in a precarious state."⁶ For Zhang, the decline of the family is a global phenomenon. In the age of globalization, advanced technology, capital, and their attendant ideologies threaten to hijack human ways of life. This global decline has spread to China as well, primarily as a consequence of Western influence since the Opium Wars. That influence gave rise to a tendency "opposed to the Chinese family and even to the human family as such"—a tendency that found its "most vivid and self-conscious" expression in the New Culture Movement. Zhang regards Lu Xun's 鲁迅 (1881–1936) writings on fatherhood as representative of this tendency. This anti-family current also laid the intellectual groundwork for China's reception of the Marxist theory of the family. Marxism holds that the family is absent from both the beginning and the end of human history. Zhang's primary concern, to be sure, is the decline of family in the lives of the Chinese people—a decline he attributes to the influence of Western thought. To reverse or at least delay this decline, he argues strenuously for the fundamental significance of family, both for Chinese society and for human life as such.

Zhang's critique of the homelessness of the two pillars of Western civilization—Greek philosophy and Christian faith—is largely unproblematic, since both are, in their essential nature, oriented toward a spiritual aspiration that transcends secular life. This critique, however, can easily be misunderstood, giving the impression that Western civilization as a whole lacks a home. In fact, at the level of social life and institutions, family was also a vital bearer of Western civilization. Coulanges's work reveals the centrality of family in ancient Greek and Roman society, and the homeless dimension of the Christian spirit did not entirely erase lay believers' attachment to family life.

5 Translator's note: The hearth fire was central to domestic religion in ancient Greece and Rome. As Fustel de Coulanges describes in *The Ancient City* (Book I–II), each family maintained a perpetual flame on the hearth, which represented the spiritual presence of its ancestors and the continuity of the lineage. The extinction of this fire signified the end of the family's religious existence. Chen returns to Coulanges's account at length in Section 5 below.

6 Zhang Xianglong, *Jia yu xiao*, 82.

2 Heidegger: *Dasein's* Departure from Home

Zhang holds that Western civilization is without home. Whether in its religious or its philosophical dimension, the West exhibits a condition of homelessness—a loss of roots. In his view, more than two millennia of Western philosophy neglected family as “the first experience of human life,” and it was “not until the relatively recent phenomenological movement that philosophers such as Heidegger and Levinas began to attend to the question of family.”⁷ In Heidegger, Zhang sees the beginning of Western philosophy’s concern over this issue. This claim, to be sure, requires some clarification. Western philosophy’s attention to family has a long history, from Aristotle (384–322 BCE) to Adam Smith (1723–1790). None of these thinkers, however, made family the subject of a positive philosophical argument in its own right. In Heidegger’s philosophical reflections on the “house of being,” Zhang discerns an element of homesickness and nostalgia in Western philosophy. Although Heidegger’s house of Being is not a family of blood, of kinship affection, or of parents and children, Zhang nonetheless calls it “Heidegger’s philosophy of family.”⁸ In this “philosophy of family,” Zhang sees “a site for substantive exchange between ancient Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy—a poetic path of homecoming.” He further speculates that Heidegger’s thinking on earth and home may have been influenced by the thought of Laozi 老子 (571–471 BCE).⁹

For Heidegger, being-at-home in the ordinary sense is nothing other than the habitual and familiar everyday condition of the “they”—a mode of existence that is inauthentic. Zhang recognizes this clearly.¹⁰ Heidegger characterizes this being-at-home as the “they’s” tranquilized self-assurance in the average everydayness of *Dasein*, in which the “they” takes the familiar entirely for granted.¹¹ Put differently, *Dasein's* being-at-home is its daily falling: a sinking into this familiar mode, an absorption into the crowd of the “they.” Heidegger calls this the falling flight into the “at-home” of publicness.¹² *Dasein* falls into the publicness of the “they” with unreflective familiarity and

7 Ibid., 5.

8 Ibid., 325–26.

9 Ibid., 326.

10 Ibid., 304.

11 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 233.

12 Ibid., 233–34. The full passage reads: “When in falling we flee into the ‘at-home’ of publicness, we flee in the face of the ‘not-at-home’; that is, we flee in the face of the uncanniness which lies in *Dasein*.”

complacent self-satisfaction. It is not a state of pristine authenticity to be admired but an inauthentic condition from which *Dasein* must be delivered: “That kind of being-in-the-world which is tranquillized and familiar is a mode of *Dasein*’s uncanniness, not the reverse.”¹³

There is, however, for Heidegger, a voice that awakens *Dasein* from its fallen state, and this voice arises from anxiety (*Angst*). While the “they” remain lost in the world, anxiety confronts *Dasein* with its own individualization, revealing it to itself: “The caller is *Dasein* in its uncanniness: primordial, thrown Being-in-the-world as the ‘not-at-home’—the bare ‘that-it-is’ in the ‘nothing’ of the world.”¹⁴ In this way, the authentic condition of human existence is not the being-at-home of everyday life but the individualized *Dasein* that, in anxiety, finds itself without home. Zhang himself acknowledges that, for Heidegger, human nature—or authenticity—resides in this condition of homelessness.¹⁵ From this perspective, family and philosophy can be seen as fundamentally opposed. The very notion of a “philosophy of family” is a contradiction in terms.

Zhang summarizes humanity’s authentic condition as one of “eeriness, violence, and homelessness.”¹⁶ How should we understand the eeriness and violence associated with homelessness? The key lies in exceeding the everyday. In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger writes: “Philosophizing is questioning about the extraordinary,” meaning that philosophical activity steps beyond the familiar terrain of everyday life to inquire into the extraordinary. Moreover, Heidegger emphasizes, “not only what is asked about is extraordinary, but also the questioning itself.”¹⁷ Both what is questioned and the questioner exceed the ordinary and the familiar, so that this kind of questioning, the moment it begins, already transcends everyday order. Heidegger borrows a term from Sophocles’ (ca. 496–406 BCE) *Antigone* to characterize human *Dasein*: *to deinotaton*, the uncanniest of the uncanny—what departs from the homely, the familiar, and the habitual.¹⁸ It is precisely this uncanniness that Zhang describes as eeriness, violence, and homelessness. Heidegger further emphasizes that the human being as the uncanniest has no recourse to kinship and

13 Ibid., 234.

14 Ibid., 321–22.

15 Zhang Xianglong, *Jia yu xiao*, 305.

16 Ibid., 304–5.

17 Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 13.

18 Ibid., 159–61. Heidegger writes: “The human being is, in one word, *to deinotaton*, the uncanniest of the uncanny.”

family. This being is “not the everyday way of being” and cannot be assessed in terms of everyday habit.¹⁹

Dasein as the uncanniest, therefore, is precisely not being at home in the familiar world of kinship and family—and exceeding the ordinary world and its opinions. Zhang argues that “the familial condition should not be treated as a social unit but as an existential-ontological unit in the Heideggerian sense.”²⁰ This is a judgment born, one might say, of a dual partiality—toward family and toward Heidegger’s philosophy.

3 Otto: Awe as Transcending the Ordinary

The fundamental orientation of Heidegger’s thought remains within the homeless spirit of Greek philosophy. The deeper this spirit’s longing for the house of Being, the more remote it stands from the family of moral bonds and kinship. The uncanny and falling constitute the two poles of Heidegger’s philosophy of *Dasein*. Although he describes the inescapability of falling in this world, he also insists on *Dasein*’s capacity to transcend the ordinary. In short, his philosophy of *Dasein* does not represent a homeward turn in Western philosophy. In orientation, it is no different from the homeless spirit of Greek philosophy: it pursues individual authenticity beyond the ordinary, not contentment in the familiar bonds of kinship.

The Chinese translation of *Introduction to Metaphysics* renders the relevant choral line—from which Heidegger borrows the concept of “the uncanny”—with considerable literary elegance, but this very elegance partly obscures the original sense of the verse. Luo Niansheng’s 羅念生 (1904–1990) translation of *Antigone* brings the meaning into sharper focus, expressing plainly that of all the world’s many wonders, none is more wondrous than the human being.²¹ Heidegger interprets this uncanniness in terms of *Dasein*’s essential need to exceed the everyday.

Rudolf Otto (1869–1937), in *The Idea of the Holy*, also takes up the concept of *deinos* in *Antigone*. Where Heidegger reads *Dasein*’s uncanniness primarily

19 Ibid., 168–70.

20 Zhang Xianglong, *Jia yu xiao*, 314.

21 Sophocles, *Antigone*, line 332. The Chinese rendering is by Luo Niansheng 羅念生, in *Luo Niansheng quanji* 羅念生全集 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2007), 2: 305: 奇異的事情雖然多，卻沒有一件比人更奇異。For Heidegger’s rendering of the same line, see Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 156: “Manifold is the uncanny, yet nothing / uncanner than man bestirs itself.” Otto renders it: “Much there is that is weird; but nought is weirder than man” (*The Idea of the Holy*, 40, see following footnotes).

through strangeness and the extraordinary, Otto approaches the wonder of the human creature through awe and the numinous. First, Otto holds that the Greek adjective *deinos* is “peculiarly difficult to translate”—so difficult, indeed, as to be nearly untranslatable. The difficulty lies in its semantic richness: “it may mean evil or imposing, potent and strange, queer and marvellous, horrifying and fascinating, divine and daemonic, and a source of ‘energy.’”²² Second, Otto notes that the German *das Ungeheure* (the monstrous, the uncanny) approximates *deinos* most closely, while the nearest English equivalent is “weird.” He favors the German term, believing it best captures the numinous and its constituent aspects: wonder, awe, majesty, reverence, and energy. Finally, to illustrate the full semantic range of *deinos*, Otto turns to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s (1749–1832) use of the word. What Otto emphasizes above all is that certain passages in Goethe preserve the word’s original non-rational character. In Goethe’s usage, it can denote “the uncanny, the fearful, the dauntingly ‘other’ and incomprehensible”—and equally “that which arouses in us stupor and θάμβος [*thambos*, astonishment].”²³ What Sophocles meant to express, Otto argues, is “just this element of the uncanny in man.”²⁴

For Otto, Sophocles’s use of *deinos* awakens the feeling of numinous awe. He also cites lines from Goethe’s *Faust* to convey the beauty of this human capacity for awe: “Awe and wonderment are man’s best part. They cost one, in the world, those sentiments, yet seized by them, man feels what’s great, immense.”²⁵ Where Heidegger emphasizes the individualized spirit of *Dasein*—that is, of the human being—breaking free from the everyday, Otto emphasizes the human feeling of awe before the unapproachable numinous. What the two thinkers share is an insistence on the extraordinary dimension of *deinos*. Heidegger stresses the authenticity of individualized *Dasein* against the crowd,

22 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), 39. Otto writes: “In the adjective δεινός [*deinos*] the Greek language possesses a word peculiarly difficult to translate ... Sophocles means to awaken the feeling of ‘numinous awe.’”

23 Ibid., 40–41. The full passage reads: “it comes to mean the uncanny, the fearful, the dauntingly ‘other’ and incomprehensible, that which arouses in us stupor and θάμβος; and finally, in the wonderful words of Faust which I have put at the beginning of this book, it becomes an almost exact synonym for our ‘numinous’ under all its aspects.”

24 Ibid., 40.

25 Translator’s note: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: A Tragedy, Parts One and Two*, trans. Martin Greenberg, fully revised ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 228 (Part 2, Act 1, lines 6466–68). The German reads: “Das Schaudern ist der Menschheit bestes Teil. / Wie auch die Welt ihm das Gefühl verteure, / Ergriffen fühlt er tief das Ungeheure.” Otto places these lines as the epigraph to *The Idea of the Holy*.

giving expression to a sense of homelessness in the world. Otto stresses the human feeling of awe before the wholly other, or the numinous, giving expression to a sense of human dust-like smallness and nothingness before the holy. In both cases, the emphasis on what exceeds the everyday reveals a fundamental gulf with kinship-based thinking. Zhang displays a partiality for both Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* and Otto's mysticism. This partiality leads him to ignore the gulf between these thinkers and Confucian thought, and to strive to reconcile two fundamentally incompatible lines of thinking.

Otto first published *The Idea of the Holy* in 1917, championing *mysterium tremendum* as the fundamental element of religion and interpreting the human strangeness that Sophocles describes through the lens of religious awe. In 1919, Freud offered his own distinctive interpretation of *das Unheimliche* (the uncanny) from the standpoint of psychoanalysis. Freud's essay appeared after Otto's work and before Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Since Freud does not cite Otto, it is impossible to determine whether he drew on *The Idea of the Holy*. What matters, however, is that Freud provides a fundamentally different interpretation of what is strange or frightening from the perspective of psychoanalysis.

4 Freud: the Constraint and Repression of Home

Whereas Heidegger and Otto both emphasize the strangeness and extraordinary quality of *deinos*, Freud takes a fundamentally different approach to *das Unheimliche* (the uncanny) by rejecting its association with unfamiliarity. Since *unheimlich* is the antonym of *heimlich* (homely, familiar, belonging to the home), what is uncanny is commonly assumed to be frightening because it is unknown and unfamiliar. Uncanniness, strangeness, and fear are, in short, attributed to unfamiliarity. Freud argues, however, that the relationship between the frightening and the unfamiliar cannot simply be reversed: what is novel may easily become frightening, but not everything novel or unfamiliar is frightening.²⁶ He grants that the uncanny belongs to the domain of the frightening, but denies that its power to frighten derives from unfamiliarity. On the contrary, the uncanny resides not in what is strange but in what is familiar. The more important question, then, is why the familiar becomes frightening.

26 Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'" (1919), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), xvii: 220. Freud writes: "the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar."

Before undertaking his psychoanalytic account of the uncanny, Freud devotes considerable attention to a semantic analysis of *heimlich*. He identifies two layers of meaning: the first points toward the domestic, the familiar, and the comfortable; the second toward what is concealed—hidden from sight, kept from others, and secret.²⁷ It is precisely this second layer that psychoanalysis seeks to bring to light: to expose what is concealed and unspoken within the human psyche. The uncanny, then, is not what is strange or unfamiliar but what is familiar yet repressed and hidden. Freud traces the formation of the familiar-yet-frightening through two mechanisms: infantile complexes and primitive beliefs. Though distinct in origin, the two produce similar effects.

In Freud's account, the psyche produces a double in order to protect the ego from injury. In the service of self-preservation, "a special agency is slowly formed there, which is able to stand over against the rest of the ego, which has the function of observing and criticizing the self and of exercising a censorship within the mind, and which we become aware of as our 'conscience.'" The double absorbs not only the narcissism that stands opposed to conscience but also the unfulfilled yet still-possible aims to which one clings in fantasy.²⁸ Although Freud's analysis of the double is methodologically psychoanalytic, in substance it closely resembles Thomas Hobbes's (1588–1679) account of the human condition in the state of nature.

In Hobbes's philosophy, individuals in the state of nature rely on their own capacities for self-preservation and enjoy absolute liberty. Because absolute liberty leads to mutual destruction, the passion of the fear of death—that ruling passion—spurs individuals to a rational insight. They enter into a covenant with one another, leaving the state of nature for the civil state, where they accept external constraint and possess only relative liberty. Yet since self-preservation remains the first principle of human existence, the fear of death always carries with it the right to escape all external constraint. The orderly political state may therefore at any moment revert to the disordered state of nature. This ever-present possibility is, paradoxically, the hidden source of human vitality. When this vitality is repressed and concealed, it produces the uncanny and the frightening. As Freud puts it, "[For] this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in

27 Ibid., 222–24. Freud's analysis shows that *heimlich* develops from "belonging to the house" to "concealed, kept from sight." He cites Schelling's definition: "*Unheimlich* is the name for everything that ought to have remained ... secret and hidden but has come to light."

28 Ibid., 234–36. Strachey's translation reads: "A special agency is slowly formed there, which is able to stand over against the rest of the ego, which has the function of observing and criticizing the self and of exercising a censorship within the mind, and which we become aware of as our 'conscience.'"

the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression.”²⁹ As Russell Jacoby (b. 1945) observes, for Freud, “What is uncanny is something oddly familiar; nothing is more familiar than the self, and nothing is stranger than the self in a foreign guise.”³⁰

Home is commonly regarded as a private domain, sharply distinct from the public sphere. Privacy and secrecy are among its constitutive elements. In Freud’s psychoanalytic terms, “the *unheimlich* is what was once *heimisch*, familiar; the prefix ‘un-’ [un-] is the token of repression.”³¹ Freud’s brilliance lies in reading the negative prefix not as logical negation but as normative constraint. Home does not signify warmth alone; it also signifies institution, order, and constraint—even an inner, hidden constraint.

Thus, what is most frightening originates not in the unfamiliar but in the most familiar—familiar elements that, through a kind of disguise, take on the appearance of strangeness. This disguise has its roots in both taboo and habit. For Freud, family and all forms of civilization are the repression and disguise of instinct. Psychoanalysis seeks to strip away civilization’s disguise and lay bare reality itself. Only by confronting the harshness of reality can human beings truly come of age. Otherwise, they remain minors.

5 Salvation and Repression

Zhang Xianglong frequently draws on *A History of the Family* to underscore that, like language, family is a hallmark of human life.³² By citing anthropologists, he seeks to demonstrate that the emphasis on the parent-child relationship is not merely a feature of Chinese culture but a fundamental aspect of human existence. The importance Confucian culture attaches to this bond is beyond dispute. To claim, however, that Western civilization entirely neglects the parent-child relationship is unwarranted. Greek philosophy and Hebraic faith may indeed seem homeless as civilizational ideals, but as Coulanges shows, the social life and institutional reality of ancient Greece and Rome were thoroughly at home.

Coulanges’s study of Greek and Roman society shows that family was long a central concept in Western social life and institutions. Most importantly, for

29 Ibid., 241.

30 Russell Jacoby, *Bloodlust: On the Roots of Violence from Cain and Abel to the Present* (New York: Free Press, 2011), 123.

31 Sigmund Freud, “The ‘Uncanny,’” 245.

32 Zhang Xianglong, *Jia yu xiao*, 14.

the ancients every dead person was a god—and not only dead heroes and great figures.³³ Ancient religion worshipped “the invisible being which is in us.”³⁴ Modern people cannot comprehend the ancient belief in the divinity of human beings—above all, the divinity of the dead. The ancient family was therefore “a religious rather than a natural association.” According to this religion, “the conjugal union was something more than a relation of the sexes and a fleeting affection”; what united husband and wife was “the powerful bond of the same worship and the same belief.”³⁵ This stands in stark contrast to the modern concept of marriage based on love. Family was a faith and an institution.

From an institutional perspective, Coulanges's account is remarkably close to the Confucian approach to family, with its emphasis on the daily life of common people. For the ancient Greeks and Romans, Coulanges writes:

The greatest misfortune that its [the family's] piety had to fear, was that its line of descendants might cease and come to an end; for then its religion would disappear from the earth, its fire would be extinguished, and the whole series of its dead would fall into oblivion and eternal misery. The great interest of human life was to continue the descent, in order to continue the worship.³⁶

If one did not know that Coulanges is describing ancient Greek and Roman society, any Chinese reader might well take this for a description of ancient China. Marriage as institution and family as religion—this held true in the ancient world, whether in China or the West.

Compared with Heidegger's philosophy of *Dasein*, the ancient Greek and Roman worship of hearth fire and ancestors is far more compatible with Confucian kinship thought, both in spiritual belief and in lived practice. Zhang emphasizes the Confucian significance of family and seeks a bridge in contemporary Western philosophy, favoring Heidegger most. Yet Heidegger's philosophy is not an ideal bridge between Chinese and Western thought on family. In his view, the essence of philosophy—or of *Dasein's* force—lies in departing from home: leaving the everyday, fleeing the “they,” rather than

33 Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome*, trans. Willard Small (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), Book I, Ch. 2, 33. Coulanges describes an ancient religion “that did not find its gods in physical nature, but in man himself.”

34 Ibid. The full passage reads: “[...] the adoration of the invisible being which is in us, the moral and thinking power which animates and governs our bodies.”

35 Ibid., Book II, Ch. 1, 42 and Ch. 2, 47.

36 Ibid., Book II, Ch. 3, 50.

returning home or reverting to the ordinary. Otto, for his part, interprets *deinos* in a religious key as the human feeling of awe before the wholly other, or the numinous. His emphasis falls on humanity's sense of dust-like smallness and nothingness before the holy—and this, too, reveals a fundamental gulf with Confucian thinking on family and kinship. Zhang is drawn to both Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* and Otto's mysticism. This attraction leads him to overlook the gulf and to strive to reconcile two fundamentally incompatible lines of thought.

Freud's psychoanalysis of the uncanny shows that what is frightening is not the unfamiliar but the familiar—more precisely, what has been constrained and repressed. His analysis emphasizes the social accumulation and civilizational repression exercised by the family and the father—the family's repression of the individual—which stands in direct contrast to Heidegger's focus on *Dasein*'s individualization away from home. Yet, in their fundamental orientation, the two converge from opposite directions. Heidegger's philosophy of *Dasein* insists on the individual's departure from home, while Otto's sense of sacred awe stresses that the numinous transcends the ordinary and is wholly unlike the here-and-now human being. The sole bond between human beings and the numinous is awe, and this capacity for awe is what makes the human being strange. What is extraordinary and numinous in Otto is, in Freud, entirely stripped of mystery. Freud's work renders the beautiful numinous both public and instinctual, bringing the lofty invisible being down to earth and making it ordinary. In effect, Freud replaces the opaque walls of the hidden home with transparent glass.

Freud's psychoanalysis reveals that family—and the civilization it reflects—is not purely redemptive but deeply constraining and repressive. This was precisely the point that May Fourth-era thinkers made in their fierce criticism of the family's negative influence. The contemporary revival of Confucian family thought, in its effort to oppose this criticism, has largely ignored the institutional reality of family and attended only to its ideal dimension—swinging from one extreme to the other.

6 Conclusion

Zhang Xianglong argues that the two constitutive elements of Western civilization—philosophy and faith—are, in their essential nature, without home. Yet the homelessness of philosophy and faith does not mean that Western society is without home. At the institutional level, family too has held great importance in Western civilization—indeed, it once held fundamental

significance. More precisely, Zhang's argument concerns the homeless ideal of Western civilization, not its institutional reality.

Zhang looks to Heidegger for points of convergence with Confucian thought on the parent-child bond. Heidegger's longing for the house of Being, however, cannot support Zhang's advocacy of the kinship family. Heidegger's house of Being is a home that lies beyond the departure from home—an ideal home reached only by leaving the family of moral bonds behind. This ideal home transcends the daily life of common people, as well as the bonds and norms of moral relationships—it transcends the social order itself. The revival of Confucian family thought that Zhang represents emphasizes both the Confucian way of everyday common life and the ethical-ontological status of the parent-child bond, while largely ignoring the significance of family as a social institution.

Heidegger speaks of anxiety from the standpoint of philosophy, stressing humanity's fundamental anxiety before nothingness. Otto speaks of awe from the standpoint of religion, stressing humanity's awe before the wholly other. For finite human beings, the wholly other is, in a sense, nothingness writ large—an absolute negation. Freud internalizes both the philosophical nothingness and the religious wholly other, transforming philosophical and religious awe into psychological fear. He traces the social origins and psychological causes of that fear. His psychoanalysis of fear emphasizes the constraining and repressive function of family and of civilizational mechanisms. This inner, invisible force is nothing other than the psychological mechanism produced by civilization's repression of the individual.

In sum, the contemporary revival of Confucian family thought has recognized the homelessness of Western civilizational ideals but overlooked the at-homeness of Western society and institutions. It has highlighted the intellectual and ethical dimensions of the Confucian family revival while neglecting its social and institutional dimensions. Similarly, it has emphasized the positive significance of the Confucian concept of kinship but ignored the negative significance of family as an institution. Family can be a warm refuge in the realm of emotion, but it can also be a source of stern repression in the realm of institutions.

Translated by Jenny Lu