



Chinese and Western philosophy in dialogue

Ronnie Littlejohn & Qingjun Li

To cite this article: Ronnie Littlejohn & Qingjun Li (2019): Chinese and Western philosophy in dialogue, Educational Philosophy and Theory, DOI: [10.1080/00131857.2019.1701386](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2019.1701386)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2019.1701386>



Published online: 11 Dec 2019.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 364



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Chinese and Western philosophy in dialogue

Preface

We are pleased to provide two explorations on the topic of dialogue in Chinese philosophy. In this paper, we consider the educational and theoretical dialogues in China resulting from the encounter between Chinese and Western philosophy down to the present. We consider how this conversation began and how it has evolved into what has become a robust discipline of scholarship and teaching known as Comparative Philosophy in both China and the West. In the next paper, we will focus specifically on dialogues in the historical stream of Chinese philosophy as these occurred within education in China itself, including the nature of some of the most influential discussions and institutions in which these occurred.

Introduction

The most familiar and widely used survey of the introduction of Western thought into China that was available in the mid-20th century was written by Feng Youlan (1895–1990) and included in his *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (Feng, 1948). Feng begins his account with the work of the brilliant translator, Yan Fu (1853–1921), but he does not go back to the beginnings of China's encounter with Western thought. Since the writing of Feng's account, there was very little detailed reflection on the Chinese reception of Western philosophy until 1999. In December of that year, the East Asian Department of the University of Gottingen sponsored an international conference on the theme, 'Translating Western Knowledge into Late Imperial China'. The gathering featured an international slate of scholars offering papers interpreting the reception, appropriation, and criticism of Western thought in China largely through the lens of how important terms from Western philosophical, scientific, and political were rendered into Chinese. For example, Wong Mankong of Hongkong Baptist University discussed the rendering of 'God' with special emphasis on a Chinese response to the 'Term Question'. Han Qi presented a paper on the translation of Aristotle's *Cosmology*. There were dozens of other topics as well.

The 2002 publication of *Contemporary Chinese Philosophy* provided essays on sixteen Chinese thinkers, and many of the articles considered the appropriation and dialogue of Chinese thinkers with the West (Cheng and Bunnin, 2002). Then, in 2007, Zhou Xiaoliang wrote an essay entitled, 'The Studies of Western Philosophy in China: Historical Review, Present State and Prospects'. Zhou devotes the first section of this paper to an historical review of the introduction of Western philosophy into China, and he takes the position that Feng took before him: namely, that in the late 19th century, the invasions by Western powers and concomitant decline of Chinese national strength led to an increasing interest on the part of Chinese intellectuals, not only in Western science and technology, but also in its culture and ideas (Zhou, 2007). In Mou Bo's collection of scholarly essays on the *History of Chinese Philosophy*, several authors discuss important Chinese intellectuals' interpretations of Western philosophers. Mou himself is author of the chapter 'Constructive Engagement of Chinese and Western Philosophy: A Contemporary Trend toward World Philosophy' (Mou, 2009).

The important Chinese philosopher Peng Guoxiang of Zhejiang University has made the interesting point that to study Chinese Philosophy today in China means engaging with interpretations and reconstructions of traditional Chinese philosophies (i.e., Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism) as these have integrated Western Philosophy. Peng divides the development of contemporary Chinese philosophy into three stages: Formation (1910–1950s), dormancy and disruption (1950s–1970s), and development and integration into the global conversation of philosophy (1980–Present) (Peng, 2018). In the following, we modify and simplify Peng’s three stages of the dialogue between Chinese and Western philosophies into the categories of Appropriation, Critical Engagement, and Comparison and Beyond.

The early period of dialogue between Chinese and Western philosophy: appropriation

With the arrival of Western Christian missionaries in the late sixteenth century, China came into sustained contact with Europe, and many Chinese intellectuals began to believe that the West had overtaken China in various scientific and technological fields. Immediately, a space was opened for dialogue between China with its extraordinarily rich philosophical history and different approaches to scientific learning and those to be found in the West. Appreciation for the possibilities to dialogue came from both sides, but Chinese thinkers began to appropriate Western thought with enthusiasm, sometimes resulting in setting aside explanatory and philosophical systems used for centuries.

To facilitate their relations with Chinese literati, the missionaries translated works of Western science and technology as well as Christian texts into Chinese. Between 1582 and 1773, more than seventy missionaries of various nationalities undertook this kind of work. These included Italian Fathers Matteo Ricci, Nicolo Longobardi, and Giulio Aleni; the Portuguese missionary, Francis Furtado; as well as those from Switzerland (Jean Terrenz), Poland (Jean Nicolas Smogolenshi), and France (Ferdinand Verbiest and Nicolas Trigaut). The missionaries were assisted by Chinese collaborators. For example, Xu Guangqi assisted Matteo Ricci when he translated Euclid’s *Elements* in 1607. Ricci and Li Zhizao introduced the Chinese to classical Western logic via a Portuguese university-level textbook brought to China in 1625. In fact, Xu Guangqi and Li Zhizao were two of the ‘Three Pillars of Chinese Catholicism’ (中国天主教的三柱石) along with Yang Tingyun, who was the third. Han Qi presented an analysis of how Francis Furtado and Li Zhizao used Chinese terms to translate Western ideas at the ‘Translating Western Knowledge into Late Imperial China’ conference sponsored by the University of Gottingen in December 1999 (Littlejohn, 2015).

After the first Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895, Yan Fu (1854–1921), who studied in England from 1877–1879, became the most influential translator of Western works in China. His translations included Thomas Henry Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics* (1893), published in Chinese in 1898; Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* (1776), published in Chinese in 1902; Herbert Spenser’s *The Study of Sociology* (1872) and John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty* (1859), both translations published in Chinese in 1904; J.S. Mill’s *A System of Logic* (1843), translated in 1905; and William Stanley Jevon’s *The Theory of Political Economy* (1878), translated in 1909 (Feng, 1948).

This new scientific Western ontology made no use of the traditional Chinese operators, such as *qi*, *yin* and *yang*, and the five phases (*wu-xing*). Yan Fu faced the task of appropriating into Chinese Western scientific and philosophical works that had an entirely different set of concepts and emphases. China’s correlative physics valorized harmony and mutual interdependence of natural forces, whereas Western science was built on a framework employing the mechanisms of ‘survival of the fittest’, ‘struggle for adaptation’, and ‘natural selection’.

One might think that the infusion of Western scientific evolutionary theory that depended on empirical observation of competition, and transmission of dominant characteristics of cognitive

and biological developments would require the complete abandonment of traditional Chinese ontologies, and that Yan Fu's translation represented the herald of such change; however, Yan's actual appropriation of these theories was much different.

Shen Tsingsong (Vincent Shen) wrote an extensive analysis of Yan Fu's version of Huxley's work, and he argued that Yan did much more than the mere translation of *Evolution and Ethics*. According to Shen, Yan Fu's appropriation transformed Huxley's work by infusing into his translation the Chinese ontological concepts and sentiments in which he had been educated. Yan had the sense that Chinese ontology, going all the way back to the *Yijing*, always made room for creativity, novelty, and productivity. Even Daoist ontologies of transformation (*hua* 化) could be interpreted as evolutionary in force. Moreover, the Darwinian notion of environmental adaptation as an explanation for evolution was not totally absent from classical Chinese ontology either. In Neo-Confucian thought, the Great Ultimate was understood to have launched a dynamic process of interaction between movement and tranquillity, first in the forces of *yin* and *yang*, then in the five phases, the combinations of which gave rise to the myriad of things. Yan's most important contribution was not the translation itself, but what Shen calls, 'the reconstruction of Huxley's discourse to adapt it to the current needs of the Chinese people' (Shen, 2015).

In Yan's view, China was deficient scientifically and socially as a result of its inability to excel in the international competition of worldviews. In search for why China was weaker and less able to compete compared to the Western nations, Yan claimed that the reason was China's lack of liberty for its people (Yan, 1986). Yan not only accepted John Stuart Mill's position in *On Liberty* that the strength of a body politic lies in its commitment to the discovery of truth, but he also held that freedom of thought and liberty to choose one's own lifestyle created the novelty and progress present in Western countries but absent in China (Yan, 1986). Accordingly, he claimed that liberty is essential in order to produce a strong nation. When people lack liberty, they are not motivated to fight for the state or work hard in order to create a productive society. Nevertheless, Yan believed the task of implementing liberty varies under different political systems. The challenges faced in Mill's England were not the same as those facing the Chinese coming out of a long history of imperial and despotic systems. He did not support China's 1911 revolution to create a Republic and disestablish the Qing dynasty. He insisted on gradual reform and political change. Yan believed the Chinese people at the turn of the twentieth century were not yet ready or capable of participatory government and responsible use of free expression. Xinyan Jiang reminds us that prior to Yan Fu there had never before been an analysis of the nature and place of liberty in Chinese political philosophy (Jiang, 2009).

Another important figure in the early period of the dialogue between Chinese and Western philosophy marked by appropriation of Western thought was Hu Shi (1891–1962). While studying in Shanghai, Hu read Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics*, Darwin's *Origin of Species* and other works of Western science that Yan and Ma Junwu (1881–1940) had translated. He wrote,

It was these essays which first violently shocked me out of the comfortable dream that our ancient civilization was self-sufficient and had nothing to learn from the militant and materialistic West except in the weapons of war and vehicles of commerce. They opened to me, as to hundreds of others, an entirely new vision of the world (Chou, 1995).

While still a young student in Shanghai, Hu summarized the changes in his conception of reality and the universe in what he entitled the 'New Credo', published in 1923. His commitment to the experimental sciences represents a turn away from traditional Chinese ontology and its vocabulary. Unlike Yan Fu, Hu Shi set aside the Chinese grammar of *qi*, *yin*, *yang*, *dao*, and the five phases (*wuxing*). He turned toward a new Western philosophical and scientific vocabulary and that moved him away from the traditional Chinese beliefs which had formed his culture. The 'New Credo' says,

1. On the basis of our knowledge of astronomy and physics, we should recognize that the world of space is infinitely large.

2. On the basis of our geological and paleontological knowledge, we should recognize that the universe extends over infinite time.
3. On the basis of all our verifiable scientific knowledge, we should recognize that the universe and everything in it follow natural laws of movements in change. So, that is 'natural' in the Chinese sense of 'being so of its self', and there is no need for the concept of a supernatural Ruler or Creator.
4. On the basis of the biological sciences, we should recognize the terrific wastefulness and brutality in the struggle for existence in the biological world, and consequently the untenability of the hypothesis of a humane Ruler.
5. On the basis of the biological, physiological, and psychological sciences, we should recognize that man is only one species in the animal kingdom and differs from the other species only in degree, but not in kind.
6. On the basis of the knowledge derived from anthropology, sociology, and the biological sciences, we should understand the history and causes of the evolution of living organisms and of human society.
7. On the basis of the biological and psychological sciences, we should recognize that all psychological phenomena could be explained through the law of causality.
8. On the basis of biological and historical knowledge, we should recognize that morality and religion are subject to change, and that the causes of such change can be scientifically studied.
9. On the basis of our newer knowledge of physics and chemistry, we should recognize that matter is full of motion and not static.
10. On the basis of biological, sociological, and historical knowledge, we should recognize that the individual self is subject to death and decay; however, the sum total of individual achievement, for better or for worse, lives on in the immortality of the Larger Self. That to live for the sake of the species and posterity is religion of the highest kind, and that those religions that seek a future life either in Heaven or in the Pure Land, are selfish religions (Hu, 1931).

The middle period of dialogue between Chinese and Western philosophy: critical engagement

Xiao Yang calls Liang Qichao (1873–1929) the most widely read public intellectual in China during the transitional period from the late Qing dynasty (1644–1912) to the early Republican era (1912–1949) (Xiao, 2002). Some helpful studies of Liang's thought in English include Chang (1971) and Levenson (1970). The beginning of his philosophical career can be traced to his studies with Kang Youwei (1858–1927), and he was only twenty-two years old when he and Kang organized the scholars' protest in Beijing in 1895. He was instrumental in bringing about the 'One Hundred Days Reform' in 1898. Liang's perceptive analysis of the relevance of new Western philosophical texts led him to put aside the common distinction between Chinese learning and Western learning made by scholars of his day. He preferred to speak simply of *political learning* (*zheng xue*) that included *both* Chinese and Western thought. In his essay, 'A Treatise on Reform' and his 1902 book *New Citizens*, Liang proposed to develop a modern Chinese political philosophy designed to produce what he called a 'new citizenry' (*xinmin*) for China (Liang, 1999). He thought that competition with Western ideas and lifestyles would bring energy into China's society. Accordingly, he was both an activist and an intellectual father of reform in China in the late Qing dynasty. He was involved in the new Republican government of China after 1911, holding several political positions. Nonetheless, while Liang was an advocate for the state protection of freedom among its citizens, he also insisted that freedom does not mean license and it must find its expression in laws that foster the integration of the people and the well-being of society.

Accordingly, he critically rejected the idea that the body politic should be understood as built on a 'social contract' as Western philosophy said. Instead, he claimed that what benefits the greatest number is what the individual should submit himself to in law. The ultimate goal of the state is harmony and order, not the maximization of individual human liberty of choice. In his essay, 'On the Progress China Has Made in the Last Fifty Years (1922)', he took the Chinese term *min* (people) that was used to mark the people who made up a population and replaced it with the concept *guomin* (citizens) in an intentional effort to tie identity and nationalism together.

Zhang Dongsun (1886–1973) was likewise one of the most important philosophers in China, owing to his efforts to establish a more critical dialogue with Western philosophy. Zhang's approach has variously been labelled as 'Pluralistic Epistemology' or 'Cultural Epistemology' (Jiang, 2002). His ground-breaking essay, 'A Chinese Philosopher's Theory of Knowledge' represented the first well-developed Chinese 'sociology of knowledge' (Muzumdar, 1956). His pluralistic cultural epistemology was built on the premise that there is no real or true knowledge that transcends all cultures. Knowledge and truth are functions of the criteria set up within a specific cultural epistemology, and there is no way to approach 'reality' or 'truth' that can be bleached free of the cultural constraints determining what one is looking for, what questions one asks, or what is taken as sufficient evidence for a belief. An implication of this position was that what was to be considered true and equally important, as life-furthering, was defined by a cultural web of beliefs and practices. Some of these were incommensurable with those of other cultures, but this did not mean that one set of cultural understandings was inferior to the other.

Mou Zongsan (1909–1995) was also a major contributor to the dialogue between Chinese and Western philosophical and intellectual exchange. In his study of Zhu Xi and other Neo-Confucians, Mou critically employed the philosophical framework of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). He did not simply appropriate Kant's language and approach, but he offered his own reading of the Neo-Confucians as a corrective to points where he believed Kant had gotten moral philosophy wrong (Tan, 2009). For Mou, the Neo-Confucian philosophical of *equilibrium* (*zhong* 中) found in the heart-mind (*xin* 心) of every person, where the Principle(s) (*li* 理) of Heaven are known by all humans immediately and inherently, should be preferred to Kant's philosophy of the rational application of the categorical imperative. He extended his theory by making the claim that sagehood in Confucian tradition represents the realization in practice of the 'oughts' or 'duties' of the moral law that Kant identified with the maxims of morality.

Not only were Chinese philosophers engaging with Western thinkers while on their own soil, but some Western thinkers went to China. One of these philosophers, whose influence continues in on philosophy in China and on Comparative Philosophy, was John Dewey (1859–1952). When Dewey arrived in Shanghai on May 1, 1919, the story of Western philosophy's impact on Chinese thought turned a new page. American Pragmatism's influence on Chinese intellectual history began. While Dewey planned to stay only for a couple of months, he postponed his return again and again, remaining until July 11, 1921. During this two-year period, Dewey lectured widely and was even called the 'Second Confucius' by some. Hu Shi once observed that no Western scholar had exerted the magnitude of Dewey's influence up to that time (Hu, 1921). Although Hu was a student of Dewey's at Columbia and under his influence for most of his professional life; nevertheless, it was Dewey's understanding of science and its method that most marked Hu's later writings but not so much his philosophical pragmatism. When Hu left America to return to China, Dewey's major works, *Reconstruction in Philosophy, Experience and Nature*, and *Request for Certainty*, had not yet been published, and the debate on whether he read this works and what impact they had on him still raged (Chen, 2010). By the 1950s, a tidal wave of critical essays had nearly erased Dewey's presence from China (Hall and Ames, 1999). It was not until after the era of Deng Xiaoping's reforms that interest rekindled in Dewey.

Liang Shuming (1892–1988) was introduced to Western philosophy by his father, and he developed an interest in utilitarianism while he was still young, even though he had not yet read Bentham or Mill (An, 2002). According to his own account, the most important shift in his

philosophical pilgrimage occurred after 1920 when he turned back toward Confucianism, rather than in the direction of Western thought. Liang's 1921 work *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies* still remains a significant example of comparative philosophy because of its argument for a 'three cultures' theory. He compared the Chinese, Indian, and Western traditions and used this work to create a more general understanding of three types of human nature. The work sets out the construction of his distinctive version of contemporary Confucianism in response to Western thought.

All of this notwithstanding, no thinker was as important to the critical engagement of the Western philosophy of Marxism in China of the twentieth century as was Mao Zedong (1893–1976). He became the first Chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, the founder of the New China (October 1, 1949) and the Father of the Nation. Of course, there are many studies of Mao's thought, but for his analysis of Western philosophy readers may find helpful the work of Nick Knight (2007, 2010). Among the great number of English language biographies, Jonathan Spence (1999) is both reliable and readable. For English readers, the complete collected works of Mao from 1917–1945 are at the U.S. Government's Joint Publications Research Service, where all articles signed by Chairman Mao individually or jointly, as well as those unsigned but verified as his, are available. For works after 1945, *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* (Mao, 1968) is a good source. Mao's critical engagement with Western Marxism meant two most fundamental decisions: 1) rejecting China's traditional past with its social and economic oppression of women, workers, and peasants by the landowners; 2) making a commitment that China would stand up to imperialist powers of the West and chart it on national destiny with a new pride (Zhou, 2007).

While some Westerners question Mao's credentials as a philosopher, actually he did educate himself extensively on Chinese history and philosophy, especially in the areas of social, political, and economic thought. Few philosophers have had their writings distributed as widely and used in so many different ways as the book *Quotations from Chairman Mao* (a.k.a., *the Little Red Book*). According to Mao, the emergence of a new political order could not be as smooth as either the Chinese philosophers of his era or the Western social philosophers believed. The process is messy, transient, and conflicted (Mao, 1966).

The current dialogue between Chinese and Western philosophy: comparison and beyond

It is perhaps an odd phenomenon that the development of dialogue between Chinese and Western Philosophy was greatly hampered in the West by the fact that Chinese philosophy from the 1950s to the 1990s generally showed up in Western education only in academic departments of East Asian Studies, Sinology, History, and sometimes Religious Studies, but not in Philosophy departments. This phenomenon marginalized Chinese philosophy in the philosophical academy of the West and even led to claims that the Chinese actually did not have 'philosophy', at least as this was understood under the influence of both main traditions in the West: Analytical Philosophy and Continental Philosophy. Graduate programs that educated philosophers and professional scholarly journals and associations ignored, overlooked, and sometimes actively suppressed the study of and dialogue with Chinese philosophical texts and figures. Two essays that shine light on this situation were written by Van Norden: 'What Should Western Philosophy Learn from Chinese Philosophy?' (1996b) and his correspondence with the American Philosophical Association, entitled 'An Open Letter to the APA' (1996a).

The ice finally began to melt on dialogue with Chinese philosophy in the West as a few philosophers of Chinese ancestry made their way into U.S. philosophy programs that were committed to an intentional recognition of the value of Chinese thought and dialogue with its traditions. Wing-tsit Chan (Chen Rongjie, 1901–1994) was one of the most formidable of these

scholars. Others included Din cheuk Lau (1921–2010), and Antonio Cua (1932–2007). These philosophers and others, such as Angus C. Graham (1919–1991), Eliot Deutsch and David Nivison (1923–2014), began to produce another generation of scholars whose work may be characterized as Comparative Philosophy including Roger Ames, Stephen Angle, Stephen Bokenkamp, Du Weiming, Philip J. Ivanhoe, Livia Kohn, Donald J. Munro, Henry Rosemont, Jr. (1934–2017), Shen Qingsong (Vincent Shen, 1949–2018), David Wong, and Xin Guanglai (Shun Kwong-loi). In the third generation of scholars influencing the educational theory and practice of philosophical instruction about Chinese and Comparative Philosophy, we could name many, including Chinese philosophers Bai Tongdong, Huang Yong, Karyn Lai, Li Chenyang, Liu Jilu, Mou Bo, Ni Peimin, Tan Sor-hoon, Xiao Yong, and Robin Wang (Peng, 2018). Among philosophers who are not ethnically Chinese, we should include Paul D'Ambrosio, Tim Connolly, Chris Fraser, Paul Goldin, Eric Hutton, Ronnie Littlejohn, John Makeham, Thomas Michael, James Miller, Hans Georg Moeller, Franklin Perkins, Aaron Stalnaker, and Bryan Van Norden.

As appreciation for Chinese philosophy has grown in the West, the dialogue has evolved into an activity now called simply, 'Comparative Philosophy'. The two most basic English language internet encyclopedias of philosophy have articles considering what Comparative Philosophy is in a broad sense (Littlejohn, 2010) and the other devoted to the task of comparison between Chinese and Western philosophy specifically (Wong, 2014). A very useful book-length study of how philosophers think about the process of dialogue across traditions is *Doing Philosophy Comparatively* (Connolly, 2015). Also extremely helpful to an understanding of the work of comparative philosophers is Sor-hoon Tan's, *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Chinese Philosophy Methodologies* (2016).

An important development in the comparative dialogue between Chinese and Western philosophy has occurred within the last decade within China. Several prominent universities in China have begun graduate programs in philosophy which are both taught in English and also richly engage Western and Chinese traditions. These M.A. programs focus on Chinese Philosophy and Comparative Philosophy. Aside from the high quality of the work being done by the faculties of these programs, what makes this trend truly remarkable is that it makes it possible for students, who have been trained in the West and can only function at the graduate level in English, to come to China for graduate work and learn under faculty who engage sources across traditions, many of whom are top Chinese scholars. Students from the U.S., the U.K., France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Japan, Korea, and many Asian and Southeast Asian countries have taken advantage of this unique approach to philosophical education. In fact, we may consider this particular model at the university level to truly be 'the cutting edge' of Comparative Philosophy in the 21st century up to now. Some of these programs are those at Beijing University, Beijing Normal University, East China Normal University, Fudan University, Renmin University, and most recently, Wuhan University. These universities have built philosophy faculties with both native-born Chinese philosophers and Western-born and trained scholars. They also bring eminent philosophers from across the world to their universities to deliver short-term lectures in their specialized fields. A list of the scholars teaching and researching at these universities would be too long to include in its entirety, but a fair sample (with apologies for omissions) of faculty and recent visiting scholars includes Roger Ames, Chen Bo, Du Weiming, and Wang Bo at Beijing University; Yuan Guiren, Liu Xiaogan, and Thomas Michael at Beijing Normal University; Paul D'Ambrosio, Yang Guorong, and Liu Liangjian at East China Normal University; Wen Haiming and Yao Xinzong at Renmin University; and Hao Changchi, Bryan Van Norden, and Li Yong at Wuhan University.

Of course, the dialogue between Chinese and Western philosophy takes place globally in spaces other than the university setting. In his 1996a 'An Open Letter to the APA', comparative philosopher Bryan Van Norden complained that philosophers writing on comparative subjects were being segregated out of the mainstream philosophical journals in the U.S. Although Van Norden did not make it entirely clear in his letter, his complaint seems to be directed toward

two ways in which scholars of Comparative Philosophy were being disenfranchised from mainstream scholarly journals.

One way in which this happened was that philosophers had to publish their work in area studies journals which do not focus on philosophy, but the cultures of China, India, Asia, or the Middle East. Another way in which this exclusion occurred was that the articles written by comparative philosophers was subsumed under philosophy journals devoted to various traditions, but which were not explicitly comparative in focus, such as the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, *African Philosophy*, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, *Philosophy in Japan*, and *Asian Philosophy*.

Since Van Norden stated his concerns about the lack of scholarly journals devoted to Comparative Philosophy, several prominent academic journals now provide opportunities for the development and engagement in this kind of dialogue. Van Norden was well aware of the journal *Philosophy East & West* when he wrote. But he was looking beyond this single option. One of the more recent journals focusing on comparative dialogue which has established itself as highly recognized is *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*. The *Dao* journal not only publishes articles comparing Chinese and Western philosophies, but also those which set Chinese philosophy in dialogue with other Asian philosophies (e.g., Indian, Japanese and Korean). Among even newer journals, *Comparative Philosophy: An International Journal of Constructive Engagement of Distinct Approaches toward World Philosophy*, should be included. Another important recent journal is *Frontiers of Philosophy in China*. Published out of the Research Center for Value and Culture and the School of Philosophy of Beijing Normal University, this journal focuses on original scholarship related to Chinese philosophy and comparative studies between Chinese philosophy and other world philosophies.

Some publishers have also created monograph and edited book series specifically devoted to Comparative Philosophy. The State University of New York (SUNY) is well known for two of its series edited by Roger Ames: 'Asian Studies Development' and 'Chinese Philosophy and Culture'. Several volumes in each series are devoted to dialogue between Chinese and Western philosophy. The *Dao Companions to Chinese Philosophy* (Series Editor Yong Huang), published by Springer, has a vigorous referee process, and since its beginning it has published some of the most highly recognized comparative philosophical essays. Bloomsbury Publishing is building a significant list of works on Chinese and Comparative Philosophy.

Professional associations of scholars facilitate dialogue comparing the traditions of Chinese and Western Philosophy. Some of these include the Association of Asian Studies (founded 1948, restructured 1970) and the American Philosophical Association (founded 1900), both of which support sessions and panels of scholarly papers sponsored by organizations devoted to the dialogue of Comparative Philosophy. The Society of Asian and Comparative Philosophy (founded 1968) includes many scholars who work on Chinese and Western comparisons, as does the Association of Chinese Philosophers of America (founded 1995), the European Association for Chinese Philosophy (founded 2014), the International Society for Chinese Philosophy (founded 1975), the International Society for Comparative Studies of Chinese and Western Philosophy (founded 2002), and the Society for Teaching Comparative Philosophy (founded 2014). Papers have found their way from these conferences into books and journals on a staggering array of topics in the dialogue between Chinese and Western philosophy. A small sample of these includes Fay (1996); Graham (1989); Carr and Ivanhoe (2000); Clarke (2000); Sim (2007); Ames (2011); King and Schilling (2011); and Cline (2012).

The most important ongoing international internet blog forum for dialogue on Chinese and Comparative Philosophy is *Warp, Weft, and Way* (<http://warpweftandway.com>). The primary purpose of this active discussion group is to promote and stimulate exchange about Chinese philosophy and cross-traditions. It includes inquiry among scholars and students of philosophy, whatever their level of training is.

While not an internet blog, another kind of intellectual community emerged in Beijing in 2010. It has occupied a space to express dialogue about Chinese and Western philosophy very broadly

and lies outside of conventional university curriculum and academic publishing and conferences. *ThinkIN* (<http://www.thinkinchina.asia/>) is largely composed of young scholars who live and work in China. Its stated purpose is to build an informal platform where Chinese and foreign academics can discuss and help each other by exchanging ideas and information. The community organizes monthly public discussions and explicitly models itself on the Greek *agora*, or public gathering.

Professional academic conferences also play an important role in the educational dialogue between Western and Chinese philosophy, and many papers have been devoted to the definition and methodology of Comparative Philosophy (Angle, 2010). There are too many of these conferences to mention, but the best known of these is the East-West Philosophers Conference, which was first held in 1939 and will hold its 12th international conference in Honolulu, Hawaii in May 2020. Some of the most recent specialized conferences featuring dialogue between Chinese and Western philosophy include the following. 'What Makes Us Human? Philosophical and Religious Perspectives in China and the West' was held at the Central European University in the summer of 2016 in Budapest, Hungary. The Sungkyun Institute for Confucian Studies and East Asian Philosophy (SKKU) hosted an International Conference on the theme 'Confucianism, Buddhism, and Kantian Moral Theory' in September 2019 on the campus of Sunkyunkwan University, Seoul, Korea. In the summer of 2019, the conference, 'Comparative Philosophy Forum' was held in Beijing. Also in 2019, East China Normal University in Shanghai sponsored the conference 'Beyond Comparisons: Chinese Philosophy Today'. The Chinese University of Hong Kong sponsored a conference devoted to the work of Michael Slote, entitled 'Slote Encountering Chinese Philosophy', and the papers from that conference will be published by Bloomsbury.

Conclusion

Understanding just what Comparative Philosophy and dialogue between Chinese and Western Philosophy should be is the subject of a substantial body of ongoing scholarly reflection (e.g., Balslev, 1997; Deutsch, 1991; Krishna, 1988; Kupperman 2002; Larson and Deutsch, 1988; Masson-Oursel & McCarthy, 1951; Mou 2010; Mou and Tieszen, 2013; Neville, 2001; Ni, 2006; Rosemont, 2015; Shen, 2003; Struhl, 2010; Weber, 2013; Wong, 1989). Generally speaking, there is a broad agreement that this approach does not lead toward the creation of a synthesis of philosophical traditions and certainly not to a simple setting of one position alongside another with no critical engagement. Even comparative philosophers are now calling for a move 'Beyond Comparison'.

What is being created as a result of the dialogue between Chinese and Western philosophy is just the sort of thing that education is meant to produce. This current dialogue does not result in some new theory that unlocks all the riddles or solves all the quandaries arising in philosophy. Instead, the outcome is the *emergence of a different sort of philosopher*. These new philosophers bend language and culture. They do not so much inhabit one or both of the standpoints represented by the traditions from which they draw, as they give birth to an emerging standpoint different from them and which is thereby creatively a new way of seeing the human condition.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors


References

- Ames, R. (2011). *Confucian role ethics: A vocabulary*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.
- An, Y. (2002). Liang Shuming: Eastern and western cultures and confucianism. In C. Cheng & N. Bunnin (Eds.), *Contemporary Chinese philosophy* (pp. 147–164). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Angle, S. (2010). The minimal definition and methodology of comparative philosophy, a report from a conference. *Comparative Philosophy*, 1(1), 106–110.

- Balslev, A. (1997). Philosophy and cross-cultural conversation: Some comments on the project of comparative philosophy. *Metaphilosophy*, 28(4), 359–359. doi:10.1111/1467-9973.00065
- Carr, K., & Ivanhoe, P. (2000). *The sense of antirationalism: The religious thought of Zhuangzi and Kierkegaard*. New York, NY: Seven Bridges Press.
- Chang, H. (1971). *Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao and intellectual transition in China*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Chen, Y. (2010). Pragmatism in China and Chinese philosophy. Retrieved from http://brown.edu/Programs/Nanjing/content/documents/Pragmatism_in_China_ChenYajun.pdf
- Cheng, C., & Bunnin, N. (Eds.). (2002). *Contemporary Chinese philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Chou, C. (Ed.). (1995). *Collection of Hu Shih's english writings* (Vol. 3). Heidelberg: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Publishing Co.
- Clarke, J. (2000). *The Tao of the West: Western transformations of Taoist thought*. London: Routledge.
- Cline, E. (2012). *Confucius, Rawls, and the sense of justice*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press.
- Connolly, T. (2015). *Doing philosophy comparatively*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Deutsch, E. (Ed.). (1991). *Culture and modernity: East-west philosophic perspectives*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Fay, B. (1996). *Contemporary philosophy of social science: A multicultural approach*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Feng, Y. (1948). *A short history of Chinese philosophy*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Graham, A. (1989). *Disputers of the tao: Philosophical argument in ancient China*. La Salle, IL: Open Court.
- Hall, D., & Ames, R. (1999). *Democracy of the dead: Dewey, Confucius and the hope for democracy in China*. Chicago: Open Court.
- Hu, S. (1921). Mr. Dewey and China. *Enlightenment, Supplement of Republic Daily*.
- Hu, S. (1931). My credo and its evolution. In H. Leach (Ed.), *Living philosophies: A series of intimate Credos* (pp. 235–263). New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Jiang, X. (2002). Zhang Dongsun: Pluralist epistemology and Chinese philosophy. In C. Cheng & N. Bunnin (Eds.), *Contemporary Chinese philosophy* (pp. 57–81). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Jiang, X. (2009). Enlightenment movement. In B. Mou (Ed.), *History of Chinese philosophy* (pp. 473–511). New York, NY: Routledge.
- King, R., & Schilling, D. (Eds.). (2011). *How should one live? Comparing ethics in ancient China and Greco-Roman antiquity*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Knight, N. (2007). *Rethinking Mao: Explorations in Mao Zedong's thought*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Knight, N. (2010). *Marxist philosophy in China: From Qu Qiubai to Mao Zedong*. Heidelberg: Springer.
- Krishna, D. (1988). Comparative philosophy: What it is and what it ought to be. In G. Larson & E. Deutsch (Eds.), *Interpreting across boundaries: New essays in comparative philosophy* (pp. 71–83). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kupperman, J. (2002). The purposes and functions of comparative philosophy. *APA Newsletter on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies*, 2(1), 26–29.
- Larson, G., & Deutsch, E. (Eds.). (1988). *Interpreting across boundaries: New essays in comparative philosophy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Levenson, J. (1970). *Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao and the mind of modern China*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Liang, Q. (1999). *Liang Qichao quanji, the collected works of Liang Qichao* (Vol. 10). Beijing: Beijing Publishing House.
- Littlejohn, R. (2015). Chinese receptions of Western philosophy. Retrieved from <https://www.asianetworkexchange.org/articles/abstract/10.16995/ane.136/>
- Littlejohn, R. (2010). *Comparative philosophy*. Retrieved from <https://www.iep.utm.edu/comparat/>
- Mao, Z. (1966). *Quotations from Mao Tse Tung*. Beijing: Peking Foreign Languages Press. Mao Tse Tung internet archive. Retrieved from <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/red-book/index.htm>
- Mao, Z. (1968). *Mao Zedong xuanji, selected works of Mao Zedong*. Beijing: Renmin Press. Retrieved from <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/index.htm>
- Mason-Oursel, P., & McCarthy, H. E. (1951). True philosophy is comparative philosophy. *Philosophy East and West*, 1(1), 6–9. doi:10.2307/1396931
- Mou, B. (2010). On constructive-engagement strategy of comparative philosophy: A journal theme introduction. *Comparative Philosophy*, 1(1), 1–32.
- Mou, B. (Ed.). (2009). *History of Chinese philosophy*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Mou, B., & Tieszen, R. (Eds.). (2013). *Constructive engagement of analytic and continental approaches in philosophy: From the vantage point of comparative philosophy*. Leiden: Brill.
- Muzumdar, H. (1956). A Chinese philosopher's theory of knowledge. *The Midwest Sociologist*, 19(1), 12–17.
- Neville, R. (2001). Two forms of comparative philosophy. *Dao*, 1(1), 1–13. doi:10.1007/BF02857460
- Ni, P. (2006). Traversing the territory of comparative philosophy. *Social of Asian and Comparative Philosophy Forum*, 23(46), 17–34.
- Peng, G. (2018). Contemporary Chinese philosophy in the Chinese-speaking world: An overview. *Frontiers of Philosophy in China*, 13(1), 91–119.

- Rosemont, H. (2015). *Against individualism: A Confucian rethinking of the foundations of morality, politics, family, and religion*. London: Lexington Books.
- Shen, V. (2003). Some thoughts on intercultural philosophy and Chinese philosophy. *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 30(3-4), 357–372. doi:10.1111/1540-6253.00125
- Shen, V. (2015). Evolutionism through Chinese eyes: Yan Fu, Ma Junwu and their translations of Darwinian evolutionism. *ASIANetwork Exchange: A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts*, 22(1), 49–60. doi:10.16995/ane.135
- Sim, M. (2007). *Remastering morals with Aristotle and Confucius*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Spence, J. (1999). *Mao zedong: A life*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Struhl, K. (2010). No (more) philosophy without cross-cultural philosophy. *Philosophy Compass*, 5(4), 287–295. doi: 10.1111/j.1747-9991.2010.00291.x
- Tan, S. (Ed.). (2016). *The Bloomsbury research handbook of Chinese philosophy methodologies*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Tan, S. (2009). Contemporary Neo-confucian philosophy. In B. Mou (Ed.), *History of Chinese philosophy* (pp. 539–570). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Van Norden, B. (1996a). An open letter to the APA. *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 70(2), 161–163.
- Van Norden, B. (1996b). What should western philosophy learn from Chinese philosophy? In P. Ivanhoe (Ed.), *Chinese language, thought, and culture: Nivison and his critics* (pp. 224–249). Chicago, IL: Open Court.
- Weber, R. (2013). How to compare? On the methodological state of comparative philosophy. *Philosophy Compass*, 8(7), 593–603. doi:10.1111/phc3.12042
- Wong, D. (1989). Three kinds of incommensurability. In M. Krausz (Ed.), *Relativism: Interpretation and confrontation* (pp. 140–159) Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press.
- Wong, D. (2014). Comparative philosophy: Chinese and Western. Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/comparphil-chiwes/>.
- Xiao, Y. (2002). Liang Qichao's political and social philosophy. In C. Cheng & N. Bunnin (Eds.), *Contemporary Chinese philosophy* (pp. 17–36). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Yan, F. (1986). *Yan Fu ji (Collected works of Yan Fu)* (Vol. 5). Beijing: Zhonghua Shju.
- Zhou, X. (2007). The studies of western philosophy in China: Historical review, present states and prospects. Paper presented at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Retrieved from <http://www.cnki.com.cn/Article/CJFDTOTAL-ZXYJ200707008.htm>.

Ronnie Littlejohn
Asian Studies, Belmont University, Nashville, TN, USA
 ronnie.littlejohn@belmont.edu

Qingjun Li
Asian Studies and Chinese Language, Belmont University, Nashville, TN, USA
 qingjun.li@belmont.edu