

RECENT WORK

BOOK REVIEW ON
NEW FRONTIERS OF CHINESE PHILOSOPHY
(*NOVE GRANICE KINESKE FILOZOFIJE* 中國哲學新探索)
(EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY NEVAD KAHTERAN)*

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**ON THE TINY BRIDGE OF UNDERSTANDING:
CHINESE PHILOSOPHY, WESTERN DISCOURSES
AND THE FUSION OF NEW HORIZONS**

Whenever sinologists speak of Chinese philosophy, we are unavoidably confronted with the question of the suitability of this term. Scholars trained in Western philosophy, on the other hand, have only limited access to the general theory and genuine philosophical aspects of Chinese thought. Hence, for the majority of them, these features of classical Chinese discourses continue to appear obscure, unsystematic and therefore lacking any theoretical reliability. Consequently, we must inspect the basic dilemma or question of whether it is possible at all to declare that certain discourses of traditional Chinese thought are philosophy. This question becomes increasingly significant, for especially in our present, inter-connected and globalized world, efforts to obtain a cross-cultural understanding of reality are more essential than ever. However, attempts to gain an insight into the modes of such comprehension without considering the philosophical perspective of others seem to be not only arrogant, but also—to put it mildly—quite naïve. The book was created in a sincere effort to overcome bigotries and prejudices which can lead to such self-centered Eurocentric attitudes. This is one of the main reasons because of which this work is of utmost significance for any form of truly intercultural dialogue between Europe and Eastern Asia.

It was born on many crossroads, connected by tiny and fragile bridges of mutual

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understanding. It was published in Sarajevo, this beautiful and interculturally significant city embedded right in the very heart of the multicolored Balkan Peninsula. Aiming to introduce the topical and cutting edge researches in the field of Chinese philosophy, it followed a similar book devoted to the contemporary investigations in Japanese philosophy. Both works could only be published thanks to the resilient, persistent and continuous exertions of Professor Nevad Katheran, who devoted much of his life and his academic career to the goal of improving intellectual and philosophical dialogues between different cultures. The present book was compiled with the additional support of Bo Mou, who belongs to the most important and innovative scholars in the field of contemporary Chinese philosophy. The result of their joint efforts is an anthology, which contains important contributions written by several leading experts in contemporary Chinese philosophy such as Tu Weiming, Roger T. Ames, Cheng Chung-ying, Bo Mou, and others. Their works are doubtless paving new ways of understanding, interpreting and explaining the fruitfulness of this ancient, but nevertheless always topical East Asian intellectual heritage, aiming to enrich through it our common globalized world.

The book is structured in a logically coherent and transparent manner; it opens with two introductory essays written by Bo Mou, in which he problematizes some fundamental questions regarding the history and the methodology of Chinese philosophy and exposes the significance and the urgent need of its assimilation into the scope of global philosophy.

These basic issues are followed by a critical introduction and evaluation of its contemporary situation; Cheng Chung-ying, the author of this section, also introduces in it some of his own concepts that were coined in order to facilitate the transfer of certain specifically Chinese paradigms to the Western world. Among other issues, he shows that the very identity or the essential nature of Chinese philosophy was always open towards—and hence continuously enriched by—different, external streams of thought, such as for instance Islam.

Thus, the next article, written by Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, can be seen as case study which proves the abovementioned statement, for it introduces to us the cultural history of Islamic population in the late imperial China, i.e. in the same period in which we could witness the first blossoming and first formations of the New (or Modern) Confucian stream of thought in the country.

Through the lens of this intellectual current and its contributions to the revival of Confucian humanism, Tu Wei-ming, who is the author of the following section, offers the reader innovative possibilities of pondering on the nature of history and society. He clearly shows why and how humanism is the keynote in Chinese philosophy: human beings are in the forefront of Chinese philosophers and human society has occupied their attention throughout the ages. For centuries, Chinese philosophy has, similar to other philosophies all over the world, been the central driving force for creating ideas and shaping knowledge which forms and develops human understanding, launches human curiosity, and inspires human creativity. In this context, Tu raises the important and immensely topical question about the

relation between the universal and the culturally conditioned elements of the modernization process.

In the next section, Roger T. Ames offers us a fascinating study of a typical traditional Chinese thought pattern, which doubtless belongs to such culturally conditioned elements. The author shows how and why the Chinese model of paronomasia, which is based on the specifically Chinese patterns of analogical thought, contributes a great deal to the subtle, but simultaneously harmoniously dynamic ways of expressing meaning.

In the following article Takahiro Nakajima elaborates on a rather different aspect of Chinese philosophy: he demonstrates how these ancient cognitive patterns were creatively transformed through their first fruitful contacts with the Western philosophy by comparing Dewey's and Hu Shi's pragmatism. These modernized transformations, however, certainly took place on the basis of traditional Confucian pragmatism, which was very life-oriented.

In order to show that this tendency was an important, but by no means the only significant current of traditional Chinese intellectual history, Maja Milčinski reveals to the readers another important sphere, which is equally intimately linked to the rich heritage of classical Chinese wisdom. She introduces the Daoist ways of thinking, feeling and perceiving death, which is in their view an inseparable—and therefore precious—part of our life.

The basic features of both above mentioned ancient schools of thought are critically introduced by Dušan Pajin, the author of the next section, devoted to a more general introduction of Confucian and Daoist philosophy respectively.

The last two sections are written by Lam Wing-keung and Zhang Xianglong respectively and are—each in its own way—dealing with important questions regarding comparative philosophy and the embeddedness of Chinese philosophy into a global intercultural dialogue. These contributions clearly show that polylogues between different forms of philosophical intellectual creativity are not only possible, but also a most sensible thing to do. If we consider their value and significance within the framework of contemporary global developments, we can with an easy conscience ask ourselves what role will be played, and what share modern and adequate reinterpretations of classical Chinese philosophy will have in this process.

In spite of numerous remaining dilemmas regarding the nature of Chinese philosophy, every reader of this book will clearly see that the authors had no intention to reinterpret Chinese tradition in terms of Western concepts. They are all well aware of the fact that philosophy as an academic discipline has arisen from the essential human need to philosophize. This need or this feature of human thought and sentiment is something universal, as for instance, the human ability to generate language. Although the ability or the potential to create language and thus linguistic communication is universal, each individual language and the grammatical structures by which it is defined, is culturally conditioned. Thus, the expression “Chinese philosophy” does not refer to a geographic dimension of this universal term, but is rather an expression of the cultural conditionality which defines a certain form of philosophizing, or of a certain system of philosophical thought with a typical

paradigmatic structure. This facilitates our understanding of the fact that Chinese philosophy is not a philosophy in the traditional European sense, but a different philosophical discourse, based on different methodology and with different theoretical concerns. Hence, it is not coincidental that traditional Chinese thought also developed certain clearly differentiated forms of inquiry which greatly differ from those which were generally developed within classical European discourses.

Recognizing the comprehension, analysis and transmission of reality based on diversely structured socio-political contexts as a categorical and essential postulate always offers the prospect of enrichment. It also protects us from the tyranny of universalized unidimensional ideologies. This is why we need Chinese philosophy to become an indispensable part of our globalized intellectual world. And this is also what makes this book so immensely important: it offers us possibilities for fruitful fusions of hitherto unknown horizons. In our time, it is also especially meaningful that it was created and published in Sarajevo, a place which enables these new horizons to emerge on the fruitful crossroads of many different histories, cultures, ideologies and religions.