The *Gongfu* Approach to Teaching and Doing Chinese Philosophy across Cultures

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Abstract

This paper introduces a method of doing and teaching East Asian philosophy transculturally. The method underlies a pedagogy that has proven successful with students from diverse international backgrounds studying primarily in English, which suggests its potential for the wider scholarly community. The method centres on the practice, or *gongfu*, of doing philosophy with classical Chinese texts. The *gongfu* approach emphasizes the skill of interpreting and analysing texts within the context of the traditional works themselves. We have found that this skills-based approach to analysis bears much philosophical fruit. It does so, moreover, without subordinating the texts, their ideas, and their arguments to other more academically predominant frameworks. Or in more positive terms, it allows and encourages students to critically philosophize with the early Confucian and Daoist texts on their own terms, and to then creatively bring those unique insights and perspectives to bear on contemporary life.

This paper first introduces the *gongfu* approach to doing and teaching Chinese philosophy and its distinctive characteristics. It then contextualizes the value of this method through critically examining the nature of Chinese philosophy and how we can do *Chinese* philosophy in English. (How Chinese is it, and in what ways?) Throughout I offer short case studies from our program. I conclude by highlighting its promise as a mode (or valuable component) of transcultural philosophizing and briefly reflect on some reservations one might have.

Keywords: *Gongfu*, transcultural, methodology, Chinese philosophy, pedagogy

Gongfu pristop k poučevanju in izvajanju kitajske filozofije v različnih kulturah

Izvleček

Članek predstavi metodo transkulturnega izvajanja in poučevanja vzhodnoazijske filozofije. Metoda je osnova pedagogike, ki se je izkazala za uspešno pri študentih in študentkah iz različnih mednarodnih okolij, ki študirajo predvsem v angleščini, kar kaže na njen potencial za širšo znanstveno skupnost. Ta metoda se osredotoča na prakso oziroma *gongfu*

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izvajanja filozofije s klasičnimi kitajskimi besedili. *Gongfu* pristop poudarja spretnost interpretacije in analiziranja besedil v kontekstu tradicionalnih del. Avtor članka namreč ugotavlja, da ta metodološki pristop k analizi, ki temelji na veščinah, obrodi veliko filozofskih sadov, saj besedila ter njegove ideje in argumentacije ne podreja drugim okvirom, ki so akademsko bolj prevladujoči. Z drugimi besedami, metoda študente in študentke spodbuja, da kritično filozofirajo z zgodnjimi konfucijanskimi in daoističnimi besedili v okviru njihovih lastnih pogojev, ter nato ta edinstvena spoznanja in poglede ustvarjalno prenesejo na sodobno življenje. Članek najprej predstavi *gongfu* pristop k izvajanju in poučevanju kitajske filozofije ter njegove posebne značilnosti. Nato vrednost te metode kontekstualizira s kritičnim preučevanjem značilnosti kitajske filozofije in tega, kako lahko kitajsko filozofijo izvajamo v angleščini (kako kitajska je in v katerih vidikih?). V članku avtor izpostavi kratke študije primerov iz svojega pedagoškega programa. Na koncu poudari, da je lahko tovrsten pristop dragocena komponenta transkulturnega filozofiranja, in hkrati ponudi razmislek o nekaterih zadržkih, ki bi jih lahko akademska skupnost do te metode morda imela.

Ključne besede: *Gongfu*, transkulturnost, metodologija, kitajska filozofija, pedagogika

Introduction

After some years of experimentation in East China Normal University's graduate program in Chinese philosophy, we have settled on a practice- and skills-based pedagogy. Students learn through guided, collaborative reading of the traditional texts, relying on instructors to introduce and explain key concepts, contexts, and problematics but ultimately figuring out for themselves what to make of things. We understand this as a *gongfu* approach to learning. It encourages heuristic interpretation of passages and ideas through students' own informed reflection and discussion. The method thereby centres on creative exploration of philosophical meanings and possibilities within Chinese tradition, rather than on teaching, for example, who Zhuangzi was, what he thought, the meaning of his teachings, or even scholarly debates over interpretations of his teachings—the main foci of many courses and programs in Asian philosophy, especially those conducted in English. This method has proven fruitful specifically for our program, where self-motivated students from across the globe come together out of their shared interest in Chinese philosophical traditions. To us, this suggests that the *gongfu* method could be suitable for studying and doing Chinese philosophy across non-Eastern, principally Anglophone discourse more broadly. Our student body parallels the general composition of scholars in the field.

There are many methods to doing Chinese philosophy that, in their own ways, see much success. So, to be clear, this is not an argument for the superiority of a

single approach. Still, the present paper aims to depict unique strengths of doing and teaching Chinese philosophy this way, and specifically its potential for doing Chinese philosophy across traditions and languages. I argue that its inventive nature helps bypass questions of the legitimacy of doing non-Western philosophy in English—scepticism of which has developed for decades and remains an issue of significant academic concern. It does this by focusing on the practice—the *gongfu*—of doing Chinese philosophy rather than making claims about it. In this practice, we inherit and carry forward tradition. We carry it across eras and cultures as well.

This is possible through viewing philosophy as a craft and recognizing that crafts are simultaneously a matter of inheritance and creation. The craft of making good pizza, for instance, is acquired through learning methods that have been discovered and invented by others through experience and experimentation. One inherits others' experience and processes and puts them into practice for oneself, as suitable to one's own context, conditions, and preferences, in ways that differ from but remain deeply rooted in the pizza-making that came before. Hannah Arendt (1961) describes this as the nature of "education" generally, pointing out that such inheritance is itself inherently "new": it is not mere replication but the passing forth of particular forms of meaning-making through which successive generations give new life to the practices, and indeed the "world", they inherit. We may think also of the famous progression through which *The Karate Kid*'s Daniel-*san* inherits Japanese martial arts tradition in western California: Mr. Miyagi, his *sensei*, guides Daniel in self-discovery of basic karate techniques through familiar practices using local resources ("wash on, wash off"). That the practices travel fluidly across time and place is testament to their transcultural value, and yet these are not universal or generic skills, but distinctively karate skills, bound specifically to that tradition. Despite training in this new environment, through unique heuristics, the skills Daniel learns seem to be no less karate than if he had been a young man in Japan. There is something new, and yet it is also the old thing.

The skills-based approach to Chinese philosophy calls on us, as students of the tradition, to exercise and develop (in that order, because the development occurs through the exercise) capacities for critical reading, analysis, and interpretation of the classical Chinese as well as for evaluation of the practical and philosophical implications of various interpretations. Students of the tradition may be undergraduates, graduate students, or "life-long students" who work with the texts professionally.

This paper outlines the thinking behind the *gongfu* approach—a philosophy of doing philosophy this way. It first introduces this approach and its distinctive characteristics. It then contextualizes the value of this method through critically

examining the nature of Chinese philosophy and, specifically, how we do *Chinese* philosophy in English. (How Chinese is it, and in what ways?) Throughout I offer short case studies from our program. I conclude by highlighting its promise as a mode (or valuable component) of transcultural (or "global") philosophizing and briefly reflect on some reservations one might have.

The *Gongfu* Approach and Cuisine

The *gongfu* approach views Chinese philosophy as a practice and art rather than merely an object of study. We may think of this in terms of the difference between learning about food, learning to cook food, and training as a chef. (I fancy myself rather knowledgeable about food, and am even able to cook several things, but do not consider myself even an amateur chef.) The hope is to cultivate scholars of Chinese philosophy in a sense comparable to training chefs—developing a combination of skill, understanding, judgment, and creativity. Its aim is "mastery" of the craft in the sense of enabling inventive achievement[1]—specifically through exploration and analysis of the conceptual and value schemes put forth in traditional texts.

Let me begin with a (perhaps overly) simple example. Reading *Analects* 6.20, we have: "To know-*zhi* it is surpassed by liking-*hao* it, and to like-*hao* it is surpassed by taking delight-*le* in it." The text here distinguishes three things: to know-*zhi* something, to like-*hao* something, and to delight-*le* in something. Working with these distinctions, we can create meaningful potential interpretations of the three terms and their differences. Perhaps to *zhi* is merely cognitive, to *hao* involves a positive affective inclination, and to *le* combines both? Or perhaps *zhi* is passive, *hao* is motivational but competes with other motives, and *le* motivates action more fully? Or maybe the difference between *hao* and *le* is that *hao* is individualistic preference and *le* is shared communal enjoyment? Rather than working from the English terms, we bracket the three key verbs here—*zhi* as "knowing", *hao* as "liking", and *le* as "delighting in"—as terms with various possible meanings, and we then together explore their diverse interpretive possibilities. When we later encounter *Analects* 9.18, where Confucius tells us "I have yet to meet the person who is as fond (*hao*) of virtue as of lust and beauty", we (students, teachers, scholars) can carry over the possible readings of that term from passage 6.20 and consider whether they fit here and what the implications are of such readings. Through this manner of open-ended exploration, we consider possibilities such as: perhaps

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1   Inventive achievement, of course, is more than mere creativity. My amateur cooking is sometimes quite creative, for example, but there is a large gap between that inventiveness and recognizable culinary achievement.

Confucius sees virtue as a matter of shared enjoyment (*le*) rather than individual predilections (*hao*)? We can also work back to 6.20, and ask: if *hao* can take better and worse objects, perhaps *le* can only take good objects?

This example highlights many of the key qualities of the *gongfu* approach. Firstly, it is closely tethered to the text and tradition, and yet also allows for—even fosters—consideration of novel readings. Certain interpretations we entertain will hold up well and yield interesting possibilities, and others will not. As with young chefs, some new dishes will taste better than others, and some need to go straight in the trash. But the creative practice is essential to future achievement, and merely following a recipe is not sufficient to develop skills of invention and judgement. In class, instructors must thus be authoritative while encouraging the presumption of authority, and to some extent also authorship, by the students.[2] This practice in the task of unpacking what a text gives us allows tradition to unfold anew. It is less pouring old wine into new bottles, and more making new wine from an old vine.

Compare this with other common approaches. Most common, in my experience, are pedagogies that present Eastern, Asian, or Chinese philosophies as objects of study rather than as discourses to engage in. This is how most Eastern Philosophy courses I know of are taught at American colleges and universities. Test questions ask: What school does Zhuang-tzu belong to? What are Buddha's Four Noble Truths? What are the differences between Daoist and Confucian views of the good life? This is, of course, valuable learning. In fortunate cases, it also lays the groundwork for further contextualization and discussion of Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian ideas, aiming to bring greater relevance to the subject matter. This tends to rest on comparison and contrast: for example, in American culture the squeaky wheel gets the grease, while in Japan's Confucian ethic the nail that sticks out gets the hammer. Such methods of instruction can succeed in piquing students' interest in non-Western traditions of thought, showing they offer unique and exotic insights or outlooks. Even better, such comparison—for example, of ethics of individualism *versus* harmony, or identity frameworks of authenticity *versus* sincerity, or moralities of rights *versus* rites—can offer students deeper understanding of both their own cultures and the possibilities and practices that exist beyond them. In the best cases, these can be further brought to bear on contemporary life: What would Laozi think of global warming? What would Mencius think of the Black Lives Matter movement? Such engagement takes some aspect of traditional teaching and asks students to see its relevance today. This is undoubtedly valuable for learning comparative and non-Western philosophy, just

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2   One anonymous reviewer notes that this presupposes a certain level of expertise on the part of *gongfu* instructor(s), a characteristic which distinguishes this approach from otherwise similar proposals for doing "global philosophy"—a helpful clarificatory point (and much appreciated).

as it is enriching to enjoy diverse cuisines.[3] It is also safe. Students acquire codified knowledge: they learn what Confucius taught, rather than rehearsing various potential (mis)readings of what he taught. This is quantifiable information they can be proud of, and which others can esteem—a core measure of successful education. This can also be understood as a consumption model. Students enjoy a nice meal rather than struggling, and potentially failing, to cook for themselves.

Another common approach is more advanced, and less dogmatic. We may read the texts through asking: Is there free will in the *Analects*? And by extension, also: How does Confucius conceive of moral responsibility? The nature of moral duty? What about moral reasoning? Emotions? Autonomy? The self? These are "philosophical" questions—and in an important sense they are the more "traditional" questions of Confucian *philosophy*, a discipline that dates back only a century or two. This is another highly valuable approach, one I use in my own scholarship and have adopted in teaching graduate courses. It is a close ally to the *gongfu* approach, in that it asks students to critically explore the nature of the teachings rather than just learn information about them. It is also undoubtedly essential and enriching work to undertake for both students and scholars. But it differs from the *gongfu* approach in first and foremost asking the texts to speak to an external discussion, that of modern non-Eastern philosophy, within the framework of that other discussion. We may think of it as following familiar recipes to cook up philosophy with Chinese ingredients.

The *gongfu* approach instead first seeks to gather what the texts can say to us on their own terms, which then may (or may not) bear on broader philosophical discussions and debates. The difference can be, in my own experience, profound. Again, a concrete example might help. We may consider: What does Confucius mean in famously stating that he differs from certain other exemplars by being *wu ke wu bu ke* (18.8)? Well, his diverse descriptions of the six exemplars each involves their sense of self (*shen* 身)—its purity or its disgrace. Another passage seems to further characterize Confucius as lacking a sense of self (*wu wo* 毋我) (9.4). So perhaps part of being *wu ke wu bu ke* is related to being *wu wo*—without a sense of self?[4] Why would that be? In tracing terms and ideas in this way, questions arise that bear on broader, familiar philosophical issues: identity, ethical flexibility, plurality, to name but a few. We may draw conclusions about autonomy from this investigation, but we do not frame our inquiry into the text in terms of autonomy or other established Anglophone concepts or problematics.

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3   Paul D'Ambrosio and Timothy Connolly (2017) highlight the virtues of this approach.

4   Song commentator Xing Bing 邢昺 recognizes this connection between the two passages. See his commentary on C-Text: https://ctext.org/lunyu-zhushu/zi-han.

This helps thread the dual dangers of becoming untethered from the text and of losing philosophical interest. Disjunction from the text is difficult to avoid in analysing the passages in translation, and is exacerbated by approaching them through familiar Anglophone frameworks. *Wu wo* in translation becomes not being "egotistical" or "self-absorbed", and the key place of the self (*shen*) in 18.8, so present in the Chinese, fades almost entirely into the background, lost in the required convolutions of English grammar. So, while discussing the ideas in English, we tether that conversation closely to the terms and concepts of the original text so as to reduce the ease of moving accidentally or prematurely onto other grounds—analysing merely egoism and altruism, for example. We attempt to draw teachings and ideas out of the text by working within and across the vocabulary of the text, and then moving beyond it. This kind of work, I propose, puts us on the path to more than just cooking up familiar philosophical recipes using the classical texts.

This does not seek a "correct" reading of the text. It tells us not what the text means, or what Confucius thought, or what the distinctively "Confucian" philosophical views are, at least not definitively. We are instead engaging and honing skills for investigating and drawing out views from the texts—skills of creative exploration, analysis, and evaluation that allow for responsible and critical insight and innovation within the tradition. These are skills that Confucius himself seems to have expected, even demanded, of his disciples—and perhaps of people generally.

But is such free creativity enjoyed at the expense of academic and philosophical rigor? Of course, chefs do follow standard rules and procedures. The Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana, for example, has codified "precise rules for the preparation and processing of 'veraci' (original) pizzas."[5] And yet the Associazione's President, Vincenzo Pace, tells us:

> The pizza secret lies all in the dough rising. Its recipe? It doesn't exist and I can tell you that, because I've learnt since I was a child that dough rising changes according to the weather, hot or cold, dry or dump. For instance if it's cold, you need hot water and a little salt, if it's hot you need less salt since it slows down the rising. These issues must be taken into consideration the night before, when preparing the dough. Ten to twelve hours are needed for a perfect rising. *You can standardize the process, but it is the experience that refines the art.* (Emphasis added)

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5   https://www.pizzanapoletana.org/en/storia_avpn, accessed January 7, 2022. The pizza-based line of thinking is indebted entirely to Paul J. D'Ambrosio, who introduced it to me in discussion with a group of professors over pizza dinner. I owe my awareness of the AVPN, and the subsequent enjoyment of many extraordinary pizzas, to Chris Mulcahy and Laura D. Wade.

General standards offer important guides. But just following the rules is not enough. A true chef of Neapolitan pizza must exercise a cultivated artistic judgement. The official recommended rising time runs from 8 to 24 hours—you make the call. And a masterful chef may invent new versions of pizza Napoletana that will be officially recognized by the Associazione "if they are informed by the Neapolitan tradition of pizzas and are not in contrast with the rules of gastronomy". What makes a pizza Neapolitan? The designation "is characterised by ingredients, means and technologies of production". To be "veraci" is a matter of what you make it from and how you make it. But there is no one right way.

The *gongfu* approach views Chinese philosophy similarly, as a matter of masterfully combining certain ingredients in certain ways. Chinese philosophy is a tradition of thought distinguished by what it is made from and how it is made. But there is another, deeper connection between Napoletana pizza-making and Chinese philosophy: their shared component of decontextualization. The criteria for Napoletana pizza were established in the face of the globalization and commodification of the traditional dish. Only then did the question arise: What makes a pizza Neapolitan? Is it the shape? The person who makes it? Where it is eaten? The guild of pizza masters answered this question by recourse to tradition—traditional ingredients and practices. Eating a pizza in Naples, cooked by a local resident, does not make the pizza Neapolitan. It must be "produced and processed according to the old Neapolitan traditions and customs".

What makes this especially pertinent to Chinese philosophy today, then, is the transcultural potential of the Associazione's approach in the international forum of pizza-making. Pizza-makers are precluded from simply rebranding a regular, generic pie "Neapolitan" (e.g., as a marketing trick, to draw interest and increase sales) and as a result, customers enjoy an authentic product tied to the actual, rich culinary traditions of Naples—which they can now get around the world, from Hong Kong to Los Angeles, London, and New York. Chefs do not have to be Italian to make authentic Neapolitan pizza, or even to invent new ones. They just have to source their materials properly and use them responsibly, informed but not necessarily constrained by tradition.

What (is) Chinese Philosophy?

An ongoing, and perhaps inherent, identity crisis of Chinese philosophy parallels the questions the Neapolitan pizza guild faced. What counts as Chinese philosophy, and what makes it distinctively valuable? There has been much ado over the question of whether Chinese philosophy—what we call Chinese

philosophy, anyway—is properly considered "philosophy".[6] I here examine the other side of the equation: whether, or in what sense, Chinese philosophy is properly Chinese.

On this question, scholars have recently drawn a distinction between two senses of "Chinese" philosophy: philosophy done in the Chinese language, *Hanyu zhexue*, and philosophy done with sources from Chinese tradition, *Zhongguo zhexue*. The distinction frames a choice regarding what defines the Chineseness of Chinese philosophy. The established term at present is *Zhongguo zhexue*, which roots its Chineseness in "China" (*Zhongguo*). The proposed alternative seeks to shift that foundation to its distinctive linguistic medium (*Hanyu*). This would, of course, present a problem for doing Chinese philosophy across cultures and languages. It implies, for example, that doing Confucian, Daoist, and Chan Buddhist philosophy in another language is not properly considered "Chinese philosophy"—a troublesome prospect for our English-taught graduate program in Chinese Philosophy. At the same time, it is a proposal based in considerations that are not easily dismissed.

Yang Xiao notes that the term *Hanyu zhexue* can refer to either (i) the looser criterion of "any philosophy done in *hanyu*", the Chinese language, or (ii) the tighter criterion of "any philosophy done in *hanyu*, whose distinctive features are determined by the distinctive features of *hanyu*" (Xiao 2020, 151). The first sense, it seems, may not be substantively Chinese: we do not consider all philosophy done in English to be English philosophy in any meaningful sense. On the contrary, we generally find it perfectly fine to do Chinese philosophy in English without considering it English philosophy. The second sense, in contrast, offers a workable conception. It points to how doing philosophy in a given language tends to shape that discourse in certain ways. This draws its plausibility from the way distinctive features of traditional Chinese thinking seem essentially integrated with the language they are expressed through.

The proposal that we identify "Chinese philosophy" with the second sense of *Hanyu zhexue* rather than its predominant conception as *Zhongguo zhexue* understands its defining features less in line with the historical, geographical, political, ethnic, or even cultural components defining Chineseness and more in terms of Chinese philosophy operating as a distinct linguistic conceptual system. This turns on seeing philosophy and thinking as shaped by, or even products of, the structure of the particular language it operates in. Xiao points out that this argument for *Hanyu zhexue* is premised on a thesis of linguistic relativity that affirms linguistic determinism: that the characteristics of the language we think

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6   Defoort (2001; 2006); Connolly (2015, 12–16); Lin et al. (1995).

in determines the kinds of thoughts we have (Xiao 2020, 142). This is also true of linguistic relativism generally, not just of the formulation Xiao attributes to the *Hanyu zhexue* discussions. It goes back to the origins of linguistic relativity in contemporary academia, with the Sapir-Whorf theory of linguistic relativity, which boils down to "the claim that what and how we see the world is determined for us by the overt and covert structures of our native language" (Rosemont 1988, 36). If this is true, one may presume it is generally reasonable to identify philosophic traditions with their distinctive determinative languages. At the same time, we cannot attribute too great a role to language, since it is not the exclusive determinant but at most one of many important factors in how ideas are shaped. Yang Guorong makes the point in a more general way, arguing that language is a crucial element in the ongoing process of human meaning-making but does not comprehensively encapsulate or determine that process (Yang Guorong 2021). If language is not fully determinative of thought, then it may make more sense to identify Chinese philosophy with its broader cultural tradition than merely with the linguistic system it (traditionally) trades in.

However, without seeing the second sense of *Hanyu zhexue* as the sole proper criterion of "Chinese" philosophy, we may still acknowledge and appreciate that philosophizing in Chinese operates—or at least can and sometimes does operate—in ways uniquely shaped by particular features of the language. For example, the term *qing* connotes (i) emotion, (ii) essence, and (iii) situated interconnection, three concepts quite independent of one another in English. Chinese philosophers, from classical to contemporary, have worked these overlaps so that their ideas, arguments, and theories cohere comfortably through the term in ways not possible in English. The Qing-dynasty scholar Dai Zhen, for example, explicates the term as essential stuff, and uses it to refer to our essentially human emotions (Dai 1961, §30). Li Zehou's theory of "emotion as substance" (*qing benti*) asserts the fundamentality of *qing*, understood as the lived and felt experience of human interrelations (Li Zehou 2011, 39–63). These kinds of connections are counterintuitive to many Europeans and Americans, who tend to think of emotion, essence, and concrete relations separately. This has even shaped modern scholarship, which includes significant discussion of which of these meanings to attribute to *qing* in the classical texts: Did Mencius and Zhuangzi use *qing* to refer to feelings, or to essence?[7] However, the seemingly independent meanings reveal close interconnections upon reflection: we often judge authenticity (essence, truth) through feeling and intuition, and our emotions arise precisely in and through our concrete

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7   See e.g., Yang Bojun (1960, 241); Li Xueqin (1999, 11.300–301); Graham (1989, 98–99; 1990, 49–55).

relations and interactions with others. Thinking in English also has its distinctive conceptual interconnections. Consider the case of "freedom", which combines agency, non-interference, self-determination, and self-realization with a notorious ambiguity, and thereby pulls extraordinary weight in much Western thought.[8] A crucial upshot is this: we can manoeuvre in Chinese and English in certain ways more or less comfortably, which leads to particular ways of thinking and valuing in each.

So while language may not be fully deterministic, we can acknowledge it has some essential connection to the distinctive forms of Chinese philosophical thinking. It may be tempting, then, to shift the either-or *Hanyu–Zhongguo zhexue* framework to a both-and: Chinese philosophy both belongs to China's particular cultural traditions and incorporates distinctive nuances of the Chinese language. Moreover, the traditional Chinese sources were written both in Chinese and in China, so as regards traditional texts and thinkers the distinction is largely moot. However, for modern and contemporary philosophy, the difference becomes meaningful, even necessary. Especially as regards the international, primarily Anglophone discourse of "Chinese philosophy", the distinction may be of crucial consequence. And since Xiao lampoons the vagueness of the *Hanyu–Zhongguo zhexue* discussions, let me draw more clearly the distinction between "CP-Lang", as philosophy as distinctively shaped by the Chinese language, and "CP-Trad", as philosophical thought original to Chinese tradition.

A potential objection to the CP-Lang criterion for defining the Chineseness of Chinese philosophy is that much contemporary Anglophone Confucian moral and political philosophy would no longer count as "Chinese philosophy" under it. Even where these works are sensitive to the conceptual nuances of classical texts and terms—carefully explicating the nature of *ren* in Mencius, for example—the philosophy they do with Confucian sources often operates primarily on Western philosophical terms. Consider major works by leading contemporary political theorists such as Joseph Chan and Sungmoon Kim,[9] along with Zhouyao Li, Franz Mang, and others. These are "Chinese" or "East Asian" philosophy in working with materials that originated in and are associated with China and East Asia, with a focus on their contemporary relevance to these regions, but they speak entirely in and on the terms of modern Anglo-American political philosophy. By the same standard, most articles in volumes such as *Confucianism and Human Rights*, *Essays on the Moral Philosophy of Mengzi*, and

8   See Carleo (2021, esp. 12–15).
9   Chan (2014); Kim (2016); (2018).

Confucian Ethics[10]—collections I deeply admire, have learned a great deal from, and refer to frequently in my own thinking, teaching, and writing—fall beyond the pale of the CP-Lang definition. They cook up Chinese ingredients, but not with Chinese methods. They primarily do Anglophone philosophy with Chinese sources.

This helps show what is at stake with the CP-Lang/*Hanyu* condition of Chinese philosophy. On the one hand, I expect nearly everyone agrees that the aforementioned works are, in fact, properly considered Chinese philosophy, which suggests the CP-Lang criterion fails. Xiao makes this point in more general terms, noting "the scope of Chinese philosophy is obviously much larger than the scope of *hanyu* philosophy" since Chinese philosophy done in other languages remains Chinese despite not meeting the *Hanyu* stipulation (Xiao 2020, 152). Scholars can and do do Chinese philosophy in "Tibetan, Korean, Japanese, English, French, and German" (ibid.). On the other hand, however, this is where the value of the distinction itself arises. Certain works do CP-Trad but not CP-Lang. The usefulness of the two criteria may lie less in delimiting the proper scope of "Chinese" philosophy and rather in distinguishing different manners in which Chinese philosophy is being done.

Some works do CP-Trad but not CP-Lang. Other works do CP-Lang but not CP-Trad. I think here of modern philosophical texts that draw heavily or even exclusively on non-Eastern sources, yet in their reapplication of these sources to Chinese culture and society become distinctively Chinese. Within the particular problematics of Chinese intellectual tradition and through the conceptual frameworks of Chinese linguistic conventions, the foreign ideas are sometimes transformed. Such works can thereby be considered Chinese philosophy despite being rooted in or drawing heavily on non-Chinese sources. Mou Zongsan's revision of Kantian metaphysics and morality, which famously transforms Kant's metaphysics of morals into a moral metaphysics, is one example. A similar view may be taken of Yan Fu's adaptation (and perhaps even his translation) of J. S. Mill's philosophy of individual freedom. Both present non-Eastern philosophies through distinctively Confucian language, images, and conceptual schemes, and therein transform the theories into partly or even entirely novel sets of views. They do Chinese philosophy with non-traditional sources.

Generalizing these observations, we may say: rather than asking which standard, XP-Lang or XP-Trad, properly or better defines "X" philosophy, we can accept them both. Discussing sources from X tradition and doing so in ways distinctively shaped by X language constitute a pair of compatible but distinct conditions (or

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10   De Bary and Tu (1998); Liu and Ivanhoe (2002); Shun and Wong (2004).

forms) of X-ness. Each concerns important components of what makes Chinese philosophy Chinese.[11] We may even see each as independently sufficient to validate the "X-ness" of a philosophy.

Two further observations tie back into the value of the *gongfu* approach for doing philosophy across cultures. The first point is the dynamic interrelation of the CP-Lang and CP-Trad criteria. Yan Fu and Mou Zongsan did Chinese philosophy with non-Chinese sources precisely by reconstructing those ideas in the language and concepts of neo-Confucian texts. We can go further: non-Chinese sources can become Chinese philosophy and thus incorporated into CP-Trad by being translated into and reconfigured in this way—through typically Chinese terms, categories, images, turns of phrase, and conceptual schemes. This is an essential part of how Buddhism became Chinese philosophy and central to the tradition. It shows that the linguistic and conceptual frameworks through which philosophy proceeds are themselves partly constitutive of its tradition. The second additional point follows: when we do philosophy with traditionally Chinese sources that is not informed by the nuances of their particular language, we are not *merely* doing CP-Trad without CP-Lang, as though this takes place instead in no language, on neutral terms. These are cases of CP-Trad done as (most often) AP-Lang, Chinese sources discussed on the terms of Anglo-American discourse. The predominant way of doing Chinese philosophy in English is this: cooking up American recipes with Chinese ingredients.

The value of the *gongfu* approach is that it does Chinese philosophy in English without shifting it as fully onto the grounds of Anglophone discourse. It recognizes that there are close, essential ties between the terms in which philosophical thinking proceeds and the tradition in which it is done.

Doing Chinese Philosophy through *Gongfu*

The moniker "*gongfu* approach" is adapted partly from Peimin Ni's *gongfu* or "Kung-fu" reading of the *Analects*. This takes Confucius's teachings as "*gongfu* instructions" and "a *gongfu* system" entailing a certain approach to practice (Ni 2018, 268). They present guides to living, without having too much to do with

11   Liangjian Liu (2015) explicates the "interactive relation between the content of philosophy done in the Chinese language (*Hanyuyan zhexue*) and the study of Chinese philosophy (*Zhongguo zhexue*)", therein identifying that Chinese thought has particular views of the nature of language; Liu also identifies that through translingual comparison we see the influence of structure of the Chinese language on Chinese thought; and finally that phenomenological description of the key terms of Chinese thinking (traditional and modern) allows for unique exploration of fundamental philosophical questions through the language and logic of Chinese thought.

abstract reasoning and propositional argument. Ni thus eschews attempts to "articulate Confucius' thoughts as a theoretical system of propositional knowledge", believing "the philosophy of Confucius does not focus on obtaining propositional truth, but instead on how to live one's life" (ibid., 268, 275).

Confucius, in the *gongfu* reading, offers guides much like the Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana: the Master's "*gongfu* instructions are more like protocols, which can allow flexibility", and the teachings go "far beyond" rules and obligations, "into the realm of mastering the art of living" (Ni 2017, 27). Confucius intends to guide us in our practice, in how we live, and reading the *Analects* should thus include (and attend to) this broader array of interpretive possibilities. We should be careful to note this does not necessarily preclude reading Confucius through more analytic, argumentative, propositional, philosophical, critical, rationalist frameworks. Rather than reducing the number of possible interpretations by excluding such approaches, Ni admonishes us merely to not limit our readings to them, and not to take Confucius himself as primarily putting forth abstract, rational theories and arguments. This enriches and expands our interpretive horizon, asking us to take more into account when we read Confucius, not less.

It is important to emphasize that the *gongfu* approach outlined in this paper does not adopt Ni's *gongfu* reading of the *Analects*. It does not preclude or even discourage us from assessing the texts in terms of their logical propositions. So how and why call this a *gongfu* methodology? It is "*gongfu*" in the sense that Ni attributes to the *Analects* itself, in prioritizing the "art" of making meaning situated within a tradition. Rather than teaching propositions (e.g., "Confucius says X; which we can contrast with Laozi, who says Y, or with Kant, who says Z"), the *gongfu* method familiarizes students with effective (and justifiable, cogent, and contextualized) manners of creating meaning from the texts.

A key concern motivating Ni's advocacy of the *gongfu* approach is the modern move to read the *Analects* in abstract, intellectualistic rather than practical terms, so as to incorporate it into academic philosophical discourse. However well-intentioned this may be, in Ni's view it makes Confucianism less itself and more like mainstream Western philosophy.

The *gongfu* approach allows us to arrive at views that framing our study in other more common ways inhibits. We play with possible interpretations of *hao* and *le* rather than (or at least prior to) asking whether Confucian virtue is eudemonistic. But it does not foster untethered creativity. While inventive interpretation is encouraged, such interpretation should draw directly on and tie in closely with the specific terms and passages in the texts. This is in fact itself a typically,

substantively Confucian characteristic. Various Confucian philosophers, ancient and modern, practice precisely this sort of tethered creativity. Confucius himself famously edited the cannon, as did Zhu Xi. Arguments against competing thinkers are put in terms of "correcting" understanding of the meaning of terms and ideas in canonized texts.[12] More recently, contemporary scholars have offered various frameworks for conceptualizing and justifying this. Li Zehou links human thought and reason to culture, understanding Confucian tradition along with all theoretical and practical reasoning as constantly evolving through and adapting to human practice.[13] There is not one true Confucianism, but distinctively Confucian insights which can inform and enrich contemporary thinking and ways of life. Yang Guorong describes a similar dynamic in terms of world-making, offering a view in which humans continuously author their world through concrete interactive meaning-making—a view itself developed from the Confucian classics (Yang 2021). Henry Rosemont Jr. encapsulates this attitude in declaring the value of his own interpretation of Confucianism to be independent of its fidelity to classical thought, a useful "creative misreading of early Confucian writings" (Rosemont 2015, 9).

This way of interpreting Confucian teachings, based on Confucian tradition itself, is both conservative and progressive. It is a matter of preserving and saving culture and tradition precisely through their adaptation to the present. We do not need to—or want to—reinvent the pizza. As noted above, Hannah Arendt (1961) describes "education" in this vein, as a matter of both saving and creating "the world": the possessors of culture and knowledge, the masters of arts and sciences, persons of "authority" who take responsibility for this "world"—they preserve it by passing it on to younger, future generations. This inheritance by the new, meanwhile, carries the world forward in everchanging ways—building on, editing, and adapting what they have been given. This is what passing on the Way (*chuan dao*) has involved from Confucius through Han Yu to Mou Zongsan and Li Zehou. For all, where we go wrong is not in changing our inherited teachings, culture, "world", or "the Way" to suit the times and shifting circumstance. This is necessary, and is itself the nature of the Way. The call is not in substance to preserve or revive some "true" original meaning of the teachings, although it often takes this simplified outward form. It is rather for caution against straying too far from

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12 This is central to the commentarial tradition of directly explicating texts, but also goes beyond it. For example, Qing Confucian Dai Zhen's treatise *An Evidential Study of the Meanings of Terms in the Mencius* goes through key concepts—including *li* (principle), *tian dao* (the Way of heaven), *xing* (human nature), *ren yi li zhi* (the cardinal virtues), *cheng* (sincerity), and *quan* (weighing)—in attempt to correct widespread misunderstanding of metaphysical, metaethical, moral, and practical components of Confucian teachings (Dai 1961).

13 See Li Zehou (2011; 2018); Rošker (2019; 2020, 14–20, 67–73).

the traditional teachings by accidentally grafting ideas from competing ways of thought onto our understanding of those texts, replacing one tradition with another. That is, we want to be careful about what we label "veraci" pizza. How to do this? Again, nearly all seem to agree, despite the diverse, incompatible philosophies each draws from the same tradition: we must return to the texts, they say, and look to the terms and concepts we find there. On that basis we can construct a truly Confucian philosophy for today.

Most scholars will agree that close reading of the texts and interpretation of them are essential, foundational to training in and doing Chinese philosophy. The *gongfu* approach proposes a way of doing so that helps carry more of what is substantively Chinese about Chinese philosophy, both as CP-Trad and CP-Lang, across languages and cultures. This functions similarly to the study and interpretation of the texts within Confucian tradition. At the same time, it also does not attempt to bracket the "undue" influence of familiar ideas from other traditions. We do not attempt to speak exclusively in Confucian terms or work solely within the conceptual realms of Chinese classics. On the contrary, the value and potential of studying these texts are enriched by working across traditions, vocabularies, and frameworks. It is simply that, working with texts and thinkers from Chinese traditions, we prioritize interpretation and discussion of the passages through the context, concepts, and terms of the original Chinese in order to keep the door to those connections as open as possible.

The premise is that working out the connotations and connections of the Chinese terms offers platforms for exploring interpretive possibilities, and that we need to be careful in working with English translations because CP-Trad operating in AP-Lang can prematurely restrain or shift the scope of interpretive possibility. Consider one more example: Reading Zhou Dunyi's *Taiji tu shuo (Explanation of the Diagram of* Taiji), we evaluate different potential interpretations of the nature of *taiji* and *wuji*—the supreme ultimate and the nothingness ultimate—within the passage's broader discussion of *tai*, *wu*, and *ji*, informed by the intellectual context of these concepts. Is *taiji* the ultimate limit of supremacy, and *wuji* the ultimate limit of nothingness? Or are they that which has the ultimate limit and that which has no limit? A related question: how does this pairing of *tai* and *wu* compare with the similar Laozian pairing of *you* and *wu* (roughly, being and nothingness)? We take into account the other forms or uses of *ji* in the text: *dongji* (the movement of the ultimate, or utmost movement?), *jingji* (utmost tranquillity, or the tranquillity of the ultimate?), and most importantly, *renji* (utmost humanity? the human ideal?). How does the discussion of cosmological generation and constitution in terms of *taiji*, *wuji*, *dongji*, and *jingji* connect with the ensuing discussion of *renji*, seemingly as an ethical ideal? We point out the relation to

Analects 2.1, where the ideal ruler is portrayed as *beichen*, the north pole star, and the deeper conceptual connection between polarity, the pole star, and human virtue within early Chinese thought.[14] Leading students into the texts, we explore the conceptual world through which the ideas originated and through which they unfold especially rich meaning.

This allows more CP-Trad to shine through, since it carries more of the CP-Lang elements of the tradition to the table. But it is not attempting to do CP-Lang. It is just drawing out conceptual and linguistic connections from the texts to enrich the *gongfu* practice of responsible, creative exploration of ideas and meaning by students and scholars around the world, in our case primarily in English. This may be considered "global philosophy", but more accurately is Chinese philosophy done globally. Nor does it view the Anglophone linguistic-conceptual system as an obstacle to the true meaning of the texts. Instead, it aims to work across several main linguistic systems of contemporary Chinese philosophy—traditional Chinese, modern Chinese, and English—in this practice. Again, following Ni (in a way), the *gongfu* approach aims to be more inclusive, not less.

There is one last question or concern I want to raise here: Some may be sceptical that we can work fruitfully across distinct, incommensurate conceptual systems. Is it possible? Don't we need a cogent, unifying framework within which to pose, address, and resolve philosophical questions? Henry Rosemont Jr. famously pointed out the incommensurability among conceptual schemes of such diverse languages and traditions as Chinese and English. He also distinguished the recognition of this incommensurability from the presumption that there exist "impassable barriers" between their ideas (Rosemont 1996). Rosemont believed that the pluralist recognition of diverse conceptual and value schemes among different linguistic-philosophical traditions "extends our intellectual horizons" and "can open up our vistas", and that in contrast "the impassable barriers claim can close them" (ibid., 164). While different conceptual schemes may allow us to view the world in different ways—and to even make different worlds for us—there is, he believed, translatability among the languages that allows for interchange between them, and thus also between the worlds (or less radically, views of the world) they present (Rosemont 1988, 42, 46–47). In this view, one can work fruitfully across philosophical traditions just as a chef can blend diverse cuisines. The *gongfu* view goes even further, recognizing that traditions and cuisines themselves originate and develop through such fusion. After all, Buddhist ideas were gradually, fundamentally incorporated into Chinese philosophical tradition from their origins in

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14   For a thorough explication of these connection, see Jia (2009, 460–65, 479–86).

the West, just as the chili pepper was first brought to China from the Americas by European traders.

Transcultural, Comparative, and Incommensurable Systems

I hope to have shown the potential of the *gongfu* approach for doing Chinese philosophy transculturally, operating across multiple languages, conceptual systems, and intellectual traditions at once. It may be considered "postcomparative", in that it discards with separation between traditions and instead brings them together to bear on human issues (rather than Chinese, Asian, or Western issues) today. In this, it may be deployed as a method of doing "global philosophy", since it brings Chinese philosophy to bear on global philosophical issues and in global discourse. Of course, it is a specific manner of doing global philosophy, in that it centres on training in the particular skills of doing philosophy with, in, and through Chinese tradition.[15] I believe its traits have certain strengths compared with more common comparative approaches. In this final section, I suggest that it may be best taken to augment rather than compete with or seek to replace comparative study.

The incommensurability of different linguistic and conceptual systems has haunted comparative methods. Xinli Wang identifies the challenge:

> If two distinct c-p [cultural-philosophic] languages are incommensurable, comparative study between them is compromised such that rational philosophical comparison between them is problematic, difficult, and even in some measure unattainable. One needs to proceed with extreme caution. (Wang Xinli 2018, 580)

Wang's conclusion is that "meaningful comparison" between incommensurable systems is possible, but within highly restricted parameters.

> Systematic comparison, which requires the existence of a common language into which both languages to be compared can be translated without loss, cannot proceed in the case of incommensurability. Similarly, classical content-comparison based on the sameness of meaning/reference cannot be carried out between two incommensurable c-p languages. (ibid.)

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15   A very helpful contextualizing review of "postcomparative" transcultural approaches to global philosophy, along with an alternative proposal centering on "sublation" rather than *gongfu*, is recently given by Jana S. Rošker (2022).

Wang's solution for arriving at "meaningful comparison" is to instead seek "rational comparison between *semantic contents*" of diverse schemes ("c-p languages") (ibid., 580, emphasis in original). He believes this can overcome obstacles to incommensurability by operating "at the *meta-theoretical level*, namely the comparison between distinct sets of cultural schemes, such as transcendentism *versus* immanentism and exclusive duality *versus* inclusive duality" (ibid., emphasis in original). Wang calls this "presuppositional comparison", since it compares two cultural schemes underlying the linguistic systems, citing David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames (1987, 1998) as models (Wang Xinli 2018, 581).[16] The virtues of this approach are "obvious":

> It does not require that there exist a neutral language into which both languages can be translated without loss. It does not require that there exist a unitary truth theory accepted by both languages. It does not require sameness or overlap of meaning or reference. Actually, it sidesteps many problems caused by meaning, reference, and translation.

Different systems can be meaningfully compared by levelling up (or ratcheting down?) to their disparate fundamentals.

Compare Wang's proposed "presuppositional comparison" with the *gongfu* approach. *Gongfu* does not seek a "meta-theoretical level" for comparison but rather operates within, or at least with continual reference and sensitivity to, the conceptual schemes of the classical texts. It seeks to move beyond the comparative project altogether, toward a synthetic one. This, however, in no way denies or devalues the comparative project. If anything, we find that it offers a more robust foundation for comparison. It facilitates, even motivates, the sort of "presuppositional comparison" Wang highlights the value of. It pushes us to consider (and operates through considering) the frameworks offered by the texts—the conceptual schemes and value systems they affirm and promote—and to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, practical and theoretical. Wang champions comparison of the overall frameworks of diverse conceptual systems, while the *gongfu* approach proceeds through syncretic exploration and evaluation of the conceptual systems of particular texts and traditions. *Gongfu* analysis and evaluation is fundamental and a prerequisite to the kind of comparison Wang advocates. From here, I must add one small objection to the way Wang puts things.

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16   Interestingly, Wang does not cite the middle book of this Hall and Ames trilogy, in which they most explicitly put forth their comparative methodology. They explain this in terms of dominant and recessive modes of "problematic thinking", which is inverse between China and the West (Hall and Ames 1995, esp. xvi–xviii).

Wang champions "presuppositional" comparison, but this description is misleading. No comparison can proceed prior to accepting some suppositions from which to move forward. What Wang substantively describes is the attempt to proceed not from a place with no suppositions but rather from "pooling together" and working across all suppositions from both systems. This is "meta-theoretical" in that it works beyond each system *qua* system; however, it does not do so by taking up a third position, but rather by working through and across the components of both systems at once. We play neither rap nor rock'n'roll, but rather meld the two distinct genres. So one issue with the term "presuppositional" is that the approach it describes does not proceed prior to supposition but rather through embracing, exploring, and working across the diverse, conflicting suppositions of multiple systems. (It thus precedes total commitment to any foundational suppositions, and in this sense it might be better seen as provisionally suppositional rather than "presuppositional".)

Liangjian Liu and I have recently contrasted two levels of philosophizing: *yin* and *yang*. Drawing on Robin R. Wang's explication of these elements within traditional Chinese thought, we see *yang* philosophy as focused on "explicit order" and particular problematics, while *yin* philosophy directs us to examine the "underlying order" of foundational background elements on which particular problematics are based (Carleo and Liu 2021, 133–34; Wang Robin R. 2012, 145–48). *Gongfu* and the "presuppositional" approach commit us to exploring and reckoning with the *yin* factors as well as the *yang* components of multiple systems. We work forward from what resources we have, and from within that concrete, syncretic, historical position we evaluate which suppositions to value and hold to. The *gongfu* syncretism seeks a richer, more diverse field of premises and suppositions that offer a richer fabric from which to proceed with *yang* philosophizing.

We may understand this as exploring traditional Chinese lines of reasoning, brought into the modern international arena. Seeing philosophy as primarily the exploration of various lines of reasoning—especially on normative and existential topics—the *gongfu* approach places Chinese philosophy on equal footing to other discourses and traditions. Indeed, many philosophers question the predominance of familiar Western lines of thinking in philosophy. As Jana S. Rošker writes,

> It has become clear to most people that "Western epistemology" represents only one of many different forms of historically transmitted social models for the perception and interpretation of reality. Hence, polylogues between different forms of such intellectual creativity are not only possible, but also a most sensible thing to do. (Rošker 2021, 7; cites Ames 2015, 109–10).

Among the various manners of negotiating and renegotiating which epistemological models we adopt and deploy across traditions and languages—comparative and postcomparative—the *gongfu* method contributes a valuable, even crucial, instrument to the toolbox of global philosophy.[17]

Having touted its strengths, let me conclude by turning to some potential concerns about the *gongfu* method. One might object that this approach seems poised to relegate Chinese philosophy to the margins of philosophical discourse, if not banish it altogether. Philosophy departments are uninterested in this kind of loose "creative exploration", and demand analytic rigor.[18] While this approach might be common in or suited to East Asian institutions, it will hardly pique the interest of non-Eastern academic philosophers. The only places for such interpretive reading in American and European institutions are Sinology and comparative literature departments (and Sinologists might reject its insufficient rigor, as well).

This objection is premised on considerations both theoretical and practical. The theoretical side involves the question of the legitimacy of Chinese philosophy as philosophy. More practically, the question is one of publishing, jobs, and funding: Who gets what? Since scholars committed to certain conceptual frameworks and problematics stand as gatekeepers to the discourse and profession, even those hoping to diversify the field require new voices to speak meaningfully to and within those commitments. These practical dimensions of the objection are analogous to saying that training Daniel in karate will not prepare him for the boxing ring, where different rules apply and other skillsets determine success. Even if such *gongfu* training in Chinese philosophy is valuable in its own way, it is not valuable in the right ways—the most valuable ways.

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17   One possible concern here is that the commitments and frameworks of global and comparative philosophy may prevent accepting or even recognizing the relevance and value of the *gongfu* approach. In other words, *gongfu* may be valuable on its own terms, but those terms may not speak to global or comparative thinking. Many thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out, and for offering a way to "objectivize" *gongfu's* contribution on a methodological "middle ground": the recent work of two Western neurologists, Morten H. Christiansen and Nick Chater (2022). Christiansen and Chatter offer scientific evidence for recognizing the *gongfu*-like nature of the evolution of natural languages, which occurs holistically *via* culturally (and historically) situated invention. As they describe it, the spontaneous, evolutionary development of languages is, indeed, world altering for us. Moreover, the meaning-making power of particular languages relies not on set epistemic or linguistic structures but on the interactive, imaginative communications of language users—particular humans creatively conveying understanding to one another in ever new ways that also rely on and inherit linguistic traditions and conventions. The objective (scientific) quality of this general property of language and meaning may help those with non-*gongfu* epistemic commitments to recognize the method's worth.

18   Indeed, nowhere here have I properly, analytically defined the *gongfu* approach itself—a stark violation of "philosophic" norms, yet fully aligned with the nature of *gongfu* practice and its descriptive, contextual, contingent approach to meaning and meaning-making.

What are the right ways to do philosophy generally, and specifically Chinese philosophy? I suggested that the ongoing, and perhaps inherent, identity crisis of Chinese philosophy parallels the questions the Neapolitan pizza guild faced: What counts as *Chinese* philosophy (or *Neapolitan* pizza), and what makes it distinctively valuable? For Chinese philosophy, however, the questions raise an additional hurdle not faced by the pizza chefs. No one would question whether Neapolitan pizza is legitimately pizza, only what makes a pizza distinctively Neapolitan. Chinese philosophy faces both questions: What makes it legitimately philosophy, and how is it distinctively Chinese? The dual demands, moreover, often conflict, creating the "double bind" on specialists in Chinese philosophy described by Amy Olberding: to be sufficiently philosophical requires trading in questions of established non-Eastern academic philosophy, yet to be distinctively valuable demands offering something uniquely Chinese (Olberding 2015, 15). We need to cook something palatable, but exotic.

So what to do in the face of this double-bind? Yong Huang argues that it necessitates we demonstrate Chinese philosophy can "help solve the problems that occupy current mainstream Western philosophers" (Huang 2016, 18–19). He thus proposes "while we let Western philosophy dictate what issues to talk about, we let Chinese philosophy have the final say on each of these issues" (Huang 2013, 133; cf. 2016, 19). The practical appeal of this approach is undeniable—if we want access to the kingdom, we must make keys that fit the locks. Another proposal is to drop the focus on being Chinese and simply philosophize along generic lines, using Chinese sources. The premise for this is that, for philosophy students and scholars, the "value of Chinese and other 'Non-Western' philosophies comes not from their being 'Chinese' or 'Non-Western,' but from being philosophical" (D'Ambrosio, Amarantidou, and Connolly 2021). Of course, the inverse move might work as well. We could drop the claim to being "philosophical" in the narrow sense of established discourses that dominate (non-Asian) academic departments, which tend broadly toward either Analytic or Continental, and this would reduce the pressure to conform to the norms of those discourses. Perhaps interpretation of the texts is better off elsewhere, avoiding the "violence in inclusion" that occurs at the hands of philosophy professors (Møllgaard 2021). There seem to be several decent solutions, and at the same time, no perfect one.

The *gongfu* outlook reframes these weaknesses—insufficiently palatable and/or insufficiently exotic, insufficiently philosophical and/or insufficiently Chinese—as strengths. We strive to be philosophical without sticking too closely to questions external to the texts, and we aim to move beyond the texts while remaining tethered to them. We seek to speak to matters of contemporary philosophical

interest and import without diving wholesale into the framework of other traditions and discourse. Seeing the task not as locking down a series of incontrovertible truths, but rather as exploring the insights of various traditional texts, and seeing tradition not merely as established by the past but also as carried forward in the present, we face neither of the theoretical components of Chinese philosophy's double bind. The practical components of institutional structures, incentives, and norms remain, but as a wise and successful philosopher once suggested, perhaps the most effective path to acceptance is paved by original, engaging work that gets people interested and excited.[19] The skills and learning achieved through the *gongfu* approach, I believe, are geared precisely to make that possible. In other words, we need more chefs to make new, delectable dishes.

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19 Paraphrasing Robert C. Neville, proposing the career of Roger T. Ames as a model.

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