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Abstract

I will argue for three points. The first is on the need to make Chinese philosophy a world philosophy. The second point is that, in order to promote Chinese philosophy as a world philosophy we should not historicize philosophy. Philosophy and history are two different disciplines. As important as historical context is, overemphasizing it or even taking philosophy merely as a matter of intellectual history makes it difficult for non-specialists to study Chinese philosophy, and is therefore counter-productive to advancing it as a world philosophy. A good balance is thus needed in order to develop Chinese philosophy in response to contemporary needs and not to exclude a large number of non-specialists from studying and drawing on it. My third point is that comparative philosophy is the most effective way to study, examine and develop Chinese philosophy as a world philosophy. Comparative philosophy provides a much needed bridge across different cultures for philosophy to connect on the world stage.

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Abstract

I will argue for three points. The first is on the need to make Chinese philosophy a world philosophy. The second point is that, in order to promote Chinese philosophy as a world philosophy we should not historicize philosophy. Philosophy and history are two different disciplines. As important as historical context is, overemphasizing it or even taking philosophy merely as a matter of intellectual history makes it difficult for non-specialists to study Chinese philosophy, and is therefore counter-productive to advancing it as a world philosophy. A good balance is thus needed in order to develop Chinese philosophy in response to contemporary needs and not to exclude a large number of non-specialists from studying and drawing on it. My third point is that comparative philosophy is the most effective way to study, examine and develop Chinese philosophy as a world philosophy. Comparative philosophy provides a much needed bridge across different cultures for philosophy to connect on the world stage.

Keywords: Chinese philosophy, world philosophy, history, comparative philosophy

Kitajska filozofija kot svetovna filozofija

Izvleček

To, za kar se zavzemam, bom prikazal v treh točkah. Prvič gre za potrebo po tem, da postane kitajska filozofija del svetovne filozofije. Pri drugi točki gre za to, da kitajske filozofije ne smemo historizirati, če jo želimo promovirati kot svetovno filozofijo. Filozofija in zgodovina sta dve različni disciplini. Četudi je zgodovinski kontekst nadvse pomemben, ga ne smemo pretirano poudarjati ali celo reducirati filozofijo na objekt idejne zgodovine. V tem primeru bodo osebe, ki niso specializirane za zgodovino, kitajsko filozofijo zelo težko razumele, zato so taki pristopi za projekt uveljavitve kitajske filozofije kot dela svetovne filozofije nadvse kontraproduktivni. Če torej želimo kitajsko filozofijo razvijati kot odziv na potrebe današnjega časa, pri tem ne smemo izključevati velikega števila ljudi, ki niso strokovnjaki za področje kitajske idejne zgodovine, kajti tudi oni se morajo soočiti s kitajsko filozofijo, jo spoznati in razvijati naprej. Tretja točka, ki jo nameravam obravnavati v tem članku, pa izhaja iz prepričanja, da je primerjalna filozofija najučinkovitejša metoda za učenje, vrednotenje in razvijanje kitajske filozofije v ogrodju svetovne filozofije.

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Primerjalna filozofija ponuja zelo pomemben most, ki povezuje različne kulture in njihovim filozofijam omogoča, da se vzajemno povežejo na svetovni ravni.

Ključne besede: kitajska filozofija, svetovna filozofija, zgodovina, primerjalna filozofija

Chinese philosophy as a world philosophy can mean two related yet different movements. The first movement takes Chinese philosophy[1] as the representative philosophy of a geographical area, alongside philosophies from other parts of the world, such as Indian philosophy, African philosophy, and Japanese philosophy. In this sense, we can find Chinese philosophy in such venues as the *Oxford Handbook of World Philosophy* (Edelglass and Garfield 2011), where "world philosophy" means philosophies in or from various parts of the world. Understood this way, we could think of the panda in China and the koala in Australia as their counterparts in the animal kingdom. Chinese philosophy in this first sense stands for how the Chinese understand the world, or "how they do things over there". The second is an ambitious contemporary movement to extend the relevance of Chinese philosophy beyond its geographic origin, to be studied, examined, developed, and advanced anywhere in the world as a cross-cultural enterprise.[2] The second movement also includes taking insights from Chinese philosophy to construct contemporary world philosophy beyond any particular region. In this second sense, we can think of the current standing of Greek philosophy (e.g., Plato, Aristotle) as a counterpart. Rightly or not, Aristotle's theory of human virtues is not merely about Greeks—it is about humanity across the globe. Ideas from Plato or Aristotle have been drawn on to philosophize on current issues in our world, to enrich philosophical activities beyond any particular culture. For these reasons, we can say that Plato and Aristotle are part of our world philosophy today. Moreover, these two movements are closely related. For one thing, Chinese philosophy as a world philosophy in the second sense has its roots in the first and began with the first movement. I believe that in the first sense Chinese philosophy has already been established as a world philosophy. Whether one teaches a course on world philosophy or publishes a book on it, Chinese philosophy usually has a secure place in it. In the second sense, however, Chinese philosophy is still far from being a world philosophy. The process for it to happen has begun, but there is still a long way to go. In this essay, my focus is primarily on Chinese philosophy as a world

1 Chinese philosophy includes Confucianism, Daoism, Chinese Buddhism, etc. For the sake of simplicity, I will use "Chinese philosophy" in a singular form, even though it contains multiple perspectives and a large number of individual thinkers.

2 For such an example, see Neville (2000).

philosophy as understood in the second sense—that of a movement to extend the relevance of Chinese philosophy so that it can be studied, examined, developed, and advanced anywhere in the world, as a cross-cultural endeavour.

I will argue for three points. The first is on the need to make Chinese philosophy a world philosophy by extending the first movement into the second one. The second point is that in order to promote Chinese philosophy as a world philosophy we should not historicize philosophy. As a cultural product, philosophy cannot be separated from history. Being two disciplines, however, each should maintain its relative independence. As important as historical context is, overemphasizing it or even taking philosophy merely as a matter of intellectual history makes it difficult for non-specialists to study Chinese philosophy, and is therefore counter-productive to advancing it as a world philosophy. A good balance is thus needed in order to develop Chinese philosophy in response to contemporary needs and not to exclude a large number of non-specialists from studying and drawing from it. This point primarily aims to prepare Chinese philosophy materially as a philosophy to be presented to the world, and there is also a need to find a feasible way to draw a large number of philosophers to work with Chinese philosophy. Hence, my third point is that doing comparative philosophy is the most effective way to study, examine and develop Chinese philosophy as a world philosophy. Comparative philosophy provides a much needed bridge across different cultures for philosophy to connect on the world stage.

Studying Chinese Philosophy as a World Philosophy

Our world has irreversibly entered a global era, in which various cultures interact and co-exist through active encounters. Cultural isolation is no longer a viable option, and to live a meaningful life, a person must now be equipped with cultural competence. That is, one must understand various cultures in the world, especially the world's major cultural traditions. For this reason, we need to learn and understand other cultures and must learn and understand philosophies from other cultural traditions. A philosophy represents a general conceptualization of human experience in the world. As such, it not only reflects commonalities of human experience across cultures, but also manifests experiences of carving the world more or less in different ways across cultures. For instance, Confucian philosophy, which lies at the foundation of Chinese culture, has made *ren* (仁 humaneness, care) and *li* (禮 ritual propriety) among the leading factors that are needed for a good life. These terms have no exact counterparts in Western languages, even though they undoubtedly overlap with some Western concepts. Such leading

concepts are parts of a "final vocabulary" in the Confucian culture. The idea of a "final vocabulary" is traceable to the American pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty, who writes:

> All human beings carry about a set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives. These are the words in which we formulate praise of our friends and contempt for our enemies, our long-term projects, our deepest self-doubts and our highest hopes. … I shall call these words a person's "final vocabulary". (Rorty 1989, 73)

Accordingly, a shared final vocabulary in a culture reflects a philosophy in that culture. In Confucian culture, *ren* and *li* belong to such a "final vocabulary". We praise actions as manifesting *ren* and complying with *li*; we condemn other actions as anti-*ren* (不仁 *bu ren*) and against *li* (非禮 *fei li*). As far as moral judgments are concerned, no more is needed beyond such evaluations within the culture.[3] Rorty's concept of a final vocabulary suggests that we cannot really understand a culture without learning its philosophy, as philosophy is the backbone of a culture. This is because shared final vocabularies indicate people's deeply held values and commitments, which reveal their cultural identities and their ways of life. In order to understand Confucian culture, one should understand why such concepts as *ren* and *li* carry such great moral force within the culture. This means one needs to learn its philosophy.[4]

The need to study Chinese philosophy has intensified due to the rise of China. Its expanding economic power, political influence, and military might give China tremendous clout in shaping the world that we live in. This reality makes it obvious that we cannot have a good understanding of today's world without understanding China. Of course, we cannot understand China without understanding its culture, and we cannot have a good understanding of Chinese culture without understanding its philosophy.

The above reasons not only justify studying Chinese philosophy as a cultural representation of an important region, but also as a world philosophy. Contemporary world philosophy should draw on resources from all over the world. Chinese philosophy is rich in cultural and philosophical resources. Each philosophical or

3 Rorty may have overstated it when he said that "Those words are as far as he can go with language; beyond them is only helpless passivity or a resort to force" (Rorty 1989, 73). Surely, we can always go further to elaborate and explicate why being un-*ren* or *fei-li* is bad, which is the task of philosophy, but usually such additional justifications are not needed for people who understand the same final vocabulary.

4 For a discussion of understanding cultural patterns through comparative philosophy, readers can see Li (2016).

cultural tradition is entitled to its own pride and can claim its own richness in cultural resources, but few can match Chinese culture in this regard. Its rich cultural resources have enabled it to exert influence in East Asia and Southeast Asia. Confucianism, Daoism, and Chinese Buddhism have already left important, even defining marks in these regions. These philosophical traditions are still alive and evolving today. The making of contemporary world philosophy without Chinese philosophy as a significant ingredient is thus fundamentally lacking, and so Chinese philosophy should be taken seriously, studied and developed in a global context, which means taking it as a world philosophy.

Let me be explicit that the need to study Chinese philosophy as a world philosophy does not imply a wholesale acceptance of traditional Chinese philosophy. By "wholesale acceptance" I mean embracing everything in it as truth, and taking it as a guiding principle in life and in handling world affairs. It is the nature of philosophy to involve disagreement. No philosophical theory is universally valid, and no philosophy is perfect for everyone all the time. Studying a philosophy does not mean taking it as one's ideology. In the same way, studying Plato and Aristotle does not require us to embrace their ideas even though we have much to learn from them. Taking Chinese philosophy as a world philosophy does imply, however, that we take its perspectives seriously and draw on its insights in philosophizing about world issues.

The very idea of Chinese philosophy as a world philosophy implies that it has something important to contribute to world philosophy from its own perspectives. Working with other world philosophical traditions, Chinese philosophy can provide philosophical recourses and contribute to producing new solutions to world problems. One such example is the Chinese idea of 和 (*he*), usually translated as harmony. The English word "harmony", however, expresses only one aspect of *he*. *He* is much richer than congruence or peacefulness, as usually conveyed by "harmony" and similar terms in Western languages.[5] Admittedly, *he* has been used in various senses over a long period of time in China, including the sense of peacefulness. As a philosophical idea, however, it is far richer than that. To put it in very brief terms, *he* stands for a dynamic process through which various parties join hands through interaction, coordination, collaboration, mutual enhancement, and mutual transformation in order to reach "optimal symbiosis", to borrow the term from Roger Ames (2020). We can translate it as "harmony" only in a rehabilitated sense of the word, to be understood as "dynamic harmony" or "deep harmony".[6] The difficulty with translation suggests that there is no close counterpart to this

5 For a thorough linguistic analysis of "harmony", see Oxford (2022).

6 For more discussion of this idea, readers can see Li (2014).

idea in Western philosophy. Heraclitus began to consider harmony (αρμονία) as generated from opposites in a dynamic process. However, his fragments contain little philosophical elaboration. Plato produced an elaborated account of harmony in terms of an orderly arrangement of the three classes of the guardians, auxiliaries, and producers in his ideal society. Yet his account is rigid and has oppressive consequences in practice. The Western philosophical tradition has no concept comparable to the transformative nature of *he* found in the Chinese tradition. Now, the philosophers' role is to develop and explicate a philosophy of *he* out of the rich resources of ancient Chinese philosophy. A contemporary philosophy of harmony should be developed in the context of world philosophy rather than merely as an idea for and within Chinese philosophy.

But what does it mean for Chinese philosophy to become a world philosophy? In practical terms, making Chinese philosophy a world philosophy includes two important aspects. First, it becomes a major reference point for philosophizing on the world stage. Philosophy is always done within a context, with its contextualized issues, considerations, and reference points. The philosophy or philosophies which are taken as major and frequent reference points reflect their perceived relevance and importance in philosophizing. We can take Greek philosophy as an example. Alfred North Whitehead once said, "The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato" (Whitehead 1979, 39). Claiming that the entire European (Western) philosophical tradition consists of mere footnotes to one ancient Greek philosopher is obviously an exaggeration, but it reflects the fact that Plato has been a frequent reference point in Western philosophy.[7] Whitehead's list of key names for Western philosophy can be extended to include Aristotle, Descartes, Locke, Kant, and so forth, whose ideas continue to live on today. Being Aristotelian is not merely about Aristotle, but also Alasdair MacIntyre; being Kantian is not merely about Immanuel Kant, but also John Rawls. Moreover, today such figures are not only important figures for those engaged in Western philosophy, they are also important reference points in works of non-Western philosophers, and are part of world philosophy. The idea of Chinese philosophy as a world philosophy thus implies that relevant figures or ideas from Chinese philosophy will become frequent and significant reference points for philosophizing on the world stage as well. For example, Confucius will be a reference point when virtue ethics is discussed, and *li* 禮 will be a comparative consideration as far as issues of rules in ethics and social philosophy are concerned.

7 In the view of Whitehead, Plato's philosophy stands for the worldview of a static and unchanging reality, the opposite of Whiteheadian process philosophy. I thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this point.

In close relation to the above point, another important indicator of Chinese philosophy becoming a world philosophy is to have a relatively large number of philosophers interested in, knowledgeable of, and frequently engaging with it. This includes Chinese philosophy specialists, but more importantly, there should be a large number of non-specialists engaging with Chinese philosophy, as this would be a major indicator of Chinese philosophy having become a world philosophy. How large a number is large enough is relative and an open question. Nevertheless, most people would probably agree that the current number is far from adequate. In this regard, specialists have a special task to promote Chinese philosophy to become a world philosophy by attracting non-specialists towards studying it. In recent years, an increasing number of philosophers outside China have engaged or begun to engage Chinese philosophy in their own work. Moreover, scholars of Chinese philosophy have actively sought to engage Western philosophers. The growing list of Western philosophers who have been in dialogue with Chinese philosophy includes Ronald Davidson (see Mou 2006), John Searle (see Mou 2008), Richard Rorty (see Huang 2009), Michael Sandel (see Sandel and D'Ambrosio 2019), Michael Slote (see Huang 2020),[8] and Ernest Sosa (see Huang 2022), but many more are needed. To move towards such a goal, Chinese specialists need to reflect on effective ways to promote Chinese philosophy as a world philosophy.

Resisting the Historicization of Chinese Philosophy

To be clear, by historicizing Chinese philosophy I do not mean the study of the history of Chinese philosophy, which is perfectly legitimate and extremely worthwhile. Rather, I refer to the tendency and practice to turn Chinese philosophy into merely a study of the history of philosophical ideas and to use the criteria of historical studies to evaluate and address philosophical inquiries. In other words, the process of historicizing turns the activities of philosophical inquiries into inquiries of history, be it the history of philosophy or the history of ideas. While the study of Chinese philosophy and the study of Chinese intellectual history obviously overlap, these are nevertheless two different disciplines and approaches, each with its own legitimacy. Using the methodology and evaluative matrix of one discipline to assess the other can have detrimental effects. This tendency, I argue, has become an obstacle to the development of Chinese philosophy in contemporary times, and hence a distraction to the movement of making Chinese philosophy a world philosophy.

8 Michael Slote is among the small number of Western philosophers who have philosophized in dialogue with Chinese philosophy (Slote 2018).

In China there has been a strong tradition of classic (scriptural) studies (*jingxue* 經學) since ancient times. An important feature of this tradition is a long-held practice of not differentiating literature, history, and philosophy (*wenshizhe bufen* 文史哲不分). The *jingxue* tradition carries with it a strong emphasis on historical context and textual exegesis, while depreciating philosophical innovation, as it is epitomized in the slogan "all six classics are history (*liujing jie shi* 六經皆史)". Its historical contribution to Chinese culture notwithstanding, this tradition prizes knowledge of the past rather than constructing and advancing philosophical arguments. The negative effect of this tradition on the work of Chinese philosophy has not been confined to China. The situation outside China has been exacerbated by the fact that, for a long time, Chinese philosophy outside the country has been located outside philosophy departments in universities, in departments of East Asian studies, history, or religious studies. While some scholars working in these are unquestionably outstanding philosophers, they are few and far between. This reality naturally brings with it a tendency in the West to study Chinese philosophy in the context of history, rather than philosophy. Against such a background, returning to history has become a deep-seated practice for many people who conduct research in the field of Chinese philosophy. A consequence of this conventional practice is to overemphasize historical studies and to under-appreciate philosophical inquiries. Or, to put it in another way, it is the tendency to place history above philosophy and to use historical studies to judge and depreciate philosophical studies.[9]

One common indication of this unfortunate situation is for scholars of Chinese intellectual history to attack philosophers by accusing the latter of misrepresenting the ideas of ancient Chinese texts. For instance, Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光, a renowned scholar of Chinese intellectual history, recently criticized Zhao Tingyang 赵汀阳 for Zhao's philosophical work on the Confucian ideal of *tianxia* (天下 "all under Heaven") (Ge 2015). Zhao and others have attempted to draw on the ancient Chinese concept as a model to rethink a new world order for today. In Zhao's view, traceable to the ancient Zhou dynasty, *tianxia* stands for a proposed world system in which all parts of the world come under one umbrella as one large family, in contrast to the conception of the world as a collection of nation states (Zhao 2016). Ge criticized the philosophical theory of *tianxia* by Zhao and others as doing "unhistorical history" (*feilishi de lishi* 非历史的历史), and accused them

9 In his insightful book *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China*, Tao Jiang discusses a somewhat parallel divergence between sinologists and philosophers in the context of studying Chinese philosophy in Western scholarship (Jiang 2021, 2). While I am sympathetic to his discussion, my concern is here not limited to Western scholarship and my focus is specifically on historical approaches to studying Chinese thought rather than sinology in general terms.

of implying that such an ideal world actually existed in ancient China, in which all tribes were in great harmony and that there was no division between "internal" and "external" or between "I" and "you", and that everyone in the world was treated equally. Ge argued that in the minds of the ancient Chinese there were actual distinctions between "I" and "others", "internal" and "external", "Chinese" and "foreigners", and between "China" and "the rest" (Ge 2015). As Ge wrote:

> Now some scholars think this way. They reformulated the imagined "*tianxia*" in ancient China for a *tianxia*-ism for the modern world order, thinking *tianxia*-ism can move the current world from disorder, to peace, and then further to grand harmony. These scholars think their theory has designed a world system in which there is no differentiation between large or small countries, no differentiation between advanced or backward civilizations, with no national borders and racial distinctions. They hold that such a system can not only lay the foundation for modern China, but also can legislate for the future world. Regardless of their motives, from a scholarly perspective, they have constructed an unhistorical history. (ibid.)
>
> 现在一些学者是这样想的. 他们把古代中国想象的"天下"改造成针对现代世界秩序的"天下主义", 觉得这个"天下主义"能够使世界从乱世、升平世到太平世 (三世说), 并且认为它已经设计了一个"不再有大国小国的区别, 也不再有文明落后的区别, 即消除了国界与种界"的世界制度 (远近小大若一), 因而它不仅为现代中国奠定基础, 而且为世界的未来立法. 这些想法无论其动机如何, 从学术角度看, 都是构造了一个非历史的历史.

Therefore, Ge concluded, Zhao and others are wrong.

I have absolutely no doubt that Ge's essay is an outstanding piece of work with regard to historical scholarship. His attack is misplaced, however. What Ge seems unaware of is that he offered a historical critique of a philosophical initiative. As Ge insisted, "the ideal of *tianxia* at best existed only in the writings of ancient thinkers; it was not a political reality in history (*zhezhong lixiang de "tianxia" chongqiliang zhishi gudai xuezhe de sixiang zhuzuo, que bushi lishi zhong de zhengzhi xianshi* 这种理想的"天下"充其量只是古代学者的思想著作, 却不是历史中的政治现实)" (ibid.). But being an idea in ancient works is more than what Zhao *et al.* need. In fact, strictly speaking, they even do not need it to have existed in ancient writings in a ready-made form, because what these contemporary thinkers have been doing is exactly developing and reformulating—therefore reforming—an ancient idea. Zhao never claimed that his *tianxia*-ism was a duplicate of

a historical reality.[10] To the contrary, Zhao explicitly characterized *tianxia* as an "idea", "the perfect conception for a thing to be", rather than something that had been actually realized (Zhao 2006, 30). Or, as he says, "*tianxia* is a theory" (Zhao 2016, 1). It is a constructed *ideal* rather than an already achieved reality. Nevertheless, the idea has the potential to be further explored, developed, and even implemented, as a candidate theory for today's world. Therefore, even though all of Ge's findings from history are correct, it does nothing to refute Zhao's proposal.

Ge's misplaced attack on Zhao and others is by no means an isolated phenomenon. In the English-speaking world, there is also a tendency towards confusing Chinese philosophy with the history of ideas, and hence judging works of Chinese philosophy in the Procrustean bed of the other disciplines. We see this tendency in scholarly articles and book reviews. One such example can be found in a well-researched article by Joachim Gentz, a brilliant scholar of Chinese intellectual history, who writes on the Chinese idea of *he* 和:

> Concrete visions of peace, harmony and proper order also differed greatly among these [ancient Chinese] thinkers, even among thinkers belonging to the same tradition. Their visions differed both in terms of the particular aspects that were emphasized and regarding the ranking of concepts and terms in their respective normative vocabulary. Reconstructions of "the Confucian concept of harmony" or "the Confucian philosophy of harmony" are thus not very convincing. (Gentz 2020, 39)

If Gentz launches his criticism against works of Chinese intellectual history his view may well hold, except that he specifically targets works on Chinese philosophy (ibid., 38). By explicitly using the consequent adverb "thus", Gentz claims that because there were diverse ideas and understandings of *he* in the Confucian tradition, reconstructing a contemporary version of the Confucian philosophy of harmony has to be unconvincing. On such reasoning, one can study Confucius's and other thinkers' philosophy in history, but one cannot develop a new Confucian philosophy today by drawing on their respective ideas. Gentz's assumption seems to be that because the idea in history was not presented in a unified manner, therefore contemporary thinkers cannot reconstruct it coherently today. Such reasoning is flawed. Gentz's misplaced criticism can only be explained logically by

10 Even if such a view was suggested by others, it is hardly worth Ge making such a big deal of it. After all, hardly any serious scholars have held such a view. Ge's main target is evidently *tianxia* as an idea proposed by philosophers, and he chose Zhao's book (2005) as his primary target. Although Ge also mentions technical difficulties with implementing Zhao's *tianxia* as an "idea", Ge's focus is how Zhao's idea is not based on historical facts, something which Zhao has never claimed. To be fair, Ge acknowledges the limitations of his approach to the issue in question.

a confusion of philosophical reconstruction with historical reconstruction. Confucian philosophy being a living and evolving philosophy under continuous construction simply does not appear on his radar.

Evidently, there exists a considerable gap between what philosophers do and what their historian critics believe they do. The historian critics often fundamentally misunderstand the nature of philosophers' work. Whereas historians are often concerned with whole pictures of ancient events or full articulations of ideas as originally presented in history, philosophers (rather than people merely doing the worthy work of the history of philosophy) are concerned with what is still alive from the rich resources of antiquity. For the purposes of philosophers, it matters little whether an idea was once tangled with dead and rotten elements, as long as the idea remains meaningful and can be reformulated for a good purpose today. Philosophers wish to produce new ideas or rework ideas traceable to antiquity in order to generate new theories to solve contemporary problems. Their historian critics—however well-intended but misguided—often operate on the assumption that ideas or theories generated in history must be treated as if they were in history.

In this regard, reconstruction means different things for historians than for philosophers. For historians, reconstruction means placing ideas back in their historical contexts and uncovering a version of the past that is as close to historical reality as possible. For philosophers, however, reconstruction is by no means mere restoration. We can use the example of reconstructing an ancient house to show the difference. Historians are concerned with going back to the original state of the house, including even the originally poorly designed, badly constructed, and even already rotten parts, for the sake of historical accuracy. For philosophers, reconstruction takes place with active construction. They are concerned primarily with the purposes of today. In the analogy of reconstructing an ancient house, philosophers do not have to include its originally poorly designed, badly constructed, and already rotten parts as long as the reconstructed one bears adequate resemblance to the old and enough original parts are used in the reconstruction. Philosophers are thus selective when using old parts, and can even alter these parts by bending, trimming, and cutting in order to fit in the newly constructed whole. As far as reconstruction is concerned, all they need is to be able to have appropriate connections to the past and to give it due credit. Reconstructing a philosophical idea initially proposed by the ancients is a way to draw on its potential and reformulate it in a new light. For example, if an idea is traceable to Mencius, then it is a Mencian idea, even though a reformed one. In our analogy of house-reconstruction, it can be done either as a historical project or a philosophical project—both can be legitimate and meaningful in their own right. A problem arises when one project uses its own standard to judge the other.

Historians like Ge Zhaoguang apparently do not understand an important difference, a difference between historians' efforts to figure out how ancient ideas were formulated and practiced on the one hand, and philosophers' effort to draw on ancient ideas in formulating new theories in order to solve contemporary problems on the other. It is a mistake to use the yardstick from one disciple to measure the value and legitimacy of the other.

The two groups thus talk past each other when historians take their enthusiasm from historical perspectives to criticize philosophers on their philosophical endeavours. Imagine that a Christian philosopher attempts to make a case for promoting the Christian ideal of love as a solution to our world's problems. And her critic counter-argues that Christian love is in fact racist, citing evidence from American history. Or a democrat promotes democracy while opponents cite the example of democracy in ancient Athens as a counterargument to prove that democracy was and therefore is exclusivist and divisive against women and working people. To be sure, people may or may not agree on whether Christian love is a good solution to our problems or whether democracy is the best form of government. Nevertheless, Christian philosophers do not have to show that the Christian ideal of love was practiced in perfect ways in history in order to promote it, and today's democrats do not need to presume that democracy in ancient Athens was already perfectly implemented or a perfect democratic theory had been articulated back then. Admittedly, it is definitely legitimate for historians to stand up when people fabricate history by claiming that the idea of Christian love was never practiced in racist ways, or that democracy in Athens was not discriminatory, or that the ancient Chinese idea of *tianxia* was already fully implemented in antiquity and that its original design was as what has been presented today. However, that is simply not the case here. Even if there have been sporadic misrepresentations of history, the main thrust of the *tianxia* philosophical discourse is not about history. In order to make their criticisms relevant, critics must show why the idea of *tianxia* cannot be formulated or reformulated the way some philosophers today have attempted to do, and why such a reformulated idea cannot in principle be applicable to today's world. Historians should do better in understanding the task of philosophy, to respect philosophers' space for their work rather than jumping too quickly to shout "ha, that's not history!" For philosophers, yes, the idea of *tianxia* was not perfectly conceived by the ancients, much less implemented in history. But so what? It does not mean the idea cannot be reworked for good use today.[11]

11 Just to be clear, I also think Zhao's *tianxia* proposal is fundamentally flawed and that it is a dangerous move at this time, and am sympathetic to Ge's concerns. However, Zhao's work is not a study of history, and arguments against his proposal have to be made in philosophy or political theory rather than history.

This tendency must be taken seriously, because it not only reflects simply a misunderstanding of the nature of philosophy by some historians[12]—however well-intended they are—but is also counterproductive to developing Chinese philosophy as a world philosophy for several reasons. First, historicizing Chinese philosophy distorts the nature of philosophy. If these historian critics were to succeed, Chinese philosophy as a living enterprise would become impossible, not to mention becoming a world philosophy. Such a tendency reinforces a bias that Chinese philosophy is merely a collection of ancient ideas with no new life. Such a characterization makes Chinese philosophy irrelevant to world philosophy. In order to become a world philosophy, Chinese philosophy must participate actively on the world stage in philosophizing on contemporary issues with its rich resources drawn from the past—it must resist various efforts, either conscious or not, in order to avoid being kept in the museum of ancient ideas.

Philosophy has its own evolving history, just like other subjects of study. But philosophy also has its own perennial topics of inquiry, even though the specific forms of these issues may change with the times. Past philosophical activities in specific forms can be subjects of study mainly for historians or scholars of the history of philosophy. Perennial issues of philosophy are subjects of study mainly for philosophers. It is against the very nature of philosophy to require philosophers to limit themselves to historical context, even though such a requirement may be suitable for historians of philosophy or ideas. For example, Mencius advocated a philosophy of *ren zheng* (仁政 "benevolent government"). In his view, *ren zheng* is a moral requirement of rulers. Of course, rulers for him were kings and princes, and they were by no means democratically elected government officials. Today, in the context of Chinese philosophy can we say that it is a Mencian idea that political leaders have such a moral obligation? In one sense, we cannot if we equate "Mencian" with "Mencius", because Mencius could not have thought of political leaders in democratic societies. In another important sense, however, there is a legitimate ground to make such a claim. Philosophers should be allowed to make such claims by argument without being accused of being unhistorical.

The second reason to resist historicizing Chinese philosophy is a practical one, as an overemphasis on historical context makes it difficult for non-specialists to engage with Chinese philosophy. Non-specialists of Chinese philosophy, by definition, are those who have not been able or are unwilling to train themselves as Chinese philosophy specialists. They are interested mainly in philosophical issues that are common across their own home tradition and Chinese tradition

12 By calling these scholars "historians" I do not mean they do not or cannot do philosophy. Some are well capable of doing philosophy. However, with regard to their works discussed here they are doing history, however wonderful that work may be.

when they engage with Chinese philosophy. For their purposes, shared concerns or commonality of issues between philosophical traditions are more relevant than specific differences. To use as an example Mencius's idea of *ren zheng* again, constructing a positive case for such a philosophy in contemporary times can be both a defence and a development of Mencius's philosophy. For this purpose, meaningful work can be done without returning to the historical context of Mencius's time. I am not claiming that there is no need to consider Mencius's idea in his historical context. However, it is not necessary for every kind of inquiry. As far as promoting Chinese philosophy to become a world philosophy is concerned, overemphasis on its historical context poses a major obstacle to achieving this goal. While we should always welcome historians of ideas to share their wisdom and insights with us, when they get carried away and overstep the boundaries between history and philosophy we must tell our overzealous historian friends to back off, and we must do this for the sake of Chinese philosophy.

Just to be absolutely clear, my argument in this section by no means denies that historians' scholarly work—including on the history of philosophy—is considered highly valuable in itself and that it can be valuable to philosophers. My point is that history should not be confused with philosophy and that historical studies should not replace philosophical inquiries. Instead, such work should be utilized to enhance the movement to make Chinese philosophy a world philosophy by providing a historical context for people to better understand Chinese philosophy as it was presented in history, not to replace philosophy or to undermine its contemporary development. In promoting Chinese philosophy as a world philosophy, historians of Chinese philosophy, thought or intellectual ideas should be allies with Chinese philosophers, not antagonists.

Advancing Chinese Philosophy through Comparative Philosophy

Promoting Chinese philosophy as a world philosophy calls for more people to study Chinese philosophy and to draw on Chinese philosophy in constructing contemporary philosophy across the globe. Achieving such a goal calls for two categories of philosophers. First, specialists of Chinese philosophy, who take Chinese philosophy as their primary subject of study. Philosophy communities across the globe have specialists on Greek philosophy, and as Chinese philosophy becomes a world philosophy we can expect more philosophers specializing in this area of study, especially in major research universities.[13] The expansion of this category of philosophers will increase the influence of Chinese philosophy on the world stage.

13 For a forceful appeal towards such a goal, see Garfield and van Norden (2016).

The second category is people with primary focuses on non-Chinese philosophy who study and draw on Chinese philosophy. The second category should include a much larger number of people than the first. To a great extent, this camp will decide the success or failure of the effort to make Chinese philosophy a world philosophy. Because most philosophers in the world will not be specialists in Chinese philosophy, engaging in comparative philosophy is a useful way to bridge the gap between Chinese philosophy and world philosophy. When specialists of Chinese philosophy engage in comparative studies, they make Chinese philosophy more accessible to non-specialists, and in doing so help to bring Chinese philosophy under the umbrella of philosophy across the world. For non-specialists, comparative philosophy provides a fertile ground for them to study and benefit from Chinese philosophy. The comparative study of Chinese philosophy by specialists does not diminish the value of Chinese philosophy, nor obscure its specific characteristics. On the contrary, it helps to highlight these characteristics, and realize how important these differences are in better understanding Chinese philosophy. Now we need to take a close look at comparative philosophy.

In his essay "Two Forms of Comparative Philosophy", published in the inaugural issue of *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*, Robert Neville articulates two fundamental approaches to comparative philosophy, objectivist and normative. He writes:

> The objectivist approach treats the positions to be compared as finished objects, takes up a perspective of distance upon them, and measures its comparative judgments in empirical ways over against the evidence of the positions. The normative approach centers first on addressing contemporary philosophical problems and looks to the historical positions as resources for contemporary thinking, bringing them into comparative perspective against the contemporary background. (Neville 2001, 2)

Unlike the objectivist approach, the focus of the normative approach is not on discovering the philosophical positions of past philosophers. Rather, it involves "reconstructing the traditions, as any living tradition does in growing to meet new philosophical situations, and does so by bringing them into comparative interaction" (ibid.). Tim Connolly likewise argues that there are two dimensions of comparative philosophy. The first is the interpretative dimension, in which one compares in order to understand. He writes, "the interpretative dimension looks at the philosophies as historical objects, trying to get a sense of why they developed the way they did" (Connolly 2015, 30).[14] The second is the constructive

14 I would note that the category of "historical objects" does not have to mean ancient objects. It should include all worthy philosophies in existence, from antiquity to contemporary.

dimension. The constructive dimension is future-oriented, where "different cultural-philosophical traditions engage one another in order to make constructive philosophical progress" (ibid.). Presumably, one could engage in the first dimension of comparative work without extending to the second dimension, though that is not the whole picture of comparative philosophy. It is a mistake to take the category of comparative philosophy exclusively as interpretative while leaving out the constructive dimension.[15]

Similarly, I understand comparative philosophy as philosophizing through comparison and contrast across philosophical traditions in order to learn about other cultural traditions, to solve philosophical problems, to generate new insights, and to develop new theories. In other words, comparative philosophy is *philosophizing comparatively*. It includes but is not limited to the work of cross-cultural comparison. The enterprise of philosophizing includes what Connolly calls "the constructive dimension", or "comparative interaction" as Neville has characterized. Understood this way, there is no need to overcome comparative philosophy to stage a "post-comparative philosophy".[16] The "comparative philosophy" that appears in the names of academic journals must be understood as including both the interpretative and construction dimensions of comparative philosophy. These include *Philosophy East and West: A Quarterly of Comparative Philosophy*, *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*, *Comparative and Continental Philosophy*, and *Comparative Philosophy: An International Journal of Constructive Engagement of Distinct Approaches toward World Philosophy*. These titles remain truthful to what these journals aim to accomplish.

Comparative philosophy is an effective way for non-specialists of Chinese philosophy to learn and engage with Chinese philosophy. In the past few decades, more and more philosophers have begun to incorporate Chinese philosophy in their work. It is probably safe to say that most philosophy departments in the United States, for instance, now include some form of Chinese philosophy in their course offerings, and that most teachers of these courses are non-specialists in Chinese philosophy. A large number of them study Chinese philosophy with a comparative approach, and this is different from Chinese philosophy specialists. While

15 Understood this way, on each dimension of comparative philosophy one can use different methodologies. On the interpretative dimension, for instance, one can choose one's conceptual framework for interpretation. For a criticism of relying on Western conceptual frameworks to interpret Chinese philosophical views, readers can see Rošker (2021), especially Section 1.1 "Problems of Transcultural Research" (ibid., 11–30). It is neither my intention nor necessary for the purpose of this essay to discuss a broad range of issues associated with the topic of comparative philosophy or cross-cultural philosophy.

16 For an example of the effort towards "post-comparative philosophy", readers can see Kahteran and Weber (2021).

non-specialists should be encouraged to study Chinese philosophy in depth and to develop expertise, we should keep in mind that their primary aim is not studying Chinese philosophy for its own sake, but to learn enough so they can borrow from Chinese philosophy for their own philosophical explorations. There is obviously a trade-off, and it should be balanced in accordance with personal interests and individual needs. Setting the bar unrealistically high is counterproductive. In comparison, professionally trained Chinese philosophers carry a strong background in the history of Chinese philosophy. They learn, understand, and interpret Chinese philosophy from within the tradition. This can be both an advantage and a disadvantage. The advantage is obvious. Professionally trained, they are equipped with philological tools for textual exegesis, know the history, and are familiar with traditional problematics. In the meantime, because of their close affiliation with the tradition, they can also overlook philosophically significant insights or problems. The special features of a thing are often in better view when compared with other things. A famous 11th century Chinese poem says that one does not see the real picture of the mountain because one is situated inside it.[17] However, people outside may be able to identify some of its important features and enjoy its beauty by viewing it from a distance. In this regard, philosophers trained in non-Chinese philosophy may have an advantage when they expand into Chinese philosophy. Non-specialists often approach Chinese philosophy selectively, with particular philosophical issues in mind. They want to learn how Chinese philosophy formulates or tackles an issue that has been a problem in non-Chinese philosophy. For example, how has freedom been conceptualized in Chinese philosophy? What is the role of virtue in Chinese philosophy? In approaching Chinese philosophy with pre-conceived questions, non-specialists draw Chinese philosophy into dialogue with non-Chinese philosophy. Their study has not been the mere passive absorption of information from the subject. An interesting consequence of this phenomenon is that the comparative study of Chinese philosophy by Western philosophers has shaped how Chinese philosophy is understood, interpreted, and presented. Non-specialists ask questions out of conceptual curiosity from their philosophical perspectives. Specialists then attempt to answer such questions. This "demand-supply" dynamic has helped to shape the current field of Chinese philosophy. As far as making Chinese philosophy a world philosophy is concerned, we may say that whereas Chinese philosophy specialists attempt to "push" Chinese philosophy onto the world stage, non-specialists through their engagement "pull" Chinese philosophy onto it. While they both contribute to the same process, it is often the latter that helps to present Chinese philosophy in ways that are more philosophically relevant to non-Chinese philosophers. In this

17 *Bushi Lushan zhen mianmu, zhiyuan shenzai ci shanzhong* 不識廬山真面目,只緣身在此山中.

regard, non-specialists are not passive learners of Chinese philosophy—they are also active makers of contemporary Chinese philosophy. The combined effects of these forces shape Chinese philosophy as presented on the world stage.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is a great need to make Chinese philosophy a world philosophy. Towards such a goal, we need to resist the tendency of historicizing Chinese philosophy—it should not be reduced to the history of Chinese philosophy, nor should it be confused with the history of ideas even though they are undoubtedly related. While working closely with other disciplines, Chinese philosophy should maintain its relative independence as a discipline in its own right. Today, one effective way to make Chinese philosophy a world philosophy is to study it comparatively, to make its rich content meaningful to non-specialists of Chinese philosophy, and to enhance its contribution towards constructing contemporary philosophy for the entire world.

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