

Converting Chinese Philosophy into the Analytic Context

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§ Background: Is Chinese Philosophy A Philosophy or Religion?

Chinese philosophy has its roots in religion, and has spread to the general Chinese public as a mixture of attitudes in life, cultural spirit, as well as religious practices. However, Chinese philosophy is not just a collection of wisdom on life or a religious discourse on how to lead a good life; it is also a form of philosophy. And yet its philosophical import has often been slighted in the Western philosophical world. Two hundred years ago, Hegel remarked that there is no separation between philosophy and religion in the East: “That which we call Eastern Philosophy is more properly the religious mode of thought and the conception of the world belonging generally to the Orientals and approximates very closely to Philosophy.” (Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 1)

Under this conception, Hegel’s attitude with Chinese philosophy was completely dismissive. He described Confucius as “only a man who has a certain amount of practical and worldly wisdom — one with whom there is no speculative philosophy,” and “it would have been better had [his works] never been translated.” With Laozi’s conception of ‘*dao*,’ Hegel commented: “to the Chinese what is highest and the origin of things is nothing, emptiness, the altogether undetermined, the abstract universal,” and “if

Philosophy has got no further than to such expression, it still stands on its most elementary stage. What is there to be found in all this learning?" (Ibid.)

Hegel thought that in Chinese philosophy there was no speculative thinking, and thus he came to the conclusion that Chinese philosophy was not philosophy. But such an observation is totally inadequate. The nature of Chinese philosophical works is that these works often contain the end result of the philosophers' speculative thinking. The completed works are either students' truthful records of the masters' mature thought, or later philosophers' reinterpretation of the ancient classical texts. One needs to go through the texts with careful reading and analysis to dig out the threads and the rationale behind each view. Based on his limited resources on Chinese philosophy and his misinformed reading of Chinese texts, Hegel was biased against taking Chinese philosophy as a form of respectable philosophy.

Unfortunately, such a bias persisted till this day. From the early introduction of Chinese thinking to the Western world by Western missionaries, Chinese philosophy has been seen merely as a different form of world religion. Confucianism and Daoism were not taught as a philosophy course, but in courses in world religion. Chinese philosophy, as well as other Asian philosophy, has been marginalized and de-philosophized. Currently in North America, there are very few graduate programs in philosophy that include Chinese philosophy as one of its areas. Scholars who specialize in Chinese philosophy have to seek graduate-level jobs at East Asian Studies or Religious Studies departments. It is a great concern where an English-speaking student could go for Ph.D. study on

Chinese philosophy in North America. The prejudice seems deep-rooted in the philosophy circle in the U.S. None of the top-ranked graduate programs includes any specialist on Chinese philosophy among its faculty. At the same time, the demand for understanding Chinese philosophy is growing among undergraduate students. There are more and more universities hiring specialists in Chinese philosophy and increasing numbers of philosophy departments offering Chinese philosophy (among other Asian philosophy courses) in their regular curriculum. The trend is growing, and now it is really the time to examine the status of Chinese philosophy in the U.S. In the 2008 newsletter of the American Philosophical Association (APA), there was a special discussion on the “crisis” for Chinese philosophy in the United States since there are very limited choices for students interested in Chinese philosophy in selecting graduate programs. The contributing authors (Angle, Ames, Van Norden, Im, Wong, etc.) all point to the omission of Chinese philosophy in the top-ranking graduate programs in the U.S., as the crisis in the sustainability of Chinese philosophy as a field in the American philosophical arena. Some (Van Norden, Tiwald) have attributed the reason partially to ignorance of and bias against Chinese philosophy on the part of American philosophers. To correct this kind of mentality, I believe, we need to first get rid of the conception that “there is no such thing as Chinese philosophy.” (Van Norden, in *Newsletter*)

I do not deny that various schools of Chinese philosophy have taken up a separate form of religion in Chinese history as well as in contemporary Chinese society: Confucianism has its temples established for Confucius, and every year there is a national celebration of his birthday. Daoism has many Daoist temples where the famous Daoists are worshiped.

Buddhism, most evidently a form of religion, has permeated the populace in the Chinese world and has many devoted followers. However, to say that all these schools have a religious influence in Chinese culture is not to deny that they too have a rich philosophical dimension: the philosophical dimension that speculates on the origin of the universe, on the basic elements of all things, on human nature and man's relation to myriad things, on the meaning of life and death, on the conception of justice or just polity, and on the ethical code for human conduct.

I believe that whether Chinese thinking is philosophy or religion also depends on the perspective of the person who is engaged in the study. If one treats it as a form of religion, one advocates the view and adheres to the teaching in one's life. If one treats it as philosophy, on the other hand, one can uncover many deeper philosophical ideas, raise many questions against the philosophical position, develop many new threads from the old texts, and further engage in the existing debates. Philosophy is what one does, not just what the text says. If everyone treats Chinese philosophy as an ancient mode of thinking, study it merely out of cultural curiosity without being philosophically engaged, then Chinese philosophy is dead. The responsibility lies on contemporary scholars. The ancient texts addressed the ancient people; we need to make it come alive to contemporary readers. How much we can enrich the ancient texts and make them relevant to today's world depends on our effort, and our effort constitutes our contribution to the development of Chinese *philosophy*.

§ Existing Methodologies

There are many current approaches to Chinese philosophy. For starter, I can enumerate the following examples:

1. Traditional textual annotation and reinterpretation — This is a method commonly used by Chinese scholars throughout Chinese history. Often the annotations themselves incorporate each commentator's own philosophical view; hence, a classic text can receive various reinterpretations. At times, the subtle differences in the interpretations resulted in grave disputes in the intellectual history of China. In recent decades, a major effort is also devoted to translating classical texts into modern Chinese, so that the younger generations and those without classical Chinese training can read with ease.
2. Intellectual history approach — This is the approach that the famous Chinese historian Fung Youlan undertook when he wrote *The History of Chinese Philosophy*. From my observation, I think that many Chinese scholars in China today endorse this methodology. The emphasis is on placing each philosopher in an intellectual lineage and explaining how one view develops from another. In the history of Chinese philosophy, this method is particularly pertinent, since many Chinese philosophers took themselves to be students or followers of another great master before them. They took their mission to be expounding or defending the master's view. There were various "schools" established from this mentality. Of course, not all followers simply repeated what the master had said; hence,

- from within each school there also developed new turns and novel ideas. The intellectual history approach can analyze the similarities and differences in the transmission of thought.
3. Sinological approach — Sinology has a long history in the Western world (dating back to the thirteenth or the fourteenth century), and the term mostly refers to studies of China by non-Chinese. The early missionaries from the sixteenth century on played a major role in the development of Sinology. As I understand it, contemporary Sinologists tend to focus more on classical Chinese language and literature, and the analysis tends to focus on the meaning and interpretation of linguistic expressions in classical texts. When applied to Chinese philosophy, Sinologists tend to be more literal — they want their assertions to be backed by actual textual evidence. As a result, they downplay the philosophical connotations of each text and refrain from engaging in systematic reconstruction of any thinker's philosophy.
 4. Hermeneutic approach¹ — Hermeneutics is a generic term that covers a variety of approaches, and here I shall restrict it to the study of Chinese philosophy. Chinese hermeneutics aims to keep a balance of the original texts and the current conditions of the world. The purpose is to keep the tradition alive and make it applicable in today's world. The scholars who take this approach embrace Heidegger's view that there is no absolutely objective interpretation of the text that can be separated from the interpreter's own historical reality or subjectivity.

They respect the original texts and the authors' intent, but believe that the texts can be reinterpreted so as to engage in contemporary philosophical dialogues. They wish to engage with the text in a productive way, adding to the text's complexity and depth in meaning. The reinterpretation can place a historical text in the contemporary context and renders it anew. For example, some recent scholars have been trying to give the traditional Chinese philosophy a feminist reading, by reinterpreting the original text with the modern conception of femininity. Others have attempted to apply Laozi's *Daodejing* to issues in environmental ethics, even though environmental ethics was clearly not a conception in ancient times. Another branch of Chinese hermeneutics is called 'onto-hermeneutics,' represented by Chung-ying Cheng. As On-cho Ng explains this methodology: "In onto-hermeneutic terms, reading and interrogating a text is no simple verbal and textual lapidary. To understand is to grasp this intended correspondence between the text and the represented reality." (Ng 2007, 390) To gain this understanding, according to onto-hermeneutics, the reader "lives, inhabits, and experiences the very reality that the text describes." (Ibid.) In other words, this kind of methodology stresses the reader's experiential engagement with the world in her comprehension of the text.

5. Comparative philosophy approach — This approach actually includes a wide variety of comparative approaches. The method contrasts and compares topics and ideas in Chinese philosophy with some issues that one finds in Western or other philosophies. Sometimes the comparative study shows the similarities of

theories; sometimes it points out the differences. These are more interpretative in nature, and the goal is to enhance understanding for readers who are familiar with one of the theories under comparison. But the approach is not limited to interpretation. More and more scholars aim to enhance constructive communication between two traditions that were developed apart. Sometimes the study uses the conceptual scheme of another theory to analyze the theory under investigation; sometimes it further employs another theory to provide solutions to issues present in the first theory. We can see the comparative philosophy approach as building an intellectual bridge for understanding the other view and to gain insights on one's starting theory. For readers who are not on either side of the bridge, however, the comparative study may not be very helpful. Also, the comparative study using Continental philosophy as the entry point and the comparative study using analytic philosophy as the entry point are very different both in style and in content. Those who are more familiar with the analytic style would not find the Continental comparative approach very helpful, and the sentiment is mutual.

6. Analytic philosophy approach — Philosophical analysis becomes a characteristic of analytic philosophy, and this approach focuses on the conceptual analysis of philosophical ideas, the clear formulation of argumentation, the investigation of philosophical problems and their solutions, and the posing of hypothetical thought experiments to test one's intuition. Typically, the analysis begins with the original text, but goes further to construct a philosophical system for the original

Chinese philosopher who did not do so in his writing. As it is done today, the analytic approach is often combined with the comparative philosophy approach.

My view is that all these methodologies accomplish different functions for the study of Chinese philosophy, and they should not be seen as mutually competitive or exclusive of one another. Anyone with a broad background can combine the above methods in engaging in his or her study. The study of Chinese philosophy can be done by people with different training, with different intellectual interests, and for different audiences. There is no need to debate on which method is the right method for studying Chinese philosophy, since the criterion depends on one's epistemological interest. I have been advocating and applying the analytic approach in my own works, and in this talk I wish to give a brief explanation of this methodology.

§ Preliminary Understanding: Are Chinese Philosophy and Analytic Philosophy Compatible?

To convert Chinese thought into the analytic context is not to presume that the two traditions are naturally compatible. For one thing, the Chinese tradition has always emphasized that one should go beyond linguistic expressions, to seek “transcendental truth,” to “grasp the meaning behind words” and to “comprehend the teacher's sayings with one's heart (or intuitive understanding).” Contemporary Confucians take Confucianism to be “some kind of practical wisdom and transcendental truth which

cannot be understood by any objective and logical methods.” (Fung, 1) Daoism is particularly a teaching that downplays literal understanding as well as linguistic or logical analysis. A concept should remain ambiguous so as to be open to multiple interpretations, and as soon as a clear definition is given, the concept is restricted and the richness is gone. Therefore, Daoist concepts are said to be “unanalyzable.” Zen Buddhism also emphasizes “the transmissions of heart,” which cannot be accomplished by words alone. A metaphor they use is that our words are like the finger that points to the moon: one should pay attention to the moon (the truth) rather than the finger (words) itself. This is why some people have felt that the analytic method is not suitable for Chinese philosophy, and that by using it, we are losing “the spiritual essence”² of Chinese philosophy. One such opinion is expressed by Eske Møllgaard against analytic philosophical treatment of Chinese philosophy: “this philosophy cannot claim any special status in the study of Chinese thought — in fact it hampers productive research in this area. In particular, the style of philosophy introduced into the study of Chinese thought is not concerned with *reading* but with *analysis*, and therefore it reduces unique thought to arguments and subsumes the specific under abstract categories.” (Møllgaard, 321) I respect the opinion; however, I think that the analytic method is just one means to the end and the end is to understand Chinese philosophy. Understanding cannot be based merely on the readers’ intuitive grasp, since there would be no independent criterion to judge whether the intuition is correct or not. Contemporary interpreters of ancient texts should aim to assist readers in understanding, and the precise choice of words along with the clear formulation of views is an effective means. The analytic presentation of Chinese philosophy certainly does not exhaust the whole content of Chinese philosophy, but it is a

start in the right direction.

There is also resistance among Chinese scholars to analyzing Chinese philosophy with Western methodologies or Western conceptual schemes. Their main reason is that Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy are essentially different, such that the two conceptual schemes are “incommensurable to each other.” (Fung, 1) Some people have also suggested that since Chinese philosophy was developed in China and has been deeply intertwined with the Chinese culture and the Chinese way of thinking, anyone without a Chinese (both the language and the culture) background would not be able to truly appreciate the spirit of Chinese philosophy. I personally think that this kind of attitude is basically closing the doors to outsiders. If Chinese philosophy is to reach out to people who were not already immersed in this kind of thinking, it needs various ways of presentation that makes it “accessible.” I reject any “nationalistic” treatment of Chinese philosophy by Chinese scholars, and argue that for Chinese philosophy to develop a global dimension and a respectable philosophical dimension, it needs to adopt the language that is open to non-Chinese philosophers. Since nowadays in North America, most philosophers have been trained in the mainstream analytic philosophy, the analytic presentation of Chinese philosophy would make Chinese philosophy less mysterious, less intimidating, and more philosophically engaging. There are certainly issues in Chinese philosophy that the analytic philosophers can relate to, and these philosophers can engage in the discussion once they understand the issues. For example, most traditional Chinese philosophers have explored metaphysical issues and ethical issues, and some of them also have their epistemological views. These views are often

different from those that have emerged in the Western tradition, and they may provide interesting alternatives to the accepted views in the West. At the same time, analytic philosophy can also suggest many new topics and problems for the development of Chinese philosophy. Chinese philosophy, as well as other Asian philosophies, needs to be “reinvented” in order to become part of the global philosophical exchange. The analytic approach provides a new way to continue the philosophical development.

§ Analytic Comparative Philosophy Approach to Chinese Philosophy: Background

I personally have been taking the analytic and comparative approach. I prefer this combination both because of my personal training and because of my audience. I studied Chinese philosophy in Taiwan, and obtained my Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees at National Taiwan University. I had a deep passion for Chinese philosophy and my Master’s thesis was on a Chinese philosopher of the seventeenth century. After I went to the U.S. for my doctorate degree, however, I devoted my attention fully to analytic philosophy since that was what most major philosophy programs (including my own — University of Rochester) offered at the time. I worked primarily on philosophy of mind and philosophy of language. For about ten years, I hardly thought about Chinese philosophy. After I started teaching in Upstate New York, students often approached me to plead for offering Chinese philosophy course. Initially I always declined, because after being fully immersed in the analytic philosophical mode, I found Chinese philosophical terms vague and Chinese philosophical argumentation sloppy. But

eventually I gave in to students' requests and offered an experimental course on Chinese philosophy. I aimed to explain what I had felt to be in my blood and in my bones, to students who had not been brought up in the Chinese culture, who were not familiar with the philosophical terms commonly used by the Chinese people. For this purpose, I found the analytic style to be the most helpful. I would analyze the philosophical terms to make them less mystifying. I would lay out the philosophers' argumentation and ask for students' reflection or critique. I would compare Chinese philosophical views to those Western views that my students knew about. After one experimental course, I found the result encouraging. I felt that using the analytic style made Chinese philosophy more accessible to my students, and I also began to see more and more points of common concerns and similar ideas between Chinese thought and Western thinking. There was no book that took a systematic analytic approach to Chinese philosophy at the time, and thus I took upon myself to write such a book. My book, *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy: from Ancient Philosophy to Chinese Buddhism*, came out in 2006 by Blackwell Publishing. In this book, I employed the analytic approach that emphasizes the analysis of concepts, the formulation of arguments, the examination of basic assumptions, and the pursuit of clarity in language.

I am certainly not alone in my endeavors. The development of explicating Chinese philosophy with the analytic approach started way before me, and I relied on the early scholars' analyses as my guideline. Furthermore, there are now many Chinese scholars who have gone through similar intellectual paths to mine, and they too felt the need to convert Chinese philosophy into the analytic context. There are also many non-Chinese

philosophers who came out of the analytic training, and they found it natural to discuss the issues in Chinese philosophy with the analytic approach. I have seen this trend in North America, in Hong Kong, in Taiwan and in China. In his article “The Analytic and Comparative Studies of Chinese Philosophy,” Cheng-yang Li observes that there are three major groups of scholars who take this approach. The first group includes the Chinese scholars who went to the U.S. in the eighties from various philosophy programs in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Their native language is Chinese, and they have received solid training in analytic philosophy. They have produced many comparative studies from the analytic approach. The second group includes non-Chinese philosophers who have received extensive training in Chinese, and their proficiency in reading original Chinese texts enables them to produce quality research on Chinese philosophy. The third group includes philosophers who came from Western philosophical training but became interested in Chinese philosophy on their own. They mostly do not read Chinese texts, and must rely on translations. Their background training in Western philosophy, in particular, in analytic philosophy, inclines them to take a comparative analytic approach to Chinese philosophical issues as well. (Li 2007, 262)

The trend is also spreading back to areas in the Chinese-speaking world. In 2005, National Cheng Chi University in Taipei hosted a conference on “Chinese Philosophy in Analytic Perspectives.” In 2009, the Association of Chinese Philosophers in North America (ACPA) worked with the Institute of Thoughts and Culture in Modern China as well as the Philosophy Department of East China Normal University to co-sponsor an international workshop on “Chinese Philosophy and Analytic Philosophy.” Another

society, the International Society for Comparative Studies of Chinese and Western Philosophy (ISCWP), has also organized numerous conferences on the interchanges between Chinese philosophy and analytic philosophy in China. These are merely the more recent events.

§ Analytic Comparative Philosophy Approach to Chinese Philosophy: An Application

One basic premise in converting Chinese philosophy into the analytic context is that the interpreter must have a solid understanding of the original texts, so that the analytic treatment would not distort the philosophical content of the original text. Another important requirement is that the contemporary interpreter must appreciate the original texts in their social, historical contexts, so that the new interpretation does not result in awkward “anachronism” (using Li’s term, 268). Finally, I think the conversion should be done systematically, holistically, so that individual works would not be taken out of their intellectual lineage and be injected with alien notions.

I believe that to systematically convert Chinese philosophy into the analytic context, we need to explicate the fundamental issues to which analytic philosophers can relate. As Donald Munro puts it, we have to “present philosophical findings accessible to a broad audience... Present the human problem. Do not just present the textual problem. That is not of interest to people outside of Sinology.” (Cheung & Liu 2008) I see the common concerns shared by Western and Chinese thinkers alike, and this is where I would

establish my comparisons. I begin with metaphysics, in particular, with the Chinese cosmology. To begin with, Confucians have the fundamental conviction that the world has always existed, is full of vitality and is governed by a certain principle, which is called *Dao* or the Way. Daoism, on the other hand, has its distinctive thesis that Being comes from Nonbeing. *Dao* to Laozi stands for an objective reality that is not a perceptible, describable, or even humanly conceivable. It has also been seen as the principle, the origin, the motivator, etc. of all things. Since Truth is *Dao*, we humans can never know the real Truth. Chinese Buddhism, to give it a rough depiction, originates from the belief that the phenomenal world is basically the construction of the mind's conceptions as well as other mental activities. These three different worldviews co-exist in Chinese philosophy, and the validity of each view has been the focus of debates among many Chinese philosophers in history. From the basic metaphysical differences generate different views on human perception and conception. Confucianism affirms the possibility of man's grasping the Truth, and such persons who not only can grasp the ultimate Truth, but also can institute moral codes for human society, are called 'the sages.' Since Daoism denies that *Dao* can be captured by human conceptions and words, *Dao* is cognitively closed to us. Chinese Buddhism, finally, claims that only when we can let go of our conceptions of and emotional attachments to material things, can we gain the enlightenment that all is empty of its own nature. Therefore, knowledge hinders true understanding. I characterize these metaphysical/epistemological differences as that between realism (Confucianism) and anti-realism (Daoism and Buddhism). I have also contrasted Laozi's view and Zhuangzi's view as that between metaphysical realism and

internal realism in my “A Daoist Conception of Truth.” (In *Comparative Approaches to Chinese Philosophy*, (ed.) Bo Mou, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2003.)

Secondly, the basic element of Chinese metaphysics is *qi*, which is different from the notion of *matter* in Western metaphysics. *Qi* is dynamic while matter is inactive; *qi* penetrates everything while matter is solid; *qi* is constantly changing while matter is static. Chinese cosmology treats *qi* as existentially prior to matter – the condensation of *qi* constitutes matter. Everything is comprised of *qi*, and the various degrees of purity or impurity determine the levels of existence. *Qi* is not volitional; hence, our creation is not the result of any intentional production. *Qi* condenses and rarefies, but it never gets exhausted or even diminished. *Qi* pervades the universe; in other words, the universe is simply the totality of *qi* in perpetual motion and constant alteration. In this cosmology, the cosmos is viewed as being composed of a great force (*qi*), which, even though having no mind of its own, has an intrinsic order in its movement. This great force permeates everything in the cosmos; hence, everything is interconnected in this organic whole. To understand Chinese metaphysics, one must appreciate the notion of *qi*. Based on this basic notion, Chinese philosophy develops a holistic approach to human beings’ relation to the world of nature as well as humans’ interpersonal relationships. If we see other things as made of the same *qi* as I am, then the boundaries between others and me become fluid and transient. This metaphysical conception of the world also forms the basis of Chinese moral philosophy.

Another important comparison is frequently made between Chinese ethical views and Western ethical views. I cannot possibly do justice to the richness of the discussions that have emerged so far. Here I will just state what I perceive to be the main spirits of Confucianism and Daoism. In the Confucian moral society, people are categorized into different groups according to their varying degrees of moral cultivation. One who is morally exemplary is called “the superior person” (*junzi*, sometimes translated as “the gentleman”). Those who not only have superior moral characters themselves, but also help others cultivate themselves, are men of humanity (men of *ren*); and finally, those who can extend benevolence to all people and bring succor to the multitude, are the sages (*sheng*). The complete moral self-cultivation is a process that one is committed to undertake throughout one’s life. The highest moral goal is world peace and harmony, such that everyone is free from starvation and brutal death. What this ethics characterizes is a virtue ethics that stresses benevolence and altruism. Daoism takes a radically different approach to ethics. Both Laozi and Zhuangzi reject the moral preaching of Confucians, and they blame ethical codes as part of the corruption of the world. Laozi takes the fundamental virtue to be ‘inactivity’ (*wu-wei*). We can perhaps say that Laozi’s notion of ‘*wu-wei*’ incorporates three functions: (1) when things are running well, do nothing to interfere; (2) when the sage has to do something, do it with no personal, selfish desire; (3) in all his acts, the sage should conform to *Dao*, the natural pattern of things, and refrain from introducing human intervention. The method of inactivity works best when people are in a primitive society with very basic natural needs. Laozi thinks that all unnatural desires are derived from artificial conditioning from society. Zhuangzi also saw the distinction between morality and immorality as an artificial separation introduced

by people like Confucius. The ethically ideal state, according to Zhuangzi, is a state where people are naturally moral without even thinking about the notion of *morality* itself. The ultimate moral goal for Daoism is to be in accord with the natural state of being, which demands ridding oneself of one's preferences, prejudices and meddling. It has often been pointed out that the Confucian ethical view is a form of social holism — everyone is interconnected in a larger social web; Daoism, on the other hand, leads to a form of spiritual individualism — one aims to free oneself from conventional bondages.

I am now working on my second book that continues the analytic treatment to the later period of Chinese philosophy. The title of this book project is *Metaphysics, Mind and Morality: An Analytic Approach to Neo-Confucianism*. 'Neo-Confucianism' typically refers to the revival of Confucianism developed between the eleventh and the eighteenth century in China, spanning over four dynasties in Chinese history: Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties. Comparable to what "Modern Philosophy" (between the 17th and the 19th Century in Europe) accomplished in Western philosophy, Neo-Confucianism also revitalized classical philosophy and brought the traditional philosophical discourse to a new dimension. Neo-Confucianism was a new form of Confucianism that came after the dominance of Daoism and subsequently Buddhism in the Chinese intellectual circle. The transformation of Confucianism as a result of the challenge and influence of Daoism and Buddhism was a most remarkable and significant development in the history of Chinese philosophy. Neo-Confucianism invigorates the metaphysical investigation in the classic *Yijing* and incorporates different concepts and perspectives from Daoism as well as Chinese Buddhism into its discourse.

The aim of my book project is to explicate Neo-Confucianism in its major themes and to see how they exemplify a coherent underlying concern: the relation between Nature and man. Neo-Confucians were fundamentally concerned with the role humans play in the moral reconstruction of the world around them. In their view, humans not only endow the world of nature with meaning, but also share moral attributes with natural phenomena. Their worldview combines metaphysics and morality, and the connecting point is the human mind. Hence the title for my book: *Metaphysics, Mind and Morality*.

The organization of this book is thematic rather than chronological. The major common themes in Neo-Confucianism include: (1) the relationship between the two constituents of the universe—cosmic principle and cosmic force (*qi*); (2) the debate on whether human nature, or the human mind, is the exemplification of this cosmic principle; (3) the analysis of the roots of human good and evil as a way to answer the question of what makes human morality possible. The book has three parts: Part One deals with the Neo-Confucian metaphysics, and I shall explicate the commitment to moral realism in their metaphysical view. Part Two examines their views on human nature and their explanations of the relation between man and Nature. Part Three investigates Neo-Confucians' various forms of virtue ethics, their answers to the problem of evil and their proposals for moral education or moral transformation. The ancient Chinese philosophers' debate on whether human nature is good or bad was given a new dimension in the discourse of Neo-Confucians. They were concerned with the foundation for morality, and they traced the possibility of morality to the various aspects of human mind

— desires, sentiments, will, reason, etc. In this context, I will also bring in current discussion of moral psychology into my explication of Neo-Confucianism.

The analytic approach focuses more on the analysis of key philosophical concepts and the examination of the philosophers' basic assumptions. The analysis in this book will draw comparisons to analytic philosophy in its main issues and concerns. This approach attempts to bring Neo-Confucianism into the context of contemporary philosophy and to see how those issues in the Neo-Confucian terminology are actually quite akin to the issues dealt with by Western philosophers. It aims to show that even though Chinese philosophers use different terms, narrative strategies and analytic modes, their concerns are often similar to those of their Western counterparts: for example, What is the nature of reality? Wherein lies the foundation of our moral values? Is human nature fundamentally good or bad? How do human beings connect to the whole universe? What is the foundation of our knowledge of the world? My goal is to make these issues accessible to Western thinkers by shedding light on their universality through the analytic explication of these texts.

§ Conclusion

I recently taught a mini-course in Taiwan to a group of young scholars and undergraduate students who were interested in Neo-Confucianism, and I used that chance to present my analytic approach to Neo-Confucianism. Even though at the beginning, some students were skeptical about whether the application of philosophical analysis and Western

philosophical conceptual schemes that I used for comparison were suitable for understanding Neo-Confucianism, eventually my students all affirmed the value of taking Neo-Confucianism to a different level. It is very encouraging for me to see their response. I understand that the comparative and analytic path is just starting and there will always be scholars who would choose a different path. I think that any philosophical tradition needs multiple developments and there is no need to oppose the other paths even if one believes the path one takes is the best one. What is crucial for those who wish to convert Chinese philosophy into the analytic context is to produce quality works that “meet the standards of the best ‘mainstream’ philosophers.” (Van Norden, *Newsletter*).

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² This is a contemporary Chinese philosopher Mou Zong-san's (1909-1995) term.