

Chinese Philosophers and Global Philosophy 中国哲学家与全球哲学

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ABSTRACT

The paper begins with a distinction between “studying” and “doing” philosophy, and suggests that when we ask about the influence of Western thought on Chinese philosophy in the twentieth century, we keep this distinction in mind — even though the two approaches to philosophy can never be completely separate. Much of the paper revolves around the idea of “global philosophy,” by which I mean philosophy that is open, at least in principle, to the insights and approaches of philosophical traditions from around the globe. My central contention is that the category of “global philosophy” provides a good way to understand and assess many of the roles that Western thought has played with respect to Chinese philosophy in the twentieth century. Many Chinese philosophers were global philosophers, even if they also saw themselves as having additional cultural or spiritual goals. In addition, we can both articulate what good global philosophical methodology would look like, and critique methodologies that fail to meet this standard. I illustrate both sorts of methodology through an examination of Jiang Qing 蒋庆’s book Political Confucianism 政治儒学.

KEYWORDS

Global philosophy, comparative philosophy, New Confucianism, Jiang Qing, Political Confucianism

How has Western thought informed research in Chinese philosophy?¹ To begin answering this question, it is helpful to distinguish between two things that might be meant by research in Chinese philosophy. On the one hand, we might mean studying Chinese philosophy (研究中国哲学). On the other hand, we might have in mind something more like doing Chinese philosophy (作中国哲学). Are we interested in the roles played by Western categories as they

¹ Many thanks to Professors Liu Xiaogan and Christopher Fraser for their invitation to speak at the inaugural conference of the Research Center for Chinese Philosophy and Culture. Thanks, too, to my fellow participants at the conference, whose presentations and comments have greatly informed the present essay.

have influenced the interpretation of the history of Chinese philosophy? Or are we interested in the roles played by Western categories as they have influenced the creative, forward-looking development of Chinese philosophy? The answer, in most cases, will be “both.” This ambiguity that I have identified exists because it is impossible to completely separate “studying Chinese philosophy” from “doing Chinese philosophy.” Still, I believe that identifying this difference, and asking what difference it might make if we think about the different ways in which Western thought informs both the studying, and the doing, of Chinese philosophy, will be constructive.

I proceed as follows. First I define one of the terms that appears in my title, namely “global philosophy,” which I argue is both an excellent approach for us to adopt today, and often characterized the work of Chinese philosophers in the twentieth century. I then flesh out this claim with some attention to the use to which a number of Chinese philosophers put Western-derived concepts throughout the twentieth century. Several of the figures I discuss are associated with the “New Confucian (当代新儒家)” movement, and in my next section I explore issues surrounding my characterization of these individuals as “philosophers.” Finally, I examine a very recent book that engages in global political philosophy from a Confucian perspective, namely Jiang Qing 蒋庆’s *Political Confucianism* 政治儒学. By exploring the strengths and weaknesses of the book, we can see more clearly by what standards global philosophical claims can be evaluated. In my conclusion, I return to the productive ambiguity between studying and doing Chinese philosophy.

1. Global Philosophy

Consider a distinction between comparative and global philosophy. “Comparative philosophy” is a term with which we are all familiar. At least when taken at face value, the practice of comparative philosophy would seem to involve “studying,” as opposed to “doing,” various philosophies. We ask, for instance, how a particular Chinese concept should be understood, and part of our method is to compare it with relevant Western concepts. Such a method is valuable because it can reveal things about concepts — both Chinese and Western — that might not have been apparent without the comparative framework. American philosophers who engage in comparative philosophy regularly tell our students that we learn things about ourselves through studying others in a comparative fashion. What we mean, at least in part, is that our own commitments and blind spots often become perspicuous only when set in contrast to others’ ways of viewing the world.

Some work that goes under the name of “comparative philosophy,” though, aims at more than comparison. The authors of three recent papers on the methodology of comparative philosophy say that they aim to “integrate,” “challenge,” and “seek truth,” respectively.² Each of these ideas depends on being able to compare ideas, texts, and reasons across philosophical traditions, but each goes beyond comparison to urge that we undertake creative philosophy. Each of these ideas, that is, requires critical engagement among multiple traditions, with the implicit recognition that no single tradition can determine in advance how such engagement will turn out. For the sake of clarity, I propose that we label this enterprise “global philosophy”: engaging in

² See, respectively: Robert E. Allinson, "The Myth of Comparative Philosophy or the Comparative Philosophy Malgré Lui," Bryan Van Norden, "Mencius and Augustine on Evil: a Test Case for Comparative Philosophy," and Ji-yuan Yu and Nicholas Bunnin, "Saving the Phenomena: an Aristotelian Method in Comparative Philosophy," all in *Two Roads to Wisdom? Chinese and Analytic Philosophical Traditions*, edited by Mou Bo (Chicago: Open Court, 2001).

philosophy in a way that is open, at least in principle, to the insights and approaches of philosophers and philosophical traditions from around the globe.³

Some immediate clarifications are necessary. First, global philosophy is not premised on the existence of a single set of context-independent truths applicable to everyone on the globe. Rather, it is the commitment to open-minded and open-ended dialogue. To be sure, if we are to learn from one another, there must turn out to be some concepts or experiences that we have adequately in common. But we need not stipulate in advance what these are. Second, it would be natural to worry that just as the socio-economic process called “globalization” seems to be led primarily by the interests of the most powerful individuals, corporations, and states, so “global philosophy” will be primarily shaped by those philosophical traditions whose adherents and institutional supporters currently possess the most cultural (and other forms of) capital. This is a legitimate concern. Indeed, writing about the increasing hegemony of modern Anglo-American and European philosophy around the globe, Robert Solomon laments, “It seems that the globalization of free market economics goes with the globalization of one brief moment in philosophy, with similarly devastating effects on local cultures and the rich varieties of human experience.”⁴ However, the goals of “global philosophy” are precisely to counter the globalization of one philosophical tradition. Since the banner of global philosophy has been carried by individuals with strong commitments to non-Western philosophical traditions, we should see the idea of global philosophy as an effort to critique those who believe Western philosophy to be the only viable philosophy on the globe.

³ This approach has a similar spirit to that Robert Neville called for in his 1993 Presidential Address to the 8th International Conference on Chinese Philosophy, in which he insisted that Chinese philosophy “constitutes a body of philosophy of worldwide importance”; philosophers everywhere, he added, “need to take account of Chinese philosophy as a living resource for civilized thinking.” Robert Cummings Neville, “Confucianism as a World Philosophy: Presidential Address for the 8th International Conference on Chinese Philosophy, Beijing, 1993” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 21 (1994): pp. 5-25.

⁴ Robert C. Solomon, “What is Philosophy?’ the Status of World Philosophy in the Profession,” *Philosophy East & West* 51:1 (2001): p. 100.

Finally, some global philosophers write about a future “world philosophy” that we will all share, based on a synthesis of existing traditions.⁵ Perhaps this will come to pass, but not only is its possibility not a premise of global philosophy; in fact its very desirability is open to dispute. Zheng Jiadong 郑家栋, for instance, has stressed that while cross-cultural philosophical dialogue is possible and productive, it will not (and should not) remove all differences among our various particular traditions.⁶ Zheng’s view finds support in Brian Fay’s notion of multicultural “interactionism,” which “doesn’t envision the transcendence of difference (something it thinks is impossible in any case).... [Instead,] in encounters between selves and others, between similarity and difference, the choice is not to adopt one or the other, but to hold them in dynamic tension.”⁷ Fay looks for “growth,” as seen from within each perspective, but not for “consensus.”⁸ Engaging in global philosophy, therefore, does not mean giving up one’s “home” in a particular tradition or approach. It does not mean coming to speak in a neutered, accessible-because-empty language that has been shorn of connection to central texts and terminology, as we might imagine Alasdair MacIntyre arguing.⁹ Rather, global philosophy demands that we work to understand other traditions in their own terms, and find grounds on which we can engage one another constructively.

⁵ See, for instance, Feng Youlan 冯友兰’s contribution to a 1948 “Symposium on Oriental Philosophy” organized by *The Philosophical Review*, in which he writes that “Only a union of rationalism and mysticism will make a philosophy worthy of the one world of the future.” Yu-lan Fung, “Chinese Philosophy and a Future World Philosophy,” *The Philosophical Review* 57:6 (1948): pp. 539-49.

⁶ 郑家栋: “中西对话中的儒学与中国哲学”, 《断裂中的传统》(北京: 中国社会科学出版社, 2001), p. 516.

⁷ Brian Fay, *Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science: A Multicultural Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 234.

⁸ Ibid., p. 245. In his contribution to the 1948 Symposium on Oriental Philosophy, E. A. Burttt proposes a way in which “Occidental” philosophers can approach “Oriental” philosophies in a spirit Fay would no doubt applaud: “Readiness for... growth, through appreciative understanding of the contrasting contexts of ways of philosophizing in the East is, indeed, the only attitude by which we can gradually learn what in our present criterion is dependably sound and what is merely an expression of some partisan cultural interest of the Occident.” E. A. Burttt, “How Can the Philosophies of East and West Meet?” *The Philosophical Review* 57:6 (1948): p. 603.

⁹ See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988). For some critical discussion, see Stephen C. Angle, “Pluralism in Practice: Incommensurability and Constraints on Change in Ethical Discourses,” in Michael Barnhart, ed., *Varieties of Ethical Reflection: New Directions for Ethics in a Global Context* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2002), pp. 119-37.

Constructive engagement means, in all likelihood, critiquing some of one's own tradition's assumptions, but I believe that all live traditions must be prepared for such critiques in any case. Here is Zheng Jiadong, a leading Confucian scholar, on the situation in which Confucianism finds itself:

As an ancient spiritual tradition, Confucianism is facing a more serious test than it has ever before encountered. This test will not be resolved by shouting stirring slogans about how this next century will be the "Asian Century" or the "Confucian Century." From another perspective, though, this kind of test can at the same time provide contemporary Confucianism with a favorable opportunity for self-transformation and development. A simultaneous test and opportunity, a crisis and a turning point: this is the fundamental reality that Confucianism today must face.¹⁰

This well expresses the kind of vulnerability to which global philosophy opens us up. Of course the Confucian tradition is more than (what we now call) philosophy: as I will discuss below, there are important cultural and religious dimensions as well. But the point I want to emphasize here is the sense in which global philosophy poses a simultaneous challenge and opportunity to all philosophical traditions.

2. Some Global Philosophers

With this understanding of "global philosophy" in hand, I now want to argue that many Chinese philosophers throughout the twentieth century operated as global philosophers. In my book *Human Rights and Chinese Thought*, I have discussed at some length the early development of explicit Chinese discussions of "*quanli* 权利" and related terms. A central argument of the book is that terms like "*quanli*" were appropriated, interpreted, or one could even say "manufactured," in order to solve problems that were conceptualized (at least initially)

¹⁰ 郑家栋: 〈中西对话中的儒学与中国哲学〉, 《断裂中的传统》(北京: 中国社会科学出版社, 2001), p. 519.

in traditional frameworks.¹¹ For instance, the question of how to articulate people's legitimate desires and interests — on both individual and social levels — had long been a vexed issue for Confucians. This is not to say that Confucians had no vocabulary in which to discuss legitimate desires, but for a variety of reasons they had trouble speaking clearly about legitimate desires and interests, and this lack of clarity had social and political consequences. Thinkers like Liang Qichao 梁启超 and Liu Shipei 刘师培 were open to the possibility that concepts and reasoning from outside China might help to solve some of the problems they identified. Their active appropriation (and interpretation) of ideas like “rights” from foreign traditions, in order to better handle local difficulties, is a good example of global philosophy at work.

Other examples of global philosophical approaches can be seen in the work of individuals associated with the “New Confucian” movement.¹² These thinkers draw on Western philosophers like Kant or Hegel, and sometimes on Buddhist teachings, in order to develop a Confucianism that can meet the challenges of a new era. The constructive role these various non-Confucian traditions play qualifies the New Confucians as global philosophers, but they do not always understand themselves as such. A brief look at one of the group's core documents will help to illustrate some of the ambiguity surrounding New Confucianism and global philosophy.

In 1958, Zhang Junmai 张君勱, Tang Junyi 唐君毅, Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, and Xu Fuguan 徐复观 jointly issued a “Manifesto for a Reappraisal of Sinology and Reconstruction of Chinese Culture.” After a rousing and provocative discussion of some of Chinese culture's central strengths (as they view it), the authors write:

¹¹ Stephen C. Angle, *Human Rights and Chinese Thought: a Cross-Cultural Inquiry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹² On “New Confucianism,” see John Makeham, “The Retrospective Creation of New Confucianism,” in John Makeham, ed., *New Confucianism: A Critical Examination* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), pp. 25-53; see also below.

That there are shortcomings in Chinese thought cannot be denied. What we must recognize here is that any culture should be considered in terms of the positive value of its basic ideologies. Shortcomings are observed only when the ideologies are extended and developed or when they encounter in their applications unfavorable circumstances. If with an individual we first ascertain his merits and thus come to respect him, and then determine his shortcomings so that as an expression of our regard we may try to remedy them, then how much more should we take this attitude towards a culture, which is an expression of the spiritual life of a people.¹³

In other words, philosophical traditions need to be developed charitably and critically. In the English version of the Manifesto, published later than the original Chinese version, the authors are explicit that such development should include openness to others:

A program of such extension is to include into consideration the ideals of other cultures. This does not disregard the intrinsic proprieties of Chinese culture, but stresses the absorption of whatever is good. Merely to add Western elements of science and technology to Chinese tradition is not a fruitful method. We therefore decide to search for ideals in our inner heart and follow them.¹⁴

Here, it appears that while the authors have not abandoned Chinese culture nor Chinese traditions, they nonetheless recognize that live traditions need to progress in an atmosphere that is open to the best one can learn from all sources. In the original Chinese version of the Manifesto, though, they put these matters quite differently. They still recognize the existence of shortcomings in Chinese thought as it stands, but insist that Confucianism must overcome these problems through internal critique and growth, rather than by adding on elements from the outside. They write that it is commonly held that in order to improve a culture's ideals and remove its shortcomings,

it is best to combine the ideals of other cultures together with those of Chinese culture. But this method thinks only to expand the ideals of Chinese culture by adding on from

¹³ Carsun Chang, "A Manifesto for a Re-Appraisal of Sinology and Reconstruction of Chinese Culture" in *The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought*, vol. 2 (New York: Bookman Associates, 1962), p. 468. See also 〈为中国文化敬告世界人士宣言〉, in 封祖盛编: 《当代新儒家》(Beijing: Sanlian Shudian, 1989), p. 26. For convenience, I quote from the abridged, published English translation of the Manifesto, but include references to a recent re-publication of the Chinese original.

¹⁴ Carsun Chang, "A Manifesto for a Re-Appraisal of Sinology and Reconstruction of Chinese Culture" in *The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought*, vol. 2 (New York: Bookman Associates, 1962), p. 468-9.

the outside, and it ignores the question of in what direction Chinese culture itself seeks to develop its ideals.¹⁵

For instance, it might be thought that the Western distinction among religion, philosophy, and morality is a good thing, and thus should be added to the ideals of Chinese culture, which lacks such distinctions. The Manifesto's authors argue, however, that such an approach ignores the possibility that Chinese Confucian ideals have their own logic and coherence that would be violated by adding on these Western distinctions. They state that they will not follow the "external addition" method, but instead will look for ways to develop Chinese ideals that keep to the culture's fundamental orientations.

The contrast between the English and Chinese versions of the Manifesto may appear confusing, but in the end I find it instructive. Both versions rule out the "external addition" idea, even if the English version confines itself to a more narrow understanding of what counts as an external addition (that is, Western science and technology). Both stress internal growth. Near the end of the Manifesto, this is reiterated in a sentence that is virtually identical in both Chinese and English versions: "What needs to be done now is for each nation critically to re-examine and re-evaluate its own culture, taking into consideration the future of mankind as a whole."¹⁶ The question that is raised by juxtaposing the English and Chinese versions of the Manifesto is what role, exactly, consideration of non-Chinese ideals should have in the internal growth of Chinese thought. The English version says that internal growth should "include into consideration the ideals of other cultures," but does not say how. The Chinese version rejects simple addition of

¹⁵ 〈为中国文化敬告世界人士宣言〉, in 封祖盛编: 《当代新儒家》(Beijing: Sanlian Shudian, 1989), p. 27.

¹⁶ Carsun Chang, "A Manifesto for a Re-Appraisal of Sinology and Reconstruction of Chinese Culture" in *The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought*, vol. 2 (New York: Bookman Associates, 1962), p. 482. See also 〈为中国文化敬告世界人士宣言〉, in 封祖盛编: 《当代新儒家》(Beijing: Sanlian Shudian, 1989), p. 49. The striking similarity between this statement and Charles Taylor's proposed methodology for forging an "unforced consensus" is worth noting. See Charles Taylor, "Conditions of an Unforced Consensus on Human Rights" in Joanne R. Bauer, and Daniel A. Bell, eds., *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 124-44.

outside ideals, but does not claim that Chinese thinkers must be sealed off from reflection on, or influence by, foreign philosophy. There is thus space here for global philosophy. Indeed, when Tang, Mou, and the others pursue their own philosophical projects, concepts and questions from foreign philosophical traditions play important roles, even though these thinkers are right to see themselves as building from a base in Confucianism.

I said above that global philosophy is not premised on the existence of a single set of context-independent truths applicable to everyone on the globe. We should note, though, that it is possible to interpret Zhang, Tang, Mou, and Xu as disagreeing with me on this point. They speak of the formation of a “world civilization” and seek to arrive at “a true unity with mankind.” In a similar vein, they write “Though there are many nations now, mankind will eventually become one and undivided.”¹⁷ Of course it is possible that they are correct that we will one day realize a world civilization, but I want to insist that global philosophy need not aim at such a “unity,” nor does its coherence rest on the possibility of such a unity. All it requires is that we can, at least in principle, communicate with one another, and this possibility is guaranteed by the arguments of Donald Davidson and others.¹⁸

The next question I want to take up is whether a Chinese philosopher who explicitly or implicitly rejects the approaches and vocabulary of Chinese philosophical traditions can be said to be a global philosopher. Consider Chen Duxiu 陈独秀, who argued in the 1910s that China needed to turn its back on Confucianism and embrace Western ideologies. Was he a global philosopher? By raising this question, I want to emphasize once again that “global philosopher”

¹⁷ Carsun Chang, "A Manifesto for a Re-Appraisal of Sinology and Reconstruction of Chinese Culture" in *The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought*, vol. 2 (New York: Bookman Associates, 1962), pp. 476, 478, 481.

¹⁸ For the arguments of Davidson and Robert Brandom as grounding the possibility of global philosophy, see Stephen C. Angle, "Making Room for Comparative Philosophy: Davidson, Brandom, and Conceptual Distance." in Bo Mou, ed., *Davidson's Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy: Constructive Engagement* (Leiden: Brill, Forthcoming).

does not simply mean anyone who unthinkingly jumps on the bandwagon of a philosophical school currently fashionable with some global elite. Being closed-minded about the values of one's own philosophical traditions disqualifies one from being a global philosopher, just as being closed-minded about the value of others' traditions would. With this standard in mind, I would nonetheless at least tentatively argue that Chen Duxiu counts as a global philosopher because of his considerable engagement with Confucianism. His rejection (which, of course, may not have been as complete as he thought it was) of Chinese traditions was not closed-minded, but defended with reasons and based on extensive knowledge of the textual tradition. He in fact argues as only a global philosopher could when, in an important 1916 article, he says that without the alternative of a Western model, there would be no way to expose the weaknesses of Confucianism. With the Western model in hand, though, he argues that we can compare and show the Western approach (of human rights, equality, and so on) to be superior.¹⁹ To be sure, saying that he was a global philosopher is not to say that he was necessarily correct. No matter what his contemporaries, or we today, make of his arguments, his method was that of global philosophy.

3. Culture, Philosophy, Practice

It is important to recognize that there can be more involved in a commitment to the Confucian tradition than simply finding it philosophically persuasive. The authors of the 1948 Manifesto were all advocates of democracy, variously understood. They criticized the way in which Chen Duxiu argued for democracy, however, saying that he “urged the destruction of the traditional Chinese culture, making democracy no more than an import product from the West

¹⁹ 陈独秀：〈宪法与孔教〉，in 《陈独秀文章选编（上）》（北京：三联书店，1984），p. 148.

without root in Chinese culture.”²⁰ This was problematic on two levels. The failure to ground a notion of democracy on elements of traditional culture, the Manifesto’s authors felt, helped to explain the failure of democracy to flourish in China. More fundamentally, they believed that demolishing traditional culture, rather than reconstructing it, was deeply mistaken. Zheng Jiadong has written, “the New Confucians’ identification (认同) with the Confucian tradition does not just rest on sentiments derived from their life experiences, but also rests on [a commitment to] an entire cultural direction.”²¹ At least in part, Zheng argues, these thinkers were concerned “not with the abstract problem of how to be a person, but with the actual, concrete problem of becoming a Chinese person” [Ibid.]. As Mou Zongsan put it, “On the one hand, there is freedom of belief, which cannot be interfered with. But for one born Chinese to self-consciously go and be a Chinese person, to existentially go and be a Chinese person, this is a matter of choosing oneself, not a matter of freedom of belief” [quoted in Ibid.]. In short, New Confucians like Mou saw their philosophy as bound up in a cultural identity movement. This raised the stakes for which they were playing: a rejection of Confucianism came to mean a rejection of their very identity, and (as they saw it, at least) of the identities of their hundreds of millions of compatriots.

One way in which issues of cultural identity intersect with the question of global philosophy is already clear: Chen’s rejection of Confucianism was seen as not simply a philosophical move, but as culturally self-destructive. In fact, according to Zheng’s analysis, the situation of the New Confucians themselves was also deeply problematic, especially for those

²⁰ Carsun Chang, "A Manifesto for a Re-Appraisal of Sinology and Reconstruction of Chinese Culture" in *The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought*, vol. 2 (New York: Bookman Associates, 1962), p. 474. See also 〈为中国文化敬告世界人士宣言〉, in 封祖盛编: 《当代新儒家》(北京: 三联书店, 1989), p. 35.

²¹ 郑家栋: 〈当代儒学与中国社会〉, 《断裂中的传统》(北京: 中国社会科学出版社, 2001), p. 3.

increasingly distant from the cultural and institutional milieu of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Zheng observes that:

In the later developments of New Confucianism, laying out theoretical distinctions, developing systems, and perfecting academic theories seem to have become the focus of attention. Moral practice, the presentation of innate/moral knowledge, the question of whether moral consciousness can connect with the transcendent, and so on, to a large degree have all become academic matters rather than matters of genuine practice.²² [quoted in Makeham 2005, 11]

In other words, New Confucians over the last several decades have increasingly been operating “as professional philosophers in the modern sense rather than [Confucians 儒者] in the traditional sense” [Ibid., 12]. One final way that Zheng has characterized this change is by saying that “When the day came that the search for knowledge became its leading feature, New Confucianism, as a particular school, lost its unique determinant character, and became dissolved within the horizon of the pluralist developments of contemporary Confucianism (儒学)” [Ibid., 11].

All of this could seem like an indictment of Confucians today operating as global philosophers, though I think that Zheng’s own position is considerably more subtle — as is indicated by his view, cited above, that the present moment represents both a “test” and an “opportunity” for the Confucian tradition. In any event, it seems to me that there are three different things we can see Zheng saying may be lost as New Confucianism comes increasingly to look like pure global philosophy. First is cultural self-identity. I agree that cultural identity is significant, and reiterate that global philosophy does not ask us to abandon “home” traditions. At the same time, it is crucial not to essentialize “culture” into something static and pure. I will return to this question below. A second issue is whether a “school” of New Confucianism has

²² Quoted in John Makeham, "Guest Editor's Introduction: Guo Qiyong and Zheng Jiadong on New Confucianism," *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 36:2 (2005): p. 11.

been lost. I am actually very skeptical about whether there ever was a “school” of New Confucianism,²³ but even if there was, I fail to see its dissolution into a broader, more pluralist realm of global philosophy as intrinsically problematic. If it is problematic, it is only because of its connection to the third issue, namely Zheng’s assertion that contemporary Confucianism, like professional philosophy more generally, is concerned with “academic matters” rather than “genuine practice.”

This issue of the practical significance of Confucianism and of philosophy today is complex. On the one hand, I am unhappy with the degree to which the practice of philosophy in my country (the United States) is largely confined to technical, in-house discussions among professionals, with neither an impact on the wider public nor even on how we professional philosophers ourselves live our lives.²⁴ So to some degree, Zheng’s worry about a lack of practical import of professionalized contemporary Confucianism is of a piece with worries about professionalized philosophy in general. In fact, Zheng’s worries about Confucianism notwithstanding, I hold out some hope that the practical dimensions of Confucianism may assist global philosophers working primarily in other traditions to better realize the practical significance of philosophical work in their own contexts.²⁵ On the other hand, the very distinction between “philosophy” and “religion,” as well as many other social and cultural changes that have affected the ways in which one can pursue “Confucianism” in China, are

²³ For an important treatment of the question of whether New Confucianism was ever a “school,” see John Makeham, “The Retrospective Creation of New Confucianism,” in John Makeham, ed., *New Confucianism: A Critical Examination* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), pp. 25-53. Admittedly, Zheng’s description of the relation between Mou Zongsan — ironically, perhaps the most “intellectualized” of the New Confucians — and his students certainly bears some resemblance to traditional master-disciple relations. See Zheng, Jiadong. “Between History and Thought: Mou Zongsan and the New Confucianism That Walked Out of History,” *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 36:2 (2005): pp. 49-66.

²⁴ Of course I am not alone in my dissatisfaction. One indication of this is the recent creation, by the American Philosophical Association, of a Committee on Public Philosophy.

²⁵ Showing how engaging with the Confucian tradition can help us to better realize the practical possibilities of philosophy — in helping us to live better lives — is a central goal of my book in progress, *Sagehood and the Global Philosophical Significance of Neo-Confucianism*.

comparatively recent phenomena.²⁶ Zheng writes compellingly about the ways in which figures such as Mou Zongsan struggled with tensions brought about by the uneasy fit of Confucianism within the category of “philosophy.” Zheng says that central practical goals, like helping society to reach a “settled” state (安顿社会), seem religious, while the academic methods to which Mou and others have no choice but to appeal push them toward philosophy.²⁷ Again, one problem here might be a too-ready assumption that philosophy is not, or cannot be, itself extremely practical. Be this as it may, there do seem to be differences between the way at least some in China today understand Confucianism, and the way the vast majority in the West understand philosophy: witness, for instance, current efforts in Beijing and elsewhere to found Confucian academies for school-age children. I conclude this section, therefore, with the thought that both the theory and the practice of what counts as philosophy is in flux, both in China and (I hope) in the West. Zheng offers the following optimistic thought: the development of contemporary Confucianism is not nearing completion, but in fact has just begun; the impressive results of philosophers like the various authors of the Manifesto, he says, should just be seen as a kind of “prelude.”²⁸

4. Jiang Qing’s Methodologies

So far, I have explained what I mean by “global philosophy,” and briefly substantiated my claim that a variety of Chinese thinkers from the twentieth century should be understood as

²⁶ It is striking to compare these processes in China with changes that took place over many centuries in Europe. See, in particular, Pierre Hadot on the nature of Hellenistic philosophical schools, and on the emergence of a distinction between theology and philosophy. Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises From Socrates to Foucault* (Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1995).

²⁷ 郑家栋：〈当代儒学与中国社会〉，《断裂中的传统》（北京：中国社会科学出版社，2001），p. 29.

²⁸ 郑家栋：〈中西对话中的儒学与中国哲学〉，《断裂中的传统》（北京：中国社会科学出版社，2001），p. 518.

global philosophers. It is now time for a more detailed discussion of a single contemporary Chinese philosopher, so that I can articulate more clearly the standards we can use to assess global philosophical projects, as well as further delineate the relationship between studying and doing Chinese philosophy.

For my current purposes, I will be more concerned with some parts than others of Jiang Qing's *Political Confucianism: The Changing Direction, Particularities, and Development of Contemporary Confucianism*. In particular, I am not going to focus on Jiang's interpretive and historical claim that Confucianism should be understood as distinguishable into two traditions, namely political Confucianism and the moral Confucianism of Tang, Mou and others. Neither will I engage directly with his claims that political Confucianism is more apt for facing China's current challenges than moral Confucianism. Instead, I will concentrate on two aspects of Jiang's book: first, the kinds of relations he sees between Confucianism and Western philosophical traditions; and second, the ways he argues for his various conclusions. That is, I will put his methodology and implicit epistemology into the foreground.

Jiang Qing strongly affirms that he is not merely studying Chinese philosophy, but doing Chinese philosophy. In terms reminiscent of the 1958 Manifesto, he asserts that "In China, Confucianism is not an already finished, dead tradition, only suited for scholarly research; it is a live tradition, full of creativity and plasticity, that is in the midst of a process of formation and development."²⁹ As such, Confucians need to reflect critically on the strengths and weaknesses of various Western schools of thought, and on how to adapt their strengths to enrich Confucianism's resources. In other words, at this point in the book, Jiang's position sounds precisely like the global philosophical attitude that I have been advocating.

²⁹ 蒋庆：《政治儒学》（北京：三联书店，2003年），页118。

Having asserted the need to engage critically with Western ideologies, Jiang proceeds to do so — briefly at this point, and in more detail later in the book. He looks, for instance, at Western conservatism. He applauds its combination of universalistic aspiration with groundedness in historical circumstances and particular traditions, and says that political Confucianism has much to learn from a detailed dialogue with conservatism. At the same time, he argues that Western conservatism is not adequately self-critical, and so is liable to become a tool of power holders [Ibid., 120]. He urges that political Confucianism be developed in such a way as to avoid this defect, by firmly holding on to the critical potential of its ultimate ideals. It is difficult not to feel that more needs to be said on this point, because the dynamic that Jiang identifies in conservatism certainly has been a problem for Confucians in the past.³⁰ And indeed, Jiang takes up some of these issues later in the book, for instance when he explores the types of civil society that political Confucianism ought to endorse. For now, the point I want to emphasize is that Jiang's approach in this section is exemplary global philosophy, even if it is incomplete.

Jiang's book contains many sections like the one I have just discussed, in which reasoning that we can all recognize and assess is offered in defense of specific claims, many of them built upon terms or ideas from Confucian texts. The arguments are not all equally persuasive, but many of them are insightful and challenging. When Jiang turns to explicit discussion of the methodology on which political Confucianism should rely, though, he says something very different.

Faced with the question of why moral Confucianism has continued to have proponents and interpreters in the twentieth century, while political Confucianism did not, Jiang turns to

³⁰ See Wm. Theodore deBary, *The Trouble With Confucianism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); and Alan T. Wood, *Limits to Autocracy: From Sung Neo-Confucianism to a Doctrine of Political Rights* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995).

what he says is the epistemological method grounding political Confucianism, namely the study of Classics (*jingxue* 经学). For a variety of reasons, *jingxue* was abandoned in the twentieth century. Jiang's analysis here is quite astute, including such reasons as the transformation of *jingxue* into pure historical scholarship and the doubting of antiquity; the role of Western disciplinary divisions in undermining the unity of the Classics — and with the loss of unity, so too a loss of sacredness; and the superficial exploitation of Classics by warlords [Ibid., 155-7]. As a result, Jiang concludes, any Chinese cultural revival lacks a foundation, since Chinese culture is expressed through the Classics, rather than being floating, unattached ideas. He writes: “the Classics are Chinese culture; depart from the Classics and it's [simply] not Chinese culture” [Ibid., 157]. Furthermore, he asserts that “study” (*xue*) of the Classics does not encompass any arbitrarily chosen approach to their appreciation or interpretation, but must be grounded in one of a small number of specific, systematic approaches. Interpretive traditions have schools, he says; one cannot undertake an interpretation of the Classics without a school to serve as context and guide. Without a school, one only has miscellaneous, random opinions that are little better than slogans [Ibid., 161]. Jiang then proceeds to summarize how one reads various Classics through the lens of his favored school. In the end, he concludes, “If Chinese culture cannot instantiate its Chinese characteristics, but completely embraces and accepts Western culture, then Chinese culture has become identical with Western culture, losing its self-identity, and losing its essence while superficially preserving its name” [Ibid., 201].

I find all this both fascinating and deeply problematic. It is fascinating, in part, because of how closely it echoes arguments being made today by many Muslim political philosophers, both conservative and progressive. According to them, the only arguments acceptable in their

communities are those grounded in a legitimate interpretation of the Islamic canon.³¹ This is clearly not the place to assess the plausibility of such positions with respect to Muslims worldwide, but I do feel confident in asserting that Jiang Qing is mistaken with respect to China and Chinese communities. He is correct that the Chinese Classics have lost their sacredness, but this has far-reaching implications that he is powerless to combat. That a given idea or institution is recorded in one of the Classics is not, on its own, a reason why anyone today should believe it. Moreover, as we seek to engage with these texts — which do, after all, contain a great deal of insight and are well worth our attention — we need not be constrained by one or another of the traditional schools of interpretation. We should realize that Jiang’s conclusion — namely, Chinese culture must either “instantiate its Chinese characteristics” or else “completely embrace” Western culture — is a false dichotomy, at least if we take “Chinese characteristics” to mean the necessity of a grounding in *jingxue*, as Jiang asserts.

Perhaps the strongest argument against Jiang’s methodological position is made again and again elsewhere in his book, albeit implicitly. Jiang undertakes sustained, critical engagement with books like Deng Xiaojun 邓小军's *The Logical Integration of Confucian Thought and Democratic Thought* 儒家思想与民主思想的逻辑结合 and Deng Zhenglai 邓正来 and Jing Yuejin 景跃进's *Constructing a Chinese Civil Society* 建构中国的市民社会. In each case, Jiang’s argumentation is a model of what I have been calling global philosophy. Nowhere does he rest an argument on the simple assertion of the various passages his *jingxue* method highlighted. Let me give a brief example. Jiang nicely summarizes the view expressed by Deng Zhenglai and Jing Yuejin: a plurality of interest groups, of which the state is just one, will

³¹ See Abdullahi An-Na'im, *Toward an Islamic Revolution: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990); and Tariq Ramadan, *Islam, the West, and the Challenges of Modernity* (Markfield, Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 2001).

limit the ability of any power-holder. Jiang identifies two flaws, though: he argues that value pluralism will lead to a problematic form of value relativism, and also that losing the distinction between public and private power can lead to anarchism, and thus back to tyranny [Ibid., 311-12]. Furthermore, while Confucianism is not in conflict with pluralism, it also has “*da yi tong* 大一统” (great unity) which provides a common metaphysical basis. To be sure, in order to explain this idea of *da yi tong*, Jiang adverts to the Classics, among other sources. My point, though, is that his argument rests on reasons like the superiority of a metaphysical view that combines pluralism with an underlying value unity, rather than on any bald appeal to the Classics.

So the sacredness of the Classics has been lost; global philosophers are left to draw on the Confucian tradition in much the same way we might draw on the texts of Aristotle or Plato. Does this mean that the only reasons to which a global philosopher can appeal are those that anyone can recognize as reasons? What of the contemporary Islamic philosophers to whom I alluded above; are they barred from global philosophy if they appeal to reasons grounded in their sacred canon? Not at all. Many Islamic philosophers today are exemplary global philosophers, in that they are open to, and engage with, reasoning from outside their own tradition. It is quite possible, for instance, to be a devout Muslim and at the same time to feel the force of recent arguments for women’s equality or for human rights more generally. This can lead both to constructive theological, philosophical, and interpretive work within the Islamic tradition itself, and to constructive critiques of (for example) the Western human rights tradition.³² Non-Muslim global philosophers should of course be open to such critiques, as well as to the range of insights one may find in the Islamic canon. In a variety of ways, non-Muslims can also take seriously the fact

³² An excellent example of both kinds of constructive work is found in Abdullahi An-Na’im, *Toward an Islamic Revolution: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990).

that a given idea or precept is endorsed in the Islamic canon, though non-Muslims will not treat the endorsement in a sacred canon itself as a reason for adopting such an idea. The premise of global philosophy, in short, is not that we must all reason the same, but rather that we often do — at least enough to make real headway in our various philosophical enterprises — when we allow ourselves to be open.

Before concluding, two clarifications about the idea of sacredness. First, nothing in my argument depends on a specific sense in which the Classics used to be “sacred.” Jiang says they were, and asserts a mode of interacting with them that mirrors, I have said, approaches claimed within the Islamic tradition. Perhaps some will doubt that the Confucian Classics were ever “sacred” in anything like the sense in which the Islamic canon is sacred. This is an interesting question, but note that my focus is on the twentieth century in which whatever sacredness the Confucian classics may have had has been lost. So while we can perhaps debate the status of the Confucian canon prior to the twentieth century, this does not affect my argument. Second, note that I have not denied that Confucianism today may continue to have a strong relevance to spiritual matters, depending on how one defines “spiritual.” Indeed, an important theme of the 1958 Manifesto discussed above is the spiritual or religious significance of Confucianism. All I want to insist on here is that these spiritual issues, which I believe have deep significance, do not depend on appeal to a sacred canon.

In closing, I want to return to my earlier distinction between studying and doing Chinese philosophy, and use this opportunity to acknowledge that some of Jiang’s worries about miscellaneous, random interpretations of the Classics might have some substance, even if the answer to these worries is not what Jiang thinks it is. There is an inevitable tension between historical fidelity and philosophical construction. The former pushes us toward carefully

qualified, highly context-sensitive interpretations; the latter, toward generalization, loose paraphrase, critical emendation, and more. No matter what our goals, anyone dealing with an intellectual tradition finds him or herself pulled back and forth between these poles. No one is a pure “historian” or pure “philosopher.” Historians cannot do their work without endeavoring to genuinely understand (and thereby become engaged by) the ideas with which their subject grappled. For their part, philosophers cannot make words they have inherited from a tradition mean whatever they want: changing things requires work, the work of engaging with the tradition’s meanings, to one degree or another. Unless one does this, one risks making the tradition into a set of random slogans, just as Jiang warns. In other words, studying and doing Chinese philosophy must be closely intertwined. Only by balancing their distinctive demands can we take seriously both Chinese and Western traditions in the way that global philosophy requires.