

Chinese Philosophy: Paths between Convergence and Divergence
The 1st Online Conference of the European Association for Chinese Philosophy (EACP)
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Program:

12-2 PM CET

Ai YUAN (Tsinghua University, China)

Rhetorical Questions in the Daodejing

Frank Saunders Jr. (Yonsei University, Underwood International College, Korea)

Two Approaches to Fate in the Zhuangzi

Jordan Davis (Zhejiang University, China)

Sympathy and Resonance: A Comparison of Greco-Roman and Chinese Sources

Rafal K. Stepien (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore)

Is Reality Literary? Chinese Buddhist Poetics as Metaphysics

2-2:30 PM CET

Break

2:30-4 PM CET

Yves Vendé (Université Catholique de Lille, France)

First principle, divergences, and correlative thinking

Siqi LIU (King's College London, London)

Contemporary neo-Daoism: A nexus between Daoism and Euro-American philosophy

Milan Matthesen (University of Basel, Switzerland)

Philosophers as Problem-solvers - A Global Philosophical Approach to Mou Zongsan and Post-Holocaust Ethics

4-4:30 PM CET

Break

4:30-6 PM CET

Wenjin CUI (University of New Hampshire, USA)

An Intensified Correlation Between Engagement and Detachment: Lu Xun and the Modern Transformation of Correlative Thinking

Huaiyu WANG (Georgia College & State University, USA)

The Yijing and the Life of Nature in Early Chinese Philosophy: Thinking beyond the correlative model

Stephen Walker (University of Chicago, USA)

Exclusionary followers and integrative leaders in the Huainanzi

Zoom link to the Online Conference:

<https://gettysburg.zoom.us/j/99877756339>

zoom id: 998 7775 6339

No Registration Needed

General theme of the conference:

It is usually acknowledged that Chinese philosophy bloomed during the Warring States, in an epoch of cultural and political division when thinkers or masters roamed from one state to the other, trying to present their ways of thinking and governing to the different rulers. Therefore, despite the anti-historic and monolithic Orientalist interpretation of China, this philosophy arose thanks to the richness of the divergence of thoughts. Simultaneously, since the Han, the Chinese Empire showed a holistic attitude aiming at composing those divergences, often at the price of homologation. However, thanks to the disrupting and enriching effect of Buddhist thought, refined syncretic schools arose as that of the Song and Ming Neo-Confucians. Furthermore, since the first Jesuits entered China, the meeting with Western thought has presented both divergent and convergent streams, which continues to be the case nowadays. Contemporary philosophy in China shows this divergence-convergence paradigm constantly at work.

Despite this paradigm being in common with other civilizations' histories, Chinese thought provides a very peculiar view on the question of divergence-convergence which contributes to a more prolific transcultural definition of the paradigm. This peculiar view – which we can differently name correlative thought, nonduality of opposites, relational thinking, binary categories system, etc. – took a large variety of forms in the long history of Chinese thought. One of the most renowned and influential is the *yin-yang* 陰陽 theory, but the paradigm is also evident in Han historiography, Huayan Buddhism, naturalist poetry, and Neo-Confucianism, not to mention contemporary New Confucianism, where we can find extraordinarily relevant and innovative instances of this paradigm. In this conference, speakers are invited to discuss their research to shed new light on the richness of this correlative intellectual attitude from any perspective: metaphysical, ethical, historical, theoretical, linguistic, rhetorical, esthetic, etc.

Abstracts of the selected speakers:

Ai YUAN (Tsinghua University, China)

Rhetorical Questions in the Daodejing

This paper provides a typology of rhetorical questions in the *Daodejing*, examines its rhetorical function, and their use in argument construction. It argues against reading rhetorical questions as propositional statements. Instead, by categorizing different functions of rhetorical questions based on their literary structure, I show how:

(1) rhetorical questions suggest a potential context for understanding an abstract argument; (2) consecutive rhetorical questions are used to hammer down a point by adding emotive force all the while rhetorically ‘silencing’ the audience; (3) rhetorical questions engage the audience by drawing on performative and dramatic elements of language; (4) different degrees of reliance on rhetorical questions in different versions of the *Daodejing* change the nature and meaning of individual segments across editions; (5) texts such as the *Daodejing* have been read in widely diverging ways, one key element underlying such variance in reception is the different understanding of rhetorical questions and resulting divergence in understanding the argumentative logic of the text as a whole.

By providing a typology of the functions, uses, structures, and reception of rhetorical questions, this paper suggests that they are vital in understanding the ways in which the *Daodejing* constructs arguments, logic, effect and audiences.

Frank Saunders Jr. (Yonsei University, Underwood International College, Korea)

Two Approaches to Fate in the Zhuangzi

Zhuangist ethics places great emphasis on the convergence point between the forces that lie beyond our control—fate *ming* 命—and those that lie within it. According to recent scholarly discussions, a Zhuangist approach to fate encourages us to exercise clarity (*ming* 明) in distinguishing between things that are and are not within our control, to actively accept our place within the

transformation of all things, and to adeptly respond to them so as to go along with them successfully, thereby exercising our agency to the fullest without worrying about that which we cannot control. At least three recent articles have discussed Zhuangist approaches to fate in fruitful detail (Valmisa 2015; Yuan 2016; Lenehan 2020; Zhang 2021). In this paper, I want to explore two distinct approaches to fate within the *Zhuangzi* anthology, each of which in turn provides its own explanation of the successful convergence of fate and human agency. The two approaches can be generally understood as *active* and *passive* respectively, and the main feature I will focus on here that differentiates the two is the amount of *effort* required to successfully respond to the forces that lie beyond our control. Additionally, I notice that the concept of *xing* 性 (“spontaneous character”) tends to track the passive approach, and I suggest in closing that the presence of *xing* in Warring States discourse may be in large part responsible for the particularity of the passive approach to fate in comparison with the active one within the *Zhuangzi* anthology.

Jordan Davis (Zhejiang University, China)

Sympathy and Resonance: A Comparison of Greco-Roman and Chinese Sources

What do magnetic attraction, acoustic resonance, the cycles of the moon and the changes of shellfish have in common? Each of these natural correspondences appears in cosmological discussions in both Greco-Roman and early Chinese texts. In the Greek world, the Stoics were the first to subsume various natural correspondences under an explicit cosmic principle. This principle, called “sympathy” (*sumpatheia* συμπάθεια), functioned as part of broader arguments that forwarded a view of the cosmos as an organic unity.

Research on Chinese thought has long stated that Han Dynasty thinkers advocated a theory of resonance (*ganying* 感應). Much like Stoic sympathy, resonance promoted the interconnectedness and unity of the cosmos. On the surface, the use of natural correspondences in connection with cosmological arguments shows striking similarities between the two traditions, but a closer look shows that the philosophical goals of Han Dynasty thinkers differed fundamentally from their Greek counterparts.

This paper analyzes the arguments and examples used by the Stoics and Han cosmologists to show that despite mainstream beliefs, there is little evidence that Han thinkers argued explicitly for the organic unity of the cosmos. Nor did they use a theoretical concept called *ganying*. Instead, early sources contain evidence that the theories promoted by Han cosmologists were more diverse than is often assumed. Further analysis shows that we must re-evaluate many of the mainstream conclusions concerning early Chinese understandings of the cosmos.

Rafal K. Stepien (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore)

Is Reality Literary? Chinese Buddhist Poetics as Metaphysics

The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons (文心雕龍) is China’s earliest surviving systematic treatise of literary theory. In it, the Buddhist scholar Liu Xie (劉勰 c. 465-522) draws on the full semantic range of the Chinese character *wen* (文) as ‘pattern, cultivation, word, literature’, to propose that ‘literary patterns’ (言之文) are the very ‘mind of heaven and earth’ (天地之心), the very manifestation of natural ‘suchness’ (自然). This last term is of prime importance in Chinese Buddhist philosophy, where it embodies the ‘Buddha nature’ (佛性) or ‘original mind’ (本心) divergently manifested in all sentient beings, by means of which they are able to converge upon ‘emptiness’ (空) and thereby just be ‘truly thus’ (真如). Such thusness is in turn understood by the Chan Buddhist tradition to necessitate ‘not depending on words and letters’ (不立文字). In this paper, however, I argue that the Chan disavowal of ‘words and letters’ is itself a philosophical strategy aimed at the ultimate identification of literature with suchness (文 with 如), form with emptiness (色 with 空). For ultimately, and despite the apparent diversity of metaphysical-cum- literary phenomena, language and literature turn out in this philosophical vision to be precisely what convey *wen*, the very pattern of reality-as-literature, or what I term ‘litereality’.

Yves Vendé (Université Catholique de Lille, France)

First principle, divergences, and correlative thinking

It is often argued that when Jesuits arrived in China, they chose Early Confucianism as an interlocutor to create sympathy from Chinese officials. For example, in the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* published in 1687 in Paris, they rely on Zhang Juzheng's commentaries against Zhu Xi's perspective, which was then seen as materialistic. This perspective does not account for all the divergences of opinions among missionaries in their interpretations of Chinese tradition. For example, a few years after the publication of the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, in the context of the Rites controversy, a Flemish Jesuit, François Noel, gives much more room to Zhu Xi's reading of the *Taiji* 太极, and the correlative movement of Yin and Yang at stake in the Taiji's creative dynamism, in the *Philosophia Sinica* (Prague, 1711). In this book, Noel does rely on Zhu Xi to interpret the first principle and create a connection with earlier Greek thinkers, especially Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle, about the correlation of "opposites" as a process of generation, even if the Christianisation of this process may be taken with cautiousness nowadays.

Instead of focusing on the traditional question to assess whether or not Noel understood correctly the Chinese texts, this presentation will focus on how Noel's original framework shaped in Europe through the Coimbra commentaries of Aristotle — a frame to which it is impossible to relate without a hermeneutical operation — was transformed by reading Chinese Classics and Zhu Xi's commentaries.

Siqi LIU (King's College London, London)

Contemporary neo-Daoism: A nexus between Daoism and Euro-American philosophy

In April 1996, the Daojia wenhua guoji xueshu yantaohui (The international academic symposium on Daoism) took place in Beijing. In this symposium, the term Dangdai xin Daojia was proposed to define a group of Chinese scholars who researched on Daoist philosophy and aesthetics and initiated a comparative study between Daoism and Euro-American philosophy from the late-nineteenth century to the twentieth century. These scholars include Yan Fu, Wang Guowei, Tang Yongtong, Meng Wentong, Jin Yuelin, Zhu Guangqian, Zong Baihua, and Thomé H. Fang. According to Chen Guying, these neo-Daoists' inheritance and development of Daoism can be divided into three main stages. The first stage is between the end of the First Opium War (1840–42) and the beginning of the Second Opium War (1856–60), when the sociopolitical significance of Daoism was rediscovered. The second stage ran through three revolutionary movements from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, when certain intellectuals reinterpreted Daoism via the contemporary Euro-American epistemic discourses of democracy, freedom, and equality. The third stage began after the May Fourth Movement (1919), when an increasing number of scholars focused on the significance of Daoism in the academic field and established China's own philosophical systems and aesthetic structures. This paper explores why contemporary neo-Daoism emerged and developed in this historical stage, how they reinterpreted Daoist philosophies through a comparative dialogue, and what influence do their theories have on other disciplines nowadays.

Milan Matthiesen (University of Basel, Switzerland)

Philosophers as Problem-solvers - A Global Philosophical Approach to Mou Zongsan and Post-Holocaust Ethics

In the wake of postcolonial theory's rise to prominence, the call for a global or intercultural philosophy has been voiced by many actors in the field. Marginalized in philosophy or political science departments, non-western theories, philosophies, and thought have been relegated to the sidelines. In the field of philosophy, questions such as who *has* philosophy, or who has *philosophy* and not just *thought*, as Derrida put it, or whether philosophy is an idiosyncratic tradition sprung from the ancient Greeks, have been widely discussed. Ultimately these debates have put the burden of proof on defenders of non-western philosophers, who have taken on the task of arguing why their

philosophy should be allowed to enter the pantheon of "philosophy proper." Following John Kekes' pragmatist philosophy and Stephan Gosepath's recent call for a new approach towards global philosophy, I argue that regarding philosophers and thinkers as "problem-solvers" opens pathways to a comparative philosophy beyond the need to continuously prove one's belongingness. In this presentation, I demonstrate this approach by using Mou Zongsan's post-war writings and the European tradition of post-Holocaust ethics as examples where two geographically far-removed groups of intellectuals attempted to solve similar problems presented to them by their environment: at the personal level, the exile situation, at the political level, the eminent threat of totalitarianism, and at the global level, the rise of modernity and the vanishing of tradition. By drawing this comparison, I show how this novel approach can lead to a fruitful exchange between different traditions of philosophy.

Wenjin CUI (University of New Hampshire, USA)

An Intensified Correlation Between Engagement and Detachment: Lu Xun and the Modern Transformation of Correlative Thinking

Generally known as a radical critic of Chinese tradition, Lu Xun is hailed by some as a great revolutionary whose revolt against tradition propelled the modern transformation of China, and criticized by others for his presumed "totalistic iconoclasm" against Chinese tradition. Meanwhile, as a kind of revision of such an iconoclastic image, some recent scholarship has paid increasing attention to the many vital ties Lu Xun maintained with Chinese tradition. Regardless of these specific positions, however, few attempts have been made to understand Lu Xun's relationship with Chinese tradition at the level of the epistemic ground of correlative thinking.

This paper argues that Lu Xun's iconoclastic critique of Chinese tradition should be understood as a modernist attempt to revitalize the correlative understanding of the world that underlies the Chinese tradition. On one hand, as shown in his critique of the lack of spiritual allegiance of Confucianism and Daoism, Lu Xun's radical stance toward Chinese tradition is due to his concern regarding the lethargic flow of life that is caused by correlative thinking's relative lack of differentiation between the material and the spiritual. On the other hand, as seen in his famous speech on the Wei-Jin manner, Lu Xun acknowledges the positive role this non-differentiating attitude can play both in serving the purpose of action and in creating a distance from the status quo. In striving toward an intensified correlation between active engagement and passive detachment, Lu Xun made a strong case for the modern transformation of correlative thinking.

Huaiyu WANG (Georgia College & State University, USA)

The Yijing and the Life of Nature in Early Chinese Philosophy: Thinking beyond the correlative model

My research aims to move beyond prevalent models in contemporary ontological studies so as to recover the original meanings of early Chinese experiences of the Life of nature with a focus on *the Great Treatise* of the *Yijing*. Despite recent claims to interpret Chinese thinking on its own terms, such prevalent models as correlative cosmology still involve inadequacies as it is predicated on Western metaphysical worldviews. Western philosophy starts with an architectonic conception of nature as the *composition* of individual *substances* and seeks to answer the question on what things are made up of by identifying certain *ultimate reality* in the realm of matter (e.g. atoms, elements) or form (viz. mind, idea). In contrast, early Chinese approach consists in a conception of the world of nature, not as the composite of individual substances but as the realm of dynamic interplays and coherences of different kinds of *natures*, ie. potencies and powers with competing features and functions. These features and potencies, which are regarded as *secondary* attributes to the *substance* as the first-order realities of Nature in Western metaphysics, are conceived in early Chinese thinking as the *primary* indicators for the way of nature, for the spontaneous and self-arising *process* of life emergence. I will illustrate how this early Chinese idea of nature may throw a new light on the

philosophical meanings of the key early Chinese ideas of yin and yang, *wuxing* (five phases/natures), and the meanings of persons and things as shown by the *Great Treatise*.

Stephen Walker (University of Chicago, USA)

Exclusionary followers and integrative leaders in the Huainanzi

The *Huainanzi* is routinely cited as a paradigm example of philosophical integration: a self-conscious experiment in synthesis, it seeks to ground all the “hundred schools” in the infinite Way. I’ll begin this paper by reviewing the most important formal and conceptual features of the *Huainanzi*’s integrative project, before making two experimental arguments of my own.

The first is that the *Huainanzi* effectively *succeeds* in its project and is therefore a culminating moment in the early Chinese conversation. This claim is normative, not historical, and concerns the unusual degree of thoroughness and thoughtfulness with which its authors reformulate and contextualize the ideas of the contending schools. The infinity of possible responses to changing situations, the elusiveness of the processes by which we form those responses, and the suitedness of different teachings to people with different levels of responsibility are all themes that—if taken as seriously as the *Huainanzi* would like us to take them—would significantly reshape our critical engagements with the surrounding corpus.

My second argument dwells on the last of those themes: according to the *Huainanzi*, the more inflexible one’s views and values, the less qualified one is to oversee large projects and manage other people. This explicitly entails that sages are uncommitted to anything resembling morality or truth as we ordinarily understand them—and that people *committed* to these things inevitably earn their place in society only with lower-level jobs. I will argue not only that these claims make excellent sense but also that they can help us understand the persistent amorality of governments as necessary to their proper functioning, rather than as avoidable or tragic in itself.