How to Do Chinese Philosophy in a Western Philosophical Context: Introducing a Unique Approach to Chinese Philosophy

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Abstract

This essay introduces a unique approach to Chinese philosophy in a Western philosophical context. The central question of such an approach is why a Western philosopher ought to care about, or what he or she can learn from, Chinese philosophy. For this reason, instead of comparing and contrasting some aspects of Chinese and Western philosophy, as is usually done, a comparativist should first be familiar with the issues Western philosophers are interested in, the representative views that they have developed on each of these issues, and any problems that exist with each of these views, and then try to see whether Chinese philosophers have anything new or better to say on any of these issues. Since this approach is inevitably comparative, this presentation is preceded by a discussion of the possibility of comparative philosophy; and since such a methodological discussion is necessarily abstract, it is followed by a case study adopting such an approach to Chinese philosophy.

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1. Introduction

How to do Chinese philosophy in a non-Chinese context? It can be legitimately claimed that there are perhaps as many answers to this question as there are scholars doing Chinese philosophy in a non-Chinese context. In this essay, I shall limit my focus to doing Chinese philosophy in a Western context, which is where I have been doing Chinese philosophy until now. Conceivably, such a discussion will bypass the disagreement that still exists among Chinese scholars about whether there is such a thing called "Chinese philosophy." Given the fact that the term "philosophy" originated in the West, those who provide a positive answer to the question clearly think that what is called philosophy also exists in Chinese traditional thought, while those who answer it negatively think that there is no such a thing in Chinese tradition, for better or for worse. Given the wide diversity of philosophical thinking in the Western tradition and broad overlaps between traditional Chinese thinking and Western philosophy, I think it is pretty safe to assume that Chinese philosophy does exist, although the central thesis of this essay, as will become clear later, particularly in Section 2, can still stand without this assumption. Since our concern is thus the way to do Chinese philosophy in a Western context, from which the term "philosophy" in "Chinese philosophy" derives, to do Chinese philosophy in a Western context is inevitably comparative in the sense that it will, in one way or another, to a greater or lesser extent and either consciously or unconsciously, involve comparison between Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy. Thus, I shall argue for the possibility of such a comparative philosophy in section 2; in section 3 I shall propose a unique model for doing comparative philosophy as an alternative to more familiar types of comparative philosophy; I shall then illustrate this comparative methodology with a comparative philosophy project that I have been recently conducting through a series of publications in section 4; finally, in section 5, this essay will conclude with a brief summary.

2. The Possibility of Comparative Philosophy

The most common type of comparative philosophy is what Kwong-loi Shun 信廣來 calls "direct comparison," which

> engages in explicit and direct comparison of thinkers, texts, movements, concepts, or themes from two different traditions, with a … goal of helping us understand the perspective of one or the other of the two traditions. Examples include comparative studies of Confucius and Aristotle, Confucian and Kantian ethics, the Confucian notion of *chi* 恥 and the contemporary Western notion of shame, or the Confucian and contemporary Western perspectives on the relation between self and society. Often, such a comparative study involves a discussion of similarities and differences between traditions, though it may also go beyond such a discussion. [1]

Such a way of doing comparative philosophy has to meet two challenges, which are of course not necessarily insurmountable. The first, most clearly voiced by Alasdair MacIntyre, involves the idea of incommensurability. For example, between Confucianism and Aristotelianism, while there are some similarities and differences, MacIntyre claims that "there are indeed no shared standards and measures, external to both systems and neutral between them.… The two systems of thought and practice are incommensurable in the sense made familiar to us by Thomas Kuhn." [2] Although the two systems may be about one and the same subject matter, "in their characterizations of and questions about that subject matter [they] employ, to some large and significant degree, concepts whose applicability entails the nonapplicability, the vacuousness, of the conceptual scheme or schemes employed by their rivals"; and this is because "the standard or standards which determine how the true-false distinction is to be applied are

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1 Kwong-loi Shun 信廣來, "Studying Confucian and Comparative Ethics: Methodological Reflections," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 36.3 (2009.9): 468.

2 Alasdair MacIntyre, "Incommensurability, Truth, and the Conversation between Confucians and Aristotelians about the Virtues," in Eliot Deutsch, ed., *Culture and Modernity: East-West Philosophical Perspectives* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1991), p. 109.

not the same. And there is … no higher standard yet available to judge between these rival standards."[3] By incommensurability of two theories, Kuhn originally "intended only to insist that there was no common language within which both could be fully expressed and which could therefore be used in a point-by-point comparison between them."[4] So MacIntyre may be right that there are no common measures between two different philosophers from two different philosophical traditions. However, does this mean that we therefore cannot compare these two philosophers? The answer, as Richard Bernstein points out, is "no": "Kuhn never intended to deny that paradigm theories can be compared—indeed *rationally* compared and evaluated. In insisting on incommensurability, his main point was to indicate the ways in which paradigm theories *can* and *cannot* be compared."[5] The reason incommensurable theories can be compared is that, when we compare two philosophers from two different philosophical traditions, for example, we do not compare each of the two with a common measure and then see how each of the two stands with this common measure. Such a comparison is, by definition, impossible, if there is indeed no common measure between and among different philosophical traditions (and it is difficult to prove that there is one). Rather, what we do is to compare the two directly with each other. This is similar to translation. As Jeffrey Stout points out, when we translate one language (the source language) into another (the target language), we do not first translate source language A into a third, supposed neutral, language C (such as Esperanto), which serves as a common measure for both source language A and target language B, and then translate this neutral language C into target language B. Even if there is no such

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3   Alasdair MacIntyre, "Incommensurability, Truth, and the Conversation between Confucians and Aristotelians about the Virtues," p. 110.

4   Thomas S. Kuhn, "Theory-Change as Structure-Change: Comments on the Sneed Formalism," *Erkenntnis* 10.2 (1976.7): 190-191.

5   Richard Bernstein, "Incommensurability and Otherness Revisited," in Eliot Deutsch, ed., *Culture and Modernity: East-West Philosophical Perspectives* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1991), p. 81.

neutral common language, we can still translate between different languages, as we translate them directly into each other.[6] Similarly even if there is no common measure between two different philosophical traditions, we can still do comparisons between philosophers belonging to these philosophical traditions, because we are comparing them directly with each other.

The second challenge of doing comparative philosophy is what David Wong regards as "the most obvious sin": "assimilating another tradition to one's own by unreflectively importing assumptions, frameworks, and agendas into one's reading of that other tradition."[7] If the first challenge is about the tool a comparativist uses to do comparative study, this second challenge is related to the comparativist him- or herself. In normal cases, what a comparativist does is to compare something in his/her home tradition to something in a different tradition. In this sense, the comparativist is not neutral: he/she, consciously or unconsciously, tends to use the terms and categories familiar to him/her and to his/her audience in the home tradition to explain things in the alien tradition. What happens in such a comparison is best captured by the Chinese term *geyi* 格義, often translated as meaning-matching, to describe the efforts of the early Chinese Buddhists to use existing Chinese philosophical concepts to introduce alien Buddhist ideas to a Chinese audience.[8] It

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6   Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics after Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents* (Boston: Beacon, 1988), p. 63.

7   David Wong, "Comparative Philosophy: Chinese and Western," in Edward N. Zalta, ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2009 Edition), §4, URL=http://plato.stanford. edu/archives/win2009/entries/comparphil-chiwes.

8   Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢 recently noticed an interesting phenomenon: while it is understandable that comparativists in the West use terms and concepts from their own philosophical traditions to explain and interpret things in Chinese philosophy to their Western audience, which is their "*geyi*" after all, it is strange that contemporary Chinese scholars also use Western philosophical terms, terms with which they and their Chinese audience are less familiar, to explain and interpret Chinese philosophical ideas. Liu coined the term *fanxiang geyi* 反向格義 (reverse meaning-matching) to describe this phenomenon. See Liu Xiaogan, "Between Two Orientations: The Case of Zhu Xi's *Collected Commentaries on the Analects*" 掙扎游走于兩種定向之間──以朱熹《論語集注》為例, *The Journal of Chinese Philosophy and Culture* 中國哲學與文

should be noted that *geyi* is done not to intentionally distort the alien tradition but to make the "best" sense of it; moreover, as David Wong points out, it may be done by someone who "is a dissident from the main trends in one's home tradition" in order to "find another tradition that 'got it right.'"[9] For whatever purpose, however, the danger here is the possible distortion of another tradition as a consequence if not as an intention.

This second challenge seems to be more daunting, as it is indeed the case that a comparativist often compares his/her home tradition with another tradition, and, as Gadamer's hermeneutics teaches us so well, it is unreasonable to expect a comparativist to become presuppositionless when understanding and interpreting the other tradition. For that matter, the potential danger of distorting the target tradition(s) cannot be avoided even by a comparativist who compares two traditions other than his/her own, for example, a comparativist, whose home tradition is Chinese, comparing Western and Indian philosophy. This comparativist may be even-handed with the two traditions he/she compares but may distort both by, perhaps unconsciously, imposing the framework, concepts, and issues of his/her home tradition upon the two alien traditions he/she compares.[10] However, a number

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化, No. 3, *Orientation in Hermeneutics* 經典詮釋之定向 (Guilin 桂林: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe 廣西師範大學出版社, 2008), pp. 108-132. Since comparativists on both sides use Western concepts to explain and interpret Chinese philosophy, the result is what Kwong-loi Shun describes as asymmetry: "there is a trend in comparative studies to approach Chinese thought from a Western philosophical perspective, by reference to frameworks, concepts, or issues found in Western philosophical discussions. This trend is seen not only in works published in the English language, but also in those published in Chinese. Conversely, in the contemporary literature, we rarely find attempts to approach Western philosophical thought by reference to frameworks, concepts, or issues found in Chinese philosophical discussions. Given that Chinese ethical traditions are no less rich in insights and resources compared to Western ethical traditions, or at least many of us would so believe, this asymmetry is deeply puzzling." Kwong-loi Shun, "Studying Confucian and Comparative Ethics: Methodological Reflections," p. 470.

9 David Wong, "Comparative Philosophy: Chinese and Western," §4.

10 The problem may be avoided only by MacIntyre's "bilinguals": people who are raised in one tradition but become members of another tradition. But even they, for MacIntyre, may be unable

of perceptive comparativists have recently proposed ways to minimize if not entirely avoid this potential danger. Here I would like to mention just three examples of such a strategy that seem to me most promising.

The first is to apply the principle of charity, particularly the version corrected by the principle of humanity, when we interpret an alien philosophical tradition, as advocated by David Wong himself and Chad Hansen. According to the version of principle of charity formulated by Quine and adopted by early Davidson, when we interpret a philosopher of an alien tradition, we ought to aim at the "maximal" agreement between us, the interpreters, and the philosopher, the interpretee. When we are not able to make sense of what the philosopher says, we should not simply regard it as false or nonsense; rather we should admit that perhaps we have not fully interpreted the philosopher correctly, and we cannot claim that we understand the philosopher correctly until we reach the maximum agreement with the philosopher.

The importance of this principle in comparative philosophy is that it enjoins us to take the philosopher(s) from the alien tradition seriously. However, as Chad Hansen points out, the principle of charity

> poses a danger, since in practice, it foists upon users of that language a body of truths which we (with a completely different scientific and cultural background) accept. So they proposed that we maximize reasonableness rather than truth. … The principle of humanity thus allows us to attribute philosophical doctrines that are different from any we adopt now or have historically adopted. Our interpretive theory must simply explain why, given people's other beliefs, they accept the belief in question. That it now seems (or ever seemed) true to us is not crucial. [11]

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to resolve conflicts of belief between these two traditions, despite their perfect understanding of both sides' views. All they can do is merely go back and forth between them with ease, but, just like anyone else, they are unable to compare them. See Alasdair MacIntyre, "Relativism, Power, and Philosophy," in Michael Krausz, ed., *Relativism: A Contemporary Anthology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 409-430.

11 Chad Hansen, *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought: A Philosophical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 10-11.

In other words, to follow this principle, an interpreter may run the risk of making the interpretee look too much like the interpreter. For this reason, principle of charity should be corrected by the principle of humanity, originally developed by Richard Grandy as an alternative to the principle of charity. According to the principle of humanity, "If a translation tells us that the other person's beliefs and desires are connected in a way that is too bizarre for us to make sense of, then the translation is useless for our purposes. So we have, as a pragmatic constraint on translation, the condition that the imputed pattern of relations among beliefs, desires, and the world be as similar to our own as possible."[12]

In appearance, this does not sound much different from the principle of charity, but what Grandy wants to emphasize is that our interpretees are also humans and so tend to err, and when they actually err, we should not interpret them as not erring out of charity. He uses the example of a person, Paul, coming to a party and making a claim that "the man with a martini is a philosopher" when he saw a man who, not a philosopher, was actually drinking water from a martini glass, and yet there was indeed a philosopher at the party, whom Paul didn't see, and who was drinking a martini. Now Grandy says that the principle of charity may dictate us to interpret what Paul says as true, while his principle of humanity will recognize Paul's statement as false. For this reason, the principle of humanity allows an interpreter to attribute false beliefs to the interpretee where the principle of charity does not allow. The basic idea of the principle was later incorporated by Davidson into his revised version of principle of charity, which emphasizes *optimal* agreement instead of *maximal* agreement and thus also allows us to interpret others as making mistakes. In his application of the revised version of principle of charity in comparative philosophy, David Wong claims that, in interpreting others, "charity directs us to 'optimize' agreement between them and ourselves wherever it is

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12   Richard Grandy, "Reference, Meaning, and Belief," *Journal of Philosophy* 70.14 (1973.8): 443.

plausible to do so. The idea is to make them ʿright, as far as we can tell, as often as possible.ʾ"[13] This, however, does not prohibit us from attributing mistakes to our interpretees, if we can identify them. Still, if we find others believing something different from what we believe and yet we cannot identify the mistakes they make, we should construe them as making no mistakes but as taking a different path from the one we are taking, perhaps a path that we could have taken ourselves.

The second is Aaron Stalnakerʾs bridge concepts. Bridge concepts are not imposed from the comparativistʾs home tradition upon another tradition, nor are they concepts common to the traditions being compared, nor are they imported from the alien tradition to our home tradition. Rather, as pointed out by Mark A. Berkson, "the cross-cultural comparativist is, in many cases, forced to come up with terms from outside both traditions and languages to act as ʿbridge concepts,ʾ for if the terms come from one of the traditions or thinkers being studied, the comparison will be driven in a biased way."[14] They are thus concepts that bridge the traditions being compared. To serve this function, they "can be given enough content to be meaningful and guide comparative inquiry yet are still open to great specification in particular cases."[15] Apparently, such bridge concepts at the beginning of the comparison are vague, and in this sense they are merely thin concepts,[16] not necessarily corresponding to particular terms in the traditions

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13   David B. Wong. *Noralities Moralities: A Defense of Pluralistic Relativism* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2006), p. 13.

14   Mark A. Berkson, "Conceptions of Self / No-self and Modes of Connection: Comparative Soteriological Structures in Classical Chinese Thought," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33.2 (2005.6): 295.

15   Aaron Stalnaker, *Overcoming Our Evil: Human Nature and Spiritual Exercises in Xunzi and Augustine* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006), p. 17.

16   For this reason, Stalnaker acknowledges that his bridge concept performs a similar function to Robert Nevilleʾs "vague categories." See Robert Cummings Neville, *The Human Condition* (Albany, NY: The State University of New York Press, 2001), pp. 9-16; Aaron Stalnaker, *Overcoming Our Evil: Human Nature and Spiritual Exercises in Xunzi and Augustine*, p. 26 note 61.

being compared. It is in this sense that they are *ad hoc* concepts. However, this does not mean that "they are thereby purely neutral, but that they are articulated in order not to prejudice the comparison so that one side is rendered in glowing terms, while another is presented as foolish. Bridge concepts, in other words, are designed to facilitate comparative description and analysis of the concepts."[17] The task of comparison in this approach is thus to fill in the details of these thin bridge concepts from the traditions being compared so that they become thick. However, since different traditions have different details to fill in such originally thin bridge concepts, the result of the comparative work is that each single thin bridge concept at the beginning of the comparison becomes two thick concepts at the end of the comparison.

The third is Edward Slingerland's conceptual metaphor. Just as Stalnaker develops his bridge concept as a *via media* between a local concept from one of the traditions under comparison and the universal concepts reflecting the deep structure of both traditions being compared, Slingerland develops his conceptual metaphor also as a *via media*, this time between individual words and philosophical theories. In other words, when comparing two traditions or parts thereof, on the one hand, a comparativist should not start with individual linguistic signs from his/her home tradition and then look for its counterpart in the target tradition (which he calls the word fetishism approach),[18] for example "human nature" in the West and *xing* 性 in Confucianism. Such words, despite their lexical similarity, may have significantly different meanings in their respective traditions. On the other hand, the comparativist should not take a particular philosophical theory from his/her home tradition and compare it with a particular

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17　Aaron Stalnaker, "Comparative Religious Ethics and the Problem of 'Human Nature,'" *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33.2 (2005.6): 213.

18　Bryan van Norden uses "the lexical fallacy" to refer to the same idea, and he cites Henry Rosemont as an example of committing such a fallacy. See Bryan W. van Norden, *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 22.

philosophical theory in the target tradition (which Slingerland regards as the theory-based approach), as there can hardly be a perfect fit between philosophical theories from the two traditions compared (which is then regarded as evidence of cognitive incommensurability). In contrast, Slingerland claims that, when we do comparisons, we should look at the level of conceptual metaphor, which "is more general than any individual linguistic sign but also more basic than a theory." [19] Drawing on contemporary cognitive sciences, Slingerland argues that conceptual metaphors, understood broadly to also include simile and analogy, arise as our embodied mind adapts to our environment. Conceptual metaphors are important to comparative studies, because on the one hand, as "human bodies are quite similar the world over, and the types of environments human beings face are also shared in most important respects, one would expect to find a high degree of similarity with regard to conceptual metaphors across human cultures and languages, especially with regard to primary metaphor;" [20] on the other hand,

> the recognition that these structures are contingent on bodies and the physical environment, that no set of conceptual schemas provides unmediated access to the "things in themselves," and that some degree of cultural variation in schemas is to be expected allows us to avoid the sort of rigid universalism.… Ideally, at least, the methods of cognitive linguistics give scholars in the humanities access to a shared conceptual grammar that can allow them to engage in genuine conversation with other cultures. [21]

It is not my purpose here to assess the strengths and weaknesses of such strategies. I only want to show that the second challenge facing a comparativist, not to impose concepts, frameworks, and issues from one's home tradition to the target tradition, may be adequately met.

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19 Edward Slingerland, "Conceptual Metaphor Theory as Methodology for Comparative Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72.1 (2004.3): 13.

20 Edward Slingerland, "Conceptions of the Self in the *Zhuangzi*: Conceptual Metaphor Analysis and Comparative Thought," *Philosophy East and West* 54.3 (2004.7): 327.

21 Edward Slingerland, "Conceptions of the Self in the *Zhuangzi*," p. 336.

3. How to Do Chinese Philosophy in a Western Philosophical Context: Introducing a Unique Approach to Chinese Philosophy

If it is possible to do comparative philosophy, the next question is how to do it, a question closely connected to the purpose of doing it. For Aaron Stalnaker, it is for historical contextualization: the "insightful interpretations that recreate as closely as possible the initial conditions for a text's reception, and thus perhaps as well authorial intention."[22] He contrasts comparative philosophy with this goal with comparative philosophy with a goal of "creative, emblematic generalization" represented, in his view, by the collaborative comparative work done by David Hall and Roger Ames, which, in Stalnaker's view,

> is most profitably interpreted … as a creative attempt to articulate a form of "New Confucianism" that draws heavily on American pragmatism. Thus Confucius serves as the emblem and "launch pad" for their [Ames and Hall's] own creative philosophizing in a Confucian vein. The main potential virtue of this strategy is the development of novel approaches to familiar material. … The danger with emblematic generalization, then, is of losing touch with the historical sources that provoked one's efforts in the first place.[23]

The contrast between these two different goals and therefore two different types of comparative philosophy has been stressed by many others. In his article published in the inaugural issue of *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*, entitled "Two Forms of Comparative Philosophy," Robert Neville designates them as the objectivist and normative approaches respectively:

> The objectivist approach treats the positions to be compared as finished objects, takes up a perspective of distance upon them, and measures its comparative judgments in empirical ways over against the evidence of the positions. The

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22 Aaron Stalnaker, *Overcoming Our Evil*, p. 15.

23 Aaron Stalnaker, *Overcoming Our Evil*, pp. 15-16.

> normative approach centers first on addressing contemporary philosophical problems and looks to the historical positions as resources for contemporary thinking, bringing them into comparative perspective against the contemporary background.[24]

More recently Kwong-loi Shun contrasts these two types of comparative philosophy as textual studies and philosophical constructions. The former "engages in explicit and direct comparison of thinkers, texts, movements, concepts, or themes from two different traditions, with a … goal of helping us understand the perspective of one or the other of the two traditions.… Often, such a comparative study involves a discussion of similarities and differences between traditions"; the latter

> is directed to building an account of our ethical life that engages our own experiences and is of appeal to us. Though not as commonly found in the literature, there can be a kind of study that discusses issues in ethics in a way that draws on insights from two different ethical traditions, though without necessarily mentioning, or with only incidental references to, these two traditions.… In doing so, one might not have made any direct reference to these two traditions, though one might have included footnote references to acknowledge the sources of one's ideas.[25]

This is because in this activity, "we are no longer constrained by textual and historical considerations, and are instead guided by criteria of excellence pertaining to this philosophical exercise."[26] Similarly, Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢 distinguishes between two orientations in doing Chinese philosophy: historical and objective study and innovative development of ideas. In his view, "in the studies oriented toward historical objectivity, of course, one can also borrow or make reference to Western perspectives, concepts, and methodology, but it is not so necessary, and the room for

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24 Robert Cummings Neville, "Two Forms of Comparative Philosophy." *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 1.1 (2001.12): 2.

25 Kwong-loi Shun, "Studying Confucian and Comparative Ethics," pp. 468-469.

26 Kwong-loi Shun, "Studying Confucian and Comparative Ethics," pp. 455-456.

such a borrowing is not so big";[27] in contrast, in theoretical innovation,

> one does not have to borrow the fully developed Western philosophical concepts and definitions to interpret Chinese philosophical terms, but one can borrow the problematic, theoretical dimensions, thesis, and concepts to deepen the ideas in ancient Chinese philosophy. Through transplantation, development, modification, criticism, or renovation, one can create Chinese philosophical theories, concepts, and theses to meet the challenges we are facing in the contemporary world and enrich and substantiate traditional Chinese thought.[28]

In contrast, or rather in addition to, these two common ways of doing comparative philosophy, I present here another approach. One way to see the unique features of this way of doing comparative philosophy is to see the unique purpose it serves. As we have seen, what type of comparative philosophy one does is at least partially determined by the goal, and the goal one attempts to reach is at least partially affected by the audience one has in mind. Since we are doing Chinese philosophy in a Western context, one question that we have to ask is why Western philosophers ought to know anything about Chinese philosophy. There are of course many intelligible ways to answer this question and therefore many legitimate ways to do comparative studies of Chinese and Western philosophy. However, I think one of the most convincing answers, if available, to this question is that Western philosophers have something important to learn from Chinese philosophy. With this goal in mind, a comparativist should first be familiar with the issues Western philosophers are interested in, the representative views that have been developed on each of these issues and any problems that exist with each of these views, and then try to see whether Chinese philosophers have anything new or better to say. Such an approach demands a significant amount of patience from the comparativist, not only because it requires a comparativist to engage both traditions deeply, but also because

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27   Liu Xiaogan, *Interpretation and Orientation: Methodology in the Study of Chinese Philosophy* 詮釋與定向: 中國哲學研究方法論之探究 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan 商務印書館, 2009), p. 441.

28   Liu Xiaogan, *Interpretation and Orientation*, p. 443.

the comparativist may often feel it necessary to abandon a comparative study project, either because the views developed in the Western philosophical traditions are already very much satisfactory or at least more satisfactory than anything that can be found in Chinese philosophy, or, if not satisfactory, then because Chinese philosophers have nothing better to say.

Ideally, to make such a comparative study more manageable, the comparativist should limit him- or herself to a specific area of philosophical studies, such as metaphysics, ethics, political philosophy, epistemology, etc., or a sub-discipline within one such area. Still, since there is no assumption that Chinese philosophy is overall superior to Western philosophy, any study of such a nature, at least in its final presentation, is unsystematic, since it only includes such topics of a chosen area on which Chinese philosophers have something better to say, while silent on topics on which Western philosophers have something better to say. It is thus important to realize that, on the one hand, those aspects of the Chinese philosopher the comparativist does not choose to discuss are not necessarily valueless. Some of them may be extremely important. They are not discussed simply because they do not connect to the issues raised in the Western philosophical traditions in any significant way. On the other hand, it is also important to keep in mind that topics not discussed in a particular comparative study are not necessarily insignificant in the relevant philosophical discipline. Some of those topics may belong to the core area of the discipline. However, in some of these cases, Western philosophers have already provided convincing arguments or at least more convincing arguments than those we can find in Chinese philosophy; and in others, while the representative positions developed over the course of the history of Western philosophy may be unsatisfactory or problematic, Chinese philosophy does not have anything better to offer.[29]

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29 Since such a way of doing comparative philosophy is essentially to use traditional Chinese thought to provide better answers to questions raised in the Western philosophical tradition, as stated at the beginning of this essay, while I believe that traditional Chinese thought does contain philosophy, we can still conduct this type of comparative philosophy even if it does not. Just as

Such a way of doing Chinese philosophy may continue to contribute to what Kwong-loi Shun regards as the problematic asymmetry in the comparative study of Chinese and Western philosophy: "to approach Chinese thought from a Western philosophical perspective, by reference to frameworks, concepts, or issues found in Western philosophical discussions," and not the other way round. [30] Shun listed seven different ways in which such an asymmetry is exhibited, and the way of doing Chinese philosophy I propose here may be guilty of the fourth and / or the fifth ways. The fourth way "focuses on certain questions raised in Western philosophical discussions, and considers how Chinese thinkers would view and address such questions"; [31] and the fifth way, like the fourth way, "also focuses on certain questions raised in Western philosophical discussion, but instead of just considering how Chinese thinkers might view the relevant questions differently, also attempts to address the questions in a way that draws on the insight of Chinese thought." [32] If there is anything special in my approach that is not fully captured by Shun's characterization of these two ways, it is my attempt to argue that Chinese thinkers' views on these Western philosophical questions are superior to those found in the history of Western philosophy itself. However, precisely because of this, my approach may be guilty of an opposite asymmetry. Instead of being

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(Western) philosophy can learn from other disciplines such as literary criticism, political science, psychology, sociology, etc., it can also certainly learn from traditional Chinese thought. More concretely, there has been debate about whether Confucian ethics can properly be understood as virtue ethics. While my answer to this is affirmative, my comparative study of Confucianism and contemporary (Western) virtue ethics can proceed even if this is not the case; my concern in such studies is to see how the former can help the latter to resolve its internal difficulties or respond to external criticisms that it otherwise is unable to handle. See Yong Huang, "The Self-Centeredness Objection to Virtue Ethics: Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucian Response," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84.4 (Fall 2010): 651-692; and "Two Dilemmas of Virtue Ethics and How Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism Avoids Them," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 36 (2011): 247-281.

30 Kwong-loi Shun, "Studying Confucian and Comparative Ethics," p. 470.

31 Kwong-loi Shun, "Studying Confucian and Comparative Ethics," p. 469.

32 Kwong-loi Shun, "Studying Confucian and Comparative Ethics," pp. 469-470.

even-handed, showing the respective strengths and weaknesses of both Chinese and Western philosophers under comparison, on issues selected for discussion, for reasons mentioned above, I attempt to show that views offered in the Chinese philosophical tradition are superior to the representative views in the Western philosophical tradition. As a result, I might be mistaken by some as a Chinese philosophy fundamentalist. It is true that Shun's point is not about the symmetry to be maintained in any individual study of Chinese philosophy but about the symmetry of overall studies of Chinese philosophy (there are overwhelmingly more Western centered studies than Chinese-oriented studies). Still, it is my hope that the two asymmetries in opposite directions present in my approach to comparative philosophy can themselves somehow balance each other, resulting in a special kind of symmetry between the Chinese side and the Western side: while I let Western philosophy dictate what issues to talk about, I let Chinese philosophy have the final say on each of these issues.

As I have mentioned, I take this approach primarily because I am writing in English and addressing a Western audience. The basic idea is that, if I want to introduce to Western philosophers a Chinese philosopher they are not familiar with, it is pointless to show them how ridiculous (some of) this Chinese philosopher's ideas are or how inferior these ideas are to those found in their (Western philosophers') own tradition; this will serve only to provide them with a dose of confidence in their own tradition, which they hardly need. Instead, I believe what they would most like to know is what interesting and important things this Chinese philosopher has to say on the philosophical issues they are concerned with. For that reason, if I am writing in Chinese and addressing a Chinese audience, my approach is the reverse: I try to see on what important and yet controversial issues in Chinese philosophy Western philosophers have something better to say. In other words, I let Chinese philosophy dictate what issues to discuss and let Western philosophy have its final say on each of the issues under investigation. [33]

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33   However, perhaps due to what Shun regards as asymmetry and what Liu Xiaogan describes as

Now, we can try to see where this way of doing comparative philosophy stands between the two contrasting models of comparative philosophy outlined above. Clearly, it is not a textual study. The primary purpose of this way of doing comparative philosophy is not to provide a new interpretation of Chinese philosophers but to see how Chinese philosophers can help Western philosophers better deal with their (the Western philosophers') questions. Moreover, according to Shun's characterization, in textual studies, whether or not the ideas are philosophically appealing to us from a contemporary perspective should not affect the process;[34] while in the comparative study I promote here, I have left out precisely those aspects of Chinese philosophy that are not philosophically appealing to us comparativists in the sense that they are not conducive to solutions to issues in Western philosophy.[35] However, nor does this study fit well with the category of philosophical construction. On the one hand, the comparativist does not intend to construct his/her own philosophical theory. Rather, what he/she does is to show how Chinese philosophers can help Western philosophers answer their own questions. In the sense that such a comparative study does provide new answers to traditional questions in Western philosophy, there is certainly some philosophical construction involved. However, this is so only if we look at the thing within the

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reverse meaning-matching (*fanxiang geyi*) in the contemporary study of Chinese philosophy, the situation of Chinese philosophy in China can hardly be compared with that of Western philosophy in the West. In other words, Western philosophy defines what philosophy is, not only in the West but also in China, so much so that in recent years there has been a hot debate with broad participation among Chinese intellectuals in China on the legitimacy of Chinese philosophy: whether there is such a thing called *Chinese* philosophy, with the suspicion that Chinese tradition consists merely of some thought but not philosophy. For this reason, when I tentatively presented some preliminary results of this study at a number of Chinese universities, I surprisingly met with extraordinary enthusiasm among students of Chinese philosophy, as if they felt some kind of relief, realizing that Chinese philosophy after all is not that bad as *philosophy*.

34 Kwong-loi Shun, "Studying Confucian and Comparative Ethics," p. 455.

35 To say this of course does not mean that we should not study these aspects. As a matter of fact, only after we study the various aspects of a philosopher or a philosophical text can we know which aspects are philosophically appealing.

context of Western philosophy: something new comes up, although this something new is actually not new, as it has been present in Chinese philosophy all along. So if there is any philosophical construction, it is not done by the comparativist, although clearly this comparativist fully endorses it. On the other hand, comparative philosophy aiming at philosophical construction tends to downplay the importance of textual studies, at least as characterized by some. For example, Stalnaker states that such approaches "should be judged on their own intellectual merits, regardless of historical faithfulness to their sources," as there is a danger of losing touch with the historical sources that provoked one's efforts in the first place.[36] Shun also states that, in taking this approach, "we are no longer constrained by textual and historical considerations, and are instead guided by criteria of excellence pertaining to this philosophical exercise."[37] In this sense, this approach differs from philosophical construction. What a comparativist is doing is to present Chinese philosophers' answers to important philosophical issues in the Western tradition, even though these Chinese philosophers may not have these issues in mind when they develop the ideas the comparativist uses in his or her study. Of course, since the comparativist also endorses these ideas, these Chinese philosophers' views on the issues in question can also be seen as the comparativist's views, but they are not the views that the comparativist develops him- or herself merely with some inspiration from Chinese philosophers. Thus it is important for the comparativist to make sure that the views he/she presents are indeed views of the Chinese philosopher(s) under study, which can only be done through careful textual study. Of course, it is possible that the comparativist may have misunderstood some aspects of the Chinese philosopher, and if this is the case, then such misunderstandings should be corrected by further textual study instead of being excused or even defended for their philosophical utility.[38]

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36   Aaron Stalnaker, *Overcoming Our Evil*, p. 16.

37   Kwong-loi Shun, "Studying Confucian and Comparative Ethics," pp. 455-456.

38   When asked about such a methodology of comparative philosophy, I once used the following imperfect analogy to explain it. The Chinese philosopher's ideas are regarded here as tools, each of which fitting into its own designated space with its unique shape and size in the toolbox.

4. A Case Study: Moral Relativism

　　The presentation of this unique way of doing Chinese-Western comparative philosophy has so far inevitably been abstract. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, and the best way to introduce this way of doing comparative philosophy is to do it. In recent years, I have conducted a number of comparative philosophy projects using this approach, including studies involving such Chinese philosophers as Confucius,[39] the Cheng Brothers 二程,[40] and Zhu Xi 朱熹.[41] However, in this section, I shall present a brief summary of a number of studies I have done that aim to show how Zhuangzi's 莊子 version of moral relativism can avoid the problem of moral relativism developed in the Western philosophical tradition.[42] In what follows,

Some of these tools are taken out of the toolbox in this study to solve some problems in the Western philosophical tradition. When the job is done, if we can still put these tools back into their designated spaces in the original toolbox, that means we have not bent them out of shape in the process of using them; if we cannot put them back any longer, that means that we have somehow distorted them in order to accomplish our tasks. So there is still the criterion of whether or not our understanding of Chinese philosophical texts is adequate when we use them to answer Western philosophical questions. Thus, in his discussion of the two orientations in the interpretation of classics, the objective orientation toward the text and the subjective orientation toward the present, Liu Xiaogan points out that these two orientations do not exhaust all possible approaches to philosophical classics, and specifically mentions my approach to comparative philosophy as a plausible way that does not fit well into either of the two orientations. See Liu Xiaogan, "On the Nature and Role of Chinese Philosophy: A Response to Discussions on *Fanxiang Geyi*" 中國哲學妾身未明? 關於"反向格義"之討論的回應, *Journal of Nanjing University: Philosophy, Humanities and Social Science Edition* 南京大學學報 (哲學・人文科學・社會科學) 2008.2: 87.

39　Yong Huang, *Confucius: Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum Publications, 2013).

40　Yong Huang, *Why Be Moral? Learning from the Neo-Confucian Cheng Brothers* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, forthcoming).

41　Yong Huang, "The Self-Centeredness Objection to Virtue Ethics: Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucian Response," and "Two Dilemmas of Virtue Ethics and How Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism Avoids Them."

42　Yong Huang, "A Copper Rule Versus the Golden Rule: A Daoist Confucian Proposal for Global Ethics," *Philosophy East and West* 55.3 (2005.7): 394-425; "Interpretation of the Other:

I shall provide a brief summary of these studies, illustrating the unique features of the type of comparative philosophy advocated here.

Moral absolutism, which claims that morality consists of a set of principles applicable to all cultures and societies from ancient to present, has become increasingly untenable, particularly in this global age. However, its alternative, moral relativism, at least in the two versions developed in the Western philosophical tradition, appraiser relativism and agent relativism, is no less problematic. According to David Lyons, appraiser relativism is a view that "a moral judgment is valid if, and only if, it accords with the norms of the appraiser's social group."[43] So an action can be judged as morally right or wrong only in relation to a particular moral framework. Since different appraisers may belong to different social groups with different norms, it is natural that one same action judged as moral in relation to one moral framework may be judged as immoral in relation to a different framework. In Lyons's view, appraiser relativism often suffers from the problem of incoherence, by which he means that the same action may thus be appraised as right and wrong at the same time,[44] since there are multiple appraisers of the same action holding different moral frameworks.

A Cultural Hermeneutics," in Inwon Choue, Samuel Lee, Pierre Sane, eds*., Inter-regional Philosophical Dialogues: Democracy and Social Action in Asia and the Arab World* (Seoul: UNESCO / Korea National Commission of UNESCO, 2006), pp. 189-204; "Respecting Different Ways of Life: A Daoist Ethics of Virtue in the *Zhuangzi*." *Journal of Asian Studies* 69.4 (2010.11): 1049-1069; "The Ethics of Difference in the *Zhuangzi*," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78.1 (2010.3): 65-99; "Toward a Benign Moral Relativism: From Agent / Critics-centered to the Patient-centered," in Yang Xiao and Yong Huang, eds., *Moral Relativism and Chinese Philosophy: David Wong and His Critics* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2014); "The Patient Moral Relativism in the *Zhuangzi*," in Dennis Schilling and Richard King, eds., *Zhuangzi: Ethics at Ease* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, forthcoming).

43   David Lyons, "Ethical Relativism and the Problem of Incoherence," in Michael Krausz and Jack W. Meiland, eds., *Relativism: Cognitive and Moral* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), p. 212.

44   David Lyons, "Ethical Relativism and the Problem of Incoherence," p. 212.

　　Gilbert Harman, one of the most serious advocates of moral relativism, tries to avoid the problem of incoherence in appraisal relativism, which he also calls critic relativism [45] and moral judgment relativism. [46] He tries to show that there are only apparent, not real, moral disagreements. He provides the following definition of moral relativism: "For the purposes of assigning *objective* truth conditions, a judgment of the form, *it would be morally wrong of P to D*, has to be understood as elliptical for a judgment of the form, *in relation to moral framework M, it would be morally wrong of P to D*." [47] In other words, judgment of an action as morally right and wrong is always relative to the moral framework of the judge, the critic, the appraiser, or, simply, the speaker. What is unique about Harman's definition is that, although we often simply say that it is morally right or wrong of someone to do something without making reference to any such framework, Harman's definition reminds us that the form of our common moral judgment is faultlessly incomplete but has to be understood as elliptical for the complete formulation, which qualifies its truth to a particular moral framework.

　　The problem of incoherence that Lyons thinks appraiser relativism suffers from appears precisely because of the mistaken conception of our common moral judgments as complete. In Harman's view, if relativism allows an action to be judged as both morally right and wrong by the same standard, it is indeed incoherent. However, his formulation of relativism avoids this incoherence by stating that an action can be judged as morally right relative to one moral framework and as wrong relative to a different framework. Here there is no incoherence. To show this, he uses the analogy of motion. To say that an object is both moving and stationary relative to the same spatio-temporal framework is indeed incoherent. However, "something that is moving in relation to one spatio-temporal framework can be at rest in relation to

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45　Gilbert Harman, "Moral Relativism," in Gilbert Harman and Judith Jarvis Thomson, eds., *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), p. 62.

46　Gilbert Harman, *Explaining Value and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 22.

47　Gilbert Harman, "Moral Relativism," p. 43.

another."[48] Since apparently conflicting judgments about a particular action's moral rightness are made from different moral frameworks, they are not really conflicting, just as apparently conflicting judgments about a particular object's motion are not really conflicting, since they are made from different spatio-temporal frameworks. Moreover, just as "no spatio-temporal framework can be singled out as the one and only framework that captures the truth about whether something is in motion,"[49] no moral framework can be singled out as the one and only framework that captures the truth about whether a moral judgment is true.

To say this does not mean that Harman's indexical relativism can indeed successfully avoid the problem of incoherence identified by David Lyons. Two persons making different judgments about an object's motion, both true relative to their respective spatio-temporal frameworks, can clearly realize that they do not disagree on whether the given object is in motion or not. In contrast, two persons making different judgments about an action's morality, again both true relative to their respective moral frameworks, do feel that they fundamentally disagree with each other, even after they are made aware that their judgments are based on two different moral frameworks. Here Harman ignores an important difference between these two types of judgments, a difference most of his critics even fail to realize. When two persons make judgments about whether an object is in motion or at rest, they merely provide different descriptions of the object, which, if both are indeed true, can be mutually translated into each other. They do not intend to make any normative claim about the object: whether it should be in motion or at rest. Yet when two appraisers make moral judgments about an action's being morally right or wrong, they do not merely describe the action in light of different coordinates. They make normative claims about the action: whether it should be performed or not. Thus, when two appraisers make conflicting moral judgments about an action, one saying that it is morally right and the other saying that it is morally wrong, the

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48   Gilbert Harman, "Moral Relativism," p. 3.

49   Gilbert Harman, "Moral Relativism," p. 3.

conflict is a practical one rather than a theoretical one: the potential agent receives two conflicting recommendations: one says that he/she should perform the action, while the other says that he/she should not perform the action. The person cannot simultaneously both perform the action and not perform the action to conform to these two opposite prescriptions. For this reason, Harman's attempt to avoid the problem of incoherence by disclosing the elliptical nature of moral judgments is unsuccessful.

In contrast to appraiser relativism, agent relativism, which Harman also calls normative moral relativism, is the view that "a moral demand *D* applies to a person only if that person either accepts *D* (i.e. intends to act in accordance with *D*) or fails to accept *D* only because of ignorance of relevant (nonmoral) facts, a failure to reason something through, or some sort of (nonmoral) mental defect like irrationality, stupidity, confusion, or mental illness."[50] While appraiser relativism claims that an action is right or wrong relative to the moral framework of the appraiser, agent relativism holds that an act is right or wrong relative to the framework of the agent. Unlike appraiser relativism, which is incoherent when there are multiple (as is in most cases) appraisers with different moral frameworks, agent relativism does not have the problem of incoherence, since there is only one standard, that of the agent, that is relevant to moral judgments. Lyons thus acknowledges that "such a theory seems not to validate conflicting moral judgments.… If we wish to judge a given act … this theory tells us to apply the norms of her social group. It therefore seems to imply that any single item of conduct can correctly be judged in one and only one way."[51]

However, if we accept such agent relativism, there will be a serious consequence. If moral nihilism, according to Harman's own definition, "rejects morality altogether including any sort of relative morality,"[52] then agent relativism

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50   Gilbert Harman, *Explaining Value and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*, p. 30.

51   David Lyons, "Ethical Relativism and the Problem of Incoherence," p. 211.

52   Gilbert Harman, "Moral Relativism," p. 5.

accepts everything any agent does as moral, as long as it is not performed out of "ignorance of relevant (nonmoral) facts, a failure to reason something through, or some sort of (nonmoral) mental defect like irrationality, stupidity, confusion, or mental illness." In other words, moral judgments of an action make sense only if the agent performs the action or fails to perform it due to such non-moral reasons; for only in such cases does the agent have reason to perform or refrain from performing an action on the one hand and yet still fail to perform or refrain from performing it on the other. If an agent does not have reason to perform an action, then we cannot say that the person morally ought to perform the action in the sense that he/she should and could have performed the action; and if the agent does not have reason to refrain from performing an action, then we cannot say that the person morally ought not to perform it in the sense that he/she should and could have not performed it. For this reason, Harman claims that "the criminal is not irrational or unreasonable in relation to criminal morality, but only in relation to a morality the criminal rejects. But the fact that it is irrational or unreasonable in relation to this other morality not to have concern and respect for others, does not give the criminal who rejects that morality any reason to avoid harming or injuring others."[53] In other words, according to agent relativism, the criminal's action can be appropriately judged only in terms of "criminal morality" the criminal accepts, and not the morality of having concern and respect for others that he rejects. When thus appropriately judged, the criminal has done what he/she morally ought to do and has not done what he/she morally ought not to do. Thus, "the claim that Hitler ought morally not to have ordered the extermination of the Jews would not be true, if in fact Hitler did not have compelling reason to refrain and if the claim that Hitler ought morally not to have ordered the extermination of the Jews implies that Hitler had compelling reasons to refrain."[54] Within the context of this agent relativism, when a critic holds a different moral framework from that of the agent, the critic cannot make reason implying

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53 Gilbert Harman, *Explaining Value and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*, p. 90.
54 Gilbert Harman, "Moral Relativism," p. 61.

judgments in relation to the critic's morality, such as "Hitler was doing things that are morally wrong for us to do," although he can make reason implying judgments in relation to the agent's morality, such as "Hitler was doing the morally right thing for a Nazi to do."[55] However, to alleviate our concern, Harman thinks that agent relativism does allow a critic to make a different type of moral judgment, the non-reason implying judgment, in relation to the critic's morality, such as "Hitler was a great evil." However, a further examination of what Harman means makes it clear that such judgments or evaluations are anything but *moral* judgments or evaluations. In Harman's view, the evaluation that "Hitler was a great evil" falls into the same category as the evaluation that "it is terrible that the tiger attacked the children at the zoo." The former does not imply that Hitler should or ought not to be a great evil, just as the latter does not imply that it is morally wrong of the tiger to have attacked children. Here, Harman makes it clear that we are "no more able to judge that it was wrong of Hitler to have acted as he acted than to judge that it was wrong of the tiger to have attacked the children."[56] The only function of such judgments or evaluations is to show that we do not like Hitler's actions, but this is no different from our dislike for the harm a tiger or, for that matter, a hurricane or an earthquake, does to humans.

So both types of relativism have problems. Appraiser relativism cannot deal with the practical incoherence of moral judgments making references to different moral frameworks. Agent relativism avoids this incoherence only at the expense of the very purpose of morality, as it justifies any action, however horrible, as moral. It is in this context that it becomes interesting to turn to the Chinese philosopher, Zhuangzi, or the text named after him, the *Zhuangzi*. Zhuangzi is also often regarded as a relativist. However, we find in him a unique type of relativism that is unseen in the Western philosophical tradition. In contrast to agent relativism and appraiser relativism, I characterize this unique type of moral relativism as patient relativism.

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55   Gilbert Harman, "Moral Relativism," p. 62.
56   Gilbert Harman, "Moral Relativism," p. 60.

Just as agent relativism is the view that a moral judgment is relative to the agentʼs standards, and appraiser relativism holds that a moral judgment is relative to the appraiserʼs standards, for patient relativism, a moral judgment is relative to the standard of the patient, the recipient of the action in question. In other words, for patient relativism, it is not only wrong for us to do things to others for our (agentsʼ or appraisersʼ) own benefit; it may also be wrong for us to do things to others for what we consider to be in their interests. The reason is that what we consider to be good for others may not be considered good by those others themselves, and what is considered good by some others may not be considered good by some "other" others. Since the recipients of our actions are particular others who may be different from us agents or appraisers, we have to adopt standards of the actual recipients of our action, and not those of anyone elseʼs, in evaluating our actions toward them. If we think that what is good for us must also be good for others and thus were to impose our standard of good upon them, calamity would likely result.

This is precisely the moral of the story we are told at the end of Chapter 7, the last of the inner chapters:

> The emperor of the Southern Sea was Shu 儵, the emperor of the Northern Sea was Hu 忽, and the emperor of the Central Region was Hundun 渾沌. Shu and Hu often met each other in Hundunʼs land, where Hundun provided them with wonderful hospitality. Thinking of repaying his kindness, Shu and Hu said, "everyone has seven orifices with which to see, hear, eat, and breathe. Only Hundun does not have them. Let us try to open them on him." They opened one orifice a day. By the seventh day, Hundun died. (*Zhuangzi* 7)[57]

While this story is extremely rich in meaning,[58] in the context of this essay, it is particularly important to acknowledge that Emperors Shu and Hu have no ill will at all toward Emperor Hundun. Rather, they are very grateful to Hundun and would

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57 Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, comp., *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1995), p. 309.

58 Wu, Kuangming 吳光明, "Emperor Hundun 混沌: A Cultural Hermeneutic." *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 6.3 (2007): 263-279.

like to repay Hundun's hospitality. To do so, they consider that Hundun, as far as he is different from them (by not having the seven orifices), is deficient. So out of "good will," to rectify Hundun's deficiency, they decide to add the missing orifices for him. The resulting action is nevertheless wrong, deadly (in a literal sense) wrong, because they do not understand that things in the universe, while different, are of equal value. They fail to realize that, to equalize things, what one needs to do is not to make them identical but to recognize their equal value, however different they are.

This idea is more vividly and clearly expressed by Zhuangzi or perhaps one of his followers, the author of the *Zhi le* 至樂 chapter, in the equally famous story of the Marquis of Lu's 魯 misguided care of a seabird:

> Of old, when a seabird alighted outside the capital of Lu, the Marquis of Lu went out to receive it, gave it wine in the temple, and had the *Jiushao* 九韶 music played to amuse it and a bullock slaughtered to feed it. However, the bird was dazed and too timid to eat or drink anything. In three days it was dead. The Marquis of Lu treated the bird as he would like to be treated, and not as the bird would like to be treated. Had he treated the bird as it would like to be treated, he would have let it roost in a deep forest and allowed it to wander over the plain, swim in a river or lake, feed upon fish, and fly in formation with others. (*Zhuangzi* 18)[59]

Here, the author of the *Zhi le* chapter makes it clear that the problem with the Marquis of Lu in his treatment of the seabird is that he treats "the bird as he would like to be treated": he likes wine, so he lets the bird drink wine; he likes the *Jiushao* music, so he lets the bird "enjoy" the music; he likes banquets, so he "entertains" the bird with a banquet. The result is the death of the bird. In other words, the Marquis of Lu does not care to learn about the uniqueness of the seabird. Instead, he simply regards his own standard as the universal standard and applies it to the seabird. In the view of the author of this chapter, the Marquis of Lu should have "treated the bird as the bird would like to be treated": to "let it roost in a deep forest and allow it to wander over the plain, swim in a river or lake, feed upon fish, and fly in formation

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59   Guo Qingfan, comp., *Zhuangzi jishi*, p. 621.

with others." This is exactly what is required by Zhuangzian patient relativism, a position that puts the patient at the center of both our moral actions and moral deliberations. An action, or lack thereof, is moral only if the patient, the person who receives it, approves it.

Such a patient relativism can avoid the respective problems of the familiar types of moral relativism in Western philosophy. On the one hand, since according to patient relativism there is only one standard that is relevant in our moral judgment, i.e., the standard of the patient, there is no problem of incoherence, theoretical or practical, that plagues appraiser relativism. On the other hand, since the standard of the patient is the only standard of our moral judgment of any action, then, unlike agent relativism, it does not license as moral such horrible actions as committed by people like Nazis, robbers, and thieves. Here, Hitler's action would be moral only if Jews were willing to be killed, a robber's actions would be moral only if his victims would like to be robbed, and the actions of a thief would be moral only if people would prefer to have their property stolen. Moreover, it can also avoid the problem of moral universalism that both agent and appraiser moral relativism are intended to avoid. According to patient relativism, an action that is moral when done to one moral patient is not necessarily so when done to a different moral patient. So when we are deliberating over or appraising an action, whether done by someone else or by ourselves, we have to consider the interests and values of its patient.

It is in this sense that we can claim that, unlike agent relativism and appraiser relativism, in the debate between realism and anti-realism, patient relativism sides with realism. As we have seen, both appraiser relativism and agent relativism start from different moral frameworks aiming to explain or deal with the so-called intractable disagreement among people with different frameworks. As moral relativists are generally anti-realists, the different moral frameworks their relativist theories try to deal with are considered to be human inventions to promote and facilitate human cooperation. In contrast, patient relativism does not start from different moral norms about ways of life but from different ways of life

themselves.[60] For the same reason, patient relativism, unlike appraiser relativism and agent relativism, is an entirely normative ethical theory and not merely a meta-ethical theory, as what it tells us is the moral standard for right or wrong actions, not the way to think about or deal with conflicts among different moral standards. In this sense, patient relativism, surprisingly, is a form of universalism: it requires everyone to respect his/her patient's unique way of life, as long as this unique way of life itself respects other unique ways of life. It is relativistic only because it recognizes that the appropriate way of life is different for different moral patients.

5. Conclusion

I have just briefly summarized my study, developed in more detail and defended more forcefully in a number of my publications, of the *Zhuangzi* as presenting a patient moral relativism, which I argue is superior to agent moral relativism and appraiser moral relativism, the familiar types of moral relativism in the Western philosophical tradition. However, the main purpose of this essay is not to argue for such a patient moral relativism. I use it merely as an example to illustrate a methodology for doing Chinese philosophy in the Western context, and I could well have used a different case study that I have undertaken in the past to serve the same purpose. According to the methodology that I have been explicitly arguing for in this essay and implicitly used in my actual studies of Chinese philosophy published in English, the way one does Chinese philosophy should at least be partially determined by the type of audience one intends to address. Since

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60 Zhuangzi thus claims that different things have different natures or natural tendencies. For example, "a good horse can gallop a thousand miles a day but is not as good as a cat or weasel in catching mice, for the skills of the animals are different. An owl can catch fleas and see the tip of a hair at night but cannot see a hill with its eyes open during the day, for its inborn nature is different" (*Zhuangzi* 17). See Guo Qingfan, comp., *Zhuangzi jishi*, p. 580. Zhuangzian patient relativism simply requires us to respect the unique natural tendencies of our moral patients: "nature cannot be changed, destiny cannot be altered, time cannot be stopped, and Dao cannot be blocked" (*Zhuangzi* 14). See Guo Qingfan, comp., *Zhuangzi jishi*, p. 532.

one who does Chinese philosophy in the Western context must address (at least also) Western philosophers, an important question one has to keep in mind is why they ought to care about Chinese philosophy. I believe that they will hardly be interested in learning how inferior or even absurd some philosophical views developed in the Chinese tradition are; they may be slightly more interested and sometimes even surprised to learn that some Chinese philosophers have developed positions very similar to those in their own tradition, sometimes much earlier although often less systematic; however, they will be most interested in being shown that they can learn things from Chinese philosophy or that Chinese philosophers have better things to say on the very issues they have been dealing with. I do not claim that this is the only way to do Chinese philosophy in the Western context, but I do think it is at least one of the legitimate approaches, although I also wish to further claim that it is perhaps a more interesting, important, and fruitful one.

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在西方哲學背景中從事中國哲學研究
——一種新的嘗試

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摘　要

　　本文提出一種在西方哲學背景中研究中國哲學的獨特方式。其核心問題是西方哲學家為甚麼要關心中國哲學，或者能夠從中國哲學中學到甚麼東西。因此從事這樣一種研究的學者所要作的，就不能是簡單地比較中西哲學的異同，並指出各自的優劣；而應該首先對西方哲學家所關心的問題，他們在這些問題上有代表性的看法，及這些看法所可能存在的問題有所瞭解，並在此基礎上看中國傳統哲學在這些問題上，是否有比西方哲學更好的看法。由於這樣一種研究屬於比較的研究，本文在轉向這種研究方法之前，首先討論了一般意義上的比較哲學的可能性。而由於關於比較哲學的這種純粹方法論的討論，不可避免地具有抽象性，本文在最後一部分，對筆者近年用這種方法所作的一個研究案例，做了概要的介紹。

關鍵詞：比較哲學、中國哲學、方法論、道德相對主義、莊子