

## **SPECIAL ISSUE**

# **CELEBRATING THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR COMPARATIVE STUDIES OF CHINESE AND WESTERN PHILOSOPHY**

## **INTRODUCTION**

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This special issue of *Comparative Philosophy* was commissioned to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the International Society for Comparative Studies of Chinese and Western Philosophy (ISCWP). When the idea first came to the ISCWP Board, we immediately thought of this journal as the ideal venue for a special journal issue, given that the journal and the society were both the creations of our esteemed colleague Bo Mou who, since the time we brought the idea to him, has worked tirelessly to bring out this special issue. We thank him not only for the success of this project, but also his longstanding support and dedication to the ISCWP. We also want to thank those who responded to the call for papers for the special issue, the reviewers, and the authors who together make this issue a significant contribution to comparative philosophy.

This special issue showcases the work of ISCWP members, the authors of the selected papers hailed from the United States, Europe and Asia, reflecting the wide geographical distribution of its membership. Their contributions reflect the society's emphasis on the constructive engagement between Chinese philosophy, including Confucian, Daoist, and Mohist, and Western philosophy broadly defined, from ancient Greek and European Enlightenment philosophy, to contemporary Islamic philosophy and analytic philosophy. These comparative studies are sensitive to the contemporary development and resources of philosophy and their mutual advancement, and strive to contribute to philosophy as common intellectual wealth of

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all humanity, and to advance respective studies of Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy. The topics range from contemporary problems of human rights, global poverty, establishment of a Kantian “invisible church,” the issue of contemporary philosophical problem of rule-following, to the challenging possibility of viewing an ancient Chinese philosopher as a “social scientist.” Some of them go beyond applying comparative philosophy to solve some particular contemporary problems, or to achieve better understanding of different philosophical traditions or philosophies compared; they are also self-conscious reflection on the methodology of comparative philosophy and the reading of ancient texts in contemporary contexts.

Stephen Angle’s extremely rich study of contemporary Islamic and Confucian approaches to democracy and human rights does not just offer a variety of different perspectives on reconciling these two traditions with democracy and human rights. It skillfully brings out the internal diversity and contestation within each tradition and analyzes the approaches into four categories according to how a contemporary philosopher read the canonical texts of his/her tradition in bringing the resources of those texts to the contemporary problem of human rights. Angle introduces us to the works of contemporary Islamic and Confucian philosophers whose approaches to texts could be considered literalist, hermeneutic, creative transformation, and instrumentalist. Philosophers from the two traditions who seem to share the same textual approach may develop the approach differently due to significant differences in the intellectual and cultural context in which they make their arguments. The differences governing a tradition’s relationship to its core texts have “enormous implications for the flexibility with which members of these traditions can approach new, and potentially attractive, values and institutions like democracy and human rights.”

Sean Walsh employs a comparison between the Mencian *jun-zi* (Superior Gentleman) and the Aristotelian *megalopsuchos* (Magnanimous Man) to argue that virtue ethics with its ethical partiality could nevertheless meet the demands of alleviating global poverty as rigorously as utilitarian ethics. Besides adding to the already extensive comparisons between classical Greek and Chinese philosophies, this study takes up an important challenge to contemporary virtue ethics posed by other moral philosophers, and engages a serious problem of global proportions that deserve attention from everyone, not just philosophers.

Stephen Palmquist argues that the *Dao-De-Jing* has passages that could be read as upholding the often neglected guiding principles (universality, purity, freedom and unchangeableness) of the “invisible church” in Immanuel Kant’s philosophy of religion. He adopts Kant’s “philosophical approach” to interpreting classical (religious) texts, that of reading a moral meaning into them, even though the resulting interpretation “may often seem forced, and may often actually be forced.” This controversial hermeneutical principle enables him to consider “the *possibility* of a Daoist model for a Kantian form of religious life.” Other than its interest for philosophers of religion, this comparative study might inspire more comparisons between Kant’s philosophy and Daoism to compete with the more common comparisons with Confucianism. Its combination of Daoist and Kantian approaches

for organizing a religious community extends the reach of Kant's philosophical approach to religion and contributes to its claim of universality while at the same time presents Daoism from a novel perspective that is not bound by its native culture.

Chung-I Lin examines comparable interest in the problem of rule-following among contemporary analytic philosophers, drawing mainly on the arguments of John McDowell and Robert Brandom, and ancient Chinese philosophers, focusing on the Mohists. In ancient China, the problem takes the form of how to follow the way (*dao*), which is not merely a debate about language but a debate with practical and moral significance. Beginning with McDowell's formulation of the problem – "How can a performance be nothing but a 'blind' reaction to a situation, not an attempt to act on interpretation and be a case of going by a rule?" – Lin presents textual evidence to show that the Mohist philosophy developed from a position that views *dao*-following as involving understanding that is always interpretation to finding a way between the Scylla of equating understanding with interpretation and the Charybdis of treating rule-following as a "blind" reaction to a situation. His comparison of two Mohist concepts employed in the discourse about *dao*-following, standards (*fa*) and analogy (*lei*), leads to the conclusion that the latter provides a better solution of how knowing the *dao* can move from merely knowing the meaning of words to correct practice of *dao*. As an action scenario, analogy in Mohist philosophy overcomes the problems of multiple plausible interpretations and missing contexts in the use of rules as well as non-propositional models, to present *dao*-following not as a "blind reaction" to a situation but as an act of reason that can generate an adequate intention to act. With this conclusion, Lin then critically engages the contemporary discussion of rule-following in analytic philosophy.

Henrique Schneider suggests that the Legalist, Han Fei, resembles social scientists in building a model of human nature, the state, and their relationship, and then proceeding to provide empirical support for his model by drawing on accounts of historical events, in order to provide recommendations to the ruler. Social scientists also approach society by building models that they test with empirical studies, with the aim of providing policy advice. Schneider notes that unlike many of his contemporaries, Han Fei's interest in history is not primarily to make moral judgments about events of the past; to Han Fei, what history really can teach are actual circumstances and workings of society and human behavior. Recommendations on how to govern should be based on an understanding of such actualities insofar as they are still relevant to the present rather than standards handed down from the past. Schneider pays careful attention to Han Fei's method of argument to make his point. The aim of his study is not a misguided anachronistic reading of an ancient (pre-scientific) text. It challenges the clichéd view of Chinese philosophy as a kind of "speculative morality." The author also offers it as a case study of a technique in comparative philosophy he calls "historical correspondence," which compares "the thinker being analyzed in the context of his time and culture and similar philosophies/approaches today in the context of our time and culture."

I hope that readers will enjoy these five contributions to constructive engagement between Chinese Philosophy and Western Philosophy and find them edifying. They

are valuable additions to comparative philosophy. I would like to thank again everybody who contributed to making this special issue celebrating ISCWP's tenth anniversary a reality. Here's wishing ISCWP many more anniversaries.