

FROM CONTEMPLATION TO COUNSELING: EXPLORING PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE BY CONSTRUCTIVE-ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY OF COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY

XIAOJUN DING, CHAO YANG, PETER HARTELOH & FENG YU

ABSTRACT: *This paper applies Bo Mou's Constructive-Engagement Strategy of Comparative Philosophy (CESCP) to explore philosophical practice as a novel paradigm that applies philosophy to everyday life. The study advocates for a transformative methodology that seeks truth through critical engagement, joint contributions, and diverse methodological tools, advancing the discipline towards a comprehensive world philosophy. Philosophical practice, characterized by its engagement with human experience and existential inquiries, integrates Eastern and Western philosophies to guide individuals in the art of living. It offers a philosophical alternative to psychological counseling, focusing on reasoning to address life's challenges and ethical dilemmas. The paper examines the integration of Chinese philosophy, particularly Confucianism, into philosophical practice, highlighting its relevance for contemporary counseling. It discusses Confucianism's impact on philosophical practice, advances in self-cultivation and gong-fu theory, and the holistic Confucian view of body-mind integration, contrasting it with some Western approaches. We conclude that the practical dimensions of Confucianism oppose Western theoretical philosophy but align with Western philosophical practice. By employing CESCP, this research enriches philosophical practice, integrating diverse philosophies while respecting each tradition's context. The approach combines Eastern relational perspectives with Western analytical depth, enhancing philosophical counseling and contributing to a global philosophical dialogue. This fusion of horizons aims to foster cross-cultural understanding and develop universally relevant wisdom.*

Keywords: *Confucianism, constructive-engagement strategy of comparative philosophy (CESCP), philosophical counseling (PC), philosophical practice (PP), philosophical therapy, practical wisdom, Socratic dialogue*

DING, XIAOJUN (丁曉軍): Associate Professor of Philosophy, Xi'an Jiaotong University, Xi'an, China. Email: xiaojunding@xjtu.edu.cn

YANG, CHAO (楊超): Graduate Student, Advanced Institute for Confucian Studies, Shandong University, Jinan, China. Email: yckx0621@163.com

HARTELOH, PETER: Researcher, Erasmus Institute for Philosophical Practice, Rotterdam, The Netherlands. Email: info@filosofischepraktijk.com

YU, FENG (喻豐): Professor of Psychology, Wuhan University, Wuhan, China. Email: psychpedia@whu.edu.cn

1. INTRODUCTION

The domain of philosophy spans a broad spectrum from abstract thought to tangible human experiences. Comparative philosophy has evolved as a crucial field through the interplay of Eastern and Western perspectives. This discipline's foundations were laid during the 16th century with the Jesuit missions to China, initiating a dialogue between divergent philosophical and cultural traditions. Over time, especially through the upheavals of the Opium Wars and the Reform Movement of the late Qing Dynasty, as well as the New Culture Movement, there was a concerted effort to rediscover and rejuvenate Chinese culture by reevaluating its past. Pioneering scholars like Hu Shi and Liang Shuming later worked on synthesizing elements from these diverse traditions, marking a significant advancement in the field. By the late 20th century, the literature on comparative philosophy and culture flourished, with notable contributions from Li (1988), Zhang (1998), Hall and Ames (2005), Xu (2014b), and the "Comparative Philosophy Translation and Research" series edited by Genyou Wu and Bryan W. van Norden.

The 20th century also saw a practical turn in philosophy (Ding et al. 2024b), with philosophers like Hadot (1995) and Nussbaum (1994) framing it as a 'way of life' or 'therapy of desire', aimed at integrating personal growth, societal engagement, and our relationship with the universe. There was a growing consensus that theoretical philosophy had drifted from classical philosophy's original goals, becoming too abstract and detached from real-world human experiences. Philosophical practice (PP), which gained prominence in the 1980s through figures like Pierre Grimes in the United States and Gerd Böttcher Achenbach in Germany, sought to remedy this by applying philosophy in more accessible ways, such as through Socratic dialogue and philosophical counseling (PC).

PP represents an important evolution from academic to applied philosophy, demonstrating a commitment to addressing the existential challenges individuals face daily (Ding et al. 2024b). In this paper, we begin by introducing the concept of comparative philosophy and its significance, including the Constructive-Engagement Strategy of Comparative Philosophy proposed by Bo Mou (Section 2). We then transition to focus on PP as an emerging paradigm in Western philosophy (Section 3). The issues are structured around the rise and development of PP, tracing its historical roots and evolution from the 1980s onwards. The paper discusses jointly concerned issues in PP, including the search for meaning, the use of philosophy as an educational tool, and philosophy as a way of life. It also addresses the relationship between PC and psychotherapy, highlighting the differences and potential complementarities (Section 4). The paper then delves into specific aspects of PP, such as PC and its methodologies, including Socratic dialogue. We explore the integration of Eastern philosophies, particularly Confucianism, into PP, examining how these different philosophical traditions can contribute to and enrich the practice (Section 5). Throughout, this paper maintains a comparative approach, drawing connections between Western and Eastern philosophical traditions and their applications in PP.

Overall, our analysis advocates for a holistic approach to philosophy that honors academic rigor while also valuing practical applications. We aim to demonstrate that the true value of philosophy lies not only in contemplative understanding but also in actionable wisdom that can guide individuals through the complexities of life.

2. THE IDENTITY, SIGNIFICANCE, AND CONSTRUCTIVE- ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY OF COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY

2.1 THE IDENTITY OF COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY

The concept of comparative philosophy encompasses a tripartite identity that can be delineated along three distinct, yet interrelated, dimensions, as elucidated by Mou (2022). These dimensions are instrumental in understanding the discipline's comprehensive nature and its progressive orientation within the broader philosophical landscape.

The first dimension pertains to its 'character', delineating comparative philosophy as "a general way of doing philosophy" (Mou 2022). This aspect underscores the universal applicability of comparative philosophy, positioning it not as a niche or peripheral activity but as a foundational approach applicable across various philosophical inquiries and traditions. It emphasizes the inclusive and accessible nature of this methodology, transcending specific cultural or intellectual boundaries to address a wide spectrum of philosophical issues. As Rockmore (1997) aptly puts it, "philosophy itself has no country" and is "the land of the mind" – an assertion that resonates with the character dimension of comparative philosophy, stressing its vocation to serve as a universal medium of intellectual exploration.

The second dimension, the 'approach', emphasizes 'cross-tradition engagement', which is at the heart of comparative philosophy's methodological practice (Mou 2022). This dimension entails an active dialogical exchange between diverse philosophical traditions, fostering mutual understanding and intellectual enrichment. Cross-tradition engagement is essential for comparative philosophy as it allows for the synthesis of ideas, the critique of parochial biases, and the creation of a more integrated philosophical discourse. This dialogical approach aligns with the sentiments of Panikkar (1979), who advocates for "dialogue in the new pluriverse", recognizing the importance of intercultural conversations in the quest for universal insights. Comparative philosophy is taught as a method of intercultural comparison, offering new insights like the 'axial age' concept. This period highlights a shared philosophical attitude among figures such as Lao Tse, Buddha, and Socrates across different places/cultures (Armstrong 2006).

Finally, the 'direction' dimension of comparative philosophy is oriented "toward world philosophy" (Mou 2022). This forward-looking trajectory envisions a global philosophical enterprise that transcends the limitations of individual traditions and seeks to distill collective wisdom in pursuit of universal truths. It is about charting a course towards a philosophy that is not only comparative in method but also comprehensive in its scope, aiming for a more interconnected and cooperative global

philosophical community. As Mall (2000) notes, “the future of philosophy may lie in its past” – an affirmation that invites us to view the history of philosophy not as a series of isolated narratives but as a cumulative journey towards a shared philosophical destiny.

In integrating these three dimensions – character, approach, and direction – comparative philosophy emerges as a dynamic and transformative way of doing philosophy (Mou 2022). It advocates for an intellectual ethos that is at once critical and collaborative, local and global, rooted in tradition yet aspiring towards a collective philosophical wisdom. This tri-dimensional framework not only defines the identity of comparative philosophy but also sets the stage for its ongoing evolution as a cornerstone for intercultural philosophical engagement and a beacon for world philosophy.

2.2 THE SIGNIFICANCE AND VALUE OF COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY

Comparative philosophy is of paramount importance to the development of World Philosophy, offering a platform for the synthesis of diverse philosophical traditions. It not only facilitates the convergence of varying paradigms but also creates an environment for intellectual synergy. By integrating insights across traditions, this discipline contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of philosophical issues. Bo Mou champions this approach for his constructive engagement strategy, which fosters the synthesis of diverse ideas and methodologies to tackle common philosophical concerns (Mou 2020; 2024).

Furthermore, comparative philosophy plays a crucial role in promoting mutual understanding and respect among different cultural and philosophical traditions. It transcends theoretical exchange, having practical implications for intercultural dialogue and collaboration. Philosophical traditions, with their unique historical, cultural, and national backgrounds, offer a wide array of perspectives on key human topics, greatly enriching humanity’s intellectual and spiritual domains. The International Society for Comparative Studies of Chinese and Western Philosophy (ISCWP) underscores this inter-traditional engagement as a means to “recognize and appreciate the worth of diverse intellectual heritages” (Mou 2022), a process that extends beyond mere academic pursuit to foster empathy and intercultural respect in an interconnected yet diverse global landscape.

The discipline’s growth also hinges on applying epistemological frameworks that honor each tradition’s integrity. Such an approach requires openness and a critical examination of knowledge, allowing guiding principles to arise naturally from cross-cultural engagement. Mou (2022) points out the necessity for “adequate methodological guiding principles” to manage and unify the array of philosophical insights for a world philosophy. The adoption of these methodologies yields a deeper, more nuanced comprehension of philosophical doctrines, pushing the limits of traditional wisdom.

Overall, comparative philosophy is vital for the progression of World Philosophy, as it not only fosters the amalgamation of ideas from varied traditions but also

advocates for a culture of cross-cultural understanding and respect. Embracing a methodological framework that is inclusive and exacting, comparative philosophy exemplifies the collaborative intellectual progress and intercultural appreciation that are possible.

2.3 THE CONSTRUCTIVE-ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY OF COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY

In his pivotal work, Mou (2010) advocates for an innovative paradigm shift in the realm of comparative philosophy. He proposes an approach that transcends the conventional practice of merely delineating similarities and differences, urging for a more profound and interactive methodology characterized by constructive engagement and dialogue (Mou 2007). This approach is not just a philosophical endeavor; it is a quest for truth that requires rigorous critical engagement. The objective is not to espouse an “anything goes” attitude but to foster a genuine and disciplined search for understanding and knowledge.

Building upon this foundational premise, Mou (2015; 2022) outlines six core emphases of the Constructive-Engagement Strategy of Comparative Philosophy (CESCP), which serve as guiding principles for this intellectual discourse:

(1) The primary emphasis is on “critical engagement” as a vehicle for the pursuit of truth (Mou 2022). This approach necessitates a disciplined critique that is both rigorous and fair, recognizing that the ultimate aim of philosophy is to uncover and understand truths about our world and our place within it. Thus, the CESCP aligns itself with the Socratic tradition of dialectical reasoning as a means to refine ideas and beliefs (Hoaglund 1993; Meyer 2018).

(2) The strategy also underscores the “constructive joint contribution” of distinct philosophical traditions (Mou 2022). By facilitating a dialogue that allows these approaches to learn from each other, the CESCP engenders a richer, more nuanced understanding that would not be possible through solitary inquiry. As articulated by Gadamer (2004), understanding is not just about reconstructing a historical past but also about a fusion of horizons where different cultural and philosophical viewpoints come into a conversation, expanding the boundaries of knowledge.

(3) Further emphasis is placed on the “philosophical interpretation” of seminal texts rather than solely on their historical description (Mou 2022). This interpretive lens seeks to engage with the thinkers’ original ideas and arguments, probing their contemporary relevance and applying their insights to modern philosophical discourse. This approach echoes the hermeneutic tradition, emphasizing that texts are not static artifacts but living documents that continue to speak to us across time and culture (Dallmayr 2009; Grondin 1994).

(4) The CESCP recognizes the “complementary nature of addressing jointly concerned issues”, suggesting that multiple philosophical traditions can provide unique perspectives to a common problem, thereby enriching the discourse (Mou 2022). This idea is reminiscent of Isaiah Berlin’s notion of value pluralism, where multiple values

and viewpoints coexist and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of complex issues (Berlin 2013).

(5) Another crucial emphasis of the CЕССР is the identification and application of “eligible perspectives”, “adequate guiding principles”, and “effective instruments” derived from various philosophical approaches (Mou 2022). This principle acknowledges that each tradition brings to the table a set of tools and methodologies that can be instrumental in tackling philosophical problems, much like Thomas Kuhn’s understanding of scientific paradigms providing distinct models for solving puzzles within their respective domains (Kuhn 1962).

(6) Lastly, the CЕССР emphasizes the importance of recognizing and addressing both “potential/implicit and actual/explicit issues” (Mou 2022). This dual focus ensures that philosophy does not only grapple with the apparent and immediate but also delves into the underlying and emergent questions that may not yet be fully articulated. As John Rawls suggests, addressing implicit issues involves understanding the principles that underpin the explicit structures of society, thus revealing deeper insights into justice and fairness (Rawls 1971).

In summary, the six emphases of CЕССР as outlined by Mou (2022) constitute a comprehensive framework that aims to revitalize comparative philosophy. This framework not only fosters a collaborative search for truth but also promotes an incisive and multifaceted exploration of philosophical thought that is both critical and constructive. Through this innovative lens, comparative philosophy can achieve its full potential as a dynamic and transformative field of intellectual engagement.

By applying the CЕССР, we not only honor the integrity of each philosophical tradition but also create a fertile ground for innovative thought. This strategy encourages an interdisciplinary approach that respects the particularities of each system while seeking universal truths and practical wisdom that can be applied to philosophy and beyond.

3. PP AS A BURGEONING PARADIGM IN WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

PP represents an evolving paradigm in Western philosophy, bridging the gap between academic discourse and real-world application. It transforms philosophy from a purely theoretical pursuit into a practical tool for guidance, aligning with Pierre Hadot’s (1995) view of philosophy as a way of life (Harteloh 2013b). Practitioners employ Socratic dialogue and counseling to engage individuals and groups, including both adults and children, in reflective and transformative conversations.

This shift is not merely a theoretical and general development but responds to a broader societal yearning for meaning and purpose. The relevance and impact of PP warrant empirical and personal investigation to fully understand its implications and efficacy. Its growth underscores the need for philosophy to be not only an academic discipline but also a practical resource for personal and communal well-being.

3.1 THE RISE AND DEVELOPMENT OF PP

In today's intricate world, the importance of logical reasoning and philosophical thinking cannot be overstated. The 1980s marked a renaissance in PP as philosophers sought to reconnect theory with everyday life, with figures such as Lou Marinoff advocating for its long-standing tradition (Marinoff 1999). This practice, deeply rooted in the teachings of Socrates and Confucius, offers counsel reflective of ancient wisdom (Ding et al. 2024a; Ma et al. 2021). Lou Marinoff, as the founding president of the American Philosophical Practitioners Association (APPA), underscores the universality of PP across diverse historical figures (Marinoff 2001; 2020).

Despite its egalitarian roots, modern philosophy often recedes into academic isolation, disconnected from public engagement. Seeking to bridge this divide, Amsterdam students in the 1970s revitalized the Socratic method to foster applied philosophy. This led to the integration of PC into the Dutch PP, inspired by Achenbach's establishment of the first PP center in 1981. PP has since experienced fluctuations in popularity, contributing to the rise of public philosophy or 'publieksfilosofie' (Harteloh 2019). The 1980s brought a renaissance of interest in philosophy as a tool for interpreting societal trends and existential questions, with Gerd Böttcher Achenbach's work playing a pivotal role in this resurgence (Achenbach 2010; Achenbach et al. 1984).

The economic climate of the 1990s led to increased incorporation of Socratic dialogue in the corporate world, while individual philosophical consultations persisted, albeit in the shadow of psychotherapy. The financial model of psychotherapy, often supported by health insurance, presented a formidable challenge for PC, which typically required out-of-pocket payments—an obstacle not necessarily reflective of affordability but perhaps indicative of the public's reluctance to invest in such services. Despite the competition, PC offered a robust alternative to psychotherapy, particularly as it thrived amidst the 'depression epidemic' in Western society (Marinoff 1999).

At the turn of the millennium, Lou Marinoff's book *Plato, Not Prozac* (Marinoff 1999) captured the public's imagination, catapulting PP into the mainstream despite sparking debates within the field. Marinoff's work, as encapsulated by the book's title, critiqued the excessive medicalization of mental health and the over-reliance on pharmaceutical interventions in psychotherapy, advocating for philosophical dialogue as an alternative. The tendency to medicalize personal struggles, often mischaracterizing them as illnesses, overlooks the philosophical roots of many life challenges—these are not merely symptomatic but are deeply tied to an individual's worldview and life choices. While medical treatments may offer symptomatic relief, PP aims to engage with and address the fundamental existential questions at the heart of these issues. Philosophical practitioners, or "philosophical doctors", offer a non-pharmacological approach that seeks to heal the mind through intellectual and reflective means, positioning philosophy as a therapeutic tool for mental well-being (Ding et al. 2019; 2022; 2023).

Currently, the viability of PP or PC as a sole professional pursuit remains elusive. Many philosophers engage in consultations or Socratic group dialogues as supplementary activities to other professional responsibilities or in cases where earning a living exclusively from practicing philosophy is not a necessity.

3.2 JOINTLY CONCERNED ISSUES/TOPICS IN PP

The development of PP in the Netherlands, characterized by the application of the Socratic method and the rise of PC, is mirrored in various forms around the world, with each country adapting the practice to its cultural and educational contexts (Ding et al. 2024c; Harteloh 2019; 2023). The general tendencies observed in the Netherlands—such as the search for meaning, the use of philosophy as an educational tool, and the aim to support individual philosophizing—can be compared to developments in other nations to extract a global perspective on the evolution of PP.

First, the search for Meaning. Globally, there is a universal human quest for meaning, which PP addresses by providing individuals with tools to explore existential questions. In countries like the United States, PP has been influenced by the works of philosophers like Lou Marinoff, who popularized the concept of PP as “the therapy for the sane” (Marinoff 2004). Similarly, in the United Kingdom, organizations and forums that promote public engagement with philosophy reflect this search for meaning, paralleling the Dutch movement of ‘publieksfilosofie’.

Second, PP as the educational tool inside and outside universities/schools. In terms of education, PP has been integrated into curricula not just within the Netherlands but also in places like the United States, with the Philosophy for Children (P4C) movement, and Italy, with the Community of Inquiry approach (Gregory 2022; Mayseless and Kizel 2022). These initiatives use philosophy as a tool to develop critical thinking, ethical reflection, and a sense of community among students, extending beyond the realm of theoretical and general philosophy.

Third, PP aimed at a way of life. Philosophy as a way of life, a concept revitalized by Pierre Hadot (1995), finds resonance in various cultures. In France, for instance, philosophical cafes and the practice of philosophy in everyday life (e.g., the Stoic week) are common, reflecting a desire to integrate philosophical reflection into the fabric of daily existence (Pigliucci and Lopez 2019; Robertson 2013). The spread of philosophical cafes in countries all over the world echoes the Dutch emphasis on philosophy as a practical guide for living (Ding 2019; Harteloh 2019).

Finally, PP as supporting the philosophizing of individuals. Across the globe, there has been a consistent effort to encourage individuals to engage with philosophy personally. PC, as seen in Germany with Achenbach’s work, has spread to other European countries, South America, East Asia, and beyond, with each region tailoring the practice to its own societal needs (Kono et al. 2017; Pan 2017; Rhee 2017; Weiss 2017). This individual-focused approach to philosophy encourages personal growth and self-reflection, similar to the Dutch experience (Harteloh 2013a).

In summary, these general tendencies suggest a growing international movement that seeks to make philosophy accessible and applicable to everyday life, reaffirming its value as a means of personal and societal transformation. Despite regional variations, the core elements of PP remain consistent: a commitment to exploring life’s profound questions and to living philosophically (i.e., act in accordance with one’s own philosophical ideas on the good, right and aesthetic), an educational mission that

transcends academic boundaries, and a dedication to fostering individual and communal philosophical engagement.

4. COMPARATIVE STUDIES IN PP

Philosophy encompasses diverse methodologies yet shares a unifying focus on the lived human experience. This discipline finds commonality in examining how individuals grapple with existence and transcendence, transcending cultural and historical boundaries (Yu and He 2005, 179). The essence of human existential states provides a nexus for disparate philosophical traditions. Karl Jaspers regards pivotal figures such as Confucius, Buddha, Socrates, and Jesus as architects of foundational thought paradigms. He highlights Confucius' endeavor to redeem humanity by reviving ancient wisdom, akin to Jewish prophets interpreting divine will (Jaspers 2010, 128; Wu 2019, 149). Both Eastern and Western thought, in this framework, seek to weave eternal truths into the historical tapestry.

Comparative philosophy thus reveals a convergence across philosophical divides—be they Eastern versus Western, Anglo-American versus Continental, or ancient versus modern—around shared existential themes. These include reflections on mortality, social interaction, self-awareness, lifestyle choices, and emotional well-being. Philosophy, in this context, emerges as a practice centered on the self, an exercise in truth-seeking, and an 'art of living' (Ding et al. 2024b). It equips us to introspect, find life's meaning, and deliberate on the art of living well.

The spectrum of PP is broad, engaging with everyday personal dilemmas as well as universal human concerns. It draws from a rich repository of theories and methodologies, ranging from Lydia Amir's use of humor, Michael Russell's adoption of existentialism, and Anders Lindseth's Spinozist insights, to Marc Sautet's philosophical café, Ran Lahav's deep philosophy, and Aleksandar Fatic's utilization of Epicureanism. It also includes Pierre Grimes's Socratic midwifery, Oscar Brenifier's radical Socratic questioning, Peter Harteloh's clinical-reflexive method, Elliot D. Cohen's logic-based clinical philosophy, Gerd Achenbach's groundbreaking 'beyond method' approach, and Pierre Hadot's vision of philosophy as a way of life (Ding 2016; Ding et al. 2024b). These diverse strands of PP connect by aiming to address the enduring questions of human existence through actionable wisdom. They are applied in exercises, consultations or counselings, courses or teachings, readings and philosophical walks.

In general, we can summarize several dichotomies intrinsic to the field of PP across cultures.

(1) *Theoretical Philosophy vs. Practical Philosophy*. Theoretical philosophy, which concerns itself with the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, often engages with abstract concepts in disciplines such as metaphysics, epistemology, and logic (Kant 1785/1998). In contrast, practical philosophy seeks direct application of philosophical insights in everyday life, addressing ethical, political, and social questions. Philosophers like Aristotle have historically emphasized the importance of

praxis – action informed by ethical virtues – as a central component of a flourishing life (Crisp 2014).

The distinction between these two branches underscores a fundamental debate within the field: Should philosophy be a pure science like physics, or should it acknowledge a practical branch like medicine? Can philosophy be studied objectively, or does it require personal involvement? Should it be purely academic, or is it inherently a practice?

(2) *Continental Practice vs. Analytic Practice*. Continental practice is characterized by its broad interpretive, reflective, and critique-oriented approach, often delving into the realms of existentialism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics (Heidegger 1927/1962). This tradition has been shaped by philosophers like Sartre and Derrida, who focus on the human experience and the deconstruction of texts and societal structures (Derrida 1967/1976; Sartre 1956). In contrast, analytic practice, with roots in the works of Russell and Wittgenstein, emphasizes clarity, logical rigor, and the use of argumentation to solve philosophical problems (Russell 1912/1986; Wittgenstein 1921/1981). Despite the perceived dichotomy, both traditions offer profound insights into the human condition, each complementing the other in the broader philosophical discourse (Critchley 2001). In particular, ordinary language philosophy, inspired by Wittgenstein, also serves as a bridge to PP.

(3) *Eastern Practice vs. Western Practice*. The dichotomy between Eastern and Western practices of philosophy often ignores the rich interplay and shared concerns between these traditions. Eastern practice, influenced by teachings such as Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, emphasizes harmony, balance, and inner cultivation. Western philosophy, with its origins in Greek thought, has traditionally been concerned with the pursuit of truth, justice, beauty, and the good life. Some scholars have argued that despite their differing starting points, both Eastern and Western philosophies converge on similar ultimate concerns, such as the nature of reality, ethics, and the pursuit of wisdom (Ding and Yu 2022; Findlay 1970). For instance, ‘meditation’ is a practice found in both Eastern and Western philosophical traditions, each with distinct content (Eifring 2010; Singla 2011; Vohra-Gupta et al. 2007).

(4) *Philosophical Counseling and Therapy vs. Psychological Counseling and Therapy*. Philosophical counseling and therapy offer an alternative to psychological approaches by focusing on reasoning and philosophical understanding as tools for addressing life’s questions and challenges (Ding 2016). Unlike psychological counseling, which might address mental health issues from a clinical perspective, PC tends to explore existential and moral dimensions of these concerns, often without pathologizing them (Ding et al. 2024b; Marinoff 1999). PC explores the philosophical roots of psychotherapy, such as the Stoic influences on Rational Emotive/Cognitive Therapy and the Platonic origins of Freudian psychoanalysis (e.g., the cave metaphor). Its goal is not merely symptom relief but a fundamental change in existence. This approach aligns with the views of Pierre Hadot, who sees philosophy as a ‘way of life’ (Hadot 1995), a practice aimed at transforming the individual’s way of being in the world.

Accordingly, the CЕСCP serves as a robust framework that facilitates a thorough exploration of PP by interweaving diverse philosophical traditions, allowing us to:

(1) *Integrate diverse philosophical traditions*: It enables the synthesis of distinct philosophical insights by juxtaposing and melding different traditions. For example, combining the analytical rigor found in many resources from the analytic tradition with the relational approaches present in numerous philosophical traditions, including but not limited to Chinese philosophy can inform culturally nuanced PC in China (Ma et al. 2021).

(2) *Engage critically across philosophies*: This strategy involves a respectful yet critical examination of different philosophical critiques, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding. The varied responses to human loneliness within Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism exemplify this critical engagement (Ding et al. 2022).

(3) *Foster constructive dialogues*: Constructive dialogues actively produce fresh insights. Comparative analyses, such as those between Buddhist liberation paths and Stoic principles, demonstrate this dynamic interaction (Ding et al. 2023).

(4) *Consider cultural and historical contexts*: Acknowledging the specific contexts that inform philosophical traditions is essential. This recognition allows for a nuanced comparison of methods such as the Socratic technique and Confucian teaching methods, as well as Buddhist and Stoic approaches to desire and emotion management (Ding et al. 2023; Ma et al. 2021).

In conclusion, PP encompasses a spectrum of methodologies and exercises, each offering unique insights into leading a philosophical life, highlighting its practical nature and serving as a form of philosophical therapy. By engaging with these varied approaches, philosophical practitioners can cater to the diverse needs and perspectives of their clients, fostering a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of human questions and the pursuit of wisdom (Ding and Yu 2022).

5. A FURTHER COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EASTERN AND WESTERN PP: THE CASE OF CONFUCIANISM

Contemporary PC, rooted in Western thought, is garnering increasing interest in the East, particularly in China (Ding et al. 2024c). This interest aligns with the profound legacy of Chinese philosophy, especially Confucianism, which has historically emphasized the pragmatic application of philosophical insights to everyday life challenges.

While PC originated from Achenbach's Western approach, which subsequently influenced the Chinese tradition of PP, it finds resonance with traditional Chinese philosophical methods. The convergence of these traditions offers rich opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue and the development of more comprehensive approaches to applying philosophy in practical contexts. This synthesis of Eastern and Western philosophy not only enhances the field of PC but also contributes to a more globalized understanding of philosophy's role in addressing contemporary life challenges.

5.1 THE CONTRIBUTION OF CONFUCIANISM TO PP

Confucianism has significantly shaped East Asian cultures, providing a robust framework for personal behavior, social relationships, and community governance, which has contributed to the region's stability and success (Rozman 2014; Tu 1996). At the heart of Confucian thought is humanism, a concept with diverse interpretations across different historical contexts. Western humanism, while occasionally critiqued for its ecological implications, calls for a nuanced systems theory to safeguard human continuity. Confucianism's holistic perspective, which sees humans as inextricably linked to the cosmos, offers a rich source of insight for these contemporary ecological debates (Tu 2001; Tucker 1993).

Confucianism stresses the harmony of knowledge and action, advocating for practical wisdom that permeates daily life. It posits that moral excellence is attainable for all through self-cultivation and collective action. The Confucian ethical framework, built on the five constant virtues—仁 *Ren* (Humaneness), 義 *Yi* (Righteousness), 禮 *Li* (Rites), 智 *Zhi* (Wisdom), and 信 *Xin* (Integrity)—is highly pertinent to PP. These virtues collectively foster an ethical compass that guides altruism, justice, propriety, discernment, and sincerity, all of which are integral to the therapeutic process in PC.

Incorporating these principles into PC could serve as a comprehensive tool for counselors, aligning client issues with these ethical tenets and examining their interconnectedness. Such integration leverages a deep philosophical heritage to assist individuals in addressing modern dilemmas (Harteloh 2013a). Confucianism's relevance in PC reflects the timeless nature of philosophical wisdom and its adaptability to contemporary counseling contexts. As PC progresses and becomes more international, embracing philosophies like Confucianism will only enrich the field and its cross-cultural applicability. It also emphasizes the truly *philosophical* nature of counseling, a topic of ongoing discussion among practitioners who question what makes counseling philosophical.

Confucius' role as a mentor to a diverse cohort—from students to state leaders—demonstrates the practicality of his moral system, which includes, beyond the five constant virtues, principles such as “忠 *Zhong* (Loyalty)” and “孝 *Xiao* (Filial piety)”. These have been pivotal in molding Chinese societal ethics for generations. Thus, they can indeed serve as diagnostic tools for individual problems.

The *Analects* of Confucius offers not just philosophical insights but practical counsel resembling modern PC. For instance, Confucius' interaction with his student Ran Qiu, who struggled with self-doubt, showcases Confucius' approach to overcoming mental barriers and advocating for determination in general (*Analects* 6.11). So in PP, the individual engages in a process of self-interpretation within the context of philosophical ideas, akin to a philosophical walk (Harteloh 2021). A person might reflect on a saying and discover insights about herself, such as her imperfections, relationships, and will. This self-discovery fosters self-cultivation and mental well-being.

The task of categorizing these ancient consultations within the PC framework requires a detailed analysis of case studies from Confucian literature. Modern philosophical counselors can glean consultation models from these texts that resonate with today's challenges. It is similar to matching Confucian quotes with consultation themes during a philosophical walk (Harteloh 2021).

The timeless nature of these historical interactions between ancient ideas and contemporary problems provides invaluable wisdom for understanding and managing human behavior and motives. Integrating Confucian teachings into PC necessitates valuing their lasting insight and considering their relevance to contemporary life's complexities.

5.2 ADVANCEMENTS IN CONFUCIAN SELF-CULTIVATION AND *GONG-FU* THEORY RESEARCH IN CHINESE ACADEMIA

Chinese academia is also shifting paradigms and increasingly focusing on the rich traditions of “self-cultivation” and “*gong-fu*” in Confucian philosophy, drawing upon comparative methodologies with Western thought. Zhu Xi's classic interpretation method is presented as a transformative spiritual practice akin to PP, reminiscent of Foucault's ‘techniques of the self’ that aim for personal transformation and the attainment of virtues such as happiness and wisdom (“大學 *Great Learning*”; Foucault 2016, 54; Peng 2019, 53). As Michel Foucault worked in line with the thoughts of his teacher Pierre Hadot, Eastern and Western PP seem to meet in the concept of self-cultivation here, but they may differ in PC as a means of supporting self-cultivation. On the other hand, the phrase ‘工夫 *gong-fu*’ refers to expertise gained through sustained effort, as emphasized by Song-Ming neo-Confucians. Initially associated with compulsory labor, it now denotes dedication to achieving goals through time and energy (Chen 2020b). Ni (2021, 2022) measures “*gong-fu*” by its effectiveness, appeal, and moral value.

The Confucian tradition further develops the concept of self-cultivation. Lisheng Chen reinterprets Confucian self-cultivation as both a moral and spiritual exercise, while Guoxiang Peng underscores its significance for both physical and mental training within the *gong-fu* theoretical framework (Chen 2021; Peng 2022). Peimin Ni reclaims Confucian *gong-fu* philosophy as an ‘art of living’, emphasizing the practice's foundational role in Confucian thought (Ni 2022). Yushun Huang examines the health-preserving dimension of Confucianism, using *Mencius* as a case study for individual life care and advancing ‘Living Confucianism’ as a theoretical system that revives the primacy of life (Huang 2017; 2023). Chenggui Li contributes to the discourse by highlighting distinctive Chinese philosophical approaches to mental health issues (Li 2023). Anwu Lin integrates the therapeutic wisdom inherent in Chinese philosophical traditions—Confucianism's emphasis on ethical conduct and moral innovation, Daoism's naturalness and non-action, and Buddhism's wisdom and compassion—using the ‘alienation condition of human existence’ to bridge these insights with the logotherapy (Lin 2011). This synthesis represents a shift toward a life-oriented and practical theoretical consensus in China.

Confucian self-cultivation practices comprise maintaining tranquility, nurturing goodness, introspection, fixing one's nature, cultivating the mind, and maintaining reverence, all aimed at temperamental transformation and thought purification. These are reflected in Confucius' daily practices, as detailed in the “鄉黨 Xiang Dang” chapter of the *Analects*. This aligns closely with Stoic philosophy. The principles can be translated into practical exercises. Clearly, across philosophical traditions—whether in theoretical or practical philosophy, Eastern or Western, philosophical or psychological counseling—there is a shared focus on holistic life reflection and the provision of comprehensive self-improvement paths. Philosophical inquiry now extends beyond abstract theory into the realm of life practice, seeking integrity through persistent spiritual exercise and self-awareness (Zhang 2023). This represents a return to philosophy's origins, bridging the gap between theory and practice in the current era.

5.3 CONFUCIANISM AND BODY-MIND INTEGRATION AS PRACTICAL WISDOM

Confucianism, as Mou Zongsan and Xu Fuguan illuminate, contrasts with the curiosity-driven inquiry of ancient Greek philosophy by emerging from a deep concern for human suffering (Mou 2008; Xu 2014a). Greek philosophy seeks objective knowledge, whereas Chinese philosophy centers on actualizing the Dao, the harmonious way of life. In this tradition, ‘gong-fu’ represents the disciplined effort, ability, and method to align oneself with the Dao, syncing with the universe's natural rhythms, and achieving oneness with all (Ni 2022, 8).

Both Eastern and Western philosophies have pursued life's spiritual and philosophical knowledge. Confucianism intricately weaves personal internal cultivation with life's quality. The *Analects* reflects this, stating that without ‘ren’, one cannot withstand adversity or sustain joy. Confucius suggested a pathway to ‘ren’ through mutual establishment and enlargement of self and others — a principle of reciprocity at the heart of his ethical system aimed at guiding individuals to harmonious living (Ding et al. 2024a).

This ethos fosters a symbiotic relationship between oneself and others, where the self cultivates personal attributes and initiates practical actions, aligning with Charles Taylor's analysis of the self (Taylor 1989), across both mental and physical realms. Mencius articulated this by advocating for the preservation of the mind and nourishment of character as the means to honor Heaven, not overly concerned with life's length but rather its moral quality (Zeng 2023, 513). This synergistic body-mind relationship transforms self-cultivation into a continuous, organic process, wherein the body is not simply a physical entity but an embodiment of an integrated, dynamic life force (Wang 2022).

5.4 COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON CONFUCIAN PHYSICAL AND MENTAL CULTIVATION

In the Western philosophical tradition, the concept of an ‘exercise in dying’ (Hadot 1995), as practiced by ancient Greek and Roman philosophers, reflects a long-standing dualistic worldview. Western metaphysics has often aimed to transcend the physical, animalistic aspects of existence, advocating for a detachment from the corporeal ‘self’ to attain a realm of pure spirit, epitomized by rationality and faith. This approach is encapsulated in the Platonic allegory of the ‘cave’, where liberation from the body is equated with intellectual and spiritual enlightenment.

In contrast, Confucian philosophy regards the body as the foundational locus for self-reflection and self-enhancement, as well as a vital conduit for interpersonal connection, empathy, and compassion. Confucian thought recognizes the significance of bodily experiences and personal worth as catalysts for awareness of family responsibilities and the cultivation of moral virtues such as compassion, reverence, shame, respect, and filial piety (Slingerland 2013; Wu 1997).

The Pre-Qin texts emphasize the importance of ‘self-cultivation’, ‘self-examination’, and ‘body preservation’, highlighting the body’s integral role in upholding social order through rites and righteousness. Rites, in particular, serve as an essential vehicle for nurturing a benevolent spirit. By adhering to daily norms and practicality within the structure of ‘role-relationships’, individuals foster a profound interconnectivity with others, the world, and all entities, thereby advancing the Confucian vision of harmonious living (Fan 2012).

5.4.1 THE INTERPLAY OF THE SECULAR AND THE SACRED: CONFUCIAN BODY-MIND CULTIVATION VS. WESTERN PP

Philosophy in the West and Confucianism differ markedly, with one distinction being the divergent views on the relationship between body and mind, and another being the contrasting attitudes towards daily social life. Hannah Arendt articulates this sentiment, suggesting that philosophical thought requires a retreat from the everyday, as it hinders contemplation (Arendt 2014, 168). However, Greek and Roman philosophers actually developed practical wisdom (phronesis), subordinating theory (episteme, nous) to it, as seen in Aristotle’s work.

In general, Confucianism views daily life as the essential milieu for self-improvement. Roger T. Ames (2017) notes that Confucian virtues are inherently relational, emerging from familial and societal contexts. While certain strands of Western philosophical traditions, particularly those influenced by rationalist and deontological frameworks, may treat virtues like ‘courage’ and ‘justice’ as abstract principles with universal claims (Ames 2017), it is important to recognize the diversity of perspectives within Western thought. For example, Socrates always reasons from concrete examples of abstract virtues to uncover underlying principles. Aristotle treats virtues, including ‘courage’, as situational and context-dependent qualities. As discussed by Ladikos (2004), Aristotle’s approach aligns more closely with the situational ethics found in Confucian philosophy and emphasizes the practical and embodied nature of virtues, stating that a courageous man feels and acts according to the merits of each case and as reason directs him.

The Confucian approach integrates daily experiences and relationships into a path of moral refinement and self-purification. Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi encapsulate this philosophy, advocating for natural emotional responses and a sincere, undistracted mind as the hallmarks of integrity and selflessness (Cheng and Cheng 2010, 114).

In divergence from some Western theoretical philosophy's idealization of an abstract, transcendent realm, Confucian philosophy sanctifies the secular. It proposes that the 'sacred sense' is not exclusive to a celestial domain but is woven into the fabric of the secular, everyday world, thus forging an indelible bond between humans and the cosmos (Fingarette 2016; Peng 2005, 25).

5.4.2 INTEGRATING COSMIC HARMONY WITH HUMAN ETHICS IN NEO-CONFUCIANISM

Neo-Confucianism during the Song and Ming dynasties embraced the philosophy of cosmic and human unity (Huang 1986, 552). This period saw scholars like Zhou Dunyi, who saw humankind as the pinnacle of creation, capable of the highest forms of understanding, advocating for a cultivation that aligns human virtue with the cosmic order (Zhou 1992, 1488). The emphasis was on the inseparable bond between humanity and the cosmos, with the aspiration to emulate the virtue of Heaven and Earth.

Cheng Hao's belief in the 'unity of heaven and man' underscored the integration of 'ren' with the natural world, suggesting that humans reflect the selfless essence of the cosmos and share a common destiny with it (Huang 1986, 540). Likewise, Lu Jiuyuan's bold claim, "the universe is my mind, my mind is the universe", epitomizes the Neo-Confucian commitment to a profound identification with the cosmos (Lu 1980, 483).

Zhang Zai's ethical framework emphasized empathy, viewing all things as extensions of oneself, thus promoting a universal concern rooted in the interconnectedness of all existence (Zhang 1978, 24). This holistic view positions human beings within a dynamic and relational cosmic fabric, where personal growth is intertwined with the principle of cosmic unity.

The Confucian cultivation methods are the embodiment of ancient insights into the origin and structure of the cosmos, blending cosmological speculation with practical ethics (Angle 2018). This connection laid the groundwork for a theory of mind and nature, positing that humans are integral to the cosmos and should regard the world's transformations with a unified perspective. This mind-nature theory addresses humanity's deepest questions, exploring human nature, our ties to the universe, and our moral development. Confucianism propounds that human existence transcends mere physicality; it is inherently moral. The essence of life, according to Confucians, is to metamorphose existence into a moral journey, perpetually striving for the highest virtues, emulating gentleman-like qualities, and deepening the understanding of human nature (Ivanhoe 2013).

5.5 "CULTIVATE ONESELF IN REVERENTIAL CAREFULNESS" AND "CARING FOR ONESELF": CONVERGING PATHS OF EASTERN AND WESTERN PP

Classical philosophy, spanning from East to West, focuses on refining life through self-cultivation. Confucius' principle of "cultivate oneself in reverential carefulness" aligns with the Ancient Greek exhortation to "care for yourself", reflecting a universal human inclination toward self-improvement and an ideal state of being. Michel Foucault, in his lecture series "The Hermeneutics of the Subject" and "Subjectivity and Truth," traced the evolution of self-care from 'self-knowledge' in ancient Greece to 'self-cultivation' in the Greco-Roman period, and finally to 'self-renunciation' in the Christian era (Foucault 2010, 4). In these lectures, Foucault heavily draws on the thoughts of his teacher, Pierre Hadot. Alasdair MacIntyre further conceptualized this trajectory as a transformative process guided by (Aristotelian) practical reason and experience (i.e., *phronesis*), aiming to move from our current nature to our full potential (Chen 2020a).

This 'practical turn' in philosophy advocates for methodologies that are life-affirming. Peimin Ni (2018) illustrates this with Zhuangzi's approach to understanding the unity of things for cognitive truth, as well as for self-cultivation to attain the 'Pivot of Dao'. Similarly, Mencius's contrast between humans and animals highlights an ontological distinction, but also serves as a discussion on achieving the Confucian life ideal (Bloom 1997; Liu and Shun 1996). Western philosophy, while often grappling with the dichotomy of individualism versus relational existence, also offers insights into how these views shape one's life.

Despite their differing methods, Eastern and Western philosophies converge in their constructive wisdom on the self, community, nature, and public welfare. Both traditions foster a dialogue with the 'true self' involving introspection and self-care. Socratic philosophy seeks universal truths, while Confucian philosophy emphasizes context-specific guidance (Ding et al. 2024a). However, Socrates departed from examples and ultimately realized he knew that he knew nothing (Leshner 1987).

Confucianism may seem like a mystic state theory or a purely experiential discipline from certain Western philosophical perspectives. Yet, Confucianism rightly places direct human experience as the foundation of any sound doctrine; Confucian teachings, while grounded in experience, transcend empiricism by integrating an innate moral and sacred dimension (Zhang 2018).

In practice, Confucianism advocates for "practicing in affairs", honing skills and maintaining inner peace through daily interactions (Hwang 2001; Yum 1998). It promotes a deep understanding that aligns inner beliefs with outward behavior, a unity of knowledge and action. Philosophies from both the East and West share a commitment to the authentic experience of existence, an awareness of our true feelings, and the quest for a good life. They provide invaluable guidance for living well, informing our daily actions and experiences.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The meeting point of Eastern and Western PP lies in self-cultivation. Although definitions of the self may differ, change and growth are inevitable outcomes of

engaging in philosophy. Moving beyond everyday concerns about health, work, relationships, and thoughts, PC—whether Eastern or Western—provides individuals with the wisdom to interpret themselves philosophically and embrace philosophy as a way of life.

Moreover, the application of the CЕСP in PP can address jointly concerned issues/topics in a complementary way. It contributes to world philosophy by utilizing eligible perspectives, adequate guiding principles, and effective instruments from different approaches. PP, when viewed through a cross-tradition engaging lens, is rooted in the lived experiences of individuals and transcends the boundaries of established schools of thought. It encourages an open and dynamic discourse, facilitating the synthesis of new philosophical ideas through a ‘fusion of horizons’ that expands mutual understanding and respect across cultures.

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