

CHINESE METAPHYSICS AS A FRUIFUL SUBJECT OF STUDY

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Abstract: The study of Chinese philosophy in the English-speaking world has largely focused on ethical and political theories. In comparison, Chinese metaphysics—here understood primarily as theories regarding the nature, components, and operating principles of reality—has been far less researched and recognized. In this essay, we examine various meanings of “metaphysics” as it has been used in denoting a branch of philosophy and make the case that metaphysics is an important part of Chinese philosophy. We argue for the need to study Chinese metaphysics as a serious field of scholarship. We also present some most recent studies of Chinese metaphysics by leading scholars of Chinese philosophy who publish in the English-speaking world. This essay aims to show that not only that Chinese metaphysics is an appropriate and legitimate subject of scholarly research but it can also be a fruitful subfield of in the study in Chinese philosophy.

A rapid growth of interest in Chinese philosophy has accompanied the rise of China on the world stage. This interest, though, has generally focused on ethical and political theories, ranging from connections between virtue ethics and Confucianism, to applications of Daoism to environmental ethics, to debates on the implications of Confucian political thought for democracy. In comparison, Chinese metaphysics—here understood primarily as theories regarding the nature, components, and operating principles of reality—has been far less researched and recognized. In this essay, we examine various meanings of “metaphysics” as it has been used in denoting a branch of philosophy and make the case that metaphysics is an important part of Chinese philosophy. We argue for the need to study Chinese metaphysics as a serious field of scholarship. In the later part of the essay, we will present some most recent studies of Chinese metaphysics by leading scholars of Chinese philosophy who publish in the English-speaking world. The central point of this essay is that not only that Chinese metaphysics is an appropriate and legitimate subject of scholarly research but it can also be a fruitful subfield of in the study in Chinese philosophy.

I

Raising the question of studying Chinese metaphysics implies that the Chinese have metaphysics. Such a claim itself invites a host of questions. Do the Chinese really have metaphysics? If so, what is it? Is Chinese metaphysics fundamentally and qualitatively different from Western metaphysics? If there are fundamental and qualitative differences, what are these differences, and what are their implications for

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the study of metaphysics? Questions such as these have been debated for decades, but there is little consensus on the answers. Much of these debates, of course, hinge on one notoriously difficult question: what is metaphysics? Although it is not so difficult to recognize whether or not a specific issue is metaphysical, it is nearly impossible to give a precise definition that corresponds to our actual uses of the term. In fact, Peter van Inwagen has suggested that in the seventeenth century, the category of metaphysics expanded to become “a repository of philosophical problems that could not be otherwise classified,” so that the category itself lacked unity (van Inwagen 2007). Thus a precise and final definition is unlikely to work and we must rather take our orientation from a loosely connected set of problems or a general domain of concerns.

If we look historically, the word “metaphysics” was originally associated with a branch of Aristotle’s philosophy. It is derived from a collective title given by his student(s) to the fourteen books by Aristotle that we currently think of as making up his *Metaphysics* (van Inwagen 2007). The word literally means “after the *Physics*,” probably indicating the place of the topics covered in these books in Aristotle’s philosophical curriculum. It suggests that one should study this part after having studied the *Physics*, which deals with nature. Because “meta” also means “beyond,” “metaphysics” may also be interpreted as “the science of what is beyond the physical,” but that itself is open to several interpretations. Metaphysics could be the study of what is beyond the reach of the natural sciences, or beyond the whole of nature (studying the “supernatural”), or beyond the whole changing world of appearances and perception. Aristotle himself, however, did not use the term “metaphysics.” He defines this part of the philosophy in terms of “first philosophy,” which is the science that studies “the first causes and the principles of things” or “being qua being” (*Metaphysics* 981b28, 1003a21; Barnes 1553, 1584). The latter has come to be called ontology, the science (*logos*) of being (*onto*) as such. In the fourteen books of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle covers a wide range of subjects, including existence in general (“being”), the constitution of reality (“matter,” “form,” “universals”), individual entities (“substance”), identity (“essence,” “definition”), and change (“actuality,” “potentiality,” “material cause,” “formal cause,” “efficient cause,” “final cause”). If we use these topics from Aristotle to designate a general domain of concern or inquiry, we could call “metaphysics” the study of reality in its general form. That would include the nature of being itself, but would also encompass discussions of the kinds of beings that exist, the basic forms of causality, the sources of order and generation, and so on. In practice, the boundaries of metaphysics are sometimes vague and subject to change, and questions about the boundaries themselves can be considered to be within the domain of metaphysics.

If we use “metaphysics” in this sense, it is obvious that metaphysics is present in Chinese thought, traceable most clearly back to such texts as the *Yijing*, the *Daodejing*, and the *Huainanzi*. Chinese philosophers have since antiquity debated about existence and non-existence in terms of “you 有” and “wu 無”; they developed a conception of the constitution of things in terms of patterns of “qi 氣” (material force); and they understood the world overwhelmingly as in a perpetual state of change (“yi

易”). Many Chinese thinkers labeled the ultimate reality as the “*dao* 道” (the “way”) and took the fundamental operating principle of the world as the pairing forces of “*yin-yang* 陰陽.” While there was no Chinese term corresponding precisely to the Western term “metaphysics,” the phrase commonly used to translate “metaphysics” into Chinese was taken from the *Yijing*. The *Yijing* classifies two forms of existence as “what is without (specific) forms 形而上者” and “what is with (specific) forms 形而下者” (Gao Heng 1998, 407), or literally, “what are above (*shang*) forms” and “what are below (*xia*) forms.” Being “above” something implies transcending it or not being confined by it. “What is above forms,” therefore, means what is not confined by any forms. These can also be seen as two realms of studies, with the latter roughly corresponding to the tangible physical realm and the former the “realm beyond the tangible.” Studying what is beyond the tangible or things confined by specific forms is not a matter of physics; it is metaphysical. Moreover, questions about the line between what is above and what is below forms are themselves metaphysical questions.

Ancient Chinese thinkers pondered such things as “道 *dao*,” “氣 *qi*,” “太極 *taiji*” (the Origin) and “兩儀 *liangyi*” (the Two Forces) in attempting to explicate phenomena in the world. Their indigenous metaphysical views were greatly enriched by the absorption of Buddhist metaphysics, which eventually led to new forms of Confucian metaphysics as manifested in what has become known in English as “Neo-Confucianism” during the Song and Ming dynasties. Though unquestionably different, notions like “氣 *qi*” and “理 *li*” in Neo-Confucianism can be seen as counterparts of “matter” and “form” in Aristotelian metaphysics. Similar ideas on both sides are employed to account for “what is with (specific) forms” in terms of “what is without (specific) forms.”

Given that Chinese philosophers obviously discussed the nature of reality and the ways of its operation, why would anyone say that the Chinese do not have metaphysics? To understand this question, it is helpful to distinguish a general domain of concern or inquiry from the specific questions asked in any given tradition in that domain, which then must also be distinguished from the specific theories meant to answer those questions. These layers are difficult to discern without a cross-cultural view. That is, from a view restricted to one culture, it is easy to think that the questions in that tradition are the only legitimate questions. Moreover, if certain answers to the questions are dominant enough, one might take them as the only possible answers. In this way, the answers that emerge can be seen as definitive of the domain of inquiry itself. Two of the most central questions of metaphysics are, what is ultimately real, and, what is the ultimate cause for what exists? In the Western tradition, the dominant answers to both questions, at least before the 20th century, have been what is eternal and unchanging. From the start of the medieval period well into the 17th and 18th centuries, almost every European philosopher took the ultimate metaphysical foundation to be a God that transcended the world and existed outside of time and change. It is more difficult to generalize about the classical world, but the most extreme proponent of this view was Parmenides, who denied that change is even possible. He held that there is only *Being* and that non-being does not exist. Without

non-being, *Being* itself does not change. It therefore follows that becoming is impossible (Graham 2010: 215-219). While this denial of change was an exception rather than the norm, the most influential Greek philosophers did privilege the eternal in their metaphysics. This is most obvious in Plato's philosophy, where the forms that ground reality and our understanding of it are all eternal and unchanging. Even Aristotle, who took change much more seriously, held the ultimate driving force of the universe as an "unmoved mover" (*Physics* 8.6; 260a15019; Barnes 434). All things are put into motion through emulation of this eternal unchanging being, which serves as the ultimate final cause for all that exists (*Metaphysics* XII.7 1072a25-26; Barnes 1694). With the Christianization of Western Philosophy, a perfect and eternal God took the place of this ultimate reality, a position which remained dominant into the 19th century.

If we take metaphysics as the study of the ultimate and take the ultimate as the unchanging, then it follows that metaphysics is the study of "things that do not change." On this definition, there would be no (or little) Chinese metaphysics. Ancient Chinese viewed "what is without (specific) forms" as the *dao*, but the *dao* is not fixed. Its nature—if we can say so—is change, as expounded in the *Yijing*, often regarded as the primary classic of all Chinese classics. To put it another way, the only thing that does not change is change. The "constant Dao" is the constantly changing Dao. If metaphysics is understood as a study of what is unchanging, then Chinese thought did not have metaphysics; or, as Roger Ames says in a forthcoming essay, it had an *ametaphysic* metaphysics (Ames 2015). In other words, Chinese metaphysics generally rejects the fundamental assumption of an unchanging reality and instead takes the ultimate itself as changing.

The definition of metaphysics as the study of what is unchanging naturally leads into another common definition, that metaphysics studies what is beyond the sensible world of appearances. It is obvious that the world around us changes; we never experience anything that is truly unchanging. If the ultimate reality is unchanging, then, it must be radically different from the world that appears around us. This view leads to a transcendental realm, in terms of "forms," "God," or the "noumenal" in Western philosophy. This separation is clearest in Kant, who said of the sources of metaphysical cognition: "it already lies in the concept of metaphysics that they cannot be empirical . . . for the cognition is supposed to be not physical but metaphysical, i.e., lying beyond experience" (Kant 1997, 15). In this quotation, Kant takes lying beyond experience as definitive of the domain of metaphysics. Once again, if we take this definition of metaphysics, then there would be no (or little) Chinese metaphysics. Just as Chinese thinkers did not posit an unchanging ultimate reality, they generally did not take the ultimate as radically transcending the world. This contrast is pointed out nicely by the renowned 20th century Chinese philosopher Tang Junyi 唐君毅, who described the mainstream Western mind as follows,

Starting with pursuing substance beyond phenomena, the Western mind regards all phenomena as attributes of things instead of reality itself. Consequently, it always attempts to put aside phenomena in order to explore the real and unchanging substance underlying the cosmos. In contrast, the cosmos in the Chinese mind is

only a flow, a dynamism; all things in the cosmos can only be in process, beyond which there is no fixed reality as substratum. (Tang 1988, 9-10)

Chinese thinkers did make a qualitative distinction between the realm of “what is with (specific) forms” and that of “what is without (specific) forms.” A thing with a form is an instrument (*qi* 器), which can be perceived and specifically described. That which is without forms cannot be perceived or specifically described. In this limited sense, there is something like a reality-appearance distinction. But there is no transcendental distinction between the two realms. The same point applies to the distinction between “*li* 理” (“order,” “principle”) and “*qi* 氣” (material force). Although the Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi (1130-1200) held a somewhat dualist view of the two, they are not ultimately separable, because *li* resides with *qi*, and without *qi*, *li* would have nothing to attach with (Li 1986, 3). It is perhaps in this sense that we should understand Roger Ames when he writes,

There is little evidence that early Chinese thinkers were interested in the search for and the articulation of an ontological ground for phenomena—some Being behind the beings, some One behind the many, some ideal world behind the world of change. (Ames 2011, 216)

For the ancient Chinese, change occurs at both the levels of “what is with (specific) forms” and “what is without (specific) forms.” The key contrast is not in terms of “being” versus “becoming” but rather “form” and “formless.” Furthermore, the realm of “what is without (specific) forms” is not like a “God” who is fundamentally distinct from the physical world. Instead, “what is with (specific) forms” is a manifestation of “what is without (specific) forms,” just as the *qi* 氣 solidified in tangible entities is the same stuff as the *qi* dispersed. These two “realms” are better seen as two conceptions of the same existence, because without “what is with (specific) forms” there is no “what is without (specific) forms.” Without believing in a transcendental realm, Chinese thinkers could not have had a “science” to study it. If metaphysics is to be defined as the “science” that studies solely what transcends appearance, then we would have to say that ancient Chinese thinkers did not have metaphysics.

In both of these cases, though, one mistakenly identifies metaphysics with particular answers to the main metaphysical questions. There are a host of problems with such an identification. Most obviously, it excludes many Western philosophers who are uncontroversially identified as doing metaphysics. While it is *generally* true that most Western philosophers have taken the ultimate reality and the ultimate cause of reality to be eternal and transcendent (e.g., God), it would be false to claim that *all* Western metaphysicians uniformly presuppose an unchanging reality as the object of their study. In the *Theatetus*, Socrates tells us “a secret” doctrine of the early Greeks:

There is no single thing or quality, but out of motion and change and admixture all things are becoming relatively to one another, which “becoming” is by us incorrectly called being, but is really becoming, for nothing ever is, but all things are becoming. (Edman 1936: 474)

Socrates affirms that this was even not a minority view:

Summon all philosophers-Protagoras, Heraclitus, Empedocles, and the rest of them, one after another, and with the exception of Parmenides they will agree with you in this. Summon the great masters of either kind of poetry-Epicharmus, the prince of Comedy, and Homer of Tragedy; when the latter sings of "Ocean whence sprang the gods, and mother Tethys," does he not mean that all things are the offspring of flux and motion? (Edman 1936: 474-5)

Similarly, in Book IV of *Metaphysics*, Aristotle speaks of how earlier Greek philosophers' view of an ever changing reality affected their view of what is knowable:

Because they saw that all this world of nature is in movement and that about that which changes no true statement can be made, they said that of course, regarding that which everywhere in every respect is changing, nothing could truly be affirmed. It was this belief that blossomed into the most extreme of the views above mentioned, that of the professed Heracliteans. (*Metaphysics* IV. 5)

Aristotle here refers to thinkers like Cratylus, who allegedly did not think he could say anything meaningful but only moved his finger, because things were in constant change. Cratylus criticized Heraclitus for saying that it is impossible to step twice into the same river; he went so far as to hold that one could not step into the same river even once. Denial of the existence of an unchanging reality places one in opposition to those affirming it. But either way, both are engaging in a debate within the domain of metaphysics. Jean-Paul Sartre once said: "I do not think myself any less a metaphysician in denying the existence of God than Leibniz was in affirming it" (Sartre 1949, 139). Likewise, thinkers such as Protagoras, Heraclitus, and Cratylus are legitimate subjects for books on the history of metaphysics. It should also be noted that their views did not die out in the West. While the Christianization of Western philosophy made such views nearly impossible to express, process-oriented views emerged again in the 18th and 19th centuries, as with Hegel and Nietzsche, and it is safe to say that their views and the likes became dominant among philosophers of the 20th century.

The claim that metaphysics exclusively studies the transcendental realm also is a generalization with many exceptions. Even though regarding his "first philosophy" as "the most divine science" that studies the cause of all things (*Metaphysics* Book 1, 983a 6-10; Barnes 1555), Aristotle evidently covers this-worldly objects in his metaphysics. For the most part, the "four causes" are not transcendental in character. Contra Plato, Aristotle places them in the same realm as ordinary objects. Bricks are the material cause of a house; parents are the efficient cause of a child. Moving forward in the tradition, no one would deny that Spinoza was a metaphysician, but his whole philosophy was directed toward a rejection of transcendence. For Spinoza, God and Nature are one and the same. He establishes this by insisting that God as a substance possesses infinite attributes and that no two substances can share an

attribute. It follows that the existence of that infinite substance precludes the existence of any other substance. Therefore, Nature or God is an indivisible, uncaused, substantial whole. All is in it. All is immanent. The same can be said for Hegel and for many 20th century philosophers. Hegel's infinite *Geist*, or cosmic spirit, realizes itself by unfolding from lower to higher developmental stages in the forms of the finite through dialectical processes. The *Geist* is not transcendent to the finite. It posits itself through the finite. If metaphysics must affirm the transcendent, Hegel would not have qualified as a metaphysician. Few, if any, would deny Hegel as a metaphysician, however.

If Western thinkers with a view of the world characterized as becoming rather than being, or who base their views on immanence rather than transcendence, are considered to be doing metaphysics, one cannot say that the Chinese lack metaphysics just because their worldview is predominantly one of change and immanence. In sum, under the category of "metaphysics," Western philosophers have studied both being and becoming, both immanence and transcendence. What they share in common is not their answers to questions under the umbrella of "metaphysics," but that they all attempt to address issues with regard to the nature, components, and operating principles of reality. It is in this sense we can claim that Chinese thinkers have engaged in the study of metaphysics and that "Chinese metaphysics" can be used as a shorthand to designate a host of theories and ideas developed by Chinese philosophers in their attempt to address pertinent questions.

Some contemporary thinkers do not deny that the Chinese have metaphysics. They insist, however, that Chinese metaphysics is fundamentally different from Western metaphysics. One common view is that metaphysics in the two traditions emerges from profoundly distinct orientations. For example, some have argued that Western metaphysics is "metaphysics of nature," as it pursues truth in the transcendental realm, whereas Chinese metaphysics is "metaphysics of ethics," in the pursuit of the good life (e.g., Yu and Xu 2009). This view echoes a famous claim by A. C. Graham, that the while Western philosophers have primarily searched for being or truth, the central question of Chinese philosophy has been, what is the proper way? (Graham 1989, 222) There is a grain of truth to this contrast. Ancient Greek philosophy began with a strong curiosity about the nature of reality, seen in such thinkers as Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Heraclitus, Xenophanes, Parmenides, Zeno, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, and Pythagoras. The majority of ancient Chinese thinkers, in comparison, focused on socio-ethical issues. They ventured into metaphysics because of these ethical concerns. As Chris Fraser argues in a forthcoming essay, the Mohists were concerned with *tian* 天 (heaven), but primarily as a guide for action. This orientation set the direction for later metaphysical debates (Fraser 2015). Mencius apparently developed his thought about *xing* 性 (human nature or characteristic tendencies) or *tiandao* 天道 (Heavenly Way) for the sake of his theory of inborn virtues, which itself was developed through concerns about self-cultivation. This contrast between Chinese and Western philosophies, however, should not be exaggerated. This characterization is modeled on the division between fact and value. The "fact versus value" divide did not become an issue in the West

until David Hume problematized their association. Aristotle, we should remember, used the “facts” about the proper human function as the basis for his argument for the ethical goal of *eudemonia*; one of the “four causes” investigated in the *Metaphysics* is the final cause, which determines the proper function of humanity and its virtuosity. Furthermore, an important branch of Kant’s philosophy is “moral metaphysics,” on the basis of the notion of a rational will. The rational will for Kant is a free will, which is a key concept of modern metaphysics. Meanwhile, as Jiyuan Yu argues in a forthcoming essay, the development of Chinese metaphysics makes it hard to believe that Chinese philosophers were not also motivated by a desire to better understand reality (Yu 2015). Thus, it is more accurate to say that the difference between Chinese and Western metaphysics is a matter of degrees and of emphases rather than a radical, qualitative distinction in kind. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that in the Chinese tradition, the metaphysical and the moral are always intertwined, as the status of values, the nature of the self, and conceptions of order all have metaphysical implications, if not foundations. In the Chinese tradition, for example, *wuwei* 無為, the Daoist guiding principle for the virtuous life, is at the same time a metaphysical conception of reality. *Xing* 性, a key idea in Mencius’s moral philosophy also defines the nature of human existence. *Dao*, a core notion in both Confucianism and Daoism, is at once ethical and metaphysical. *Yin* and *yang* are metaphysical forces as well as social/moral principles. The same holds true for the conceptions of *he* 和 (harmony), *li* 理 (coherence or reasonable order), and *tian* 天 (heaven). In view of this connection, studying Chinese ethical theories without examining their metaphysical presuppositions risks misrepresenting these moral perspectives. With the advancement of the study and deepening research of Chinese philosophy in our age, confining our study to Chinese political, social and ethical theories is no longer acceptable. The aim of studying Chinese metaphysics is not to isolate metaphysical views from other aspects of philosophy, but rather to focus on the metaphysical aspect of the philosophical continuum while showing how metaphysical conceptions connect to other areas of concern.

Even if we allow that metaphysics was pursued in both the West and in China, one might still claim that the issues they considered and the theories they produced have no commonality. After all, there are almost no key metaphysical terms in Chinese that translate easily into English, and vice versa. In that case, the overlap between Chinese metaphysics and Western metaphysics would be merely nominal, not substantial. Admittedly, some differences must be acknowledged. Given that the dominant metaphysical views in China differed significantly from those that dominated Europe, the two traditions naturally came to focus on different problems. For example, the relationship between free will and natural causality was never an issue in Chinese philosophy, nor was the division between mind and body. Since most Chinese philosophers rejected teleology and design, one of their central concerns was spontaneity (*ziran* 自然) and how beings and order can emerge of themselves. Given that Chinese philosophers usually held a less anthropocentric view of nature than their European counterparts, they were centrally concerned with how human values and social structures relate to the patterns of nature. These issues have been less central in

Western Philosophy, at least before the 20th century. At the same time, the two traditions do share many common concerns, such as the origin and constitution of the world we experience. Placing metaphysical questions in a comparative context helps us to broaden the formulation of our questions. It not only enables us to find new insights into the standard questions of Western metaphysics, but also helps us to see how those questions might be more provincial than they initially appear to be. For example, while Chinese philosophers did not discuss free will, they were concerned with the relationship between human motivation and the forces of nature, conceived primarily as the relationship between human *xing* (nature, characteristic tendencies) and *tian* (heaven). Chinese philosophers did not discuss the nature of substance, but they did discuss individuation (see Perkins 2015). While we should not deny the differences between metaphysical thoughts in the Chinese and Western traditions, both traditions have contributed to the discipline of metaphysics and should be studied as such. For these reasons and others, Chinese metaphysics deserves careful and in-depth study no less than Western metaphysics.

Finally, the above generalizations also should not obscure the diversity within Chinese philosophy or the wide range of metaphysical positions that have appeared. Chinese philosophy developed over time, expressing internal forces, changes in political and economic contexts, and interactions with other cultures, most of all the absorption of Buddhism from India. In any given period, there were opposing schools and heated metaphysical disputes. Careful study of Chinese metaphysics should heed all these nuances.

II

If Chinese metaphysics is a worthy subject of serious scholarship, how should it be studied? What are some good examples for such study? In the rest of this essay, we would like to introduce to readers some recent studies at the frontier of Chinese metaphysics by leading scholars in the English-speaking world. These essays in an anthology published by Cambridge University Press cover all major periods of Chinese philosophy, from pre-Qin to the 20th century, all major schools, from Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, to Neo-Confucianism and New Confucianism, and many of the key thinkers and texts in Chinese philosophy. While they convey the diversity of Chinese philosophy, they are linked by a persistent set of metaphysical concerns: How does the multiplicity and diversity of the world link to a common source or basis? What is the basic element of the cosmos? What is the relationship between emptiness or voidness and our concrete experience of the world? How is harmony related on the levels of society, nature, and the cosmos? How are values grounded in the world? Moreover, while Chinese philosophy took on radically different forms over time, many terms continued to be used while being reinterpreted to serve in new ways. Thus concepts like *dao* 道 (path or way), *qi* 氣 (vital energy), *he* 和 (harmony), and *li* 理 (coherence or reasonable order) provide another link between the essays and different time periods discussed. Taken together, they also address broader questions: What metaphysical questions emerge within a worldview that emphasizes interconnection, immanence and change? Are there alternative ways of

doing metaphysics in the Chinese tradition? How do we make sense of them in the light of contemporary philosophical discourse? What is the relationship between metaphysics and other subjects in philosophy?

This book begins with two essays by Robin R. Wang and JeeLoo Liu, respectively, analyzing two of the most important concepts in Chinese philosophy: *yinyang* and *qi*. Wang's essay concentrates on the importance of *yinyang*. She makes a distinction between the kind of metaphysics which divides reality into two separate realms and metaphysical thinking. In the Chinese context *yinyang* thinking is metaphysical thinking. It rests on a vision of reality as a single self-generating, self-differentiating and self-organizing whole. She starts with an analysis of the classical Chinese phrase most often used to translate "metaphysics," *xinger shang xue* 形而上學 ("the study of what is without forms"), which is contrasted with the phrase *xinger xia* (形而下) ("what is with forms"). Wang argues, the notion of *xing* 形 (physical forms, things) in these phrases mediates between what might be called the worlds of physics and metaphysics; the realm of forms (*xing*) should be considered as a *yinyang* field of reality containing both what is within (below) and without (above) it. She then articulates six specific forms of the *yinyang* relationship, analyzing the multiplicity of *yinyang* descriptions. Finally, Wang explores the metaphor of *huanliu* 環流 (circular flowing) as a way to show how the complexity of *yinyang* interactions leads to a ceaseless process of generation and emergence (Wang 2015). *Qi*, like *yinyang*, is another core notion in Chinese metaphysics that has been developed as a conception of the fundamental component of reality. In the next chapter, JeeLoo Liu identifies a naturalistic conception of *qi* as the consistent theme across a range of philosophical texts and argues that Chinese *qi* metaphysics is a form of humanistic naturalism distinct from scientific naturalism. According to her interpretation, in the view of Chinese humanistic naturalism, the world consists of nothing but entities of the natural world, with human beings as part of it. Natural entities are accessible to the cognitive capacities of human beings, and statements about the existence and nature of natural entities are truth-apt. Liu traces the main issues in *qi* cosmology throughout the history of Chinese philosophy, beginning with texts such as the *Yijing*, the *Daodejing*, the *Zhuangzi*, and the *Huainanzi*, moving into the theories of Neo-Confucians such as Zhang Zai and Wang Fuzhi, and concluding in the 20th century, with Xiong Shili's efforts to reconcile *qi* with modern science. An important feature of Liu's essay is that it situates the discussion of *qi* in the contemporary discourse on metaphysics, making ancient ideas relevant to our times. By analyzing related issues in naturalistic terms, Liu demystifies the notion of *qi* and renders Chinese cosmology a plausible alternative in contemporary philosophical discourse (Liu 2015).

Metaphysics studies forms of existence, and one of its key concerns is with the nature of individual entities. How did Chinese philosophers understand individual entities? How does *qi* manifest itself as entities in the world? Franklin Perkins examines the problem of individuation and, along with it, some of the most fundamental metaphysical issues. Perkins shows that while Chinese philosophers gave ontological priority to interconnected processes and change, holding a type of "process metaphysics," they did not deny the existence of individual things. His essay

examines approaches to individuation in various philosophies from the Warring States period, concentrating on the concept of *wu* 物, thing. Perkins investigates various accounts of the status and origins of “things” in early Chinese philosophy and concludes by discussing the ways in which individuation is conditioned by the shared view that the ultimate origin of things is not itself a thing (Perkins 2015). Thus, Perkins’ essay bridges from the concept of *qi* as discussed by JeeLoo Liu in the preceding chapter to people’s encounters with the world in daily life.

Mohism was a major school of thought during the classic period in China, yet there has been little study of its metaphysical views. In Chapter Four, Chris Fraser explores the understanding of reality that emerges from Mohist doctrines concerning *tian* 天 (heaven, nature), the *san fa* 三法 (“Three Models”), and *ming* 命 (fate). For the Mohists, reality follows fixed, recognizable patterns, and is reliably knowable through sense perception, inference, and historical precedent. Ethical norms are a human-independent feature of reality. The Mohist *dao* thus purports to be the *dao* of reality itself, grounded in reliable knowledge of the world. The question that guides the Mohists’ attitude toward reality is not about its fundamental structure but its *dao*—what regular patterns it follows and what course it takes. Fraser also discusses the philosophical significance of these metaphysical views, the problems they raise, and how they set the agenda for philosophical discourse in early China. Fraser’s study shows that the Mohist conception of reality and the theoretical orientation of Mohist metaphysics significantly influenced the general direction of early Chinese philosophical discourse. Features of Mohist thought that became shared premises of pre-Buddhist metaphysics include their formal focus on *dao*, their explanation of reality by appeal to patterns, relations, and regularities rather than abstract forms or structural constitution, their confidence in the reality of the natural world as known through perception, and their view that *dao* is grounded in nature (Fraser 2015).

Roger T. Ames in Chapter Five addresses directly the question of “metaphysics” in a Chinese context by exploring a “metaphysical” reading of the early Confucian classic the *Zhongyong* (中庸 *The Way of Centrality*). He begins by examining some of the general presuppositions of early Chinese philosophy, concentrating on the senses in which we can and cannot speak of classical Chinese “metaphysics.” In particular, Ames explains why Chinese philosophers had little interest in the nature of being as such, while they concentrated instead on questions like “how can human beings collaborate most effectively with the heavens and the earth to produce a flourishing world?” Ames then turns to the *Zhongyong* as a concrete example and as a response to Mohist views of heaven. The *Zhongyong* presents human beings as having a reflexive and integral relationship within the creative cosmic process. The immanent, inchoate, and thus underdetermined penumbra of the emerging cosmic order provides the opening and the opportunity for cultivated human “becomings” to collaborate symbiotically with the heavens and the earth to be co-creators in achieving a flourishing world (Ames 2015).

The philosophies of Laozi and Heraclitus are paradigmatic examples of dynamic views of reality. Although they are often brought up in the same breath, their similarities and differences are still in need of further examination. In Chapter Six,

Jiyuan Yu presents a meticulous comparison of Laozi and Heraclitus. He proposes that Heraclitus and Laozi each discover a new way of perceiving and thinking about reality, and that the picture of *logos* and the picture of *dao* are surprisingly similar. For both, the world is one but is characterized by a dynamism constituted in tensions between opposites and transformations among them. Based on his findings through this comparison, Yu challenges two influential claims about Chinese metaphysics. One is that Chinese philosophers do not pursue a reality behind the veil of appearances, and the other is that Chinese philosophers were not concerned with the truth about reality but only with the way to live well. Yu's study gives evidence that there are Chinese philosophers such as Laozi who inquire into something like a reality behind appearances, and that Chinese philosophers such as Laozi are concerned with the truth about reality as well as with the way to live well (Yu 2015).

Michael Puett in Chapter Seven takes readers to a rather unlikely place for metaphysics, the *Liji* (禮記 *Records of Rites*). *Li* (ritual) is a key concept in Confucian philosophy. It has been, however, studied almost exclusively as a subject of ethical and political-social philosophy. Puett shows that the *Liji* presents a sophisticated and powerful set of theories concerning ritual and how it affects reality. The "Liyun" chapter of the text makes it clear that ritual was created by humans, and that the construction of proper order is a human project of transforming and organizing the world through ritual. These theories are also, however, rooted within a complex set of metaphysical claims. Puett analyzes these metaphysical arguments to discuss why they are so important for the theories of ritual found within the text, and to explore the philosophical implications of attempts to develop a ritual-based vision of reality. Puett argues that the author(s) of the "Liyun" did not take harmony as a pre-existing characteristic of the world to which human beings should conform. On the contrary, harmony must be constructed by human beings through domesticating and managing the basic forces of the natural world (Puett 2015).

The introduction of Buddhism from India brought a new set of metaphysical issues and concepts that were gradually adapted into Chinese philosophy, making a significant contribution to metaphysical theories in China. In Chapter Eight, Hans-Rudolf Kantor presents us with various concepts of reality in Chinese Buddhism as they merge with issues of epistemology. Kantor shows that Chinese Buddhists developed diverse ways to interpret ontological indeterminacy, the inseparability of truth and falseness, and the existential relevance of falseness. He introduces and compares the various constructivist views of reality developed in the traditions of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism, bringing together Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, *tathāgatagarbha*, Tiantai, and Huayan texts. According to these constructivist models, truth and falsehood are mutually constitutive and inter-referential. On the level of epistemology, our insight into truth requires and includes the experience of falsehood. On the level of metaphysics, falsehood itself is a significant feature of reality, constituting a dimension of our world. The epistemological and metaphysical senses of the inseparability of truth and falsehood coincide because the world and the way we exist in it are dependent upon our epistemic stance (Kantor 2015).

Alfred North Whitehead is one of the Western philosophers best known for advocating an ontology of becoming rather than being. It is not surprising, therefore, that his philosophy possesses an affinity with some Chinese counterparts. In Chapter Nine, Vincent Shen compares Whitehead's ontological principle and the concept of event with the philosophy of Huayan Buddhism. Shen shows that the ontology of dynamic relationships so much cherished in Chinese philosophy is in fact quite close to Whitehead's ontology of event. For Whitehead, universal relatedness determines that all events are directed towards many other events for their meaning. Within Huayan Buddhism's doctrine of Ten Mysterious Gates (*shi xuan men* 十玄門), Whitehead's view is similar to the way the "Gate of Relying on *Shi* (actualities, events, phenomena)" is used to explain dharma and produce understanding, but there is also an important contrast. While Huayan tends to reduce the "many others" and their comprehensive harmony to the "one mind," Whitehead argues that every actual entity tends towards others through its own dynamic energy. Every actual entity receives objectifications from others and objectifies itself upon others. Shen goes on to offer some critical reflections out of this comparison, in search of a positive development of the ontology of event and dynamic relations (Shen 2015).

In an innovative move, Brook Ziporyn in Chapter Ten examines and interprets Zhang Zai's metaphysics of polar relations in terms of "harmony as substance." Zhang Zai, one of the founding figures of "Neo-Confucianism," is well-known for his "Western Inscription," but his "Eastern Inscription" has not received much attention. In this "Eastern Inscription," Zhang puts forth a metaphysical view which reinterprets the heterodox notion of "Voidness" so as to make it a justification of the cardinal importance of human relationships. As Ziporyn shows, Zhang accomplishes this by defining the nature of material force (*qi*) as a joining of polar opposites (*yin* and *yang*, *qian* 乾 and *kun* 坤, etc.), and hence as a necessary alternation and "Great Harmony" between condensed and dispersed material force. This polarity is manifested in the individual condensed forms as their mutual stimulation and response (感 *gan*), i.e., their relationships with one another. This metaphysical view legitimizes the alternation of life and death and the cardinal importance of human relationships, both of which were repudiated by Buddhists. The resulting view is a kind of "monism," but a monism which takes "harmony" as its ultimate category. That is, "harmony" is Zhang's answer to the question, "what are all things?" Ziporyn's chapter provides a concrete and powerful example of the kind of Chinese *qi*-based metaphysics (as articulated by JeeLoo Liu) based on polarity (as articulated by Robin R. Wang). Along with the previous two chapters by Kantor and Shen, Ziporyn's discussion also sets the stage as we move to the next chapter on the metaphysics of Zhu Xi, the most influential Confucian thinker of the last millennium (Ziporyn 2015).

The Song philosopher Zhu Xi's "learning of the way" (*daoxue* 道學) became the imperial orthodox ideology and has continued to influence Confucian philosophers to the present. In his chapter, John Berthrong begins by examining the broader question of how the term "metaphysics" can be applied in a Chinese context, and then turns to address structural issues in Zhu's mature metaphysics. Berthrong argues that Zhu's metaphysics provides an architectonic vision of a kalogenic axiological cosmology,

that is, a cosmology which expresses a fundamental concern for moral and aesthetic (kalogenic) values. This cosmology also embraces an intersubjective sense of ethical self-cultivation and conduct: we are never alone in the world but always embedded in the cosmos and connected ethically with our fellow human beings. Developing a lexicography of Zhu's metaphysics, Berthrong provides an outline of many of the key philosophical terms embedded in Zhu's philosophy. In this chapter, readers find a superb example of how in Chinese philosophy metaphysics and axiology system are constructed to support to each other within one coherent philosophical system (Berthrong 2015).

Xiong Shili was one of the most important Chinese philosophers of the twentieth century. Xiong integrated concepts, problems, and themes from traditional Chinese philosophy with elements emblematic of Sinitic Buddhist philosophy to articulate an ambitious philosophical syncretism. The analysis in the last chapter of the anthology, by John Makeham, focuses on one of Xiong's major philosophical works, *New Treatise on the Uniqueness of Consciousness*. The first part of Makeham's analysis introduces Xiong's radical monism and his related critique of Yogācāra philosophy as a kind of ontological dualism. Xiong's critiques are grounded in the Mahayana doctrine of conditioned origination (*yuanqi* 緣起) and the doctrine that the phenomenal world is not ontologically distinct from undifferentiated absolute reality (*dharmakāya*). In the second part, Makeham adduces a range of evidence drawn from the *New Treatise* to show that the Huayan Buddhist doctrine of nature origination (*xingqi* 性起) played a central role in the entirety of Xiong's constructive philosophy. Makeham concludes that unlike the Madhyamaka from which Xiong draws inspiration, Xiong effectively posits Fundamental Reality/Suchness/inherent nature/the Absolute as an underlying "locus" on which phenomenal/conventional reality is ontologically grounded, just as the sea supports the waves yet is not different from the waves (Makeham 2015).

In sum, these essays cover all major periods and schools of Chinese philosophy, revealing their diversity, common concerns, and lines of development. The authors not only present the metaphysical theories of these various thinkers and texts, but also make original contributions to the development of Chinese metaphysics itself. As such, their studies present cutting-edge research in Chinese metaphysics and serve as a powerful testimony for the existence of Chinese metaphysics and the legitimacy of studying it. It is our hope that these expert contributors have provided a hallmark work in the study of Chinese metaphysics that will serve as a valuable reference point for the study of Chinese philosophy in the years to come. Most of all, we hope that they will serve as a starting point and inspiration for a more expansive conception of metaphysics, one that is able to address and incorporate the wealth of metaphysical questions and insights develop by cultures around the world. Indeed, the existence and the legitimacy of Chinese metaphysics is no longer a question. The real question in front of us is how to better study it and how to make such a study more fruitful. Let us move forward.¹

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