Of Diversities and Comparisons . . .

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Encyclopedias can be useful in teaching philosophy when students need some reading that sets out the basics on a key topic in a few pages without their getting lost in too many complex details or being misled by oversimplifications. They can also be edifying for the philosophy teacher and scholar—providing reliable, up-to-date information on topics that lie in their field but that are not part of their working knowledge. For these reasons, those working in Chinese philosophy will welcome the publication of the Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy. The 187 entries cover a variety of subject areas such as “Moral Philosophy” and “Philosophy of language”; Confucianism in different periods and countries, Daoism, Mohism, Legalism, the school of names, Buddhism, and Marxism in China; philosophical trends in post-Mao China, Taiwan, and overseas; key concepts such as dao (the way), fa (law, standards), liyi fenshu (principle and manifestations), and quanli (rights); texts such as the Huainanzi and the Wenzi; and thinkers from Laozi and Confucius to Hu Shih and Mou Zongsan.

Instead of more numerous short entries, this encyclopedia has opted for fewer entries of greater length—the Preface tells us that entries on important thinkers and philosophical topics typically range from five thousand to nine thousand words in length, and a quick check reveals that even the shortest entry is at least two pages long (more than one thousand words). This format allows authors to explore the philosophical issues at some depth, and expound even complex arguments in detail. The connections between different concepts, thinkers, texts, philosophical theories, and development that stretch across different periods and territories can be delineated more clearly in a single entry. There is a danger of duplication with this format, as some texts and concepts may be covered in several articles; for example, most of “Confucianism: Constructs of Classical Thought” is on what the author identifies as six key texts of Classical Confucianism: the Analects, Mencius, Xunzi, Yizhuan, Zhongyong (Doctrine of the mean), and Daxue (Great Learning). The sections on Mencius and Xunzi (pp. 66–67) merely introduce a small part of what is discussed in much greater depth and detail in the entries on these two thinkers (pp. 440–448 and 821–829). The Zhongyong and Daxue also have their own entries, and “Confucianism: Confucius” (p. 61) contains an entire section on the Analects.

As it turns out, the duplication is less than expected. Pei-jung Fu, author of “Confucianism: Constructs of Classical Thought,” implicitly questions Xunzi’s Confucian pedigree, beginning his discussion with “Xunzi professed to be an advocate of Confucianism” (p. 67). Such doubt is clearly not shared by A. S. Cua, who au-
 authored the entry on “Xunzi,” introducing the thinker as “an important exponent of classical Confucianism” (p. 821). Cua also does not share Fu’s view that “the real issue between Mencius and Xunzi lies in their concepts of heaven (tian)” (p. 67). Fu and the author of the entry on the Zhongyong translate key terms in the texts differently: Fu discusses “five ethical codes” and “three comprehensive virtues” (p. 68) while Yanming An calls them “five universal paths” and “three universal virtues” (p. 890). Such differences can be either thought provoking or confusing (especially when unaccompanied by Chinese characters or even pinyin), depending on the reader. The sections on the Analects in “Confucianism: Confucius” and “Confucianism: Constructs of Classical Thought” have hardly anything in common; the first examines it as an account of how Confucius lives as an exemplar remembered by his students, while the latter discusses its content, focusing on ren 仁 and li 理, as well as on Confucius’ religious concerns. While concepts such as ren and li are frequently discussed, the different ways in which authors employ them and the different characteristics, contexts, and philosophical stakes they pay attention to enrich one’s understanding of the many dimensions of these concepts even as similarities in diverse entries reinforce certain aspects and perspectives.

One comes across disagreements to various degrees on common or related topics among different entries. While Stephen Angle claims that Mozi’s philosophy of governance is “ultimately a matter of utilitarian judgment” (p. 535), and David Wong considers Mozi “the singular representative of utilitarianism in Chinese thought” (p. 453), Kwong-loi Shun questions comparisons of Mohist teachings with utilitarian thought (p. 474). Chung-ying Cheng’s “Logic and Language” claims that names (ming) “were not simple units of language but representations of substantive things and objects” (p. 343). Chad Hansen’s “Philosophy of Language” contradicts Cheng, arguing instead that no classical Chinese philosopher seems “even to have formulated a representational picture of how language operates” and that “thinkers associate names with ways of making distinction rather than with reference to particulars” (pp. 569–570). To Hansen, “Chinese thinkers view language pragmatically” (p. 570), but Cheng, while admitting a pragmatic element, is convinced that there are ontological considerations underpinning the different theories of language in pre-Qin China (p. 344). Cheng insists that “Platonist ontology appears in the works of Gongsun Long” (p. 350) and understands this Platonist ontology as “an abstract ontology of universals” (p. 351), while Whalen Lai’s entry on “Gongsun Long,” commenting on Fung Yu-lan’s Platonist interpretation of the thinker, finds “no evidence that Chinese thinkers ever subscribed to a realist theory of universals” (p. 270).

Disagreements are to be expected in a field as dynamic and diverse as Chinese philosophy today. But this does imply that few entries, if any, can lay claim to giving the last word on any topic. It is noteworthy that the Preface informs us that the entries on various topics in Chinese philosophy are by “writers who have made original contributions to its development” (p. xvii) but makes no claim about the views being authoritative or representative. Giving space to diverse views, including outright contradictory views, is one way of addressing Jaakko Hintikka’s worry about
the danger of proliferating encyclopedias, handbooks, and anthologies in philosophy having the tendency “to freeze the status quo and make it increasingly difficult for new unconventional ideas to make a breakthrough.”

One can also try to leave the possibility of new developments open by pointing out the dependence of received views on important presuppositions. Most of the entries I read fail to make such presuppositions explicit or to mention recent developments that they do not agree with, but a few entries at least bring to the reader’s attention current debates in Chinese philosophy about textual interpretation as well as philosophical issues, or raise questions that require further research and reflection. Despite the danger of freezing the status quo, this reference work is useful if newcomers to the field are given some guidance in using it, and more experienced scholars reading the articles with the usual caveats will still find most of them interesting and edifying.

Surveys of Sub-disciplines: “Moral Philosophy”

The most distinctive contributions to the Encyclopedia are the survey articles on the various subject areas. Besides “Moral Philosophy,” there are entries on “Moral Psychology” and “Philosophy of Human Nature.” And in addition to “Philosophy of Language,” also covered are “Language and Logic,” “Metaphysics,” “Philosophy of Mind,” and “Philosophy of Knowledge.” Other areas receiving attention are “Aesthetics,” “Philosophy of Art,” “Philosophy of Literature,” “Philosophy of Culture,” “Philosophy of History,” and “Philosophy of Change.” Instead of an entry on “Political Philosophy,” there is one on “Philosophy of Governance.” While “Philosophy of Religion” does not appear in the entries list, there is an entry on “Religions.” There are also entries on “Cosmology,” “Science and Technology,” and “Scientism and Humanism.” Excluding bibliographies, which vary greatly in length, all these entries are relatively long, the shortest (“Aesthetics” and “Philosophy of Human Nature”) being about three pages or roughly 2,500 words and the longest (“Philosophy of History”) about fourteen pages. The editor seems to have left the length entirely to the discretion of the individual authors; there is no obvious conclusion to be drawn from the length of an entry about the importance, scope, or complexity of its subject area.

These entries not only provide basic information on concepts, theories, and important works and thinkers in each subject area but also discuss key philosophical issues in considerable depth. The entry on “Moral Philosophy” (pp. 469–475) begins with an affirmation that Chinese thinkers share an ethical concern in asking the question “How should one live?”—and after examining the various ways they answer this question as applied to different groups of people, concludes with a fairly detailed discussion of whether Chinese schools of thought may be described as moral thought” (p. 473). The author, Kwong-loi Shun, not only gives synopses of various pre-Qin Chinese thinkers’ ethical thought but also draws our attention to certain interpretive disputes by taking a stand that he makes clear is not unanimous among scholars—for example, when challenging the frequent interpretation of Yangists as concerned primarily with their own interests (p. 470). Woven into the account
of competing conceptions of the ethical life in China from the sixth to third centuries B.C.E. is an argument that, despite their differences, these conceptions share similarities that distinguish them from Western ethical traditions. They are responses to concrete practical problems of the time, aimed at bringing about actual changes. Their differences arise from different diagnoses of those problems and the different remedies proposed.

Confucians, Daoists, Yangists, Mohists, and others all approached ethical life via two fundamental questions: how to restore order and how individuals should behave given the problems of their times. They also agreed that the two questions are intimately linked and saw “a convergence between what is in the public interest and what is in an individual’s real interest” (p. 469). Shun explains this convergence in terms of their audiences sharing a concern with the disorders of their times and a common human concern with one’s own interest. Most of the account of competing conceptions of the ethical life focuses on Confucianism and Daoism via an examination of three concepts distinctive in Confucian thought to which Daoists are opposed: li 礼 (rites and their observance), ren 仁 (humanity, benevolence), and yi 义 (propriety, righteousness). In the process, these concepts are related to other ethical concepts such as gong 敬 (respectfulness), jing 敬 (reverence, seriousness), ci 辞 (politely declining), rang 让 (yielding to others), chi 辜 (shame), and ru 辱 (disgrace). Clarifying the distinctions as well as connections among these concepts provides us with a clearer conceptual map of Confucian ethical thought.

Daoists regarded the Confucian emphasis on ren, yi, and li, with its attachment to the significance of traditional social morality, as neglecting the fundamental grounding of the human condition in a nature order. The Zhuangzi, via a reflection on the use of language, considers it misguided to attach importance to any particular conception of the ethical life since there is no neutral mediator adjudicating between competing views. The Laozi, via a reflection on the operation of the natural order, views Confucian ethics as a deviation from the ideal human life. Although there is no explicit statement about social participation—there is textual evidence for both a life of withdrawal and involvement in ordinary social activities—it is clear that Daoists believed that social participation is not as important as the Confucians claimed. Despite their disagreements, however, Confucians and Daoists both regarded their main ethical task as involving the reshaping of the self in harmony with nature.

Shun addresses the charge by some Western scholars that the Confucian emphasis on li indicates “a failure to distinguish between the moral and the traditional” by elucidating how, “while li encompasses rules of conduct that may appear oblivious of the contemporary western distinction between the moral and the nonmoral, these rules exhibit a unity both in the attitude that they are supposed to reflect and in the social functions they perform” (p. 471). An unqualified application of the moral-nonmoral distinction to Chinese thought risks oversimplifying the nature of the latter. The argument is taken up in greater detail as the engagement with Western philosophy continues in the concluding discussion, which brings out certain important differences between Chinese thought and Western moral philosophy. Chinese
schools of thought clearly construe moral philosophy as a concern with how one should live. On the other hand, when described with connotations specific to certain Western traditions, such as Kantian notions of rationality and autonomy, morality has no application to Chinese ethical thought. Shun explores various ways of understanding morality between these two extremes in Western philosophy and assesses their applicability to Chinese thought. He shows how, although the moral-nonmoral distinction may be applicable for certain purposes in discussing Chinese thought under certain characterizations of morality, the distinction can be misleading as it may not capture anything of significance to a particular school of thought even when the notion of morality appears applicable.

**Chinese-Western Comparisons**

Explicit comparisons with Western philosophy in content and method often inform the discussions in the entries on various philosophical topics. These comparative perspectives, handled well, give the entries additional scope and depth as well as raising precisely the kind of methodological and philosophical problems that arise from discussing Chinese philosophy in English, problems that those of us teaching Chinese philosophy in English would want students to become aware of and hopefully reflect further on. The need for comparison with Western philosophy varies. An entry titled the “Philosophy of Change” is included because of the importance of one particular text in Chinese philosophy, the *Yijing* (Book of change)—although, given the content of that entry, one wonders why it was not simply titled “*Yijing,*” there is no reason to expect a comparison with Western thought.

In contrast, “Philosophy of Knowledge” begins with a long section (pp. 558–560) on Western epistemology as background, which structures the discussion of Chinese philosophy in the rest of the entry. Chung-ying Cheng’s exposition of what he calls “ontological epistemology” in Chinese philosophy takes the reader through the *Zhouyi*, pre-Qin Confucianism, and the contrast between the philosophical positions of the *Daxue* and the *Zhongyong* on knowledge. He sets the tone of the discussion by noting that “some discussions of the Chinese notion of knowledge have tended to assume too many Western epistemological concepts and thus have failed to bring out the true character of Chinese epistemology—or, perhaps, the fact that there is no Chinese ‘epistemology’ in precisely the western sense” (p. 558). Both “Philosophy of Art” and “Philosophy of Literature” make judicious comparisons with Western methods and ideas at key points that help to forestall inappropriate assumptions and conclusions about Chinese philosophy that might otherwise arise. While someone with a background in these areas of Western philosophy will obviously appreciate these entries more, those without such a background will still have no problem understanding and benefiting from them.

In the “Philosophy of History,” a reference to a distinction in the field between philosophizing about the meaning or pattern of the past and philosophical analysis and criticism of how historians think, or ought to think, sets the scene, without any further comparison with Western philosophy (except for a casual mention of Colling-
wood with reference to Zhang Xuecheng’s discussion of the possibility of rethinking past thought) until the discussion of Chinese Marxists adapting Marx’s philosophy of history to China at the end of the entry. Robert Neville begins his entry by explicitly noting that “Philosophy of Culture” (pp. 525–533) is a Western category that has no exact Chinese counterpart. There is no further explicit Western-Chinese comparison until the concluding section (pp. 531–532), which links Chinese philosophy of culture to “contemporary world philosophy”—as mutual benefits accrue from relative differences between Chinese and Western philosophical traditions. The lack of comparison with Western thought in no way diminishes the content of such entries as “Moral Psychology” and “Philosophy of Human Nature.”

Although generally well handled, the comparative element can become a liability, as evident in the entry on “Metaphysics” (pp. 449–452). Its comparison with Western thought raises more questions than it answers. While this could be a good thing in certain contexts, it diminishes the usefulness of an encyclopedia entry. Vincent Shen anchors the discussion of Chinese “metaphysics,” which he describes as comprising expositions of ultimate reality that appeal to some doctrine of the dao 道 (p. 449), with a distinction between two understandings of metaphysics in Western philosophy: the Platonic and the Aristotelian. He judges the “meta” in Chinese metaphysics to be closer to Plato’s meaning than Aristotle’s, insofar as “dao is above all empirical beings and all formal beings,” but readers are left wondering what this “closeness” amounts to, given the admission that “there is no dualism of ideal world and physical world, sensation and reason” (p. 451). Moreover, a large part of the discussion on Chinese metaphysics is of qi 器 (implements or ontic things), xing 形 (material form), and dao 道, which Shen claims “correspond more or less to the physical, the mathematical, and the metaphysical in Aristotle” (p. 449). This “more or less” correspondence fails to illuminate the sections on qi, xing, and dao—which, fortunately, are not without merit of their own—nor do these sections cast any further light on the vague comparison. Despite referring at the beginning to Aristotle’s definition of metaphysics as “a science which investigates being qua being,” there is no further mention of “being” in the metaphysical sense and no explanation of the absence. The question of whether there is a concept of “being” in Chinese philosophy is explicitly raised by Chad Hansen in the entry on “Youwu: Being and Non-being” (pp. 847–849), but there is not even a cross-reference to this entry in “Metaphysics” (this is just one of several instances of inadequate cross-referencing in the Encyclopedia).

The diversity with which authors have handled or simply left out the comparative factor is a strength insofar as it prevents the Encyclopedia from becoming tedious for those with no interest in comparative issues and from being overly self-conscious in the handling of its relationship with Western thought. For those who are interested in comparative issues and, furthermore, believe that doing Chinese philosophy in English invariably introduces an intercultural comparative factor, the Encyclopedia very sensibly includes separate entries on topics such as “Comparative Philosophy” (pp. 51–58), “Inter-cultural Hermeneutics” (pp. 315–320), and “Translation and its Problems” (pp. 734–739). Beginning with the works of the Jesuits, Lauren Pfister’s
historical overview of the transmission of ancient “Confucian” source texts into modern English illustrates the different intellectual interests and cultural preconceptions that contextualize translations of Chinese philosophical texts. This entry would be even more useful if the current problems of contemporary translations, especially the hermeneutical and philosophical issues at stake among some of the more prominent translators today, were discussed in greater detail and depth.

The short definition of intercultural hermeneutics is given as “the proper study, and thereby understanding, of any message passed between cultures, and what happens in the course of that transmission” (p. 315). The author, Robert Allinson, explores four acts of understanding that constitute the task: understanding the categories of understanding of one’s own culture; understanding the categories of understanding of the culture one intends to understand; the creation of a hybrid product in any successful act of intercultural hermeneutics; and using this hybrid product to achieve a greater understanding of the two cultures that initiated the task. Allinson emphasizes the need to “transcend” the limitations of the categories of understanding of both one’s own culture and the culture one intends to understand. He is also careful to distinguish intercultural hermeneutics from postmodernist “interpretation,” which he sees as “creation, not understanding” (p. 319). Understanding is possible only if one is willing to free oneself from being ruled by a preexistent standpoint, but this does not mean that any interpretation is acceptable; flexible criteria does not mean no criteria.

Allinson includes comparative philosophers among “today’s ‘Hermes’”—practitioners of intercultural hermeneutics. While his entry deals with understanding at an abstract level aimed at “an understanding, an understanding of understanding, and an understanding of the understanding of understanding” (p. 320), David Wong’s entry on comparative philosophy discusses more concrete attempts at intercultural understanding and the specific key problems in comparative philosophy. The key methodological issues revolve around how to deal with similarities and differences between cultures. Wong examines four main approaches in comparing Chinese and Western ethical philosophy by taking the reader through actual comparisons of Western and Confucian versions of the Golden Rule, parallel conflicts between particularistic duties and duties that transcend the boundaries of special relationships, Confucian ethics as virtue ethics compared with ancient Greek ethics, individualistic and social conceptions of human nature in Western and Chinese thought, similarities and differences between Buddhism and Daoism on the one hand and Hellenistic Stoicism and Epicureanism on the other, and between Nietzsche and Zhuangzi.

An approach emphasizing similarities may elucidate common features of human life across different cultures; it is important, however, to recognize that such similarities coexist with significant differences. A second approach focuses on differences by criticizing one culture from the standpoint of another; such criticism could be ethnocentric or its reverse, that is, criticizing one’s own culture using the insights of another culture. Wong employs specific examples to argue that criticism of this type may not do justice to comparing and evaluating traditions. A third approach avoids
asserting the superiority of one or the other tradition and adopts an evaluative stance that brings out how each tradition has something important to learn from the other. A fourth, pluralistic, approach recognizes that it is not wrong for each tradition to emphasize different values, and teaches us about the diversity and richness of what human beings may reasonably prize and the impossibility of reconciling all that they prize in just one single ideal.

On comparisons in epistemology and metaphysics, Wong highlights the use of the “invitational” method of persuasion in ancient Chinese texts and the accompanying therapeutic aim for philosophy. While there is a contrast in emphasis, such a mode and aim of philosophizing are not absent in Western philosophy; neither is the argumentative mode that is dominant in Western philosophy absent from Chinese philosophy. Wong argues that “part of the value of doing comparative philosophy may, in fact, lie not in confronting some alien system of thought but in recognizing how themes that are not currently dominant in one’s own tradition are combined in unfamiliar ways and given enduringly dominant places in other traditions” (p. 55). He takes issue with some contemporary interpretations of classical Chinese philosophy as a pragmatic and antimetaphysical alternative to Western mainstream thinking. He argues that some comparisons on the question of truth, the question of the roles of reason and feelings and their relation, are problematic because they entail mapping philosophical divisions originating in the Western tradition onto a thinker who did not make quite the same divisions—and, as a result, “Chinese thinkers are enlisted in a fight that was not theirs and that perhaps they do not even regard as a fight” (p. 56). Wong’s nuanced treatment of various comparisons elucidates the importance of finding an appropriate balance between similarities and differences if one is to overcome the difficulties and benefit from the complexities of comparative philosophy—lessons that are also relevant to those studying Chinese philosophy in a Western language.

Comparison with Other Encyclopedias

Reference works in philosophy have been paying more attention to Chinese philosophy in the last decade. In the 1998 Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy (REP), besides a long survey article on “Chinese Philosophy” there are nearly sixty entries on Chinese philosophy and related areas such as Japanese and Korean Confucianism. One year earlier, Routledge also published the Companion Encyclopedia of Asian Philosophy, with nine long articles ranging from ten to fifty pages on various aspects of Chinese Philosophy. This was followed by the Encyclopedia of Asian Philosophy (EAP), with 268 entries under “China.” The year 2003 saw the publication of not only the Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy (ECP) but also the Encyclopedia of Confucianism (EC). The 950 entries in the latter cover not only philosophy but various aspects of Confucianism: scholars, writings, rituals, events, and places, as well as key concepts, phrases, and theories.

There is more complementarity than duplication among the available reference works. Less than a quarter of the entries in the EAP appear in the ECP. In any case,
nearly all the entries in the former were by Whalen Lai, with a few by Oliver Leaman, or authored jointly, whereas the 187 alphabetically arranged entries in the ECP are written by seventy-six scholars. While nearly all the Chinese philosophy topics with entries in the REP are covered by the ECP, and nearly half the entries in the ECP are listed in the EC, in only a few cases were the common entries in different works written by the same author: Roger Ames wrote the entry on Confucius and Michael Nylan the entry on Yang Xiong for the REP, the ECP, and the EC. Antonio Cua wrote the entry on Xunzi, and Anne/Joanne Birdwhistell the entry on Shao Yong for both the ECP and the REP. Chad Hansen wrote the entries on Qing 情 (reality or feeling), Shì 其 (this and not, right and wrong), Wuwei 無為 (taking no action), and Youwu 有無 (being and nonbeing), and Kai-wing Chow the entry on Chen Que for both the ECP and the EC.

Even when the same author has written on a topic for more than one of the encyclopedias, the entries are still different. For one thing, the ECP allows more space for each topic than the others. For example, Birdwhistell’s entry on Shao Yong in the REP gives the barest outline (about 350 words) of the philosopher’s thought, focusing on natural patterns of change in the universe and the experience of sagely knowledge. A useful list of Shao Yong’s works, as well as English references and further readings, takes up more space. The entry in the ECP on Shao Yong takes up nearly six pages (about five thousand words), with enough substance to serve as the basic reading on Shao Yong in a module on Chinese Philosophy or Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism. The content of Shao’s philosophy is given sufficiently detailed treatment to illuminate his rather obscure views in a way that is philosophically thought provoking. Although it does not have an appended list of Shao Yong’s works (which are all mentioned in the entry), its bibliography includes Chinese as well as English literature on the thinker.

A similar comparison could be made between the entries on Chen Que in the ECP and the EC, both written by Kai-wing Chow. The ECP entry on Chen Que is more than six times longer than the roughly three-hundred-word entry in the EC. The ECP is able to include a bibliography of both English and Chinese works not found in the EC. The ECP entry expounds Chen’s monistic view of human nature and the necessity of moral effort to establish one’s good nature by discussing arguments in specific works, and links his emphasis on developing good habits through rituals to Zhang Zai. His attack on the Daxue as a work of Chan Buddhism and his related critique of Song Confucians for assimilating Chan Buddhism are also discussed in some depth. Chen’s purism and ritualism informed his ritual practice and his position in the controversy regarding the canonical model of lineage. He advocated strict adherence to the classical rituals, which he equated with the “heavenly principle” (tianli 天理). The entry ends with an assessment that Chen is as important as Gü Yanwu and Huang Zongxi in his contribution to the reorientation of Confucian ethics and classical scholarship in the early Qing dynasty.

In general, the EC is useful for quick reference on a wider range of topics in Confucianism, but understandably does not provide the same philosophical scope and depth as the ECP on individual subjects, even though some of the EC’s major entries
are two or three thousand words in length. The difference in detail and depth is evident in the entries on *Qing, Shi'ei, Wuwei,* and *Youwu* by Hansen in both the *ECP* and the *EC.* Compared with the three-hundred-word entry in the *EC,* the *ECP* entry on *Qing* (feeling or reality) is able to give a substantial exposition of Hansen’s hypothesis: “in early China, the character referred to input from the world that is relevant to following a guide (a *dao*), . . . [W]e can explain two uses—‘reality’ and ‘sentiment’—as both emerging from the conception of presocial inputs we use to direct our behavior according to social guides” (p. 620). This explanation is accomplished through a discussion of the positive and negative uses of *Qing* in the *Analects, Mozi, Mencius, Daodejing, Zhuangzi, Xunzi,* the Han Confucianism of Dong Zhongshu, the psychology of Chinese Buddhism, and Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism.

The “Yin-Yang” entry in the *REP* and the “Yin and Yang” entry in the *ECP* are by no means mutually substitutable, although they are fairly close in length and by the same author, Roger Ames. They share the basic idea—that *yin* and *yang* are about correlative contrast between unique particulars rather than an essentialist dualism of ontological categories—but the content and expression vary. The former focuses on the pragmatic use of the relationship in sorting out phenomena in the classical Chinese world, bringing out the “tension between multiple perspectives” and enabling us “to interpret and bring coherence to our circumstances by allowing us to discern the patterns in relationships within particular contexts.” The *yin-yang* vocabulary is functional in helping us understand the unique components of a situation so that we may identify the critical factors that would “turn the configuration of an unfolding situation into an opportunity” (p. 832). The *ECP* entry begins with an etymology of the terms and proceeds to elucidate the nature of the *yin-yang* relationship and how it came to be associated with the five-phases cosmology that emerged in the early Han dynasty. It then elaborates on the “correlative” cosmology of classical China and contrasts it with the dualism familiar in classical Western metaphysical thinking. It ends with an interesting speculation about why *yin-yang* violates the pattern common in classical China of giving dominance to the first member of a correlative pair: the correlative way of understanding relatedness known as *yin-yang* thinking predates the use of this particular “binomial” expression, which became prominent only in the late Warring States period, and “perhaps the application of this term as it evolved was purposely directed at challenging persistent cultural assumptions” (p. 847).

If we compare entries on the same topic by different authors, it becomes even clearer that we do not have too much in the way of reference materials in Chinese philosophy. Interesting diversity and contrasts abound when different authors discuss the same or overlapping topics. The entry on “Yin-Yang” in the *EC* is very different from the entries in both the *REP* and the *ECP.* It is more text based and discusses Zou Yan’s thought as well as Song and Ming Confucian understandings of *yin* and *yang* that are not mentioned in the entries in the other two encyclopedias. Occasionally one finds outright contradictions when comparing entries on the same topic in different reference works. An example is the *EC* and *ECP* entries on Chen Xianzhang by Alan Wood and William Yau-nang Ng, respectively. According to Ng, “by identify-
ing the mind-heart with the principle, Chen took a radically different position from that of the school of Cheng-Zhu, which separated the mind-heart from the principle” (p. 36). Wood, in contrast, asserts that “Chen rejected the dualism implied in the Neo-Confucian understanding of li 理 and qi 气 (material force). Nor could Chen accept Lu Jiuyuan’s view of the mind as principle, since that implied there was no objective reality or principle outside of the mind” (p. 51). Some might feel that this undermines the reliability of the content (of at least one of the references); one might also take this to mean that if one needs to check a topic in an encyclopedia, it is better to check more than one reference work, and such contradictions simply indicate the need for further research on one’s own.

Entries on the Guodian Bamboo Slips

There are two entries in the ECP on the “Texts in Guodian Bamboo Slips,” one under Confucianism (pp. 149–153) and one under Daoism. These entries, by Xiaogan Liu, give an overview of the 730 bamboo slips excavated from a Chu tomb in 1993, which have been arranged into fourteen Confucian and two Daoist texts. The entries give brief summaries of contents of these texts as well as discussing their significance for Chinese philosophy. The tomb is dated no later than 278 B.C.E. and can perhaps be dated to even before 300 B.C.E., which means that the works were composed no later than the fourth century. This discovery has been compared to the “Discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls” and Liu believes “it is definitely necessary to rewrite the history of early Confucianism in the light of the new doctrines presented in the texts,” even though it is still too early to evaluate the Guodian texts comprehensively and appropriately. There is no comparable entry in any of the other existing reference works. The EC does not even list it in the index, although the entry on the Si-Meng xuepai 思孟学派 (Zisi-Mengzi School) mentions that “the recent Guodian archeological finds might shed new light on the traditional view” about the direct filiation between Zisi and Mengzi (p. 573).

There is no entry on Zisi in the EC, although the Si-Meng xuepai entry refers to “the article on Zisi.” If that reflects skepticism about the existence of Zisi, that skepticism can now be laid to rest. As Liu argues in his ECP entry, “Confucianism: Texts in Guodian Bamboo Slips,” the text of the Lu Mu Gong wen Zisi 鲁穆公问子思 confirms the existence of Zisi and the work bearing his name, and proves the authenticity of the teacher-student relationship between Zisi and Duke Mu of Lu in pre-Qin texts and Han histories (p. 150). The discovery of the Lu Mu Gong wen Zisi together with the Ziyi 紫衣 (easily identified with the Liji chapter bearing the same name) suggests that the Ziyi belongs to Zisi’s doctrines and that some sections of the Liji originally existed in the middle Warring States period (p. 151). The Guodian bamboo slips together with other archeological discoveries prove wrong those early twentieth-century yigu 疑古 (doubting antiquity) scholars who dismissed historical records and texts or changed their dating to a later time at least with regard to some texts. To Liu, these archeological finds “reveal a simple truth: historians in Han China saw more texts and records of their past than we can hope to imagine,
and the histories and bibliographies from Han times have proved sounder than subsequent speculations and inferences” (p. 150).

The Guodian bamboo slips also raise questions about the opposition between Daoism and Confucianism. Not only were Confucian and Daoist texts found together in the same tomb, but some important passages shared ideas from both Confucian and Daoist schools (pp. 150–151). The presence of Daoist ideas and style in Confucian texts indicates that the division into Daoism and Confucianism is a later construction and that there was no strong tension or distinction between Confucianism and Daoism in pre-Qin China (p. 152). This is further supported by Liu’s examination of the Laozi bamboo slips in the entry on “Daoism: Texts in Guodian Bamboo Slips.” The bamboo slips of the Laozi contain thirty-three chapters or passages corresponding to thirty-one chapters in the received traditional versions. Liu highlights both the concepts in the traditional versions of the Laozi that are broadly reflected in the bamboo slips of the Laozi, and significant differences between them. Two sentences in the received versions of chapter 19—“Abandon humanity (ren) and discard righteousness (yi)” and “Abandon sageliness (shen) [sic] and discard intelligence (zhi)” — are replaced by “Abandon pretension (wei) and discard cunning (zhi)” and “Abandon intelligence (shen) and discard dispute (bian).” Liu concludes, “This critical difference suggests that the earlier version of the Laozi did not attack Confucianism as the received versions did, and this helps us correct our stereotype of the conflict between Daoism and Confucianism in the Warring States period” (p. 231).

Liu notes that the bamboo slips have not resolved the dispute about the date of the Laozi and explains how different evaluations of the three bundles of slips of the Laozi support and cause problems for each of the three existing theories. In Liu’s view, the discovery of the bamboo slips may suggest that the Laozi existed earlier than had been supposed, but we cannot rely merely on the slip version of the Laozi to construct a theory about the formation and composition of the texts (p. 230). Besides the Laozi the bamboo slips also include another newly discovered Daoist text, the Taiyi sheng shui 太一生水, which has generated great excitement in academic circles. This text emphasizes the importance of water instead of qi 氣 (material force, element) in the generation and development of the universe, and “is generally understood to be the earliest Chinese cosmogony, though it may be interpreted mainly as having to do with the formation of the year and time rather than the universe” (p. 231).

Buddhism and Daoism

There are more entries on Confucianism than any other school in Chinese philosophy. Twenty long entries examine Confucianism during different dynastic periods and in the twentieth century; Confucianism in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam; and specific aspects such as “Confucianism: Ethics,” “Confucianism: Ethics and Law,” “Confucianism: Rhetoric,” “Confucianism: Tradition (Dao tong),” “Confucianism: Humanism and Enlightenment,” “Confucianism: Vision,” and “Confucianism: Dia-
logues.” In comparison, there are only two entries on Buddhism, one a historical survey and the other on Zen. Daoism gets a bit more attention with four entries: “Daoism: Classical (Dao jia),” “Daoism: Neo-Daoism (Xuanxue),” “Daoism: Religious,” and “Daoism: Texts in Guodian Bamboo Slips.” Although there are some entries on Buddhist and Daoist thinkers, such as Mazu Daoyi, Fazang, Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Xi Kang, and on Daoist concepts such as xu (emptiness), youwu (being and non-being), and zhenren (the true, authentic person), these are too few to outweigh the Confucian emphasis. Provided one does not read this as an assessment of the relative importance of the three philosophies vis-à-vis one another or as reflecting the interest of students of Chinese philosophy in the different schools, this is not necessarily a problem. A one-volume reference work, even one as heavy and unwieldy as this one, cannot possibly cover everything in Chinese philosophy adequately. And there are other references on Buddhism and Daoism.3

Some Problems

A browse of the list of entries gives the impression that there is overwhelming emphasis on thinkers as compared to texts or concepts. However, entries on thinkers contain extensive discussions of the texts, theories, and concepts associated with them. Entries on Zhuangzi, Xunzi, and Mencius discuss the texts named after them and specific concepts more than the individuals. One would expect that texts given individual entry would be those of considerable importance in Chinese philosophy and not associated with any one particular thinker. There are entries for the Daxue and Zhongyong, the Guanzi, the Heguanzi treatise, the Huainanzi text, and the Wenzi treatise. The ECP, in contrast to the REP, does not consider the Lushi chunqiu worthy of an entire entry. However, rather than worry over disagreements among the various encyclopedia editors’ editorial decisions, one could look at this positively as providing more coverage between the topics. At first glance, some omissions, of the Yiijing and the Chunqiu for example, seem hardly justifiable. A reader with some knowledge of Chinese philosophy would no doubt guess that the “Philosophy of Change” entry would examine the Yiijing while the “Philosophy of History” would discuss the Chunqiu; a complete novice would turn to the index for help.

The index confirms that the “Philosophy of Change” entry in its entirety concerns the Yiijing, and there are more than thirty other significant mentions of the Yiijing scattered through various entries. But using the index to check out the Chunqiu runs into serious problems. “Chunqiu” is not listed in the index, and a further search for “Spring and Autumn Annals” yields only a cross-reference to the Chunqiu fanlu—which is a different text. Of the ten sub-entries indexed under “Chunqiu fanlu (Spring and Autumn Annals),” only the first two are actually about Chunqiu fanlu, the other eight (including one, “Gongyang, Commentary on,”) refer to the Chunqiu itself. Of the two most important commentaries on the Chunqiu, the Gongyang Commentary is indexed, but the Zuo Commentary is strangely indexed as “Zuo,” even though authors who mention this text all refer to it as Zuozhuan or Zuo Commentary. A check in the index for Lushi chunqiu is also potentially confus-
ing because it has been misspelled as Lūshi qunchiu (one also comes across quite a few typographical errors in the main text even with a very selective reading). These may be the only problems with a very long index—an admittedly daunting task of composition—but it is disconcerting to encounter them at the first use of the index. An index is important in a reference work of this kind, especially given that the ECP has opted for fewer entries of greater length rather than more numerous but shorter entries.

A truly thorough review of the Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy would take up too much space and is beyond the meager ability of one reviewer. From my rather selective reading, inevitably reflecting my personal interests and philosophical inclinations, I find the work generally useful and interesting, despite a few flaws.

Notes

