Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power (review)

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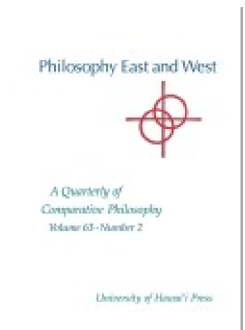

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been a rational, individualistic environment. While much of this section is a departure from the philosophical considerations of the preceding chapters, McCarthy elucidates the connections that she sees between them. Indeed, it is in this final chapter that many of McCarthy's claims gain purchase, as she offers a real, embodied, relational example of the sort of space she hopes to create.

It could be argued that there are places in this final chapter in which McCarthy does not go far enough in explaining just how it is that the type of embodied ethics she has been advocating is enacted. She writes about her initial worries that caring for the souls of her students was at the expense of their intellectual development, and while she says that she eventually came to see that "fostering nondualism and taking care are integral to the intellectual development of my students" (p. 98), this point may not be as clear to her readers. The worry here is that while McCarthy has provided a fine argument for the importance of nondualism and embodiment in philosophical thought, this argument may not extend all the way to the sorts of practices McCarthy wishes to promote. That is to say that while contemplative education does seem to be valuable, and education systems are certainly in need of reformation, more work needs to be done to explain how the concepts of bodymind and nondualism facilitate such reformation. This is not necessarily a deficiency of McCarthy's work here as it is a call for further investigation.

This book is a first step in the direction of a comparative feminist ethics, and McCarthy has done a commendable job of marking out the way. As McCarthy argues, non-Western and feminist philosophies have much to learn from each other, and a more nuanced dialogue between them will provide a needed challenge to more traditional assumptions about the relationship between the body and the mind, and the ways in which this relationship grounds our ethical life.

Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power. By Yan Xuetong. Translated by Edmund Ryden. Edited by Daniel A. Bell and Sun Zhe. The Princeton-China Series. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011. Pp. viii + 300. Hardcover $29.95, ISBN 978-0-691-14826-7.

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Many readers of *Philosophy East and West* will find this collection of three essays by Chinese foreign policy analyst and international relations theorist Yan Xuetong 阎学通, accompanied by three corresponding commentaries by other Chinese scholars and followed by Yan's response, interesting for a number of reasons. Despite the different perspectives and norms of international relations (IR) theory, Yan is offering a reading of ancient Chinese texts most of which are read also by philosophers, and is specifically interested in their philosophical ideas. Philosophical Pragmatists would approve of Yan's objective of learning from ancient Chinese thought to "enrich contemporary international relations theory and present findings relevant to China's

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foreign policy" (p. 21). Comparative philosophers might have something to learn from his carefully structured comparative method, or find something to criticize that would advance their own reflections on methodology.

The central themes running through Yan's three essays—"A Comparative Study of Pre-Qin Interstate Political Philosophy," "Xunzi's Interstate Political Philosophy and Its Message for Today," and "Hegemony in *The Stratagems of the Warring States*" (co-written with Huang Yuxing)—are hegemony and international order. Ancient Chinese thinkers have a concept easily equated with hegemony, *ba* 霸, which some of them contrast with *wang* 王, usually translated as "the true king" or "the sage-king." This book adopts the translation "humane authority" to capture the key difference in the nature of power and authority—clearly issues highly relevant to contemporary political philosophy—between *wang* and *ba* in Chinese thought, and to avoid any misunderstanding that Yan might be advocating some kind of outdated sagely monarchy. The significance of this distinction for Yan lies in the options it highlights for China's rise: to replace America as a hegemonic power with similar *realpolitik* considerations or to preside over a comparatively harmonious international order (p. 204). Some may have qualms about treating the feudal states of the Zhou dynasty as equivalents of modern nation-states in contemporary IR theories, and Yan acknowledges that there are significant differences (p. 25). However, insofar as one could identify polities with varying degrees of independent control over territories and population—even their own armies—contending with one another for dominance, the similarities are sufficient for contemporary IR theory to be interested in the ancient discourses generated by the interactions of these polities.[1]

Yan compares the interstate political philosophy of seven pre-Qin Masters: Laozi, Mozi, Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi, Guanzi, and Hanfeizi. On the level of analysis, Yan interprets the three *Ru* Masters as analyzing states and interstate politics on the basis of the individual, the morality of the ruler in particular. Guanzi and Hanfeizi take the state (its relative power) as the determinant of interstate relations, while Laozi and Mozi approach these relations from the standpoint of the whole system of states. The distinctions along this axis are about relative emphases rather than mutually exclusive categories, as Yan later notes that "all of the thinkers ascribe the ultimate cause of shifts in interstate leadership to the ruler himself" (p. 57). Given the autocratic nature of these states compared with modern nation-states, the ruler understandably played a much more important role in the intra- and interstate politics of the time; however, Yan emphasizes throughout the three essays the importance of the ruler employing talented and worthy persons in the success of the state. He sees an important lesson in this for contemporary international relations: first, the importance of "the thought of the leaders" should not be neglected and exclusive attention paid to only material factors (p. 66), and second, competition for talent is not peculiar to the knowledge economy, and China needs to attract people of leadership quality (not "merely technicians") from all over the world.

The seven pre-Qin thinkers are also classified as "materialist determinist" (Hanfeizi), maintaining that material conditions determine the outcome of interstate competition and conflict, or "conceptual determinist" (Laozi, Mozi, Confucius, and

Mencius), maintaining that the ideas of rulers and other key players determine the nature of states, their relative strength, and whether there is international order or chaos. For Guanzi and Xunzi, both material conditions and people's ideas are factors in interstate relations. The preponderance of "conceptual determinists" among these early Chinese thinkers encourages Yan to go against the current exclusive emphasis on material benefits and force in IR theory, and convinces him that China's aspiration to lead the world depends on successful universal acceptance of its "theory of harmonious world" and accompanying international norms, rather than on economic and military power alone.

While pre-Qin thinkers differ in their views about the causes of war, justifications (if any) for war, and the paths to peace, Yan sees a crucial similarity in their generally linking interstate order to morality. This is connected to their distinguishing the coercion of brute force, the domination of hegemony depending on "strategic reliability," and humane authority depending on trust and respect. Yan understands the pre-Qin idea of "all under heaven" (*tianxia* 天下) not as a descriptive term for "the world" but as a normative term signifying international authority, an idea that contemporary international order should try to approximate. Pre-Qin interstate political philosophy highlights for Yan a number of weaknesses in contemporary IR theory, including the absence of a distinction between state power and international authority and the connection between the nature of hegemonic power and the stability of the international order. Yan believes that to attain leadership status in the international community China needs to show that it is more responsible than the United States as a major power. However, Yan is realist enough to recognize that moral authority is not enough; he argues that "hard power may in fact be equally important for both humane authority and hegemony" (p. 91) in his criticism of Xunzi for overlooking this.[2] Yan seems unaware that this concession would have been a major departure from the Confucian tradition, and if accepted it would have significant philosophical implications that need to be examined seriously. It also renders the key distinction between hegemony and humane authority less clear and less powerful as a challenge to current IR trends.

Given the importance Yan places on the role of morality in pre-Qin interstate political philosophy, it is necessary to be clear about the conceptual boundaries between the moral and the political, and to probe deeper into the nature of both and the relationship between them. In his third essay, he states that "the term *political power* is modern; its corresponding terms in the ancient period are *virtue, benevolence, the Way, justice, law, worthies,* and *sages*" (p. 115; original italics). If true, this creates serious problems for the way he talks of the political in comparing pre-Qin philosophy and IR theory as if they are discussing the same thing, and draws lessons about the political and moral from pre-Qin historical examples for contemporary international relations. It may be an important lesson for IR theory to learn that the moral matters a great deal to the political and that they may not be as separate as assumed, but if they are conceptually not even distinct, or distinct in one discourse but not the other, there would be serious confusion, unless some very clever conceptual clarification is carried out first in framing the comparisons.

The chapters by other Chinese scholars commenting on the first three essays, and Yan's response, give readers valuable insight into the agreements and disagreements among Chinese scholars themselves about Chinese foreign policies and international relations theory, as well as the relevance of pre-Qin texts and philosophy to both.

Notes

1 – This issue is discussed in the book by the commentator, Yang Qiangru (pp. 147–149).

2 – Cf. Xu Jin, in his comments on Yan's essay on Xunzi's interstate political philosophy, considers this point to be a misreading of Xunzi and of pre-Qin Chinese history (p. 171).