

Eastern philosophy grows in interaction

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and LI HAOTAN

Scholars exchanged views on Eastern philosophy studies at a seminar in Jinan, Shandong Province, from Oct. 24–25.

The seminar was hosted by the School of Philosophy and Social Development at Shandong University and the Center for Judaic and Inter-Religious Studies at Shandong University.

Eastern countries share a long history of exchanges and integration in the fields of philosophy, religion, and ideology and culture, said Li Suping, a research fellow from the Institute of Philosophy at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). Eastern philosophy occupies an important position which underlies the cultural roots of many countries along the Belt and Road. It is urgent for academia to strengthen related research, and dig into Eastern ideas and wisdom, providing intellectual support for today's development.

Ancient Chinese history is roughly divided into early (pre-Qin era), middle (since about the Qin and Han dynasties), and late (since about the Song Dynasty) ancient times. In Li's view, early ancient times witnessed the first climax of Eastern philosophy, laying the foundation for its later development. China in East Asia, India in South Asia, Persia, Mesopotamia, and Palestine in West Asia, and Egypt in North Africa, were the main birthplaces of Eastern cultures. The middle ancient times was a period when Eastern philosophy sustained an upsurge. Indian philosophy, Arab Islamic philosophy, and East Asian philosophy represented by the Han and Tang schools of thought in China had their own characteristics. The late ancient

times saw an unbalanced development of Eastern philosophy. During this period, Indian philosophy and Arab Islamic philosophy began to decline, while East Asian philosophy continued to prosper and develop. Modern times experienced an initial collision which led to a fusion between Eastern and Western philosophy.

Historically, cultural interactions and exchanges among Eastern countries and between East and West injected vitality into the development of Eastern philosophy.

The spread of Confucianism promoted the integration of East Asian cultures, noted Fu Yongjun, director of the Chinese Hermeneutics Research Center at Shandong University. East Asian Confucianism is embodied as an ideological system of "diversity in unity." Based on basic Confucian values and thoughts, Confucians of different regions in East Asia transcended spatio-temporal constraints and creatively interpreted Confucian classics to carry forward Confucianism. They share common Confucian values and uphold common Confucian spirits.

Taoism exerted a positive effect on the formation of modern Japanese philosophy, said Xu Shuisheng, a professor from the School of Philosophy at Wuhan University. Modern Japanese philosophers have a knowledge structure that widely absorbs ancient, modern, Eastern, and Western philosophy. They naturally apply Taoism and form a high degree of rational consciousness. Nourished by Western philosophy and culture, modern Japanese philosophers have also actively merged and recreated Eastern and Western thoughts.

According to Wei Changhai, a professor from the Department of Philosophy and

Religious Studies at Peking University, Eastern philosophy has not been officially included as a sub-discipline of philosophy at higher education institutions, which is not conducive to the development of this discipline. As Eastern philosophy studies have become increasingly important, we look forward to the education authorities' actively promoting the development of Eastern philosophy.

Through history, the development of Korean studies on Chinese philosopher Wang Yangming, Japanese Buddhist studies, Indian philosophy, and others, were all closely related to the history of Chinese philosophy. Thus, it is necessary to advance Eastern philosophy studies by combining them with Chinese philosophy, Wei suggested.

Fu Youde, director of the Center for Judaic and Inter-Religious Studies at Shandong University, noted that religious and cultural exchanges played an important part in the history of Eastern philosophy. We should look into the changes and development of Eastern religions from a cross-religious perspective, determining their influence on Eastern philosophy.

A History of Eastern Philosophy, published in 2010, represents an important achievement in the 21st century study of Eastern philosophy in China. The book analyzes the development of Eastern philosophy for about five millennia, spanning from the 30th century BCE to the 20th century, and expounds on the philosophical thoughts of each stage according to the region. This framework reveals the internal development laws of Eastern philosophy, highlighting collisions and fusions within Eastern philosophy, and between Eastern and Western philosophy. Li pointed out that the book filled several gaps in Eastern philosophy, including writing the world's first history of Vietnamese philosophy.

The philosophy of Chinese ethnic minorities is not merely an integral part of Chinese philosophy, but also Eastern philosophy, which needs further study, said He Chengxuan, a research fellow at the Institute of Philosophy at CASS. Comparative studies should be conducted to uncover the distinctive religions and philosophies of various ethnic minorities. Philosophical research of ethnic minorities has gained increasing attention and praise from the academic community, becoming an eye-catching emerging discipline.

knowledge bases. Academics should break disciplinary silos and build an interdisciplinary research environment. Within an inter- and transdisciplinary framework, natural and engineering sciences, social sciences and the humanities become integrated, and none of them should be hegemonic or maintain their own prerogatives.

To understand and cope with global change we need to harness all fields of human knowledge, Holm said. Scientific division of labor means that knowledge is compartmentalized in different reference systems, but the challenges of sustainability, resilience, resistance, and adaptation are best accomplished via dialogue across reference systems.



*Spiritual Sources
of Ancient Chinese
Civilization*

By Xia Hai
Zhonghua
Book Company
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Tracing spiritual resources through pre-Qin thoughts

By CHENG SUDONG

Authored by Xia Hai, a Chinese studies scholar, *Spiritual Sources of Ancient Chinese Civilization* comprehensively examines the ideological sources of Confucianism, Taoism, Legalism, and Mohism, as well as seven sages including Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi, Laozi, Chuang Tzu, Han Feizi, and Mo Tzu, tracing the spiritual origins of Chinese civilization.

The book focuses on the overall background of the pre-Qin scholars' thoughts (prior to 221 BCE) and their internal interactions. Although these philosophers' doctrines mostly appear in the form of antagonism and debate, the core topics, or the ideological basis of knowledge systems share considerable commonality—a product of the holistic era of the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States period (770–221 BCE).

In the first chapter, the author comprehensively investigates how new changes in social forms, political structures, and economic systems impacted the development of ideology, culture, and education at that time. On this basis, the differentiation between and within various schools of thought is further explored.

The author repeatedly underscores commonality among various schools of thought, while also analyzing their respective uniqueness. For instance, in the second chapter on pre-Qin Confucianism, after discussing the differences between Mencius' and Xunzi's thoughts, the author looks for similarities. Both philosophers shared perspectives which venerated Confucius and strived to open up outer courses. Internal correlations on topics which the two philosophers highly disagreed upon are highlighted. These topics include the theory of human nature, a debate over the original goodness or evil of human nature, and methods for governance, a debate over wielding morality or violence in governance.

This book integrates the history of philosophy and a vision of political studies. The philosophical history angle observes the development and evolution of historical concepts, doctrines, and ideological systems, while the political perspective focuses on the establishment and operation of political entities including states and regimes.

For example, when discussing the value of *The Han Feizi* in politics, the author compares it with *The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), noting their similarities in terms of human nature's presupposition and the means of governance. "After their birth, the two works were both scolded or banned on the surface, but in fact they became textbooks for autocratic monarchs and worshipped by rulers," the author writes. Such judgments provide a reference to understand the political theories in early classical works, though deeper discussions are required regarding accuracy.

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Scholars shed light on Eastern philosophy at a forum in Jinan, Shandong Province, Oct. 24–25. Photo: FILE

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In Fuller's opinion, the humanities should be future-facing and work towards "Humanity 2.0." Transhumanism and posthumanism are increasingly used to capture alternative futures, and they will become prominent in the humanities in the coming years. The difference between the two lies in whether people should amplify or reduce their differences from nature.

Transhumanism advocates for the enhancement of human intellect and physiology by developing and making widely available sophisticated technologies. Posthumanism says humans should blend with nature as we are just one of the many species co-habiting the planet, Fuller explained. Both theories,

though mutually opposed, challenge classical and even modern views that have anchored humanistic research and teaching. These futuristic visions will have significant implications for the humanities, especially in regard to ethics and philosophy.

Some scholars argue that the role of the humanities is not to describe and construct the world, but rather to develop critical voices who will speak against established notions. This is a radical position, according to Poul Holm, a professor of history at Trinity College Dublin. Holm believed that scholars cannot renounce the reference to reality and truth without compromising their academic positions. Complex problems increase the need to activate all relevant