

Report on the ACPA Shanghai Workshop on Chinese Philosophy and Analytic Philosophy

On June 19-20th, 2009, ACPA and East China Normal University successfully organized an International Symposium on Chinese Philosophy and Analytic Philosophy. As the president of ACPA, I will give a brief report on the conference together with some of my own reflections.

A total of 31 philosophers, coming from Mainland China, Hong Kong, and the United States, presented their papers at the conference. These papers touched on a variety of interesting topics concerning Chinese philosophy and analytic philosophy.

The first set of papers focuses on the nature of analytic philosophy and its historical and present interaction with Chinese philosophy. Chinese philosophers were already familiar with analytic philosophy even at the time of its emergence in early 20th century. Some eminent Chinese philosophers were students or advocates of analytic philosophy. For example, Jin Yue-lin (金岳霖) was deeply influenced by Russell's philosophy, and Hong Qian (洪谦) was a student of Schlick, a key figure of the Vienna Circle. Feng You-lan (冯友兰), though no fan of logical positivism, also applied and endorsed analytic method in his own theory.

A clarification on what analytic philosophy means is needed here. What is called analytic philosophy today is very different from how it was understood in early 20th century. In particular, many claims made by early analytic philosophers (such as Logical Positivists' principle of verification and their rejection of metaphysics, and Ordinary Language movement's doctrine of linguistic analysis) are already abandoned. Yet analytic philosophy is still alive and strong in terms of its methodology. The analytic method is defined by its emphasis on clear and precise logical thinking and expression, and on the articulation and the strength of argumentation. The majority of conference participants agreed that the analytic method is very important and is of great value to the studies of Chinese philosophy. However, there were also some questions raised about whether there are other alternative but equally valuable methodological approaches to Chinese philosophy. One particularly interesting issue is what kind of role personal intuition (or in general, the intuitive method) can play in philosophy. Analytic philosophy, whether looked at from its empiricist tradition or from its scientific influence, is based on the studies of objective and inter-subjective experiences. So there seems to be little room for a personal intuitive method that is confined to one's own private sphere. But quite a few people believe that personal and intuitive experience is of primary importance to understand Chinese philosophy. Whether this tension can be resolved remains to be seen, but there is no doubt this issue has important implications for both Chinese and Western philosophy.

There were also many papers that touch on different aspects of Chinese philosophy. For example, several papers discussed Chinese logic and Chinese language, and quite a few

papers touched on Chinese ethical and political thoughts. These papers exemplified different approaches to these topics. Some authors utilize contemporary analytic philosophy to discuss problems in Chinese philosophy; some philosophers approach the issues from a comparative perspective; and some others tackle these issues within the framework of traditional Chinese philosophy. I was particularly impressed with the efforts of understanding contemporary problems in Chinese society by utilizing resources in traditional philosophy.

There were also a couple of interesting questions brought up by workshop participants, which need to be further explored. One question is how to do philosophy in *Chinese*. Since the initial introduction of Western philosophy to China in late 19th century, almost all important philosophical concepts of western philosophy have been translated into Chinese. Many concepts have no counterparts in traditional Chinese philosophy, and as a result new terms in Chinese language have to be created to express such concepts. The concern, as I understand it, is how we can do Chinese philosophy (in its broad sense) with these philosophical notations implanted from the West. In other words, how can these concepts be integrated into Chinese philosophy itself? This seems to cast some uncertainty on the future development of Chinese philosophy: in order to further develop Chinese philosophy, it seems necessary that we should learn from the history and contemporary Western philosophy; yet it remains unclear how to overcome the linguistic and conceptual barrier between Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy.

The other question is closely related to the theme of the workshop. Analytic philosophy may have a lot of virtues, yet how can analytic philosophy actually help with the studies and development of Chinese philosophy? How can it help to solve problems in traditional and modern Chinese philosophy? There is a similar question on the Western side: what is the value of Chinese philosophy to Western philosophy? Why should we continue to study and teach Chinese philosophy in the West? These two questions are two sides of the same coin, and both need to be answered. On the Chinese side, if we can manifest the values of analytic philosophy to the studies of Chinese philosophy, either from methodological considerations or case studies, it can go a long way to promote analytic philosophy in China and to facilitate future development of Chinese philosophy. On the side of the Western world, we also need to show how Chinese philosophy can help with answering key questions in traditional and contemporary Western philosophy. The true and lasting values of Chinese philosophy depend on the successes of such efforts.