

CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

• PREAMBLE

- Chinese philosophy emerged out of the Chinese people's fundamental beliefs, cultural background, and tradition.
- Three strains characterize philosophical thoughts in ancient China.
- They include intrinsic reverence (Ji) for nature (like heaven) and worship of ancestral spirits via rites and rituals (li), the quest for methodology, and focus on the potentiality and creativity of the human subject.

• PHILOSOPHY IN CHINA

- The strains of thought mentioned above found their way into different periods of philosophical development in China.
- The periods are the classical era, the neo-Daoist and Buddhist era, the neo-Confucian era, and the modern era.

PHILOSOPHICAL DOCTRINES IN CHINA VIA THE PERIODS

• CONFUCIANISM (CLASSICAL PERIOD)

- Confucius anchors his teachings on the *Dao* (i.e., the way of man and the ancient sage-kings) and the *de* (i.e., virtue).
- He underlines that imbibing those virtues would restore and reformulate *li* (rites and rituals) on a social and cultural level and reconstruct the world of human harmony and values.
- Mencius and Xun Zi applied the principles mentioned above.

• Ethical Thoughts of Confucius

- Confucius believes that one can cultivate morals when one eschews vice and practices virtues, especially benevolence.

• Political Thought

- Applying the Notion of benevolence to politics, Confucius emphasized benevolent government and virtuous rule and opposed the government, which depended only on administrative decrees and punishment.

• Epistemology

- Confucius admitted that some people were born with knowledge (i.e., innate knowledge). Such knowledge is accessible through intuition or experience and deduction.

THE METAPHYSICS OF CONFUCIANISM

- The metaphysical tradition of Confucianism unveils a *dialectical understanding of reality as a dynamic presentation of events and things in a universal interconnectedness*.
- The central idea is creative change (*yi, shengsheng*), which manifests itself in the generation of life, in the transformation of states of being, and in the two modes of becoming referred to as *yin* and *yang*, the invisible and the visible, the formless and the formed, the soft and the firm, the creative and the receptive.
- Transformation (*hua*) of things in these two modes of becoming is the subtle creative movement of reality in growth and decline, in an interchange of vital forces (*qi*), which also embodies relevant forms and principles (*li*).

- Hence, any event is concrete and principled, phenomenal and noumenal.
- The phenomenal and the noumenal cannot be separated, and their unity is realized in a cosmological process that is also ontologically understood.
- There is no way to speak of the ontological except by referring to it as the ultimate creative source and origin of the cosmological.
- One can understand metaphysical principles of confucianism on this onto-cosmological notion of consciousness.

- That is why formal academic study is not essential for attaining truth in Confucianism.
- God Himself (conscious being or consciousness) is truth, so whatever consciousness blesses receives the qualities central to it (i.e., consciousness), which are in three layers.
- Each of the **three layers of consciousness** is constructed for analytical purposes and is interconnected since they are different dimensions of the same consciousness.

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- The **first layer, cosmological consciousness**, defines the *objective world of being and becoming for the human person*.
- The **second layer, the consciousness of the human self**, provides a world of human distinction based on the self-reflection of the human mind and heart in which a human self can be uniquely identified in the life world of humanity.

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- The **third layer, political consciousness**, is where the human-self projects or reconstructs an ideal political and practical world of reality in which it (i.e., the human self) realizes its desires for power, creativity, and freedom of action.
- Hence we may regard the three layers as forming an integral part of each other so that any human action and language imparts and receives meaning relative to these three layers.
- So, "God" in Confucianism is an entity capable of integrating these layers of consciousness in its being.
- Hence, we can reach eternal truth, Mencius would say, within this frame of reference.

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- So, consciousness takes an active interest in the welfare and development of humanity.
- It also contains the truth and establishes the true philosophy of life that guides actions in everyday life.
- This stance means that Confucianism is a philosophy of life devoid of belief in an external God (conscious being).

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DAOISM OR TAOISM

- According to tradition, Lao-tzu (Laozi) founded Daoism during China's Warring States period. This school's second most important book is the work attributed to Chuang-tzu (Zhuangzi, 369-286 BCE).
- **Metaphysics**
 - The ultimate reality (i.e., the *Dao*) is the source of all existence, and we can grasp it through mystical experience since it is formless and invisible. Such experience begins with subduing one's desires.
- **Ethics**
 - The most practical advice of Daoism is that of *non-action* (*wu Wei*), also called *effortless action*: everything we do should flow with simple spontaneity and without contrivance (plan).
- **Daoist Epistemology**
 - The epistemological implication of *non-action* is that we should act spontaneously through natural intuition (i.e., *non-mind* [*wu-hsin*]).
 - Our understanding of the *Dao* comes through the practice of *non-mind*.
 - So, we do not need to act to know something since our knowledge is innate or intuitive. That means it is easier to know than to act upon knowledge gained (practical aspect).
 - To judge the veracity of knowledge, one must trace the source of the utterance (justification) and find its situation (context) and put the knowledge into practice since knowing and doing form a unity.

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- **Daoist Political Philosophy**
 - When rulers follow the *Dao* (attitude of non-action), their states will be ordered and in natural harmony
- **NEO-DAOIST (NEO-DAOIST PERIOD):**
 - They concentrated on whether Ultimate Reality is Being or Nonbeing and whether the principle *li* (rites and rituals) underlying a thing was universal or particular.
- **ZEN-BUDDHISM (BUDDHIST ERA)**
 - According to Mahayana's works, this is the Notion of *emptiness*, that all reality is devoid of any discernable content or description. Hence, being empty means that there are some characterless things in reality.
 - Zen-epistemology has it that an agent gains enlightenment when a seasoned teacher transmits something from his mind during training.
- **THE NEO-CONFUCIAN PERIOD**
 - The neo-Confucianists argue that a fundamental principle or pattern (i.e., the *li*) makes a thing what it is together with the *qi* ("vital breath," "pneuma")

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EVALUATION

- Though relevant to the existential conditions of the Chinese people, Chinese philosophy went through a series of modifications such that some of its doctrines have lost their original status.

CONCLUSION

- Chinese philosophy is unique due to its humanistic undertone.

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JAPANESE PHILOSOPHY

PREAMBLE

- Japanese thinkers drew from various traditions such as Chinese and Shintōism, Confucianism, Daoism, and Indian Buddhism.
- The latter, which is the focus of our discourse, was brought to Japan from Korea during the fourth to sixth centuries A.D.

JAPANESE BUDDHISM

- Buddhism is one of the mainsprings of Japanese philosophy. Though originating in India, it spread and adapted to many different cultures like that of the Chinese

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PHILOSOPHICAL DOCTRINES

• Metaphysics

- Yogācāra presents realms of consciousness, namely: a level where a mind is enlightened and unenlightened.
- The former liberates one from ignorance, craving, and delusion when an unenlightened mind begins to practice Buddhism.
- The Mādhyamika, on the other hand, presents the Notion of Two Truths.
- The first or Lower Truth is the accessible, expressible, conventional truth and a necessary precursor to attaining the higher truth, which words cannot express.

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Epistemology

- The distinctive epistemological mood of Mādhyamika is in Japan's Zen Buddhist kōan or riddles (absurd riddles).
- The koan system involves a Zen master having his students answer a series of ridiculous riddles over many years.
- The student liberates his mind from traditional reasoning and ignorance to discover the ultimate reality.

Psychology

- Yogācāra presents the cosmos as the reflection or projection of consciousness.

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Evaluation

- The doctrine of two levels of truth casts suspicion on all verbal formulation. The Lotus Sūtra thereby relativizes the 'truths' of Buddhism and emphasizes the role of magical methods in Buddhist practice, a key feature of Esoteric Buddhism.

Conclusion

- The underlying philosophical basis of Japanese Buddhism owes more to Yogācāra and the Notion of innate enlightenment than to Mādhyamika logic.

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KOREAN PHILOSOPHY

Preamble

- Besides other practices in Korea, Buddhism was prominent.
- Its prominence arose due to its satisfaction with the need for a unified belief system that would reconcile diverse native religious thought and practice and provide a political rationale for the monarch-centred sovereign state.
- Let us unveil its basic tenets in (south) Korea.

Buddhism in Korea

- Korean Buddhism distinguishes itself from other forms of Buddhism due to its attempt to resolve what it sees as inconsistencies in Mahayana Buddhism, its new holistic approach to Buddhism, and its effort to harmonize disputes.
- Its approach accounts for Buddhism in Korea called *Tongbulgyo* (i.e., an interpenetrated form of Buddhism).

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Core Philosophical Doctrines

• Ethics

- Korean Buddhism stresses the importance of compliance with rules to solidify the ethical norms and regulations of the newly established nations.

Metaphysics

- Korean Consciousness-Only School or the Yogacara School, claims that the external world is nothing more than the objectification of inner cognitive activities and that only consciousness and cognition exist.
- Due to cultural diffusion, new perspectives to Korean Buddhism brought fierce debates and disputes that later adjusted to accommodate each other.
- That is why the main feature of Korean Buddhism is integration (i.e., the theory of integrationism).

Epistemology

- Shilla monk Wonhyo (617-686) emphasized that people born with Buddha's mind lost track of the true facet of human existence because of ignorance (i.e., self-centeredness and greed).
- Thus, being in the state of Buddha's mind (enlightenment) is nothing but being in the state of freedom from ignorance and thus returning to the original state of the human mind.
- This stance means that knowledge is possible when one is enlightened (i.e., in the state of Buddha's mind).

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Evaluation

- In as much as Koreans cherish the doctrines of the earlier Korean scholars due to their relevance to their existential conditions, they have today accommodated other doctrines that now give them new perspectives on reality.
- This fact explains why knowledge is progressive and dynamic and never static. Time changes, and we acquire new ideas and develop new perspectives with time.

Conclusion

- Korean Buddhism has contributed much to East Asian Buddhism, especially to early Chinese, Japanese, and Tibetan schools of Buddhism.
- Besides, We cannot underestimate its relevance to Korean *Sitz im Leben*.

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COMPARISON OF THEMES

ASIAN	WESTERN	AFRICAN
Harmonious interpersonal relationship, Panpsychism	Individualism	Ubuntu/ communitarianism/ Ujamaa
Atman (individual soul)	Humans as a composite entity	Vital force as ethereal energy from God which is in every reality
The individual in harmony with all via self-discipline	Individual as a distinct person in community of other individuals	Individual as a person in union with the community
Brahman (ultimate reality)	Monism	communalism
Brahman (ultimate reality, consciousness)	Existentialism (existence precedes essence)	Essence and existence are indispensable. None precedes the other
Acknowledges different forms of knowledge	Acknowledges different forms of knowledge	Acknowledges different forms of knowledge
Reincarnation/ life cycles	Immortality	Reincarnation
Karma	Nil	Nil

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PERSPECTIVES ON METAPHYSICS (ONTOLOGY) IN AFRICA

- The understanding of *being* in most part of Africa is dynamic unlike in the West, where *being* is static and fixed.
- For some African scholars, *Being* is *existence-in-relation*, that is, *being* is force with different essence or nature (divine forces, terrestrial or celestial forces, human forces, vegetable and mineral forces).

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- Western metaphysics defines being as *that which is while being* from African perspective is an *existent force, that forms a hierarchy.*

- The hierarchy represents the modes of the existent force (i.e., being) and they include:

- God—spirits—ancestors—the dead (according to their primogeniture)—the living in their rank—animals—vegetables minerals

- All these beings interact with one another and engage in intimate ontological relationship.

CATEGORIES OF THE EXISTENT FORCE

• UMUNTU

- This is being with intelligence and this includes the human being, spirits, the human dead. This category of being for Kagame corresponds to the Aristotelian category of substance as it is in western philosophy.

- Wiredu, for instance, presents two-part conception of being or Personhood: biological and normative concepts of Personhood.

- He ties the first concept of being or Personhood partially to biological birth.

- The second dimension, the normative conception of Personhood, is based on one's ability to will freely.

- That means one's ability to will freely depend on ethical considerations.

- *If one's free will enables one to show high regard for ethical responsibilities, then the Akan would say that one is a person.*

- *In other words, one is not just born a person alone but becomes one through events and experiences that lead one to act ethically.*

• IKINTU

- This encompasses those categories of being without intelligence.

- They include all forces which do not act on their own but through the agency of force with intelligence.

- Beings here include things like the animals, plants, mineral, inanimate things. They also correspond to the Aristotelian category of substance.