

A Ukrainian Interpretation of Chinese Philosophy in the Soviet Period: A Review of “Chinese Studies in Ukrainian Philosophy of the Soviet Period”

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Rudenko and Liashenko's (2020) “Chinese studies in Ukrainian philosophy of the Soviet period” explores the philosophy and political thought of that time through the study of a Soviet-era book on Chinese philosophy. Their article argues that the content and structure of Dmytrychenko and Shynkaruk's (1958) book “The development of philosophical thought in ancient China” reflects its authors' political education intentions. This analytical argument is comprehensively presented in the paper and effectively articulates the particularity of this Ukrainian book on Chinese philosophy. In this article, I examine Rudenko and Liashenko's paper from the perspective of positivism and of an individual who received a traditional Chinese education. Through a comparison with other books on Chinese philosophy, I discuss Rudenko and Liashenko's argument regarding the materialist historical view of Dmytrychenko and Shynkaruk's book. The lack of excerpts from the original Chinese texts affects the correctness of some interpretations in the reviewed article. Nonetheless, through a dialogue between the two authors and contemporary philosophers, the reviewed article touches upon many philosophical ideas and research topics that are worth reading and studying, especially in terms of socialist philosophy, the historical development of Marxism, and the study of Ukrainian philosophy.

Keywords: Chinese philosophy, materialism, Marxism, reception study, Soviet period, Ukrainian philosophy

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Introduction

The article *Chinese studies in Ukrainian philosophy of the Soviet period* by Ukrainian philosophy researchers Sergii Rudenko and Iryna Liashenko (2020) is a reception study of Chinese philosophy aiming to enhance the understanding of Soviet-era Ukrainian philosophy and Marxism. The article's first author, Sergii Rudenko, is an expert in the study of philosophy in present-day Ukraine, particularly the history of Marxism. This article is one of his representative works. Coauthor Iryna Liashenko is currently a Ph.D. candidate and assistant professor of philosophy. She is an expert in Hegel and philosophical education and history. Their article is primarily an analysis of Volodymyr Dmytrychenko and Volodymyr Shynkaruk's (1958) book *The development of philosophical thought in ancient China*, a philosophy education book of particular significance for the development of philosophy and philosophy education in Ukraine in the second half of the 20th century. This review article is based on the views of a positivist social science researcher who received a traditional Chinese education in Taiwan. This paper conducts a preliminary comparison of the contents of Ukrainian Chinese philosophy books with English Chinese philosophy books and provides suggestions for the interpretation of Chinese literature in the reviewed article.

The methods used by Rudenko and Liashenko to analyze Dmytrychenko and Shynkaruk's book are based primarily on the discourse of Mróz (2016), who argues that the selection of specific information reflects the intention of the selector. The authors also refer to other philosophy researchers' comments on the book and their discussion of the development of philosophy during the period in question to examine the influence of the book at that time. They believe that this Ukrainian Chinese philosophy book introduces the origins of Chinese philosophy and the Chinese philosophy school to prove that the development of philosophy should be diverse and multiorigin and that philosophy education should not be centered on Western philosophy. Rudenko and Liashenko also note that in Dmytrychenko and Shynkaruk's book, Chinese philosophy is mainly seen through the lens of interactive dialectics of idealism and materialism and the differences between dialectical and historical materialism.

Rudenko and Liashenko explain that because the three representative figures addressed by this Ukrainian Chinese philosophy book are Laozi 老子, Confucius 孔子 and Wang Chong (or Wang Ch'ung) 王充 and that the authors of the book classifies Laozi and Wang as materialist and Confucius is idealist, the book places a greater emphasis on materialism. Moreover, they point out that Dmytrychenko and Shynkaruk regard Confucius as an idealist and Laozi as a materialist, considering their respective philosophies diametrically opposed, unlike contemporary scholars, who do not consider materialism and idealism mutually exclusive. The authors also remind readers that since the introduction of Chinese philosophical ideas in the Ukrainian Chinese philosophy book is not based on the author's direct translation of the original Chinese works, there may be errors of understanding caused by the translation process. The discussion of three philosophical research topics at the end of the authors' analysis is worth readers discovering for themselves, especially readers interested in philosophical education, Marxism, and the development of Soviet-era Ukrainian philosophy (Rudenko & Liashenko 2020). Namely, the three topics are the following: "Is it possible today to go beyond the West-centric guidelines in the study of the history of philosophy?", "Are reception studies an effective and reliable method of studying history of philosophy in general and Ukrainian philosophy of the Soviet era and the philosophy of ancient China in particular?", and "Can we trust the texts written by Ukrainian philosophers of the Soviet era about the philosophy of ancient China?"

A review from the perspective of positivism and of an individual who received a traditional Chinese education

Overall, Rudenko and Liashenko's analysis of the structure and contents of *The development of philosophical thought in ancient China* clearly explains the particularity of the book. This particularity lies in its emphasis on materialism, reflecting the ideological environment in socialist Ukraine. Compared to Fung Yu-lan's (1948) *A short history of Chinese philosophy* and Mou Zongsan's (1983) *Nineteen lectures on Chinese philosophy*, two well-known books on Chinese philosophy, Dmytrychenko and Shynkaruk's book clearly attaches greater importance to Wang Chong. In contrast, in Fung Yu-lan's book, Wang Chong's name does not appear in any chapter titles and appears only once in the subtitle in Chapter 18 ('The Ascendancy of Confucianism and Revival of Taoism') and only four times throughout the book. Considering that in his book, Confucius is mentioned 231 times, Mencius 216 times, Zhuangzi 162 times, and Laozi 131 times, it is clear that unlike the Ukrainian philosophers, Fung Yu-lan does not value Wang Chong as much as Laozi and Confucius. Both Fung's and Mou's Chinese philosophy books (Fung, 1948; Mou, 1983) introducing Buddhism and Zen in China receive independent chapters, but Dmytrychenko and Shynkaruk do not dedicate separate chapters to Buddhism and Zen, which may have something to do with the atheism that was championed at the time (Defoort & Zinda, 2010).

In fact, the emphasis on Wang Chong can also be seen in Marxist education in socialist China. Chinese scholars under Communist rule mostly regarded Wang as the earliest materialist philosopher, and Wang Chong's book *Lun heng* 論衡 ("About balance/balanced discussions") questioned many ancient superstitions and fallacies through methods similar to today's scientific argument; indeed, Wang Chong is often referred to by Chinese scholars as a great atheist (Klein & Klein, 2016). In China, ideological education under socialism emphasizes that Wang Chong's role in questioning Confucius's ideas has had political significance, especially in the Cultural Revolution, and that opposition to Confucius's thought is considered political correctness (Reinders 2004). However, Wang Chong may be more of a skeptic focused on logical argumentation and questioning the unnatural parts – similar to what are now known as the "scientifically unverifiable" parts – of the story and discourse about Confucius. It would not be appropriate for us to interpret Wang Chong's ideas as being in total opposition to Confucius or Confucianism (McLeod, 2015).

In their conclusions and discussions, Rudenko and Liashenko's analysis puts forward the idea of eliminating Western centralism in philosophical education; similar discussions can be found surrounding the very definition of philosophy in the study of Chinese philosophy because the term "philosophy" is alien to the Chinese language. There is a lively discussion in the Chinese and international academic community about whether we can study the history of philosophy within a Western framework. Defoort (2001, 2006) has thoroughly discussed whether so-called Chinese philosophy is actually Chinese philosophy or rather philosophy in China. In Taiwan, Chinese philosophical ideas are mostly learned through literature and the classics. The word "philosophy" (哲學 *zhe-xue/tetsugaku*) was a Japanese coinage of Chinese character compounds used to translate Western philosophy concepts and then passed on to present-day China (Chung, 2001; Lee, 2019). Although the Western academic classification was introduced at the end of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), the government was concerned about the invasion of Western thought, and philosophy did not become an independent subject. By comparing the development of the "history of Chinese thought" in Chinese departments

and the "history of Chinese philosophy" in philosophy departments of universities in Taiwan, Tsung-Ting Lee (2019) finds that the textbooks of the two courses are characterized by high levels of overlap, but the history of Chinese thought covers a wider range. The fact that the word "thought" is more abstract and inclusive than "philosophy," coupled with the fact that the latter term is from an alien language, may indicate that discussion of the "philosophy" of the Chinese itself implies a certain meaning and framework, perhaps centered on the West or Western interpretation.

Another issue of which readers need to be reminded before reading the reviewed paper is the Chinese translation. Traditional Chinese is a language and a character system whose pronunciation is as important as its glyphs. Relevant Chinese literature should note the original Chinese text for reference; otherwise, issues related to "one pronunciation–multiple meanings" and "one glyph–multiple meanings" and the variety of transliteration systems (such as the Wade-Giles index, Chinese pinyin system, and Yale index) make it difficult for interpreters to ascertain the meaning of the original text. It should also be noted that studies on ancient Chinese books should use the Traditional Chinese Big5 encoding method for Chinese words. Using the Simplified Chinese GB2312 character set may lead to misinterpretations of the original meaning of ancient Chinese texts.

In Rudenko and Liashenko's analysis, three translations of Chinese words should be noted. One is the distinction between *qi* and *qi* in *Tai-qi*, which can be confused in the rendering of English letters using romanization, since *chi*, *ji*, and *qi* may all represent the same word according to different transliteration systems (Xing & Feng, 2016). *Qi* alone and *qi* in *Tai-qi* look like the same word in both the Ukrainian Chinese philosophy book and Rudenko and Liashenko's analysis, which is confusing (Adler, 2014; Leslie, 1956). The second word to be aware of is *Tao* (or *Dao*, 道), which may have two very important meanings: "truth/principle" as a noun and "make sense/reason/see the truth" as a verb. These two explanations help expand our understanding of what Laozi might have wished to express. Third, the article mentions the two Chinese words *Ming-tzu*, but pronunciation alone does not help determine precisely what they refer to in the original Chinese texts. Without citing the original Chinese text, *Ming-tzu* may mean "Mencius" (孟子/meng-zi/meng-tzu) or "School of Names (Logicians)" (名家 Ming-jia) or anything that sounds alike, which is confusing for the reader.

In future studies, it would be ideal to have a corresponding Chinese text and Roman phonetic display to enhance the interpretation accuracy of the Chinese terms. This is of great importance for correctly understanding the text and its intended interpretation at a given time. For example, the interpretation of Confucianism by Western missionaries may be selective because of religious considerations (Horyna, 2020; Hung, 2003); without the original text for comparison, there will be analytical problems. I believe that this method is critical for the future exchange of cross-cultural values, cognition, and ideas.

Conclusion

Rudenko and Liashenko's article is of great importance for philosophy research and for reception studies. The article's structure is clear, and the authors carefully excerpt important original passages, which are very helpful for the reader. Although there are no original Chinese texts provided for reference, making it difficult to interpret some content, the article makes a significant contribution to the discourse in contemporary philosophy research. I believe that this is a contribution that should not be missed, especially for students of philosophy and Marxism studies and the history of Soviet-era Ukrainian philosophy.

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