

# 1

## Introduction

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### PROLOGUE

That everything changes is a commonplace in diverse religious and philosophical cultures spread across time and space. But even if we accept this adage for the moment, the really interesting question then becomes, what is the nature of the process of change? How are things transformed? What remains the same even within such general transformations, if anything at all? This concern with change and its process is not a new philosophical insight. At the beginning of the Greek adventure in philosophy, Heraclitus made his famous observation about not being able to step into the same river twice—“Everything flows and nothing abides; everything gives way and nothing stays fixed. You cannot step into the same river, for other waters and yet others go flowing on” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 359). Whitehead once quipped that you probably could not step into the same river even once. Whitehead’s particular contribution to the discussion of the universal reach of process is partially defined in the famous category of ultimate as creativity: “Creativity’ is the universal of universals characterizing matter of fact” (Whitehead 1978, 21). A moment later Whitehead glosses creativity as “the principle of *novelty*” (21). Commenting on the vast range of opinion about change or process, Nicholas Rescher writes in his short introduction to the history and praxis of process metaphysics: “Process metaphysics as a general line of approach holds that physical existence is at bottom processual; that processes rather than things best represent the phenomena that we encounter in the natural world about us” (Rescher 1996, 2). Gordon Kaufman, from a theological perspective that would have been appreciated by Mou Zongsan (1909–95), writes, “We do not know why or how creativity comes about: it is a profound *mystery*. The mark that identifies the occurrence of creativity is its

*consequence*: something strikingly *new*, something *transformative* has come into being, has become a significant feature of the ongoing world” (Kaufman 2006, xiv). Like so many other primordial philosophical insights, the concept of creativity is a perfect example of a vague general category that is specified in many different fashions. Yet one thing is clear: something new, novel, transformative, and transforming marks the mystery of creativity.

Nonetheless, Dorothy Emmet’s conversation with a philosopher friend captures the difficulty to specifying just what “process” can possibly mean (remember that Emmet was one of Whitehead’s first and foremost students). “When I remarked to a philosopher friend that I was wanting to think about processes, he rejoined ‘A process is just one damn event after another.’ I didn’t think it was; indeed it was the difference between processes, facts and events or just things changing that interested me” (Emmet 1992, 1).

At the other end of the Eurasian landmass, Kongzi Confucius 孔子 also opined that a river runs on constantly and later exegetes took the master to be observing by his cryptic remark the constant passage of nature as a form of process. “The Master was standing on the riverbank, and observed, ‘Isn’t life passing just like this, never ceasing day or night?’” (*Analects* 9.17).<sup>1</sup> Of course, it is a stretch to relocate from Kongzi’s Zhou dynasty Shandong riverbank to Whitehead’s Charles River in the contemporary American city of Cambridge.

The point that Heraclitus sought to make (we think) was that there is a pattern of change that governs the flux of the world. “All things come to pass in accordance with the Logos” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 360). In their commentary on the pre-Socratics, Lakoff and Johnson note that we find three great metaphors for the essence of philosophy in this early period that endure throughout the history of Western philosophy. These are: essence is matter; essence is form; and essence is patterns of change. They give rise, à la Stephen Pepper’s theory of root metaphors (Pepper 1942), to classical materialist, formalist, and process metaphysics (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 363). In some respects, Kongzi may be even more process-oriented than Heraclitus, because he does not seek the logos of change amid the other structures of life, but merely notes that life and the river are in constant flux. However, it is as difficult to know precisely what Kongzi intended to teach as it is to explain the cryptic saying of Heraclitus. One could also argue that the Buddha even founded a whole religious reform movement on the fact that nothing ever stays the same.<sup>2</sup>

However difficult comparative philosophy is, we are driven to make comparisons between currency exchange rates when we travel and different ideas when we encounter them.<sup>3</sup> Second-generation cognitive science scholars such as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that all human thought is based on the use of metaphor. Metaphors are engines of comparison; hence, we are caught in a double bind. Postmodernists and critical theorists are worried about all the potential problems of comparison done in blissful ignorance or bad faith, and yet we cannot escape the act of comparison. This is a delicious

irony for postmodernism when one stops to think about it for a moment. Notwithstanding his qualms about the magical shortcomings of comparison, Jonathan Z. Smith considers that comparison is essential to the study of the history of religion; what Smith asserts is that we need to use comparison responsibly and with as much critical self-awareness as we can muster.<sup>4</sup> We all compare, and we all want to make our comparisons as accurate or correct or interesting as possible. These days we also do not want the domination of taxonomies wherein we force our own prejudices willy-nilly on the philosophical categories and religious ideals of other people. Our global city is a place, we hope, of informed and compassionate dialogue at the very least. We might not practice the perfect art of comparison, but we do not want to be caught out being naive about what a good comparison might look like.

In the philosophical and theological arts, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Chinese intellectuals and educated professionals already have appropriated or are appropriating the best of the Western philosophical traditions. On the other side of the Pacific, Western intellectuals have lagged behind this kind of intercultural exchange, though this is gradually beginning to change as more and more philosophers and theologians become fascinated by the revival of various Asian cultures and philosophical and theological traditions. Although I will confine myself to examples drawn from the rich scope of Chinese thought, the same argument holds for engagement with the worlds of South Asia (Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Jain, and Sikh) and the Middle East—not to mention the riches of what has been labeled “traditional wisdom” in Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Oceania. Actually, what is really needed is an awareness of what Ninian Smart calls “world philosophies” (1999) as inclusive of the best of human thinking from any continent and many islands. It is time that Western philosophers and theologians engage “other worlds” so that such new intellectual suppleness might, in the end, make them more effective “game players” in the pluralistic matrix of the modern world.<sup>5</sup>

#### COMPARATIVE NARRATIVES: THE PARITY OF NATURAL COMPLEXES

The simplest comparative way forward would be to compare and contrast these classical, early modern, and modern Chinese and Western expositions of the trait of process to find out their similarities and differences.<sup>6</sup> However, chastened by criticism by scholars such as Jonathan Z. Smith and Lloyd and Sivin (2002) that such unreflective comparison, however interesting it might be, is methodologically unsound, some account of why such a comparison of significant traits is possible is in order. If we accept Whitehead’s argument about the importance of the analysis of the trait of process within any adequate speculative philosophy as a working comparative hypothesis, then there is a warrant for proceeding with a cross-cultural comparison of selected Chinese and Western texts and traditions.

Prudence suggests that when comparison is made across cultures, a vague general category, following Neville's (2001a, 2001b, 2001c) discussion of vagueness based on Peirce, is a useful intermediary step before the specifics of the comparison are investigated. The examples will be selected texts from the Chinese Confucian and Daoist traditions and the American naturalist tradition, of which Whitehead's process philosophy is a stellar example. Moreover, I have decided to choose a specific philosophical notion from the work of Justus Buchler to serve as a vague general comparative category. I announce my choice for a pragmatically useful comparison, but I will not mount a full defense of the choice until the final chapter. My reticence is based on a pragmatic consideration. The proof the value of the choice of Buchler's category of a *natural complex* will become clear if and only if the choice of the concept of natural complexes is shown to have worked to evoke a successful comparison of the role of the trait of process in philosophies as diverse as Whitehead's speculative cosmology and Liezi's romp through the various orders of the Dao 道. Both the Dao and Whitehead's cosmological notion of creativity would be examples of natural complexes qua vague general terms in Chinese and Western philosophical discourse.<sup>7</sup>

Buchler opens his essay on metaphysics with the following lines: "Whatever is, in whatever way, is a natural complex. The entire sequel, in a sense, amplifies the statement" (Buchler 1990, 1). The two phrases, "in whatever way" and "in a sense" ironically even parallel the double negations of the *Daodejing's* reflections on the Dao and name(s). As we shall see in chapter 4, Chen Chun (1159–1223) defines the Dao in the following manner: "Tao is the way. Originally the meaning of the word was a path, and path means a common road for people to walk on. If it is meant for only one person, it cannot be called a road" (Chen Chun 1986, 105). Slightly later Chen adds, "Tao is not external to things and affairs as something empty. In reality Tao is not separate from things" (107). Hence, whatever is, is a natural complex, or, as Chen would say, affairs and things (*shi wu* 事物) that need to be endlessly connected to other things and affairs and that can be endlessly ramified by walking along the path of the Dao. But my comparative rhetoric is getting ahead of the path as a natural complex we will traverse together.

Another reason I have chosen Buchler's notion of a natural complex as the vague general comparative concept is that, at least according to Buchler's own account, a natural complex has both ontological and cosmological implications. Neville (1992, 1995b, 1995c), for one, has been highly critical of Whitehead's version of process philosophy because it lacks an ontological dimension. According to Neville, Whitehead has provided us with a brilliant cosmology, but this is only half of what counts for an adequate speculative philosophy in the Western tradition (Berthrong 1998b). Neville maintains that an adequate speculative philosophy must embrace both cosmology and ontology. If Buchler's notion of a natural complex helps to show how philosophies of process as diverse as Xunzi's classical Confucian discourses, Liezi's

Daoist speculations, Zhu Xi's and Chen Chun's *daoxue* 道學 (Study of the Way), and Whitehead's system can generate an ontological trait to parallel their processive cosmologies, then the notion of a natural complex will have played a very important comparative role between classical Confucianism, Wei-Jin (220–316 CE) Daoism, Song *daoxue*, and modern American naturalism. We will return to the ontological question in chapter 5.

At present all I can do is anticipate the arguments that will follow about how the notion of a natural complex helps to tease out both the cosmological and ontological traits implicit in Song and contemporary Anglo-American process thought. I will return to a dialogue among the three forms of Chinese philosophy and contemporary American naturalism in chapter 5.

### TEXTUAL CONTENTS

As the twentieth century turned into the twenty-first, many other scholars, following the lead of Joseph Needham, began to notice and explore the processive nature of Chinese thought.<sup>8</sup> The notion of process, postulated as a secondary concern in Western philosophy and philosophical theology—a thesis that will be tested in the following chapters—was discovered to be a major theme of Chinese thought. By any fair descriptive measure, certain Chinese philosophers, separated in time and divided by genealogical loyalties in the Daoist and Confucian wings of Chinese culture, did have a place for process in their philosophies and worldviews.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, I was delighted to discover that Mou Zongsan asserted that process or “creativity itself,” as he would define it, was a foundational trait informing all of Confucian thought (Mou Zongshen 1994, 31–32, 53–54). Because Mou has been recognized not only as one of the founders of the New Confucian movement but also as perhaps its most important systematic philosopher in the twentieth century, I felt confirmed in my search for process themes in Confucian discourse.

So after having discovered that Mou Zongsan postulated a vital role for process as creativity itself in Confucian thought, I formulated the following problem: How do we go about explaining its functions both in Chinese philosophy and in traditions of Western Modernity<sup>10</sup> such as the philosophical and theological school of thought inspired by Whitehead? And what would this Chinese version of process possibly mean for modern Western philosophical understandings of creativity and process philosophy and theology? I am challenged by Nicholas Rescher's (1996) hypothesis that process is indeed a part of a great deal of Western thought and did not have to wait for Whitehead to explain it to us.<sup>11</sup> If I am correct, Whitehead's firm enunciation of the role of process in the cosmos would have been both comprehensible and appreciated by many Chinese intellectuals, ranging from classical thinkers of the Zhou dynasty, Wei-Jin savants, and Confucian revivalists of the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing periods, to modern New Confucians—as well as to assorted Daoist and Buddhist intellectuals.

Of course, the Chinese Confucian or Ruist tradition 儒學<sup>12</sup> is as diverse as the Western philosophical tradition. In order to escape vacuity of reference, I will focus my attention on three specific Confucian and Daoist thinkers and spend most of my time on the Confucians. My major Confucian interlocutors are drawn from the classical and the neo-Confucian periods—namely, Xunzi, at the end of the Warring States period, Zhu Xi, and Zhu Xi's student Chen Chun in the Southern Song. However, in order to avoid the unwarranted hegemony of the Confucian voice, I will also devote a chapter to the Wei-Jin period text of the *Liezi*.<sup>13</sup> I will, of course, defend these choices in later chapters.<sup>14</sup>

Moving forward to the contemporary scene, one of the particularities of the modern world has been the explosion of information, of which comparative philosophy is only one protodiscipline seeking to find a place among the voices of a contested postmodernity. If we cannot even understand the complexities of the canonical Western tradition, what hope is there for comprehending something as strange as Confucian, Daoist, or neo-Confucian ontology, cosmology or axiology? It is scant support to remember that Montaigne (Toulmin 1990), at the very beginning of Western Modernity, was excited by the discovery of peoples and forms of thought from around the expanding world of the sixteenth century. Nonetheless, timidity has never been a great virtue in philosophical discourse. Prudence might make us hesitate before launching into new oceans of thought before we have even plumbed the depths of the Western heritage, but faintness of vision has never been one of the characteristics of the modern Western world. The positive caution is, again, the legitimate concern for scholarly rigor, the persistent desideratum to compare apples to apples and oranges to oranges and only compare them as exemplars of fruit.

I will defend the claim that it is more and more pressing to develop responsible methodologies for comparison among worldviews from different philosophical and religious cultures in the modern world. This has a pragmatic component: like mountain climbers taking on the Himalayas and the Alps, philosophers compare and contrast rival visions of intellectual structures of human cultural creativity because they are there. Intellectuals indulge in comparative praxis sometimes for nothing more than the pure joy of comparing Xunzi with Aristotle or Augustine (Stalnaker 2006), or Laozi and Zhuangzi with the skeptics, or Zhu Xi with Whitehead (Berthrong 1998b). The permutations are legion and governed both by taste and the magic of an illuminating comparison, which can have the same impact as a really lively metaphor. But as with all the arts, some comparisons make more sense than others, and some comparative methodologies help to make for better, more rigorous, and more responsible comparative acts. Finally, in the pragmatic mode, given the shrinking nature of our ecumenical world, we had better learn to compare, contrast, and appreciate our different philosophies and religions if we have any hope of living in a peaceful world. Although good comparison will not end international and intercultural conflict, it is hard

to envision any reduction of tension without better understanding based on responsible comparisons.

## WORLD PROCESS

One of the new insights of global scholarship in history and economics is that history and economics must be truly global in scope. For instance, André Gunder Frank (1998) urges the writing of a truly ecumenical or universal economic history. Frank makes the case for a unified world, or at least a unified Afro-Eurasian economy, long before the “rise of the West.” He contends that, in fact, the rise of the West to economic dominance was only made possible by two other ecumenical conditions. First was the European conquest of the Americas and the concomitant discovery of vast amounts of silver and gold. Frank notes that the plundered silver reserves of the New World were the price of admission of the West into the flourishing economy of the East. Second was the fact that the East—that is to say, primarily India and China—had created a huge interregional world of trade that allowed for the rise of the West economically. Moreover, Frank notes that the West only became a dominant partner in this Afro-Eurasian trading world in the early nineteenth century. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the traditional dominance of Asia, and most specifically China and the wider East Asian world, began to assert itself yet again. If Napoleon was correct that China is a sleeping giant dragon awakened only at risk to Western notions of the self and society, then the transformations could be as great and dangerous in the intellectual world as they already are in the economic domain. Buddhism, for instance, is the most rapidly growing religion in North America. Does this mean that the importation of Nissans, Subarus, and Toyotas signal the arrival of Buddhism, Vedanta, Daoism, Shinto, and Song-style neo-Confucianism into the mind of the West? No one really knows, but if silver and gold flowed east along with theoretical baggage, then perhaps ideas will now flow west along with tangible goods.

On a deeper level, some kind of comparative methodology is necessitated by the very act of cross-cultural comparison. Just as with all other cultural domains, there are good comparisons and bad comparisons, magical or dull in their turn. Ultimately what makes for a good comparison is the new light that it throws on one or both of the parties being compared. Good comparison can lead to an increase of human knowledge. It can also lead to the reduction of intercultural social gaffes. We can all learn what color flowers to send to weddings and funerals after having learned that American and East Asian understandings of appropriate colors for joy and sorrow are different. For instance, white is sign of bereavement and should definitely not be sent along to a joyous Chinese wedding.

The art of comparison requires sensitivity to the creation and management of comparative categories. Even though we are all human beings, and equal in

that respect, it is not likewise clear that we are all theists or atheists in our own ways. What counts as a good work in Confucian thought needs to be compared meticulously to what would count as a good work in Christian theology. Sometimes we will find a convergence, but in other cases we will find divergence and diversity. The diversity of what counts for human flourishing among different cultures should cause us to pause and ask if the comparative categories we are using to illumine the contrasts are good ones—that is, whether they work to bring clarity rather than further darkness and confusion.

Of course, the range of traditions that pay careful philosophical attention to the root metaphor, prototype, hypothesis, trait, or motif of process in what is loosely called “Asian” thought could be expanded greatly beyond even our test cases of Xunzi, Liezi, and Zhu Xi and his disciple Chen Chun. For instance, within the Chinese cultural world, the diverse set of traditions collectively known as Daoism are prime candidates for honorable mention as foundational texts and schools of process thought along with Confucianism. In fact, when talking about the early classical Chinese world that gave birth to the Confucian tradition, it is impossible not to mention its dialectical twin, Daoism. In the later periods of the development of Confucian thought in the Northern and Southern Song, the massive influence of Buddhism on the neo-Confucian revival makes it impossible to consider the neo-Confucians without a sidelong glance at their Buddhist cousins. The only excuse for not discussing neo-Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism together is that such a comparison is pragmatically unfeasible, given the question of scope (and that publishers are nervous about printing books too large to sell).

In an appendix, “The Alchemy of Process,” I will explore another neglected pathway of process thought within the Western world. This is the world of Western esoteric, occult, theosophical, or magical religion. This esoteric tradition, albeit often unnoticed, ignored, scorned, and repressed, extends from thinking in the ancient Near East to the modern New Age movement. While many other students of process thought have already shown its extensive roots in the mainline history of Western philosophy and theology, I want to explore the world of what Dame Frances Yates (1979, 1986) has called the history of occult philosophy and theosophy. There was and is always something worrisome about looking into those subjects; nonetheless, there are certain features of the history of occult philosophy, especially beginning with Ramon Llull in the thirteenth century, that merit our attention. Llull, who lived and was inspired by the religious and philosophical pluralism of the Spain of his day, helped to introduce the Cabala into Christian theology.<sup>15</sup> His style of thinking had a great impact, as we shall see, on various Renaissance thinkers and through that tree of learning, down to the world of contemporary New Age religion. While these connections with the Western esoteric tradition may not endear process thought to orthodox Christian theologians, it is an interesting and perhaps not-so-minor footnote to the expansion of our understanding of the interest in process themes in Europe and beyond.



One fascinating feature of the occult and esoteric philosophers of early modern Europe is their ecumenical openness to other philosophical and religious traditions. Although many of these thinkers remained, at least according to their own lights, Christians, they demonstrated a marked willingness to consider dialogue with the Jewish and Islamic worlds. For instance, one of the main features of the early modern occult movement was the creation of a Christian Cabala in which there was always an element of spiritual practice. The more orthodox Christian authorities were always worried that these occult philosophers were too much interested in magic—especially evil ritual magic—but this element of praxis would have been perfectly comprehensible to various strains of the Chinese tradition. But then, Confucians were used to dealing with their Daoist cousins, the occult masters of the Chinese world.

### THE PROTOTYPE OF PROCESS

The cooperative duo of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, with Lakoff representing linguistics and cultural analysis and Johnson philosophy, have written a number of influential studies focusing on the topic of metaphor (1980, 1999). Edward Slingerland (2003) has creatively applied the Lakoff-and-Johnson method of metaphor analysis or “philosophy in the flesh” to a set of early Chinese philosophical texts. Of course, the study of metaphor has a storied history in the development of Western thought; Aristotle would hardly be surprised by the perennial fascination shown by philosophers, literary critics, and even theologians with the supple and pervasive role that metaphors, living and dead, play in our collective cultural sensitivities. Stephen Pepper (1942) wrote about the “root metaphors” that govern all philosophical systems whether or not the metaphors are recognized as the roots to alternative worldviews as such.

While philosophers and theologians have acknowledged more than a passing interest in the role or rule of metaphor in thought and life, there has also been a countervailing opinion about metaphoric influence. As Plato portrays him, Socrates fought a long battle against the sophistic tradition and rhetoric in general in his constant search for a strict definition of virtue and true knowledge. The dialectical argument of Plato is that merely giving a facile account of a virtue or a cracking good metaphor will not do. What we really need is the clear articulation of principles to order thought, action, and passion. This is also a story told by David Hall and Roger Ames, as well, in terms of what they call first- and second-order philosophical sensibilities.<sup>16</sup> According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), there are literally “metaphors we live by”; hence, I can assume that Whitehead’s system is a prototype *sensu stricto* that can be used to focus attention on what constitutes an ecumenical global family of process philosophies *sensu lato*. I will demonstrate how reflection on the Chinese Confucian and Daoist material helps us move from

a strict to a wide sense of process thought, and how the Chinese discourse can interact creatively with modern Western philosophy and theology.

The collaborative and individual work of Lakoff and Johnson is attractive for the investigation of Chinese thought because of reasons intrinsic to its own form and because of the way it throws new light on certain features of Chinese thought (Slingerland 2003). The first reason is that metaphoric analysis takes us to a vague and yet specific level; metaphors are general enough that they sometimes make sense across cultures, and when they are too culturally specific to be readily understood beyond the culture of origin, they provoke in us the desire to perform acts of multicultural hermeneutic. Secondly, the study of metaphor does not claim logical universality, yet it does point to very concrete human proclivities for action and reflection in the lifeworlds of individuals and communities. Moreover, many generations of modern critical students of Chinese thought in general and the Confucian and Daoist traditions in particular have noticed the extensive use of metaphors as a basis for philosophical argumentation. I will argue that metaphoric analysis (my label for the philosophical work of Lakoff and Johnson) provides an intriguing segue into the cross-cultural study of ecumenical process thought. Of course, the proof for this assertion, as with other such hypotheses announced in the introduction, will only become evident over the course of the book.

Because some younger scholars are only now attempting the specific link between Lakoff and Johnson's metaphoric analysis and the Chinese traditions in any systematic way,<sup>17</sup> I would like to outline the reasons for this methodological approach to cross-cultural hermeneutic. First, metaphors, although often specifically culturally and historically located, are, if Lakoff and Johnson are correct, about as foundational to human language and culture as any item in the human communicative repertoire. Metaphoric analysis holds that metaphors literally structure the way we feel, think, and act—we really do need to walk the road of the Way, as the Daoists and Confucians would say. Second, building on this initial premise of the role of metaphor in all human interactions, is the oft-noticed proclivity for Chinese philosophers to use stories and metaphors to make their intellectual points.

I will argue that the Lakoff-and-Johnson theory of metaphors and its application to the use of metaphors in Chinese thought is not related to the old theory that Chinese thinkers do not have anything resembling Western general theories. This old bromide stated that Chinese philosophers had recourse to metaphors as rhetorical devices because Sinitic traditions lacked any sustained theory of the rational articulation of thought in the way the West had Aristotle's theory. Of course, as scholars have continued to analyze and even discover more and more texts from the Zhou period, it has become clear that some Chinese philosophers, most notably those associated with the lineage of Mozi and the later Confucians and Legalists, were perfectly capable of articulate reasoning and the logical presentation of their various cases. In the Confucian tradition, Xunzi adapted the Moist logic for his own Confucian purposes.

Truth be told, most Confucians, following Mengzi (Mencius), did not like to enter into the logical world of Mozi but were forced to do so in order to defend “this culture of ours.” Notwithstanding the general lack of interest in following either the Moist school or Xunzi’s style of carefully reasoned essays, clarity of thought was as highly prized in China as anywhere else, as we shall see in the work of Zhu Xi and Chen Chun.

My thesis is that although there is plenty of vagueness and lack of precision in Chinese intellectual life, there is nothing in the manner that Confucians or Daoists articulate their worldview that is less coherent than the discourses of any other great culture if we understand the Confucian Way as a vast tradition spanning time and even as an international movement with significant outposts in Korea and Japan.<sup>18</sup> It is simply vastly different from the forms of respectable discourse developed in the European, Islamic, Buddhist, and South Asian cultural worlds. Chinese thought is an intricate interlocking array of natural complexes and root metaphors to live by.

One of the reasons why Western scholars have had difficulty in recognizing the typical Confucian patterns of reasoning is that so much of the best Confucian thought has been devoted to the writing of commentaries ever since the founding of the Han dynasty in the second century BCE. Lloyd and Sivin (2002) have also given some cogent thought to the social location of the famous early Chinese thinkers and to the question of why they used certain genres in explaining their insights into the world. Perhaps this is why many modern Western intellectuals also overlook the rich resources of medieval Western theologians who also often did their work in the commentary mode. Moreover, very little of this vast East Asian commentarial tradition has been translated into any European languages and remains locked away in the records of the voluminous battles between Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese scholars about the various levels of meaning to be found in the Confucian canon. I have always felt that it was regrettable that someone like Zhu Xi did not follow Xunzi’s example in writing topical essays explaining contested points of theory and practice; but this is just a perfect example of my modern Western proclivity for a certain format in philosophical presentation.

When Confucians seek clarity about some matter—say, for instance, the proper form of a family ritual—they can do so with a precision that would make Emily Post proud. Zhu Xi was as famous for his easy-to-understand compendium of rituals (Chu 1991) as for his philosophy; surely, more people made use of his rituals for family life than of the intricacies of his philosophical speculations. No, it is not that the Confucians lacked the tools of intellectual precision or logic; rather, Confucians were concerned with topics different from those often thought to be fundamental to any serious Western philosophy. Some Chinese thinkers, such as the medieval Buddhist theoreticians of the Tiantai and Huayan schools, could be as metaphysical as any systematist anywhere in the world (Ziporyn 2000). As we shall see, Xunzi and

the great Song neo-Confucian Zhu Xi also had systematic inclinations when they thought it was necessary.

The Daoists provide a counterpoint to the Confucian view of a well-ordered world of sages and their commanding rituals. The Daoists will have none of this Confucian pomposity. Because of their rejection of Confucian orderliness, some scholars have argued that the classic Daoist texts of the late Zhou period are irrationalist in nature. However, I will argue, based on the work of scholars such as A. C. Graham (1992b) and others, that what we find in the best of Daoist writing is not irrationalism, but rather an antirationalist sensibility. Irrationalism and antirationism might look alike but are decidedly different beasts. Our excursion into the *Liezi* will show this side of Chinese thought.

#### MOTIFS OF GLOBALLY ECUMENICAL PROCESS THOUGHT

It is now proper to ask a basic question: What do we mean by process thought? What does a process prototype look like? The first reason for not attempting a concise or strict definition of the term or tradition(s) should be obvious by now. Whitehead often made the point that in complex matters we should distrust the simple and seek the obscure or complex for the simple reason that the obscure might be shadowy but more congruent with the reality being described. The great Wei-Jin *xuanxue* 玄學 Dark Learning masters would have agreed (Ziporyn 2003). The second reason is that I have been convinced by the work of Lakoff and Johnson that it makes more sense to begin the process of definition by providing a set of metaphors than a strictly logical and exhaustive definition of process thought. The third reason derives from the second. If one expressed aim of this book is to expand the ecumenical global reach of an extensive definition of process thought, then we would expect that something new might be added to the definitional mixture by the inclusion of Chinese material. Of course, nothing might be added by that addition, but the outcome will be obvious only after the attempt has been made.

In Western philosophy, Nicholas Rescher has provided us with a starting place for constructing a prototype in *Process Metaphysics: An Introduction to Process Philosophy* (1996). Rescher, while deeply appreciative of Whitehead's achievement, argues that process philosophy is a phenomenon wider than just the movement begun by Whitehead. Rather, Rescher notes that we can find motifs anticipating modern process thought beginning among the classical Greek philosophers. As Rescher moves into the modern period, he lists pragmatic theorists such as Peirce, James, Bergson, and Dewey as major process thinkers alongside Whitehead.

After his historical review, Rescher provides a list of six basic themes and ideas of process thought *sensu lato*. In framing his synopsis of process traits, Rescher states: "*The characteristic feature of process philosophy is its*

*stress on the primacy of activity—and on the range of associated factors such as time, change, innovation, and so forth. It maintains that these conceptions are not just necessary but even basic to our understanding of the world*” (1996, 27; italics in the original). Along with these fundamental two motifs—the primacy of activity and the concomitant need for themes such as change and innovation—Rescher (27–49) lists four other key traits for any process philosophy *sensu lato*. I will list all six motifs in bullet form because they provide us with a starting point for identifying the range of what counts as process thought.

*Rescher’s List*

- primacy of activity
- necessity of change and innovation and so forth
- the internal complexity of change and development
- the idea of process entails various characteristic distinctions concerning change and development over time
- substance is subordinate to process
- the real is processual and things are what they do

*Additional Themes and Motifs*

- pluralism
- relationality

I add two more basic traits to Rescher’s list in anticipation of the expansion of process thought beyond the European cultural world—namely, the themes of pluralism and relationality. Most process philosophy *sensu stricto* and *sensu lato* is pluralistic and hence also interested in the relationships of natural complexes. The patron saint of the seventh trait of pluralism within process thought is William James. It is hard to have process without a plurality of occurrences and things, to use Rescher’s formulation of process pluralism. According to Rescher, “[T]he overarching neutral category of *existent item* or *entity* or *individual* branches out into two realizations: *things* (substances) and *processes* (activities)” (1996, 34). However, the inclusion of pluralism as a seventh basic idea of process thought will need to be defended during the rest of the book.

The eighth basic theme is relationality or the connections of the various natural complexes. I have added this in deference to the Confucian and neo-Confucian traditions. The modern New Confucian philosopher Mou Zong-san has suggested that a prime characteristic of all Confucian thought is what he calls “concern consciousness”—a profoundly pluralistic form of connective axiology (1994, 19). Moreover, Rescher details how important various doctrines of relationality are to diverse Western process philosophers. I think that Whitehead would have appreciated the addition of the theme of relationality. In *Modes of Thought* (1938, 229–30) he reminds us of the Quaker admonition to have a care or concern for each other and for the created order. This

is a statement of the profound relational and axiological nature of process thought. For instance, if we affirm a pluralistic universe, it stands to reason that we will have to explore the relations between the creatures of a pluralistic cosmos, even if these relationships are judged to be trivial in nature, or as profound as they often are for *daoxue* thinkers such as Zhu Xi and Chen Chun. Furthermore, it is hard to see how concern consciousness for self and others does not imply pluralism. If there is not something or someone to be concerned about, why bother?

In the spirit of the project of expanding Rescher's discussions beyond the examination of process in the various Western traditions, what are the kinds of semantic terms common the Confucian and Daoist texts and contexts? Ames and Rosemont (1998, 281) have a very useful discussion of five key Chinese terms for change. These five are:

*gai* 改 (to change, alter, correct, amend, or reform)

*bian* 變 (to manifest gradual change over time)

*hua* 化 (the trait of transformation such that one thing becomes something else)

*qian* 遷 (to change from one place or aspect to another)

*yi* 易 (to exchange one thing for another); also, part of the title of the essential text, the *Yijing* 易經 (*Book of Changes*)

To this list I would also add terms such as:

*ziran* 自然 (the primal trait of spontaneity)

*sheng* 生 (birth or generativity); often quoted from the *Yijing*'s famous formulation *shengsheng buxi* 生生不息 (ceaseless generativity)

*shi* 勢 (the transformative efficacy of things and events)

*wei* 偽 (the active art of contrivance); especially important for Xunzi

*Ziran* is extremely important as a marker for change or transformation in the tradition of the *Zhuangzi* and the *Liezi*—and actually for all elite Chinese intellectuals, including the Song *daoxue* scholars. *Sheng*, as Mou Zongsan has argued over and over again, represents the key notion of fundamental change as a critical trait of the cosmos in the whole Confucian tradition.<sup>19</sup> François Jullien (1995) has devoted a whole monograph to the philosophical exposition of the notion of *shi* as the dynamic power of efficacy, yet another important demonstration of the role of the trait of process in the Chinese cultural world. And as we shall see, *wei* as artful human contrivance is a critical notion for Xunzi.

Rescher goes on to provide an interpretation of the basic motif of process. "A process is a coordinated group of changes in the complexion of reality, an organized family of occurrences that are systematically linked to one another either casually or functionally" (1996, 38). Moreover, processes develop over and in time, according to Rescher. Process has a "developmental, forward-looking aspect" (39). Rescher also has a good method

of distinguishing two major modes of process—namely, those that produce “things” and those that produce transformation among things or events. There are “*product-productive processes*” that create the kinds of things that we call concrete objects or substances. The other modality is “*state-transformative processes*” such that what are changed are the various present configurations of reality in order that further processes can occur. Here Rescher gives examples such as windstorms and earthquakes. The great Southern Sung neo-Confucian Zhu Xi adds, as we shall see, another set to the state-transformative processes—namely, the inclusion of events such as refined ethical rituals. According to Zhu, an appropriate ethical response to a complicated personal situation has as much claim to concrete reality as a bowl of steaming rice.

Rescher adds another key motif for process thought *sensu lato* by differentiating *owned* and *unowned* processes. Owned processes “are those that represent the activity of agents: the chirping of birds, the flowering of a bush, the rotting of a fallen tree” (1996, 42). Unowned processes, in contrast, do not represent the actions of any specific actor. Rescher’s examples of unowned processes are “the cooling of the temperature, the change in climate, the flashing of lightning, the fluctuation of a magnetic field” (42). The Chinese tradition, as well as others, may have some problems with the notion of unowned processes. From Zhu’s vantage point, the Dao as the Way of Heaven owns all processes—or better, all processes are integrally related as manifested in the Dao. Perhaps Rescher’s point is better expressed when he notes: “Not every [unowned] process can be seen as consisting, in the final analysis, in the activities of one or more things” (43). As we shall see, individual principles or *li* for Zhu are representative of the Supreme Ultimate as the highest expression of all coherent principle in general.<sup>20</sup>

Rescher continues his discussion of basic ideas of process thought, but for our purposes, the present list, as expanded to include various Chinese terms, provides us with a prototype of what process philosophy is in its modern European (and Chinese) guise. Rescher’s work, to borrow from ethnography, is both emic (internal to the tradition) and etic (external to the tradition). It is an emic account because Rescher approves of many of the original themes of process philosophy and commends them to other modern philosophers. It is etic because it is not biased toward any one version of the process tradition; for instance, Rescher does not privilege Whitehead as the sole prototype of process philosophy. In short, Rescher provides a benchmark against which other philosophies can be measured in order to decide if they are part of the process family or merely close relatives. Of course, it may also be necessary, from time to time, to add additional motifs to Rescher’s list when we move into the worlds of classical Confucian, Daoist, and neo-Confucian discourses. But before we deal with the three specific Chinese thinkers and movements, we need to reflect more on the nature and scope of comparative nomenclatures and methods.

## THE QUESTION OF NOMENCLATURE

Before we launch into our investigation of the trait of process in Xunzi, Liezi, Zhu, and Chen's thought in the following three chapters, we need to examine the question of nomenclature for describing the Confucian and Daoist traditions. This may seem somewhat pedantic, but it is not, especially because of a recent spate of discussions about the status of Western categorical constructs such as Confucianism and Daoism when compared to the Chinese materials in question. The crux of the matter is that some quite reputable scholars have now argued that there are no such things as Confucianism or Daoism to be found in East Asia—these are pure categorical fictions conjured up by the Western imagination. The argument is, not to put too fine a point on it, that these are traditions invented by Western scholars in the nineteenth century. And if these are mere Western inventions, we cannot pretend that these terms can pick out anything that has coherence within traditional Asian cultures.

The intellectual and social historian of Japan Harry Harootunian, has extended the argument beyond the invention of specific world religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Daoism, and Shinto to the very notion of Asia itself. "It has been one of the enduring ironies of the study of Asia that Asia itself, as an object, simply doesn't exist. While geographers and mapmakers once confidently named a sector on maps, noting even its coordinates as if in fact it existed, this enmapped place has never been more than a simulacrum of a substanceless something. . . . I have always felt that the Association of Asian Studies periodically brought specialists together in order to reaffirm the existence of what clearly is a phantom" (Harootunian 2000, 25).

Harootunian is making the same kind of point that Zhang Longxi (1998) has made about markers such as Confucianism and Daoism. We need to be careful about mistaking our terminology concerning philosophical and religious traditions for something of ontological or cosmological reality.

The problem is that we have become accustomed to these terms, rather like the way Professor Henry Higgins becomes accustomed to faces. When I talk about Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism with my Chinese colleagues, they know what I am talking about, either using Modern Chinese or English. Modern Chinese intellectuals have developed perfectly good neologisms or have refurbished older terminology to match what Western scholars call Confucianism or Daoism; words such as *rujiao* 儒教 or *rujia* 儒家, for instance, are used in the case of Confucianism. What in the West is designated "neo-Confucianism" is now simply called *xin* 新 *rujiao* or (neo-Confucianism) to distinguish the Song revival from the classical thinkers of the Warring States period. This does not mean that my Chinese colleagues are not sensitive to the kinds of definitional questions I am raising. They are concerned, but they are ecumenical comparative scholars who are as steeped in the Western study of philosophy and religion as they are in the study of Chinese intellectual history.



I will return to a longer examination of the Daoist side of things in the chapter on the *Liezi*. Besides, scholarly concerns about the nature and history of texts and the definition of traditions and religions would strike the Daoist sages like *Liezi* as a very Confucian conceit. Texts, just like everything else in the world, are self-creative or autotelic when you come right down to it. Whatever order we find, we humans impose it from our limited personal perspectives, like frogs looking at the sky from the bottom of a well and defining the sky as a very small blue ball. Zhuangzi made the point once that when you use a finger to point at the moon, you should not keep looking at the finger once you have sighted the moon. The moon and finger have other uses. Who cares who wrote the texts? The point is the point, maybe—if you can figure out if there is a point to be made in any case.

No one is arguing that there is nothing in East Asia that resembles the common understanding of “Confucianism” as the term is now commonly understood in scholarly circles in the Euro-American world and in China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Whole libraries are full of works that deal with Kongzi, Mengzi, Xunzi, Dong Zonghu, and all the Song, Ming, Yuan, and Qing revivalists—as well as the writings of generations of Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese followers of the Confucian Way (Berthrong 1998a; Yao 2003). What is at stake is the scholarly definition of the term “Confucian” or “Confucianism.” Another variant of the problem with finding proper names is the already lengthy debate about whether or not Confucianism (or Daoism) is a religion.<sup>21</sup> There are those who maintain one side of the contest with great vigor. The crux of the matter is how one defines religion. If we take the model for religion to be that of Western Asia in general and Christianity in particular, then it is hard to see how Confucianism can be called a religion. It lacks so many of the marks of a true Christian church that it is hard to see how the name “religion” can be applied to it. However, most historians of religion have now learned to move beyond the strict confines of Western Christian history in order to define religion.

Mark Edward Lewis (1990) provides one of the most original and persuasive accounts of the rise of the “Confucian” school. In a brilliant reexamination of the development of Chinese intellectual culture from the Shang to the end of the Han dynasty, Lewis alternates between using the Chinese term *ru* 儒 and the English form of “Confucian” or “Confucianism” (see also Puett 2001, 2002). Lewis is well aware that there is nothing quite like what modern Western and Chinese scholars take to be Confucianism in early China. The term that comes closest to Confucianism is *ru*. However, Lewis further demonstrates that there is not a perfect fit between the Chinese notion of *ru* and the English term “Confucian.” “Confucian” would actually be a specialized subset of the *ru*—that is, scholars who see themselves following in the steps of Kongzi in contradistinction to other scholars following teachers such as Laozi, Zhuangzi, or Mozi, for instance. Even the definition of *ru* is contested; suffice it to say that it came to identify a rather ill-defined group of ritual

specialists and scholars during the long development of the Zhou dynasty. Later it became more and more a term for disciples of Kongzi, Mengzi, and Xunzi. I commend Lewis's meticulous account of this story for the details of the vicissitudes of the history of the development of *ru* as a marker for a group of scholars with a particular pedigree.<sup>22</sup>

A direct descendant of Kongzi, Kong Zigao (312–262 BCE), responded with the following definition of what it means to be a Confucian: “Prince P'ing-yüan said: ‘From where is the term “Confucian” derived?’ Tzu-kao (Zigao) answered: ‘It is derived from the idea of the combination of the various exquisite virtues, and the conjoining of the six arts, such that whether in action or repose he never loses the core of the Way’”(Ariel 1989, 135). This definition comes from a text at least as early as the *Liezi* and shows that a descendant to the master had a pretty good idea of what it takes to be a *ru* or Confucian.

However this might be in terms of the history of the English terms “Confucian” and “Confucianism,” it is good to remember the sensible words of Xinzhong Yao, the editor of the newly published multivolume encyclopedia of Confucianism. He writes that

“Confucianism” is never a clear-cut notion that can be defined in terms of one or another western discipline. Like all other Eastern traditions Confucianism contains within itself multidimensional ideas and ideals, ethical, political, religious, philosophical, educational, etc. These values are intertwined with each other, and are explored and manifested in Confucian doctrines concerning human nature and destiny, familial relationships and virtues, community norms and disciplines, social structure and political cohesion, and religious beliefs and spiritual practices. In history, Confucian ideas and ideals were the basic way of life in China and other East Asian countries, and to some extent they continue to function as such in modern times. (Yao 2003, 1:5)

Although the term “Confucianism” does lack a specific and clearly defined Chinese counterpart, generations of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese scholars have had a sufficiently accurate sense of intellectual self-identity that they have been able to distinguish their teachings from those of Moists, Daoists, Legalists, and Buddhists with clarity. Whatever else they were, they were *ru* scholars.<sup>23</sup>

#### PROCESS, SCEPTICISM, AND NATURALISM

The more I reflected on the text of the *Liezi*, the more I became convinced that two other philosophical themes or traits are linked to the cross-cultural expansion of the comparative history of process thought—especially in its Daoist manifestation as a decidedly skeptical turn of mind. These two are skepticism per se and its close cousin, relativism. Although it is hard to think of Zhu Xi or Whitehead as skeptics, in highly circumscribed epistemological

terms Whitehead, at least, actually is one. “But, putting aside the difficulties of language, deficiency in imaginative penetration forbids progress in any form than that of an asymptotic approach to a scheme of principles, only definable in terms of the ideal which they should satisfy” (Whitehead 1978, 4). In short, we must be skeptical about any final claims of dogmatic certainty. “There remains the final reflection, how shallow, how puny, and imperfect are efforts to sound the depths in the nature of things. In philosophical discussion, the merest hint of dogmatic certainty as to finality of statement is an exhibition of folly” (xiv). This kind of epistemological modesty is not a flaming skepticism that denies we can know anything with precision, but rather a warning about thinking too highly of the mind-heart’s ability to provide us with a perfect philosophical dictionary. Whitehead never denies that we cannot know all sorts of things about the world, and that some of these conclusions are much more accurate than others. Nor does Whitehead ever suggest that we suspend all judgment about the world. Rather, Whitehead pleads for humility about the range and scope of human cognition and about any claims to finality in terms of metaphysical insight. And while Zhu Xi thought a sage could comprehend the principles of the myriad things and events of the world, he was also aware of how difficult such comprehension was and that the world was an endlessly complex, growing, and changing array of the ceaseless interplay of the generativity of the yin and yang forces. Sages can also make mistakes; but what makes a sage a sage is that the sage then tries to correct her or his mistakes.

In the Chinese philosophical tradition, skepticism and Xunzi and Zhu Xi are not often linked. Being “Ruist” philosophers, both are probably mild skeptics at most; their skepticism is somewhat like that of Whitehead, although different in important respects, as we shall see. They believed that we can learn a great deal about the world, and what we can learn is more than enough to cultivate personal and social morality. They simply were not interested in the kinds of epistemological questions that gave rise to the skeptical tradition in the West. For instance, Zhu Xi may not want to be a skeptic, but this does not mean that the burden of his reflections on human knowledge do not conduce, at least in modern terms, to a skeptical or restrained epistemology when compared to other Song, Yuan, and Ming thinkers such as Wang Yangming and his followers. Zhu Xi knew a lot but also realized that the world was a vast place and that there were always new things to investigate. If investigation never really stops, then a certain mild skepticism is in order. Nonetheless, Xunzi and Zhu Xi, when compared to the author of the *Liezi* and Whitehead, are hardly skeptical of their world at all. To claim perfection in terms of their own cultivation would have offended against Confucian humility and deference, but it was clear nonetheless that if they were skeptics at all, they were mild ones.

The second theme that trails along after skepticism is relativism. Here again, there is nothing strange about noting the relativistic tendencies of

the classical Daoist texts such as the *Liezi*. Moreover, Ruist scholars likewise have always recognized the need for sensitivity to context and perspective, and this lends their thought a mild relativist cast in the sense of awareness that judgment must always allow for sensitivity to the context of a situation or the perspective of the witness. Whether this Ruist relativism is merely the recognition that all things are related to all other things and events or is expressive of a more robust relativism such as found in Protagoras is something that we will explore in later parts of the book. This realism expresses itself in terms of what Justus Buchler calls ordinal naturalism in the sense that each thing is related to other things or events via its position in the various orders of nature.<sup>24</sup>

Although Zhu Xi defines the world in terms of a realistic pluralism based on and nourished by an ethical axiology that can be defined as an ordinal (relational) naturalism (Kim 2000), it is much harder to see how Zhu Xi can then move to a strong form of epistemological skepticism as some kind of logical entailment. As Joseph Margolis (1991) has argued at length, a philosopher can defend a robust version of relativism and yet not succumb to epistemological skepticism. According to Margolis there is no automatic logical path leading from Protagoras and the other Sophists to the teachings of Sextus Empiricus.

While Margolis is correct in warning the unwary about jumping from relativism as a mild form of skeptical cognition to a complete suspension of any opinion, Scharfstein is also equally prescient in noting that such jumps from philosophical position to philosophical position do happen with enough frequency to warrant curiosity about why this categorical drift takes place. Scharfstein buttresses his argument (1989, 1998) by carrying out his research in the history of philosophy in a comparative fashion, noting that these kinds of connections between process and the other traits do exist in India and China as well as in the West. Of course, merely piling up examples drawn from different cultures over the last three thousand years does not make a conclusive philosophical case. As Jonathan Z. Smith has repeatedly warned (Patton and Ray 2000), it could be just another example of the magic of comparison. It does, nonetheless, provide material for examining why certain ideas are affined to others, even cross-culturally. As the Indian philosophers are fond of saying, when we see smoke, can fire be far behind? There is perhaps no necessary connection between seeing smoke and finding a fire, but more times than not, there will be a fire somewhere.<sup>25</sup>

My initial hypothesis is that realistic pluralism is one key categorical natural complex or root metaphor, aided and abetted by an emphasis on the role of process for my Chinese and Western exemplars. The point is not hard to fathom. If there are many things or events, then they will stand in various relations one to another. They will be “relative” to each other for no more astounding reason than that they are plural and hence in some kind of relation to each other (Emmet 1992). This was the basis for Whitehead’s own version of