

Introduction

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In Chinese philosophy, Realism is best understood in contrast to Idealism. Realist approaches rely on situations as they present themselves, and people's characters, as they are. Realists put forward theoretical and philosophical resources to deal with reality, not to change it. For example, if an agent is self-interested, the Realist wastes no time deploring this trait of character but invests in developing ways of using it. Realist philosophers throughout China's history famously relied on rewards and punishments because they recognized that self-interested agents like the former and dislike the latter. The Idealist, in contrast, aims at establishing situations that resemble a philosophical ideal, developing agents' characters in light of ethical desiderata. When confronted with the self-interested agent, the idealist works to change this suboptimal character trait, aiding the agent to develop more virtuous dispositions.

It was perhaps Arthur Waley who first argued for the label "Realist" to be applied to the *fajia* adherents. Marcel Granet and Herrlee G. Creel, on the other hand, used the term "administrators" to refer to this school, while Alfred Forke called them "*Staatsphilosophen*." Contemporarily, *fajia* is usually rendered as "Legalism." However, as this volume sets out to explain, the Realist strand of Chinese political philosophy expanded beyond those thinkers who are now labeled as Legalists.¹ As a consequence, and contrary to much contemporary popular discourse, not all Chinese philosophy is about changing human nature. Many classical sources study human nature as it is and develop moral, practical, or political philosophies based on it.

Adventures in Chinese Realism showcases such Realist streaks in Chinese philosophy. As such, it is an ambitious volume exploring early and classical Chinese philosophy and applying it to contemporary issues. The different chapters—written by a diverse and inclusive set of authors—bring together a multifaceted discourse spanning different philosophical schools, academic disciplines, times, and cultures:

- The chapters herein are primarily philosophical investigations into Chinese Realist philosophies—foremost Legalism and Daoism—and the challenges they posed to Idealism, especially a variety of strands of Confucianism.
- At the same time, these chapters apply Chinese Realist frameworks to contemporary issues such as business ethics, Chinese meritocracy, and hegemony, among other things.
- In applying these Realist frameworks, the chapters of this volume cross the boundaries of philosophy as an academic discipline and engage in constructive dialogue with several others, particularly political studies, cultural studies, and international relations.
- When addressing global non-philosophical topics using the analytical tools of Chinese philosophy, this volume puts forward a way of doing philosophy comparatively that transcends the differences of “East” and “West,” looking for both similarities within differences and differences within similarities.
- Certain chapters focus on how to handle early Chinese philosophy, its texts, and authorship, thus advancing a range of methodological issues that should be of interest to the specialist and generalist alike.

The diversity in Chinese philosophy is at the heart of this volume. Instead of including a brief outline of each chapter in this introduction, two appendices showcase the integrative-didactical approach pursued here. Appendix 1 relates the chapters of this volume, making direct and indirect connections among them explicit. Appendix 2 details on a chapter-by-chapter basis how to use this volume in classes. Each chapter is related both to a series of philosophical topics and to a series of contemporary issues in social philosophy, democracy, business ethics, and more.

HOW THE MATERIAL FITS TOGETHER

The various chapters in this volume are purposefully diverse so as to provide multiple perspectives. However, there remain common threads running through all chapters. Specifically, all chapters are investigations into Chinese Realist thought. While they may examine different instantiations of Realist thinking, each chapter either pivots around one or compares a selection of them. In doing so, this volume not only showcases the inner differentiation of Realisms in Chinese philosophy but also offers insights into individual thinkers and their relations with one another.

Additionally, all chapters are applications of Realist thought in a wider context. Most chapters utilize a Chinese Realist framework to engage with contemporary issues, and some chapters apply it as a critique or as a reform program for Chinese political thinking. In doing so, this volume showcases the timelessness of Chinese Realism. While the appendices relate the chapters with one another, with other philosophical questions and with contemporary applications, specific footnotes indicate particularly relevant relationships among chapters.

Instead of introducing each chapter here, we offer some thoughts on the overall organization of this volume. Chapters 1 to 6 reflect the application of Chinese Realist frameworks on contemporary issues, such as international relations (Chapters 1 and 6), regulation of corporations (Chapter 3), the power of the executive branch (Chapter 2), and the structure and reform of the meritocratic state (Chapters 4 and 5). The second half of this publication (Chapters 7 to 10) applies Chinese Realisms to more conceptual questions of ordering the polity and leading the state. These questions are in principle timeless but also apply to contemporary nation states. They refer to language, meaning, and its importance in the bureaucratic system (Chapters 7 and 8); the risk of a self-referencing bureaucracy (Chapter 9); and the logical structure of punishment (Chapter 10). Finally, Chapter 11 serves a range of purposes. As well as asking how to use legal language appropriately, it is also a discourse on philosophical methodology, and it provides an outline of how the authors in this volume approach the reading and interpretation of the Chinese texts that they examine (see below).

SOME NOTES ON THE TEXTS AND LANGUAGES

When discussing early Chinese philosophy, special attention should be paid to its underlying texts. We are used to referring to the oeuvres of

early philosophers as books. Historical and Sinological evidence, though, show that they were not texts composed by single authors with an intended design. Rather, they are collections of writings and sayings. Not infrequently, these writings and sayings are attributable to one author who lends a name to an eponymous book. But in each of these collections, many other texts and sayings are also included. The early compilers naturally thought these materials belonged to the teachings of the idealized author. While this intent at preserving and expanding a text's spirit provides philosophers with "food for thought," it poses several challenges for textual analysis. In this volume, we opt for a pragmatic way of dealing with this conundrum. We accept the early compilers' decision to include additional material as part of a text. We treat the various texts under investigation as the outcome of an ideal authorship, as bodies of work whose materials belong to a common spirit. The philosophical underpinning of this approach is explained in Chapter 11, Al Martinich's "Ideal Interpretation of Political Texts."

This volume is directed to a broad audience. For this reason, we have decided not to use Chinese characters. Chinese philosophical terminology is transcribed into Pinyin and italicized. We have also opted for Chinese-Pinyin naming conventions. Thus, Confucius is rendered as Kongzi, Mencius as Mengzi; however, we have maintained the Latinization when adjectives are used, and the authors of secondary sources are listed with their preferred Romanization. Book titles such as the *Daodejing* and the *Han Feizi* are written in the Pinyin transliteration and italicized, whereas names of people are not in italics. (It is worth noting that the suffix *-zi* can be translated as "master." Therefore, *Kongzi* means Master Kong. It is from *Kongzi* or *Mengzi* that the Latinization into *Confucius* and *Mencius* occurred. The case of [the] *Han Feizi* is more complicated. While the book is usually referred to as the *Han Feizi*, the person can be rendered as Han Fei or Han Feizi. In order to clarify the distinction, we opt for rendering the person as Han Fei and the book as the *Han Feizi*.) Other than these editorial guidelines, we allowed authors to keep their individual style, namely concerning their choice of translations.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Finally, and happily, the editors would like to express their sincere thanks to the Hayek Fund for Scholars for its financial assistance. SUNY Press

editors Michael Rinella and Ryan Morris, anonymous peer reviewers, and Jessa Ramsey's proofreading were also essential to this volume. Most chapters have been presented and discussed in several workshops organized by the editors. These were the group sessions of the Pacific meeting of the American Philosophical Association in the years 2015–2018, as well as the Conference of the International Society for Chinese Philosophy in 2017. The authors and editors wish to thank the participants at these sessions for their feedback.

For the editors, and hopefully for the reader, the adventures in Chinese Realism begin here.

NOTES

1. Eirik Lang Harris, "Legalism: Introducing a Concept and Analyzing Aspects of Han Fei's Political Philosophy," *Philosophy Compass* 9, no. 3 (2014).