

ORIGINAL PLANNING FOR A SINO-GREEK CLASSICAL PHILOSOPHY MEETING AND RESEARCH PROJECT

Greek and Chinese philosophy is a vast subject and best would be to opt as a core event for a high-powered, very focused Symposium on a part of it of multiply special significance. The choice is facilitated by the extraordinary coincidence in chronology of the peak periods of most original thought-production in the two cultures, their “classical” achievements being encompassed between, say, 600 and 300 BCE. Salient themes of an equally remarkable parallelism in the respective philosophical development of theses within the interval that may be profitably selected for treatment are:

1) Cosmogony, the origin of the world from a principle (an infinite, ineffable one in particular, as e.g. in Anaximander and in Tao Te Ching).

2) Cosmology, fundamental structure of the Universe: Yin-Yang polarity (Tsou Yen) and Pythagorean Dualism: the doctrine of the Five Forces and the Empedoclean Four Roots-Elements, with their subsequent articulations. Tao and Logos. Dualism-in-Monism.

3) Man and the World. The fundamental convergence of natural and human systems: the corresponding coimplication of (Meta)physics, Politics and Ethics.

4) The doctrine of the Mean, the role of the Best (aristos) and the cohesion of society. Merit and obedience. The Confucian “propriety” and the Platonic “oikeiopraxis”. Individualism and Utilitarianism.

5) The question of the inherent legitimacy of Power in e.g. Shang Yang and the Legalists on the one hand, some Sophistic thinking on the other. Positive Law and Natural Self-Regulation.

6) Problems of strict Rationalism. The logical “paradoxes” of the Dialecticians in China (e.g. Hui Shih, Kung-Sung Lung) and Greece (late Eleatism, the Megarics and related tendencies).

These threads may be gathered up under a title like:

THE WAY AND LOGOS OF COSMIC HARMONY AND OF HUMAN ORDER: IDEAS OF RATIONALITY IN GREEK AND CHINESE CLASSICAL PHILOSOPHY.

We may add to the list the topic (7) of philosophical thinking on the theory of human activity, of its motivation, end, economic organization and monetization.

A longish duration should be envisaged for such a Symposium, given the complexity of the issues and the virgin ground that of necessity will have to be covered in bringing together those two mostly incommunicable up to now fields of study (despite a few brave attempts at bridging them). Two-hour sessions (half of it devoted to the presentation of a single paper and the other half to discussion on it) have been proven very fertile in similar high-level meetings. The development of a meaningful on-going debate will require at least 10 days in this case, including time for appropriate side events of an archaeological or cultural nature. about 15 scholars is a good number for an integrable process.

It is possible to realize this colloque in the context of a broader conference meant for wider audiences. That would allow for a reasonable, coherent extension in the areas to be covered. More aspects of the field circumscribed could be added as well as other dimensions in the comparison of the two philosophical cultures introduced, leading beyond the limits of the classical periods. For instance, for the more ancient era comparison may be instituted between Chinese poetry of the Book of Odes and roughly contemporary Greek Epics, with regard to their respective world – and life-views. And at the other end one may follow the philosophical history of basic groupings of classical thought in postclassical times. Later syncretisms are usually very revealing. The impact of Buddhism on the one hand upon Chinese thought and on the other of the Eastern cultures and Christianity upon Greek thought, as well as the modifications undergone by philosophical outlooks, mentalities and views as a result of the imperialisation of China and of the Greek world under Rome are other possible important areas of collaborative research. But such amplifications of the core meeting proposed above, entail a tremendously

large event that has to be very carefully planned if it is not to become chaotic. Best would be to envisage carrying it out in a sequence of appropriately organized symposia and conferences.