

Nietzsche and Chinese Thought

Prologue by James Luchte

Often when we think of Chinese thought, we immediately are transported to the ancient philosophies of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. Moreover, when we juxtapose Chinese thought with the German philosopher Nietzsche, we tend to think of the latter philosopher's relationship with ancient Chinese thought. In this way, we have had many comparisons and contrasts between Nietzsche and specific Chinese thinkers, such as Laozi, Zhangzi, Confucius and Siddhartha. There is an established literature of such engagements between ancient Chinese thought and the early and later philosophies of Nietzsche.

Yet, such engagements remain incomplete if we are to understand the complexity and living relationship of Nietzsche and Chinese thought. After all, what is Chinese thought? Did the Chinese only think before the fall of the dynastic monarchy in 1911? In *Nietzsche and Asian Thought* (1991, University of Chicago Press), a collection of essays edited by Graham Parkes, the latter already explores the early Nietzsche reception in Japan, and its 'Nietzsche Fever' of 1903, and David Kelly lays out the topography of Nietzsche's influence upon China in 'Nietzscheans' such as Lu Xun, the founder of modern Chinese literature, and Li Shicen, a philosopher in the May Fourth Movement, and details the history of Nietzsche scholarship in the China of the 20th century. These essays contribute to an understanding of the living relationships between European philosophy and that of contemporary China.

In light of the contemporary reality of Asian thought, the essays in this section do not seek to merely rehash the comparisons and contrasts between Nietzsche and ancient Chinese thought. On the contrary, the essays are expressions of contemporary Asian thought upon the *topos* of Nietzsche's relationship with China.

The first essay, by Wang Shunning (Department of Philosophy of Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, China), ‘Tranquillity as the Essential Word of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*,’ contests the significance and meaning of intoxication as it has been emphasized in Western scholarship. From a contemporary Daoist reading, she contends that tranquility is the highest transfiguration of intoxication, and that Nietzsche transforms his focus from music in the narrow sense to the tones of life in what she calls ‘pan-musicalization.’ Tranquility is the goal of life and it is a state that is achieved only by the one who creates his own values, away from the crowd.

The second essay, by Soraj Hongladarom (Department of Philosophy, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand) maintains the contemporary perspective through a challenge to Nietzsche’s understanding of Buddhism. Hongladarom claims that Nietzsche lacked a textually sound interpretation of Buddhism and suffered from his reliance upon the glosses of Schopenhauer, who maintained a ‘dual world’ perspective on Buddhism. Hongladarom claims, however, that, despite these misinterpretations, Nietzsche’s philosophy has more of a kinship with Buddhism than he himself would have admitted, especially with respect to the question of nihilism. The essay seeks to create a relationship between the Buddhist aversion to suffering and Nietzsche’s emphasis upon that which is useful for life. Such a reading requires a re-interpretation of the basic relationship between Buddhism and Nietzsche.

In the third essay, ‘Daggers and Spears: Lu Xun and Nietzsche on Cultural Revolution,’ James Luchte (Department of Philosophy, Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, China) engages in the longstanding and bitter contestation of the relationship of Lu Xun and Nietzsche. Luchte begins with an account of Lu Xun’s reading of Nietzsche and many other poets, philosophers, and writers from Russia, England, America and Europe. It was through these readings, especially of Byron and Shelley, that Lu Xun articulated his conception of revolutionary literature and cultural revolution in his early pre-1911 essays.

Luchte then challenges those who would seek to dissociate Lu Xun from Nietzsche with what he calls the ‘Nietzsche caricature’ that still persists in many accounts of Nietzsche. In light of the shared focus upon revolutionary creativity between Nietzsche and Lu Xun, Luchte turns to Lu Xun’s early essays which announce a Chinese literature *to come*. Luchte next engages with this modern and revolutionary literature, which only began to appear seven years after the 1911 revolution. Lu Xun’s ‘daggers and spears’ were used to laugh the remnants of the old order out of existence. Luchte then turns to Lu Xun’s controversial essay, ‘Literature of a Revolutionary Period,’ in which he tells cadets that literature has no place once the fighting has begun. Luchte closes with a consideration of the existential difference between Nietzsche, the writer, poet and composer, travelling around Europe on his pension, and Lu Xun, the revolutionary republican and Marxist who directly engaged in revolution – but a difference which is merely a fulfilment of Nietzsche’s call to his fellow creators, ‘This is my way! Where is yours?’