



Newsletter No. 5, September 2020

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MESSAGE FROM THE NEWSLETTER EDITOR

All scholars and friends interested in Chinese philosophy can feel the very special situation that is unfolding before our eyes. Special circumstances require special newsletters.

The board of the EACP considers the present newsletter as particularly important as a way to stay in contact with our members. The well-written report from our president will address our general situation, as well as giving an overview over the events of the past EACP conference in Ghent.

For the first time in the history of the EACP, this newsletter will contain an essay: a special contribution by Jana Rošker entitled “What is Virism and how is it connected to Chinese Philosophy”, which we are very grateful for.

It is good to know that academic activities dealing with Chinese Philosophy are still continuing in these times, often shifting to an online format. You will find a few announcements on the final pages of newsletter. If you know of more activities in the field, feel free to inform the board or the webmaster, so that we can spread the information via the EACP mailing list.

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**NEXT NEWSLETTER ISSUE:
May 2021**

**DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS:
April 15 2021**

REPORT FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear EACP members!

This fifth newsletter of our European Association of Chinese Philosophy is brought to you in a time that is challenging for many of us. Juggling between caring for our families and friends, home schooling our kids and operating Zoom meetings, we have discovered every nook and corner of our homes. No time for voyages, one would think. In *À la recherche du temps perdu*, however, Marcel Proust famously described the “only true voyage” as “not to travel through a hundred different lands with the same pair of eyes, but to see the same land through a hundred different pairs of eyes”. To be fair, some of you might have started to question whether Proust has really thought through this sentence, once the land has suddenly shrunk to the walls of your home. Others might have had no time or energy for such musings, just dealing with the difficulties day by day and trying to make oneself useful.

Under the given circumstances, our last conference in Ghent (September 5–7, 2019) might seem like a distant

thought, but it is good to remember the wonderful event our association staged under the skillful and efficient organization of Ady Van den Stock and Bart Dessein, the keynote addresses by Leigh Jenco and Wen Haiming, but also the engaged panels and discussions and the many encounters with old and new friends. At the general meeting of our association in Ghent, we had the opportunity to thank a group of esteemed board members, namely Bart Dessein, Lun Du, Jana Rošker and Vytis Silius, for their service in the past five years. They have been with the association from the very beginning, and we count on their continuing support and advice. Jana Rošker, who has been nothing less than the driving force behind the founding and the operation of this association, became the first honorary member of our association. In Ghent, we also welcomed new members of a now extended board. We look forward to their inputs, ideas and energy in advancing our association and its goals.

In September last year, as we sat together in Ghent, we looked confidently forward to a board meeting this year at the EACS conference in Leipzig to discuss and prepare our association’s next biannual conference in beautiful Macerata, Italy, to be organized by Selusi Ambrogio in 2021. Well, today, Leipzig has been postponed for a full year and we are left with no other choice than to wait and see how the pandemic will evolve. We hope for the best, while we prepare for different kinds of scenarios. The biannual conferences are of course a fundamental cornerstone in the building of our asso-

ciation. In the future, we will have to explore additional channels of communication (digital and non-digital) to intensify our scholarly exchanges and maximize the benefits an association can provide.

As is of little surprise for an association like ours, the events surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic have had an extraordinary impact on many of our members at both personal and professional levels, as has the evolving crisis and standoff in Hong Kong. As we all know, the practice of studying Chinese philosophy does not occur in a vacuum, but brings with it a relationship to China (however conceived), through all sorts of personal contacts and experiences, traveling activities and often prolonged stays throughout the region. Individual tragedy, communal hardship, the current strains on public health and the politicization of the events have quite unavoidably troubled our minds. Many of us, each from his or her different positionality, have felt a sense of responsibility to reflect on the events and offer our thoughts to friends and colleagues or to a wider public. In these times, it is certainly difficult if not impossible to separate one's professional interests from the urge to become active and engaged. Whilst our association is not political and certainly knows no shared ideological agenda other than the commitment to the fundamental value of academic freedom and independence, it is as opportune as inherently meaningful to use this moment for a critical self-examination of researching Chinese philosophy in a connected world. Jana Rošker offers exactly this in her

thought-provoking essay exclusively written for our newsletter.

Let me end by thanking everyone who offers his or her time and thought for the well-being and improvement of our association, in whatever capacity that might be. This newsletter has been put together again by Christian Soffel, who deserves special mention and gratefulness. It will be good when and if we can all meet again, non-virtual eye to non-virtual eye. Having trained in our homes ad nauseam to multiply a hundred times our one pair of eyes, we will hopefully put our new sight rather sooner than later on Macerata – and reunite and discuss again, as always, but certainly as never before.

Ralph Weber, EACP president

4th BIENNIAL CONFERENCE OF THE EACP

**MACERATA , ITALY,
SEPTEMBER 2021**

At the last EACP conference in 2019, it was decided that the **4th Biennial Conference of the European Association for Chinese Philosophy (EACP)** as well as the General Assembly will take place at **Macerata University (Italy)** in early September 2021. Currently, the board is still planning to hold this event as a regular conference in this time frame, and the correspond-

ing preparations are on track. More details will be communicated to the community in the upcoming months.

WHAT IS VIRISM AND HOW IS IT CONNECTED TO CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

**An Essay by Jana Rošker
(Ljubljana University)**

Essentially, this short essay is about connections. In this text, I will first ask the question about the actual connection between the outbursts of the Coronavirus on the one, and of certain new forms of racism and Sinophobia on the other side. Then, I will also raise the question about the connection between the so-called “Chinese virus” and the so-called “Chinese philosophy”.

If we add up the concepts of virus and racism, we acquire a new compound *Virism*. Hence the title. But *Virism* is not only an abbreviation and a combination of the two concepts discussed here, but also an attempt to formulate (and in this way, illuminate) that, which connects them. So what actually connects this new virus and racism? Since I live in Slovenia, I had the opportunity to closely observe and experience this connection on the basis of my everyday life in this small provincial society. But I nevertheless believe that my experiences and observations are not very different from the ones ob-

tained by many of my colleagues and friends who live in other European regions.

What the new virus and certain new forms of racism have in common in our current time and space, is definitely the fact that they both originated in a specific region, namely in China. It was there that the deadly Coronavirus was born, it was there, where it began to grow and to develop, to spread among the people, until it reached a scope and an intensity that called for the end of silence. At the very same time, it was no longer possible to hope that it will be killed if only all Chinese people would ignore it stubbornly and long enough.

Even before the outburst of the virus, racism in Slovenia was often targeted against the Chinese people. Of course, they were never the only victims of Slovene racism; in this tiny little country, racist remarks are also much too often and all too generously torpedoed against all other people whose appearance—at the very first glance—suggests that they do not belong to “us”, but rather to a foreign, that is, a strange and unknown part of the world. And yet: Chinese people are certainly anything but the most popular persons among the immigrant population. The social quotients of Sinophobia are rising much faster than the ones defining other forms of Xenophobia. In fact, I often feel that Chinese culture is continuously being pulled down towards the lowest end of a long chain of gradually negative valuations, in which each subordinated category is being pushed further into the background, further away from ourselves, far away

from civilization, to a faraway place somewhere beyond the actual boundary that separates humans from animals, to a strange, almost bizarre place in which one can forget the fact that we are all *animal rationale*.

The media, both classical and social, bear a great responsibility for the growth of such stereotypes and prejudices. What does the average Slovenian person really know about China and its people?

On the streets, they are already accustomed to the daily encounter of exhausted Chinese migrant women and their burnt-out spouses. In recent years, these often invisible social strata were fortunately to a great extent replaced by crowds of loaded, albeit often loud and attention-grabbing Chinese tourists. But what kind of image of the Chinese people is being conveyed to us by the media? Reports about their superpower-homeland are, in fact, disturbingly common. But almost all of them fall into (at least) one of the following three categories:

- The first one consists of reports about China's explosive economic growth and its huge technological advances. These include, of course, manifold reports on Chinese neo-colonialism. They warn us, in an implicit or explicit manner, against the new "yellow danger" linked to the growing political power of the Chinese state, which is, of course, creepy, especially considering the fact that this power seems to be rooted in some kind of traditional despotism and coupled with modern "communism", without any respect for what we call human rights.

- The second category includes the un-

surpassable delicacies of Chinese food, the superb arts of Chinese Kung-fu and Tai-chi, the so-called Chinese medicine, and everything else that China can offer to our terribly alienated bodies and minds.

- In the third category, the Chinese people are some kind of primitive monsters, because they all eat dogs and bats. These are the Chinese we must fear and avoid. Wherever and whenever possible, we have to eliminate them from our beautifully petty and kitschy world.

Most sinologists and scholars of Chinese studies are certainly aware of a completely different image of China and its people. This awareness is not merely something that arises from our knowledge of Chinese history, Chinese culture and Chinese population as a whole. It is rather something rooted in our personal experience of China, and of the Chinese people. It is an intimate knowledge of a culture which permeates every corner of this country, in which most people don't see themselves as being primarily individuals, living in an isolated, self-dependent and independent manner. In China, there are so many warm nests, big and small, and each person is dwelling in a nesting existence. (Almost) nobody is an island.

Hence, why don't the media tell us anything else about China?

For example, what it is like to have a Chinese friend.

For I can assure you that having a Chinese friend, is some of the most beautiful gifts that can be offered to you in this world. I have quite a few of them myself, and I keep thinking of

them, and missing them, especially now, during this strange period in which the virus is raging globally and pushing all of us—irrespectively of the colour of our skin or the food we eat—into self-isolation and lockdown.

And why don't the media provide us with an image that shows the incredible power of the unique Chinese creativity? Indeed, the ingenuity of these persons knows no boundaries. But it is probably easier to negate it altogether, just as the chief editor of the German newspaper *Bild*, who recently wrote in his editorial comment, addressed to China's president Xi Jinping:

Those who are not free are not creative. Those who are not innovative do not invent anything. That is why you have made your country the world champion in the stealing of intellectual property. China enriches itself with the inventions of others instead of inventing new products by itself. The reason for this is that you are not letting the young people in your country think freely. The biggest Chinese export success that nobody wanted, but that went around the whole world anyway, is Corona. (Julian Reichelt, *Bild*, 16.04.2020)

Not all European media are openly Sinophobic in such a manifest way. However, why there are so little media that—at least occasionally—reveal something about the Chinese culture? With this term I do not imply the infamous notion by which most Slovenian people understand the Imperial Kung-pao Chicken and some mysterious guy called Lao-tze. No, by apply-

ing this term, I think of the invaluable treasures that the Chinese ideational tradition can offer to all of humanity and our planet as such. And these treasures are both innumerable and precious.

However, it is probably difficult to present facts and facets of history, art, literature and music theory we do not know much about. It is much easier to remain silent and not even mention them, and to preserve in this way the latently prevailing assumption that China simply never created or developed a real, relevant history, art, literature or music.

In this context, we can all be reminded of the well-known, familiar controversies, which still permeate the provocative notion of Chinese philosophy. Many philosophers are still struggling with the question of whether we can “allow” certain scopes or lines within the Chinese theoretical thought to be called “philosophy”, that is a real and widely relevant discourse. In this context, we can begin with raising an even more elementary question, which has often been raised in the context of comparative intercultural philosophy, namely the question why there is such an asymmetry between the Chinese knowledge of Western philosophy and vice versa. Most of the relevant Western works are translated into Chinese very soon after they have been published in their original languages. But in the Western cultural areas, the situation is completely different. In his introduction of the project “Translating China” that was published on the website entitled *Yiduobufen*¹, Roger

1 <http://en.yiduobufen.com/>

Ames exposes:

There is and continues to be a profound asymmetry in comparative studies. We enter a Chinese bookstore or a Chinese library, and all of the most recent world scholarship is being made available in accurate and accessible Chinese translations. We enter a European or American bookstore or library, and never mind recent Chinese scholarship, but even the monumental works of the greatest minds of Chinese philosophy and culture are absent. (Roger Ames, "Translating China")

Most of the Western prejudices against Chinese philosophy can be seen as arising from such a truly remarkable ignorance and simultaneously, as their result. As we have seen, the superficial understanding, or bolder, the widespread misunderstanding of ancient Chinese texts, continues to hold sway in Western theories on China. Among others, one reason for this situation has to do with the history of Sinology as such. The earliest translations of original Confucian and Daoist texts were the products of Western missionaries who often interpreted them through the lens of Western concepts and methodologies. Another reason for these prejudices might be found in the fact that there are still almost no translations of later philosophical sources in Western languages. While many classical works from the pre-Qin era have been repeatedly translated, the West still does not know much about philosophy from later periods, in which Chinese philosophers began to create systematic the-

ories. With some rare exceptions, the main works of Han and Wei-Jin theoreticians have still not been rendered into Western languages. Even the pinnacles of medieval Chinese philosophy, namely the Neo-Confucian discourses from the Song and Ming Dynasties, are practically unknown in the Western world, and the same holds true for almost the entire opus of pre-modern Chinese philosophy. Considering all this, it is easier to understand why Western scholars—and Western people in general—have often criticized Chinese as lacking any systematic theory. Such statements are, of course, not racist. They say this only because they do not know Chinese philosophy at all. They think that what we call Chinese philosophy can only be equated to the teachings of Confucius, Buddha, Lao-tse, and perhaps Zhuangzi. All of these thinkers are being accused of having failed to establish any abstract systems that are supposed to underlie any, not just philosophical, theory. But Confucius, for instance, lived at a time in which the ancient Greek pre-Socratic philosophy was being developed. And as is well-known, the works of pre-Socratic philosophy are also preserved only in a fragmentary form, and do not contain any systematic theory. However, nobody equates Western philosophy with pre-Socratic philosophy. In contrast, the original Confucianism and Daoism from the pre-Qin period are still regarded as the sole representatives of the entire range and history of Chinese philosophical thought. Nobody knows Zhu Xi, Wang Yang-ming, Ji Kang or Wang Bi. And even less is known about later, by no means

less significant philosophical and scholarly theoreticians such as Dai Zhen, Wang Fuzhi, or Wang Guowei. If we try to find a reason for this epistemological asymmetry, we will soon discover that there are many of them. If we look to the 18th and 19th centuries, for instance, it is obvious that in the process of “importing” modernization to semi-colonial China, Western ideas came to the country along with its investment capital and technology. In such a situation, Chinese intellectuals were and remain forced to immerse themselves deeply into the wide oeuvre of traditional and modern Western thought, and to confront its “Otherness”. Be as it may, the fact is that Western philosophy knows only itself. But it still sets the general standards for philosophical inquiry, so all other philosophies have to be familiar with the Western one.

From this telling example we can clearly see that Slovenian, European and even the whole of Western culture does not know much about East Asia, let alone about China. Whenever the widest strata of Slovene population is being informed about China, these information never include evidences on Chinese thought, Chinese art or science. It is much easier to simply write about primitive Chinese, who eat dogs. And bats. And who are dirty. This is why they have destroyed our planet and brought Coronavirus upon us. When some years ago, we were confronted with the virus of the mad cow disease, which did not arrive from China, but from the UK, nobody accused the British people to have brought it upon us because they are

dirty, primitive and irrational. English and Scottish people who were living in Slovenia, were not feared. Nobody hesitated to shake hands with them. And nobody has secretly—or even openly—wished they might disappear and return to the places they originally came from.

At present, however, all Asians living in Europe are subject to dubious views and treatments. They are being pushed into the margins of society. The old racism that has been latent so far, is now being revived and it proudly raises its ugly head. It is increasingly often reflected in hate speech, isolation and discrimination. Chinese restaurants stand alone. Museums refuse to accept the visits of Chinese curators. Vendors in shops refuse to serve people who look Asian. In the beginning of the Coronavirus’ spread to Europe, even some medical doctors refused to treat Chinese patients.

All this indicates that anti-Chinese and anti-Asian racism was latent in our societies even before the outbreak of the virus. Shortly after the pandemic, however, we also received news of the xenophobic outbreaks of Chinese men and women, first against their compatriots from Wuhan and its environs, then more or less across the board against all internal migrants, who mostly came from underdeveloped rural areas to the richer urban centers. Finally, these outrages culminated in attacks, isolation, persecution and imprisonment of the black African population living, working or studying in China². As these attacks were mostly

2 See for instance Boothe, Claudine. 2020. “Covid-19 Theories, Black History and Transmodernity”.

provoked by the appearance or color of the people against whom they were directed, they were undoubtedly racist. Particularly in view of the assumption that xenophobia and racism are based on an “innate” fear of alienation, which is something “universally human”, the question arises in all this whether racism is not something universal.

In sociology there are two types of racism. The first is individual; it manifests itself in racist outbursts on the interpersonal level. It refers to the racist assumptions, beliefs or behavior of an individual and is “a form of racial discrimination based on conscious and unconscious personal prejudice”³. Individual racism may be related to or learned from the broader socio-economic history of particular societies in which individuals live, or it may be based on personal fears and prejudices. What is important is that such racism occurs at the personal level and as such must be distinguished from so-called structural racism, the second form of racism. In this type of racism, inequalities are rooted in the system-wide functioning of a society which excludes a significant number of members of certain groups from significant participation in key social institutions⁴. This is where we need to expose the fact that the origins of systemic and

27.04. 2020. p. 1-9.; Pai, Hsiao Hung. 2020. “The Corona Virus Crisis has exposed China’s long history of racism”; The Guardian; April, 25,2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/25/coronavirus-exposed-china-history-racism-africans-guangzhou> (Accessed 02.07.2020).

3 Henry, Frances and Carol Tator. 2006. *Racial Profiling in Canada: Challenging the Myths of ‘a Few Bad Apples’*. Toronto: University of Toronto press, p.329

4 Ibid., 26.

structural racism lie in colonization, which is one of the central pillars of Western modernization and its economic and political domination⁵. And the roots of both colonization and racism are closely linked to the dominant worldviews that have shaped European societies from ancient times to the present.

Racism is namely not something limited to an openly vocational maintenance. It is an inherent, almost essential part of the very discourse of Western philosophy, which relies on realities of the concept of “race” as a “substance”, that is, as Xiang Shuchen vividly describes in her article entitled *Why the Confucians had no concept of race*⁶, characterized by determinism, hypostatization, and reification and rooted in a paradigm in which the being precedes the becoming. Latent forms of racism are always part of a widespread mind-set which manifests itself in a tendency to do nothing about a current state of affairs; it is a mechanistic, non-reflected and uncritical attitude, which lacks any kind of autonomy, and is conservative by its very nature. In this sense, latent racism is by no means better than an open one would be, for they both can, in principle, equally contribute to the structural preservation of existing discrimination. Actually, a latent (and hence, unconscious) racism might be even more dangerous (and more persistent) than a conscious one,

5 For a good and informative analysis of this phenomena see Keegan, Timothy. 1997. *The Colonial Roots of Racism: Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.

6 Xiang, Shuchen. 2019. “Why the Confucians had no Concept of Race”. *Philosophy Compass* DOI: 10.1111/phc3.12627.

for (almost) no educated person in her sane mind would nowadays still openly advocate racism. Hence, these latent forms of racism are, in fact, even more harmful precisely because they are difficult to grasp, to point out, and hence, to fight against. And as we have all recently witnessed, just a tiny virus is enough for racism to regain its structural basis, to revive and re-manifest itself, and to spread, much faster than the actual virus that is its alleged cause.

Until that changes, we do not have many options in protection against the Coronavirus. I must point out that I did not mean to say that the virus as such is not a reason for being concerned. Of course we all need to protect ourselves and our fellow people against it. However, we must do so by keeping up our personal and collective hygiene and by preserving our emphatic sensibility. Luckily, the latter is not only the best prevention against the Coronavirus, but also against racism. The only way to overcome the entire spectrum of *vir-ism* is the way of our mutual, interpersonal solidarity. It is the way of building new bridges instead of mining and destroying the old ones.

RECENT AND UPCOMING EVENTS

Huiwen Helen Zhang has pointed out the following recent and upcoming events:

1) “Chinese Classics for German Modernity: Laozi to Kafka,” Yale EverScholar Seminar, Zoom, July 27, 2020.

<https://everscholar.org/event/kafka-and-china-how-ancient-chinese-texts-found-their-way-to-modern-germany>

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/huiwenhelenzhang_chinese-classics-for-german-modernity-laozi-activity-6688813413314957313-AvdV

2) “Digital Transreading: Revitalizing the Canon,” international conference organized by the Network for Digital Literary Studies, “Synergies: Bridging the Gap Between Traditional and Digital Literary Studies,” University of Southern Denmark, September 27–29, 2020.

https://www.sdu.dk/da/om_sdu/institutter_centre/ikv/forskning/forskningsprojekter/network+for+digital+literary+studies/network_for_digital_literary_studies

3) “Dao for Modernity: Europe Transreads China,” EverScholar Seminar at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), October 1–4, 2020.

<https://everscholar.org/course-2>

EACP Membership Payment

If you would like to become a member of the European Association for Chinese Philosophy, please:

1. Create a user account at the EACP page: <http://ea-cp.eu/user/register>
2. Complete the application form (You must be logged in to view the form. Please be sure to include all the required information).
3. After your membership is approved, you will be notified immediately.
4. The payment of the membership fee should be done to the EACP account according to the instructions at: <http://ea-cp.eu/members/membership-fee>
5. You will become an active member after the payment of the membership fee.

Welcome!