I'm not a bot

形而上学, 形而上學, 形上 are the top translations of "metaphysics" into Chinese. branch of philosophy that studies first principles [..] As he put it, "he who understands baboon would do more towards metaphysics than Locke." 达尔文说,"理解了狒狒,你就比洛克更接近形而上学。" branch of philosophy that studies first principles branch of philosophy that studies first principles [..] + The most popular queries list: 1K, ~2K, ~3K, ~4K, ~5K, ~5-10K, ~10-20K, ~20-50K, ~50-100K, ~100k-200K, ~200-500K, ~1M Glosbe Proudly made with ♥ in Poland Estimated Reading Time: 5 mins History of the Five Arts A rich history of philosophical inquiry underlies the studies of Chinese metaphysics (中华玄学), with this rich tradition dating back to ancient China where it was concerned with discerning the nature and science of reality. Across the centuries, scholars and philosophers used their knowledge of Chinese metaphysics to understand the patterns and principles of the universe and its relationship and impact on human lives. Chinese metaphysics, while often synonymous with Feng Shui, encompasses a wide range of practices and principles. The Five Arts, or 五术, is a fundamental concept in Chinese metaphysics, referring to five fields of study that form an essential foundation for the philosophical study of the universe and its laws. Derived from the I-Ching (易經), or the Book of Changes, the Five Arts covered ancient Chinese discussions surrounding time, space and the universe, channelling the concepts and reasonings of Yin and Yang. Early Taoist studies and practices contributed to its early development, inspiring the Five Arts to be a worthy study on its own. The Five Arts — Mountain (山), Medicine (医), Divination (卜), Physical Inspection (相), and Destiny (命) — form the foundation of the philosophical study of the universe and its relation to human life, each with its unique history, development and traditional and modern applications. Mountain (山) The Art of Mountain was known as a path of self-improvement that saw its practitioners sequestering themselves into mountainous regions, immersing themselves in nature and studying ancient Chinese texts to cultivate the mind. In the Art of Mountain, methods such as maintaining dietary habits, meditation and martial arts were thought to achieve an optimal state in one's physical and mental capabilities. Maintaining dietary habits involved using foraged food and balanced nutrition to enhance physical strength and alleviate illnesses, while meditation involved using mindfulness techniques to strengthen the mind. The study of ancient texts, such as those by Lao Zi (老子) and Zhuang Zi (庄子) also strengthened the mind by stimulating and encouraging philosophical perspectives. At the same time, martial arts training was used to strengthen the body and overall mental-physical health to promote personal growth. In summary, the Art of Mountain focuses on philosophies that utilise various methods, including mental and physical, to develop a well-rounded personality. History of Mountain in Ancient China Originating during the Spring and Autumn Period (771 to 476 BCE), the imperial Art of Mountain in ancient China is rooted in Taoist principles, notably influenced by Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching《道德经》. This foundational text not only shaped the philosophy of the Art of Mountain but became a cornerstone of Taoist thought. Yang Yun Song, a luminary of the Tang dynasty, authored several key texts during his seclusion in the mountains, including the Shaking Dragon Classic《撼龙经》, Uncertain Dragon Classic《疑龙经》and Heavenly Jade Classic《天玉经》. He based his observations on travelling through mountainous regions of China, and these principles were formed from his recordings of mountainous villages and communities, and their effects on the population. Lu Ban (鲁班), the foremost Chinese architect, structural engineer, and inventor recognised that Nature inspired structure. His thoughts were later compiled by the historian Guo Pu (郭璞) in the classic text, "Book of Burial"《葬书》— which detailed the principles of geomancy and the methods for locating auspicious sites for buildings and significant landmarks. These classics became foundational texts in the study of Chinese metaphysics, contributing to shaping the landscape and destiny of imperial China. In later years, these texts laid the groundwork for the evolution of Imperial Feng Shui studies throughout the Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties. Modern Applications for the Art of Mountain Today, the principles of the Art of Mountain have seamlessly woven into modern wellness and fitness routines, such as yoga, Tai Chi, and meditation. These practices centred on achieving mental and physical balance, drawing from the wisdom of the Art of Mountain. Martial arts disciplines such as Ba Gua Zhang, Tai Chi, and Xingyi Quan were both a means of self-defence and powerful tools for enhancing overall well-being. This art's profound respect for nature resonates with ongoing environmental conservation efforts and sustainable living philosophies, providing invaluable wisdom and methodologies for nurturing holistic health, promoting environmental consciousness and fostering a balanced lifestyle. Medicine (医) The art of Medicine refers to the study and practice of traditional Chinese medicine. It delves into matters of health, focusing on methods of curing disease, ailments, illnesses and physical diagnosis. Within this study, the principles of Qi, Yin and Yang, and the Five Elements underpin a practitioner's understanding of an individual's health and well-being. While its research and studies are strongly linked to the Bagua (八卦), I-Ching and the relationships between the Five Elements, examples of its methods take the form of Traditional Chinese Medicine, acupuncture (针灸) or herbal medicine (草药). History of Medicine in Ancient China The Warring States period (476 to 221 BC) was met with the emergence of several schools of thought regarding the art of Medicine, including "Yellow Emperor's Inner Cannon"《黄帝内经》— an ancient Chinese medical text highly respected as the fundamental source for doctrines in Chinese medicine for more than two millennia. The work, comprising two separate volumes, establishes the theoretical basis of traditional Chinese medicine, and its diagnostic methods and discusses acupuncture in Chinese medicine. During the Han dynasty (202 BC to 9 AD, 25 to 220 AD), acupuncture and herbal medicine became more prominent methods of medical treatment and maintaining health. During this period, Zhang Zhongjing (張仲景), a Chinese pharmacologist and one of the most eminent Chinese physicians during the late Han dynasty authored "Treatise on Cold Pathogenic and Miscellaneous Diseases"《伤寒杂病论》— which became a foundational text for the advancement of Chinese medicine. The Tang dynasty saw the emergence of pulse diagnosis as a diagnostic method in Chinese medicine, alongside the use of moxibustion in treating ailments. At this time, Sun Simiao, a physician and Taoist monk renowned for his significant contributions to Chinese medicinal knowledge and compassion towards his patients authored the "Essential Formulas Worth a Thousand in Gold for Emergencies" 《備急千金要方》— which detailed medical disorders, diagnoses, treatments and remedies. The publication "Compendium of Materia Medica"《本草纲目》compiled by Li Shizhen (李时珍) during the Ming dynasty (1368 to 1644 AD) — an encyclopaedic gathering of knowledge surrounding Chinese medicine, natural history and herbology — came to be acknowledged as the foundation for what we recognise today as traditional Chinese medicine. Modern Applications for the Art of Medicine Today, traditional Chinese medicine is widely practised worldwide, with treatments that include herbal remedies, acupuncture, moxibustion, cupping, and Tui Na massages. As an alternative medical practice, traditional Chinese medicine has been the subject of research and clinical trials worldwide, with studies investigating its efficacy for conditions such as chronic pains, infertility and cancer. Divination (卜) The art of Divination has a long history in Chinese metaphysics, widely used by prominent military and political figures, such as Zhuge Liang (诸葛亮), Li Chunfeng (李淳风), Liu Bowen (刘伯温), and Zeng Guofan (曾国藩), to strategise their victories. According to ancient texts, this art form manifests in three main methods: fortune telling, auspicious date selection and the analysis of the cosmic flow of energy. History of Divination in Ancient China According to Chinese legends and mythology, Fu Xi (伏羲) is widely credited with the creation of the I-Ching, setting the foundation for Chinese divination practices. The refining of divination practices during the Zhou dynasty (1046 to 256 BC) was associated with the use of the I-Ching as a divination tool. Following this in the latter half of the Zhou dynasty, Confucious (孔子), a paragon of Chinese sages, philosophised that the I-Ching was a tool of personal reflection and ethical guidance. The Qin dynasty saw the outlaw of divination, although it continued to be practised underground. It was not until the Tang dynasty (618 to 907 AD) that divinatory arts saw a resurgence in the socio-cultural fabric of dynastic China, with the reintroduction of various forms of divination such as Na Jia divination (纳甲筮法), Plum Blossom Divination (梅花易数) and the Three Styles — Liu Ren (六壬), Tai Yi Divine Numeration (太乙神) and Qi Men Dun Jia (奇门遁甲). The Tang dynasty under Emperor Taizong's rule additionally experienced advancements in divination, in part due to Emperor Taizong's consultations with diviners and astrologers in making inspired decisions, resulting in the publication of the treatise based on the I-Ching, "Early Heaven Bagua"《先天八卦》. Modern Applications for the Art of Divination While divination methods remain widely used today for personal guidance, some techniques have been adapted for more contemporary use in business and finance. For example, Qi Men Dun Jia (奇门遁甲) is used as a method of guidance in making business, trade or investment decisions, in career or academic pursuits. Qi Men Dun Jia is a calculation tool used to accurately select an auspicious, yet exact time and direction to take action and produce a desired result. This widely used tool utilises astronomical observation and consists of various aspects of Chinese metaphysics, creating strategies as solutions. Qi Men Dun Jia comprises three components: Qi (奇), Men () and Dun Jia (遁甲). Qi refers to three specific Heavenly Stems: Yi (乙), Bing (丙) and Ding (丁). Men, translates to "Door", and expresses an individual's interpersonal relationships. Dun Jia refers to the other six Heavenly Stems: Wu (戊), Ji (己), Geng (庚), Xin (辛), Ren (壬) and Gui (癸) — all of which hide the remaining Heavenly Stem, Jia (甲). Physical Inspection (相) The study of Physical Appearance refers to the study of physical forms or physical inspection of an individual. This art form includes different categories of physical inspection. 名相 (míng xiāng) is the examination of an individual's or shop's name through the analysis of the Five Elements and other divination techniques. 印相 (yìn xiàng) refers to the observation of an individual's seal to determine their destiny. Throughout China's history, seals have played key roles in the establishment of different dynasties, coming to be recognised as a symbol of power, and a mark of endorsement from the Chinese emperors. Physical Inspection may include the inspection of physical spaces. For example, 家相 (jiā xiāng) analyses the layout of a home to determine the quality of its Feng Shui, as well as the fortunes of its occupants. Another category of Physical Inspection includes 墓相 (mù xiāng) refers to the placement of ancestral tombs, to ensure good fortune for the family's future generations. 人相 (rén xiāng) refers to the practice of reading an individual's physical appearance, on the basis that an individual's outward appearance is a reflection of their inner nature, which can be used in gaining insight into their personality and in predicting their inherent potential. This branch encompasses two well-known examples: Palmistry, the practice of divination through the study of the palm and Face Reading. History of Physical Inspection in Ancient China The earliest known writings surrounding the practices of Physical Inspection date back to as early as the Shang dynasty, the first established ruling dynasty of China in recorded history. During the Qin dynasty, Physical Inspection practices were associated with superstition and were consequently prohibited. During the Zhou dynasty, Guan Zhong (管仲), a philosopher and chancellor to the Duke Huan of Qi, was known for his disposition for physiognomy — able to read an individual's personality through their appearance. The philosopher, politician and author Dong Zhongshu (董仲舒) penned "Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals" 《春秋繁露》, which drew upon Chinese metaphysical concepts like the Five Elements and included teachings on physiognomy and its use in the selection of capable government officials. The Song dynasty (960 to 1279 AD) saw the peak of Physical Inspection methods in dynastic China, with the development of the "Three Physiognomies" system that utilises facial features, body shape and mannerisms to determine an individual's character and potential. Modern Applications for the Art of Physical Inspection The principles of Physical Inspection are still widely used today, with contemporary practitioners adapting such techniques for use in fields such as business and dating. Even the use of facial recognition technology in law enforcement, marketing or technology fields could be seen as a contemporary application of physiognomy. Destiny (命) A key aspect of the Five Arts, the art of Destiny refers to the study of fate calculation. This branch of the Five Arts refers to the influence of cosmic forces on the fates and fortunes of people. Destiny practices have been extensively observed throughout documented Chinese history — its methods were practised widely by members of the ruling elite and circles of nobility alike, who used this knowledge to implement and provide guidance and insight into their strengths, weaknesses, and potential for success. History of Destiny in Ancient China Astrology, a major proponent of Destiny practices, underwent developments during the Western Zhou dynasty (1045 to 771 BC) as a method for future prediction, and in determining auspicious calendar dates. The Han dynasty saw the development of the Four Pillars of Destiny (八字) system and its use in determining an individual's fate through their birth information and location. Emperor Wu, who reigned during the Han dynasty consulted astrologers and diviners on important decisions, eventually developing the Nine Star Qi (九星气学) system as a popular modality in Destiny practices alongside astrology. A widely renowned method of destiny analysis, Purple Star Astrology (紫微斗数) emerged during the Tang dynasty. This method is thought to have originated from Lu Chun Yang (吕纯阳), before being further developed by Chen Xi Yi (陳希夷) during the Song dynasty, followed by Luo Hong Xian (罗洪先) in the Ming dynasty, resulting in its present-day practice. The Ming dynasty also produced two prominent figures in the art of destiny analysis. Liu Bowen, a military strategist and philosopher, was known for his expertise in divination and destiny analysis — having used these skills in devising successful military campaigns and strategies. Jiang Da Hong (蒋大鸿), a Taoist master, authored "The Secret of the Golden Flower"《太乙金華宗旨》, which included teachings and commentary on astrology and Bazi. Modern Applications for the Art of Destiny Today, the art of destiny analysis encompasses the presumption of an individual's fate in pursuit of abundance, prosperity and progress. Its more renowned methods include Bazi (八字) and Purple Star Astrology (紫微斗数), which have been widely adapted for use in Feng Shui analyses, business and marketing consulting, and life coaching. The Five Arts, today In conclusion, the Five Arts form an integral branch of Chinese metaphysics, with unique histories, developments and applications as detailed as that of the Chinese civilisation itself. Today, the Five Arts have evolved and adapted to a contemporary lifestyle, and continue to be used in different forms to provide a comprehensive understanding of the universe and our place within it. At Imperial Harvest, Master David's rich and multi-generational in Imperial Feng Shui has fostered his knowledge and expertise in the Five Arts of Chinese metaphysics. As an architect of contemporary Imperial Feng Shui, Master David has distilled the principles of the Five Arts into the methodology behind Imperial Harvest, catalysing breakthrough success within our family of blessed clients through effective Imperial Feng Shui solutions. Imperial Harvest's expert consultants are always on hand to guide you on your journey and provide you with insights to help you realise your fullest potential. Book a complimentary consultation today or contact us at +65 92301640. Book A Bazi Consultation We are located at For prospective clients:Imperial Harvest 402 Orchard Road Delfi Orchard #02-07/08 Singapore 238876 For existing clients:Imperial Harvest Prestige 402 Orchard Road Delfi Orchard #03-24/25 Singapore 238876 Journey with us into the mystical world of Chinese Metaphysics, where ancient wisdom and modern insights converge to reveal the secrets of harmonizing with the cosmos. This age-old philosophical framework, rooted in Chinese traditions, explores the profound interplay between humans and the natural world. From Feng Shui's artful arrangement of spaces to the timeless divination of the I Ching, Chinese Metaphysics offers a tapestry of wisdom that has intrigued and guided generations.In this exploration, we embark on a fascinating odyssey, unraveling the mystique of Chinese Metaphysics and its enduring relevance in our contemporary lives. As we traverse through its rich history and delve into its core principles, we'll discover the profound influence it has on various aspects of life, from health and relationships to career and well-being. Join us as we bridge the ancient with the modern, shedding light on the timeless wisdom that continues to shape our world today.First of all Chinese metaphysics is not astrologyIt is not religion as well and it is not based on a religionIt is not based on superstitions and can't be used as a heal-all remedyChinese metaphysics is a broad and complex field that encompasses a range of traditional Chinese beliefs and practices aimed at understanding and harmonizing the relationships between humans and the natural world. It draws upon ancient Chinese philosophy, cosmology, and spiritual traditions to provide insights into various aspects of life, including destiny, health, relationships, and the environment. Some key components of Chinese metaphysics include:Yin and Yang: Chinese metaphysics often revolves around the concept of Yin and Yang, which represent the dualistic and complementary forces in the universe. Yin is associated with qualities like darkness, receptivity, and the feminine, while Yang represents light, activity, and the masculine. The balance and interaction between Yin and Yang are central to achieving harmony and well-being.Five Elements (Wu Xing): The Five Elements theory, consisting of Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water, plays a significant role in Chinese metaphysics. These elements are associated with various aspects of life, including personality traits, health, and environmental influences. Understanding the interactions and cycles of these elements is crucial for achieving balance and harmony.Feng Shui: Feng Shui is the ancient Chinese practice of arranging one's environment to optimize the flow of energy (Qi) and promote health, prosperity, and well-being. It involves the placement of objects, furniture, and structures in a way that aligns with the principles of Yin and Yang and the Five Elements.Ba Zi (Four Pillars of Destiny): Ba Zi is a form of Chinese astrology that uses an individual's date and time of birth to create a birth chart known as the Four Pillars of Destiny. This chart provides insights into an individual's personality, strengths, weaknesses, and life path.I Ching: The I Ching, or Book of Changes, is an ancient divination text that is widely used in Chinese metaphysics. It consists of a series of hexagrams and is consulted to gain insights into decision-making, future events, and personal growth.Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM): While not exclusive to Chinese metaphysics, TCM is often integrated into these practices. It focuses on balancing the body's energy (Qi) and the principles of Yin and Yang to maintain health and treat illnesses.Chinese metaphysics is a rich and multifaceted field that has been developed and refined over thousands of years. It offers a unique perspective on life, destiny, and the interconnection between individuals and the natural world, with the ultimate goal of achieving balance and harmony.Chinese Metaphysics and Western astrology are both systems designed to provide insights into individuals' lives, but they differ significantly in their principles and methodologies. Chinese Metaphysics, often exemplified by practices like Ba Zi and Feng Shui, is deeply rooted in ancient Chinese philosophy and is more concerned with holistic balance and harmony. It emphasizes the interplay of cosmic energies, the five elements, and the cyclical nature of time to understand one's destiny and surroundings.On the other hand, Western astrology is primarily based on the positions and movements of celestial bodies, particularly the planets and stars in the zodiac. It focuses on one's astrological birth chart to predict personality traits and future events. While both systems have their enthusiasts, Chinese Metaphysics tends to explore a broader range of life aspects, including relationships, career, and health, while Western astrology often places a stronger emphasis on personal characteristics and potential life events.In essence, Chinese Metaphysics and Western astrology offer distinct lenses through which individuals can gain insight into their lives and destinies, with each system shaped by its unique cultural and philosophical foundations.A parallel between the main esoteric systemsFrom ancient times people tried to understand the world as a harmonious and holistic entity. Observing all the phenomena in the surrounding environment, they recognized five patterns for existence and transformations in nature.Esoteric systems from various cultures, such as the Chinese system, the Indian system, and Hermeticism, each offer unique perspectives on the mysteries of existence and personal transformation. Here's a parallel between these systems:1. Chinese Metaphysics (e.g., Ba Zi and Feng Shui):Originating in ancient China, Chinese metaphysics is deeply rooted in Daoist and Confucian philosophy.It emphasizes the balance and harmonious flow of cosmic energies, such as Yin and Yang, the Five Elements, the Cosmic Trinity, and the cyclical nature of time.Chinese metaphysics, like Ba Zi, seeks to decode an individual's destiny through their birth chart and provide guidance for various life aspects.Feng Shui focuses on the alignment and arrangement of one's environment to optimize energy flow and promote well-being.2. Indian Systems (e.g., Vedic Astrology and Ayurveda):Indian esoteric systems have their roots in Hindu and Vedic traditions and encompass a diverse array of practices.Vedic Astrology, also known as Jyotish, interprets celestial bodies' positions to understand one's life path and potential challenges.Ayurveda, an Indian system of medicine, focuses on balancing an individual's physical and mental constitution through diet, herbs, and lifestyle choices.3. Hermeticism:Hermeticism is a Western esoteric tradition that traces its lineage to the ancient Egyptian god Thoth, also known as Hermes Trismegistus.It emphasizes the interconnectedness of the spiritual and material realms, with core principles including the Hermetic maxim "As above, so below."Hermeticism encompasses a wide range of mystical, alchemical, and magical practices aimed at achieving spiritual enlightenment and personal transformation.It influenced various Western esoteric traditions, such as the Kabbalah and alchemy.While these esoteric systems vary significantly in their cultural origins and methodologies, they share a common thread of seeking profound insights into the human experience and the mysteries of existence. Each system offers a unique approach to personal growth, self-discovery, and the quest for spiritual wisdom, catering to diverse philosophical and spiritual inclinations.The five patterns of the esoteric systemsA fascinating parallel among various esoteric systems is the use of five fundamental patterns, each known by different names but serving as essential building blocks for understanding the cosmos and human existence. In the Chinese system, these five patterns are represented as Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water, forming the foundation of the Five Elements theory.In the Indian system, the five tattvas—often referred to as Earth, Water, Fire, Air, and Akasha (ether)—are the elemental components that underpin life and the universe. These elements are pivotal in systems like Ayurveda and Vedic cosmology, where they play a significant role in understanding human constitution and the nature of reality.In Hermeticism, the five patterns manifest as Akasha, Earth, Fire, Water, and Air. Akasha, often referred to as 'æther,' represents the quintessence or spirit, while Earth, Fire, Water, and Air embody the traditional four classical elements. These elements are central to Hermetic philosophy, alchemical processes, and mystical practices, each holding a unique symbolic and metaphysical significance.Across these diverse esoteric systems, the common use of five fundamental patterns reflects a shared understanding of the interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual realms, as well as the belief that these elements serve as the fundamental building blocks of the universe and the human experience.ConclusionIn the realm of Chinese Metaphysics, the wisdom of Ba Zi serves as a diagnostic tool, offering profound insights into the unchangeable aspects of our given life template, which accounts for approximately 33% of our life's composition. Understanding this template, as uncovered through Ba Zi, holds the key to catalyzing positive change.Concurrently, Feng Shui, though a valuable remedy for our life's environmental aspects, can influence a maximum of 33% of the whole. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that many Feng Shui remedies often involve significant changes that may not be readily feasible for everyone.Amid these factors, the pivotal question arises: What is the right action to take? The answer, lying within the profound principles of the five elements—Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water—demands a deep and patient comprehension. Categorizing any action into one of these five elemental classes is no simple task, but with dedication and unwavering perseverance, the path to success becomes attainable.Throughout this journey toward self-discovery and balance, Master Wey remains a steadfast companion, offering his invaluable guidance and counsel, illuminating the path toward the light. First published Thu Apr 2, 2015; substantive revision Mon Oct 16, 2023 While there was no word corresponding precisely to the term "metaphysics," China has a long tradition of philosophical inquiry concerned with the ultimate nature of reality—its being, origins, components, ways of changing, and so on. In this sense, we can speak of metaphysics in Chinese Philosophy, even if the particular questions and positions that arose differed from those dominant in Europe. Explicit metaphysical discussions appeared in China with a turn toward questions of cosmogony in the mid-fourth century BCE. These cosmogonies express views that became fundamental for almost all later metaphysics in China. In these texts, all things are interconnected and constantly changing. They arise spontaneously from an ultimate source (most often called dao 道, the way or guide) that resists objectification but is immanent in the world and accessible to cultivated people. Vitality and growth is the very nature of existence, and the natural world exhibits consistent patterns that can be observed and followed, in particular, cyclical patterns based on interaction between polar forces (such as yin 陰 and yang 陽). This outlook differs from the assumptions that dominated metaphysical thinking in Europe after the introduction of Christianity: the belief that the ultimate principle of the world is transcendent but anthropomorphic (as human beings are made in its image), that the things of the world arise through design, and that the world is composed of ontologically distinct substances. These assumptions have been widely rejected by philosophers over the course of the 20th century, and in the Chinese tradition we see one possibility for what metaphysics might look like if it were neither apologizing for nor reacting against such views (in Nietzsche's terms, a metaphysics based neither on God nor the Death of God). This is not to say that Chinese metaphysics is homogenous or without its own problems. Rather, we can say that while European metaphysics has tended to center on problems of reconciliation (how ontologically distinct things can interact), Chinese metaphysics has been more concerned with problems of distinction. The most central problems are around the status of individualized things, the relationship between the patterns of nature and specifically human values, and how to understand the ultimate ground of the world in a way that avoids either reification or nihilism. These become problems precisely because of the underlying assumptions of holism and change. Readers should keep in mind that a survey of metaphysics in Chinese Philosophy is no more adequate than such a survey would be regarding Europe. The entry has necessarily left out more than it has included. Aside from introducing the most influential positions and philosophers, the goal is to illuminate recurring patterns and concerns that can serve as orientation for further reading. This entire entry could be taken up with the question begged by its title: Is there metaphysics in Chinese Philosophy? Rather than argue for the legitimacy of my topic in the abstract, I will explicate specific issues and positions from various Chinese philosophers, leaving it to readers to decide how well they fit the category of metaphysics. Nonetheless, I cannot entirely ignore the problem of applying the term "metaphysics" so far beyond its Greek origins, and so a few preliminary comments are necessary.[1] If we designate an area of philosophical inquiry concerned with the ultimate nature of reality—its being, origins, components, ways of changing, and so on—there is no question that Chinese philosophers addressed issues within this domain. The question is, do we apply the label of "metaphysics" to philosophical arguments within this domain, or do we reserve the label for some specifically European approach or theory? The latter faces an obvious problem—any definition broad enough to include all European approaches will include some Chinese theories, just as any definition narrow enough to exclude all Chinese approaches will exclude some European philosophers that everyone would agree addressed metaphysics. The choice of definitions is as much about rhetoric and power as the facts. If "metaphysics" labels the broader domain, then studying metaphysics involves engaging other cultures. In contrast, if "metaphysics" labels a specifically European view, then courses, books, and encyclopedia entries on metaphysics legitimately exclude other cultures. Aside from the political consequences of that exclusion, it obscures the many areas in which the traditions can be placed in fruitful dialogue. Those factors support using an expansive definition of metaphysics, but applying "metaphysics" to both European and Chinese thought risks obscuring the differences between the two. More insidiously, it erodes these differences by presenting Chinese philosophy in European terms. That is a legitimate worry, but I think the greater danger is in ignoring what Chinese Philosophy might contribute to discussions of metaphysics. If we do take Chinese Philosophy as having metaphysics, we must strive to avoid distorting it to fit into European terms. One problem is in selecting topics. A simple approach would be to list the main topics in European metaphysics and then see what Chinese philosophers have to say about them. The results would be disappointing, and this approach would miss what is most interesting about a cross-cultural perspective, which is its ability to raise new questions. Within this entry, I have tried as much as possible to follow and explicate the main issues that arose when Chinese philosophers were concerned with the nature of reality. I have then made brief gestures toward how these issues might connect to metaphysical problems in the European tradition. A second problem is with drawing boundaries. A label like "metaphysics" refers to certain human practices at the same time that it draws boundaries around those practices. While Chinese philosophers engaged in the kinds of practices that metaphysics refers to, they did not draw the same boundaries. Isolating metaphysical inquiry from practices of self-cultivation, for example, would have struck almost any Chinese philosopher as odd, if not dangerous. There is no native Chinese term marking the same boundaries as "metaphysics" in European philosophy. When Chinese encountered the term, it was translated by way of Japanese as xing er shang xue 形而上學, literally, "the study of what is above forms." "What is above forms" had long been a central concept in Chinese philosophy, originating in a passage from the "Xici" commentary on the Yi Jing 易經, the Classic of Changes, which says: "What is above forms refers to the way [dao 道]; what is below forms refers to utensils [qi 器]" (Gao Heng 1998, 407).[2] The distinction between what is above forms and what is below forms has a vague resemblance to the distinction between metaphysics and physics, but it is more specific (Zheng 2017; R. Wang 2015). The contrast is between the formed and the formless. Both were taken to be immanent in the world. They are two aspects of the processes of nature and would not be taken as distinct areas of inquiry. The implications of this view will appear across a range of metaphysical issues. 2. Proto-Metaphysical Background: The Mandate of Heaven As far as we know, explicit metaphysical discussions began in China in the mid to late 4th century BCE with the Laozi (Daodejing) and associated texts. Before that, the two dominant philosophical movements were the Mohists and the Confucians (Ru). Both focused on political and ethical issues and showed little direct concern with metaphysical questions, but their discussions of the divine set the context for the emergence of metaphysical debates. The two most relevant concepts are tian 天 (heaven) and ming 命 (the command; fate). The idea of tianming 天命 (the "Mandate of Heaven") first came to prominence in rationalizing the conquest of the Shang dynasty by King Wen and King Wu, who founded the Zhou dynasty in the eleventh century BCE. Heaven is described in anthropomorphic terms as having awareness, preferences, and values. Its most fundamental concern is for the people, as expressed in a famous line from the "Great Declaration" chapter of the Book of Documents (Shangshu 尚書): "Heaven sees from where my people see; heaven hears from where my people hear" (quoted from Mengzi 5A5). As a political doctrine, the claim is that heaven will support rulers who help the people and will bring disaster on rulers who do not. On this view, the world works on consistent patterns that encompass ethical and political concerns. Human beings determine their own success or failure based on these patterns rather than depending on divine whim. The emergence of this view is commonly seen as a decisive moment in the formation of Chinese philosophy. While heaven is presented as willful and anthropomorphic in the early parts of the Shangshu 尚書, it was not transcendent in the sense of being external to the system of nature. The term tian simultaneously refers to the sky, the orderly movement of the heavens, and something that covers all things equally. The classical Chinese word for the "world" or "realm" is literally what is "under-heaven", tianxia 天下. Since the actions of heaven occur through the world, the two are often difficult to distinguish. The primary expression of heaven's will is through human actions—to lose heaven's mandate is to lose their support. The eventual transition in conceptions of heaven from a willful deity to the causal patterns of nature was possible because heaven was never separate from those patterns. Debates were about the nature of heaven rather than its existence, and heaven remained a central term for philosophers holding widely different viewpoints. The belief that heaven supported good rulers and punished the bad came into question as the Zhou dynasty fell apart. Something like the classical problem of evil arose as centuries of civil war and disaster made it difficult to believe that the world was structured along ethical lines (Perkins 2014). Three responses to this crisis can be distinguished. One, exemplified by the Mohists, defended and theorized the earlier view that heaven rewarded those who are good, defined as those who care inclusively for other people. The second emphasized that good and bad events come without reason and without concern for justice. This view was associated with a new meaning for ming, taking it not as a command but as something more like blind fate. The third position argued for the regularity of natural patterns but took those patterns as amoral. On this view, human beings remain in control of their fate, but what brings success is not ethical action, at least in a conventional sense. Versions of this view appears in the Laozi and in theories arising from practical arts like medicine or military strategy. While expressed in different ways in different times, the belief that nature follows consistent patterns that can guide human action became a dominant view across Chinese philosophies, while the relationship between these patterns and humanistic values became one of the main points of dispute. 3. The Cosmogonic Turn Sometime probably in the middle of the fourth century BCE, a radical shift in vocabulary, concerns, and visions of the human took place.[3] This new position has long been known from the Laozi, but recent archaeological discoveries show that the Laozi was just one of a number of positions that together constitute what we might call "a cosmogonic turn."[4] These texts are the first we know of to directly question how the diverse things of the world arise and take form. This concern seems to have been bound up with de-centering and de-privileging human beings. As the Zhuangzi puts it: In stating the number of things we say there are "ten thousand," and human beings are just one of them. […] In comparison with the ten-thousand things, [human beings] are not even like the tip of a hair to the body of a horse. (Guo 1978, 17: 564; cf. Ziporyn 2009: 69) This break with anthropocentrism went along with a shift away from humanistic values like rightness (yi 義) or ritual propriety (li 禮) and toward concerns with maintaining life, reducing desires, and acting spontaneously. These cosmogonies share the following four assumptions: The diverse things of the world ultimately trace back to a single source. The generation of things happens spontaneously, without design or purpose. The ultimate is immanent in the world and can be accessed in some way. Between the ultimate and the myriad concrete things, there are intermediary steps, particularly a role for polarities and cyclical patterns. Almost every example of cosmogonic thinking in Chinese philosophy shares these characteristics, so I will discuss each in some detail. 3.1 Monism All Chinese thinkers who discussed ultimate origins took that origin to be unique. The best known name for this source is dao 道, which means path, way, or guide. Another important name is taiji 太極, the "supreme polarity."[5] The term taiji appears in the Yi Jing as the original unity from which yin and yang emerge. It remained an important term, particularly during the Confucian revival in the Song dynasty. Positing a single source had a decisive influence on Chinese thought, as it implies an underlying unity and connection that easily threatens differentiation and division (for the implications of this idea of oneness, see Ivanhoe 2017 and Ivanhoe et. al. 2018). One of the most persistent metaphysical concerns is the ontological status of difference and individuation (see Kwok 2016; Perkins 2015; Chai 2014a; Ziporyn 2013; Sim 2011; Fraser 2007; and Im 2007). This orientation is the opposite of that in philosophies based on dualisms or ontologically independent substances, views that were dominant through most of European intellectual history. We can say that European metaphysics has tended to focus on problems of reconciliation (how ontologically distinct things can interact), while Chinese metaphysics has been more concerned with problems of distinction (what grounds individuation). There is some ambiguity in saying that the ultimate origin is one. Chapter 42 of the Laozi says that "the one" (yi 一) generates two, which generates three and then the myriad things, but claims that the one itself is not ultimate. It is generated from dao. Chapter 40 says that things are born from being [you 有], but being is generated from no-being [wu 無]. This reflects one of the earliest metaphysical debates—is this unitary origin a thing? There seems to have been advocates for each side, but the view that came to dominate is given as a principle in the Zhuangzi: "what things things is not itself a thing" (wuwuzhe feiwu 物物者非物) (Guo 1978, 22: 763; cf. Ziporyn 2009: 91). The terms you 有 and wu 無 are among the most important metaphysical terms in the Chinese tradition (see Jing Liu 2017; Chai 2014b; B. Wang 2011; Cheng 2009; Bai 2008; and the essays in Liu and Berger 2014). They are often translated as "being" and "non-being", but wu refers not to radical nothingness but to the lack of differentiated beings. Thus in the context of the Laozi, Hans-Georg Moeller (2007) translates the two terms as "presence" and "non-presence", Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall (2003) translate them as "determinate" and "indeterminate", and Brook Ziporyn (2014) as "being-there" and "not-being-there". Taking the ultimate as no-thing places it at or beyond the limits of language. How to speak of the ultimate without making it into an object or thing became another persistent philosophical issue. The Zhuangzi points out that as soon as you label something, even as no-being (wu), it becomes a thing that needs its own explanation: There is being, there is no-being, there is not yet beginning to be no-being, there is not yet beginning to be not yet beginning to be no-being. (Guo 1978, 2: 79; cf. Ziporyn 2009: 15) This dialectic between being and no-being was later taken up in a different form through Buddhist debates about emptiness, and it can be considered one of the central metaphysical problems throughout the Chinese philosophical tradition. 3.2 Spontaneous Generation If we take no-being as indeterminacy, then the problem of a first cause is not getting many from one nor getting something from nothing but rather how differentiation emerges from the undifferentiated. The common explanation appeals to another key metaphysical concept—ziran 自然. The character zi 自 is a reflexive pronoun, and ran 然 means to be in a certain way. Thus ziran means to be so-of-oneself or to be "self-so" (for a thorough discussion, see Bruya 2022). Ziran excludes appeals to purpose, deliberation or design, and the rise of the term paralleled a displacement of heaven by terms such as dao. Using ziran to explain how things arise may seem like an evasion, not much different from replying, "that's just how it is." If we are to avoid an infinite regress of causes, though, the only possibility is to stop at something that just is the way it is from its own being. The role of ziran (self-so) is similar to the role of causa sui (self-caused) in European philosophy. While classical European metaphysics attempts to isolate self-causality in a transcendent God, the Chinese took it as the very nature of existence. In this approach, there are similarities with Spinoza's identification of being and conatus (striving) and even with Nietzsche's "will to power". Two important points follow. First, existence is seen not in terms of abstract being but rather as sheng 生: life, growth, birth, vitality. The fundamental role of sheng appears explicitly in the "Xici" commentary on the Yi Jing, which says that the foundation of the Changes is shengsheng, "generating and generating", "growing and growing", "living and living", or "natura naturans" (Gao Heng 1998: 388). This phrase inspired the famous description of nature as shengsheng buxi 生生不息: generating, generating, never ceasing! It is sometimes said that Chinese philosophy lacks ontology (and thus metaphysics) because philosophers were never concerned with being as such. It is more accurate to say that Chinese philosophers took dynamic organization as implicit in the very nature of being, rather than positing an external source for motion and order. This means that ontology is also cosmology, even biology. Second, if spontaneous generation is the very nature of being, then one can legitimately attribute ziran to both the ultimate and to things themselves. Chapter 25 of the Laozi says, "Human beings follow earth, earth follows heaven, heaven follows dao, dao follows ziran", but chapter 64 speaks of "the ziran of the myriad things", and in chapter 17, the people refer to their own ziran. This immanence contrasts with the common division between God as self-caused and everything else as caused by God, a view which ultimately sees being as divided into two fundamentally different kinds. In employing a univocal conception of being as sheng, Chinese philosophies did not segregate self-generation from the world. 3.3 Immanence The third common point is that the ultimate is immanent in the world. Verbs in classical Chinese are not modified for tense, and this introduces a fundamental ambiguity into all of these cosmogonies—while they can be read as describing something that happened in the past, they can just as well describe an ongoing process in which the generative function is always present. In one passage, Zhuangzi is asked where dao is and he replies that there is no place from which dao is absent. Pushed to give an example, he says dao is in ants and crickets. When asked to go lower, Zhuangzi says dao is in weeds, broken tiles, and even in piss and dung (Guo 1978, 22: 750; cf. Ziporyn 2009: 89). Similar statements would later be made about Buddha-nature, particularly in the tradition of Chan 禪 (Zen) Buddhism. The immanence of the source is demonstrated most of all by the fact that it remains accessible to cultivated people. In the Laozi, dao is something one can use in the world: Dao is constantly without name. Although in its unhewn simplicity it is minute, heaven and earth do not dare subordinate it. If princes and kings can preserve it, the ten thousand things will make themselves their guests. (Ch 32) It is difficult to find the right language to describe the relationship between dao and human beings. The dao is not external and it is not an object that could be grasped, so it is not a matter of getting or reaching it. Since the self-so spontaneity to which dao refers is always present, what is required is a negative process of removing obstacles. Ziran is what remains if we free ourselves from striving and conventional goals. Thus this same process is described as wuwei 無為, which literally means "lacking action" but refers to giving up actions that are coercive, effortful, or forced. The Zhuangzi describes this process as the "fasting of the heart/mind" (xinzhai 心齋), which allows us to rely directly on vital energy (qi) and respond spontaneously to whatever appears before us (Guo 1978, 4: 147; cf. Ziporyn 2009: 26). 3.4 Polarity and Cycles All of the cosmogonies posit stages between the ultimate and the concrete myriad things of the world. If the ultimate ground of things is immanent rather than teleological, then concrete things must be explained through a gradual process of spontaneous differentiation. Having a series of stages also allows for degrees of differentiation within a connected whole. That provides an explanation not just for things, but also for nature as a system. The most common stage involves interaction between two forces. These polar forces could be specified in many ways—heaven and earth, hot and cold, dry and moist—but the pair that came to dominate is yin 陰 and yang陽. (For a thorough study of yin and yang, see R. Wang 2012.) Yang originally referred to the south side of a mountain, which received the sun, while yin referred to the north side. Ultimately, yang was associated with the masculine, the forceful, and the bright, while yin was associated with the feminine, the yielding, and the obscure. Creativity followed from the interaction of yin and yang, analogous to sexual reproduction. All of the cosmogonies include cycles and processes of return. One prominent model was the four seasons. The change of seasons places cycles of growth and decay into a broader context of continuous vitality. The change of seasons itself, though, was seen as expressing a more fundamental cycle between poles such as yin and yang. Cyclical change could also be theorized through the progressions of generation (sheng 生) or overcoming (ke 克) among the five phases (wuxing 五行): wood, earth, fire, water, and metal. Another version of this cycling between poles was the claim that when processes reach an extreme, they reverse. Yet another manifestation is that things emerge from a common source and ultimately return to that source. In all of these cases, cyclicality explains the sustainability and predictability of natural patterns. 4. Impartiality and Differentiation No pre-Buddhist Chinese philosophers claimed that the qualitatively differentiated world we experience is an illusion, but their monistic metaphysics privileged connectedness and unity. While patterns of differentiation may be objective, individuation (i.e., what counts as a thing) is provisional and contextual. It is always possible to view all things as forming one whole or one body, and this unity tends toward equalizing things. From our contextual point of view, one thing can be said to be bigger, better, or more beautiful than another, but from a broader perspective all things have the same status as parts of a single body. This could lead toward skepticism of absolute values (as in the Zhuangzi) or toward an imperative to care for all things. Hui Shi (c. 380–305 BCE) is reported to have said: "Care overflowingly for all the myriad things; heaven and earth form one body [yiti 一體]" (Guo 1978, 33: 1102; Ziporyn 2009: 124). This can be seen as a radicalization of the Mohist claim that heaven generates all human beings and thus cares for them all equally, a point rooted in the early Zhou view of heaven as protecting the people. A progression toward more and more radical impartiality is mapped out in a passage from the Lüshi chunqiu 呂氏春秋, a text compiled around 239 BCE. The passage begins with a statement of nature's impartiality: The world is not one person's world but the world's world. The harmony of yinyang does not grow just one type. Sweet dew and timely rain are not partial to one thing. The birth of the myriad peoples does not favor one person. This is followed by story contrasting Kongzi (Confucius) and Lao Dan (Laozi): A person of Jing lost a bow and was not willing to search for it, saying, "A person of Jing lost it, a person of Jing will find it, so why search?" Kongzi heard this and said, "If you leave out 'Jing,' then it is acceptable". Lao Dan heard it and said, "If you leave out 'person,' then it is acceptable." Thus it was Lao Dan who reached the utmost impartiality. (Chen Qiyou 1984, 1/4: 45)[6] The level of impartiality attributed to Laozi eliminates the possibility of loss, leading to equanimity. As the reference to Kongzi suggests, this tendency toward inclusivity threatened the humanistic ethics of the Confucians. Their main response addressed a gap in the cosmogonies exemplified by the Laozi. These cosmogonies explained the dynamism inherent in particular things and the broader patterns of nature, but they did not address the differences between kinds of things—what makes human beings differ consistently from dogs? The concept that arose to fill this gap and to justify Confucian humanism is xing 性. Xing is most often translated as the "nature" of a thing or kind of thing, but it refers specifically to the way a thing responds spontaneously to its environment. In human beings, xing manifests itself primarily as desires and emotions, broadly labeled as qing 情 (genuine affects). One of the key questions debated by the Confucians was the degree to which ethical concerns like care, respect, and shame were embedded in these natural spontaneous affects. Xing became a foundation for theories of motivation but its roots are in metaphysics. Xing derives from heaven and is closely connected to sheng 生, the term meaning to live or generate. Xing moves from the generic creativity or vitality of nature to the specific life processes of kinds of things. More concretely, xing was conceptualized as the dynamic flow of qi (vital energy). One recently discovered text from the late 4th century BCE (known as the Xing zi ming chu 性自命出) brings these levels together: Although all human beings have xing, the heart lacks a stable resolve. It awaits things and then stirs, awaits being pleased and then acts, awaits practice and then stabilizes. The vital energies (qi 氣) of pleasure, anger, grief, and sadness are xing. Their appearing on the outside is because things stimulate them. Xing comes out from what is allotted (ming) and what is allotted comes down from heaven (tian). (S. Cook 2012, 697–700, slips 1–3). The term qi, translated here as "vital energy", is already well known in English. It was originally taken as one of several kinds of stuff, connected with air and breath, but it eventually became the dominant label for the basic stuff of the world, used to explain all kinds of dynamic processes, from the formation of heaven and earth to patterns of weather to the processes of the human heart.[7] It was closely connected with life and the generative power of nature. In this passage, human affects (including desires and a tendency to approve or disapprove) are the movement of this qi when stimulated by events in the world. This is part of the Confucian response to the focus on wuwei and reducing desires in texts like the Laozi and Zhuangzi—affects like sorrow and care arise spontaneously, by ziran. They are as natural for human beings as it is for water to flow downward or for trees to grow toward the sun. It may seem that this topic has drifted from metaphysics into ethics, but human actions are not different in kind from the movements of other things in the world, and human motivation expresses the tendency toward growth inherent in the very nature of existence. The use of xing and ziran in relation to motivation differs from the concerns around free will in almost every way, but they all arise as ways of explaining how human choices relate to the forces driving change in the rest of the natural world, or even how human choices relate to the very nature of being. In this way, they unite metaphysics and ethics. Beyond its role in explaining motivation, xing helps explain the organization of the world into individuals and kinds. In a series of passages arguing with a rival named Gaozi, Mengzi shows that whatever would explain the natures of things must have its own dynamism and directionality, and it must explain the specific differences between kinds of things (6A1–3). On the one side, xing differentiates things in terms of coherent patterns of force, providing a contextual and provisional basis for individuation. One can refer to the xing of a human being but also the xing of the human mouth (6A7), to the xing of a mountain ecosystem (6A8) or the xing of a single tree (6A1). On the other side, xing was generally used as a species concept—things of the same kind have the same xing. Mengzi's ethical philosophy is based on his belief that human beings share certain ways of responding to the world, all having the same xing. The status of species, though, was a point of controversy, linked to the question of whether or not all human beings could be held to the same standards. A more radical line of thought took each individual as having its own unique xing, a view rooted in parts of the Zhuangzi and developed later by Guo Xiang (?–312 CE) (Chiu forthcoming). 5. Correlative Cosmology Near the end of the Warring States Period, new assumptions about cosmology and metaphysics appeared that dominated the Han dynasty and profoundly influenced the development of Chinese thought. This new view has come to be known as "correlative cosmology," but it was not a single cosmology as much as several cosmological principles (Brindley 2012, 2–3).[8] Its core elements are various schema for sorting phenomena into kinds (lei 類) and a theory of causality based on stimulus and response (ganying 感應). These elements appear together in a paradigmatic statement from the Lüshi chunqiu: Things of the same kind summon each other, those with the same vital energy join together, and sounds that match resonate. Thus if you strum a gong note other gong will resonate; if you strum a jue note other jue will vibrate. Use a dragon to bring rain; use the form to move the shadow. The masses of people think that fortune and misfortune come from fate [ming]. How could they know from where they truly come! (Chen Qiyou 1984, 20/4: 1369) The categories used could be more or less specific, so on one side might be "human being" or "animal" while on the most general side all things could be classified as either yin or yang. Another of the most common categories were wood, earth, fire, water, and metal, known as the five phases (wuxing). Yet another set were based on the Yi Jing, using either the eight trigrams or sixty-four hexagrams. These systems of categorization were eventually integrated, so that categories from one could be translated into the others. Given the underlying ontology of change and process, categorization is not based on inherent qualities or essences but on typical ways of acting and reacting—does it tend to expand or contract, work gradually or swiftly, manifest itself obviously or subtly? Since these traits are relational, the same "thing" may not always be in the same category (it might act like wood in one context but metal in another), and because they are dynamic, the categories give immediate information on how things can be controlled, directed, or diminished. The application of the categories depends on context and the context depends on our particular purposes, but they are meant to express real properties of things. Consider the use of the most general categories, yin and yang. Yang labels the tendency to expand and dominate; yin labels the tendency to draw things in by yielding. Anything can be put in one of these two categories, but yin and yang are not inherent properties. The same thing that might be active and dominating in one relationship might be softer and yielding in another (as is commonly the case in Chinese medicine). The function of the labels can be compared to the way we label cause and effect. We can designate a cause and an effect in any change, but being a cause is not an essential property. Everything is simultaneously the cause of many effects and the effect of many causes. As cause and effect illustrate, even a set of binary categories can be helpful in analyzing situations, and yinyang could be specified in various ways. In the Yi Jing, lines representing either yin (a divided line) or yang (a straight line) can be combined into groups of three to form eight trigrams, or groups of six to form 64 categories. Each of these lines could be taken as more or less stable, leading to 4096 possible situations. The conception of causality at work here has come to be labeled with the Chinese phrase ganying 感應, "stimulus and response". This way of approaching causality reflects the fact that existence is inherently active and dynamic: nothing is purely passive or inert. The effects of a stimulus depend on the receptive and responsive capacities of the thing stimulated. One common model for ganying was resonance, as in the quotation above where the vibrations of one string stimulate vibrations in strings tuned to the same note. The final element is the role of correlations. To place phenomena in the same category is to situate them as having similar functions in analogous configurations. To be yin is to have a relationship to something that is yang, to be wood-like is to stand in certain relationships to fire, metal, earth, and water. This way of categorizing allows correlations across what would seem to be very different kinds of things. For example, an illness that is yang (expansive or overactive) can be treated with foods that are yin (receptive or calming). This kind of thinking is rooted in a concern for acting in harmony with natural patterns, going back to the concept of shi 時, which refers to the seasons, to the temporal configuration of a given moment, and to the ability to act according to the demands of that moment (Sellman 2002). These correlations were based on empirical observations, but as the categories were integrated and extended to all phenomena, the connections become less and less apparent, sometimes seeming forced and arbitrary. For example, for the first month that starts spring, the Lüshi chunqiu correlates certain days of the month, scaly animals, the musical note jue, sour tastes, and the number eight, but it also recommends surveying the land to set the boundaries of fields (so that conflicts are settled before planting begins), bans killing young animals and destroying eggs (so as to avoid shortages later), and forbids conscripting groups for war or major construction (so that they have time to plant the fields) (Chen Qiyou 1984, 1/1: 1–2). These are essentially rules for sustainability. The model that dominated modern European thinking about causality—linear causality through collision (on the model of billiard balls)—was not central to Chinese reflections on causality (as it was not central in Europe before the late Renaissance). For Chinese philosophers, the paradigms for causality were things like the effects of music over a distance, the relationship between spring and the growth of plants, and the influence between a teacher and student. This orientation followed from belief that all things are interconnected and are ultimately composed of the same stuff, qi. It also reflected practical concerns—How does culture work so that people can live together harmoniously? How do we relate to nature in a way that is sustainable? Approaching causality from this direction, though, is notoriously difficult. Han dynasty philosophers were basically starting from what we might now call ecological thinking or theories of complexity. Correlative cosmology posited a systematically ordered universe whose patterns could be grasped and mastered. The earlier quote from the Lüshi chunqiu ends with a powerful message: people think some things happen without reason or cause, attributing it to fate, but they are wrong. Nothing happens without a cause, and the system of causes can be known and controlled. This view placed human beings in control of their fates. The elevation of human power appears in the way the system of correlations provided a metaphysical foundation for what would seem to be human constructs. One early example was the correlation of leniency and violence (or the civil, wen 文, and the martial, wu 武) with the spring and the fall. This correlation made the use of violence a necessary and natural principle, while also restricting it to certain times. The paradigm for justifying social order through correlations is the Chunqiu fanlu 春秋繁露, traditionally attributed to Dong Zhongshu (179–104 BCE). In this text, yin and yang remain complementary but shift from equal forces driving generation to markers for hierarchical positions in a system of correlated arrangements (R. Wang 2005). To give just one example: The righteous [relationships] between ruler and minister, husband and wife, and father and son all derive from the Way of yin and yang. The ruler is yang; the minister is yin. The father is yang; the son is yin. The husband is yang; the wife is yin. There are no places where the Way of yin circulates alone. At the beginning [of the yearly cycle], yin is not permitted to arise by itself. Likewise, at the end [of the yearly cycle], yin is not permitted to share in [the glories] of yang's achievements. Such is the righteous principle of "joining." Thus, the minister joins his achievements to the lord; the son joins his achievements to the father; the wife joins her achievements to the husband; yin joins its achievements to yang; and Earth joins its achievements to Heaven (trans. from Queen and Major 2016, 426–27) This cosmology ends up doing much of the work that was done by anthropomorphism in the European tradition. In both cases, human culture is seen as mirroring structures at the foundation of the natural world. In the case of Europe, that foundation is seen as human-like in that we are made in the image of God, thus anthropomorphizing nature. In Chinese correlative cosmology, the opposite occurs, where specifically human phenomena are theorized as natural. In both cases, social and political hierarchies are given a metaphysical basis. The fact that similar oppressive hierarchies were rationalized and naturalized by radically different metaphysical views suggests the ease with which metaphysics comes to serve the interests of power. Han dynasty philosophy could still

be quite critical. The elevation of yang over yin in the Chunqiu fanlu is partly driven by a desire to minimize state violence, which it correlates with yin. A more radical political alternative appears in the Huainanzi 淮南子, a text compiled around 139 BCE. The Huainanzi emphasizes the inherent tendency of being toward diversification. Correlative influences generate a world that is too complex to grasp or master; politically, that justifies decentralization, minimal state power, and the value of diversity. Later in the Han dynasty, Wang Chong 王充 (27–100 CE) offers more fundamental criticisms, emphasizing the limits of human power to control and predict natural phenomena, the disjunction between virtue and worldly success, and the arbitrariness of explanations in terms of categories like the five phases. This argument is grounded in metaphysics. Wang Chong explicitly argues against beliefs that the world is ordered according to anything like a human design, claiming instead that everything arises spontaneously, by ziran (see McLeod 2019; Henderson 1984, 97–101). The Han dynasty collapsed in 220 CE, leading to a long period of fragmentation, instability, and uncertainty. The dominant philosophical movement is known as Xuanxue 玄學, “Profound Learning.” The term xuan means dark, obscure, or profound, but it also has a sense of what precedes any division, as it is used in the first chapter of the Laozi. The best known works from this movement are the commentaries by Wang Bi (226–249) (on the Laozi and Yi Jing) and by Guo Xiang (?–312 CE) (on the Zhuangzi).[9] Because of the centrality of the Laozi and Zhuangzi, the movement is sometimes known in English as “Neo-Daoism.” Different philosophers held different positions, but the core metaphysical issue was how to understand dao as ultimate ground, particularly how to interpret descriptions of dao as no-being (wu 無) and how to understand the relations between dao and the concrete world of experience. Xuanxue was important for establishing the metaphysical vocabulary used in later Chinese philosophy. One of the most important terms is li 理, which in its original use was a verb for laying out borders according to the contours of the land, or for carving jade according to its own inherent structure. Both Wang Bi and Guo Xiang use li as a technical term—for Wang Bi li refers to the patterns of coherence represented by the hexagrams of the Yi Jing, while for Guo Xiang li refers to patterns of differentiation that spontaneously arise in the world (Ziporyn 2014: 137–84). Li was later used by Chinese Buddhists to refer to emptiness and by Neo-Confucians to refer to patterns of coherence. The latter is discussed in Section 7. A second key concept to arise is the pairing of ti 體 and yong 用 (see Ziporyn 2014: 149–155; Zhang 2002: 252–53; Cua 2002; Cheng 2002). Yong means use or function. Ti originally refers to an organized form, a pattern that can be recognized, or to a body or part of the body. The pairing of tiyong was applied in different ways, but what is most consistent through these uses is that ti is singular and yong is multiple. For example, the same piece of wood (ti) could have many different uses (yong): to fuel a fire, to build a house, to carve into bowls, and so on. As in this example, the multiplicity of yong comes through involvement in concrete circumstances or purposes. In this way, ti is usually less determinate than yong. In fact, the ultimate ti was generally taken as fully indeterminate, thus allowing for infinite determinate uses (yong). The contrast between ti and yong sometimes looks like a contrast between the thing itself and the various ways it can be used. Such a contrast is highlighted in the translation of ti as substance, but this translation is misleading in several ways. First, like yin and yang, the labels ti and yong are contextual and thus the very same thing might be considered as ti in one context but as yong in another. Second, the ultimate ti is almost never taken to be individuated—it is emptiness or vital energy or the patterns of coherence (li) that all things share. So, individuation occurs more on the level of yong than ti. It is worth noting that the phrase chosen to translate the ontos in ontology was benti 本體, literally the “root” ti, a term that was prominent in Neo-Confucianism. 6. Buddhist Metaphysics in China A radical transformation of metaphysical views in China followed the introduction and incorporation of Buddhist philosophy, a process that began in the 1st century CE. On the surface, one might think that Buddhism opposes metaphysical speculation. In the famous parable of the arrow, the Buddha compares a student insistent on metaphysical speculation to someone who has been shot with a poisoned arrow but refuses to be treated until he knows who shot the arrow, why they shot it, where the arrow came from, and so on. The point is that we know that the central problem in life is suffering and we know that the cure is the elimination of self-centered desires. Nonetheless, Buddhists commonly claim that one can be released from such desires by seeing reality as it truly is. The truth to be realized is that there is no self as an independent and lasting being. Much of Buddhist philosophy can be read as a sustained attack on any kind of substance-based metaphysics. The existence of substances (and thus of the self as a real and lasting thing) requires three things: ontological separation between things (making the self distinct from others), internal unity (so that it is one self), and sameness over time (so it remains the same self). Buddhists attack all three of these, arguing that things are interconnected, lack intrinsic unity, and change endlessly. Their arguments invoke two of the main principles of Buddhist metaphysics—impermanence (anitya/wuchang 無常) and dependent co-arising (pratītyasamutpāda/yuanqi 緣起). The process oriented metaphysics of Buddhism fit with the Chinese philosophical tradition, but it brought a level of precision and complexity honed through a long tradition of intense disputation and dialectic. Positions that had been taken for granted in China were articulated in detail and defended against alternatives that had never been a concern (such as the idea of an eternal and unchanging soul). New possibilities were introduced, including the claim that only consciousness is real. Of course, as Buddhism impacted Chinese philosophy, China transformed Buddhism, leading to schools of Buddhism that never existed in India. Buddhist metaphysics in China is complex and diverse and I will just focus a few examples.[10] Much of Buddhist metaphysics involves negotiating a middle ground between reification and nihilism. The problem appears in relation to the self—it may be true that there is no self, but surely there is something which grounds or generates or is the illusion of self. One early school (Abhidharma) argued the self is a label for what is really an aggregate of momentary elements and factors, known as dharmas (fa 法). Apparent wholes like the self can be mereologically reduced to constituent factors, just as a chariot can be reduced to its parts. A more radical view extended the critique of the self to any entity that might be taken as independently real or self-defined, in Buddhist terms, anything that might have svabhāva, literally “self-being” or “self-nature” (in Chinese, zixing 自性). This denial of self-being follows from dependent co-arising, which claims that any event depends on and is bound up with others. Lacking an independent essence or ground, all phenomena are said to be empty, śūnyatā or kong 空. Emptiness is meant to be a middle ground between affirming or denying the existence of things, but such a middle ground is difficult to articulate, and the history of Buddhist philosophy can be seen as a dialectic between those proposing some kind of reality (accused of reification) and those rejecting it (accused of nihilism). This dialectic is portrayed differently by different thinkers, depending on what they take to be the final position that encompasses all others. As an example, we can consider the progression given by Zongmi 宗密 (780–841), a philosopher representative of the Huayan 華嚴 school but with close links to Chan (see Gregory 2002). In his Inquiry into the Origins of Humanity (Yuanren lun 原人論) Zongmi begins with the view that each person has a soul that is reincarnated according to his or her actions. He critiques this position by analyzing this self in terms of its parts—the self cannot be identified with the totality of parts (since some parts are lost at death) nor with one part among many (which would make the other parts irrelevant and thus not really even parts). This leads into the next position, that bodily form and cognitive mind, because of the force of causes and conditions, arise and perish from moment to moment, continuing in a series without cease, like the trickling of water or the flame of a lamp. (trans. from Gregory 2009: 143) According to Zongmi, this denial of the self cannot account for continuity, and in particular, the links between actions and consequences (karma). Some medium must hold the various elements together. That leads into the third position, that all the various changes are appearances of one mind, which is the ultimate reality. This was the position of the Yogācāra or Consciousness-Only (weishi 唯識) school of Buddhism. The claim that mind is the ultimate reality tends back toward the side of reification and so the next step negates it. Zongmi’s argument is typical of the Madhyamaka school (commonly known in Chinese as the “Three Teachings,” Sanlun 三論). If we identify this one mind with actual thoughts, then either both are illusions or both are real, but if we separate this mind from actual thoughts then we end up with thoughts that exist on their own and a mind that has no qualities whatsoever. While the target here is mind as the ultimate reality, a similar argument can be used to attack anything claimed to be independent and unchanging. For Zongmi, this position denies any form of being and so it cannot end the dialectic. He calls the fifth and final position “The Teaching that Reveals the Nature,” reinterpreting a term we have already seen, xing 性, which here stands for the Buddha-nature (Fo xing 佛性). This ultimate reality could also be referred to as the true mind or as the Tathāgatagarbha (Rulaizang如來藏), which literally means the “Womb of the Thus-Come” (“Thus-Come” being a common name for the Buddha). While the last three positions all had prominent advocates in China, the final position became dominant and was shared by Tiantai 天臺, Huayan, and Chan Buddhists. One obvious question is how this final position differs from the position of Consciousness-Only. Zongmi extends a line of argument common in Chinese Buddhism, which is to critique any form of dualism. Since nothing we experience is truly independent, simple, or unchanging, any metaphysics that posits substances with self-being requires a bifurcation between reality and appearances, or more specifically, between the substance itself and the various qualities or modes by which it appears. Buddhists argue against the coherence of any such division. This is the meaning of the common saying: “form is emptiness and emptiness is form.” Zongmi pushes this argument further to argue against any split between reality and illusion or between enlightenment and non-enlightenment. This leads to the claim that all sentient beings are already enlightened—what is needed is not to change reality or gain anything but just to realize that we are already where we need to be. The relationship between reality and illusion is one of the central debates within Chinese Buddhism (Kantor 2015). The most famous expression of this debate appears in the Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch, a foundational text for Chan Buddhism. The star disciple (Shen Xiu) first composes this poem: The body is the tree of insight; The mind is like a clear mirror. Always clean and polish it; Never allow dirt or dust! Hui Neng (638–713 CE), the central figure of the text, writes this poem in reply: Insight originally has no tree; The bright mirror has no stand. Buddha-nature is always pure and clean; How could there ever be dirt or dust? (trans. from Ivanhoe 2009, 15–16) The contrast between the two poems marks the split between the gradual and sudden enlightenment schools of Chan. How to discuss the relationship between the realm of experience and emptiness or Buddha-nature was another common theme in Chinese Buddhist philosophy. One of the more thorough and influential discussions is the Meditative Approaches to the Huayan Dharmadhātu (Huayan Fajie Guan Men 華嚴法界觀門), attributed to Dushun 杜順 (557–640) (see Fox 2009). According to Dushun, the world of experience can be viewed in four different ways. The first is as phenomena or events (shi 事), which is equivalent to the realm of form. The second is as emptiness, referred to here with the term li 理. The point is that, in one sense, reality can be seen as the multitude of phenomena but, in another sense, it can all be seen as empty, which entails a kind of equality and interchangeability. The third perspective addresses the relationship between emptiness and phenomena, using the relationship between water and waves as a metaphor. The two are mutually encompassing and mutually dependent, just as there is no water without waves and waves are nothing other than water, yet we can focus solely on the wave or solely on the water. The point is that designating a wave is not the same as designating water, yet these designations do not “obstruct” each other. The very same reality can be taken as the phenomena of everyday experience and as emptiness. The fourth perspective brings us to a metaphysical issue that has recurred across the Chinese philosophical tradition—the interconnection of things. It is not just that emptiness and phenomena are mutually penetrating but that any phenomenon is penetrated by all others. The claim that any one thing includes all others is clearest on the level of causality and intelligibility. Consider the cause for your reading this article. It might be for help in a course, or because you followed a link out of curiosity, or from a desire to better understand the context of the Laozi. But we could say the cause was the story of how your parents met—had that not happened you would not be reading this article. Or it might be the story of how my parents met, or the creation of the internet, or the founding of Stanford University, or the gravitational pull of the earth. If everything is interconnected, then anything could be given as a cause for your reading this article. What makes one answer better than another is determined only by the interests of the questioner (are they interested in increasing web traffic to the SEP? understanding digital humanities? writing my biography? writing yours?). This shows how any one event implicates and arises with all others. Consider further, though, that all things are empty. They have no independent self-nature, so what it is to be that thing is explained entirely by all of the factors that allow it to appear as what it is. Thus it is not just that things depend on each other but that things include each other. This inclusion applies not just between any two events but also between any event and the totality of other events; the story of the whole universe can be explicated from any one point. Brook Ziporyn (2000) calls this “omnicentric holism”and it has similarities with Leibniz’s claim that every substance (monad) implicitly expresses all others. This conclusion serves the soteriological purposes of Buddhist philosophy—if any one thing implies all others, then it is impossible to grasp only one thing. Grasping and attachment become incoherent. It is worth comparing this result with the elimination of loss through radical impartiality, discussed in Section 4. 7. Coherence and Vital Energy in Neo-Confucianism The interpenetration of emptiness and phenomena is an affirmation of the changing world in which we live. Thus, it is false to see Chinese Buddhism as life-negating or as denying the diversity of the world. Nonetheless, the metaphysics of emptiness is directed toward overcoming attachments. Diversity remains, but there are no individuals to grasp. The Confucian response, which became a dominant force in the Song dynasty (960–1279), was driven primarily by an aversion to these consequences. This reaction can be seen in three concrete positions—the acceptance of suffering and death as unavoidable, the differentiation of roles and norms within society, and the embrace of negative affects such as sorrow at the death of a parent or anxious concern for a child in danger. This Confucian movement is known in Chinese as the “Learning of the Way” (Daoxue 道學) and in English as “Neo-Confucianism.” While based on practical concerns, this Confucian revival was supported by metaphysical claims.[11] In terms of the dialectal movement we have seen, the Neo-Confucians take all of the Buddhist positions as nihilistic. The first influential Confucian responses appear in cosmological arguments. We can take Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1077) as an example. (For studies of Zhang Zai, see Ziporyn 2015; Kim 2015; Kasoff 1984.) Zhang Zai’s basic move is to argue that the ultimate, labeled as “Supreme Emptiness” (Taixu 太虛), cannot be nothingness but must be qi, and the fundamental characteristic of this qi must be a dynamic interplay between opposites. Zhang explains: The Supreme Emptiness of necessity consists of vital energy. Vital energy of necessity integrates to become the myriad things. Things of necessity disintegrate and return to the Supreme Emptiness. Appearance and disappearance following this cycle are a matter of necessity. (trans. modified from W. Chan 1969: 501) There are several important points to note in Zhang Zai’s position. First, he explicitly argues that the only way to explain the origins of the world we experience is if dynamism and differentiation are the very nature of existence. For this reason, Brook Ziporyn argues that the ultimate for Zhang Zai is not qi but harmony itself (Ziporyn 2015). Second, by positing qi as fundamental, Zhang Zai shifts from questions about nihilism and reification back to the relationship between the formed and the formless. In making the formed and formless two modalities of existence, Zhang Zai allows that both are equally real. In this way, he reaffirms the importance of individuated things like parents and children. Zhang Zai’s cosmology echoes the earlier Chinese cosmologies discussed in Section 3. To say that the nature of qi is active differentiation is to say that the nature of qi is sheng, vitality or generation. This emphasis on being as a force of growth and vitality was a common point among Neo-Confucians, linked directly to the virtue of ren 仁, humaneness or benevolence. To be humane is to support and extend the generative process of nature itself. Furthermore, there is a unity to things in the world, grounded in the fact that they are all made up of qi and they unfold in interlocking patterns of influence. As Zhang Zai puts it in the famous Western Inscription: Heaven is my father and earth is my mother, and even such a small creature as I finds an intimate place in their midst. Therefore that which fills the universe I regard as my body [ti 體] and that which directs the universe I consider as my nature [xing 性]. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions. (trans from W. Chan 1969: 497) Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085) compares one who does not care for other things to someone who has lost sensation in their own limbs. Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529) extends these feelings of concern even to trampled grass and broken tiles. Deriving inclusive care from the vitality and unity of nature appeared in the Warring States Period, but in opposition to Confucianism. For the Confucians, this focus on being as vitality needs an inherent order, which came through a reinterpretation of the term li 理. The complexity of the term appears in the range of common translations: principle, patterns, coherence. Li often refers to something we should follow and in this sense it might be taken as principles, but li also refers to actual patterns of differentiation, not just to ideals. Considering that li is contextual and involves human purposes and perspectives, translating the term as “coherence” or “coherent patterns” probably best brings these various aspects together. Stephen C. Angle gives an excellent brief definition of li as “the valuable, intelligible way that things fit together” (Angle 2009: 32).[12] There are patterns of coherence in the world, and these patterns define individual things, constitute nature as a system, and structure human society. Li describes the way that these patterns can be optimally harmonized or made to cohere so as to foster the human good (i.e., to be valuable and intelligible). The Neo-Confucian interpretation of li is a return to earlier Chinese views that took nature as having stable patterns that we can recognize and follow. The Neo-Confucians defend these earlier views against what they saw as Buddhist attacks by claiming that the differentiated structure of the world we live in is real. These patterns of coherence give specific form to our concerns and efforts, so that one can justify caring primarily for one’s own parents while still taking all things as extensions of one’s own body. Even so, the Neo-Confucian conception of li retains several Buddhist aspects. The most obvious example is the claim that the totality of li is contained in any one thing. Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107) coined what became a standard motto: “Li is one but distinguished as many” (li yi fen shu 理一分殊) (Angle 2009: 44). This unity within diversity was illustrated with a metaphor taken from Buddhism—the moon reflects on many different surfaces, but it remains the one same moon. Since li refers to patterns of coherence and all things ultimately form one body, it follows that all things are mutually implicated, a point already discussed in relation to Huayan Buddhism above. The Neo-Confucians do not go so far as to say that each thing contains all other things, though. Any instance of coherence implicates all others, but events still have their own reality. Another common Neo-Confucian claim with Buddhist overtones follows: if the totality of li is included within any particular thing, then it must exist within each person’s heart/mind. One of the main disputes among the Neo-Confucians was on the precise meaning and significance of this point. Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) argued that li is the nature (xing) found in the heart, while Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (1139–1192) and Wang Yangming took li and the heart to be identical. This leads to a difference in emphasis between the two main schools of Neo-Confucianism regarding their recommended process of accessing li: the “School of Li” (lixue 理學) (also known as the Cheng-Zhu school) placed more emphasis on study and learning, while the “School of Heart/Mind” (xinxue 心學) (the Lu-Wang school) concentrated more on self-reflection. This difference, though, is one of emphasis: since they agreed that li could be accessed through our own heart and through things in the world, all Neo-Confucians promoted both self-reflection and learning. Neo-Confucians always discuss li in relation to qi, vital energy. If li refers to patterns of coherence, qi is the stuff in which those patterns inhere. This distinction has functional similarities with Aristotle’s distinction between form and matter, but the force of activity and change is with qi rather than li. That means that li must be immanent in qi in some sense. The precise ontological status of li and qi became one of the main metaphysical disputes among Confucian philosophers. One could easily claim that the distinction between patterns of coherence and the stuff that follows the patterns is conceptual rather than ontological. That is close to the view seen in Zhang Zai, for whom qi is active and inherently patterned. For Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming, though, li has ontological priority over qi. Zhu Xi writes: Fundamentally, li and vital energy cannot be spoken of as prior or posterior. But if we must trace their origin, we are obliged to say that li is prior. However, li is not a separate entity. It exists right in vital energy. Without vital energy, li would have nothing to adhere to. (trans. modified from W. Chan 1969: 634) The question of the relationship between qi and li extended into cosmogonies as well. While Zhang Zai took qi to be the ultimate, Zhu Xi claimed the ultimate was li (using the term Supreme Polarity). Since li is the locus of intelligibility and values, the question ultimately was whether causal and explanatory priority was with this coherence or if coherence was instead a product of the generative forces of nature (qi). The distinction between li and qi provided a way to deal with the tension between the claim that the nature of human beings is good and the recognition that people need extensive self-cultivation in order to actually be good. Li is inherently good and is the same in all things. In that sense, we already have all that we need. The quality of qi, though, varies. Turbid qi—which manifests itself as selfishness and partiality—obscures li. Thus from the perspective of li human nature is good, but from the perspective of li and qi together, a person can be good, bad, or in between. On the psychological level, the work of self-cultivation is cultivating tranquility and impartiality; on the metaphysical level, one purifies qi so as to more perfectly express and participate in li. This view of self-cultivation inherits the Buddhist claim that, since everyone possesses Buddha-nature (fo xing), everyone is already enlightened, but merges it with Mengzi’s claim that human nature (xing) is good. Unlike Mengzi, the process of self-cultivation is not a process of extension but rather of removing the obstacles that keep us from being what we already are. Phillip J. Ivanhoe has nicely captured this point by contrasting the views of self-cultivation for Mengzi and Wang Yangming as the difference between a model of development and a model of discovery (Ivanhoe 2002). As in Buddhism, what needs to be removed are selfish and biased desires. Unlike Buddhism, and in line with Mengzi, this enlightened condition does not lead to a calm state free of desires and negative emotions. Instead, the li within us is expressed as spontaneously appropriate desires and emotions, including negative emotions like grief for a dying parent or anxious concern for a child in danger. 8. Conclusion: Beyond “Chinese Philosophy” If one turns to metaphysics in the twentieth century and beyond, it becomes necessary to distinguish “Philosophy in China” from “Chinese Philosophy”. Like almost everywhere else in the world, the twentieth century in China was characterized by the incorporation of ideas from other cultures, most obviously from Europe. The terms “philosophy” and “metaphysics” were introduced as distinct concepts through translation and thus they become the objects of conscious reflection. Even scholars dedicated to “Chinese Philosophy” set themselves in dialogue with the West, so that almost all philosophy was more or less intercultural. The main influences from Europe were Kant, Hegel, and Marx, but a wide range of philosophers were incorporated, including Nietzsche, Bergson, Dewey, and Heidegger. Almost all of the major philosophers in China—from Xiong Shili 熊十力 (1885–1968) to Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 (1895–1990) to Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909–1995)—were concerned with establishing a metaphysical foundation for Chinese Philosophy.[13] These philosophers, drawing on resources from multiple cultures and traditions, are better suited for an entry on “Metaphysics” than one on “Metaphysics in Chinese Philosophy”. In traditional Chinese philosophy, epistemology was not an explicitly developed discipline, even if Chinese philosophers since ancient times were interested in problems related to human knowledge and developed some implicit theories of knowledge. Traditionally, there was no technical Chinese term equivalent to "epistemology" in Western philosophy, for which Chinese now use the terms "zhishilun" and "renshilun" as modern translations. In contrast, metaphysics has been a central interest of Chinese philosophy, traceable back to its origin in the Yijing or Zhouyi (The [Zhou] book of changes, c. 6th–5th century BCE). The discourse on the Way (daolun ), in various forms, has always been an essential constituent of traditional Chinese philosophy. The term "xingershangxue," or simply "xingshangxue," now serving as the Chinese translation of the term "metaphysics" in Western philosophy, comes from the great appendix of the Zhouyi, where we read, "What is above forms [xing er shang ] is the Way [dao ]; what is under forms [xing er xia ] is concrete things [qi ]" (Kong, juan, p. 158). Knowledge of metaphysical reality, essential to Chinese philosophy, is also a fundamental concern of Chinese theory of knowledge.The following discussion will first deal with Chinese theories of knowledge, ascending from ordinary knowledge to science to wisdom. All three moments have their metaphysical presuppositions, especially wisdom, which is in essence the knowledge of ultimate reality and thus leads to metaphysics properly speaking.KnowledgeIt is easy to identify some texts in which traditional Chinese philosophers discussed the subject-object structure of knowledge or the knower-known relation in the process of knowing. For example, Xunzi (298–238 BCE) said, "That by which one can know is human nature; that which can be known are the principles of things" (p. 523). Mo Di (fl. 400 BCE) said, "Wisdom (zhi ) is the capacity … by which, when one knows, one necessarily knows (as with eyesight)" (p. 212), and "Wisdom, by means of the capacity to know when in contact with things, enables one to describe it, like the seen" (p. 212). Unlike in Western epistemology, where the relation between subject and object or knower and known plays an essential role, in Chinese philosophy, this is only instrumental to a deeper dynamic process in which the individual attains knowledge of external things and cognitively appropriates objects in the world for building a meaningful life.Chinese philosophers distinguished different types of knowledge, such as the Mohists' distinction between knowledge by hearsay, knowledge by explanation, and knowledge by personal experience, and Mencius's distinction between knowledge by the senses and knowledge by thinking. But more important is the Chinese concern with how to prepare the mind to know external things as they are, without bias. This can be seen in the Huanglao Daoist ideas of emptying (xu ), unifying (yi ), and quieting (jing ) the mind. These notions were later developed by Xunzi as a way to attain the great clear enlightened state of mind (da qingming ). Xunzi can be seen as the greatest theorist of knowledge in Chinese philosophy. The last master thinker in the Jixia Academy (374–221 BCE), Xunzi developed his epistemological thinking as theoretical support for scholarly argumentation in the academy, which consisted of different competing schools.In the manner of an intellectualist, Xunzi emphasized humans' cognitive ability to discern right and wrong, which he termed "discernment" (bian ). When expressed in discourse, this ability is displayed in what he called "discerning discourse" or "argumentation" (bianshuo ). Xunzi conceived of the Way as the ultimate standard for discerning right and wrong, which included classes (lei ), coherence (tong ), and distinctions (fen ) as subcriteria. Since things exist in different classes or categories (lei ), their corresponding names should also be divided similarly or differently, as the case may be. The function of discourse is to make proper distinctions and classifications (fen ) among things and names. Finally, all classifications and distinctions in discourse should be composed into a coherent system (tong ).To judge right from wrong well, one has to keep one's mind in a great clear enlightened state, attained by making one's mind empty, one, and still (xu, yi er jing ), ideas that Xunzi received and developed from the Daoists, especially (370–290 BCE). Xunzi understood that when the mind is empty, "what has already been stored [in the mind] does not hinder the reception of new knowledge," that when the mind is one, "the knowledge of particular things does not hinder their unity," and that when the mind is still, "dreams and noisy fancies do not disorder one's knowing mind" (Xunzi, p. 510).According to Xunzi, in the process of knowing and arguing for one's knowledge, one must, negatively, discard all obscuring factors and, positively, be alert to other, easily neglected aspects of an issue in dispute. Human knowledge is expressed by concepts, which, for Xunzi, are names (ming ). Names can be analyzed according to the concepts of intentions and extensions of Western formal logic. With respect to intentions, Xunzi distinguished between names discerning superiority/inferiority and names discerning identity/difference, representing concepts respectively indicating values and facts, for him the former being higher than the latter. With respect to extensions, Xunzi made the distinction between generic names (gongming ) and specific names (bieming ), analyzable by reference to the relations of "inclusion" and "belonging to" between classes and subclasses. Classes can be seen as the basis of all deductive and inductive reasoning. Since the Way, as the ultimate standard for judging right from wrong, can be classified into different classes (lei ), lei is imbued with both logical and ontological meanings.ScienceBefore modern European science emerged in the sixteenth century, Chinese science was much more advanced than European science, as shown by Joseph Needham in Science and Civilization in China. Chinese philosophers were often enthusiastic about and full of scientific knowledge. For example, Zhu Xi (1130–1200), though living in the twelfth century, was well acquainted with different kinds of scientific knowledge, and is therefore a good example to showcase the philosophical import of Chinese science. Zhu Xi can be seen as the great synthesizer of medieval Chinese scientific knowledge and its philosophical foundation, even if he lived earlier than such Western medieval thinkers as Robert Grosseteste (1175–1253), Roger Bacon (1210–1292), Albert the Great (1200–1280), St. Bonaventura (1217–1274), and St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). Zhu Xi's Wenji (Collected writings) and Yulei (Classified conversations) display his rich knowledge in the domains of calendrical astronomy, botany, music and harmonics, geomancy, medicine, etc. Also, he frequently discussed matters of science with his disciples, sometimes for the sake of scientific knowledge, sometimes to illustrate Chinese classical texts.Some of Zhu Xi' observations on natural phenomena are quite interesting and true. For example, he said, "Mountains were formed by the elevation of sea bottom." He then proceeded to prove it by pointing to the presence of seashells on top of mountains, saying, "On high mountains there are often seen shells of oyster and shellfish in the rocks. These rocks must have been earth in ancient times, and those shells from oysters and shellfish in the water. The lower becomes the higher, the soft becomes hard. This phenomenon is worthy of pondering upon, for these facts can be verified" (1999, bk. 5, p. 19). In this particular case, Joseph Needham admires Zhu Xi, writing, "Zhu Xi recognized the fact that the mountains had been elevated since the day when the shells of the living animals had been buried in the silt mud of the sea-bottom" (1959, p. 598). Note that Zhu Xi's remarks here concern mountain formation as well as fossils of sea animals. In other areas of science, Zhu Xi also correctly observed that the source of moonlight was the sun, and he correctly explained such phenomena as tides and eclipses of sun and moon.Even if Zhu Xi was full of natural knowledge and was rational in attitude, he was not satisfied with the technical dimension of scientific knowledge and sought deeper understanding by exhausting the principles of all things and developing a holistic vision of reality. In fact, his interest in knowledge of nature should be understood in his philosophical concepts of gewu zhizhi (investigating things to extend knowledge). For Zhu Xi, li, meaning principle, reason, or order, could be found in everything and was worthy of investigation. He said, "As high as the Ultimate Infinite, the Great Ultimate, and as low as one herb, one tree, as tiny as one insect, each has its principle. … If we leave one thing uninvestigated, then we lack one principle" (1999, bk. 1, p. 295). The object of Zhu Xi's investigation was the order existing in other things, which presupposed that things and their principles possessed a certain otherness. The attainment of knowledge would include knowledge of other things and knowledge of self, or better said, a detour through the other that leads to a return to oneself, as when one finally achieves sudden penetration into the nature of things and attains transparent self-knowledge. Thus, the investigation of things is a detour in which one first goes outside one's self to the other and by knowing the other, one can finally come back to knowing one's own self.So much for the Zhu Xi example. What is to be said about the epistemological specificity of Chinese science in comparison with European modern science? Generally speaking, Western modern science was historically grounded in the Greek heritage of theōria, the disinterested pursuit of truth and sheer intellectual curiosity. Aristotle said in his Metaphysics that science began in a way of life that included leisure (rhaistōnē ) and recreation (diagōgē ), such as the Egyptian priests enjoyed who discovered geometry. They did not need to care about daily necessities of life and could wonder about the causes of things and seek knowledge for its own sake. The result of their wonder was theories, whose meaning, according to Aristotle, was determined, in one sense, by practice, "not in virtue of being able to act, but of having the theory for themselves and knowing the causes" (Metaphysics 981b 6–7), and, in another sense, with respect to universal objects, seen by Aristotle as the first characteristic of science (Metaphysics, 982a 3–10, 20–23).In contrast, Chinese science in general began as a concern leading not to universal theorization but to universal praxis. It was because of his concern with the destiny of the individual and society that Chinese began to philosophize. The great appendix of the Zhouyi asserts that the study of changes began with concern and anxiety over natural calamity, not in leisure and recreation. It also suggests that the practical intention of Chinese science was to serve as guidance for a universal praxis. Nevertheless, both modern European science and traditional Chinese science are concerned with the universal, or better, the universalizable, character of science, the one more with universal theories, the other more with universal praxis, yet both of them criticize and seek to transcend particular interests, with a view to attaining universality.Because of its pragmatic concern, Chinese traditional science, in thinking about the secrets of nature, tends to use concrete images and construct concrete models for understanding natural phenomena. These images or models came directly from an intuitive or speculative vision of reality. Models in traditional Chinese science were based on analogies, that is, they were concrete models of images or small-scale models that combined the functions of explanation and pragmatic operation. For example, the construction of astronomic clepsydras (water clocks), very important in Chinese astronomy and hydraulics, expressed the genius of traditional Chinese science. Here were models that linked the movements of the heavens with the more visible movement of water or other fluid to create a visible image. In modern terms, the Chinese way of thinking in science is more analogous in form, giving birth to images and icons, which provide a more intuitive grasp of a situation in action. By contrast, the construction of models in modern European science is guided by theories presentable in mathematic form. Such models serve to mediate between mathematical theories and concrete empirical data. Modern European science, as exemplified by Newton's physics and Leibniz's mathesis universalis (a universal science modeled on mathematics), is akin to the digital way of thinking and provides a more structured and lucidly conceptualizable understanding.The special features of traditional Chinese science in comparison with modern European science concerning the epistemic structures involved in the process of constructing scientific knowledge are these: First, on the rational side, modern European science, in constructing theories, uses logically and mathematically structured languages to formulate theories of local validity, that is, with explanatory and predictive power in a particular domain of phenomena. In comparison, Chinese traditional science did not utilize logico-mathematical structures in its theory formation. Chinese never pondered about the structure of language to the point of elaborating a logic system for the formulation and control ofscientific discourse. Mathematics, although highly developed, was used only for describing and organizing data, not for formulating theories. Chinese quasi-scientific theories, lacking logical and mathematical structure, were principally presented through intuition and speculative imagination. They might have the advantage of offering insight into the totality of life and environment and giving a reasonable interpretation of them, but these "theories" somehow lacked the rigor of structural organization and logical formulation.Second, on the empirical side, modern European science is characterized by well-controlled systematic experimentation, which, by elaborating on the sensible data and our perception of them, keeps in touch with the real world, but in an artificial, technically controlled way. In contrast, the empirical data in traditional Chinese sciences were gathered through detailed but passive observations, with or without the assistance of instruments. Traditional Chinese science seldom tried any systematically organized experimentation to exercise active artificial control over human perception of natural objects.Third, in modern European science, there is conscious checking of the correspondence between the rational side and the empirical side to combine them into a coherent whole so as to serve the objective of explaining and controlling the world. The rational side of science builds up a theoretical vision of the world, while the empirical side relates this vision to the scientist's sensible construction and controlled experience of the world. Philosophical reflection, in checking the correspondence between these two aspects, assures us of their coherence and unity. In contrast, traditional Chinese science did not conceive of any interactive relation such as deduction/falsification or induction/verification or tests/confirmation to relate empirical knowledge and its intelligible ground of unity. Although Chinese traditional science did have its visions of proper science and knowledge in general, it did not have modern European science's epistemological reflection and philosophy of science—disciplines that check the nature of and correspondence between empirical and rational constructs.Still, there is unity in traditional Chinese science. Confucius (551–479 BCE) said that there is a unity binding, or a guiding thread penetrating, all his knowledge. Confucius thus seemed to affirm the complementary interaction between empirical data and thinking. He said, "He who learns without thought is confused. He who thinks without learning is in danger" (Analects 2.15). These words remind one of Kant's proposition that sensibility without concepts is blind, whereas concepts without sensibility are void. But we should be clear that the mode of unity in traditional Chinese science was a kind of mental integration with ultimate reality through ethical praxis. Here praxis or practical action was not the technical application of theories to control concrete natural or social phenomena. Rather, it was an active process of realizing what is proper in the life of the individual and society. Science and technology are not to be ignored, but must be reconsidered in the context of this ethical praxis.From the analysis above, it becomes clear that traditional Chinese science should be characterized as reasonable, and not rational in the sense of modern Western science. To be rational, one has to control the gathering of empirical data through systematic experimentation, to formulate theories in logico-mathematical language, and to check the relation of empirical data and theories through philosophical reflection. By contrast, to be reasonable, one has to find meaning for human life with reference to the totality of existence. Chinese philosophy, in its quest for what is reasonable, was caught in the tension between reference to the totality of human existence and reference to the totality of all existence. Confucianism insists on referring to the totality of human existence, whereas Daoism seeks to escape from the all too human tendencies of humanist philosophy and to refer rather to the totality of all existence, as expressed by the concept of the Way (dao ). Daoist philosophy, as a philosophy anchored in the Way and the totality of all existence, and Confucianism, as a philosophy anchored in the totality of human existence, exemplify two complementary aspects of Chinese reasonableness.WisdomWisdom is the common concern of Chinese epistemology and metaphysics. Ultimately speaking, in all Chinese philosophical traditions, wisdom is what one's knowledge should finally achieve, and wisdom in some sense always refers to what is really real, to ultimate reality. In ancient China, the same ideogram (zhi ) was used for both knowledge and wisdom, but later a radical was added to the character to differentiate wisdom (zhi ) from knowledge (also zhi ). The modern term for wisdom is zhihui. Chinese Mahayana Buddhism, while using zhihui, prefers the term banruo, a Chinese phonetic translation of the Sanskrit prajñā. When Xuanzang (596–664) set up a system of regulations for his translation project, he showed a particular respect for the term banruo in his "five categories of terms not to be translated" (wu bu fan ), while the Chinese term zhihui appeared for him to be superficial. Nevertheless, the term zhihui was also often used in Chinese Buddhism to express the idea of wisdom.In Confucianism, wisdom means three things. First, wisdom means accumulating knowledge under a unifying thread or penetrating unity, as Confucius said. In this sense, knowledge comes from investigating the natures or principles of things so as to be able to unfold them according to their natures, instead of imposing theories upon them or exploiting their energy for human short-term interests. Second, wisdom means achieving total self-understanding. For Wang Yangming (1472–1529), this entails achieving one's inborn knowledge, completely developing one's true nature, and arriving at one's full potential of the moral knowledge proper to humans. Finally, wisdom means awareness of one's own destiny or heavenly mandate. Confucius took his understanding of his heavenly mandate, at age fifty, as a crucial point of his life. Also, the Doctrine of the Mean (c. 5th century BCE) says, "Wishing to know man, he must not fail to know Heaven" (Chan, p. 105).In Daoism, Laozi, despite its critical and negative attitude toward instrumental knowledge and calculation, as shown in its negative use of the term "knowledge," nevertheless uses the term ming, defined as enlightened knowledge of the constant law of nature: "To know harmony is to accord with the constant; to know the constant is wisdom" (chap. 55). According to Daoism, to be wise, which is more than possessing mere intellectual knowledge, is to know the constant laws of nature, and from there, to be one with the Way and thereby to live a life of freedom, understood not as merely making free choices or arriving at autonomous decisions, but rather as complying with the spontaneous rhythms of nature.In Chinese Mahayana Buddhism, the Chinese term banruo is taken to mean only perfect wisdom. This is a development of the Indian tradition, where the term prajñā means knowledge as well as wisdom, perfect wisdom as well as imperfect wisdom. In Chinese Buddhism, wisdom means attaining enlightenment, a state in which one understands that all is empty and thus seeks to rid oneself of original ignorance. The term zhihui (wisdom) was used to translate prajñā, especially in Weishi's (for example, in Xuanzang's Cheng Weishi Lun, 659 CE) concept of transforming consciousness into wisdom (zhuan shi de zhi or zhuan shi cheng zhi ). For the Weishi School, more Indian than Chinese, wisdom arises from Alaya consciousness (Alya vijñāna). But for the Sanlun School, wisdom means realizing the ultimate emptiness of the world. In Chan (Zen) Buddhism, wisdom is the immediate self-realization of Buddhahood in the details of everyday life.In his Banruo wuzhi lun (Wisdom as nonknowing), Sengzhao (383–414) distinguished wisdom from common knowledge. For him, knowledge is epistemologically structured by the relation of the knowing subject and known object, and therefore is relative and limited to a particular object. The content of knowledge is expressed in logical propositions that should be free of logical contradiction. In contrast, wisdom is all-knowing and comprehends all things, including itself. Therefore, it lacks subject-object structure and is not limited and relative to any particular object. Its self-awareness results from its own crystal-clear mirroring and not from any self-reflection or intuition. For Sengzhao, wisdom was a mysterious function of a mind characterized by emptiness, and emptiness he identified with ultimate reality, which belongs to the ontology and therefore is beyond all logical considerations, including the principle of noncontradiction. For Sengzhao, wisdom was absolutely pure and was beyond all sorts of delusions arising from relative knowledge.Jizang (549–623) developed a typology of three types of wisdom. First was ultimate wisdom (shixiang banruo ), which penetrates into ultimate reality, or the emptiness of all things. This is the ultimate ground of the other types of wisdom. Second was illumining wisdom (zhengguan banruo ), which throws light upon the ultimate reality in all its different facets and manifestations. In this application of ultimate wisdom in meditating on the essence of each and every thing, one comes to see that each of them is empty. Third was linguistic wisdom (wenzi banruo ), which enables one to give powerful linguistic expression to the perfect congruence between ultimate reality and its manifestations.Metaphysics as Knowledge of Ultimate RealityMetaphysics concerns knowledge of ultimate reality. Even if all the schools of Chinese philosophy used "dao" (the Way) as a common term to refer to ultimate reality, there were other terms used in different schools, even different terms used by different philosophers within one school. For example, in Confucianism, different Confucians took the concepts of heaven, humanness, sincerity, and principle or reason as ultimate reality. In the following sections, we will see what different schools took as ultimate reality: heaven, humanness, sincerity, and principle in Confucianism, the Way in Daoism, and emptiness in Buddhism.ultimate reality in confucianismGenerally, the concept of ultimate reality in Confucianism moves from heaven (tian ), a residue from ancient Chinese religious beliefs; to humanness (ren ) in Confucius himself; then to sincerity (cheng ) in Zisi, Confucius's grandson; and to mind (xin ) or principle (li ) in neo-Confucianism. In the prephilosophical tradition, the Shijing (Book of odes) and the Shangshu (Book of documents) used the concept of heaven, imbued with a religious sense, to represent God on High. A residue of this notion could still be found in Confucius when he said, "If heaven wished to destroy this legacy, we latecomers would not have access to it. Since heaven is not going to destroy this culture of ours, what can the people of Kuang do to me?" (Analects 9.7). Confucius also said that he prayed to heaven, yet heaven, though manifesting itself through regular cosmic movement, remained silent, thus maintaining a certain unfathomability. Confucius said, "Does heaven speak? And yet the four seasons turn, and the myriad things are born and grow within it" (Analects 17.19).Confucius's proper contribution consisted in proposing the concept of humanness (ren ) as a transcen-dental foundation for ritual (li ). Humanness, a transcendental capacity in each person, had an ontological dimension in that it presupposed that all beings are interconnected, and this allows humans to be affected and respond to other people and things. Confucius considered this transcendental capacity of each person to affect and respond to others as the transcendental foundation of ritual. Sometimes humanness was combined with the Way to specify the way of humanness. With this metaphysical move, the concept of ren achieved metaphysical status in neo-Confucians such as Zhou Dunyi (1017–1073) and Zhang Zai (1020–1077), who extended humanness to the whole cosmos (a cosmic humanness), surely a metaphysical concept. Also, Zisi (493–406 BEC), Confucius's grandson, developed Confucius's idea of ultimate reality in Zhongyong (Doctrine of the Mean ) with the concept of sincerity (cheng ), which had two levels of meaning: On the psychological level, cheng meant being true to one's own self; on the metaphysical level, cheng meant the really real, truth, or reality itself.Under the influence of Tiantai Buddhism and Chan Buddhism, idealist neo-Confucians such as Lu Xiangsan (1139–1193) and Wang Yangming took mind imbued with moral values to be ultimate reality. Such a mind was attainable through moral practice and moral effort. They thereby laid the foundation for a kind of moral metaphysics. In affirming that the Great Ultimate is principle or reason (li ), the realist neo-Confucian Zhu Xi took principle or reason to be ultimate reality. For Zhu Xi, even if everything has its own principle, by way of metaphysical participation they share their reality with the cosmic principle that ultimately governs the whole world.ultimate reality in daoismDaoism coherently used "Way" (dao ) as a metaphysical concept to denote various levels of metaphysical reality and ultimate reality itself. Etymologically, the ideogram for dao is composed of two elements, the head and the act of walking on a way. Together they mean a way on which one could find direction and a way to some point. Though dao was never limited to the idea of a physical way, this image of a way suggests the meaning of dao : The dao puts everything on its way. In common use, dao also means "to say," "to speak," or "to discourse," such as the second "dao" in the opening of Laozi, which says, "The way that can be spoken of is not the constant Way" (chap. 1). In Daoism, the function of discourse is always negative. Discourse, once said, must be hushed; words, once written, must be erased. One can never discourse about ultimate reality in any human language. This is quite different from Western philosophy, from the beginning of which emphasis has been on the function of language, of logos, to express reality. Apart from these two levels of meaning, dao in Daoism has three other uses that are more philosophical:First, it refers to laws of becoming or laws of nature, especially in the term tiandao (the Way of heaven) or tiandi zhi dao (the Way of heaven and earth). In Daoism, the laws of nature have two aspects: (1) The structural law says that all things are structurally constituted of different yet complementary elements, such as being and nonbeing, yin and yang, movement and rest, weak and strong, and so on. (2) The dynamic law says that once a state of affairs has developed to the extreme in a process of change, it will naturally move to its opposite state of affairs.Second, it refers to the origin giving birth to all things. If all things are regulated by laws of nature, there must be an origin that gave birth to all things, there must be a cosmic law. Normally, the origin gives birth to all things in a process of differentiation and complexification, as indicated by these words in Laozi : "The Way gave birth to one. One gave birth to two. Two gave birth to three. Three gave birth to all things" (chap. 42).Finally, it refers to ultimate reality. The Way ultimately represents the ever self-manifesting act of existence. If there is an origin giving birth to all things, then before the origin, there must be a self-manifesting act of existence, defined in relation to all things. The self-manifesting act of existence is reality itself, whereas everything we say about the Way is but a constructed reality, which can never be reality itself. One can mention the Way to express something about it, but what is said becomes a constructed reality and not reality itself. To keep one's mind open to reality itself, all human constructions stand in need of further deconstruction.Most of the time in traditional Daoism, these three levels of the Way were closely related one another, so closely that they were often mixed up and seldom clearly distinguished in the texts. It is with philosophical effort that they can be analyzed into clearly distinguished aspects of a well-connected whole. This is to say, in traditional Daoism, ultimate reality and its multifaceted manifestations can be logically distinguished but are not ontologically distinct.ultimate reality in buddhismChinese Mahayana Buddhism, like Indian Buddhism, takes emptiness as ultimate reality. Although the Sanskrit term śūnyatā has many meanings in the Indian tradition, its Chinese equivalent kong has three major philosophical meanings, each with its own focus: First, on the ontological level, emptiness means that all things come and go through interdependent causation and therefore lack any self-nature or substance of their own. Second, on the spiritual level, it means that the spiritual achievement of the sage consists in total freedom, attaching himself neither to being nor to nonbeing, neither to dualism nor to nondualism, not even to any form of spiritual achievement, no matter how high or deep it is. To keep one's spirit totally free, one must even empty the emptiness. Third, on the linguistic level, emptiness means that all the words we use are artificially constructed, without any fixed correspondence or reference to reality.Although Indian Buddhism put more emphasis on the ontological and the linguistic senses of emptiness, Chinese Mahayana Buddhism, generally speaking, emphasized mostly the spiritual sense of emptiness. For example, in the Buzhen kong lun (On the emptiness of the unreal), Sengzhao, appropriating Daoist philosophy, interpreted emptiness as the spiritual achievement of a sage (though he also gave other meanings to the term "emptiness"). For example, we read, "The sage moves within the thousand transformations but does not change, and travels on ten thousand paths of delusion but always goes through. This is so because he leaves the empty self-nature of things as it is and does not employ the term 'emptiness' to make things empty" (Chan 1963, p. 356, with corrections).The spiritual achievement of a sage, who has no attachment to the realm of either being or nonbeing, not even any attachment to his own spiritual achievement, results from a mysterious function of his mind, which on the one hand is nonsubstantial and empty, yet on the other hand is mysterious in function and self-transcending. Because of this, the Way (emptiness as the ultimate reality) and sagehood are not far away from us and can be realized at the moment of enlightenment. "Things when touched become real. … Man when enlightened becomes mysterious" (Sengzhao, vol. 45, pp. 152–153). The idea of a mysteriously enlightened mind rendering real all things touched by it significantly influenced other Chinese Mahayana schools, especially Tiantai and Chan. In Tiantai and Chan Buddhism, the mind was taken to be ultimate reality.Inborn Knowledge and Moral MetaphysicsIdealist neo-Confucianists, such as Lu Xiangsan and Wang Yangming, considered moral knowledge as inborn and the realization of moral knowledge to be the only access to the really real. They were idealists in the sense that they took mind as the ultimate reality, identifying the human mind and the cosmic mind, which they saw as the ontological source of all values and moral knowledge. For them, knowledge meant mainly moral knowledge and was therefore value-laden. Since moral knowledge comes from the mind, humans must be capable of knowing it before all empirical knowledge. As a kind of innate knowledge, it is to be realized through human moral effort and moral practice, called "realization of innate knowledge" by Wang Yangming. Innate moral knowledge is like a permanent light within everyone, arising before the emotions. The individual realizes it by overcoming selfish tendencies, and thereby arrives at ultimate reality. Morality was thus considered a pragmatic way to access ultimate reality, and thus had metaphysical import.Inheriting this line of thought, Mou Zongsan (1909–1995), a well-known figure in modern Confucianism, proposed the idea of moral metaphysics (daode de xingshangxue ). He distinguished between moral metaphysics and the metaphysics of morals, the latter being a metaphysical study of morality and therefore moral philosophy rather than metaphysics. His idea of moral metaphysics represented an effort to emphasize the role of Confucianism and moral actions in Chinese metaphysical thinking. He also distinguished between the moral metaphysics of Confucianism and the liberation metaphysics (jietuo de xingshangxue ) of Daoism and Buddhism. Even for Mou, these three traditions of Chinese philosophy saw the human mind as capable of intellectual intuition (zhi de zhijue ), yet he preferred the Confucian way of attaining ultimate reality through moral practice and moral self-awareness. He thought that humans could achieve intellectual intuition through moral action and realize the noumenon of humanness (ren ), which represented for him the ultimate reality or the thing in itself. Sometimes Mou named it "the free infinite mind/heart," or "the true self," that, as noumenon, possessed universality, infinity, and creativity, and through a process of self-negation similar to Johann Gottlieb Fichte's "I" positing a "non-I," it could unfold itself into a world of phenomena. In Mou's philosophy, intellectual intuition is an act of self-awareness of the free infinite mind, which replaced the concept of a personal God in Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.Mou's moral metaphysics, by making Confucianism a kind of metaphysics, and thus making Confucian moral praxis an instrument for attaining ultimate reality, neglected the proper value and practical methods of Confucian moral praxis. Also, he considered morality a matter of finding one's true self, without relation to others, and thus without a proper ethical dimension. In this way, Confucianism lends its own weak points to a grand metaphysical system modeled after European philosophy. Also, by positing such an exclusively moral metaphysics, Mou neglected other metaphysical experiences, such as those in encounters with nature, in artistic creativity, in religious piety, and in historical encounters—all so rich in metaphysical implications in traditional Chinese culture. In his absolute idealism, Mou blurred and even confused the distinction between reality itself and constructed reality.Metaphorical MetaphysicsChinese philosophical traditions such as Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism all hold that ultimate reality, whatever its name, always has an unfathomable dimension and therefore is hidden from all human constructions and human languages. For this reason, the terms Chinese philosophers use to indicate ultimate reality—terms such as tian (heaven), ren (humanness), cheng (sincerity), dao (the Way), the mind, principles, emptiness, etc.—are used metaphorically rather than descriptively or ostensively. They express ideas about ultimate reality with a certain tangible image of it, which is to say that they are in some sense image-ideas, instead of pure ideas. Chinese philosophers, when grasping ultimate reality with enlightening insight, tend to form original image-ideas, something between a pure idea and an iconic image, thereby retaining the holistic character of the manifestation and the intuitive nature of the perception. This idea-image evokes the richness of ultimate reality without exhausting it, and therefore has the status of a metaphor.This basic characteristic of Chinese metaphysics provides foundations for Chinese artistic, moral, and scientific practices and historical actions. Artistic creativity, by imagination and poetic transformation, renders this idea-image into a concrete iconic image and thereby materializes it. In moral and ethical reasoning, practical reason brings the idea-image to bear on an ethical situation, leading one to intervene and thereby take moral responsibility. In science, natural philosophers built models with reference to image-ideas, creating analogical images of reality so as to grasp natural processes in an organic and holistic way. In the historical arena, one can discern, by referring to idea-images, traces of notions of ultimate reality in the historical events and actions taken by historical agents. In this sense, Chinese art, ethics, science, and history are imbued with metaphysical significance.Generally speaking, metaphor allows us to see one thing as something else. In other words, metaphor has an "as-structure," a term first used by Martin Heidegger to characterize interpretation. In the Chinese tradition, metaphysics or discourse on the Way is already a metaphorical interpretation of ultimate reality. Compared with the original manifestation of ultimate reality, various ways of realizing idea-images also possess an as-structure, in the sense that they allow us to see ultimate reality as idea-images, the later thereby serving a certain metaphorical function. In this sense, Chinese metaphysics can be characterized as a kind of metaphorical metaphysics. Viewing it in this way, one can achieve a true understanding of the spirit of Chinese philosophy.See also Chinese Philosophy: Language and Logic; Chinese Philosophy: Religion.BibliographyAristotle. Metaphysics. In The Complete Works of Aristotle, Vol. 2, edited by Jonathan Barnes. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984.Chan, Wing-tsit, trans. and ed. A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963.Fang, Thomé. Chinese Philosophy: Its Spirit and Its Development. Taipei: Linking, 1981.I Ching, or Book of Changes. 2 vols. Translated by Cary F. Baynes from the German version of Richard Wilhelm. 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