A Critical Survey of Some Recent Philosophical Research in China

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Abstract In this paper, I survey some recent literature produced by the established Chinese philosophers who regularly publish in Chinese philosophy journals and work in Mainland China. Specifically, I review the recent research of these philosophers in two areas: Chinese Philosophy and epistemology. In each area, I focus on two topics that have caught the attention of a lot of Chinese philosophers. I argue that the Chinese philosophers' research on these topics has two prevalent problems: (i) a lot of arguments they make are weak; (ii) they tend not to critically engage with others. I discuss a metaphilosophical objection that weak argumentation and disengagement are not vices of philosophical research. I also try to make sense of (i) and (ii) in terms of some cultural factors.

1 Introduction

How has the philosophical research been done in Mainland China? In this paper, I survey some recent literature produced by the established Chinese philosophers who regularly publish in Chinese philosophy journals and work in Mainland China. Specifically, I review the recent research of these philosophers in two areas: Chinese Philosophy and epistemology. In each area, I focus on two topics that have caught the attention of a lot of Chinese philosophers. I argue that the Chinese philosophers' research on these topics has some prevalent problems, which might be explained in terms of some metaphilosophical commitments and cultural factors. This conclusion may (hopefully) shed light

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on the recent research of Mainland Chinese philosophers in general since those who work in other areas have roughly the same educational background and are subject to roughly the same journal review system and promotion and tenure procedures.[1]

I shall proceed as follows. In Section 1, I will review two recent debates in the area of Chinese Philosophy: the debate over the legitimacy of Chinese Philosophy and the one over Confucian ethics. In section 2, I will survey how some leading Chinese epistemologists approach the Gettier Problem and the External World Skepticism. In both sections, I will try to reconstruct the arguments of these Chinese philosophers as charitable as I can. In section 3, I will argue that the research done by these Chinese philosophers suffers from some prevalent problems, discuss a metaphilosophical objection that these so-called problems are not vices of philosophical research, and provide an explanation why Chinese philosophers' research has these problems. Finally, I will close with a few remarks about the future of the philosophical research in Mainland China.

2 Chinese Philosophy

"Chinese Philosophy" roughly refers to the philosophical schools founded (or co-founded) by ancient Chinese philosophers such as Confucius, Mencius, Laozi, Zhuangzi, Mozi, Han Feizi, and so on in the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States periods (770–221 B.C.).[2]

There are two widely shared beliefs about Chinese Philosophy. First, it is very different from Greek Philosophy. They work with completely different fundamental concepts and address different philosophical problems in different ways. Second, Confucianism shaped traditional Chinese culture (especially the political culture) more than any other philosophical schools. It had been the ruling ideology in China roughly between 100 B.C. and 1900 A.D.[3] During this time, while other ancient philosophical schools almost stopped developing,[4] Confucianism became something similar to Scholasticism: like the *Bible*, Confucius' *Analects* was not supposed to be challenged; rather, it was the source of all important truths. The main task of scholars was to understand it correctly.

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[1] I'd like to note two things. First, I do not discuss the relevant research done by Chinese philosophers who do not regularly work in Mainland China or publish in the philosophy journals run in Mainland China (e.g., Tian-Yu Cao, Chuang Liu, Bo Mou, Huiming Ren, Hao Tang, Lei Zhong, Jing Zhu, etc.), because strictly speaking, they are not part of the philosophical community of Mainland China: they are subject to a different journal review system and/or a different promotion and tenure system. Second, my survey does not cover the papers published in *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* (FPC), the only English philosophy journal in Mainland China, because with regard to the topics my survey concerns, few papers published in FPC contain important new ideas or arguments that did not appear earlier in the papers published in the Chinese journals.

[2] In a broad sense, Buddhism, which first came to China in about 67 A.D., is also part of Chinese Philosophy. But here I use "Chinese Philosophy" in a narrow sense.

[3] There were short-time interruptions, to be sure. For example, Buddhism once became the national religion worshiped by several emperors of the Tang Dynasty (618–907 A.D.).

[4] As an exception, philosophical Daoism was revived for a short time in Wei and Jin Dynasties (220–420 A.D.). But then it stopped developing, though religious Daoism had been influential for a long time.

However, with these two beliefs come two concerns: first, is there really something in the history of China that can be appropriately called "philosophy" if the so-called Chinese Philosophy is so different from Greek Philosophy? Second, is Confucianism mainly responsible for the dark sides of China if it largely defines the traditional Chinese culture? In this section, I will survey two recent debates about these two questions.

2.1 The Debate Over the Legitimacy of Chinese Philosophy

In an essay titled "The Legitimacy Problem of Chinese Philosophy", Jiadong Zheng (2001:1) raises the following questions: "Is there any 'philosophy' in the history of China that is different from Western Philosophy? Put differently, is 'philosophy' an appropriate term for interpreting Chinese traditional ideas? How should we offer and justify an account of the concept of 'Chinese Philosophy'?" It is unclear what Zheng exactly means by the three interrogative sentences, but they have attracted the attention of a lot of Chinese philosophers, who generally understand Zheng's challenge to be whether there is anything in the history of China that we can properly call "philosophy." This is known as the "Legitimacy Problem of Chinese Philosophy" to Chinese philosophers. According to Baidu Scholar, the Chinese version of Google Scholar, there have been 1690 research articles devoted to the issue since 2001, including 82 articles in 2015. This number might be inaccurate, but the topic is undoubtedly hot.

The Legitimacy Problem can be traced back to the founding father of the subject of the History of Chinese Philosophy: Shih Hu. In the first edition of his groundbreaking work *An Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy* (1918), Hu rejects Hegel's claim that China has no philosophy and argues that some traditional Chinese ideas can be properly called "philosophy." But later, he tends to think that "Chinese Philosophy" is a misnomer and that his book had better be titled "A History of Traditional Chinese Ideas." Youlan Feng, a former student and critic of Hu, holds a different view. He believes that "Chinese Philosophy" is an appropriate name because the characteristic feature of philosophy is making arguments about certain issues such as the nature of happiness, justice, knowledge, and so on, and Chinese thinkers in history make implicit arguments about some of these issues despite the fact that there are very few explicit arguments in their writings.

The interest in the Legitimacy Problem recently got revived probably because, on the one hand, many Chinese philosophers who do Western Philosophy, in private conservations, voice that Chinese Philosophy, if there is such a thing, is much inferior to Western Philosophy and thereby not worthy of the name "philosophy." This opinion caught public attention when Derrida's remark "China has ideas but no philosophy" got published in a popular Newspaper (*Zhongguo Tushu Shangbao*, 12-13-2001). On the other hand, the quality of the recent research on Chinese Philosophy seems to many people far from satisfactory, as Wujin Yu (2004: 27) points out, "Scholars are so disappointed at the current status of research on Chinese Philosophy and even question its legitimacy." A problem with recent studies of Chinese Philosophy

is that they are philosophically uninteresting. Some might feel that the best explanation of this problem consists in that the objects of those studies cannot be properly called "philosophy."

However, those philosophers who write on the issue do not actually debate about the Legitimacy Problem. Rather, they unanimously argue or assert that there is something we may appropriately call "Chinese Philosophy." Indeed, many such as Yongjie Peng (2003), Jun Hu (2004), Yu (2004) and Zhiming Song (2013) argue that it is a pseudo-problem for it is based on two false presumptions: first, whether a thing is philosophy should be determined according to the Western standard; second, Western Philosophy is the only paradigm of philosophy. They think both assumptions are false. Hu and Yu point out that Western philosophies are so different from each other and even Western philosophers disagree on what philosophy is. Hu contends that since "philosophy" simply means loving wisdom, China surely has its own philosophy, that is, there is something that we can properly call "Chinese Philosophy." Yu reaches the same conclusion on the basis of the definition of philosophy given by Bertrand Russell in his *A History of Western Philosophy*, which says that philosophy is a subject that addresses in a rational rather than dogmatic way the questions to which definite answers has been unascertainable.

The issue that Chinese philosophers actually debate over is a normativity problem: How should we do Chinese Philosophy? There are mainly two different views: (1) we should do Chinese Philosophy in a way different from the ways in which Western Philosophers do philosophy; (2) we should employ some Western methodologies to do Chinese Philosophy.

The major argument the philosophers who hold (1) (e.g., Chen 2003a; Jiadong Zheng 2005; Chen and Zhou 2006; Cheng 2007; Yongjie Peng 2014) offer is that history has shown that (2) is wrong. By "history" they roughly mean the research done in light of the pragmatic approach and the Marxist approach to Chinese Philosophy. The pragmatic approach is represented by Shih Hu's research on Chinese Philosophy, whereas the Marxist approach was endorsed by almost all scholars on Chinese Philosophy after the Communist Party came to power and until Mao's death. The philosophers who hold (1) claim that the scholarship produced by following either approach is terribly bad, because it makes Chinese Philosophy contain nothing but a mixture of non-sense, platitudes, and naively wrong or undeveloped ideas. On their view, the best explanation why the scholarship is bad is that there is something distinctive about Chinese Philosophy which resists both the pragmatic approach and the Marxist approach. For example, Chinese Philosophers work with some fundamental philosophical concepts that are radically different from concepts in Western Philosophy. And their answers to the questions that are universally interesting are couched in their characteristic philosophical concepts. Distinctive features of Chinese Philosophy like this determine that neither the pragmatic approach nor the Marxist approach can be appropriately applied to it. In addition, the philosophers who hold (1) assert that the research on Chinese Philosophy done by two of Shih Hu's contemporaries, Shumin Liang and Shili Xiong, is first-class. And the main reason why it is first class, according to them, is that Liang and Xiong do Chinese Philosophy in the Chinese traditional

way. Hence, they conclude that in order to understand the inner logic and true spirit of Chinese Philosophy, we should do Chinese Philosophy in the way traditional Chinese Philosophers do philosophy, though they do not make clear what the traditional way is. (I'd like to note that Xiong himself told his students that it would be profitable to employ the Western method of logical analysis to do Chinese Philosophy.)

The philosophers who hold (2) (e.g., Hu 2004; Yu 2004; Fang 2005; Zhiming Song 2013) generally think that the traditional Chinese way of doing philosophy is inadequate. They do not oppose the idea that we should focus on the characteristic elements in Chinese Philosophy – the valuable elements that distinguish Chinese Philosophy from Western Philosophy in a sharp way. Nor do they deny that some traditional Chinese philosophical methodologies might be still helpful in doing Chinese Philosophy. Rather, they merely claim that some Western methodologies are indispensable for good research on Chinese Philosophy. On their view, the current research on Chinese Philosophy is disappointing because most researchers lack good training in Western Philosophy. Among those who hold (2), some (e.g., Fang 2005) maintain a Maxist approach; some (e.g., Zhang 2001) adopt a phenomenological or hermeneutic approach; some (e.g., Yu 2012 and Hu 2015) prefer an analytic approach. But none of them provides any specific arguments that the approach they endorse is fruitful or superior to other approaches.

2.2 The Debate Over Confucian Ethics

Another topic that has drawn much attention of Chinese philosophers is Confucian ethics. Since China lost the first opium war (1839–42) to UK, there have been several heated debates among Chinese intellectuals whether there is something wrong with Confucianism, which had been the ruling ideology for roughly 2000 years. The most recent debate is initiated by Liu 2002 article, in which he charges that Confucianism, by praising nepotism, permits corruption, a serious problem widely perceived in China. The debate is still going on. According to Baidu Scholar, there were 6 articles devoted to the issue in 2015.

Liu's article focuses on two cases in the *Book of Mencius*. Both cases are about Shun, one of the legendary saint-kings praised by Confucians for their perfect virtues. In the first case, a student asked Mencius, what would Shun have done if Shun's father had murdered someone? Mencius replied, while Shun would not have forbidden his Minister of Crime from apprehending his father, he would have given up his throne and "secretly carried [his father] on his back and fled, to live in the coastland, happy to the end of his days, joyfully forgetting the world" (*Mencius*: 7A35). This idea seems to be inherited from Confucius. When a duke bragged that his subjects were so upright that a son testified against his own father who stole a sheep, Confucius replied, "Among my people, those we consider 'upright' are different from this: fathers cover up for their sons, and sons cover up for their fathers. This is what it means to be 'upright'" (*Analects*: 13.18).

The second case is Shun's favorable treatment of his brother, a notorious villain. While Shun brought all other villains to justice, he made his brother the king of a state.

Mencius comments that there is nothing wrong with Shun's favoritism because a benevolent person always loves his brother and if one loves a person, one would naturally want to make that person rich and powerful. In contrast, if one is the ruler of an empire but one's brother is a homeless poor man, one does not love his brother and thereby is not benevolent.

According to Liu, Mencius' remarks about Shun show that the Confucian ethics is a form of "consanguineous ethics", a term coined by Liu, roughly meaning that we have an obligation to favor our family over others *all things considered.* Liu's key argument against the Confucian ethics can be summarized as follows:

1. The Confucian ethics implies that one should always put family before other people if there is a conflict of interests between family members and other people, e.g., one should help one's family members live a good life even if doing so would inflict harm on, or be unfair to, others including innocent people.
2. So according to the Confucian ethics, Shun should help his father flee and make his brother rich and powerful.
3. However, Shun should neither help his father flee nor make his brother rich and powerful (because it is unjust or unfair to others).
4. Therefore, the Confucian ethics is wrong.

Call this argument the "Argument from Corruption." Mu (2002) and Huang (2003) make a similar argument.

There are two major responses to the Argument from Corruption. First, a few philosophers dispute Premise (1). For example, Gong (2003) argues that Premise (1) is an absolute moral principle but Confucians do not think there are absolute moral principles. Liang (2013) contends that different Confucian philosophers have different moral philosophies. For instance, while Mencius thinks one should always protect one's parents even if they committed felonies such as murder, Zisi, a grandson of Confucius and a teacher of Mencius' teacher, holds that one should always cover for one's parents only if they committed *minor* offences; if they committed a felony, one should not cover for them.

Second, most philosophers (e.g., Guo 2002; Yang 2003; Ding 2007; Wen 2014) accept Premise (1) & (2) but deny Premise (3) of the Argument from Corruption. There are two major arguments against Premise (3), which I will call the "Argument from Historical Consequentialism" and the "Argument from Self-scapegoating," respectively.

The Argument from Historical Consequentialism goes as follows:

1. One should do x in a society if doing x leads to the best consequence in that society.
2. If Shun helped his father flee and made his brother rich and powerful, it would lead to the best consequence in the society of which he was the most powerful member.
3. Therefore, Shun should help his father flee and made his brother rich and powerful.

Philosophers who make this argument take Premise (1) for granted and try to prove Premise (2).[5] Three arguments have been made for Premise (2). The first two are based on the assumption that the subjects tend to follow the example of their ruler. Since Shun is the ruler of the empire, if he didn't help his father flee or make his brother rich and powerful, then his subjects would tend not to help their family members live a good life; if Shun did, then his subjects would tend to help their family members live a good life. Call this the "exemplar effect."

The first argument for Premise (2) of the Argument from Historical Consequentialism (e.g., Guo 2002; Yang 2003; Wen 2014) goes as follows. If members within a family did not help each other live a good life, the family would not be harmonious; if they helped each other, the family would be harmonious. So, if Shun didn't help his father flee or make his brother rich and powerful, a lot of families would be unharmonious because of the exemplar effect; if Shun did, few families would be unharmonious (Yang 2003). Now family is the foundation of society, that is, if a lot of families are unharmonious, then the social order would very likely break down; if few families are unharmonious, then the social order would likely be maintained. (Haiming Wen 2014 offers an interesting argument for this view: the country would mean nothing to one if one's family is broken.) Hence, if Shun didn't help his father flee or make his brother rich and powerful, the society would very likely collapse; if Shun did, the social order would likely be maintained. Therefore, if Shun helped his father flee and made his brother rich and powerful, it would lead to the best consequence in the society of which he was the most powerful member. Call this argument the "Argument from Family as the Foundation."

The second argument for Premise 2 of the Argument from Historical Consequentialism (e.g., Ding 2007; Li and Zhang 2011) may be called the "Argument from Natural Feelings." We have a natural tendency to love our family members and wish them to live a good life. That is, if one does not help one's family members live a good life, one acts against one's natural feelings for his family members. If Shun didn't help his father flee or make his brother rich and powerful, then a lot more people would act against one's natural feelings for his family members than if Shun did because of the the exemplar effect. The society would be more unstable or even horrible if more people acted against their natural feelings for their family members. Therefore, if Shun helped his father flee and made his brother rich and powerful, it would lead to the best consequence in the society of which he was the most powerful member.

The last argument for Premise 2 of the Argument from Historical Consequentialism appeals to the intrinsic value of some kinds of pleasure (e.g., Yang 2003; Meng 2003; Li 2013; Yu 2015). Specifically, it claims that the pleasure in the fact that one's family (especially the parent–child relationship) is harmonious and flourishing is intrinsically valuable and that

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[5] However, some of these philosophers occasionally confuse Premise (1) with cultural relativism, the idea that an act is right iff it is approved by the society in which the act occurs.

its intrinsic value can never be overridden. Some (e.g., Meng 2003) argue that it cannot be overridden because the nature of a human being is largely defined by his relationship to his family members and thereby cannot get fully developed if his family is broken. One should maximize intrinsic value. So, one should always act in a way that maximizes the pleasure in the harmony and flourishing of one's own family. In order to maximize this pleasure, the argument says, Shun must help his father flee and make his brother rich and powerful. Therefore, Shun should help his father flee and make his brother rich and powerful.

In addition to the Argument from Historical Consequentialism, there is another argument made by many philosophers (e.g., Gong 2003; Yang 2003; Ding 2007) against Premise (3) of the Argument from Corruption. It can be reformulated as follows:

1. If one assumed responsibility for the wrongdoings that one's family members committed, then he may help them flee or make them rich and powerful.
2. Shun would assume responsibility for the wrongdoings that his father and brother committed. For example, if his father committed murder, Shun would give up the throne and help his father flee. Shun's giving up the throne is a form of assuming responsibility for what his father did. Further, after making his brother the king of a state, Shun sent wise officials to help his brother. This is also a form of taking responsibility.
3. Therefore, it is not the case that Shun should not help his father flee and make his brother rich and powerful.

Call this the "Argument from Self-scapegoating." Liang (2013) notes that Confucian philosophers generally agree that one should assume responsibility for one's parents' wrongdoings (that is, make oneself a "scapegoat" for what one's parents did).

In his reply (Liu 2004, 2005), Liu does not discuss the objections to Premise (1) of his Argument from Corruption. Rather, he focuses on the objections to Premise (3) of his argument.

With regard to the Argument from Historical Consequentialism, he argues that its second premise is groundless. Specifically, he claims that given the exemplar effect, it does not follow that if Shun didn't help his father flee or make his brother rich and powerful, then his subjects would tend not to help their family members live a good life. Neither is the case that in order to maximize the pleasure in the harmony and flourishing of his own family, Shun must help his father flee and make his brother rich and powerful. This is because even if Shun didn't help his father flee or make his brother rich and powerful, there would be still other ways for him to help them live a better life. For example, he may try to reason with his father that turning in is a better choice than fleeing; he may also give support to his father when the latter was put in prison. And if his brother was brought to justice, Shun may still employ good teachers to help him cultivate virtues, use his own money to support his brother's family financially, etc. All these are respectable ways of helping his father and brother. If Shun chose them, then, given the exemplar effect, his subjects would tend to help their family members live a good life.

To be sure, Liu agrees that one has the right not to testify against one's family members who commit crime. But on his view, that does not mean one should make false testimony to protect them or help them flee or use one's political power to make them rich and powerful. Nor does it mean one has the obligation not to testify against one's family. There are many other ways for the son to help the father and maintain a harmonious family. Helping his father flee and making his brother rich and powerful are simply wrong.

With respect to the Argument from self-scapegoating, Liu and his public defender Xiaomang Deng (2007) do not challenge the first premise, which states that one should assume responsibility for the wrongdoings that one's family members committed. But they argue that Premise 2 is false, that is, Shun's giving up the throne (to help his father flee) and sending wise people to help his vicious brother fail to assume full responsibility for his father and brother's wrongdoings.

It is interesting to note that some leading Confucian philosophers have not participated in the debate. For example, Lai Chen never wrote a word about the issue. Jiadong Zheng wrote two short essays, one of which (Zheng 2003) merely summarizes some well-known theories of partiality and how Confucian ethics had been applied in the legal systems in traditional China. After being pressed for his own response to Liu's challenge, Zheng wrote the other essay, in which he admitted that he did not take sides in the previous essay but still avoided presenting his own view (Zheng 2004). Later, Zheng was arrested for helping his close relatives and friends illegally emigrate to foreign countries. There was a debate on whether he acted according to Confucian ethics.

The earlier debates over Confucian ethics were collected into a book edited by Guo (2004). More than 7/8 of the book are criticisms of Liu's view. The arrangement of the essays is interesting. Guo's response to Liu's challenge appears first, followed by others' criticisms of Liu's view. Readers have to wait until p. 853 to read Liu's first essay. And in the Preface of the book, Guo claims that the publication of the book marks the end of the debates, because every participator has said everything that can be said about the issue. But this prediction proves to be false. Since 2004, dozens of articles (some of which were authored by Guo himself) have been devoted to discussing the issue. However, only one philosopher (i.e., Xiaomang Deng) has publically defended Liu since then.

3 Epistemology

Compared to Chinese Philosophy, epistemology in the analytic tradition (esp. post-Gettier epistemology) is a rather new area of research in China: Chinese philosophers did not take epistemology seriously until twenty years ago. Although Chisholm's *Theory of Knowledge* was translated into Chinese in 1988, it received little attention. Even the two translators did not publish any papers in epistemology. The book was not quoted until 2000 and has been quoted only 7 times since then according to Google Scholar. The first introduction to epistemology written in Chinese was published in 1997, by Jun Hu,

a professor of philosophy at Peking University (Hu 1997). Since then there has been a growing interest in epistemology. Two more introductions (Chen 2003b; Xu 2006) have been published. An updated version of Hu's book (Hu 2006) also came out. Further, numerous papers in epistemology have appeared in Chinese philosophy journals. In addition, the Chinese Society of Epistemology, which now has more than 50 members, was established at Xiamen University in 2014, thanks to the effort of Jiaming Chen who was a senior professor at Xiamen and has perhaps done more work than anyone else in promoting epistemology in China.

In this section, I will survey two epistemological topics that are most popular among Chinese philosophers: the Gettier Problem and the the External World Skepticism.

3.1 The Gettier Problem

The Gettier problem concerns the nature of knowledge. In an influential paper, Gettier (1963) argues that the traditional definition of knowledge, which states that knowledge is justified true belief, cannot be correct because there are cases where justified true belief falls short of knowledge. For example, suppose that Smith and Jones have applied for a certain job. The president of the company assured Smith that Jones would in the end be selected, and Smith counted the coins in Jones's pocket ten minutes ago. So Smith is justified in believing that (a) Jones is the man who will get the job, and Jones has ten coins in his pocket. Now Smith infers from (a) that (b) the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket. And he accepts (b) on the grounds of (a). So he is justified in believing (b). But imagine, further, that unknown to Smith, it is he himself rather than Jones who will get the job and has ten coins in his pocket. So Smith does not know that (b). But (b) is true and he is justified in believing it. Hence, knowledge is not mere justified true belief.

Although a lot of Chinese philosophers have written on the Gettier problem, most of them do not propose their own solutions to the problem. Rather, they tend to focus on one or several existing solutions and argue that they are untenable. For example, Ma (2005) contends that Robert Nozick, Alvin Goldman and Timothy Williamson's response to the Gettier problem all fail. Chen (2013) argues that some forms of internalism and externalism such as Michael Clark's no-false grounds approach and Plangtinga's proper functionism are flawed; Li (2015) argues that Adrian Heathcote's truth-maker theory is unsatisfactory.

Very few philosophers argue for their own solutions to the Gettier Problem. Jiaming Chen, Jun Hu, and Jianbo Cao are the three most well-known epistemologists among them.

Chen (2001) argues for a non-false grounds approach to the Gettier Problem. According to this approach, S knows that p = Df. (1) S believes that p, (2) p is true, (3) p is justified for S, and (4) S's grounds for believing that p do not include any false propositions. The Gettier Problem arises because the traditional definition of knowledge does not require (4). Chen provides two reasons for this definition. First, it explains why there is no knowledge in the Gettier cases. For example, Smith does not know that (b) the man who will get the job

has ten coins in his pocket, because his ground for believing (b) is his false belief that (a) Jones is the man who will get the job, and Jones has ten coins in his pocket. Second, Chen claims that his account of knowledge is simpler than the competing definitions such as the defeasibility approach and the causal approach, but he makes no arguments for this claim.

While not discussing Richard Feldman's objection to the non-false grounds approach in his 2001 paper, Chen (2004) offers a quick reply to it. Feldman (1974) asks us to consider a case where a guy, named Mr. Nogot, tells his colleague Smith that he owns a Ford and even shows him a certificate to that effect. Suppose, further, that up till now Nogot has always been reliable and honest in his dealings with Smith. Let us call the conjunction of all this evidence m. Suppose Smith deduces from m its existential generalization:

(n) There is someone in the office who told Smith that he owns a Ford and even showed him a certificate to that effect, and who up till now has always been reliable and honest in his dealings with Smith.

Now (n) is true and Smith knows that it is, since he has correctly deduced it from m, which he knows to be true. On the basis of (n) Smith believes that (h) someone in the office owns a Ford. Feldman thinks that (n) justifies (h) in this case. Suppose Mr. Nogot actually does not own a Ford. So though Smith has a justified true belief that (h) and knows his evidence to be true, he still does not know (h). Feldman concludes that the non-false grounds approach cannot solve the Gettier problem. Chen argues that Feldman's objection is untenable, for (m) is false evidence given that Mr. Nogot does not actually own a Ford.

Hu (2008) defends the traditional analysis of knowledge. He argues the Gettier problem arises because of an invalid inference, i.e., Smith's inference from "Jones has ten coins in his pocket and will get the job" to "the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket" is actually invalid. But he does not explain in detail why it is invalid.

Chen (2008) later changes his mind and argues for a view similar to Hu's. Specifically, on Chen's view, the validity of Smith's inference from "Jones has ten coins in his pocket and will get the job" to "the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket" is indeterminate, because "the reference of the definite description 'the man who will get the job' is ambiguous: it could refer to either Jones or Smith or someone else" (2008: 14). If it refers to Smith, "the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket" is equivalent to "Smith (who will get the job) has ten coins in his pocket." But the inference from "Jones has ten coins in his pocket and will get the job" to "Smith (who will get the job) has ten coins in his pocket" is clearly invalid. And Smith's inference is valid if and only if "the man who will get the job" refers to Jones. Chen concludes that the Gettier cases pose no challenge to the traditional definition of knowledge.

While Chen and Hu take the the Gettier Problem seriously, Cao (2004) contends that the problem is insignificant. According to the fairly standard view, Gettier successfully shows that the traditional analysis of knowledge is inadequate and has single-handedly changed the course of epistemology. Cao

disputes this standard view. He provides three major reasons: (1) the Gettier cases merely target a definition of empirical propositional knowledge and do not pose any challenge to non-propositional or non-empirical knowledge; (2) the definition of knowledge that Gettier attacks is not significant since no significant philosophers in history actually endorse such definition; (3) Gettier's argument is based on three false assumptions, i.e., that a false belief can justify a true belief, that the Epistemic Closure Principle (i.e., if person S knows that p and that p entails q, then S knows q) is false, and that a false proposition cannot be known. (Cao does not explain how Gettier's argument is based on the last assumption.)

3.2 The External World Skepticism

The External World Skepticism (EWS) states that we do not know anything about the external world. For example, we do not know that we have two hands or that the earth is a planet of the solar system. The classical argument for EWS goes as follows:

1. One cannot eliminate the possibility that one is a brain in a vat (or deceived by an evil demon).
2. If one cannot eliminate the possibility that one is a brain in a vat (or deceived by an evil demon), then one does not know that one is not a brain in a vat (or deceived by an evil demon).
3. If one knows that one has two hands, then one knows that one is not a brain in a vat (or deceived by an evil demon).
4. So, one does not know that one has two hands.

Like the case of the Gettier Problem, most Chinese philosophers who write on EWS do not propose their own responses to the skeptical challenge. Instead, some of them merely summarize some recent responses offered by well-known philosophers in the English-speaking world. For example, Yang (2006) classifies the existing responses to skepticism into three categories, i.e., Mooreanism, contextualism, and the response proposed by Dretske and Nozick, without making any critical arguments. Wang (2009) and Yang (2014) introduce Duncan Pritchard's neo-Mooreanism and merely repeat some of Pritchard's arguments that the neo-Mooreanism is superior to the traditional approaches.

In addition, many philosophers, though not presenting their own responses to EWS, argue that certain existing responses are unable to deal with some difficulties. Cheng (2004) argues that David Lewis's contextualism is inadequate in dealing with the case where only one person is involved, that is, a case where one tries to attribute knowledge to oneself. Yang (2009) discusses seven existing objections to contextualism and argues that they are all based on a misunderstanding of contextualism. He also argues that contextualism is wrong because it is counter-intuitive that knowledge is context-sensitive, and contextualism denies the epistemic closure principle, which is in fact correct because we actually apply this principle in our reasoning.

Jianbo Cao is one of the very few philosophers who have tried to argue for their own responses to EWS. Cao has published a series of papers and a monograph on skepticism. Here I will only focus on his 2010 paper, in which he advances his own response to skepticism. Cao (2010) argues that the best solution to skepticism is contextualist infallibilism, the idea that "S knows that p (infallibly) in a context iff S is able to rule out every relevant possibility that p is false in that context" (2010: 85). A possibility is relevant (i.e., it must be ruled out in order to have knowledge) in a context just in case ruling it out can meet the requirements of the conversation or practical interests in that context. Cao's argument for contextualist infallibilism roughly runs as follows: (1) skepticism is based on unrestricted infallibilism, which states that in order to know p, one has to rule out every possibility that p is false; (2) unrestricted infallibilism is false because it leads to skepticism and other absurd consequences; (3) all forms of fallibilism are unacceptable in that they, though avoiding skepticism, contradict our intuitions, speak sacrilegiously about knowledge (which is a sacred thing), and lead to relativism; (4) contextualist infallibilism can not only avoid skepticism but also respect our intuitions, maintain the sacredness of knowledge (i.e., knowledge is something that cannot be easily obtained), and block relativism; therefore, (5) contextualist infallibilism is the best solution to skepticism.

4 An Assessment with an Explanation

In the two sections above, I have surveyed the recent research of Chinese philosophers on four topics in two areas. In this section, I will first flag two prevalent problems the research has. Then I will consider a possible objection to my analysis and show why it is untenable. Finally, I will try to offer a cultural explanation why Chinese philosophers' research has these problems.

4.1 Two Prevalent Problems of Chinese Philosophers' Research

Perhaps the most salient problem of the Chinese philosophers' research is that a lot of the arguments they make are rather weak. As readers might have observed, some arguments surveyed above are viciously invalid: even if the premises are all true, they lend little support to the conclusion. Here are four examples.

(1) Yang (2009) argues that the epistemic closure principle is correct because we actually employ this principle in our reasoning. This argument is clearly invalid, for the fact that we employ a certain rule in our reasoning does not entail that the rule is correct. The former can barely support the latter.

(2) Cao's argument for contextualist infallibilism, which is based on four premises mentioned at the end of Section 2.2, is also invalid in a bad way. Even if all the four premises are true, the conclusion is by no means well-supported, not only because there might be some non-contextualist form of infallibilism that is better than contextualist infallibilism, but also because contextualist infallibilism might suffer from some serious difficulties that a form of non-contextualist fallibilism such as Ernest Sosa's virtue epistemology can avoid. However, Cao never

considers these possibilities, nor does he ever consider any existing objections to contextualist infallibilism.

(3) With regard to the Legitimacy Problem, many argue that we should not do Chinese Philosophy in a Western Way simply because the quality of the research done in light of the two Western approaches (i.e., the pragmatic approach and the Marxist approach) to Chinese Philosophy is bad. This argument is viciously invalid because even if its premise, which is highly controversial, is true, it still fails to show that the bad quality of the research is due to the fact that the two approaches are inapplicable to Chinese Philosophy. It could be the case that the philosophers who endorse either approach are not good at applying them. Moreover, even if the two approaches are inapplicable to Chinese Philosophy, it does not mean that other Western approaches are also inapplicable or unfruitful. Anyway, from the proposition that the research on Chinese Philosophy done in light of the pragmatic approach and the Marxist approach is terribly bad, it hardly follow that we should not do Chinese Philosophy in a Western way.

(4) Chen's quick defense of the non-false grounds approach against Feldman's objection is also based on an obviously invalid inference. Chen's argument is that (m) is false evidence since Mr. Nogot does not actually own a Ford. But recall that (m) is the conjunction of two propositions: that Mr. Nogot tells Smith that he owns a Ford and even shows him a certificate to that effect, and that up till now Mr. Nogot has always been reliable and honest in his dealings with Smith. Clearly, the fact that Mr. Nogot does not actually own a Ford does not entail that (m) is false, because despite this fact, the proposition that Mr. Nogot tells Smith that he owns a Ford is still true. In short, Chen's argument is viciously invalid.

Another type of weak arguments that many Chinese philosophers make is appealing to authority.[6] For example, in arguing that the definition of knowledge that Gettier attacks is not significant, Jianbo Cao merely cites one of Mark Kaplan's arguments, namely, no important philosophers in history actually endorse the definition of knowledge that Gettier attacks. However, Kaplan (1985) himself admits that this argument alone cannot adequately show that the definition of knowledge that Gettier attacks is insignificant. He also considers the view that the definition is important to inquiry. But Cao does not discuss this view at all. In addition, Cao's argument against Gettier's assumption that a false belief can justify a true belief is also nothing more than appeal to authority, as it goes as follows: some philosophers such as Robert Meyers, Kenneth Stern and David Armstrong think the assumption is false, therefore, it is false. Cao completely disregards the fact that many philosophers have defended Gettier's assumption against Meyers, Stern, and Armstrong's objections.

Further, some philosophers refrain from making any arguments at all. Rather, they merely summarize the research done by other philosophers without making any critical arguments. For example, Jiadong Zheng just summarizes some well-known theories of partiality without making critical arguments about these theories or about Liu's challenge to the Confucian ethics. Wang (2009) and Yang (2014) merely summarize

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[6] Eric Hayot thinks that appealing to authority is actually praised as a virtue among Chinese literary critics. He writes, "If you grow up in China, you will have learned that one of the most epistemologically powerful things an essay can do–especially if written by a junior scholar–is to show that its arguments resemble those of an existing authority figure. This is usually proved by parallel citation" (2014: 39).

Pritchard's arguments against the skeptical challenge. Jun Hu, Jiaming Chen, and Xiangdong Xu in their textbooks often introduce competing epistemological theories without taking sides or making any critical arguments.[7]

Another problem that the research of Chinese philosophers has is that they are generally not used to critically engaging with one another. By "critical engagement" I mean critically discussing the written work of others in one's writings, such as explaining the similarities and/or differences between one own research and others' on the same topic, and arguing that one own research is an original contribution to the existing literature (by showing that others' research is flawed, or one's research offers a better solution to a problem than others', etc.). It is practically impossible to engage with all the literature on a certain topic if it is vast. But still one should try to engage with some of the most recent literature of which one is aware. However, Chinese philosophers tend to disregard each other's research on the same topic in their writings (though they might read each other's writings). Take the Gettier Problem for example. Jiaming Chen and Jianbo Cao's views have only been discussed once so far (see Yin 2013 and Wen 2015), though they are among the most well-known epistemologists in China. And they have the same problem: neither Chen nor Cao discusses any other Chinese epistemologist's views in their writings.

This problem is actually noticed by some Chinese philosophers. For example, in the case of the Legitimacy Problem (more exactly, the Normativity Problem), Zhiming Song notices, "there have actually been no debates on the Legitimacy Problem because those who write on the issue do not engage with each other" (Song 2013: 15). However, Song himself does not engage with others' writings, either. In fact, his article does not refer to any other's writings except for his own. And some of his arguments are basically the same as Jun Hu and Wujin Yu's.[8]

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[7] One might think that that it is quite normal for an intro-level textbook to just present the research done by other philosophers and summarize others' arguments. This is not true, however. In fact, it is quite normal for an English philosophy textbook to make critical arguments. Not only old textbooks (e.g., the Foundations of Philosophy series published by Prentice Hall between 1960s and 1980s) but also more recent textbooks (e.g., the Contemporary Introductions to Philosophy series published by Routledge between 1990s and 2010s) make critical arguments about the research done by other philosophers.

[8] To be fair, Song does discuss the views of some people who he calls "those who question the legitimacy of Chinese Philosophy." But he never makes it clear who they are. An anonymous reviewer suggests that many Chinese philosophers such as Song do implicitly engage with each other. People implicitly engage with each other if they critically discuss each other's research without naming each other. Some might argue that implicit engagement is enough for good research, for if you can persuasively show a certain view is false, it does not matter whether you name the originator or the defenders of the view. This argument contains a kernel of truth. Implicit engagement would be just as good as explicit engagement if the person who implicitly engages with others gets others' views right. But it often happens that one misrepresents one's opponent's view. Implicit engagement makes it hard to detect whether one commits the Straw-man Fallacy. If one criticizes a certain complicated view without naming the person who originates or defends the view, then it is unclear who actually holds the view, and consequently, it is hard to know whether one really makes a contribution or cause a confusion to the literature. For this reason, explicit engagement is better than implicit engagement. In addition, the fact that there is some implicit engagement among Chinese philosophers does not mean they take engagement seriously. Serious engagement involves showing that one's research makes an original contribution to the recent literature. One does not take engagement seriously if one does not care about whether one's research makes an original contribution to the recent literature, e.g., one merely attacks one's opponent's view and does not care about whether one's own arguments are basically the same as one's allies who already published their research. In this sense, a lot of Chinese philosophers who implicitly engages with others do not really take engagement seriously. They do not explain the differences between their own arguments and their allies', let alone show how their arguments are at least as good as their allies'.

In the case of the debates on the Confucian ethics, although the philosophers who endorse Confucianism engage enthusiastically with Liu's challenge, they generally do not engage with each other. For instance, some arguments made by Zebo Yang are similar to Qiyong Guo's, but Yang hardly mentions Guo in his papers, except adding a note in parentheses at the end of one paper (2003), which merely says he has read Guo's response to Liu and agrees with Guo. Apparently, he seems to think it unnecessary to explain the differences between his arguments and Guo's, for it does not matter whether he just repeats the essential arguments that Guo make; what matters is that they show Liu's challenge is wrongheaded. In addition, some of those (e.g., Meng 2003) who make different arguments from Guo and Yang's against Liu's critique do not say a word whether they agree with Guo and Yang. It seems that they do not think it necessary to show that their arguments are superior to, or as good as, Guo and Yang's arguments in defeating Liu's challenge. Again, what matters is to show Liu's challenge is wrongheaded, not to examine whether their allies make good arguments against Liu.

Finally, while many Chinese philosophers who do Western Philosophy try to critically engage with some Western philosophers, most of them tend not to engage with the recent research on the topic they are writing about. Take Chen's 2001 paper, which argues for a non-false grounds approach to the Gettier problem. Chen does not discuss or even mention the views of those who also defended a non-false grounds approach long before him (e.g. Clark 1963; Armstrong 1973). Rather, it sounds like that Chen was the first philosopher who proposed a non-false grounds approach. Further, Chen fails to consider any existing objections to the non-false grounds approach. For example, both Richard Feldman (1974) and Alvin Goldman (1976) offer some Gettier-style cases in which no false evidence is used.[9] For another example, Jianbo Cao argues that contextualist infallibilism is the best response to skepticism. He suggests that David Lewis, Fred Dretske and Nicholas Rescher all endorse contextualist infallibilism, but he does not tell us whether there is any difference between his view and their views. It is unclear what Cao's own contribution is. Moreover, Lewis and Dretske's views had been criticized by many philosophers long before Cao's paper got published. However, Cao does not discuss these criticisms at all.

One might think that the reason why Chen and Cao fail to engage with the recent research on the topic they are writing about is that they received their philosophical training in China and do not appreciate the importance of engaging with the recent research done by others. But interestingly, some American-trained Chinese philosophers have the same problem. For example, in his 2004 paper criticizing David Lewis's contextualism, Lian Cheng, who got his Ph.D from Rice University in the U.S., merely cites two essays by Lewis.[10] Lewis presents his key ideas in his classic paper, *Elusive knowledge,* which got published in 1996. Lewis' ideas had been discussed by many philosophers between 1996 and 2003. But Cheng engages with none of these philosophers.[11]

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[9] As we have seen above, Cheng only briefly discusses Feldman's objection to the non-false grounds approach in his 2004 paper.

[10] Cheng lists a paper by Keith DeRose in the References. But that is a typo. It should be Lewis' *Elusive Knowledge*. It is sad that the journal editor failed to notice the typo.

[11] To be fair, some of Cheng's papers on other topics (e.g., philosophy of mind) do not have this problem.

A direct consequence of disengaging from others is that while there are so many articles devoted to a topic, so few original research is produced: many philosophers' research merely repeats others', and some philosophers' research is even inferior to the exiting literature. The problem of repeating others' research exists not only in philosophy but also in other humanities and social sciences. There are several research articles (e.g., Guo and Meng 2004; Wu 2007) discussing this problem.

So far I have identified two prevalent problems that the research of Chinese philosophers surveyed above has: (i) a lot of arguments these Chinese philosophers make are rather weak, and some of them even refrain from making any arguments; (ii) most of them tend not to critically engage with the relevant recent literature. To be sure, there are some decent arguments made by Chinese philosophers. For example, some arguments for and against Confucian ethics (e.g., Qingping Liu's argument against Confucian ethics) are worth taking seriously even if some of their premises may be disputed. In addition, there are a few philosophers who critically engage with the recent relevant literature. For instance, Qilin Li, in his paper on Heathcote's truth-maker theory, not only makes some decent arguments but also critically engages with the recent research of other philosophers. However, the number of the philosophers who both make decent arguments and critically engage with the recent relevant literature is rather small, while Problems (i) and (ii) are widespread.[12]

4.2 An Objection and Reply

Some might object that my assessment above is based on a biased standard of how philosophy should be done. They might say while it is true that according to the standard of Anglo-American analytic philosophy, strong argumentation and critical engagement are necessary for good philosophical research, Anglo-American analytic philosophy is by no means the only paradigm of philosophy. So we should not evaluate Chinese philosophers' research in terms of the standard of Anglo-American analytic philosophy.

How should we evaluate Chinese philosophers' research then? One thought is that it should be evaluated in terms of the goals Chinese philosophers pursue. It might be argued that there are plural goals of philosophical inquiry that are worth pursuing. Anglo-American analytic philosophers take the goal to be demonstrating one's creativity and convincing others of one's ideas. That is why they stress strong argumentation and critical engagement. Chinese philosophers take the goal to be something different. That is why they do not think strong argumentation and critical engagement are important.

But what exactly is the goal of philosophical inquiry for Chinese philosophers? In the debate over the Legitimacy of Chinese Philosophy or the Normativity Problem, we have seen that Chinese philosophers disagree on how Chinese Philosophy should be done: some endorse the traditional methodology only while others argue that we should also employ some Western

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[12] I think this claim is also true with regard to the Chinese philosophers' research in other areas such as philosophy of mind and philosophy of science.

methodologies. Now methodologies are (partially) justified by goals. Which methodology we should employ depends on what goals we should pursue. Some Chinese philosophers hold that the goal is to create or rediscover something that is at least as good as, but radically different from, Western Philosophy. But if this is the goal, it seems that Chinese philosophers should engage with Western philosophers such as explaining how their philosophical research is different from the research done by (at least some) Western philosophers and arguing that the former is at least as good as the latter. So given the goal, it is difficult to justify the claim that for Chinese philosophers, both weak argumentation and disengagement are not vices of philosophical research.

A more promising defense is that Chinese philosophers take the goal of philosophical inquiry to be enhancing one's own understanding. Given this goal, it seems that we do not have to care about strong argumentation and critical engagement. Here is how the argument goes specifically:

1. The goal of philosophical inquiry is to enhance one's own understanding of philosophical issues, not to enlighten or impress others.
2. One may efficiently enhance one's own understanding of philosophical issues without making strong arguments or critically engaging with others.
3. If one can efficiently achieve the goal of inquiry without doing X, then failing to do X is not a vice as far as inquiry is concerned.
4. So both weak argumentation and disengagement are not vices as far as philosophical inquiry is concerned.

Call this argument the "Argument from self-improvement." Premise 1 is an implication of Confucian philosophy. Confucius said, "In ancient times scholars learned for their own sake; these days they learn for the sake of others" (*Analects*, 14.24). According to a fairly standard interpretation, Confucius here claims that the goal of inquiry is to improve oneself, not to impress others or win the approval of others. While this claim itself does not imply that the goal of inquiry is not to improve others, those who practices it tend to believe that one should not try to improve others until one is good and wise (*xian*). As Mencius said, "A good and wise man helps others to understand clearly by his own clear understanding. Nowadays, men try to help others understand by their own benighted ignorance" (*Mencius*, 7B20). As long as one is not good and wise, one should only try to improve oneself. This view, combined with another popular belief that one should always be humble (humility is a virtue according to almost all schools of Chinese Philosophy), entails that one should never try to improve others, for a humble person would never regard herself as good and wise. This idea is aptly expressed by Daxin Qian, a great scholar in Qing Dynasty, in the following sentence: "There is so much room for me to improve. How do I have time to criticize and enlighten others?" Qian's essay *Guan Yi*, in which the sentence appears, has been selected into the standard middle school textbook in China for dozens of years, and all students have been required to memorize this essay verbatim. So it is very likely that the idea that one should try to improve oneself instead of criticizing and enlightening others has been deeply ingrained in Chinese intellectuals since they were kids.

(Surely, while "I" should not criticize or enlighten others, some other people might still be interested in "my" research, learn something valuable, and have a better understanding. But that is not "my" goal.)

Premise 2 of the Argument from self-improvement seems plausible given a popular view of argumentation and engagement. On a very popular view, the goal of argumentation is to convince others (especially rational people). A good argument is one that achieves the goal of argumentation. So a good argument is one that is able to convince others. Now it seems that one may efficiently enhance one's own understanding of philosophical issues without convincing others. For example, one may efficiently enhance one's own understanding of a philosophical issue by figuring out how the issue bears on some other issues, how it was socially originated, how it has been approached by various great philosophers in history, etc. And one may figure out the answers to these questions without trying to convince others. So one does not have to make strong arguments as far as inquiry is concerned.

With regards to engagement, according to a lot of people, its goal is to demonstrate one's creativity, that is, to show how one's research makes an original contribution to the recent literature. In order to show that one's research makes an original contribution, one must not only (a) explain the differences between one's research and others but also (b) argue that others' research is seriously flawed, or that one's research is better than others', or that that one's research solves some significant problems that few others have dealt with. While (a) or (b) might somehow help one understand better the philosophical issue one works on, one may significantly enhance one's own understanding of the issue without (a) or (b). So one does not have to engage with others as far as inquiry is concerned.

Premise 3 of the Argument from self-improvement seems trivially true. Since the argument is valid, given the three premises, it necessarily follows that both weak argumentation and disengagement are not vices as far as philosophical inquiry is concerned.

The Argument from self-improvement is very appealing. A thorough analysis of it deserves a separate paper, as it involves many important issues. In what follows, I will just try to offer a sketchy response, showing that the argument is less plausible than it seems.

First of all, Premise 1 of the argument seems false. Premise 1 presupposes that understanding is a great (epistemic) good, for the goal of philosophical inquiry must be something that is worth pursuing. If understanding is a great good, then we have a *prime facie* obligation to maximize it: we should try to enhance not only our own understanding but also others'. Indeed, one might not be wise enough to produce the research that enhances the philosophical community's understanding. But it is not impossible to do so. In fact, many philosophers do sometimes write something that greatly enhances the philosophical community's understanding. No one is wise with regard to any topic. But it sometimes happens that a philosopher is a little wiser about a certain topic than her fellow philosophers at a certain time. She is able to produce the research that enhances the philosophical community's understanding of that topic. So there seems no reason to restrict the goal of philosophical inquiry to enhancing one's own understanding. It is more plausible that the goal is to enhance the philosophical

community's understanding of philosophical issues. The idea that one should not help others understand better until one is perfectly wise is a form of epistemic egoism, which is as wrong as the form of moral egoism stating that one should not help others live a better life until one lives the best life.[13]

It might be argued that one should not aim at helping the philosophical community understand better since one should not think one is able to do it even if one can actually do it. Specifically, one should never think one is a little wiser about any topic than her fellow philosophers at any time, not so much because one should always be intellectually humble as because one is fallible (in fact, a major reason why one should always be intellectually humble is that one is fallible). Even if it seems to one that others clearly make a mistake, one might still be wrong. Now if one does not think one is a little wiser about any topic than her fellow philosophers at any time, one should not aim at enhancing the philosophical community's understanding.

This argument is fallacious, however. From the mere fact that one is fallible about a certain topic, it does not follow that one should not think one understands the topic better than others. Even if one is fallible about something, one's beliefs about it might be still justified (and true). There is nothing preposterous in holding that "I" am (currently) justified in thinking "I" understand the nature of knowledge better than many of "my" fellow philosophers, but "I" might be wrong, and "I" am open to the evidence showing that "I" am wrong.

Finally, even if not all forms of philosophical inquiry aim at enhancing the philosophical community's understanding, at least the philosophical inquiry that involves publishing one's research must take this to be its goal. Philosophical inquiry may take many forms. One may conduct philosophical inquiry in an isolated village without publishing anything. One may also conduct philosophical inquiry at a research university and try to publish one's research. If philosophical inquiry involves publishing one's research, its goal cannot be restricted to enhancing one's own understanding, otherwise there is no point of trying to publish one's writings (leaving aside practical considerations such as getting promoted), for getting published cannot enhance one's own understanding, and one should not expect others to critically engage with one's publications and help one understand better because they are supposed to only care about enhancing their own understanding.

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[13] Many analytic philosophers hold that the goal of philosophical inquiry is reflective equilibrium. This view can also be seen as a form of epistemic egoism. Reflective equilibrium is a state of coherence among a set of beliefs achieved via a deliberative process in which one reflects on and revise one's beliefs about a topic. Such deliberative process likely enhances one's own understanding of the topic in question. But it seems that one might achieve reflective equilibrium without helping others achieve reflective equilibrium or understand better. Some might think the goal of philosophical inquiry is to not only achieve reflective equilibrium in oneself, but also help others achieve reflective equilibrium. But more philosophers seem to simply take the goal to be achieving reflective equilibrium in oneself. For example, David Lewis (1983: x-xi) writes, "Our 'intuitions' are simply opinions: our philosophical theories are the same. … a reasonable goal for a philosopher is to bring them into equilibrium. …Once the menu of well-worked out theories is before us, philosophy is a matter of opinion. … If you say flatly that there is no god, and I say that there are countless gods but none of them are our worldmates, then it may be that neither of us is making any mistake of method. We may each be bringing our opinions to equilibrium in the most careful possible way, taking account of all the arguments, distinctions, and counterexamples. But one of us, at least, is making a mistake of fact. Which one is wrong depends on what there is." Here Lewis seems to think that the goal of philosophical inquiry is just to achieve reflective equilibrium in oneself. Surely, one may kindly help others achieve reflective equilibrium, but that is not the goal of philosophical inquiry.

If the above analysis is right, then enhancing one's own understanding of philosophical issues is not a proper goal of philosophical inquiry. If it is not a proper goal, then even if many Chinese philosophers take it to be the goal, it should not be used to evaluate their research.

If we accept that the goal of philosophical inquiry is to enhance the philosophical community's understanding, [14] then we can easily see why we should care about making strong arguments and critically engaging with the recent literature: it is because *ceteris paribus*, the research that makes strong arguments can more efficiently enhance the philosophical community's understanding than the one that makes weak arguments; the research that critically engages with the recent literature can more efficiently enhance the philosophical community's understanding than the one that does not.

The goal of argument is not to convince others, but to enhance understanding. For one thing, a strong argument can enhance understanding because it can help us see how a certain (controversial) view about the issue is exactly supported or undermined by the evidence we possess. Seeing such evidential dependence constitutes an important form of understanding. It seems that a strong argument is the only means of achieving this form of understanding, at least it is the most efficient means. Further, an argument might enhance our understanding even if it fails to convince anyone of its conclusion. For example, the classic argument for External World Skepticism convinces few people. But it is still a strong argument of epistemic value, for it can enhance our understanding of the nature of knowledge. Accordingly, if one can make a valid argument whose premises are widely accepted by a lot of philosophers but whose conclusion is widely rejected by these philosophers before the argument is presented to them, then the argument can greatly enhance these philosophers' understanding of the issue in question even if it fails to convince any of them. If it can luckily convince these philosophers of its conclusion and all its premises are true, then the argument can directly help them understand why the conclusion is true.

Similarly, while engagement does essentially involve showing how one's research makes an original contribution to the recent literature, its ultimate goal is to enhance the philosophical community's understanding. If one's research fails to enhance the philosophical community's understanding, it will not be regarded as an original contribution. The point of showing how one's research makes an original contribution to the recent literature is not to show off, but to enhance the philosophical community's understanding. As we have seen above, the typical way of engaging with the recent literature is (a) explaining the differences between one's research and others and (b) arguing that others' research is flawed, or that one's research is better than others', or that that one's research solves some significant problems that few others have dealt with. It seems obvious that *ceteris paribus*, the research that does (a) and (b) properly can more efficiently enhance the philosophical community's understanding than the research that does not.

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[14] We saw above that some Chinese philosophers hold that the goal of philosophical inquiry for Chinese philosophers is to create or revive something that is at least as good as, but radically different from, Western philosophy. This goal can be understood as a means of enhancing the philosophical community's understanding, because if Chinese philosophers create or revive something that is at least as good as, but radically different from, Western philosophy, then it would surely enhance the (global) philosophical community's understanding especially when the issues Chinese philosophers address also interest Western philosophers.

To be sure, there are some virtues (e.g., writing in an accessible style, accurate observation, powerful intuition, etc.) in addition to strong argument and critical engagement that may enhance the philosophical community's understanding. These virtues might conflict with strong argument and critical engagement. Do strong argument and critical engagement override these virtues? This is a controversial issue that deserves a separate paper. Here my claim is merely that *ceteris paribus*, the research with strong argument and critical engagement is better than the one without either of them. If strong argument and critical engagement are virtues that can be overridden, it does not follow that weak argument and disengagement are not vices, though the fact that the research has these problems does not mean it is terribly bad, for it might have other virtues.

4.3 Why These Problems?

So far I have argued that Chinese philosophers' research surveyed in this paper generally has two problems: they often make weak arguments, and they tend to disengage from others. I have defended this claim against a metaphilosophical objection. In this section, I will try to explain why the two problems are prevalent. Before I begin, I'd like to confess that my explanation is not based on solid sociological research, but largely on my personal observations and informal conversations with my teachers, friends and colleagues who have been doing philosophy in China for many years.

A ready explanation is that many Chinese philosophers endorse the Argument from Self-improvement. As we have seen, the idea that the goal of inquiry is to enhance one's own understanding rather than enlighten or impress others is deeply rooted in the Confucian tradition and widely held by Chinese intellectuals. However, it is unlikely that the Argument from Self-improvement is the only reason why Chinese philosophers generally make weak arguments and tend to disengage from others. For there are Chinese philosophers who do not endorse the argument but have the same problems. In what follows, I will try to make sense of the problems in light of some more cultural factors.

Consider the disengagement problem first. There seem at least three other cultural reasons for this problems. First, while all Chinese philosophers would agree that one should be open-minded and welcome criticisms of one's own views, a lot of them still think it is impolite to challenge other people's views especially if they know these people personally. So they would not argue with other people unless they believe some really important thing is at stake, as in the case of Qingping Liu's critique of the Confucian ethics. Most of those who have argued against Liu are pious Confucians. They endeavor to revive the past glory of Confucianism. They perceive Liu's critique as something that threatens their ingrained belief and endeavor. So they have to fight back. However, as we have seen, they often do not engage with each other. In particular, they do not critically examine each other's arguments. In fact, they often repeat what their allies say without referring to them.

In addition, it is also widely believed by Chinese philosophers that it is arrogant to praise oneself in public, and saying "I argue that S's view is false" or "I will show that my solution to the problem is better than others'" in a paper or a book is often considered a form of self-praise. To be sure, there are some Chinese philosophers

who value originality and try to enhance the philosophical community's understanding. But they think it is distasteful to argue that their research makes original contributions and helps others understand better. So they avoid engaging with others. They believe that if the reader truly understands their area and reads their books or papers carefully, she will, by herself, compare their research and others', figure out the difference between them, and know that their research is better than others' in the sense that it would help fellow philosophers understand better.

Further, many Chinese philosophers believe that the research produced by Chinese philosophers is not worth taking seriously, including the research done by themselves. On their view, the philosophy academe in China is completely corrupt. Philosophers were badly trained. "Blind peer-review" is a mere slogan invented to deceive the junior philosophers who do not have connections and the non-philosophers who are interested in philosophy. It is seldom actually practiced. Most philosophers get published because they have connections, not because their research is good. Many report that although they got published in top-ranked Chinese philosophy journals, they have no idea of how to submit a manuscript to any of these journals because it is their powerful mentors who sent their papers directly to the journal editors via a private email. They confess that while they do not want to publish rubbish, they have to get published in order to make a living as a professor. They might overstate the corruption in the philosophy academe, but the problem is widely perceived.

All the three reasons are contributing factors that discourage Chinese philosophers from engaging with others. An anonymous reviewer of an earlier version of the present paper suggests that there is also a practical dilemma that partially explains why the Chinese philosophers who do Western Philosophy tend not to seriously engage with Western Philosophers. S/he writes,

> If you write in Chinese and publish in Chinese journals, it is almost impossible to get engaged with foreign philosophers, for they are simply not able to read Chinese. So the only way to engage with working scholars and to do cutting-edge research is to write in foreign languages and publish in international journals. This is surely a challenge for most philosophers educated in China. Otherwise, you have to write in a much more accessible style, doing a lot of introducing, summarizing and reviewing work, without getting involved in detailed analyses and argumentation, in order to get published in Chinese journals and to attract readers, who may likely not have the background and interest to know and understand the details. This is indeed a predicament for Chinese philosophers doing research in analytic philosophy or other styles of foreign philosophy.

If this dilemma holds, then it also supports the claim that Chinese philosophers doing Western Philosophy may not (or even should not) make detailed arguments or critically engage with Western philosophers. While there might be some Chinese philosophers believing they face such a practical dilemma and have to disengage from Western philosophers, I do not think many Chinese philosophers can believe so consistently, nor do I think the dilemma itself is tenable.

Let's consider the dilemma itself first. It does not seem to hold. For one thing, there are good reasons against its first horn, which basically states that since working

Western philosophers cannot read Chinese, the only way to engage with them and to do cutting-edge research is to write in foreign languages and publish in international journals. But it seems one can do cutting-edge research even if the philosopher one engages with cannot read one's research. For example, Polish logicians such as Leon Chwistek engaged with the research of Whitehead and Russell but wrote in polish. They still did the cutting-edge research though Whitehead and Russell cannot read polish. Later, the research of polish logicians was introduced to the logicians who cannot read polish and greatly enhanced the latter's understanding of logic. Given this historical fact, it is reasonable to think that Chinese philosophers might be able to do cutting-edge research even if the Western philosophers they engage with cannot read their research. Further, even if Chinese philosophers cannot do cutting-edge research, engaging with the Western philosophers who cannot read their research is not pointless since the Chinese readers of their research might be benefited from their engagement. Suppose you criticize the theory of a foreign philosopher S, who, like most foreign philosophers, is unable to read your criticism. But there are Chinese philosophers who read both S's work and your criticism. Your criticism, if good, can help them understand the topic in question better. As far as I know, some Chinese philosophers do not find their peers' work attractive precisely because their peers' work merely summarizes what foreign philosophers say without getting involved in detailed analyses and argumentation.

To be sure, Chinese philosophers might believe they face such a practical dilemma even if the dilemma itself does not hold. However, it seems that a large number of Chinese philosophers doing Western Philosophy cannot consistently believe that they face the dilemma, for there is evidence that they generally do not believe that if their writings contain detailed analyses and argumentation, they would fail to attract readers (because readers may likely not have the background and interest to understand detailed analyses and argumentation). Specifically, they are very interested in translating English philosophy books and articles that contain a lot of detailed analyses and argumentation. Since 1980s, not only the major Western Philosophy classics in history have been translated into Chinese (some classics such as Plato's *Republic* and Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* even have more than two Chinese versions), but also some recent classics, as well as some recent papers by leading Western philosophers, have been translated into Chinese. For example, Derek Parfit's *On What Matters,* which was originally published in 2011, was translated into Chinese in 2015. Ernest Sosa's article "Virtue Epistemology: Character versus Competence" was translated into Chinese and got published in a leading Chinese philosophy journal in 2014, even before the English text was published as a chapter in *Current Controversies in Virtue Theory* edited by Mark Alfano in 2015. If Chinese philosophers believe that the Chinese translations of Parfit and Sosa's writings, which contain highly sophisticated argumentation and nuanced analyses, can attract readers, they cannot consistently believe that if their own writings contain detailed analyses and argumentation, they would fail to attract readers.

However, one might object that readers are interested in the Chinese translations of the books and articles by Western philosophers not because these books and articles contain detailed analyses and argumentation, but because of other factors, e.g., the authors are world famous. There is some truth in this objection, but it is difficult to imagine while most readers are not interested in, nor have any understanding of,

detailed analyses and argumentation, they are still attracted to the books and articles containing a lot of detailed analyses and argumentation. It is more likely that most readers are very interested in detailed analyses and argumentation and have some understanding of them. After all, understanding comes in degrees. And people might be interested in detailed analyses and argumentation even if they cannot thoroughly understand them.

The worry that Chinese readers of philosophy books and journals might be unable to thoroughly understand detailed or sophisticated argumentation is connected to the other problem that Chinese philosophers' research has: a lot of arguments they make are rather weak. I have suggested that this problem may be partially explained by the Argument from Self-improvement endorsed by many Chinese philosophers. But there are Chinese philosophers who do care about argumentation but still make weak arguments. I think this has something to do with philosophical training in China's universities. A lot of established Chinese philosophers do not receive a good training in logic. In China, logic has never been a required course for undergraduate students who do not major or minor in philosophy, nor have graduate students (both Ph.D and M.A.) in philosophy ever been required to pass any logic exam or course. Consequently, a lot of philosophers who did not major or minor in philosophy in college never took a logic course in their life. In addition, for philosophy majors and minors, no basic first-order logic or critical thinking courses were offered at most universities until about 15 years ago. (When I was college student, the only logic course available is basic Aristotelian logic, and my instructor had little knowledge of modern logic. This is perhaps because modern logic was dismissed as bourgeois logic during the period of Mao's leadership.) So most established philosophers never took a course in basic propositional logic or predicate logic. This is perhaps the main reason why they are not very good at making arguments or following sophisticated arguments.

5 Concluding Remarks

Summing up, I have surveyed the recent research of Chinese philosophers on four topics in two areas: the Legitimacy Problem of Chinese Philosophy and Confucian ethics in the area of Chinese Philosophy, and the Gettier Problem and the External World Skepticism in the area of epistemology. I have argued that their research in general has two problems: (i) a lot of arguments these Chinese philosophers make are rather weak, and some of them even refrain from making any arguments; (ii) most of them tend not to engage with the relevant recent literature. Although there are a few Chinese philosophers who both make respectable arguments and critically engage with the relevant recent literature, the number of them is rather small. I have also considered a metaphilosophical objection to my analysis: weak argumentation and disengagement are not vices of Chinese philosophers' research because their research should be evaluated in terms of what they take to be the goal of philosophical inquiry, i.e., enhancing one's own understanding of philosophical issues, which does not require strong argumentation and critical engagement. I have argued that enhancing one's own understanding of philosophical issues is not a proper goal of philosophical inquiry. Instead, the proper goal is to enhance the philosophical community's understanding of philosophical issues, which requires strong argumentation and critical engagement.

Finally, I have also tried to make sense of (i) and (ii) in term of some cultural factors. Hopefully, my survey and analysis can shed some light on the recent research of Chinese philosophers in general.

In closing, I'd like to note that the environment for Chinese philosophers to do research has been improving despite of the problems their research has. First of all, Chinese philosophers have much more resources than they had 15 years ago. Now they can easily access the major philosophy online databases and get newly published philosophy books in both Chinese and other languages. In addition, Chinese philosophers have a lot more opportunities to exchange ideas with the foreign philosophers than before. They can get funding from the government, not just for their visits to philosophy departments in the U.S. and other countries, but also for inviting internationally well-known philosophers to give talks or even teach for a short semester at their home departments. Finally, philosophy undergraduates have received much better training in modern logic and critical thinking in recent years, as there have been more and more professors who got a Ph.D in logic. Graduate students in philosophy at top universities in China can easily get funding from the government to study for one or two years at an internationally recognized philosophy department. All these factors can help Chinese philosophers appreciate the significance of enhancing the philosophical community's understanding, facilitate serious engagement with foreign philosophers, and improve the quality of argumentation in future.

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