

評〈生命倫理學：跨文化研究〉

Commentary on “Bioethics: Cross Cultural Explorations”

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摘要 Abstract

本文評論了 Tham 的豐富論述，及其深刻解說後現代世界道德多元化和多元文化為跨文化生命倫理學對話帶來的複雜性和挑戰。本文亦回應了 Tham 提出應如何重塑跨文化接觸的本質、使命、目標和方法的關鍵問題，以協和道德普遍性和多元性之間的緊張關係，並深化參與及對話，以促進有成效的跨文化接觸。

1. A trilogy of Three Accounts

Embedded in the narration of “Bioethics: Cross Cultural Explorations” is a trilogy of three nuanced and tightly interwoven accounts: (1) a descriptive account, (2) a reflective account, and (3) a

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futuristic account. Together, they offer invaluable insights into the complexity and challenges in conducting cross-cultural bioethics dialogues. These complexities are illustrated through Father Joseph Tham's 12-year-long engagement with the project "Bioethics, Multiculturalism and Religion" in his capacity as Chair of the UNESCO project in Bioethics and Human Rights.

The descriptive account details the methodology of and activities involved in the project, as well as its objective to forge a cross-cultural agreement on global bioethics, unified by a universal human rights paradigm. This account documents the eight different events and workshops organized by the project, which brought together Christians, Buddhists, Confucians, Daoists, Jews, Hindus, Muslims and secular ethicists to engage in cross-cultural bioethics events and dialogues; the challenges and difficulties encountered throughout the process; and the revisions and adjustments that project organizers had to continuously make to generate increasingly meaningful and productive engagement.

The reflective account follows Father Tham's process of soul-searching and his reflections on the project. He notes that "a naïve supposition of universal human rights could not be taken for granted." Many cultures do not accept a human rights paradigm and are perplexed by the assumption that human rights are universal and unquestionable, as the human rights discourse lacks a theoretical foundation, and the claim of universality in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights is based on political consensus.

These critical reflections led Father Tham to state that "seeking consensus or convergence among the religions was a rather ambitious, and perhaps even unrealistic goal." The difficulty in finding common ground is further compounded by the fact there is a plurality of diverse religions, even within each of these religious groups or traditions. However, Father Tham also finds that "incommensurability does not necessarily lead to relativism, nor does it preclude rational debate and encounter."

The futuristic account raises three fundamental questions, both about the future development of the project and about the broader issue of advancing cross-cultural bioethics exchanges and discussions in the post-modern world. (1) How can pluralism be accommodated when creating meaningful and productive engagement among divergent faiths and traditions? (2) How can we accept moral pluralism and diversity without slipping into moral nihilism or relativism? (3) Is objective moral truth in bioethics deliberations achievable through human reason and judgment in the post-modern world of multiculturalism?

As a way forward, Father Tham also highlights four critical issues that need to be seriously considered to reconceptualize the nature of cross-cultural engagements, to enrich global bioethics dialogues, and to extend bioethical discussions: (1) bridging the East–West divide in the conception of human rights; (2) reformulating the nature, goal, and methodology of cross-cultural dialogue on bioethics; (3) reconciling the tension between universality and diversity in global bioethics; and (4) upholding the places of science, faith, and reason in moral deliberation on bioethical issues. These fundamental considerations must be taken seriously and require a careful, considered response.

2. Taking Moral Pluralism Seriously and Embracing the East–West Divide in the Conception of Human Rights

One possible way to bridge the East–West divide is by taking moral pluralism seriously. This requires a willingness to move beyond a view that a Western paradigm of universal human rights and/or a cosmopolitan liberalism serve as the foundation of global bioethics and govern ethical decision-making in all countries and cultures, an idea which had been forcefully argued by H. Tris Engelhardt (Engelhardt 2006). As Father Tham’s experience demonstrates, there are numerous moral visions in the field of bioethics. Each of these moral perspectives aligns with a different understanding of bioethics, reflecting differences in theoretical perspectives and moral commitments that contain deep and substantive disagreements.

It is no surprise that in Father Tham’s narration, the dominance of the universality of human rights is challenged in many non-Western traditions, notably in Eastern traditions, which prioritize duties over rights. In these traditions, the priority of the family is to guide ethical decision making in bioethical issues.

Instead of seeking consensus and convergence on a universal human rights paradigm, the field of global bioethics must accept that human rights ethics and cosmopolitan liberalism are one among many conceptualizations of human success and, as such, other substantive views from particular religions and cultural accounts are equally valid. Global bioethics discourse should be guided by the perspective that morality is plural, that diversity is real, and that cross-cultural dialogue should focus on nurturing the conditions under which moral diversity can flourish.

3. Building a Vibrant Global Bioethics Dialogue on Divergence and Diversity

Taking moral diversity seriously requires that we create a continuous global dialogue that is respectful of local differences and is carried out through open, self-critical, and rational discourse. This includes reflecting critically upon the meaning and significance of practices within one's own tradition and culture without any pretension of "universal" values. Instead of agreement or consensus, the emphasis must be on "dialogical openness" and "equal standing" in cross-cultural engagement, allowing experiences to be shared, prejudices to be challenged, disagreements to be tolerated, and horizons to be broadened in support of mutual growth and development.

As a co-founder of the *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, Engelhardt has played a pivotal role in creating intellectual spaces that bring together different voices from across the world for open debates, generating divergent understandings of bioethical concerns based in different cultural and moral perspectives. As the editor of the *Philosophy and Medicine* book series, he had inspired and supported the publication of many cross-cultural dialogues on global bioethics that have drawn insights from both Eastern and Western perspectives and from both traditional and modern resources.

As I have written elsewhere (Tao Lai 2018), the debates and the divergent understandings promoted by Engelhardt have propelled the rapid growth and flourishing of scholarly debate on bioethics in recent decades, particularly in non-Western and Asian societies. This has enabled these societies to explore and debate important bioethical issues—e.g., genetic editing, human subject research, synthetic biology, enhancement technology, cloning, third party-assisted reproduction, abortion, physician-assisted suicide, euthanasia, and the role of justice in health care—from multiple perspectives and traditions. These debates have also created valuable opportunities for people from many diverse cultures to be heard at global bioethics forums, to participate in international committees and bioethics research centers, and to contribute to bioethics policy discussions and guidelines formulation, particularly regarding the global governance of biotechnology development and regulation.

These cross-cultural exchanges and discussions have prompted deep philosophical reflections on the universality of ethics, the meaning and justifiability of ethical claims, the nature of moral reasoning, and the very idea of morality. They demonstrate that perhaps it is in moving away from such "particularity" that the search for the "universal" truly begins.

4. Embedding a Multiple Ethical Value Perspective in Cross-cultural Dialogue

To build a vibrant and inclusive global bioethics community, cross-cultural exchanges and global bioethics dialogues should be guided by a “multiple ethical value” perspective to consciously nurture divergence and foster diversity. This does not imply that we should embrace antiquated ideas, but it does imply that we should endeavor to separate what is anachronistic from what is not. This idea also suggests that we should examine the value and the correctness of the long-held views from different traditions and be ready not only to criticize but also to learn from them.

The Chinese Confucian ethical tradition offers one example of a multiple ethical perspective that accommodates moral pluralism. As explained by the contemporary Confucian scholar Kam-por Yu (Yu 2010, 27), Confucian ethics recognizes the existence of multiple perspectives and sees the value of preserving and promoting these competing perspectives. According to this perspective, there is more to ethical thinking than the distinction between good and bad or right and wrong, as there is not just one good (*shan* 善), but many goods, and one good may not be reducible to another.

Yu further notes that being able to take multiple values into consideration is regarded as following the *zhongyong* (中庸) approach to ethical decision-making (Yu 2010, 28). The approach is holistic and not one-sided. It emphasizes that ethical deliberation is not simply a choice between good and evil, but a choice among various goods. Applying the *zhongyong* approach means giving due recognition to all competing values contained in different practices and solutions and considering this recognition when making moral deliberations and judgements.

The *zhongyong* approach is holistic and inclusive in nature. It does not imply a kind of moderatism, which regards the right course of action to be somewhere between excess and inadequacy, or a tendency to hold to a middle ground (Yu 2010, 31). Embracing a multiple ethical values and perspectives in cross-cultural dialogue enables us to embrace the wisdom of rival traditions and to learn from divergent perspectives.

In a world of increasing moral pluralism, concentrating on one value while ignoring others is a moral deficiency (Yu 2010, 39). At the same time, seeking to forge a global bioethical understanding under a unifying framework of universal human rights may have the counterproductive effect of generating greater discord, distrust, and disharmony among different religions and cultural traditions.

5. Upholding Rationality and Moral Truth for Harmony in Cross-Cultural Engagement

The downside of the lack of a single moral vocabulary or a single set of moral beliefs that claim universal objectivity and validity is the difficulty in resolving moral controversies and settling bioethical disputes. While there is indeed no guarantee that all those engaging in rational debate will arrive at the same conclusions on central moral issues, the absence of a universal morality and a global bioethical understanding does not imply that any sense of morality is only a local and temporary custom or that sources of morality are purely accidental and contingent.

The impossibility of moral consensus does not imply the impossibility of moral truth, that moral truth cannot be attained through rational discursive reasoning, or that moral truth is not justifiable in discursive, rational terms. Failure in the quest for moral consensus or moral agreement does not have to mean the failure of rationality of our philosophical enterprise.

Despite the challenges faced, Father Tham is firmly convinced by his 12 years of experience with the project that “cultural and moral diversity does not automatically preclude the prospect of rational dialogue and mutual understanding.”

Global bioethics thrives on multiplicity and diversity. As Renzong Qiu wrote in “Bioethics: Asian Perspectives A Quest for Moral Diversity,” “The diversity or plurality of bioethical views will promote the growth of bioethics just as [the] late philosopher of science, Paul Feyerabend, argued that the proliferation of scientific theories promotes the growth of knowledge.” (Qiu 2004, 2)

For decades, Qiu has been a pioneer in the development of Chinese bioethics. He has made seminal contributions to the establishment of bioethics as a recognized field of research and academic study in China and has helped the field influence national public policy on the advancement of science and technology. At the international level, he is a Lifetime Member of the Kennedy Institute of Ethics and a Fellow of the Hastings Centre in the United States and has contributed on numerous occasions to rational ethical debates and discussions on global bioethical issues with peers from diverse cultures and traditions.

Harmony (*ho* 和) is a central concept in Confucian ethics, and the notions of difference and diversity are inherent in the Confucian concept of harmony (Tao 2018, chap. 9). In this conceptualization of harmony, harmony is a dynamic and generative process that serves as the source of creativity and transformation. The Chinese concept of

harmony does not imply compliance with a pre-ordained or perfect order of the world. In contrast with this static view, Confucian harmony is an active, organic, ceaseless, and ever-evolving process, one which continuously transforms and unfolds to reveal new contours, new forms, and new lives.

Si Bo, the grand historiographer of the late Western Zhou dynasty (774 BCE), explained why difference and diversity are inherent features of harmony:

When there is monotony of sound, there is no music.
 When there is monotony of things, there is no pattern.
 When there is monotony of taste, there is no delicacy.
 When there is monotony of things, there is no harmony.
 (“Zhengyu” 鄭語, chap. 16, Guoyu; Wei 1978, 515–16)

Confucian ethics also draws a sharp distinction between harmony (*ho* 和) and uniformity (*tung* 同). Harmony is regarded as the source of creativity and transformation through the ceaseless and organic interplay of different forces. Through this process, heterogeneous elements are brought into mutually balanced and complementary relationships to form new things, orders, or patterns.

Uniformity, however, is regarded as the cause of stagnation, which Yanzi explained in the Guo Yu:

He (harmony) gives rise to new things;
 Tung (uniformity) will lead to stagnation.
 To balance one thing with another is called “he”;
 To add to the same thing yet more of the same will ruin the whole.
 (“Zhengyu” 鄭語, chap. 16, Guoyu; Wei 1978, 515–16)

From the Confucian point of view, different perspectives, different values, and different opinions are the foundation of harmony. Diversity and heterogeneity form the basis for growth and prosperity in both the natural and the human worlds. Only by promoting harmony over homogeneity, accommodating disagreements, and interacting and learning from diverse perspectives can one enrich oneself and grow as a person.

Moral life thrives as much on disagreements it does on agreements. Despite the distinction drawn by Engelhardt between moral friends and moral strangers, I will always regard Engelhardt as a moral friend, although to him I am a moral stranger. Our agreements and disagreements have been intense, harmonious, and inspiring. They have prompted deep philosophical reflections that have significantly

enriched both our lives as authentic moral beings despite the absence of a common moral authority or a shared moral tradition.

In the pursuit of moral truth, the courage to embrace disagreement is an indication of moral progress and a triumph of the human spirit.

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