

# 克服跨文化生命倫理研究中常見的 預設錯誤

## Overcoming Mistaken Assumptions in Cross-cultural Bioethics Study

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### 摘要 Abstract

當下一系列的生物醫學醜聞以及人們對其多元的反應，突顯了更深入的跨文化生命倫理研究的重要性，以加深多元文化和宗教的理解，促進長期共存和繁榮。作為對 Tham 文章的拓展，本文駁斥了跨文化生命倫理比較研究中將中國文化和西方文化的簡

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單二元對立傳統，提出應警惕兩種錯誤傾向：沙文主義和種族中心主義傾向以及不可通約傾向。

The cultural differences between East and West, as well as the differences in attitudes on bioethical issues, are hot topics in the international bioethics community. Scandals in biomedical research in recent years have further increased the prominence and importance of these issues. For example, high-profile cases involving head transplant experimentation and gene-edited babies have provoked international outrage, criticism, and condemnation. Among the responses, there have been reflections on the issue of “why China?” Some researchers blame cultural differences, while others argue that there is a lack of rigorous research ethics oversight in the country. In “The Real Problem With Human Head Transplantation,” it is argued that China “is a country that has a history of taking positions on bioethical issues that diverge from most commonly accepted conceptions of medical and research ethics.”

Similarly, some believe there is a scientific and ethical divide between China and the West and that the “red lines” in the West and in China differ greatly (Tatlow 2015). Although many hospitals and universities in China have established institutional review boards (IRBs) in accordance with internationally recognized principles, they are imported systems, not home-grown institutions. For many researchers, they are treated as imported Western bureaucratic instruments with little foundation in Chinese culture.

Blaming cultural differences for these scandals is ungrounded, overly simplistic, and unjust. From a broad political, sociological, and historical perspective, these transgressions have not been isolated cases. There are deep political, cultural, institutional, and economic factors that have combined to contribute to an environment in which Chinese researchers have pursued daring but unethical “world firsts.” The diverse responses to controversial bioethical issues also suggest that more in-depth, cross-cultural studies about Eastern and Western conceptions of bioethics are needed to foster deeper cross-cultural understanding, to promote long-term coexistence, and to encourage mutual development. In Tham’s “Bioethics: Cross-cultural Explorations,” he notes that “our globe has become more pluralistic, and different moral communities coexist without sufficient knowledge of their neighbors.” He then provides the methodology of meeting evolving as a search for possible convergence or common ground among local cultures and religious traditions. His work is evidence that “culture and religion can make a coherent, substantive, and significant proposal for bioethics.”

The enterprise of cross-cultural study between China and the West is largely influenced by how we perceive Chinese and Western culture. The construction of cross-cultural, bioethical inquiry is often a two-dimensional project, including the vertical dimension—critical interpretation and analysis of ancient doctrines with an eye to “extracting the insights behind the text that link up with our own contemporary concerns and interests” (Loi 2009, 455–78) — and the horizontal dimension—comparison and contrast between Chinese moral traditions and Western theories. For centuries, China and Chinese morality has been portrayed as the “radical other” to Western morality both inside and outside China.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Italian traveler Marco Polo was amazed by China’s material wealth, enormous power, and complex social structure and morality. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Hegel harshly concluded that there was no real philosophy in China and that Confucius was merely a “practical statesman,” not a “speculative thinker.” The nineteenth-century British philosopher John Stuart Mill also warned in his essay “On Liberty” that if individuality is not promoted in society, Western civilization will remain “stationary” like the “bad” example of Chinese civilization. He believed that individuality encourages creativity and diversity, while values prominent in China, such as conformity, collectivism, and paternalism, were “dangerous.” The twentieth-century British scientist and historian Joseph Needham, “the man who loved China,” admired the “wonderful” synthesis present in Confucian philosophy, however, and wrote in his *Science and Civilization in China* series that it produced a harmoniously “organic” and “non-mechanical” evolutionary materialism.

The earliest direct Western appraisals of contemporary Chinese medical ethics were contradictory. In 1979, the Kennedy Institute of Ethics (one of the leading bioethics institutes) organized a trip to China to undertake an evaluation of contemporary Chinese medical ethics. After two weeks of interviews with Chinese scholars and doctors and observations in hospitals, the group’s spokesperson, H. Tristram Engelhardt, reported that “in the real sense there is no bioethics in the PRC as a scholarly sub-discipline.” He also stated that the Chinese saw ethics as a “mode of moral indoctrination” (a “Maoist-Leninist-Marxism,” he explained later) and that they “failed to distinguish principles” from the “grounds” or “conceptual

foundations” that justify these principles<sup>1</sup>. In contrast, only two years later, two American sociologists, Renee Fox and Judith Swazey, reported more positively on medical ethics in China after conducting field work in Tianjin. They accused Engelhardt of an “inadvertent ethnocentricity” and were in no doubt about the existence of Chinese medical ethics, which in their view emphasized a spirit of self-sacrifice and self-cultivation and a lofty sense of responsibility, modesty, self-control and devotion to family and nation, among other values.

Engelhardt, Fox, and Swazey had varying degrees of engagement with and understanding of the Chinese perspective, and some of their studies cannot properly be called comparative research. They falsely portrayed a static, monolithic, and collective China that is in radical opposition to a dynamic, pluralistic, and individualistic West (Nie 2000). Perhaps because differences are generally more interesting than similarities and because this assumption is convenient, this conception has gained enormous popularity across many fields and is still widespread in cross-cultural, Chinese–Western medical ethics studies.

Chinese culture is much richer, more diverse, and more complex than this literature may indicate. I was born and raised in the remote Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in the northwest of China, where half of the population are Muslims. I have a brother who recently converted to Islam, and I am lucky to feel and experience the cultural diversity, pluralism, and openness that exists in China. I am sure many people in other parts of China also share similar feelings and experiences. Its internal plurality and diversity have often been neglected and minimized in literature and official discourse, if not totally ignored. To appreciate the diversity present in Chinese bioethics, studies should consider both the influence of Confucianism and other competing ideologies, such as Daoism, Buddhism, and the Communist framework for moral issues in China. Even if assumption made about China may have some merit, it is important to consider whether these perceived differences between China and the West are culturally grounded or are based in the sorts of theoretical commitments. This is a difficult question, and I present two common mistakes in conceptualizing trans-cultural comparative studies to help elucidate this point. First, a trans-cultural bioethical study should not focus on the differences between cultures, or in this case, the

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(1) Engelhardt also speculated the reasons for the absence of bioethics in Chinese scholar is that 1) their lack of extended experience with a variety of moral viewpoints; 2) unfamiliarity with discussions focused primarily on discovering the comparative intellectual merits of varying moral viewpoints apart from any immediate concern to establish or maintain a single one; and 3) their overriding tendency, because of dialectical materialism, to hold that all ethical reflections are reducible to economic forces. (Engelhardt 1980).

anthropology of Chinese bioethics and Western bioethics, but rather on the contrast in basic philosophical attitudes or types of philosophy that transcend cultures. Second, the comparison between Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy should not be understood as the contrasting of “all the philosophies of one culture with all those of another.” (Rosan 1952) Eastern and Western philosophical traditions are both pluralistic in nature and do not exhibit general characteristics. Additionally, the fundamental philosophical ideas on which comparative studies should focus occur at various times and in various cultures aside outside the geographical designations of East and West. For example, the Hebrew and the Chinese cultures have many striking similarities in their ways of thinking, and Indian Idealism shares many common features with Daoism.

A more meaningful and fruitful approach to trans-cultural study is to consider the differences in similarities and similarities in differences between Chinese tradition and Western theory, as advocated by Nie. In one of my previous essays, for example, I briefly discussed the differences in similarities in a comparisons between utilitarianism and the thinking of Mozi and between Confucian teachings and the virtue ethics of Aristotle. I used Confucian doctrine as the main source of Chinese ethical tradition in this comparative study primarily because of its relative preponderance in Chinese culture, which makes it “appear distinctive or unique, and not because of any inherent linguistic, racial, or geographic characteristics.”

In addition to the clarification and articulation of the role of culture in Chinese-Western comparative bioethical studies, there are also some general difficulties and dispositions common in comparative analysis that we should watch out for: chauvinist or ethnocentric attitudes, and the incommensurability view.

Chauvinist or ethnocentric attitudes in comparative analysis are seen in habitual attempts to find or expectations of finding something comparable to one’s own thought system mirrored in a foreign culture. There is a presumption in this attitude that one’s home tradition is best and that, insofar as other traditions are different, they are inferior or erroneous. A common prejudice is the belief that a philosophy must be formulated in specific way to be considered philosophy. Eastern or other non-Western traditions are more commonly evaluated from a Western perspective than the reverse, so when evaluating diverse philosophies, we must resist the tendency to find explanations based in our own moral traditions or risk prejudging other traditions. For example, because he failed to identify the notion of individualism as conceptualized in the West, Mill regarded Chinese philosophy as backwards and a driver of China’s weak traditions. Failure to find parallel elements in a foreign system may lead to the denial of these

elements' existence. To resist this tendency, one must “break down” the specific ideas or concepts and look at how different traditions respond to individual elements of the concepts.

Another difficulty is the tendency to exaggerate and dichotomize cultural differences, believing they are incommensurable with each other. There are certainly large differences in views and values among different traditions, and some may be incommensurable—the inability to translate some Chinese concepts into equivalent Western terms, for example—but we should not suspend all judgment about the adequacy of each tradition from different philosophies or uncritically accept other traditions simply because they are different. This incommensurability approach contains the assumption that there is no common or objective moral criterion, so it is therefore impossible to make a judgment between two different views from two different traditions. This assumption is incorrect, as humanity shares much common morality, e.g., benevolence and respect, across different cultures and boundaries.

Learning about other traditions has been proposed as a remedy for this difficulty. The goal is to come to an understanding of how other philosophical traditions are tied to a life that humans find satisfying and meaningful. While I may have cleared some of the theoretical obstacles encountered and mistakes made when conducting a cross-cultural bioethics study, I believe these exercises are best demonstrated in the study of our present concerns and experiences in the contemporary world.

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