

Apophatic Paths from Europe to China: Regions without Border. By William Franke. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2018. Pp. xxii + 246. \$85.00.

The book under review is in many ways a commonplace specimen: a tome that seeks to rethink philosophy and culture from a cross-cultural comparative vantage point. But there are reasons for us to pay it attention. For starters, there is the telling autobiography of the author, which reveals the book's origination. William Franke makes a point to inform us that his long-time engagement with the apophatic, that is, the unsayable and the negative, within the European cultural contexts had at some point become no longer entirely sufficient and satisfying. He felt compelled to travel, figuratively and literally speaking, to the East. He took on teaching and research positions in Hong Kong and Macau while delving into the Asian traditions where the wisdom and value of the unsayable seem particularly prominent and prevalent. Franke's journey and sojourn, both a physical space and an ideational fount, thus amounted to a sort of scholarly *Bildung*, and the present book may be seen as an admixture of intellectual *Bildungsroman* and philosophical treatise. The title is evocative of the power of travelling beyond customary and familiar territories in such a way that borders are crossed and then erased.

To be sure, the important roles of the unspoken and unspeakable in Asian ways of thinking (Daoist, Buddhist, and Vedic, for instance) have been mulled over, lingered on, and analysed in one manner or another by many Western (and Chinese, for that matter) scholars and commentators, such as François Jullien, whose pivotal influences Franke duly acknowledges. Still, notions of the unsayable, the ineffable, and the negative often operate in the periphery, or they appear as free-wheeling and free-floating elements in scholarly disquisitions, everywhere but also nowhere. What makes Franke's work notable is the considerable daring in putting the apophatic at the very centre of an intercultural hermeneutics that builds a bridge of communication and understanding between peoples and minds via the unsayable. There is a rich dose of inescapable irony in this project—Franke speaks volume about that which cannot be spoken, labouring in fact to erect, as he describes it, an “intercultural philosophy of universalism” (p. xvii) that traverses and transcends terrains East and West.

In the name of this intercultural philosophy, Frank argues explicitly on behalf of transnational comparative studies, contending that seeing diversity, alterity, and differentness *within* one culture helps us come to grips with otherness only in a limited fashion. All cultures are articulations of the *real* as it is lived and experienced by people within them, expressed through accumulated and transmitted beliefs, rituals, symbols, and routinized normative actions. But much of the real and many of the realities are conditioned and defined by a culture's specific history. It is only

through juxtaposing and comparing cultures that we come to discern the widest possible range of what is considered to be real. In that sense, interculturality is revelatory, enabling us to see beyond specific historico-cultural contingencies in order to grasp the multifarious human possibilities and conceptualities. At the same time that we accept their cultural relativity, Franke asserts that Chinese classical wisdom offers rich resources for understanding “the unthinkable wholeness to which we must nevertheless relate ourselves arguably as a condition of the validity of all our thinking” (p. xix).

Regarding the genesis, organization, and structure of the book, it should be mentioned that several of the chapters are revised and refined versions of previously published materials and presented lectures. In other words, the monograph has been in the making for some time. Because Franke has been thinking long and hard about apophaticism in comparative and global terms, the stitching together of the various pieces into a book-length narrative does not feel disjointed or haphazard. The parts do add up to a coherent sum, on account of Franke’s strong and cogent thesis of the possibility and desirability of transcultural pathways toward a truly globalized space that discloses “what is working in *any and all* cultures *beyond* their borders and definitions and irrespective of their specific characters” (p. xx, original emphasis). Theology, or negative theological interpretation, as Franke contends, is the central conduit among these pathways, insofar as theology relates us to an Other (a Whole / an All) that nonetheless mandates our negation; it presumes the relativity of humanity by bringing it into the realm of transcendence, thereby dissolving normal standards and measures. By negative theology, Franke means the Neoplatonic philosophy premised on the idea of Nothing as a universal emanating source.

Chapter 1, “All or Nothing?: Nature in Chinese Thought and the Apophatic Occident,” takes its conceptual and analytic cue from François Jullien’s theory of blandness as the quintessence of ancient Chinese wisdom, referring to dimensions of the infinite that is beyond human apprehension and conception. Nature, construed in terms of the infinite, invisible, and ineffable, is more than phenomenal appearances. Yet, Nature is not an *a*-natural metaphysical realm of pure possibilities, for its infinity lies in the very inscrutability that is inherent and immanent in all things. In mainstream Western philosophical thinking, and in the theistic notion of God, nature is generally conceived positively as a second-order domain knowable through the physical senses. By contrast, Chinese thought unabashedly and confidently presumes a fathomless and unseen nature that is All and Nothing, such that humanity can only relate to and realize it via some form of negation of itself—Daoist *wuwei* 無為 (non-action), or the Mencian understanding of our innate moral sense as the all-pervasive and yet unmanifest human nature. While Jullien tends to see the Western and Chinese approaches to be opposing alternatives, Franke rejects such stark dichotomy, arguing

instead that apophatic wisdom can be found in both China and the West, even though admittedly, it is in Chinese thought that there is non-verbal direct and consistent engagement with Nature (the One, or the All as Nothing) as the unsayable.

Chapter 2, “Nothing and the Poetic ‘Making’ of Sense,” offers a cultural expression of the inexpressible by revealing how poetry, with its art of allusiveness and incitation, enables humanity to be in touch and in harmony with the whole, be it nature seen phenomenologically or reality construed metaphysically. Once again, using Jullien as the point of departure and reference, Franke examines how poetry, by undoing discursive, intellectual, and theoretical ratiocination, makes possible the intuitive, and therefore direct, encounter with reality as it is. Poetry does not seek to represent the objective world as such; rather, it incites and therefore invokes and evokes responses from the reader or listener who then not only harmonizes the emotions and thoughts within himself or herself but also reaches out to others and the world at large. Poetry does not prescribe a way of seeing and defining the world; it encourages and stimulates our interaction with the world and reality as they ceaselessly unfold. Franke posits that apophasis as an ideal state and an objectively given condition of reality is found not only in the Chinese poetic tradition but also the Western one, and so once more, he takes issue with Jullien’s penchant to set up the contrast between China (poesis of the immanent of things) and the West (poesis of the transcendent and metaphysical), thereby refraining from its possible dissolution and resolution. It is Franke’s robust belief that there is a common ground of apophasis to effect intercultural congress.

Chapter 3, “Immanence: The Last Word?,” takes on a big game in the hunt for intercultural understanding, that is, the vexing question of the relative and respective explanatory power of the concept-terms of immanence and transcendent as an apt description of the Chinese religio-philosophical worldview. The chapter is a rigorously critical and penetrating examination of first, Jullien’s, and second, David Hall and Roger Ames’s, views of immanence as the unique quiddity of Chinese thought. Apart from his own take on the subject matter, Franke appeals to the scholarship that defends the validity and plausibility of interpreting the Chinese conception of reality with reference to the notion of transcendence. As a result, this chapter is arguably one of the most systematic synthetic treatments of the hotly debated issue of immanence versus transcendence. Here, Franke succinctly channels some of the most clarion voices in the ongoing polemics: Robert Neville, Wolfgang Kubin, Heine Roetz, and others, not to mention the so-called New Confucians such as Mou Zongsan 牟宗三. Franke’s main contention is that the almost exclusive characterization of Chinese thought in light of immanence, in its insistence on seeing differences, unnecessarily neglects and ignores points of commensurability. Instead of harping on opposition that hampers intercultural dialogues, Franke asserts that since it is humanity’s vocation

to seek the ultimate Other and the divine, it is fruitful to accommodate the sense of transcendence by taking a serious look at theology and onto-theology, particularly negative theology, which, in its fundamentally apophatic iteration, “can best complement the untold treasures of Chinese thought as Jullien discovers and uncovers them for us” (p. 93).

In Chapter 4, “Universalism, or the Nothing That Is All,” Franke both subscribes to and subverts Jullien’s understanding of the implications of the power and prominence of the Greek (and Enlightenment) logical thinking and sense of universality vis-à-vis the Chinese conception of the whole. Jullien right tells us that logical thought in the West mandates the separation of the thinker from that which is thought, deliberately expunging subjective and circumstantial elements in such a way that what is thought by one individual is perforce identical to what is thought by others. In that very sense, thinking is universal, and the abstraction from the particular leads to universality. On the other hand, in Chinese philosophy, nature or *tian* 天 (heaven), as the all-englobing reality manifested as a regulated natural process, provides the normative that functions as universality. Franke agrees on the whole with such generalized differentiation between the two modes of thinking, but what he objects to, as with many of Jullien’s critics, is Jullien’s tendency to insist on the insurmountable differences or gap between cultures, so that China becomes the exotic other. Once again, Franke argues that negative theology can be the shared ground on which a “religiously tolerant and spiritually attuned universalism” (p. 165) can be built, because such a theology is not based on incontrovertible historical dogmas upheld and sustained by some religious authorities but is a constantly unfolding rethinking of global human possibilities and conceptualities in terms of some inconceivable All/Whole/God.

Such thinking, as Jullien avers, about the meaningful encounters of cultures requires, entails, and involves originality, that is, the ability to think freely with and through cultures. This question of originality is taken up in Chapter 5, “An Extra Word on Originality,” which, I must say, is the weakest part of the book in that its relation to the sort of apophysis in question is not substantially spelt out. To Franke, the closest analogue of this originality, in the last analysis, is the natural or nature itself, in the sense that it is ultimately nothing, which therefore cannot be explicitly articulated and laid out in accordance with some preconceived pattern; it stems from the spontaneity that springs from one’s nature. It thus negates the common sense of ethics, asking us to think of the in-between zone, or gap, between circumscribed cultural boundaries. To illuminate this originality, Franke examines Ernest Fenollosa’s seminal essay (c. 1906), “The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry,” edited and published by Ezra Pound, which became a sort of aesthetic manifesto of great influence, credited for ushering in new ways of thinking

about the nature, import, and purport of poetry. Basically, Fenollosa proposes an ideogrammic engagement with and apprehension of the Chinese language. Because the characters came from and evolved out of pictograms, the language relates to its object in a natural, rather than conventional, manner. In his words, Fenollosa claims that “in reading Chinese we do not seem to be juggling mental counters, but to be watching *things* work out their own fate” (p. 202). In short, language brings us directly to the very substantiality of things themselves, including that which lurks behind them, thereby revealing the reality of the unseen. I wish, here, Franke had integrated better both Jullien and Fenollosa’s views with his endeavour of forging an intercultural apophatic philosophy of universalism. The book can easily dispense with this chapter—an extra word that seems like an afterthought—without suffering much harm.

In the “Epilogue,” Franke acknowledges once more his enormous debt to Jullien for opening up the paths that led him into his comparative enterprise. In the process of engaging with and responding to his interlocutor, Franke relocates his apophatic project that began in the Western philosophical tradition and intellectual history to the Chinese counterparts in which he finds rich complements and resources. Both Jullien and Franke, in their own way, have come to see the common and even universal possibilities in effecting interculturality that encompasses diversity in unity. But Franke highlights his distance from Jullien. The latter calls for the elimination of theology which, to the extent that it is tied to the belief in a monotheistic creator God who is the law-giver, inhibits free thinking; the former affirms theology because, negatively construed, it “has no thinkable or sayable content” (p. 220) after all. Franke once more questions the tenability of regarding immanence exclusively as the key to Chinese thought, wondering if there is not at least some form of quasi-theological thinking, expressed apophatically.

Franke has proffered us an innovative account of apophasis as a universal basis of an intercultural philosophy. Judging it from the perspective of comparative study, I find little fault with it. Indeed, we should be thankful that new light is shed on the commonly known fact of and argument about the All/Whole/One/Nature as unutterable in Chinese thought, thanks to Franke’s deep knowledge of apophatic ideas. Yet, to borrow a colloquial Chinese saying, “Some itchy spot is not scratched!” From the standpoint of one trained in sinology, such as the present reviewer, the book perhaps could have used some focused discussions on some obvious Chinese terms that unmistakably and directly connote apophasis, apart from the obligatory *wuwei*, which are ubiquitous in Buddhist and neo-Confucian texts: *taiji* 太極 (the great ultimate), *taixu* 太虛 (the great vacuity), *xu* 虛 (vacuity), *kong* 空 (emptiness), *huan* 幻 (illusion), *xuan* 玄 (the enigmatic), *miao* 妙 (the mysterious), *weifa* 未發 (pre-issuance [of emotions]), and the like. This is not a request for philological

lucubration; it is a call for more balance, given the copious Western evidence that Franke generously supplies. Needless to say, my own *parti pris* for more coverage of the Chinese side can reasonably be seen as a sort of unreasonable imposition of the reviewer's teleology on the author's work. So, ignore my slight discontent, if you will. Read the book, and luxuriate in the plangent sounds that are unuttered.

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Speaking of Profit: Bao Shichen and Reform in Nineteenth-Century China. By William T. Rowe. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018. Pp. x + 220. \$39.95/£28.95.

本書透過詳細檢視一個獨立而敏銳的觀察者包世臣，探討十九世紀初中國面對多面向的危機時，他和一群有識之士縈繞於心的困惑和焦慮。作者指出或因包世臣多在幕後行事，清史學者遲遲才認識其重要性。最早有關包世臣的中文論著中，劉廣京聚焦於包氏及魏源二人的類比研究。自此以降，儘管對包世臣的生涯事業各方面的中文研究成果數量日增，明確以他為研究重點的英文或其他西方語文論著卻幾近闕如。過去有關包世臣的研究成果，以多種不同方式尋找其意義。絕大多數學者將他視為擁護以農業為經濟基礎的傳統信念，同意他質疑當前強固的地主業權、普遍的佃農制及農業雇工的土地制度；多數學者也注意到，伴隨著他對「勸農」相沿成習的呼喚則為「恤商」的訴求。他們看到包世臣對於國計與民生同樣關切，二者並行不悖，其中一個最為觸目及不落俗套的主題厥為直率地鼓吹逐利，而這對國家及百姓同樣適用。學者也認為包世臣明確反對過度官僚化，樂於利用私有商業勢力實現行政目標。文革後大陸學界對包世臣的論述，先是將他認定為代表地主統治菁英階級的思想家，將他視為這一階級察覺危及其持續霸權的反應的縮影。大多數有關包世臣的中文論著，即便對他偏袒地主及對階級剝削頑固不化有所貶抑，卻稱頌他早慧的愛國主義和反帝國主義。他意識到大清破滅的危機而深感痛苦，卻對國家天賦資源和人民生產豐裕財富的持續潛力信念堅定；同樣他對所屬的文士階級同道，儘管籠統地意識到他們正回應還沒有充分理解的世界經濟中新力量的挑戰，但對最終找出大清所面對許多制度及情境上問題的解決辦法能力，一貫樂觀和具有信心。