

The Master Said: Make Love, Not War

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Just over a week ago, we passed the anniversary of a year in which we commemorated the 50th anniversary of the International Society for Chinese Philosophy (ISCP). This means that exactly half a century has passed since the late Professor Cheng Chung-ying founded this society, which stands as the oldest and largest academic association in the world dedicated to building bridges between Chinese and global philosophies. The 50th anniversary is, of course, a significant milestone in the history of this association—especially so because we live in a world burdened by a range of global crises. It is precisely for this reason that such bridges, connecting diverse traditions and systems of thought, are more important than ever before.

We marked this important milestone in past June at the 24th biennial conference of the society, held under the title “Addressing Global Crises and Reimagining Solutions through Chinese Philosophy”. Although today’s most pressing crises are deeply interconnected and can therefore only be addressed on a global level, it is worth noting that the core issues underlying these predicaments—ranging from ecological catastrophe, large-scale migration, and the threat of viral pandemics to the unjust distribution of global wealth, resources, and goods—have, over the past year, increasingly culminated in the growing threat of armed conflicts and wars of aggression. For this reason, we have chosen to dedicate this issue of *Asian Studies*, which commemorates the 50th anniversary of the ISCP and includes selected contributions from the 24th, i.e., the jubilee, conference of the society, to the culture of peace and pacifism within the Chinese philosophical tradition. We regard this theme as especially significant precisely because of the aforementioned culmination of global crises into violent conflict.

At present, we are confronted with two such crisis hotspots that are deemed sufficiently “interesting” by mainstream journalism to warrant daily coverage. These are, of course, the war in Ukraine and the genocide being carried out by the Israeli state against the Palestinian people. Clearly, these two armed conflicts are by no means the only wars in which innocent lives are being lost. Yet perhaps the dark clouds of a war-driven apocalypse—one that could give rise to a new world war—have never loomed so near and so threateningly in this century as they do now. Equally dangerous, however, is the fact that militarism—along with its military terminology and ideology of fear and hatred, which underpin this type of discourse—is becoming an increasingly central part of the culture in most states and civilizations.

If we are to resist this culture, which actually does not deserve to be given such a name, and oppose the pervasive and increasingly powerful ideology that underlies it, we must learn to think differently and establish alternative forms of discourse and strategy.

The mission of the ISCP is grounded in a vision of egalitarian and mutually respectful polylogues among diverse traditions, especially between China and the so-called West. It strives to ensure that the voice of Chinese philosophy is heard not only within the narrow circles of specialized scholars dedicated to its study and global interpretation, but also more broadly. It seeks to foster a dialogue that makes space for ideas and methods that transcend the dominant paradigms established by Western-style modernization and disseminated globally through colonial ideologies. This is a culture in which we must learn to truly listen to one another, beyond the voices of the dominant intellectual currents that prevail in contemporary societies.

The same vision also undelays the work and editorial policy of the journal *Asian Studies*. Its editorial board is convinced that violence can never be resolved by even greater violence—that is, through escalating militarization—but only through radical pacifism, even if its realization comes at the cost of reducing GDP and the wealth of those among the world's richest. In this spirit, we were reminded that a culture of peace may be the most meaningful gift to mark the 50th anniversary of the ISCP, and, at the same time, the best legacy we can offer this international society for its future path of development.

Many philosophers in the Chinese tradition have thought in similar ways. This is by no means a coincidence, given that Chinese philosophy itself, as a discourse, was born in the turbulent era of the Warring States. It emerged as a hopeful step towards a new universal ethics—one that would once and for all prevent the shedding of blood and enslavement, while at the same time ensuring safety and a modest well-being for all. Such traditions have long been at the forefront of many special issues of our journal. In this context, it is worth mentioning three in particular: the issue on humanism and post-humanism in Asian traditions (see <https://journals.uni-lj.si/as/issue/view/1078>), the issue dedicated to traditional Asian ecological discourses (see <https://journals.uni-lj.si/as/issue/view/916>), and the special issue on COVID-19 as part of the broader spectrum of global crises—crises that pose dangers but also offer opportunities for renewed reflection and hope for resolution (see <https://journals.uni-lj.si/as/issue/view/754>).

Among these thematic clusters, several contributions explicitly addressed the question of peace and pacifism. Notably, Dawid Rogacz's article on the idea of Supreme Peace (*Taiping*) in premodern Chinese philosophies of history (Rogacz 2022, 401–13), Alok Bhalla's reflection on Tagore's dark vision of humanity (Bhalla 2013, 101), and Graham Parkes's open letter to Xi Jinping (Parkes 2023,

242–43). Chen Bo’s article, which traces 70 years of Western logic in China, also originated from the idea of peaceful coexistence and dialogue between politics and academia, highlighting the pacifism of the “Hundred Flowers” metaphor, in which a specifically Chinese mode of thinking was born (see Chen 2022, 77–78). Seongmin Hong, in his contribution on pandemics, explored pacifist aspects of Zhu Xi’s philosophy through the lens of ecological justice (Hong 2022, 317), while Hans-Georg Moeller (2023, 71) and Gloria Luque-Moya (2023, 130) each examined critical Daoist approaches that challenge the traditional anthropocentric supremacy over nature—approaches that not only lead to ecological crises, but also to disruptive imbalances in politics and society. In the context of the foundations of pacifism found within the Chinese philosophical tradition, Xiang Shuchen’s article, “Why the Chinese Tradition Had No Concept of ‘Barbarian’” (Xiang 2023, 149–50), is also particularly worth mentioning.

Given the state of global politics and philosophy in 2025, the 24th ISCP conference was likewise dedicated to related questions, and this issue features a selection of contributions from that jubilee conference. Special attention has been given to the articles based on the three keynote lectures with which the academic gathering was opened. We have also included all three articles by young researchers who were awarded the Charles Fu Foundation Prize. The remaining contributions are grouped thematically into two main sections: one focusing on traditional models of pacifism within the Chinese tradition, and the other on the idea of dialogue—not one grounded in adversarial opposition, but in the principle of mutual complementarity and adaptive exchange.

The keynote section of the 24th ISCP conference brings together three major contributions that explore Chinese philosophical resources for rethinking justice, interdependence, and peaceful coexistence in the face of global crises. What connects them is their shared rejection of adversarial logic and self-assertion, and their common search for philosophical pathways beyond conflict.

In his article “Confucian Role Ethics and a Holistic Conception of Justice Introduction”, Roger T. Ames draws on Confucian “zoetology” (*shengshenglun* 生生論), a philosophy centred on generative relational life, to propose an ethical framework grounded not in individual rights or substance ontology, but in dynamic relationships and co-creativity. This model of justice, inherently dialogical and non-confrontational, undermines dualistic thinking and offers a relational ontology as the basis for a peaceful societal order.

Robin Wang’s contribution, “Zhuangzi’s *Jie Xin* 解心 (Untangling the Heart-mind) and the Wisdom of Biomimicry”, connects Daoist philosophy with ecological and technological innovation. Through the metaphor of “untangling the heart-mind”, Wang presents Zhuangzi’s thought as a method for dissolving inner and outer conflict, emphasizing alignment with the natural order. In this context,

she introduces the concept of biomimicry, which is based on the principle of learning from nature rather than dominating it. This principle resonates with Daoist pacifism, for it proposes a model of technological and human development that is harmonious, not combative.

In his essay “In Search of Allies: Global Philosophy as Criticism”, Heiner Roetz argues that the dominant global logic of self-assertion is incompatible with genuine solidarity. He critiques both nationalism and superficial forms of “global philosophy” for failing to transcend cultural self-enclosure. Roetz recalls philosophy’s critical origins as a response to crisis, emphasizing its task as a culture-transcending critique. His call to form philosophical alliances against systemic violence positions global philosophy as an ally of peace, instead of identity-based assertions.

Although they proceed from different angles, all three keynote contributions outline a philosophical paradigm opposed to domination and conflict—one that centres interdependence, critique, and harmony as the conditions for a sustainable and peaceful future.

The second section consists of three essays that were awarded the Charles Fu Foundation Prize at the 24th ISCP Conference. All of these deal with critical engagement with Confucian relational ethics, which each author creatively reinterprets in response to contemporary global challenges. Their shared commitment to nonviolence and relational autonomy forms the thematic backbone of this section, linking classical Chinese thought with urgent ethical dilemmas in the age of digital alienation, technological domination, and distorted collectivism.

In his paper titled “The Confucian Conception of Self: Collectivist or Relational?”, Thomas Moore redefines the Confucian self not as collectivist in the Western sense of subordinated individuality, but as a dynamic, processual identity shaped through ethical relations. By retrieving the practice-oriented virtue of *Ren* (仁) from the *Analects* and the *Mencius*, Moore argues for a model of personhood grounded in mutual responsiveness rather than domination or isolation. This vision, integrating individuality and interdependence, exemplifies a pacifist anthropology: it resists both the violence of radical individualism and the coercive force of collective erasure.

Yuchen Liang’s essay “Resisting Technology Addiction with Mencius” explores how Confucian philosophy, and specifically Mencius’ emphasis on nurturing care and non-coercive moral cultivation, can provide an ethical framework for resisting the systemic violence of the attention economy. Drawing on the principle “don’t forget; don’t force”, Liang proposes mutual aid communities as nonviolent sites of resistance against manipulative technologies. By foregrounding the relational care structures found in Confucianism, this approach offers a pacifist alternative to punitive or exploitative responses to digital addiction, countering both techno-authoritarianism and neoliberal abandonment.

Chen Hwee Loi's Chinese contribution, "Are AI Robots Human? Exploring Confucianism's "the Distinction between a Human Being and Object" from the Ancient Confucian Way of Naming 'Objects'", examines the ethical implications of AI through the lens of ancient Confucian debates on *renwu zhi bian* (the distinction between humans and things). Rather than relying solely on human-centred moral agency, Chen traces a dual framework in early Confucianism that includes both ethical judgment *and* ethical description of nonhuman entities. This broader view resists the modern instrumentalization of "things", opening a space for non-anthropocentric, non-dominative relations with emerging intelligences. The author's nuanced reconstruction of Confucian classificatory thinking suggests a way of engaging with AI that avoids violent control and instead emphasizes ethical coexistence.

Together, these essays articulate diverse, yet intersecting visions of pacifism rooted in Confucian relationism. Whether confronting distorted views of the self, predatory technological systems, or the new ontological challenges posed by AI, they all affirm a common ethical thread: that peace is cultivated not through assertion or control, but through nurturing relationships, mutual recognition, and nonviolent co-creation.

The next section gathers four contributions that critically engage with traditional Chinese philosophical models to rethink power, politics, and the possibility of pacifism. While they are also quite diverse in their approaches, these papers converge in their rejection of violence as a necessary or desirable mode of political action. Instead, they illuminate non-belligerent paradigms embedded in classical Chinese thought, offering alternative pathways to peaceful coexistence in an increasingly conflict-driven world.

Xiang Shuchen's paper "Must Great Power Politics Necessarily be Tragic?" challenges the realist presuppositions of thinkers like John Mearsheimer by retrieving the classical Chinese distinction between *li* (力), coercive power, and *de* (德), moral or noncoercive influence. She argues that the tragedy of modern geopolitics lies in its adherence to a narrow, militarized conception of power. Drawing from the Chinese tradition's elevation of *de* over *li*, Xiang proposes an alternative understanding of power that is inherently pacifist—not weak, but sustainable, relational, and ethically grounded. This redefinition undermines the assumed inevitability of violent great power conflict.

Gregor Paul, in "The 'Confucian' Ideal Person(ality) and Pacifism", centres the ethical figure of the *junzi* (君子) as an exemplar of individual moral autonomy and nonviolence. The *junzi* refuses to resolve conflict through force and embodies virtues such as *ren* (仁) and *yi* (義), promoting persuasion over domination. Paul asks what impact such individual pacifism can have in the context of war and state violence, ultimately arguing for a virtue-based pacifism that can be normatively

binding even in political contexts. His proposed model offers a stark contrast to current justifications of militarized defence and suggests the relevance of Confucian ethics for contemporary global pacifist discourse.

Yuchen Guo's essay "Pacifism in Mengzian Political Philosophy" revisits Mencius through the lens of "positive-pragmatic pacifism". Rather than situating Mengzi within traditional just war theory, Guo highlights the philosopher's emphasis on benevolent governance and fundamental opposition to violence. Applying Olaf Müller's framework, the paper argues that Mengzi's practical political proposals reflect a constructive pacifism rooted in *realpolitik* but guided by moral ideals. This synthesis of realism and normative pacifism positions Mengzian thought as an important resource for ethical governance beyond militarism.

In his "Confucian Social Philosophy Between Self and Family", Kevin Turner explores the tension between the Confucian ideal of harmony and the historical participation of Confucian figures in armed resistance. Rather than dismissing Confucianism as either pacifist or non-pacifist, Turner emphasizes its practical orientation toward social transformation. Taking the concept of the "consciousness of worry" (憂患意識) as central to the Confucian notion of responsibility, he suggests that Confucian ethics is not passive but deeply invested in the well-being of society. While not dogmatically pacifist, this philosophy allows for nonviolent social engagement and morally grounded reform as preferred strategies.

Taken together, these essays argue that Chinese traditions offer more than abstract ethical ideals—they contain robust philosophical resources for rethinking the very foundations of political power, war, and peace. By foregrounding moral authority over coercive dominance, relational responsibility over isolation, and virtue over force, they make a compelling case for alternative models of political order anchored in pacifist principles.

The final section, *Models of Adaptation and Complementarity*, gathers five studies that reinterpret classical Chinese thought through the lenses of flexibility, harmony, and ecological interdependence. Each contribution explores how balance—rather than confrontation—functions as a principle of pacification, making adaptability and complementarity central to the philosophical architecture of nonviolence.

In his study "Complex Adaptive Systems and Chinese Philosophy: A Fruitful Resonance", Margus Ott tries to bridge contemporary complexity theory and traditional Chinese thought. He demonstrates that notions such as *yin-yang*, relational embeddedness, and processual change anticipate key concepts of complex adaptive systems (CAS). Both frameworks privilege interconnection over control and responsiveness over rigidity. Ott's comparative synthesis reveals a form of systemic pacifism: conflict is replaced by self-organization, and stability arises through dynamic equilibrium, not domination.

Rory O’Neill’s essay “Complementing Aggressive Activity with Laozian Stillness” offers a Daoist model of pacification through complementarity. Contrary to interpretations that portray Laozi’s stillness as pure withdrawal, O’Neill argues that *jing* (靜) interacts with activity as its balancing counterpart. This dialectic of stillness and movement mitigates aggression and restores stability without suppression. The political implications are profound: peace, for Laozi, is not enforced but flows from the fluid interplay of opposites—an ethical flexibility mirroring the soft power of water that overcomes rigidity without violence.

Tao Junbo’s “Shuwu’s Tragedy: Rethinking Mencius’ Arguments on the ‘Right of Rebellion’” revisits the Confucian discourse on legitimacy and moral resistance. Through an analysis of *Shuwu’s Tragedy* in the *Zuozhuan* and *Gongyangzhuan*, Tao supports Justin Tiwald’s view that Mencius’ notion of rebellion is a moral critique of tyranny, not an endorsement of violent uprising. The study highlights the Confucian tension between confronting injustice and restoring order, proposing a model of pacifist resistance grounded in ethical admonition rather than revolutionary force.

Massimiliano Lacertosa’s paper “Human and Natural: The Function of the Myriad Things (*Wanwu* 萬物) in the *Zhuangzi*” interprets Daoist cosmology as an ecological ethics of coexistence. By dissolving hierarchies between humans and the myriad things, the *Zhuangzi* offers a radical critique of anthropocentric domination. Through *wuwei* (無為), or non-coercive action, Lacertosa articulates a mode of pacifism that protects life by refusing to harm or impose. Mutual adaptation, instead of conflict, becomes the ethical ground of peace within an ever-transforming continuum of being.

In his contribution, titled “Encountering the *Zhuangzi*: Adaptability and Emptiness in the Story of Huzi, Jixian, and Liezi”, Thaddée Chantry-Gellens extends this reflection by focusing on adaptability as a spiritual and ethical practice. Through the imagery of emptiness and transformation, the *Zhuangzi* teaches attunement to change and humility before multiplicity. This adaptability, rooted in nonattachment, functions as an antidote to violence and rigidity, cultivating inner and social harmony through the acceptance of flux.

The essays in this section show that nonviolence in the Chinese philosophical tradition is not mere passivity, but an active art of transformation. Peace arises through adaptive responsiveness, balance, and ethical complementarity, i.e. through principles that dissolve oppositional conflicts. They emphasize the harmonization of diversity, and sustain coexistence across the human and natural worlds.

Across all its sections, this commemorative issue celebrates 50 years of the ISCP’s commitment to fostering intercultural understanding through philosophical dialogue. From the ontological depth of Confucian relationism to the Daoist ecological insights into adaptation and balance, the collected works articulate a

shared refusal of domination, conflict, and coercion. They demonstrate that peace between nations, species, and minds, cannot be achieved through conflicts of contradictions but rather through creative transformation, ethical responsiveness, and relational harmonization.

Probably no Chinese master ever literally said “make love, not war”, yet many have conveyed ideas that embody the same philosophical depth and moral appeal. They remind us that genuine love for humanity in the Confucian sense of humaneness (*ren* 仁), the Daoist sense of non-impositional harmonization, and the Buddhist sense of compassion, belongs to the deepest form of resistance to violence. To make love in this sense means to nurture and enjoy life in loving relationships and cultivated connections, and to restore balance in a world increasingly defined by profit-driven division. It is this humanistic and transformative spirit that has guided the ISCP for five decades, and it remains the guiding light for the future of global philosophy and the culture of peace.

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