



# Studies / Studien / Études

Original Paper UDC [165:141.113](510)Zhang D.  
Received August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

**Jana Rošker**

Univerza v Ljubljani, Filozofska fakulteta, Aškerčeva 2, SI-1000 Ljubljana  
jana.rosker@guest.arnes.si

## The Abolishment of Substance and Ontology: A New Interpretation of Zhang Dongsun's Pluralistic Epistemology<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

*Zhang Dongsun was one of the most influential thinkers of the Republic of China, a reputation which rested, in part, on his extraordinary ability to introduce Western thought in a way which was compatible with the specific methodology of traditional Chinese thought. One of his greatest contributions was most certainly the creation and development of a modern theory of knowledge, based upon ancient Chinese and Chan Buddhist epistemology, and which in many respects represents a felicitous synthesis of modern science and traditional Chinese thought. Therefore, the present paper will mainly focus upon his theory of knowledge. Zhang Dongsun called his theory "pluralistic", given the assumption that various elements that enable comprehension and reasoning were mutually exclusive and irreducible. We shall therefore critically examine the elements (yuan 元) proposed in Zhang's main epistemological treatise Plural Epistemology (Duoyuan renshilun 多元認識論), which represents the most complete, systematic and coherent treatment of his theory.*

### Key words

Chinese epistemology, Modern Chinese Philosophy, Zhang Dongsun

## 1. General introduction

While Zhang Dongsun can be considered as one of the leading Chinese philosophers of the 20th Century, his criticism of sinificated Marxist ideologies marked him as a political dissident and he was consequently consigned to oblivion for several decades; only recently has his work been rediscovered by a number of younger Chinese theorists, who have shown a growing interest in his ideas (Rošker, 2008, p. 227). His comparative studies of Chinese and Western philosophy pointed out the relevance of cultural impacts upon cognition. His studies also provided many other valuable insights into the differences between Chinese and Western philosophy. His investigations of the influence of Chinese language on the development of Chinese philosophy

1

The present article is a shortened, rewritten and elaborated version of the Chapter 21 in Jana S. Rošker's book on Pre-modern and modern

Chinese theory of knowledge (Rošker, 2008, pp. 227–263).

are a very influential and pioneering work. Besides, he was the first philosopher who exposed correlative thinking as a main characteristic of Chinese philosophy and analogical argument as a specific Chinese mode of inference. Although he is still relatively unknown in the West, Zhang definitely deserves to be recognized for his contributions to Chinese and comparative philosophy. But, most certainly, Zhang's greatest contribution was the creation and development of a modern theory of knowledge, based upon ancient Chinese and Chan Buddhist epistemology. His plural epistemology represents a felicitous synthesis of modern science and traditional Chinese thought

In contrast to most of his contemporaries, whose work was characterized by revisionism of traditional philosophy, Zhang's theory was a synthesis based on the assimilation of Western thought into the framework of traditional methodological and conceptual discourses. Epistemology is the core of Zhang's philosophy; it was founded upon a pluralistic theory of knowledge (多元認識論), and proceeded from the premise that knowledge was culturally determined and therefore essentially of a cultural nature, an aspect of his philosophy which still remains quite actual, especially in the field of intercultural research (Ibid., 228). His cultural-philosophical studies are based upon detailed comparative analyses of Chinese and European thought, with a special attention to the influence of linguistic structures upon various philosophical systems, and the connection between culturally determined differences and systems of logical reasoning in different traditions of thought. Although his comparative studies of Chinese and Western philosophy were written a half-century ago, they remain of great value. They will continue to throw light on current debates on cultural issues and to inspire comparative philosophy in our own time (Jiang Xinyan, p. 58).

Zhang's pluralism was based upon a revision of Kant's philosophy, in which he followed his own system of so-called panstructuralist cosmology, which was to a certain extent also influenced by the Chan Buddhist philosophy upon which his own worldview was based. His system represents one of the first coherent and complete synthesis of ancient Chinese and modern Western ideas. However, for most contemporary scholars his greatest contribution was in his role as the first modern Chinese philosopher who created his own theoretical system, especially in the field of epistemology (Ibid., p. 57).

## 2. Panstructuralism (Fanjiagouzhuyi 泛架構主義)

An important assumption of his theory of knowledge is the neo-realistic view that the external world exists independently of our consciousness, and that there is no exact correlation between external phenomena and our comprehension of them. Hence, we are unable to perceive these phenomena as they really are.

“須知，我們普通所謂物，即是我們所看見的是顏色，所觸摸的是形樣。這些都是物的‘性質’。可見離了性質就沒有所謂物。物有一類的性質如顏色與味道等，是倚著感覺的人的主觀而變的，所以有人主張是不屬於物的本身... 還有一類的性質如大小與方圓，有人亦說與前一類差不多，不能即斷定事物的本相。”

“We should know that what we commonly call ‘a thing’, is a color that we see, and a form that we touch. These are the ‘qualities’ of a thing. If we do not consider the qualities, then (for us) there are no things. Things possess particular qualities, like colors, scents, etc., which change according to the human senses; therefore, some people claim that they do not belong to things... There are also some other particular qualities, like the largeness, angularity, or roundness of things. These qualities are considered by some people as similar to those mentioned before, and therefore cannot define the original thing as such, either.” (Zhang Dongsun, 1929a, p. 23–24)

To explain his own view of the cosmic order and its relation to our consciousness, Zhang often used examples drawn from the discoveries of early 20<sup>th</sup> century physics, such as the difference between our perception of a color and its “actual” substance, or light waves. He argued that color was something other than light waves: while color was the product of the interaction between waves and our senses, waves belonged to the “objective” qualities of being (Zhang Dongsun, 1995b, p. 166). Similar to Kant, Zhang therefore also divides reality into the “original state of things (物的本相)” and “things for us (我們所謂物)” (Liu Wenying, 2002, Part 2, p. 866).

According to Zhang, the external cause for our sensation is not a substance, but the order or structure of the external world. What is transmitted to us through our sensory impressions is a modification of this external order (Jiang Xinyang, p. 59). Hence, his epistemology can be regarded as a relational theory of knowledge or as epistemology of relations (Rošker, 2008, p. 233). He wrote:

“關於外物，我們不能知其內性，但能知其關係，而此關係卻是一種比較固定的架構。若我們暫假定物質並無內性，而只是架構，則我們已可謂知道外物了。”

“As regards the external reality, we cannot know its internal nature (essence), but we can recognize its relations. These relations form a relatively fixed structure. If we presuppose that the qualities of things do not possess any inner nature (essence), and that things only exist as a structure, we have already recognized the external reality.” (Zhang Dongsun, 1929b, p. 32)

### 3. The Abolishment of Substance

In interpreting the basic structure of reality, he also referred to scientific discoveries regarding atoms and their most elementary structures, which transcend the categorical boundary between particles of matter and non-substantial electromagnetic waves. Here, his critique of substance was quite radical, and he denied the real existence not only of the smallest particles of matter, but also of quanta, electrons and even electromagnetic waves.

“其實我並不主張外界有如實存在的原子。須知之在物理學等於感覺論之在心理學。他們都以為全體是由部分而推誠的。我名此為零屑論 (mosaic theory of particularism) 派。好像一堆散沙，每個沙粒是硬的實體，是不變的單位。我們于心理方面即不承有所謂感相的獨立存在，則我們在物理方面當然亦用不著把原子認為散屑的實質 (pieces of substance)。姑不論原子尚可分為電子，電子尚可分為‘波子’ (wave particle)，然而這些只可視為表示外界有原子性而已。須知所謂原子性只是在構造 (structure) 上有‘原子的’ (atomic) 性質而已。並非說外界確有原子其物。不但沒有原子，並且亦沒有電子，沒有波子。所有的只是外界的構造上有分為若干單位的可能性罷了。”

“In fact, I do not believe that atoms really exist in the external world. We should understand that the atomic theory in physics is the same as sensory theory in psychology. Both theories are based on the assumption that the whole consists of the sum of its parts. I call advocates of such theories representatives of the mosaic theory of particularism. This /view/ can be compared to /the view of/ a pile of sand, in which each grain is both a solid substance and an unchangeable entity. He claimed that he didn’t acknowledge any independent existence of so-called sensory impressions in psychology; hence there is no reason to acknowledge the existence of atoms as pieces of substance in physics.

- Since there is no need to talk about atoms, why should we bother to divide them into electrons, or to divide electrons into wave particles? In his view, all this merely expresses the atomizing nature of external reality, and not the actual existence of atoms as real things. Not only are there no atoms, but there are no electrons or wave particles either.
- All this merely means that the structure has the possibility of forming certain entities.” (Zhang Dongsun, 1995b, p. 168–169)

Similarly, the discovery of the Theory of Relativity was important only in terms of recognizing structural laws, and not in terms of recognizing any new essences in nature or the cosmos.

“相對論出來以後只給了我們一些關於物理界的構造方式之知識，而不關於其‘內容’(content).”

“The discovery of the Theory of Relativity only provides some knowledge about the structural modes of the external world; it does not provide us with any knowledge about its content.” (Ibid., p. 170)

The denial of substance also refers to the sphere of ideas (Rošker, 2008, p. 234). As in Chan Buddhism, all that we perceive is not only empty in the sense of substantial absence, but also illusory. Therefore, Zhang’s cosmology is neither materialistic, nor idealistic:

“認識的多元論... 勢必根本上否認‘本質’(substance), 以為本體論上的唯心論唯物論兩元論全是不對的。”

“Pluralistic epistemology... rejects ‘substance’ and is of the opinion that the dualistic theories of idealism and materialism are completely wrong”. (Zhang Dongsun, 1995b, p. 214)

In this respect, his approaches recall classical Chinese (especially Daoist and Chan Buddhist) cosmologies, but also certain recent Western ontological systems based on the Theory of Relativity and Quantum Theory.

“時空的性質也說明了架構的性質。相對論認為，時空並不是絕對不變的，張東蓀由此也得出時空也是一種架構而非物質的存在形式的看法。”

“The constitution of time and space is also structural. The Theory of Relativity assumes that time and space are not absolute and unchangeable. On this basis, Zhang Dongsun developed his view that time and space were also a kind of structure, and not a form of matter.” (Liu Wenying, 2002, Part 2, p. 867)

#### 4. The denial of classical ontology

One reason for our inability to recognize the essence of external things “as such” is thus to be found in the very nature of their existence; for Zhang, who did not acknowledge the existence of substance, reality was a process of constant changes that manifests itself in the inter-relations of particular entities. His cosmology is not metaphysical. In his view, this constituted another difference between Kantian philosophy and his own. According to Kant, metaphysics is not abandoned, even though the priority given to epistemology radically alters its role. Zhang’s revision of Kant is, in fact, limited to the Kantian theory of knowledge. In his ontology, the Chan Buddhist impact is much stronger. In his early youth, his reading of Buddhist sacred texts got him interested in philosophy. Although he would criticize Buddhism severely later on, he always seemed to have accepted much of Buddhist cosmology, especially certain ideas from the Great Vehicle School (Mahayana). (Jiang Xinyang, p. 63)

If we reject the existence of substance, clearly the objects perceived by us can not possess any “ontological status”.

“認識的多元論把感相認為非存在者，勢必謂感相在本體上無地位，即沒有‘本體的地位’(ontological status).”

“Plural epistemology advocates the view that sense impressions are non-being. Therefore, they are without a position in the ontological sense; they do not possess any ‘ontological status’.” (Zhang Dongsun, 1995b, p. 215)

All beings exist in a process of constant change that manifests itself in a never-ending modification of structural connections, and the growth and decline of the qualities of the “essence” of particular entities (Rošker, 2008, p. 236). According to Zhang, our consciousness can only recognize certain aspects<sup>2</sup> of these manifest changes. However, this refers not only to the level of our perception and comprehension; according to Zhang, the structured order of relations is all that really exists in the cosmos. This structural order can be divided into the three basic levels of matter (物), life (生), and mind (心).

Zhang argued that all these structures are empty, for they possess neither substance, nor its qualities. The level of material being (物) is thus a merely physical substantial phenomenality which cannot be equated with material substance, but, at the most, with structural relations and the physical laws which determine its existence. For him, “matter” is a general concept comprising a total domain of many specific concepts about physical properties. There is nothing in matter itself which corresponds to our concept of matter. It is not the color, fragrance, sound or size that we perceive through our senses, because they tend to be subjective. Therefore, by “matter” he understood an object’s volume, density, or speed. Thus, in his view, matter becomes little more than a set of physics formulas. Therefore, there are only physical laws, but no matter (Jiang Xinyang, p. 64).

“或換言之，即物是物理。但須知這些物理都是由‘關係’（即一物與他物的關係）而見，并不直接關於一個物的本身。換言之，即物理只講物的關係，不講物的實質。所以質量，速率惰性，密度等等都是表示關係的樣式之一種。”

“In other words: things are physical laws. But we should know that these physical laws refer to relations (namely to the relations between a certain thing and other things); they do not refer directly to things as such. In other words: these physical laws refer to relations between things, and not to their essence. Therefore, attributes such as quality, speed, inertia or density are only different ways of expressing relations.” (Zhang Dongsun, 1995b, p. 215)

For Zhang, life (or living) (生) is a category which includes everything, included biological phenomena.

“‘生’是甚麼呢？據生物學家說，生物有生命，所以異於無生物之點有四：第一是組織；第二是職司；第三是生長的能力；第四是適應的能力。對於這四點卻不能完全用物理化學來解釋。原來我們用物理化學來對付無機物亦不過對於它的一種測量 (measurement)。我們拿了測量無生物的物理方法而測量生物必覺有些不夠用。於是必須於解釋物質的概念以外，再添一些新概念。例如‘有機性’，‘發展性’，‘自支性’，等等。就是密度，速率，質量，惰性等以外須再加有這些。不過這些新加的卻可左右他些已有的，換言之，即已有的居然為新加的所支配了。”

“What is life? According to biological theories, differences between living and non-living entities can be summarized by four characteristics: 1. community 2. organisation of work 3. growth ability and 4. adaptation ability. These four items cannot be completely explained by physics and chemistry. The physical and chemical treatment of inorganic things is based upon measurement. If we try to grasp living beings solely by subjecting them to physical measurement, it is somehow not enough. Thus, it is necessary to add some new concepts to the existing ones, for example, the concepts of ‘organicity’, ‘developmentality’, ‘autopoieticness’, etc. However, in addition to applying these new concepts, we can also continue to use the previous ones. In other words, we can say that these new concepts actually organize the old ones.” (Ibid., p. 216)

2

These aspects are atomicity (*yuanzixing* 原子性), continuity (*lianxuxing* 連續性) and creativity (*chuangbianxing* 創變性). The cosmos also possesses the quality of (latent) plasticity (*kesuxing* 可塑性), which is passive in nature

and does not belong to the external order; therefore, it cannot be perceived or comprehended directly (Zhang Dongsun, 1995, *Lixing yu liangzhi*, p. 168).

Analogously, mind (心) is a category that belongs to the overall concept of living, but also implies psychological phenomena, which are different from biological functions.

“至於‘心’亦是如此。心的性質確有和生理作用不同的地方。換言之，即拿了解釋生命的那些概念而用以解釋心意必是有些不夠用。例如‘覺’ (consciousness) 便是一個有一無二的特征。所以亦非加新概念不可。”

“The same holds true for ‘mind’. The nature of mind differs from biological functions in certain respects. In other words: it is not enough to apply concepts which explain living, in order to explain mind. Let us take the notion of ‘consciousness’ as an example. Consciousness is a unique feature, which can only be seized by applying some new concepts.” (Ibid.)

It is therefore better to replace “matter” with “physical laws”, “life” with “biological principles” and “mind” with “psychology”. In other words, terms for substance as carriers of attributes should be replaced by terms for structures or orders (Jiang Xinyang, p. 64).

“他還用‘配列’ (Arrangement) 代替‘架構’ (Structure), 同樣是為了強調宇宙的非實體性。”

“He also uses the term ‘arrangement’ to replace the term ‘structure’. Here, as well, he emphasizes the non-substantiality of the cosmos.” (Liu Wenying, 2002, Part 2, p. 867)

Hence, Zhang’s cosmos does not imply any substance or essence; it exists solely as a relational process of structural order. However, even this order is not totally natural and objective, but also depends upon our cognitive activities.

“但這些構造方式固然不是完全屬於外物本身的... 以實質而言，本來就沒有外物。以構造與方式而言，大部分的方式仍是屬於認識作用本身的，換言之，即屬於主觀的。”

“However, these structural forms as such do not entirely belong to external things as such... From the viewpoint of essence, there are no external things. But with respect to structure and form, most of the forms result from the process of comprehension. In other words, they belong to the domain of subjectivity.” (Zhang Dongsun, 1995b, p. 171)

All external structures are manifested in our mind, that (re-)establishes them in the process of forming structural patterns of thought and comprehension (Rošker, 2008, p. 23). However, Zhang’s theory is not solipsistic, since the external reality for him is not an exclusive product of our recognition:

“這些構造方式... 其中至少有若干是不由於我們的認識立法所造。”

“At least some of these structural forms are not just a product of the laws of our recognition.” (Zhang Dongsun, 1995b, p. 171)

## 5. Epistemology of relations

The relation between the external world and our subjectivity is interactive and correlative.

“我們這個宇宙並無本質，只是一套架構。這個架構的構成不是完全自然的，而必須有我們的認識作用參加其中。因為我們不能拔開認識以窺這個架構的本來面目。然而亦決不十分大虧其本質。所以仍可以說宇宙是個架構。”

“Our cosmos does not possess any essence; it is only a structure. Its constitution is not entirely natural, but inseparably connected with the function of our recognition. Without recognition we could get a glimpse of the original image of this structure. But it still cannot completely seize its essence. Therefore, we can still claim that the cosmos is a structure.” (Ibid., p. 218)

Zhang often compared his ontology to Chan Buddhist cosmology. What he called “structure”, reminded him of the Buddhist concept of (necessary or

causal) connection (因緣), in which the cosmos was seen as a complex network, consisting of innumerable, interdependent relations that are linked and separated from one another in innumerable ways and upon innumerable levels (ibid). He compares this to cosmic emptiness, which, as in the Buddhist view, cannot be equated with “nothingness”, but only with the absence of a substance, an unchangeable nature, or a self-contained, self-sufficient being. Since cosmos only consists of relational connections, it does not imply any independent, autonomous entity. This is also one of the principal reasons why the existence of substance is impossible: the world is a series of functional relations. In Buddhist cosmology, the world, which is void in itself, is a universal, eternal and unchangeable law of causal relations (因緣). Zhang Dongsun equated this law with the real objectivity of being (Jiang Xinyang, p. 65).

Zhang connected this essentially Buddhist worldview with the idea of evolution, which implies the appearance of new species, as well as a hierarchy between lower and higher forms of being, with the higher forms controlling the lower ones. Here, Zhang was probably influenced by the theory of the evolution of appearances, developed by C. Lloyd Morgan (1852–1936)<sup>3</sup> and Samuel Alexander (1859–1938)<sup>4</sup> (Ibid.). However, the new forms of being which appeared in this context were, in his view, a product of structural, and not of substantial changes.

“Combining the Buddhist idea of non-substance with a similar theory of evolution, Zhang held that the structures of the universe, although empty, are in evolution, and new kinds of structure may emerge due to changes in the combination of various structures.” (Ibid.)

But evolution, of course, cannot be equated with change as such. According to Zhang, evolution is a modification of simpler structures into more complex ones, and a joining of partial entities into more universal ones. While these structures still remain structures after their modification, they now differ from their previous forms not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively.

“每一個組織在本身必定就是一個新東西... 離開了這個微粒子的實質主義，當然使我們不能不承認凡是變化都是有所創新，否則我們勢必根本上就不承認有變化。”

“Each formation as such is already something new... If we reject this essentialism, which functions with micro-particles, we naturally have to acknowledge that every change creates something new; otherwise, we could not speak about any changes at all.” (Zhang Dongsun, 1995b, p. 173–174)

Zhang’s theory thus remains consistent, even though it denies substance, while advocating the idea of evolution.

## 6. Plurality of cognition

Zhang Dongsun called his theory “pluralistic”, given the assumption that various elements that enable comprehension and reasoning were mutually ex-

3

Conwy Lloyd Morgan was one of the first British experimental psychologists. He developed the concept of the so called “mental evolution”, the borderline between intelligence and instinct and established a tradition of careful observation of behaviour in natural settings (see Morgan, 1930, pp. 237–264). His most influential work is *Introduction to comparative psychology* (1903).

4

Alexander was an Australian philosopher, who developed the concepts of an “emergent quality” and the idea of “emergent evolution”. His most important work is *Space, Time and Deity* (1927) (see Emmet, pp. 100–120).

clusive and irreducible (無還元性); no one of them could be reduced to any of the others:

“我以為在根本上是五種互相獨立的。由感覺不能知外物；由格式不能知感覺；由設準不能知格式；由概念不能知設準。這便是我的主張所以與歷來認識論上各種學說不同之故。他們的學說可以名為認識論上的一元論或認識論上的二元論 (epistemological monism or epistemological dualism), 而我此說則當名之曰 認識論上的多元論 (epistemological pluralism). 因為我承認感覺, 範疇, 設準, 概念各有來源而不可歸併。”

“I believe there are four kinds, and that they are mutually exclusive. We cannot recognize external things through our sensations; we cannot recognize sensations through a-priori transcendental forms; we cannot recognize a-priori transcendental forms through logical postulates; and we cannot recognize logical postulates through concepts. This is why my view differs from previous theories. Those theories belong either to epistemological monism, or to epistemological dualism. My theory, however, can be called epistemological pluralism. I follow the assumption that sensations, categories, logical postulates and concepts arise from separate origins, and hence cannot be treated as a unity.” (Ibid., p. 201)

His theory remains unsatisfactory in systematic terms, however, for during the last 25 years of his life Zhang was not allowed to write, let alone publish any philosophical works and therefore only his early works are available (Rošker, 2008, p. 240). In these early treatises, we can only observe the genesis and outlines of his new pluralistic epistemology, and Zhang never had the chance to polish or systematize his theory. It is not surprising, therefore, that in his various works we can find different affirmations concerning even the number of the basic elements of comprehension:

“知識究竟由幾‘元’混而成，張東蓀說法不一。在‘條理範疇與設準’一文裏，他認為有三元，即條理 (order), 範疇 (category) 與設準 (postulate)。在‘認識論的多元論’一文以及‘認識論’一書裏，他認為有五元，即當前 (the given), 條理 (order), 範疇 (category), 設準 (postulate) 及概念 (concept)。*‘多元認識論重述’*一文...成七元之說 (感相, 外在根由, 格式, 設準, 主客, 名理基本律, 概念)... 在‘知識與文化’一書中又有一個四元說 (外在者, 知覺, 概念)。”

“Actually, Zhang Dongsun himself did not have a unified view regarding the number of basic elements that compose knowledge. In his treaty *External Order, Categories and Logical Postulates* he claimed that there are three such elements, i.e. external order, categories and postulates. In his article *Pluralism in the Theory of Knowledge* and in his book *Epistemology* he wrote that there are five such elements: the given, external order, categories, postulates and concepts; in his article *A New Formulation of Pluralistic Epistemology* he described a theory of seven elements (sensory images, external reasons, transcendental forms, logical postulates, the relation between subject and object, basic logical laws and concepts). In his book *Knowledge and Culture*, he proposed a theory of four such elements: the external, comprehension and concepts.”<sup>5</sup> (Zhang Yaonan, 1994, p. 24–25)

Given these difficulties, we shall examine the elements (*yuan* 元) proposed in Zhang’s main epistemological treatise *A New Formulation of Plural Epistemology* (多元認識論重述), which represents the most complete, systematic and coherent treatment of his theory. The basic elements for the comprehension of reality and its external order (條理), which correlates with the mind through sensory perception (直觀, 感覺) and sensations (感相), were a-priori transcendental forms (格式) and logical postulates (設準); these in turn were divided into categories (範疇), relations with semantic logical implications (相涵的關係), and concepts and ideas (概念). In the following table, Zhang listed schematically the main features of these elements:



條理 (order)	格式 (form)	設準 (postulate)	概念 (concept)
自然的又內在的 (natural immanent)	認識上超越的 (epistemically transcendent)	名理上超越的 (logically transcendent)	經驗的 (empirical)
客觀的 (objective)	主觀的 (subjective)	主觀的 (subjective)	符號的 (symbolic)
不顯明的 (implicit)	不顯明的 (implicit)	顯明的 (explicit)	顯明的 (explicit)
唯一的 (unique)	唯一的 (unique)	可換的 (alternative)	種種的 (various)
間接的 (mediate)	間接的 (mediate)	直接的 (immediate)	直接的 (immediate)
有效的 (valid)	有效的 (valid)	有效的 (valid)	可以無效的 (invalid)
是構造 (structure)	是條件 (condition)	是方法 (method)	是結論 (conclusion)
潛在所與中 (subsists in object)	與對象同存 (co-exists with object)	對付對象 (approach to object)	由對象而出 (derives from object)

(Ibid., p. 202)

In his theory, the content of recognition is not identical with the actual state of the objects of comprehension.

“須知我們所有的感覺都不是外界存在的. 所以我們絕對無法知道外界的內容.”

“We should know that none of our sensations exist in the external world. Therefore, it is absolutely impossible for us to recognize the ‘content’ of the external world.” (Ibid., p. 171)

Although we cannot comprehend the actual reality, we possess the ability to recognize its structural arrangement, which Zhang called the external order (條理). The relation between the external reality and our perception is thus structurally conditioned and has been established in accordance with certain laws.

“我主張感覺不能給我們以條理的知識, 這雖跟康德相同, 但條理卻不能完全是心的綜合能力所產, 這又和康德不同了. 因此我承認外界有其條理; 內界(即心)亦有其立法; 內界的立法又分兩種, 一為直觀上的先驗方式, 一為思維上的先驗方式. (這一點與康德相似). 至於感覺, 則不是真正的‘存在者’. 所以我此說有幾個方面, 因名之曰多元論.”

“I believe that we cannot obtain regulated (structured) recognition by sensory perception – in this respect, I agree with Kant. On the other hand, this regulation (structureness) can not arise totally from the synthetic ability of our mind – in this respect, I disagree with Kant. Therefore, I acknowledge that the external world is ordered and that our inwardness (i.e. our mind) also functions in accordance with particular laws. This regulated constitution of our inwardness can also be divided into two kinds: the first can be called the a-priori form of direct sensory perception, and the second the a-priori form of cognition. (Here, again, my view is similar to Kant’s). However, the sensations are not identical with ‘existing beings’. Since my theory arises from many different aspects, I have named it a ‘pluralistic theory’.” (Zhang Dongsun, 1995b, p. 165)

Besides, his pluralistic view cannot be identified neither with epistemological monism, (which reduces the known to the knower), nor with epistemological

5

The forth element is not given; as a devoted follower of Zhang Dongsun, Zhang Yaonan

also seems to have some problem with arithmetic.

dualism (which is based upon the division of the subject and object of comprehension).

## 7. The structure of comprehension

For Zhang, the nature of comprehension was extremely complex. In his view, the process of comprehension took place as an interaction between two poles, represented by the subject and the object of recognition:

“這個中間普通人認為沒有東西存在，即好像是空的。所以能知與所知得以直接發生關係。我則以為在這個中間 內卻有許多東西，換言之，即是複雜的。”

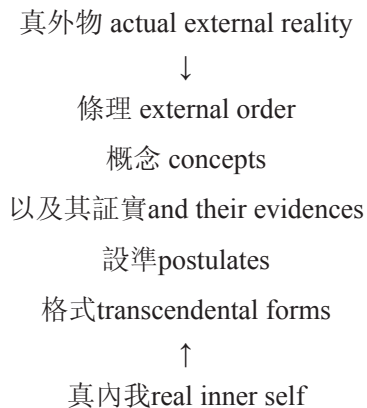
“People commonly think that there is nothing between these two poles, that between them there is only empty space. This would mean that the subject and object of recognition were in direct relation with each other. But I believe that there are many things between them, that this ‘middle’ in other words, is very complex.” (Zhang Dongsun, 1995b, p. 213)

For Zhang, the central task of epistemology was precisely the analysis of this intermediary space situated between the subject and object of recognition. He described this middle as “semi-transparent” (半透明的) and compared the process of comprehension to a ray of light focused upon the object by the subject of recognition, but with this ray of light having to pass through multicolored layers of glass (Ibid.). In addition, the process of comprehension was necessarily relative, since the absolute recognition of subject and object was impossible. Zhang formulated the process of comprehension in the following way:

“在所知那一端有個絕對不可知的外物，又有個相對可知的外界（即所謂原子性等條理）；在能知一端有個絕對不可知的自我，又有相對可知的內界。”

“At the extreme pole of the object there is external matter, which cannot be totally recognized, but there is also an external reality, that can be recognized in a relative sense (i.e. the so-called atomicity and other parts of external order). At the extreme pole of the subject there is a Self, which cannot be totally recognized, but also an inner world, which can be recognized in a relative sense.” (Ibid.)

He illustrated the structure of this process with the following scheme:



Although certain aspects of his thought are incomplete and insufficiently systematic, these deficiencies are mostly due to the fact that Zhang Dongsun was prohibited from writing and publishing during the last 25 years of his life, and therefore was unable to refine and perfect his theory in terms of style, terminology, system and essence (Rošker, 2008, p. 263). Still, in my opinion, Zhang Dongsun is definitely deserving of the attention currently being paid to his work by both Western and Chinese scholars.

## Literature

Emmet, D. (1991) Whitehead und Alexander. In M. Hampe & H. Maasen (eds.), *Die Gifford Lectures und ihre Deutung: Materialien zu Whiteheads Process und Realität*, Vol. 2 (pp. 100–120). Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.

Jiang, X. Y. (2002) Zhang Dongsun: Pluralist Epistemology and Chinese Philosophy. In C.Y. & N. Bunnin (eds.), *Contemporary Chinese Philosophy* (pp. 57–81). Oxford: Blackwell.

Liu W. Y. (2001) *Zhongguo zhexueshi bai nian shuping yu zhanwang* (An Outline and Developmental Tendencies of Chinese Philosophy during the Last 100 Years). *Zhongguo zhexue shi*, 2001(2), pp. 29–38.

Liu W. Y. (2002) *Zhongguo zhexue shi* (A History of Chinese Philosophy), Part 1 and 2. Tianjin: Nankai daxue chuban she.

Liu W. Y. (2003) *Renshi lunde fenqi yu renshi lundelexing* – *Zhongguo chuantong zhexue renshi lunde xin toushi* (Differences in Comprehension and Types of Theory of Knowledge – New Aspects of Traditional Chinese Philosophical Epistemology). *Zhexue yanjiu*, 2003(1), pp. 21–26.

Morgan, L. C. (1930a) *Introduction to Comparative Psychology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: Walter Scott.

Morgan, L. C. (1930b) *Autobiography*. In C. Murchison (ed.), *History of Psychology in Autobiography*, Vol. 2 (pp. 237–264). Worcester MA: Clark University Press.

Rošker, J. S. (2008) *Searching for the Way – Theory of Knowledge in Pre-modern and Modern China*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.

Zhang, D. S. (1922) *Du Dong Xi wenhua ji qi zhexue* (On the Culture and Philosophy of East and West). *Xue Deng*, 3 (19), pp. 30–41.

Zhang, D. S. (1924) *Kexue yu zhexue* (Science and Philosophy). Shanghai: Shanghai shangwu yinshu guan.

Zhang, D. S. (1929a) *Xin zhexue lunye* (An Anthology of New Philosophy). Shanghai: Shanghai Shangwu yinshuguan.

Zhang, D. S. (1929b) *Zhexue ABC* (The Philosophical Alphabet). Shanghai: Shanghai shijie shuju.

Zhang, D. S. (1933) *Dongde luoji shi kenengde ma?* (Is a Moving Logic Possible?). *Xin Zhonghua*, 18(1), pp. 1–11.

Zhang, D. S. (1934a) *Sixiang zhanxianshang jige shimaode wenti* (Some Fashionable Questions from the Battle – Lines of Thought). *Xin Zhonghua*, 10(2), pp. 41–47.

Zhang, D. S. (1934b) *Renshi lun* (Epistemology). Shanghai: Shanghai shijie shuju.

Zhang, D. S. (1937) *Duoyuan renshi lun chongshu* (A New Formulation of Pluralistic Epistemology). In *Zhang Junsheng xiansheng qishi shengri jinian lunwen ji*, (pp. 19–33). Beijing.

Zhang, D. S. (1939) *Wo ye tantan bianzhengde weiwu lun* (I Would also Like to Speak about Dialectical Materialism). *Da gong bao* (Xiandai sichao), 18 (9), pp. 12–13.

Zhang, D. S. (1946a) *Lixiang yu shehui* (Ideal and Society). Shanghai: Shanghai Shangwu yinshuguan.

Zhang, D. S. (1946b) *Lixiang yu minzhu* (Ideal and Democracy). Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan.

Zhang, D. S. (1995a) *Zhishi yu wenhua* (Knowledge and Culture) (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chuban she.

Zhang, D. S. (1995b) *Lixing yu liangzhi* – *Zhang Dongsun wenxuan* (Reason and Innate Knowledge – A Selection of Zhang Dongsun's work) (Zhang R. L. ed.). Shanghai: Shanghai Yuandong chuban she.

Zhang, Y. N. (1994) Zhang Dongsun zhishi lun yanjiu (Researches in Zhang Dongsun's epistemology), PhD Dissertation. Beijing: Beijing daxue.

Zhang, Y. N. (1996) Zhang Dongsun yu Jin Yuelin: liangtiao butongde zhishilun luxiang (Zhang Dongsun and Jin Yuelin: Two Different Tendencies in Epistemology). Changsha shuidian xueyuan shehui kexue xuebao, 1996(1), pp. 30–32.

Zhang, Y. N. (1998) Zhang Dongsun. Taipei: Sanmin zongjing suo.

Zhang, Y. N. (2000) Cong ershi shiji Zhongguo zhexue kand Zhang Dongsun zhi 'jiagou lun' (Zhang Dongsun's 'Structural Theory' from the Viewpoint of Chinese Philosophy of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century). Xueshu jie, 81(2), pp. 143–150.

Zhang, Y. N. (2002) Lun 'zhishi jieshi shuo' zai Zhong Xi zhexueshi shang zhi jiazhi (On the Valuation of 'Epistemological Hermeneutics' in the Histories of Chinese and Western Philosophies). In Beijing Xingzheng xueyuan xuebao, 2002(2), pp. 73–79.

Zhang, Y. N. (2003a) Shilun Zhongguo zhexuede zhishi lun zhuanxiang wenti – yi Zhang Dongsun xiansheng wei li (On the Epistemological Turn in Chinese Philosophy – Exemplified by Sir Zhang Dongsun). In Fang, L. Zh. Zhongxi huitong yu Zhongguo zhexuede jin xiandai zhuanhuan (pp. 409–430). Beijing Shangwu Yinshuguan.

Zhang, Y. N. (2003b) Zhishi lun juxian yu benti lun juxian – Zhongguo xiandai zhexuejia dui benti lun yu zhishi lun zhiguanxide liangzhong jianjie (The Priority of Epistemology or the Priority of Ontology – Two Different Approaches of Modern Chinese Philosophers to the Relation of Epistemology and Ontology). Xin Shiye, 2003(2), pp. 63–75.

Jana Rošker

**Poništenje supstance i ontologije:  
Nova interpretacija pluralističke  
epistemologije Zhang Dongsuna**

**Sažetak**

*Zhang Dongsun je bio jedan od najutjecajnijih mislitelja u Republici Kini, čiji je ugled djelomično počivao i na njegovoj iznimnoj sposobnosti predstavljanja zapadne misli na način kompatibilan sa specifičnom metodologijom tradicionalne kineske misli. Jedno od njegovih najvećih postignuća svakako je stvaranje i razvoj moderne teorije znanja, temeljene na klasičnoj kineskoj i chan-buddhističkoj epistemologiji, što umnogome predstavlja prikladnu sintezu moderne znanosti i tradicionalne kineske misli. Stoga se ovaj rad prvenstveno usmjerava na Zhangovu teoriju znanja. Zhang Dongsun je nazivao svoju teoriju »pluralističnom«, s obzirom na pretpostavku da su različiti elementi koji omogućuju shvaćanje i zaključivanje uzajamno isključivi i nesvodljivi. Iz toga ćemo razloga kritički razmotriti elemente (yuan 元) koje Zhang predlaže u svojoj glavnoj epistemološkoj raspravi Plural Epistemology (Duoyuan renshilun 多元認識論) koja predstavlja najpotpuniju, sistematičnu i koherentnu obradu njegove teorije.*

**Ključne riječi**

kineska epistemologija, suvremena kineska filozofija, Zhang Dongsun

Jana Rošker

**Aufhebung von Substanz und Ontologie:  
Eine Neuinterpretation der pluralistischen  
Epistemologie von Zhang Dongsun**

**Zusammenfassung**

*Im ersten Viertel des 20. Jahrhunderts war Zhang Dongsun einer der einflussreichsten Denker der Republik China, dessen Ansehen zum Teil auch dem Umstand zu verdanken war, dass er es wie kein anderer verstand, das abendländische Denken seinem Lebensraum auf eine Weise zu*

*vermitteln, die mit der spezifischen Methodologie des traditionellen chinesischen Denkens kompatibel war. Zu seinen größten Verdiensten gehört ohne Zweifel die Entwicklung einer modernen Erkenntnistheorie, die ihre Grundlagen im klassischen Chinesisch und in der chan-buddhistischen Epistemologie hat – was in vielerlei Hinsicht eine angemessene Synthese moderner Wissenschaft und traditionellen chinesischen Denkens darstellt. Daher widmet sich dieser Artikel in erster Linie Zhang Dongsuns Theorie des Wissens. Der Philosoph selbst bezeichnete seine Theorie als „pluralistisch“ im Hinblick auf die These, dass unterschiedliche, das Verstehen und Schlussfolgern ermöglichende Elemente sich gegenseitig ausschließen und nicht aufeinander rückführbar seien. Daher bemüht sich die Autorin um eine kritische Untersuchung der Elemente (yuan 元), die Zhang Dongsun in seiner epistemologischen Hauptschrift Plural Epistemology (Duoyuan renshilun 多元認識論) vorschlägt, in der seine Theorie am vollkommensten, systematisch und kohärent dargestellt wird.*

**Schlüsselwörter**

Chinesische Epistemologie, zeitgenössische chinesische Philosophie, Zhang Dongsun

**Jana Rošker**

**La suppression de la substance et de l'ontologie :  
Une nouvelle interprétation de l'épistémologie  
pluraliste de Zhang Dongsun**

**Résumé**

*Durant les trois premières décennies du XXe siècle, Zhang Dongsun fut l'un des penseurs les plus influents de République de Chine : une réputation qui reposait, en partie, sur son extraordinaire capacité à présenter la pensée occidentale d'une manière compatible avec les méthodes spécifiques de la pensée traditionnelle chinoise. L'une de ses contributions majeures fut sans doute d'avoir créé et développé une théorie moderne de la connaissance, fondée sur l'ancienne épistémologie bouddhiste chinoise et le chan, ce qui représente à bien des égards une synthèse de la science moderne et de la pensée traditionnelle chinoise. Ainsi, cette étude se concentrera principalement sur sa théorie de la connaissance. Zhang Dongsun qualifiait sa théorie de « pluraliste » compte tenu de l'hypothèse que les divers éléments qui permettent la compréhension et le raisonnement sont mutuellement exclusifs et irréductibles. C'est pourquoi nous allons étudier de façon critique les éléments (yuan 元) proposés dans le principal traité épistémologique de Zhang – « Epistémologie plurielle » (Duoyuan renshilun 多元認識論) – qui représente l'approche la plus complète, la plus systématique et la plus cohérente de sa théorie.*

**Mots-clés**

épistémologie chinoise, philosophie chinoise moderne, Zhang Dongsun