

## Call for Proposals

For the first several years of our Group activities, we have decided to prioritize topics either separately or together on methodological issues and constructive readings across and between Chinese and Indian canonical texts. After a fruitful inaugural panel on the Gita and Chinese thought and the issues that were generated in these discussions, we are proposing the following two interdependent foci, the first regarding content and the second methodology:

- The *Xunzi* and Indian thought — as the grand synthesizer of classical Chinese thought and the forceful defender of the Confucian project, the *Xunzi* represents a high point in classical Chinese intellectual development, both in terms of its scope and its systematicity. Ideas of the natural and the traditional, order and chaos, disciplinary naming, transformation of desires and inclinations through ritual, discourse on the transcendence, cultivation of virtue, and many others found in the *Xunzi* are ripe and appropriate for reading from classical Indian perspectives, such as from the Dharma sastras, *Mimamsa*, or even the *Mahabharata*

- Textual ambiguity and complexity in the comparative study of Chinese and Indian texts — a major challenge in comparative approaches to texts is that they tend to simplify or homogenize the message of the texts and perspectives under comparison

Our panels will seek to preserve the integrity, in terms of ambiguity and complexity, of texts and traditions, even while presenting nuanced and constructive re/readings. We will support papers that approach the *Xunzi* from classical Indian perspectives but are reflexively aware of, and demonstrate a suitably sophisticated response to, questions of ambiguity and complexity in both cultural traditions.

## Mission

This Group addresses two significant gaps in the current scholarship on Chinese and Indian religious traditions. The first gap is on historical scholarship. India and China have been the two mother cultures of South Asia and East Asia. Historically, the two were connected through the transmission and transformation of Buddhism from India to China. This remarkably fruitful incorporation and assimilation of a foreign cultural practice into another well-established culture is one of the first of its kind in the human history of cross-cultural exchanges, especially at such a magnitude. There has been inadequate scholarly attention paid to how Indian Buddhism — and its central Asian variants — introduced new issues and imaginations to the Chinese people and how the Chinese managed to appropriate the alien tradition into their own intellectual milieu, hence deeply enriching and reshaping the indigenous Chinese culture. Second, we also seek to redirect some of the attention of the comparative study of religion and philosophy away from the default West-centered approach. India and China are profoundly important civilizations, both historically and contemporarily. Despite the historical connection of Buddhism, the differences in their cultural products — whether religious, linguistic, philosophical, artistic, or material — are so striking that comparing them would highlight the true richness, plurality, and diversity of human creativity and cultural productivity. Even though the comparative approach to religion has been popular in academia for a while, current scholarship on comparative studies tends to focus on West and East — the East being either China, India, or some other nearby culture. It must be noted though that while the West both studied and challenged China and India; one notable consequence in academia has been a focus on the West's relationship with and study of them, although a lot of recent scholarship has critiqued the often implicit Orientalist framework of such studies. On the other hand, the fruitful cultural connections between India and China did not continue into the modern era, due to various internal and external factors — including foreign invasions, the gradual disappearance of Buddhism from India, the inward-turning of China, the arrival of colonialism, etc. However, in recent decades, the world has witnessed the emergence of both China and India as increasingly influential voices on the world scene. The ties between the two have also been reestablished and strengthened, with blossoming trade relationships, political dialogue, technological interactions, personnel exchanges, and growing cultural connections. Given their growing influence in the world and the increasingly robust ties between them, the cultural identities and experiences as well as the intellectual products of China and India will have major implications in terms of the way the world will be shaped in the coming decades. The lack of attention to the shared and distinct historical experiences and cultural legacies of China and India from a comparative perspective needs to be redressed. We strongly believe that studying China and India from this comparative perspective will not only provide us with fresh insights into their shared as well as their different experiences and orientations — and hence be conducive to the ongoing dialogues across cultural boundaries — but also help to widen pluralist approaches within academia by shifting the comparative perspective from purely West-centered dialogues to an engagement between these ancient and diverse Asian cultures themselves. This Group is designed as an attempt to engage Sinologists and Indologists. It will cover both historical and contemporary issues in order to explore new possibilities in the comparative study of religions.

## **Anonymity of Review Process**

Proposer names are **visible** to Chairs but **anonymous** to steering committee members.

## Questions?

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## Method of Submission

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