

# **Workshop on Politics and Wisdom: Philosophy and Strategic Thinking in the East and the West**

## **By Melodie Ruwet**

On 15 January 2018, the Centre for Governance & Public Policy at Griffith University hosted a workshop chaired by Dr. Huiyun Feng and CGPP Director Professor Haig Patapan. The workshop theme was on the differences and similarities of “Philosophy and Strategic Thinking in the East and the West”. Many distinguished scholars from the United States, Australia, mainland China and Taiwan joined a heated day of discussion.

### **Philosophical Foundations of Strategic Thinking in the East and the West**

Delia Lin from Melbourne University pointed out the interdisciplinary nature of the workshop as one strength as participants from history, philosophy, political theory and international relations fields addressed a common puzzle – what are the philosophical roots of Strategic Thinking in the East and the West? Sue Trevaskes (Griffith University) chaired a roundtable discussion by Haig Patapan (Griffith University), Li Qiang and Demin Duan (Peking University). Haig underlined some unique characteristics of the western philosophies, such as the influence of the Abrahamic religions and the turn to Science. Li Qiang discussed the concept of *Tian Xia* (天下) and the contemporary Chinese concept of political authority and transcendental truth. Later, Demin Duan (Peking University) examined whether there is a “Chinese philosophy” to start with, and whether the Chinese way of thinking qualifies as a philosophy in the Western sense. Colin Mackerras argued that the historical unity or disunity of China and Europe made a difference in philosophical roots. David Schak (Griffith University) added that there are ideas in the Chinese culture which have been crystallized by Chinese philosophers and became part of the overall culture.

### **Philosophical Impact on Strategic Thinking**

Huiyun Feng (Griffith University) chaired a session outlining the differences in the strategic thinking of the East and the West. Bradley Thayer (Oxford Fellow) believed that recognizing those differences can contribute to a more sensitive understanding of security competition and war. Shih Chih Yu (Taiwan National University) used the metaphor of chopsticks, which can be used to eat Western food as well as Eastern food, to analyse the writings of Sun Tzu and their integration in the Western literature. Wang Yuan-kang (Western Michigan University) asked whether the Confucian culture had an impact on Chinese Foreign Policy behavior and referred to the Ming and the Song dynasties. He emphasized that Chinese strategic thinking is not that different from the Western strategic thinking.

### **Strategic Thinking on Foreign Policy and Grand Strategy**

Haig Patapan (Griffith University) chaired a session on the potential impacts of different strategic thinking on state behavior. David Welch (University of Waterloo) highlighted some disciplinary barriers in studying Philosophy and International Politics, and then discussed the importance of empathy and leadership. Steve Chan (University of Colorado) offered a presentation on Chinese philosophical thinking on change and stressed the need to avoid exoticizing any culture. Huiyun Feng (Griffith University) offered an analysis of China’s Strategic Thinking and Foreign Policy and asserted that it is a good time to look at philosophy and culture because it can help us open the black box that is the state. Stephen Walker (Arizona State University) closed the presentations with a discussion of the significance of leaders and a typology of how to study leadership.

Kai He (Griffith University) wound up the workshop with some key observations as to the future directions of research on philosophy and strategic thinking. He emphasized the significance of conceptual clarity and mid-range theorizing, and the change of time and the mutual learning effect between the West and East. The workshop concluded with a recognition of the significance of the topic and possible directions for future exploration.