

RESEARCH NOTE: PROJECT
INITIATED IN CHINA TO
TRANSLATE AND RESEARCH
THE PHILOSOPHICAL WRITINGS
OF WILLIAM JAMES

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Project in China Initiated: Translation of and Research on the Philosophical Writings by William James¹

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In November, 2017 the China National Planning Office for Social Science approved a major national project “Translation and Research of the Philosophical Works by William James” (17ZDA032). The project is headed by Professor Wang Chengbing from Beijing Normal University. More than 20 professionals from the universities in Mainland China, Hong Kong of China, the United States and Italy are participating in this project, which has been endorsed by such prominent American Jamesian scholars as Professor John Mcdermott, Professor Richard Bernstein, Professor Larry Hickman, Professor Roger Ames and Professor James Campbell. This is currently among the most important philosophy academic projects in China. The project will be concluded before the end of 2022.

Overall Questions and Research Subjects Contained Within This Project

Based on a comprehensive grasp of existing research at home and abroad, this project positions itself on the academic frontier to further collect, interpret, analyze, edit and translate the classic philosophical texts of William James. While attending to the overall spirit and texts of pragmatism, it also studies the developmental process, core propositions and key concepts of Jamesian philosophy, and the status

¹ This note is abridged and modified from my report about this project to the William James Society in the Central Division of American Philosophical Association (APA) in Chicago on February 22, 2018. Thanks to the comments from Professor Tadd Ruetenik and other colleagues attending that meeting.

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and influence of James within pragmatism. Jamesian pragmatism involves various disciplinary branches, spheres or specialized research fields including philosophy, sociology, literature, psychology, political science, axiology, logic and religious studies,. The project will be interdisciplinary, multidimensional and comprehensive. The primary research concerns are enumerated below.

(1) The first aspect of the project is to collect, edit, translate and comprehensively research the Jamesian philosophical classics and commentaries.

This will involve analysis of the history and current status of James' works in the United States and European countries, as well as the current status as with its translation, publication and circulation in China.

(2) The second aspect of this project is to investigate important ideas in Jamesian philosophy, and analyze and summarize the status and influence of Jamesian philosophy in contemporary pragmatism.

This research will be organically combined with the study of James' own thought and the history of ideas, to complement and facilitate the translation and study of James's works. The project will select some pivotal concepts, such as the view of metaphysics, truth, experience, stream of consciousness and pragmatist methodology in Jamesian philosophy. Starting with these theoretical concepts, it will investigate the development of James' personal thought in the context of the development of pragmatism as a whole.

(3) The third aspect of this project is to study the status and influence of Jamesian philosophy in the history of western philosophy and contemporary western philosophy.

The study of Jamesian philosophy from the perspective of the history of philosophy has advanced among North American and European philosophers in recent years, but has been a weak link in the study of

pragmatism in China. This project will explore the relationship between Jamesian philosophy and traditional empiricism and contemporary Western philosophy, exploring the relationship between James and such of his contemporaries as Henri Bergson and Bertrand Russell, as well as more recent philosophers including Ludwig Wittgenstein and Emmanuel Levinas.

(4) The fourth aspect of the contents of this project is interdisciplinary research on axiology, jurisprudence, philosophy of mind, political philosophy, and religious philosophy in Jamesian pragmatism.

Jamesian pragmatism opposes empty talk and approaches reality comprehensively - in many disciplines and topics. Chinese researchers tend to limit their work narrowly to their own disciplinary fields and academic horizons. This project has invited researchers from different fields to undertake collaborative and cooperative research into Jamesian pragmatism, seeking breakthroughs in holistic, interdisciplinary and multidimensional and comparative research.

Thus the project will study related thoughts in James' philosophical literature, concerning theory of value, religious philosophy, psychology, philosophy of mind, social and political philosophy and the influence of his philosophy on pragmatic jurisprudence.

(5) The fifth aspect of this project is to explore the dynamic relations of Jamesian philosophy to European continental philosophy and Chinese philosophy from the point of view of comparative philosophy.

Comparative philosophy has a long history, and the study of Jamesian pragmatic philosophy from the perspective of comparative philosophy is an important academic effort. On one hand, comparative study of Chinese and Western philosophy in the 21st century is no longer simply the enumeration of common or different points of thought between different philosophers and philosophical schools. Rather it penetrates deep into the mode of thinking itself, the theoretical essence and discourse manner, of each side, in order to find common ground. On the other hand, since the end of last century, some

important experts in Western academia have become keenly interested in the comparative study of Chinese and Western philosophy, conducting comparative research, putting forward new interpretations and establishing in-depth intercultural discussions; Roger Ames' comparative study of pragmatism and Confucianism is a noteworthy example. The project will regard comparative research into Jamesian philosophy as a case study. The project will be grounded in the latest and most reliable research achievements to turn the excessive one-directional discussion into real exchanges between two sides.

Arrangements of Subprojects

The project is composed of five connected subprojects, each headed by a recognized scholar in the study of pragmatism:

Subproject 1: The Collation, Editing, Translation and Study of the Collected Philosophical Writings of William James.

Volumes 1-8 will consist of the collation, editing, translation and study of James' philosophical works.

Volume 1: *Pragmatism.*

Volume 2: *The Meaning of Truth.*

Volume 3: *A Pluralistic Universe.*

Volume 4: *Principles of Psychology*, Volume I.

Volume 5: *Principles of Psychology*, Volume II.

Volume 6: *Principles of Psychology*, Volume III.

Volume 7: *The Varieties of Religious Experience.*

Volume 8: *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy.*

Subproject 2: The Collation, Editing, Translation and Study of the Collected Philosophical Writings of William James

Volumes 9-15 will consist in the compilation, editing, translation and research of the *Collected Philosophical Writings of William James*. The contents of these 7 volumes are mainly the literature collected, collated, proofread, edited and published by foreign academics after James' death.

Volume 9: *Some Problems of Philosophy*.

Volume 10: *Essays in Radical Empiricism*.

Volume 11: *Essays in Philosophy*.

Volume 12: *Essays in Religion and Morality*.

Volume 13: *Manuscript Essays and Notes*.

Volume 14: *Manuscript Lectures*.

Volume 15: *Essays, Comments, and Reviews*.

Subproject 3: The Study of James' main Philosophical Views and his Status in Pragmatism.

This subproject consists of two parts. The first is about James' main philosophical views. The research group will investigate the core concepts in Jamesian philosophy which have influenced pragmatism and beyond that, contemporary Western philosophy. The second focuses on the James' position within pragmatism as a whole. Academia has paid relatively little attention to James's crucial position in pragmatism, and this research can also further clarify the academic status and influence of James's central concepts.

Subproject 4: The Study of Jamesian Philosophy from the Perspectives of the History of Western Philosophy and Contemporary Western Philosophy

This subproject will discuss Jamesian philosophy in the context Western philosophy as a whole. To investigate the status of a philosophical school or philosopher in the history of Western philosophy is a routine research approach. So far as the study of Jamesian philosophy is concerned, however, this approach can play an extraordinary role. First, relatively speaking, research in history of philosophy has tended to neglect pragmatism. This subproject aims to

overcome this neglect. Second, the project aims to go beyond current research predicaments and achieve some academic breakthroughs: On one hand, Jamesian pragmatism appears very simple. This feature makes it very difficult for researchers to find a foothold or focus in their research. On the other hand, Jamesian pragmatism has its own center and narrative style which has at times eluded scholars. Approaching James through the history of Western philosophy can help researchers to determine the logical starting point in James' pragmatic philosophy, map his ideas, and thus clarify the historical status of Jamesian philosophy.

This research will also examine Jamesian philosophy in the context of contemporary Western philosophy. The investigation at this aspect will, by disclosing the influence of Jamesian philosophy on contemporary western philosophy, try to understand the close relationship between Jamesian philosophy and modern Western philosophy further to understand the philosophical significance of central pragmatic ideas in the evolution of contemporary Western philosophy.

Subproject 5: The Interdisciplinary, Cross-border and Comprehensive Study of Jamesian Philosophy in the Horizon of Comparative Philosophy

Jamesian philosophy has been interdisciplinary since its emergence, involving many disciplines and fields. James himself has seriously discussed many issues and made progress. Based on James' philosophical work, the project selectively discusses James' views in jurisprudence, sociology, psychology, axiology and social philosophy. The approach through comparative philosophy mainly features these three aspects:

Firstly, the dialogue between and comparative study of Jamesian philosophy and Anglo-American analytical philosophy.

James claims his theory to be a neo-empiricism, but since its emergence, it has complex relationships with Anglo-American analytical philosophy that belongs to the empiricist tradition; and there have been inheritance, conflicts, differences and syncretism between these two. The study of relationships between Jamesian

pragmatism and analytic philosophy has become an indispensable part of research.

Secondly, the dialogue between and comparative study of James's philosophy and contemporary European continental philosophy (including phenomenology, postmodern philosophy and deconstructionism, etc.). The relationship between Jamesian pragmatism and European continental philosophy is an increasingly important topic. As the thoughts and methods of deconstructionism and postmodernism emerged in the European continental philosophical circle, researchers have attended to relationships between Jamesian pragmatism and those philosophical trends.

Thirdly, in the era of economic globalization, a comparative study of Jamesian and Chinese philosophy should be among the most noteworthy approaches to comparative study of pragmatic philosophy in the 21st century. On one hand, due to the dominance of China and the United States in today's world, American pragmatism and traditional Chinese Confucianism will inevitably be brought into dialogue. On the other hand, due especially to Dewey's exchanges with Chinese philosophers during his visit from 1919 to 1921, the influence of traditional Chinese philosophy on classical pragmatism is also a noteworthy subject. As well, due to its role in the aftermath of the May Fourth Movement, pragmatism has had an inestimable influence on Chinese modern philosophy and culture. Thus, a comparative philosophy approach would further our understanding of contemporary Chinese philosophy, culture and political life.

The Anticipated Goals of and the final outcome of this project

This project anticipates the following accomplishments:

Firstly, to accomplish the translation, and the study, of the *Collected Philosophical Writings of William James* (15 volumes) into Chinese by 2022, which is an important achievement in the field of Chinese pragmatic research. The translations will be published by the Commercial Press(商务印书馆) which was established in 1897 and is now the oldest publishing house in China, enjoying an excellent

reputation for its publications of the translations of the western classic humanity and social science works.

Secondly, to understand the essence and evolutionary process of Jamesian pragmatism, and its position in Western philosophy. This project is going to provide a big-picture account of relationships between Jamesian and Chinese and European philosophies, of the contemporary influence of Jamesian philosophy on Chinese philosophy, culture, scholarship and education, and of the possibilities and concrete vehicles for dialogues between pragmatism and Chinese philosophy. Through the study, collation and publication of the classic literature, it will provide necessary textual support for relevant academic research. The research group anticipates that its arduous work will not only promote the study of Jamesian philosophy in China and expeditiously deepen research into Jamesian philosophy and bring it to the frontier of international academia. Regarding international academic dialogues, this group anticipates that Chinese scholars will attain greater visibility and discourse power on such topics as the journey of Jamesian pragmatism in China and the comparative study of Jamesian pragmatism and Chinese philosophy. .

Thirdly, to form a research team and an academic community consisting of professionals with high scholastic level, strong interest in Jamesian pragmatism, and proficiency in international dialogues. Chinese research in pragmatism has been less robust than research on analytic and Continental European philosophy, hindering understanding of American philosophy in China. Over the the next five years this project will work hard to concentrate attention on pragmatism and expand its academic team. Supported by significant funding, the research group will translate the best James literature, write serial essays and compile the *Textbook of William James's Philosophy*, publish a monograph the *William James's Philosophy in Contemporary Academic Context*, and improve the textbook construction concerning pragmatism in China universities. It will also accelerate talent training by organizing doctoral students as participants in the research as assistant lecturers and researchers.

Fourthly, to make progress in the construction of relevant databases. All the members of the research team are experts in the study of pragmatism in China, and have accumulated significant research materials. In the course of this project, the research group will make further efforts to collect, collate, compile, translate and publish important literature (including video materials), especially to import and digest newly discovered first-hand materials and latest research publications from abroad, and build a relatively authoritative and complete literature database.

The project will be completed and pass the evaluation of the committee organized by the China National Planning Office of Social Science in 2022.