

# What Would Confucius Say? Everyone Is (More or Less) Chinese\*

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## Abstract

Where did China come from? And who is Chinese? Or put more eloquently by the contemporary philosopher Zhao Tingyang in his asking: “When the Central Plain (*Zhongyuan*) of China was perceived by its inhabitants as the boundless center of the world—as *tianxia*—what were the causes, the forces, and the destiny that coalesced across four millennia to sustain the vital and generative unity of China as a state, as a civilization, and as a history?” For Zhao, to become China as a world, and to become Chinese persons of that world, is to participate in the intergenerational transmission of this shared, emergent, and unbounded whirlpool identity. I have argued elsewhere that persons as conceived within this Confucian tradition are not ontological human “beings” grounded in a notion of strict formal and causal identity (*eidōs* and *telos*). Given what we might term “zoetological” (*shengsheng lun*) rather than ontological assumptions, the identities of such relationally-constituted, holographic persons are not defined categorically, but instead emerge analogically. We might correlate Zhao’s planetary understanding of *tianxia* as a Chinese “civilization-becoming” that having “no-outside” (*wuwai*) is holistic and inclusive, with my focus-field and holographic understanding of persons as “human becomings.”

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