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COMMENT AND DISCUSSION

Rethinking Comparative Philosophical Methodology: In Response to Weber's Criticism

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1. Comparative Philosophy as Intercultural Philosophy

More than half a century ago Charles A. Moore, the founder and editor of *Philosophy East and West*, foresaw in its first issue a new stage in the development of philosophy “characterized by transcultural co-operation and world perspective” (Moore 1951, pp. 67–70). Although Moore’s enthusiastic vision of “a synthesis between Eastern and Western philosophy” was questioned by other leading philosophers regarding its validity and possibility,¹ “the important area of East-West Philosophy” and the comparative approach have been recognized by an increasing number of philosophers worldwide. Convinced by the mutual complementarity and significant enrichment of research by this emerging sub-discipline, Masson-Oursel and McCarthy held the strong opinion that “true philosophy is comparative philosophy” (1951, p. 6).² From the point of view of the individual participants, Devaraja (1967, p. 57) believed that “one great benefit” is the potential emancipation from the uncritical assumptions lying behind one’s “cultural tradition,” an increased awareness of alternatives and the development of one’s critical thinking. Similarly, Robert L. Rein’l (1953, p. 339) argues for comparative philosophy to be understood as a means of achieving “intellectual tolerance”—“the moral life of reason,” which might be desirable for any “reasonable beings.”

Besides debate on the pros and cons, constructive reflection on the methodology has been a major concern and has contributed to further establishment of this sub-discipline of philosophy. With an awareness of the superficial idealization of comparative philosophy as a “new salvation from the East” for the West “to heal the vital illness of Western man,” Kwee Swan Liat (1951, p. 12)³ advocates that the goal of the comparative approach is indeed “towards a universal philosophy”—necessarily “a philosophy of life” in his terms—wherein priority has to be given to a “conscious, methodic evaluation” before “a true meeting” of West and East “through comparative philosophy” is even possible. He therefore emphasizes that “comparative philosophy is a multiple and integral approach to the common issues of philosophy.”

The methodological discussion continued with Laurence Rosán’s (1952, pp. 56–65) questioning of the validity of the “West–East comparison” as a necessary agenda of comparative philosophy and his rethinking of the postulate of the association

between geographical/cultural relevance and philosophical relevance. Rosán argues that “a mere geographical or even linguistic separation” or “the contrast of cultures” is not sufficient for the comparative study of philosophy. The distinctiveness or uniqueness of a philosophical tradition is “not because of any inherent linguistic, racial, or geographical characteristics.” Rosán believes that “the key to comparative philosophy” lies in “the contrast of basic philosophical attitudes or types of philosophy.” Therefore, “West–East comparison” manifests a methodological misguidance and might be after all a fruitless task. According to him, comparative philosophy is to be steered toward identification and systematic classification of the heterogeneous, basic, universal and perennial doctrines of philosophy—such as “Naturalism,” “Moralism,” and “Idealism”—and thus in a sense to a typology of philosophies.

Moore (1952, pp. 76–78) rejects Rosán’s proposal, which he believes aims at a synthesis based on “a monistic concept of method” and “interpret[s] a diversity of similar systems as constituting ‘expressions’ of a single consistent system” at the cost of each similar system’s uniqueness. Moore argues that the idea of comparative study itself suggests a diversity in methods as well as the so-called “transcultural cooperation and world perspective.” For a sufficient methodological evaluation, the “crucial task” is that pluralistic methods must be conceived “in the progressive investigation of the multiplicity of problems which inevitably arise in the study of comparative philosophy,” rather than as “a key of universal applicability” suggested by Rosán’s article. Moore also argues that the East–West or West–East comparison does not imply any “easy and shortsighted dichotomization” that assumes East and West “at opposite poles in every respect philosophically.” It seems Moore approved the association between geographical/cultural relevance and philosophical relevance—although with a rather prudent attitude. Rosán (1962, p. 242) later comes to a more moderate opinion to approve the cultural relevance in comparative philosophy. He argues that the name “East and West comparison,” with the misleading geographical suggestion, “is truly a cultural rather than a geographical approach to comparative philosophy” addressed to the “undoubted variety of cultural traditions,” which indeed under certain circumstances can be “a more effective contender in the arena of conflicting theories.”

The methodological reflection on comparative philosophy has become intertwined with the troublesome notion of “culture” from the very beginning of this new sub-discipline. Although cultural differences might not necessarily constitute the sufficient conditions of a need for comparative philosophy, they offer researchers a field with immense workable resources and a ready-made typological framework easy to adapt. This explains the fact that since the 1950s, although the research status of comparative philosophy has advanced in many regards and related studies have been so productive that contemporary researchers cannot come to an easy consensus on the subject matters of their comparisons, the methodological development has fallen far behind. The cultural approach to comparative philosophy has somehow become the default method due to its pragmatic and utilitarian advantages.

Ralph Weber's (2013, pp. 593–602) illuminating study of the recent works on “(meta-)methodology in comparative philosophy” shows that this trend has persisted well into contemporary studies and enhances its influence in the community—“all [authors] seem to rely to some degree on the presumption that comparative philosophy is best understood as ‘intercultural philosophy’.”⁴ Weber argues, however, that this “contemporary dominance of cultures in comparative philosophy,” namely the “rely[ing] on cultures as [a] philosophically relevant pre-comparative tertium,” has been an “unwarranted assumption” and has caused problems concerning “reification” and “the effect of inclusionary exclusion.”⁵ He therefore calls for a “(self-)critical engagement with comparative philosophy” with the help of his “analytical tool” of comparison, which consists of five variables that are “distinguished in standard conceptualizations,” namely “the comparer, the comparata, the pre-comparative tertium, the tertium comparationis, the result of the comparison.”⁶

Among the five variables, Weber (2014, pp. 151–169) states that “focus on the tertium comparationis and the ‘pre-comparative’ tertium precisely offers a means to evaluate comparisons,” and hence provides a criterion of “meaningful” comparison “in the rationalistic way.” He calls attention to the common neglect of a critical examination and a transparent specification of the so-called “‘pre-comparative’ tertium.” He argues that in contemporary comparative philosophy, “culture” has long served as a widely prevailing “‘pre-comparative’ tertium,” and “cultures are the carriers of relevant philosophical difference (or sameness).” He believes the burden to justify this default method lies on those who pursue comparative philosophy as “intercultural philosophy.” In brief, Weber’s work sheds new light on the recurrent methodological predicament of comparative philosophy (its intertwining with the problematic notion of “culture”). His effort in evaluating meaningful comparison in standard conceptualization is rather enlightening. Finally, his work indicates the true ecology of contemporary comparative philosophy—a de facto sub-discipline of philosophy to a large degree established as “intercultural philosophy.”

II. Response to Weber’s Criticism

Following the sketch above of the methodological predicament of current comparative philosophy—a de facto established sub-discipline of philosophy that largely functions as “intercultural” or “transcultural philosophy”—I now outline a few points that demonstrate my own reflections on how to approach, understand, and resolve this difficult problem (or perhaps to eliminate the problem entirely).

Point 1. “Comparative philosophy”⁷ in a proper sense, whether as the comparative study of philosophies or the philosophy of comparison, is not congruent with intercultural philosophy. Comparison in general is a basic function/apparatus of critical thinking, which characterizes philosophy. Thus, in this sense, no one who is responsibly engaged in the history of philosophy is not a comparative philosopher. As Graham Parkes puts it: “‘East-West’ comparative philosophy is in principle no different from ‘comparative’ philosophizing within a single tradition” (1987, p. 2). Therefore, I further argue that “comparative philosophy” in a general sense can be viewed

as a name for philosophy with a peculiar emphasis on its engaging in making comparisons.⁸ The legitimacy of the current *de facto* sub-discipline of comparative philosophy is not justified by appealing to an exclusive philosophical method of comparison.⁹ Consequently, as Parkes points out, the ultimate “criteria for the success” of “comparative philosophy” or non-comparative philosophy—“those pertaining to a discussion of a single philosopher”—are no different (*ibid.*, pp. 4–5). In fact, Weber’s meta-methodological “analytical tool” of a standard comparison is more generally applicable. Here I would like to employ it for a trial. For instance, a typical syllogism as below can potentially be translated into a comparison in terms of Weber’s “analytical tool” with its five variables in standard conceptualization:

Syllogism: “All human beings must die. Socrates is a human being. Therefore Socrates must die.”

- (1) the comparer: someone who states this syllogism
- (2) the comparata: “Socrates,” “Human beings”
- (3) the “pre-comparative” tertium: optionally, creatures (in contrast to the idea of “Creator”)
- (4) the tertium comparationis: mortality
- (5) the result of the comparison: Socrates must die like all other human beings

There may be various ways of “distorting” Weber’s “analytical tool” of comparison—for instance, we can translate the logical form “Either A or B. Not A. Then B” into a standard comparison in terms of Weber’s “analytical tool” with its five variables: the comparer—who states the argument; the comparata—A, B; the pre-comparative tertium—alternative possibility; the tertium comparationis—actuality; the result of the comparison—the alternative option B is actual.¹⁰ But the trial above is not textually ungrounded. Weber (2014, pp. 155–156) does recognize that there are “many different ways of conceptualizing the tertium comparationis” or “conceiving commonality,” since “the tertium comparationis may be related to comparata as a whole is to its parts, a substance to its accidents, an idea to its instances, or a generic concept to its subsumed concepts, and so on.” Hence, the syllogism cited above can be well understood as a comparison between the connotations of two concepts, or in Weber’s terms a comparison with its “tertium comparationis . . . related to comparata as . . . a generic concept to its subsumed concepts.” The acceptance of Weber’s “many different ways of conceptualizing the tertium comparationis”—the crucial factor in his “analytical tool” of comparison—thus might lead to many non-typical comparative studies.

Weber’s meta-methodological analytical tool has undermined the current dominant yet “unwarranted” cultural approach of comparative philosophy, but its potentially unbridled use might eventually cancel out the very idea of “comparison” as well, and finally result in eliminating the justification of the very need of an analytical tool for such a peculiar sub-discipline as comparative philosophy. After all, the general applicability of the “analytical tool” of a standard comparison designed by Weber shows that “comparison” is the least strange tool of philosophizing routinely

used by philosophers (as long as they still use syllogism). It is hard to establish any philosophical theory without making a “comparison.”

Here I want to draw attention to two more characteristics of Weber’s five variables: the plurality of “the comparata” and a possible implication of “the pre-comparative tertium”: (A) The term “comparata” seems to suggest the plurality of things being compared. For example, Weber’s own conceiving of “comparata” in his various examples often gives such an impression.¹¹ However, in some comparisons there might not be multiple things as “comparata.” One needs to keep in mind that Weber’s “at least two relata (comparata)” (Weber 2013, p. 595) can be unified in the same thing.¹² (B) The terms “pre-comparative tertium” and “tertium” both incline to the meaning of “commonality.” Particularly the notion of the “pre-comparative tertium” as the determination of the comparata seems always to come out as a certain “commonality” in Weber’s usage. A meaningful and valuable comparison often rests not in the “commonality” but rather in the difference of the “comparata.” Although Weber’s analytical tool of comparison does not prevent a comparison from seeking for the valuable difference, I still think that neutralizing the potential implicative inclination of the terms from the very beginning is not merely a trivial task when it comes to coining any new conceptual tools.

Point 2. By analogy to scientific research, I argue from a pragmatic perspective that intercultural comparison should be viewed as data analysis to achieve better explanatory power. In his study of scientific inquiry, Hempel emphasizes that

scientific knowledge . . . is not arrived at by applying some inductive inference procedure to antecedently collected data, but rather by what is often called “the method of hypothesis.” . . . [S]cientific inquiry is certainly not inductive in the narrow sense . . . [but] inductive in a wider sense, inasmuch as it involves the acceptance of hypotheses on the basis of data that afford no deductively conclusive evidence for it, but lend it only more or less strong “inductive support,” or confirmation. (Hempel 1966, pp. 17–18)

A classical argument offered by Moses Mendelssohn on “knowledge of truth” is illuminating here. Mendelssohn ([1785] 2011, pp. 11–15) agrees that philosophers often make universal claims by means of “incomplete induction,” but he thinks the universality is to be understood as “doubt-free certainty” that is based on the increasingly “convincing power of the probability” rather than on indubitable rational knowledge from “complete induction.” The universal agreement of many people allows the inference of a common ground. To draw a parallel, intercultural comparison is a practical and efficient way of reaching agreement among different people and increases “convincing power.” Thus, comparative philosophy as de facto “intercultural philosophy” is meaningful and also necessary. It sufficiently justifies its historical legitimacy by functioning as a transcultural communication or dialogue in the age of globalization. My methodological reflection on comparative philosophy is not based on a reductionist perspective by questioning what are the elements that make a standard comparison, nor on a Whig historical point of review to challenge the validity of this de facto sub-discipline functioning as intercultural philosophy and its “unwarranted” cultural approach.¹³ As argued in point one, comparison is a basic

function of philosophizing. Thus, in a sense, no philosopher is not doing “comparative” philosophy. The establishment of comparative philosophy (as indeed a de facto “intercultural philosophy”) can be better understood from the angles below.

Angle A. Intercultural comparison first of all enriches the data pool of philosophers. For centuries, many philosophers have been striving to transform philosophy into a more science-like discipline. A better scientific explanation often needs more empirical data while better sociological research often demands more statistical samples. To draw a parallel here, the ambition of transforming philosophy into a more science-like discipline must lie not only in the creation of an artificial and accurate philosophical language or in the imitation of a certain scientific method (experiment/observation/verification/falsification)—both of which have been well developed by the analytical tradition—but must also lie in a thorough analysis of the enormous existing philosophical material, or by analogy “philosophical data,”¹⁴ from different spatiotemporal origins. The latter is the destiny of comparative philosophy, which has hitherto been functioning to a large degree as a de facto inter-/transcultural study of philosophy. It is due not so much to an innovation of its philosophical method as to the need for a collective effort in carrying out a sufficient analysis of the enormous philosophical material or “philosophical data” from different spatiotemporal origins.

“Culture” offers such a workable frame in terms of different spatiotemporal origins. There is no need to assert the problematic postulate that the culturally comparable is related to the philosophically comparable. One can still assume that there might be a causal relation between culture and philosophy. But culture here offers merely a framework for starting the processing of the enormous “data.” Graham Parkes’ methodological reflection on comparative philosophy allows another perspective for defending the use of “culture” as a “‘pre-comparative’ tertium” against Weber’s accusation of it being a suspicious “unwarranted assumption” and a troublemaker that needs to be criticized (or perhaps even purged) with the help of his “analytical tool” of comparison.

Following the argument that comparative philosophy is not essentially distinguished by an exclusive philosophical method of making comparisons, which is a general characteristic of critical thinking, for Parkes the ultimate criteria for success in so-called comparative philosophy or non-comparative philosophy alike lies in one question: “does the study enhance our understanding of the philosopher’s thought, of the problems engaged by it—and of ourselves and the world?” (1987, pp. 4–5). Thus, insofar as (1) “comparative philosophy being generally more enlightening between unconnected philosophies” (ibid., p. 1)¹⁵ and (2) different cultures usually do not fail to provide, and often excel in offering, “unconnected philosophies” or “cases where there is relatively little influence, or where the thinkers are in different but overlapping disciplines . . . a thorough comparison of the similarities and divergences between the two conceptions can serve to hone our understanding of both philosophical psychologies” (ibid., p. 3), then, using culture as a “‘pre-comparative’ tertium” in comparative philosophy naturally comes to prominence.

Comparative philosophy as a thorough analysis of philosophical material will prevent ignorance in the name of being methodologically correct. However, this

prudent attitude of comparative philosophy does not mean to advocate the equal importance of each material or origin. Rather, it only calls for equality insofar as each source of philosophical “data” deserves to be analyzed, and it is necessary to process as much “data” as possible. It is not at odds with the effort of seeking “universality,” either.¹⁶ The emphasis on the otherness or the different traditions, origins, or sources of philosophical material or philosophical “data” by analogy is deemed a preparation and condition of achieving a better explanatory power. Moreover, data analysis is also compatible with both interpretative (hermeneutical) and creative reading. Competing analyses and rival engagements of the same group of “data” are expected. There is no single “method” of processing the “data.” How to properly conduct the analysis is a crucial issue in further methodological reflections, but not the task of the present article.

Angle B. “Comparative philosophy” as a transcultural communication or dialogue is necessary in the age of globalization. The historical fact that the cultural approach is the dominant methodology of comparative philosophy is not a mere coincidence. The map of cultural diversity is a dynamic image. Given the progress of globalization, the boundaries between cultures become more and more obscure and subtle. There is no longer the “Central Kingdom” 中国¹⁷ on earth, which had defended its clear boundary with a material or a cultural “Great Wall.” It is futile to do so; neither just because we now know the fact that our earth is a globe and that any point on the surface of a globe can be treated as a center that negates the idea of “the center,” nor because modern wars are no more characterized by cold weapons and horses. Besides, no country will be an intact zone and there will be no “inclusionary exclusion” (since everyone is included) in the process of globalization, and when the whole world faces such ubiquitous crises as climate change.

At present, Kwee’s proposal from the 1950s of “a world philosophy,” necessarily “a philosophy of life,” is more possible insofar as the modern life of human beings converges into similar paths and is shaped by common challenges in our age. The ideal of a world philosophy, if it is going to be meaningful and persuasive to all people, must be a philosophy of the world. The philosophy of the world is possible only insofar as it is generated via a thorough analysis of the enormous pools of philosophical material from different spatiotemporal origins. This makes a “world philosophy” an ongoing dynamic project of thinking open to changes rather than a static body of doctrines. Weber (2013, p. 594) notices that “comparative studies in general emerged in the nineteenth century in a world marked by colonialism,” and “comparative philosophy as an academic endeavor is also and in many regards an outcome of colonialism.” Here I suggest considering colonialism as a prelude (despite its unpleasantness) that inaugurated the ongoing process of globalization (in many regards not pleasant either) and reflecting on “colonialism” in the general context of transcultural communication.

Comparative philosophy as intercultural philosophy is still fulfilling its historical role in processing philosophical material from different spatiotemporal origins. It depends on “culture” for a workable framework to initiate the process. Comparative philosophy as intercultural philosophy might assume a symmetry between culture

and philosophy but need not assert any causal connection between them, even if it could turn out after all, when a full grasp of the philosophical “data” from various different spatiotemporal origins has been reached, that there is indeed such a connection. It is imaginable that comparative philosophy as intercultural philosophy will be gone if the cultural diversity is too weak, or when a common world philosophy comes onto the scene.¹⁸ But before that happens, there is still a long way to go.

III. Chinese-Western Comparative Philosophy and Philosophy in China

Ironically, a typical institutionalized Western philosopher can still claim to know nothing about Chinese philosophy even as a modest gesture, while a Chinese counterpart would suffer serious damage in her/his qualification for claiming to know nothing about Western philosophy. Chinese-Western comparison, as a common species of the current comparative philosophy as intercultural philosophy, has its own special methodological predicament—I call it the role predicament, which I will explain below.

Roger Ames and David Hall, in their breakthrough work *Thinking Through Confucius*, point out (1987, p. 313) an interesting phenomenon in the context of a then fresh proposal of “third-wave Confucianism” by Tu Wei-ming: “This is a clear irony in the fact that the recent renewed interest in Confucius is so little a Chinese and so much a Western concern.” According to them, this Chinese-Western comparative study is almost a Western-based scenario with little participation from China¹⁹—“Those who are advocates of Confucianism [in China] seem to have little or no interest in Western philosophy and frequently regard Confucianism as a bulwark serving to protect Chinese culture from unwanted foreign influences.” One of the principal concerns in their icebreaking effort “has been to provide the basis for comparative philosophical discussion of the Confucian sensibility, with regard to both a selection of classical Western thinkers and certain contemporary Western philosophers as well.” I assume that not merely the Western study of Confucianism but still other schools might also meet a similar situation.

Ames and Hall’s observation in the late 1980s is certainly true from their standpoint. But the lack of participation from Chinese philosophers in a Western-proposed Chinese-Western comparison such as “third-wave Confucianism” does not at all justify the lack of Chinese-Western comparative philosophy in China. Here lies what I call the role predicament of comparative philosophy (particularly Chinese-Western comparison) in China. “Philosophy” as a discipline imported from the West, from a Chinese perspective, has always had embedded an “innate” West-East (particularly, Western-Chinese) comparative dimension. In a sense, philosophy as a discipline in China has largely functioned since its genesis, even without self-awareness or self-assertion, as “comparative” philosophy, insofar as it deals with “data analysis” from intercultural sources.

This “innate” Western-Chinese comparative dimension has had a remarkable impact on the birth and development of a narrative of “Chinese philosophy” carried out by scholars like Feng Youlan and Hu Shi since the 1930s, and also on the New

Confucianism movement in the 1940s, which aimed to “understand Western Culture [and] . . . digest, transform, utilize and reform it for the sake of forging new Confucian thinking and new national culture” (He 1947, pp. 3–4).²⁰ The ongoing continuous introduction of Western philosophical texts and research via translation on a massive scale for more than a century not only matches up the terminologies between Chinese and Western languages or reconstructs massive new locutions and categories in the former, but also has completely shaken the entrenched assumption of tradition and significantly shaped Chinese contemporary thinking and social reality. The whole scenario resembles the early transmission of Buddhism in the Wei-Jin period (220–420 C.E.) via the scholarship of “matching the meaning or concepts” (*geyi* 格義), but in many aspects surpasses it (e.g., in its scale and in its wide and deep influence). In this ongoing “localization” of Western philosophy via translation lies essentially the inevitable perspective of West-Chinese comparison.²¹ The current “world picture” of China now is a hybrid of the West and the previous Chinese, either in the name of modernization or in that of the “Chinese Dream.”

This “innate” Western-Chinese comparative dimension is more convincing when viewed from an individual’s standpoint. For a contemporary Chinese philosopher, it is almost impossible in reality to refuse the Chinese-Western comparison or to separate the two major sources of thinking in their work. Besides the reason I have argued, that is, the innate comparative dimension in the establishment of philosophy as a discipline in China, there is another decisive factor having to do with philosophical education. A typical Chinese philosophy department consists of at least two main branches: Western Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy. Correspondingly, the modules for philosophy students are often equally divided.²²

Thus, it is not a surprise when one finds in Chung-ying Cheng’s introduction to the prominent contemporary Chinese philosophers (Cheng and Bunnin 2002, pp. 349–363) that an expert in Western philosophy often comes back to draw inspiration from Chinese thought, and an established scholar in Chinese philosophy constantly refers to Western philosophers.²³ Again, it is not unusual to find that philosophers in Chinese universities can, for instance, be professors of Wittgensteinian philosophy who also write academic monographs on the Daoist Zhuangzi.²⁴

This places Chinese-Western comparative philosophy or intercultural philosophy in a role predicament. There is no need to put special stress on “Chinese-Western comparison” or establish as a sub-discipline “intercultural philosophy,” since these notions are in a sense redundant. It is not unfair to say that philosophy in China might be closer to the destiny of comparative philosophy as I proposed in Section II.

To conclude this article, my understanding of the goal of comparative philosophy as a discipline is: a thorough analysis of the philosophical material from various spatiotemporal origins, with an incorporation of the collective effort of participants from different corners of the world. Inspired by the methodological debates of the 1950s,²⁵ I want to further suggest two priorities in the task of comparative philosophy: (1) to identify common problems or the commensurability of different philosophical issues, and (2) to seek for pluralistic solutions, or the possibility of the

diversity of solutions. Therefore, my understanding of a meaningful and valuable comparative study of philosophy has the following characteristics:

1. It has meaningful “comparata” that help to identify the common issues, for example the basic problems of humanity or the fundamental questions of philosophical pursuit—without, however, a need to generate a paradigm of comparison that must meet certain standards.

2. It has the capacity to offer various possible solutions or approaches to the common issues. A negation of a commonality sometimes is more profound than the confirmation of a commonality. The incommensurability of different solutions is more insightful than its universality. In this possible different solution, the different way of thinking or the different philosophical method/approach is most important.

3. It is regarded as a philosophical experiment. If we understand comparative philosophy as a thorough analysis of data from different spatiotemporal origins, then each case study or each comparison can be deemed a philosophical experiment. One might embark on comparative philosophy projects with the purpose of seeking diverse solutions or approaches to a certain common philosophical issue, but such quests are challenged when the philosophical issue presumed to be shared by the different cultural traditions might well turn out to be an intellectual chimera or a simple constructed “truth” via translation. The question becomes: what if the proposed philosophical problem is not even conceptualized in the other tradition? The idea of “a comparative philosophical experiment” is immune to the above-mentioned challenge. It creates a “test tube” and adds into the different thinking materials with certain unverified affinity so that trans-spatiotemporal intellectual reaction or conversation can be observed in a determined context or framework. Not all philosophical experiments will generate a “Copernican revolution” in philosophy,²⁶ as did Kant’s *Critique*, but even an experiment that results in a dead end is also meaningful insofar as it advances the research by negating a certain possibility.

Notes

1 – In the same journal issue, John Dewey (1951, p. 3) questions the validity of the dichotomy that “there is such a thing as a ‘West’ and ‘East’ that have to be synthesized.” Dewey adapts William James’ notion “that there are no ‘cultural block universes’,” that could help us to rethink the “East and West” cultural division and keep open the idea of exploring the “specific philosophical relationships” between West and East. George Santayana (1951, p. 5) claims that the synthesis between Eastern and Western Philosophy “could only be reached by blurring or emptying both systems in what was clear and distinct in their results.”

2 – They argue (ibid., p. 8) that “Comparative philosophy can furnish to each nation or people resources that others conceived, the knowledge of which can be humanizing.”

- 3 – “Such a methodic evaluation—and in a certain sense a re-evaluation—of the complete philosophical heritage of both East and West is the way of comparative philosophy.” “The way to a real understanding is a long and hard one, surpassing by far the capacities of any single investigator.”
- 4 – Weber’s use of the term “intercultural” and Moore’s preference “transcultural” are not essentially different. Both refer to interaction among multiple cultures. Another synonym is “cross-culture.” Therefore, in my argument I am using the terms interchangeably.
- 5 – It can be understood as a kind of “two-edged sword.” Weber (2013, p. 601) thinks that “the same factors that allow scholars of these cultures to claim a niche for themselves within philosophy can be and are used by others to (dis)qualify that area of scholarship as being about something other than philosophy proper.”
- 6 – Weber (2014, p. 162) defines the “tertium comparationis as the respect in which determined comparata are compared” and the “‘pre-comparative’ tertium” as “which is at work in the setting up of the comparison.”
- 7 – I use “comparative philosophy” (with quotation marks) and comparative philosophy (without quotation marks) in different senses. The former, properly understood, is a name of philosophy with a peculiar emphasis on its engaging in making comparison. The latter is the sub-discipline of philosophy *de facto*, which to a large extent functions as “intercultural” or “transcultural” philosophy.
- 8 – It is like when we call a person A, in different circumstances with distinct specific emphasis, B = Lecturer, C = Wife, D = Customer, E = Cyclist, etc.
- 9 – Comparative study between British Empiricism and German Rationalism has been a traditional and perennial theme in Western philosophy but not classified as “comparative philosophy.” East-West comparison such as between ancient Chinese and Greek political thought is typical “comparative philosophy,” while contemporary Chinese and Greek political thought might not be qualified as “comparative (political) philosophy.” This is a good example of how comparative philosophy is not called so, due to its philosophical methodology of comparison/doing comparison.
- 10 – Here are two concrete cases. (1) “Tomato is either green or red. Tomato is not green. Then Tomato is red.” The comparer—who states the argument; the comparata—two situations, green or red, B; the pre-comparative tertium—type of fruit; the tertium comparationis—color; the result of the comparison—red is the color of the Tomato. (2) “Either I have died since yesterday, or Dinosaurs are still alive. Dinosaurs are not still alive. Then I have died since yesterday.” The comparer—who states the argument; the comparata—two hypotheses; the pre-comparative tertium—hypotheses; the tertium comparationis—the actual-

ity of the hypotheses; the result of the comparison—the hypothesis “I have died since yesterday” is actual.

- 11 – “Comparata: Kant, Mou” (Weber, 2013, p. 600), “Mengzi and the Xunzi as two comparata,” “In most comparisons (say, between two horses, two texts, twenty authors, or three different cultures)” (Weber 2014, p. 163).
- 12 – For example, in the study of the process of radioactive decay of a nucleus, comparison is constantly made between different phases of the same thing. Again, a comparison can be made in the process of the negation of, or in a state of the non-presence of a single comparatus. Moreover, in some comparisons referring to introspective experience such as certain mental states and consciousness, the comparison consists in the action of realization/awareness where the lines between the compared are subtle and hardly chronologically clear-cut. A vivid example can be drawn from the proposition “I think therefore I am.” It illustrates a mental state in which I realize my very existence to be in doubt. The “comparata” lie in the same action of doubting—the moment of doubting is the moment of realizing. The realization constitutes a comparison, despite the fact that the compared are hardly two things, but rather represent awareness of the same mental state from different angles, that is, not two mental states in a clear-cut chronological order. The comparison here concerns our subjective perspectives rather than the objective thing or things.
- 13 – The benefits of these kinds of questions are limited. It is easy to sink into a regression and become tangled with endless arguments for its self-legitimacy.
- 14 – The term “philosophical data,” perhaps with certain reminiscence of Marcel Granet’s “traditional data” or “historic data” in his *Chinese Civilization* (1958), is used as an analogy to emphasize another theoretical destiny of my methodological reflection, namely focusing on philosophical material besides eliminating the problem of comparative philosophy that is intertwined with “culture.” The reason I place emphasis on philosophical material or “philosophical data” from different spatiotemporal organs is to call for a shift in current comparative philosophy from the typological style (as seen in Rosán’s proposal of the main themes of comparative philosophy—“Naturalism,” “Moralism,” and “Idealism”), which is essentially problem-oriented. This is not to say that emphasis on philosophical material, or “philosophical data,” does not allow “philosophical questions/questioning,” but merely that before we assume there is a certain common problem that lies in different “philosophical data” and use this assumption to define the choice/selection of the “philosophical data,” we need, to some extent, to be more “innocent”/ indifferent. We compare two groups of “philosophical data” because they are not yet processed, and during the course of the processing we might identify similar patterns or similar problems. It is like a scientific experiment: we set up certain conditions and observe the phenomena, although it is true that scientific research has to have certain

pre-research assumptions/questions, and the final finding could overthrow everything.

- 15 – He again emphasizes, “this last contention, and my initial claim,” is “that comparative philosophy is more fruitful between unconnected philosophies” (Parkes, 1987, p. 2).
- 16 – Found either in the ancient Greek legacy of idealizing “a single reality” or in the Chinese idealizing of the “Dao,” universality as a shared notion is not so controversial. From a hermeneutic perspective, diversity is drawn neither from the sui generis multidimensions of reality nor the incommensurable subjects, but from the specific context—a relational and dynamic notion, namely an accessible reality that is meaningful from an interior and spatiotemporally embedded perspective. Therefore, diversity comes from the unique relation between a presumed “universal external reality” and the concretized perceiver-interpreter in a given spatiotemporal context. Each specific “term” is univocal in its concrete context while evolutionary when the context itself is regarded as a changeable continuum. It is also necessary for fulfilling the function of the hermeneutic mechanism in the process of the aggregation of knowledge. The problem is that Western universalism endows a wrong status of actuality to the universal.
- 17 – The literal meaning of the Chinese characters 中国.
- 18 – To draw a comparison: there was indeed a symmetry between culture in general and economy in ancient Greece and China. However, now it is hard to establish a “comparative Economics” as a sub-discipline by adopting the cultural framework in a world where most current economic systems are capitalist in orientation. Even though comparisons between different economies are constantly made, it is not under a cultural framework. Comparison between the Anglo-American Economy and the East Asian Economy does not sound as appealing to economists as to philosophers.
- 19 – “Interpreters of Confucius such as Herbert Fingarette, Tu Wei-ming, and the authors of this work are based in American universities. Most important, neither in the People’s Republic nor in the Republic of China is there widespread evidence of the desire to engage the Anglo-European philosophic scene by appeal to the Confucian sensibility” (Ames and Hall 1987, p. 313).
- 20 – He Lin writes in his essay “On the New Development of Confucianism” (1947), “If we can understand Western Culture, then naturally we can digest, transform, utilize, and reform it for the sake of forging a new Confucian thinking and a new national culture. The New development of Confucianism cannot be based on a rejection of Western culture, but based on a full grasp of Western culture” (my translation).
- 21 – Chung-ying Cheng (Cheng and Bunnin 2002, p. 354) describes this process:

They learned Western philosophy and the method of analysis and used these to reconstruct the Chinese philosophical tradition. Since the beginning of the twentieth century,

Western philosophy was absorbed in China faster than Chinese philosophy was studied in the West. . . . These Chinese philosophers tried to catch up with the current trends in Western philosophy. . . . The Western philosophical works that were studied in modern China transformed the language of Chinese philosophy and helped to reveal the insights of traditional Chinese philosophy.

- 22 – There used to be a satirical saying that philosophy equates to three characters: 中西马 *Zhong-xi-ma*, which literally reads “Chinese-Western-Horse,” sounding like a hybrid horse. It refers to the typical tripartite philosophy modules: Chinese Philosophy, Western Philosophy, and Marxism.
- 23 – See Chung-ying Cheng’s comment on Ye Xiushan’s research.
- 24 – Refer to the works of Professor Han Linhe of Peking University.
- 25 – In particular Moore’s insightful idea of comparative philosophy as a progressive/dynamic investigation of the multiplicity of philosophical problems with pluralistic methods, and Kwee’s understanding of comparative philosophy as “a multiple and integral approach to the common issues of philosophy.”
- 26 – This metaphor is common, but not accurate. In the preface to the second edition of the *CPR*, Kant himself only refers to his critical philosophy, a philosophical “experiment in metaphysics,” as in the same kind of historical situation as that of Copernicus’ revolution in science (*CPR*, Bxvi–Bxvii). However, Kant indeed had already been deemed “a man who has reformed philosophy and thereby reformed all other sciences as well” by some of his contemporaries (Correspondence, 11:15).

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Reply to Xiao Ouyang

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The recent upsurge of interest in discussions of methodology in comparative philosophy illustrates an increasing professionalization in the discipline. Only rarely do we see today the sort of general overview with rough and ready juxtaposition of different