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Methodological aspects of comparative studies: the context of Chinese philosophy

Abstract
Methodological aspects of comparative studies: the context of Chinese philosophy

The claim that contemporary philosophy must be multicultural to be taken seriously may appear somewhat controversial. Nevertheless, the need to reevaluate classical Anglo-European philosophy in the context of the emerging contemporary philosophical canon is of great importance for a full understanding of the discipline today. Vital issues in philosophy cannot be addressed without recourse to conventions of intercultural philosophy. Comparative philosophy is among the most fruitful disciplines on a global scale. But to extend the philosophical curriculum, a new kind of discourse must allow for the accessible introduction of new ideas. This article presents an analysis of scholarly works on Chinese cultural works in literal and metaphorical translation/transmission for Western readers that have been undertaken by David Hall, Roger Ames and François Jullien, and will address the problematical nature of research within comparative studies in philosophy.

Keywords: comparative philosophy, methods, Chinese philosophy, comparison

Comparative studies as a discipline grew initially from the recognizing the need of European cultural resources to interact with geographically broad-ranging civilizations, their languages, literatures, and cultures to fully engage in appropriate discourses[1]. "Comparative studies were originally constituted […] as a modern methodology, epistemology, and ontology", writes Edward Kasperski[2], who links this description with scholarly and interpretative practice, not to a purely theoretical approach to the discipline. A comparative scholar explores the historical heritage of civilizations beyond Europe:

In the axiological sphere, a comparative orientation provided an alternative to various "centrisms" (such as ethnocentrism, Eurocentrism, polonocentrism, etc.) that sanctioned a one-sided, asymmetrical […] view of others, as well as their customs and achievements[3].

[1] See comments on this subject in Edward Kasperski, "U podstaw komparatystyki", in: *Komparatystyka dla humanistów*, ed. by Mieczysław Dąbrowski, (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2011), 30.
[2] Kasperski, "U podstaw komparatystyki", 23.
[3] Kasperski, "U podstaw komparatystyki", 23.

Comparative philosophy can be defined in the most basic sense as a form of investigation conducted within a multicultural platform, encompassing many different philosophical traditions. An essential objective for comparative philosophers is to acquire and disseminate thorough knowledge of those philosophical traditions and in doing so to contribute to proper understanding of them. The past decade has seen an increase in the popularity of ethnophilosophy, understood as the study of "ethnic philosophies", proper to various peoples and communities, including oral cultures[4]. These intellectual systems are approached without any general universalizing preconceptions about the particularity of the "Orient", the special character of "Asian peoples", or attitudes of denizens of the "Far East"[5]. When referring to "in-depth knowledge" and "proper understanding", the objective is a form of pragmatic action taken to allow an audience to penetrate a foreign society's cultural codes. As noted by Poolla Tirupati Raju, a founding father of comparative philosophy, if philosophy is to be useful for life, so should comparative philosophy; if philosophy gives man center stage, comparative philosophy should do the same. The point is to take a holistic view of man, including all aspects of human existence[6].

A principal question posed by scholars in comparative philosophy about Chinese culture is: how can we draw from this tradition on its own terms? How can we rid ourselves of culturally shaped expectations of texts from a supposedly "exotic" culture, if at all, and avoid foisting meanings on them that are completely foreign to their individual cultural context? These scholars consider it a challenge to study and describe Chinese traditions without the aid of tools created independently of its purview (which may play an auxiliary role). What criteria must be met, then, to facilitate not only

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4 The discipline first focused on the heritage of African culture and then expanded to study the thought of the oral (illiterate) and folk (literate) cultures of Southeast Asia, Oceania, Latin America, Siberia, North American Indians, Inuits, etc. See: Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, "Ethnophilosophy, Comparative Philosophy, Pragmatism: Toward a Philosophy of Ethnoscapes", [in:] *Philosophy East and West* 56 (1) (2006) (January),; entry: "Ethnophilosophy" (online http://www.ptta.pl/pef/pdf/e/etnofilozofia.pdf, last accessed: 12 August 2018).

5 This is evident in publication titles. In the 1940s, one of the most influential books was a monograph by Filmer Stuart Cuckow Northrop, *The Meeting of East and West* (New York: The MacMillan Co. 1946). In the 1960s, a slew of new monographs focused on detailed studies of individual cultures and their mindsets, e.g. The *Chinese Mind: Essentials of Chinese Philosophy and Culture*, ed. by Charles Moore (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1967); William B. Johnson, *The Austrian Mind: An Intellectual and Social History 1848-1938*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972); *The Japanese Mind: Essentials of Japanese Philosophy and Culture*, ed. by Charles Moore, Moore (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1968); Wal-dal Yang, *Korean Ways, Korean Mind* (Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi: Tamgu Dang, 1982). Among the best known is Hajime Nakamura, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples India-China-Tibet-Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1964).

6 Poolla Tirupati Raju, *East and West in Philosophy*, (Jaipur: University of Rajasthan 1955), 4. There exist at least two different approaches to philosophy. One treats it as a theoretical endeavor, the other as practical wisdom; examples of the latter are often referred to as a philosophy of life. It is difficult to resist the impression that comparative philosophy as practiced by Indian and Chinese scholars tends to be closer to life and man, while Western comparative philosophy rests on a more elaborate theoretical foundation.

a "constructive intercultural engagement"[7], as Bo Mou puts it, but an actual global philosophy; how may we enable a polylogue – that is, a debate among the largest possible number of philosophical traditions?[8]

The methodological underpinnings of comparative philosophy were first formulated by Paul Masson-Oursel[9]. An important tool Masson-Oursel proposed for the comparison of different philosophical traditions was the principle of analogy, which he defines as:

> the relations of equivalence between ideas, notions, concepts and mindsets that have emerged over the centuries in the philosophical traditions of geographically, politically, and linguistically isolated cultures: the European, the Indian, and the Chinese[10].

It would be difficult to accept objectives set by the first methodologists before comparative scholars as still relevant for contemporary researchers, however, since those early paradigms tend to situate the scholar/subject above and beyond the plane of comparison. A subject of this kind should be viewed as transcultural[11], that is, as transcending all cultural determinants placed "in between" cultures. Many contemporary scholars actually see themselves as thoroughly immersed in a concrete, tangible world that molds their subjective perceptions; according to this view, the role of comparative philosophers should also involve recognition of their own tools and predilections. At this juncture, attention must be drawn to precepts advocated by Daya Krishna, who takes a dim view of the project of comparing two cultures with the aid of categories and methods developed predominantly within one of the two, in this case, the culture of the West. Daya Krishna identifies a set of features that, to his mind, should characterize the comparative method. It should be based on a contrastive approach that: (a) highlights differences in the selection of philosophical problems and the way in which individual philosophical traditions define them; (b) emphasizes the diversity of solutions to the same philosophical problems offered by systems developed in disparate historical and cultural circumstances; (c) calls for representatives of the traditions in question to recognize the existence of radically distinct, foreign standards of thinking and alternative ways to conceptualize

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7 The term "constructive engagement" comes from: *Davidson's Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy. Constructive Engagement*, ed. by Bo Mou, (Boston: Brill 2006). In the chapter "Constructive Engagement of Chinese and Western Philosophy: A Contemporary Trend Toward World Philosophy", included in *History of Chinese Philosophy*, Bo Mou provides a detailed list of indicators of "constructive engagement" as a research trend, which has become a large-scale movement for universal philosophy. See: *History of Chinese Philosophy,* ed. by Bo Mou, (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

8 See: R. A. Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*, New York 2000, and F. M. Wimmer, "Tezy, warunki i zadania filozofii o orientacji interkulturowej", trans. by J. Stuchlik, in: *Kwartalnik Filozoficzny* 1 (28) (2000), 167–178. Quoted after Marzenna Jakubczak, "Komparatystyka na gruncie filozofii. Założenia, uprzedzenia i perspektywy", *Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej* 58 (2013).

9 Paul Masson-Oursel, *La Philosophie Comparée* (Paris: Alcan, 1923).

10 Jakubczak, "Komparatystyka na gruncie filozofii. Założenia, uprzedzenia i perspektywy", 344.

11 As a term referring to philosophical ideas, "transcultural" often appears in the context of authors who draw both from Western and from Chinese culture, such as the philosopher and writer Lin Yutang: R. J. Ricci, "Towards a Psychobiographical Study of Lin Yutang", University of Adelaide 2013 (manuscript of a PhD dissertation).

reality, which, in practice, should lead to at least partial emancipation from limitations set by their own historical and cultural contexts[12].

Interpretation and analysis should thus be undertaken across boundaries[13]. As our knowledge advances, so should our awareness of the position from which we departed and of questions we have asked along the way (and why we chose these over others).

About comparison

Does comparative analysis really need to start from a comparison? If comparative scholarship necessarily involves a thorough, factual consideration of premises adopted by the subject, as shaped by a specific culture and understanding of concepts they comes across, then any study of a foreign culture distinct from our own will be comparative by its very nature. Even if to compare and contrast is not the intended goal, one will automatically start from a ready-made, preconceived image of people and their place in the world. The cultural determinants behind ways in which we interpret reality have become so obvious and transparent to us that we either completely fail to perceive them, or confuse them for the principle of "reason"[14]. One comparative method that proves particularly fertile philosophically is to gradually raise our awareness of our prejudices[15], which tend to be subconscious. The challenge of confronting prejudices often proves both fruitful and beneficial.

Comparative philosophy consists of two components: "a comparison between philosophical traditions", and "a philosophy of comparison", with the latter is considered the more importance by a number of contemporary scholars (including Charles Moore, Roger Ames, Francois Jullien, Ralph Weber, Xianglong Zhang). Thorsten Botz-Bornstein remarks that comparative philosophy takes a special place among other comparative disciplines: just as a comparative perspective in religious studies does not turn them into a religion, comparative literature should not become literature in its own right. Comparative approaches to the two disciplines come down to a science of religion or a science of literature; in a similar vein, the goal of comparative philosophy is to engage in philosophy, an intimate process of philosophizing[16]. It should be made clear, however, that what makes this process rather particular is that it is triggered by a comparative perspective. Marzenna Jakubczak underscores this point by noting

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[12] Daya Krishna, "Comparative Philosophy: What It Is and What It Ought to Be", in: Geral James Larson and Eliot Deutsch (eds.), *Interpreting Across Boundaries: New Essays in Comparative Philosophy*, Delhi 1989, 72 ff.

[13] See. the title of Gerald James Larson and Eliot Deutsch (eds.), *Interpreting Across Boundaries: New Essays in Comparative Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1989).

[14] See: François Jullien, *Detour and Access: Strategies of Meaning in Greece* (New York: Zone Books, 2000), 9.

[15] Marzenna Jakubczak argues that focusing on the "foreign", or that with which we cannot identify, paradoxically contributes to our own deepened, critical self-identification; it allows us to acquire or complement our identity by getting to know ourselves in relation to the Other and by contrasting our own identity with that of another. Jakubczak, "Komparatystyka na gruncie filozofii. Założenia, uprzedzenia i perspektywy", 354.

[16] Botz-Bornstein, *Ethnophilosophy, Comparative Philosophy, Pragmatism: Toward a Philosophy of Ethnoscapes*, 157.

that "we practice comparative philosophy when we philosophize by comparing, or, that is, when we satisfy our philosophical aspirations in and through comparison"[17].

It makes sense to consider particular methods available to comparative scholars but also to engage, always with a comparative perspective in mind, in a (meta)analysis of conceptual categories with which we approach the study of other cultures, and the categories we encounter within the cultures in question. As Tadeusz Sławek observes:

> comparative thinking never stops at the "compared" phenomena; it also has an important self-referential dimension: a reflection on the structure of the subject, who makes the comparison, and, in doing so, ceases to be "invisible", unveils its own unfinished condition, uncovers the process by which subjectivity constitutes itself primarily in relation to that which is foreign, neighboring, and which it can never fully dominate[18].

Sławek thus suggests that the word "comparison" should be jettisoned in favor of "juxtaposition":

> When we consider thinking as a basically polemical activity, a "self-juxtaposition" leads to the healing of thought, but also to the healing of the self. To "self-juxtapose" means to "juxtapose" the self with oneself, with the self as one, the lone self, self-enclosed and complacent with oneself and the culture that constitutes the "self"[19].

The obviousness of comparison can be illusory and scholars are fairly quick to offer guidance in the form of various methodologies. It would be difficult to compare philosophical traditions without a sophisticated critical methodology on which to rely, just as a method of this kind is difficult to develop without adequate awareness of similarities and differences between philosophical traditions. More than fifty years have elapsed since Swan-liat Kwee first pointed out that any individual philosophical tradition should be studied in the context of its historical, social, and cultural determinants. His list of eight approaches typically employed by comparative philosophers – the philological, historical, comparative, formal-evaluative, psychological, phenomenological, sociological and anthropological, and a total-integrative approach – does not exhaust the variety of available methods[20].

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[17] Jakubczak, "Filozofia jako meta komparatystyka", in: *Komparatystyka na gruncie filozofii. Założenia, uprzedzenia i perspektywy*, 352.

[18] Tadeusz Sławek, "Literatura porównawcza: między lekturą, polityką i społeczeństwem", *Postscriptum* 2 –1 (48–49) (2004–2005): 61.

[19] Sławek, "Literatura porównawcza: między lekturą, polityką i społeczeństwem", 71.

[20] Swan-liat Kwee, "Methods of Comparative Philosophy", *Philosophy East and West* 1951 (April), vol. I, no. 1.

China as a model of the "Other"

How can the insights of comparative philosophy help a Western scholar studying a civilization as societally foreign as that of China?[21] An encounter with China serves as a model example of serious difficulties involved in any attempt to understand another civilization, since sources of Chinese tradition studied by comparative philosophers date back to eras long before contacts with the West. The self-referential mode must inform us from the start, from the moment we decide which definition of philosophy to use and whether it is also applicable to Chinese thought. The decision to describe Chinese thought as a "philosophy", first implemented by the Jesuits in the seventeenth century, is a controversial move that leads to certain methodological consequences and, in the longer term, requires reflection on what global philosophy is and how it should be defined. Chinese society draws from a completely different cultural context than that of the West. If we choose to speak of philosophy in its original sense, as the love of wisdom, a quest for knowledge, a systematic and critical consideration of basic problems and ideas to grasp and understand the totality of the world, then the word could indeed be applied to Chinese thought as well. However, if we opt for one of the narrower, culturally determined definitions of philosophy that specify its subject matter and fundamental concepts (truth, being, definition, rationality, etc.), it will be discovered that Chinese thought does not easily square with such formulations. Chinese philosophy oscillates around a number of concepts that are largely untranslatable and cannot be understood outside of their specific cultural context, such as *dao, de, li, wuwei, ru*, and so forth; it would be a fruitless exercise trying to find a precise definition of these terms in the teachings of Chinese sages.

Perhaps, following the suggestion of Maurycy Straszewski, we should instead treat the concepts of a foreign culture as elements of a separate "conceptual organism"[22], which can only become intelligible if we properly address their contextual meaning. Looking back to the origins of philosophy in China, we would thus first study the different schools – *jia* (e.g., *daojia*) and then of *zhexue*, the study of wisdom[23]. The Chinese

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[21] Nearly all contemporary literary theorists, especially those engaged in comparative studies, emphasize a close connection between a comparative study or reflection and the interpreter's individual, personal experience: "all that can be determined in comparative activity is enclosed in the chain of existence – text – interpretation" [(see: A. Hejmej, *Komparatystyka. Studia literackie – studia kulturowe*, Kraków: Universitas (2013)], 18) and underscore the importance of the scholar's identity.

[22] Straszewski, steeped in a nineteenth-century perspective, proposed a general division of human thought into three civilizations, which develop separately and, to an extent, in parallel, and which he takes to constitute separate conceptual organisms: the European, the Chinese, and the Indian (quoted after: Jakubczak, *Komparatystyka na gruncie filozofii. Założenia, uprzedzenia i perspektywy*, 349). Other tripartite divisions were proposed by various influential comparative scholars, including Paul Masson-Oursel (Masson-Oursel, *La Philosophie Comparée*,) and Poolla Tirupati Raju, who observed that these four are considered important philosophical traditions: Greek, Jewish, Chinese, and Indian. However, the Jewish tradition has become part of Western culture (*Introduction to Comparative Philosophy*, vii). See also Archie J. Bahm, *Comparative Philosophy: Western, Indian, and Chinese Philosophies Compared* (Albuquerque: World books 1977). Today such general classifications of philosophical traditions are being abandoned.

[23] I use this term with reference to that part of the text corpus associated with the masters (*zhuzi* 諸), along with texts of the Confucian canon, *Yijing*, from the fifth century BCE on into the nineteenth century.

"canon" was understood as a collection of sayings pronounced by ancient sages, which laid the foundations of Chinese civilization but also served as a source of inspiration for subsequent generations of thinkers, who often supplied their own commentaries[24]. If we recognize Chinese thought as among the world's most important philosophical traditions, we can study it with the use of philosophical tools that originated outside its tradition (e.g., available tools for textual analysis) and of those that we find inside it. It must be kept in mind, however, that our choice of analytical tools and methods will necessarily entail crucial methodological consequences. The underlying assumption is that the tools borrowed from another culture will aid in the discovery of something new in the tradition in question, to describe the conceptual framework of the Chinese cultural sphere and thus allow for the recognition of essentially intercultural differences in approaches to humans and their place in the world.

Hall and Ames observe that Chinese tradition has remained for so long on the sidelines of contemporary philosophical thought precisely because it does not fit the commonly accepted idea of what philosophy should do, despite the great variety of ways in which Western philosophy has conceived of its own elements. At the same time, they believe that Chinese tradition offers an abundance of methods, texts, ideas, and conceptions that could be viewed as philosophical in the strict sense[25]. For this reason, they propose that the current, rather narrow definition of philosophy should be expanded to fully appreciate the importance of Chinese thought, and thus foster a modicum of cross cultural understanding[26]. To be treated seriously, they argue, contemporary philosophy must be comparative – this postulation is a variation on a thesis by Paul Masson-Oursel in an article tellingly entitled "True Philosophy Is Comparative Philosophy"[27]. For philosophy to become comparative, it must, as a discipline, demonstrate its readiness to verify/question its definitions of what is important in the context of other cultures[28], because concepts that organize philosophical thinking in various traditions are incommensurable.

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[24] More on the subject: Carine Defoort, "Is There Such a Thing as Chinese Philosophy? Arguments of an Implicit Debate", *Philosophy East and West* 3 (51) (2001).

[25] See Roger T. Ames, David L. Hall, *Anticipating China: Thinking Through the Narratives of Chinese and Western Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

[26] Cross-cultural understanding is one of three levels of comparative methodology developed by Hall and Ames (the other two are historical and philological translation and critical reflection on the Western tradition). The authors discuss their method in Ames, Hall, *Anticipating China: Thinking Through the Narratives of Chinese and Western Culture*, David L. Hall, Roger T. Ames, *Thinking from the Han: Self, Truth and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), and elsewhere. A detailed discussion of the method can be found in the chapter "David Hall and Roger Ames: Comparative Philosophy as the Philosophy of Culture", in: Robert W. Smid, *Methodologies of Comparative Philosophy: The Pragmatist and Process Traditions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009). It would be worth pausing to consider which philosophy should be taken into account, since in the twentieth and especially in the twenty-first centuries, Chinese philosophy has largely leaned toward assimilation. The trend involves a move away from Chinese tradition and the adoption of Western philosophical methods and techniques, all under the banner of global philosophic conversation.

[27] Paul Masson-Oursel, "True Philosophy Is Comparative Philosophy", *Philosophy East and West* 1 (April 1951), 6–9.

[28] See: Robert W. Smid, *Methodologies of Comparative Philosophy*, 80.

With this in mind, a key task for Western comparative philosophers is to problematize Chinese thought's absence from the canon of philosophy that has cast itself as universal, then to help it take its rightful place in contemporary philosophical reflection.

Grading problems tackled within different philosophical traditions in terms of importance, however, does not fully account for the absence of Far Eastern texts from the Western philosophical canon. Equally relevant is their nature, perceived as impenetrable and unintelligible by Western philosophers. One task faced by scholars who go beyond purely philological analysis and attempt to arrive at universal conclusions regarding China is the need to dispel the "mystery" that surrounds Chinese culture and its texts assumed exotic nature. These authors attempt to decipher China, along with its accepted ways/methods of communication. By definition, this description only serves to expose problems relating to the meaning of foreign texts/messages/communications in the experience of an audience external to that culture: the Chinese, it stands to reason would not to be likely to describe themselves as exotic, unintelligible, or mysterious[29].

Mindsets

It is difficult to disagree with Anna Iwona Wójcik's observation that the veil of "mystery" that has a native participant in Chinese culture seem impenetrable in the European gaze "has to do with the fact that, as we study the texts of Confucian or Daoist philosophy, 'at the back of our minds,' we always have the semantic context of Western philosophy, which refers to a completely different basic interpretive model"[30]. It is not until "we study the patterns of reasoning employed by Chinese thinkers, and consider the broadest context in which, according to their own definition, their views should be placed, that a coherent and intelligible conceptual system is revealed. A system diametrically distinct from that of Plato or Aristotle, but equally clear and understandable"[31].

The theory of the relationship of language with perception and thought of Edward Sapir[32] and Benjamin Lee Whorf[33], along with Thomas Kuhn's observations about the impact of scientific theories on how we grasp and perceive the world, both suggest that people who hail from different civilizations will have very different outlooks on reality and extremely diverse perceptions. It is not that we perceive the "objective" world,

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[29] François Jullien points out that this reception stems from a misunderstanding, in "'He's Chinese,''It's All Chinese to Me'" (esp. 1–5); also see: Anna Iwona Wójcik, "Kosmos, czyli o tym, co jest najbardziej oczywiste", in: *Filozoficzne podstawy sztuki kręgu konfucjańskiego. Źródła klasyczne okresu przedhanowskiego* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2010).

[30] Wójcik, "Kosmos, czyli o tym, co jest najbardziej oczywiste", in: *Filozoficzne podstawy sztuki kręgu konfucjańskiego. Źródła klasyczne okresu przedhanowskiego*, 21.

[31] Wójcik, "Kosmos, czyli o tym, co jest najbardziej oczywiste", in: *Filozoficzne podstawy sztuki kręgu konfucjańskiego. Źródła klasyczne okresu przedhanowskiego*.

[32] "No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered to represent the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached". Edward Sapir, „The Status of Linguistics as a Science", *Language*, 5 (4) (1929): 207–214.

[33] See for example Benjamin Lee Whorf, "Language Mind and Reality", Theosophical Society in 1942 „The Theosophist", Madras, India. Vol. 63:1. 281–291; Benjamin Lee Whorf, „Four Articles on Metalinguistics", (Foreign Service Institute, Dept. of State, 1950).

the "naked" sensory data, the "facts", and then weave them together into a linguistic system – the reverse is true. Our language and perception depend upon culturally transmitted codes. Our knowledge is shaped by the worldview and the systems within which we were born and raised.

Scholars often consider whether any attempt to resist the temptation to reduce foreign texts to what our culture deems important[34], to explore a radically distinct cultural context or navigate cultural space between two incommensurable conceptual systems should or must involve the effort to modify the geography of thinking[35] etched into our minds by various social practices, as R. E. Nisbett claims. Roger Ames, when discussing the discovery of secrets hidden within another culture, refers to a looking glass. The looking-glass metaphor is not meant to imply one's finding one's own reflection in the other. Rather, the other's individual traits allow one to better understand one's own. In this sense, the ideal approach for Ames is to accept representatives of another culture exclusively on their terms. This would suggest a friendship that does not rely on resemblance: my friend is not another me, we are friends precisely because we are different. Ames recognizes the important differences in living and thinking that separate different cultures[36].

In *Detour and Access: Strategies of Meaning in China and Greece*, François Jullien explores the extent of cultural originality in the realm of "sense-making" and ponders ways of becoming a competent translator of "exotic" texts; he also analyzes several categories of Chinese philosophy (such as *dan*, *xing*), which are extremely important but essentially untranslatable, and thus are often overlooked by Western scholars. Particularly interesting is the motivation behind Jullien's study:

> China presents a case study through which to contemplate Western thought from the outside – and, in this way, to bring us out of our atavism… A theoretical distancing is desirable – and this is exactly what China offers. However, the other point of view that China offers is not immediately accessible and has to be constructed. I have attempted to construct a way to put China and Greece into perspective, on the level of discourse, rather than to trace a parallel between them, for I do not believe in the possibility of dividing the page in half with China on one side and Greece on the other. […] Strategies of meaning can only be understood from the inside, by following their internal logic[37].

What Jullien proposes, then, is a journey. In his view, the role of a scholar is essentially active; his task is to study reality, but also to build a mental model of the civilization in question and thus see his own point of view as if from outside it (one of many possible approaches, a choice dictated by his culture). His goal, he argues, is to draw

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34 See Roger Ames, "Knowing as the Realizing of Happiness: Here, on the Bridge, over the River Hao", in: *Zhuangzi and the Happy Fish*, eds. Roger Ames, Takahiro Nakajima (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press 2015).

35 Richard E. Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently… and Why* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Singapore: The Free Press, 2003).

36 Ames, "Knowing as the Realizing of Happiness", 263.

37 Jullien, *Detour and Access: Strategies of Meaning in Greece…*, 9.

up "a map of meaning in China"[38]. According to Jullien, it is often only thanks to this strategy that we are able to appreciate the originality and inventiveness of our own tradition. Importantly, in both Jullien's and Ames' discussions of methodology, they largely shun expressions like "comparison" and "comparing" to avoid the dangers of immobilization: be it an "opposition" as in the contrastive method or a false analogy in the analogical method. In Jullien's late writings, he argues that:

> To "compare" is to […] essentially fail to go on a journey: it is to stay put, and thus never to enter another place. Because man then stays within the limits of his own categories….there is no shift, no change of scenery[39].

Jullien and Ames, both active in the general field of comparative studies, and in that of Chinese thought in particular, each offer a methodological perspective compatible with their object of interest, and also with the basic principle of "studying a philosophy on its own terms": one that seems to flesh out the Chinese idea of processive reality rather than the static view that has served as standard within Western culture. In Jullien's text "À quoi sert la comparaison?", in the volume *Procès ou création*, he admits that his method contrasts with the traditional approach to comparison involving two or more *comparata* treated on equal terms and subject to the same evaluation[40]. Rather than an image of the scholar studying a closed, static object fixed in time and space, his is a proposal to follow a research path involving total immersion in a culture, a change of landscape, a "displacement" from the current paradigm. Once this has been accomplished, the scholar will be able to view the world in a completely different light. This research perspective leads to a series of particularly interesting observations made by Alasdair MacIntyre, as discussed below.

Native – Other

MacIntyre devotes numberous works to the complex issue of cultural and linguistic relativism. Traditions, as seen by the philosopher in their essence, traditions, as seen by the philosopher, are untranslatable[41]. When we ask about the "meaning" of a foreign

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[38] Ibid., 11. Jullien has come under a lot of fire for his ideas, especially in France. He has been accused, for instance, of using China to create a utopian image of a "radical Other". See, for example, Zufferey Nicolas, "Jean François Billeter. *Contre François Jullien* (Paris: Allia, 2006)", *Annales. Histoire. Sciences Sociales* 61(06), (December 2006); Jean Levi, "Réponses a un questionnaire sur François Jullien pour un journal vietnamien", in: Jean Levi, *Réflexions chinoises: Lettrés, stratèges et excentriques de Chine* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2011). For more on the critique, see Ralph Weber, "What about the Billeter-Jullien debate? And what was it about?", *Philosophy East and West*, 64 (1), (2014), 228–237.

[39] François Jullien, *Entrer dans une pensée ou des possibles de l'esprit*, (Paris: Gallimard, 2012), 29. In the text "'How to Compare?,'" Ralph Weber also talks about the readiness to step out of one's comfort zone as a necessary requirement of a comparative scholar, and discusses the issue of self-criticism, which should accompany research in comparative philosophy. See esp. Ralph Weber, "Toward (Self-)Critical Comparative Philosophy", in: idem, "'How to Compare?' – On the Methodological State of Comparative Philosophy", *Philosophy Compass* 8/7 (2013), 593–603.

[40] François Jullien, *Procès ou création: Une introduction ŕ la pensée chinoise* (Paris : Gallimard, 1989), 312–313.

[41] See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

word, sentence, or text, our preferences (unfiltered through our consciousness) immediately supply us with various criteria, while our contexts and interpretive methods affect the way we perceive the object of study. Comparative philosophers have argued that their discipline is constituted of the twin problems of "communication of meaning"[42] and "translation". If a tradition is essentially untranslatable, however, does it necessarily limit our ability to understand it? According to MacIntyre, this does not need to be the case. The fact that we understand certain ideas expressed in a foreign language does not mean we are also able to translate them (a poem would be a good case in point). If the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is correct and no extraconceptual reality exists, our choice of language also implies a choice of reality[43] (at least partially untranslatable). John Dewey, in "On Philosophical Synthesis", follows William James in holding that there are no uniform cultural universes. Indeed, Dewey argues that:

> the hope of free men everywhere is to prevent any such "cultural block universes" from ever arising and fixing themselves upon all mankind or any portion of mankind. To the extent that your journal can keep the idea open and working that there are "specific philosophical relationships" to be explored in the West and in the East[44].

How can we access this information? How can the speakers of one language understand those of another? MacIntyre argues that anyone approaching a foreign language or culture should "become like a child" and immerse himself in it without the mediation of his own language, just as a child acquires a foreign language: by discovering the world afresh through its conceptual framework, not by translating sentences, and then by assimilating it as a "second-first-language"[45]. And since it is impossible to separate such foreign-language acquisition from the process of "learning" the culture enshrined in that target language, one needs to learn to live within the new culture and, as far as possible, become a native. As Didier Cazal observes in his analysis of the face's role in Korean culture, "for a foreign face to become 'legible' in another culture, it needs to be presented in accordance with the local cultural code, if only to bring out its foreignness"[46]. Further, Cazal echoes MacIntyre in arguing that "communication, in its essence, involves a 'communion,' and is semantically related to the community [*communion*]"[47].

What does it mean, however, to share a culture or to belong to a community? According to MacIntyre, it means sharing "schemata which are at one and the same time

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[42] See Poolla Tirupati Raju, *Introduction to Comparative Philosophy* (Lincoln: University of Nebrasca Press 1962), 139.

[43] In this context, MacIntyre uses the concept of truth.

[44] John Dewey, "On Philosophical Synthesis", *Philosophy East and West* 1 (April 1951), 3.

[45] "One has to become a child all over again and to learn this language – and the corresponding parts of the culture – as a second first language". Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: Notre Dane Press, 1988), 374.

[46] Cazal, *Twarz, komunikacja międzykulturowa i etyka: przykład Korei*, 294.

[47] Cazal, T*warz, komunikacja międzykulturowa i etyka: przykład Korei*.

constitutive of and normative for intelligible action by myself and are also means for my interpretation of actions of others"[48].

Anyone who participates in a culture and has mastered its language should be able to tell when the expressions of one language cannot be translated into another. Choosing a community, including a linguistic community, involves a choice of beliefs and lifestyles, and these systems are interculturally incommensurable in that they rely on different patterns of rational justification. Although extensive components of differing languages are mutually translatable, MacIntyre argues that what sets cultural traditions apart are the features that lie at the source of their untranslatability. Importantly, the linguistic competence shared by members of a linguistic community allows for their drawing from a canon of texts that define common cultural heritage. This cultural tradition is created by poets, writers, and thinkers. Here lie the origins of the conceptual framework determining collective consciousness; the concepts and images that constitute a community first emerge in the great texts of its tradition. MacIntyre enumerates examples borrowed from his culture, such as "courage", "justice", "authority"; all such notions are derived from canonical texts. When two linguistic communities interact, each perceives through the lens of its own language the traditions of the other, which necessarily leads to misunderstandings and misconceptions. As a result of the decontextualization that accompanies the translation process, beliefs held by the other community must appear devoid of rational foundations. One issue MacIntyre touches upon is essential for comparative scholarship: the constitutive conceptual framework is derived from the major texts of a particular culture, from what is known as its canon.

A Canon

How can ancient texts at a culture's foundations also prove useful for the "study of reasoning patterns"? And what else can be found within the canon other than historical knowledge? What is required is not meaning, but a strategy of meaning[49].

It is difficult to overstate the role played in Chinese philosophy by the *Yijing* 易经, or *The Book of Changes*, a work that has remained opaque to the Western reader. The book allows us to attempt to identify and describe the basic conceptual framework that underpins the entire Chinese cultural sphere. It is often referred to as the source (*yuan*, 源) from which the teachings of the Classics originate (*jing*, 经)[50].

The strength of preconceived notions is so imperious, especially if one is new to differing cultural codes, that one tends to approach a foreign text with a list of prejudiced expectations. Even when philosophizing, we tend to hold our philosophical choices to be universally applicable[51]. An interesting case in point is Hegel's famous disappointment

[48] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science", *Monist* 60: 4 (1977), 454.

[49] A term used by François Jullien.

[50] See Wójcik, *Filozoficzne podstawy sztuki*…, 27.

[51] See Wójcik, *Filozoficzne podstawy sztuki*, 19.

in the teachings of Confucius, the greatest sage of Chinese culture. Hegel recognized the role of Confucius as a scholar and teacher, but was highly critical of him as a philosopher, almost denying him the title. Hegel argued that Confucius' remarks are "not without spirit, but there is nothing outstanding about them; his books reveal a good understanding of the affairs of man. However, he deals mainly with popular morality"; "one looks in vain for speculative philosophy in Confucius' works, for he was merely a practical statesman". In another lecture, Hegel claimed that Confucius was a moralist but not a moral philosopher; his sayings may have been apt, but they were not backed by the rigor of science. For Hegel, even if Confucius offered correct moral ideas, he never extended beyond a narrowly conventional view. Hegel also accused him of a propensity to sermonize, and of getting mired in intellectual mediocrity; contemporary man, Hegel argued, gets nothing from the abstract formulas of Confucius, which could just as easily serve as proverbs[52]. This criticism appears on the heels of Hegel asserting that he has undertaken a thorough study of the philosophies of India and of China[53].

Hegel seemingly read *The Analects* (*Lunyu*) expecting Confucius to offer an exposition of views on key themes of Western philosophy. He wanted Confucius to express an individual, original position buttressing claims of his fame as the greatest of Chinese thinkers[54]. Contemporary research into linguistic elements of Chinese philosophy, however, has shown that for the Chinese, expecting a sage to state any beliefs would be a mistake[55]. What was expected from a master/author instead was an ability to incite the disciple/reader[56]. A sage's words aren't only subtle but also indexical, meant to encourage and guide the audience's continued reflection on their own. Confucian ideas provide impetus for continuing the "continual development of meaning"[57]. His speech is variational, in the sense that the sage exploits its radical indeterminacy; striving to understand it is an integral part of the path to self-transformation[58]. Importantly, this approach is entirely understandable within the context of Chinese cultural sources. The image of the world offered by *The Book of Changes* underscores the ephemeral nature of all things and phenomena; the emphasis shifts to the relational character of things, the proper sense of timing, and the ability to act accordingly. To grasp

[52] Excerpts from Hegel's lectures and works are quoted after: Young Kun Kim, "Hegel's Criticism of Chinese Philosophy", *Philosophy East and West* 2 (28) (April 1978), 173–174. More about Hegel's reception of Chinese philosophy in: Kwok Kui Wong, "Hegel's Criticism of Laozi and Its Implications", *Philosophy East and West* 1 (61) (January 2011).

[53] Kim, *Hegel's Criticism of Chinese Philosophy*…, 173.

[54] For more on the subject: Jullien, *Detour and Access*..., 204.

[55] See e.g. Youru Wang, *Linguistic Strategies in Daoist Zhuangzi and Chan Buddhism* (London, New York: Routledge/Curzon, 2003; François Jullien, *Detour and Access*...; in: François Jullien, *In Praise of Blandness: Proceeding from Chinese Thought and Aesthetics*, trans. Paula M. Varsano (New York: Zone Books, 2007).

[56] See Jullien, "From the Master to the Disciple: The Proposition Is Only an Indication", in: *Detour and Access*...,

[57] See Jullien, "From the Master to the Disciple: The Proposition Is Only an Indication", in: *Detour and Access*...,

[58] For more on the subject, see the chapter by Xinzhong Yao, "Learning as a spiritual path", in: Xinzhong Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

hidden meanings within works of Chinese philosophy, one must pay close attention to the use of language, which is pragmatic rather than ontological, and doesn't point to any particular objective, extralinguistic reality[59]. Therefore "the Sage's word is transformed in relation to the person to whom it is addressed" (per Cheng Yi's commentary)[60]. Confucius's goal wasn't to define major concepts or provide a single unifying answer; his words are adaptable to specific circumstances and are meant to promote an adherent's personal growth.

Conclusion

Methodological preparation and a firm grasp of research methods are always useful for philosophers working within intercultural spaces. Yet these tools are of little use if a philosopher fails to realize that a comparative scholar's task is to open their mind to otherness and difference, questioning what has been accepted as a matter of course. For a constructive polylogue to take place, adopting the approach recommended by Robert L. Rein'l in the early days of the methodology of comparative philosophy is insufficient: that attitude of intellectual tolerance and of dogmatism's absence[61]. Is learning about humanity and drawing from other cultures' wisdoms possible by arriving at intellectual tolerance? How much can one learn when senses and emotions are denied or ignored? Comparative philosophy encourages Western philosophers to set body and thought in motion. It invites the awakening of faculties that encourage the quest for wisdom, thus returning to the roots of the philosophical discipline as the early Greeks had envisaged it.

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[59] See Wójcik, „Kosmos, czyli o tym, co najbardziej oczywiste", especially: „Prawda i cała prawda", in: *Filozoficzne podstawy sztuki*…. and Anna Iwona Wójcik, „Metodologia kręgów kulturowych Wschodu i Zachodu", *The Polish Journal of the Arts and Culture* 3 (2012).

[60] Jullien, *Detour and Access. Strategies of Meaning in Greece*…, 227.

[61] Robert L. Rein'l, "Comparative Philosophy and Intellectual Tolerance", *Philosophy East and West* (January), 2 (4) (1953).

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