

COMPARATIVE, TRANSCULTURAL, GLOBAL?
CHINESE PHILOSOPHY AND THE QUESTION OF METHODOLOGY

比較、跨文化、全球化？
中國哲學研究的方法論問題

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In recent years, Western debates on methodology in the field of Chinese (and other East Asian) philosophies have centred around two dominant approaches: the comparative and the transcultural. Engaging with Chinese and Asian philosophies necessarily touches upon the problem of cultural identities and differences. In the contemporary “Western” discourse on China, we can easily observe the persistent relevance of cultural comparison. The widespread opposition between “China” and “the West” heavily relies on a comparative framework that allows to determine “Western values” and distinguish between different political “systems”. “Comparison” thus serves as the discursive foundation for competing normative orders and/or ideological positions. In broader terms, *comparative philosophy* tends to develop relatively stable or fixed frameworks of identity and difference.

However, recent controversies about *comparative philosophy* have shown that the notion of “comparison” as such is highly problematic. The same frameworks that connect different philosophical discourses also tend to obstruct their intercultural communication. The process of comparing different philosophies necessarily involves numerous methodological problems that have not yet been comprehensively reflected upon and are therefore far from being solved. Despite growing criticism, comparative philosophy still seems to be a very important and useful tool for gaining new insights into numerous fundamental philosophical questions. New forms of comparison that might emerge from ongoing debates and investigations hopefully will lead to innovative approaches that are “post-comparative” in the sense of being aware of the problem that the tendency to fix identities and differences easily leads to the enforcement of “frameworks” that rather block the very possibility of intercultural communication instead of enabling it.

The development of contemporary philosophy is intimately intertwined with developments that move beyond a philosophical discourse of modernity that is Western/Eurocentric. *Transcultural philosophy* offers a multi-perspective and inclusive rather than an exclusive and isolated approach. Transcultural approaches, therefore, aim at overcoming a static, immobile, and fixed understanding of “culture”, and rather emphasize perspectives of “cultural transformation” that are open and dynamic. The prefix “trans-” in the term “transcultural” suggests not only the *transgression* of one’s boundaries and positions but also the (self-) *transformation* that is not only crucial for the very possibility of *translation* and mutual learning but also the creation of new modes of *global philosophy*. However, *transcultural philosophy*, dismissing the very distinction between identity and difference, can also prove problematic. Transculturality often creates the illusion that the problem of “identity” can be overcome in a hybrid world without fixed identities and borders.

This conference will discuss different approaches to East Asian, particularly Chinese philosophy and address the question of their respective limitations, as well as possible ways of rethinking their relation.

(Organization: Fabian Heubel, Jana S. Rošker, Hans Feger)