

INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY, CONFUCIANISM AND TAOISM

Vincent Shen

INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY,
CONFUCIANISM AND TAOISM



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This is the revised version of a key note address pronounced at the Ninth Annual Meeting of Dutch / Flemish Association of Intercultural Philosophy (NVVIF); we apologise that this body could not earlier discharge its responsibility towards the publication of this paper, and we are deeply grateful for the author's patience and understanding in this matter.

At the time, the author was Professor of Philosophy, National Chengchi University, Taipei, and incumbent of the European Chair of Chinese Studies, International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden University, the Netherlands.

The reason to specifically bring out Prof. Shen's text in the present series, even though belatedly, is that the text in its original Rotterdam version has widely circulated (e.g. through the website of the NVVIF) and has made a considerable impact on intercultural philosophy as conceived in Rotterdam.

This version was extensively re-edited for inclusion in the present series.

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I. Necessity and Strategy of an Intercultural Philosophy

One of the reasons why today we need to conduct intercultural philosophy is that philosophy was, and still is, culturally bound. Western philosophy was very much related to the long cultural heritage from ancient Greece, through Rome, to Medieval and modern Europe; whereas in other cultures, for example, in Chinese culture, we also find other traditions of philosophy. As Martin Heidegger has well articulated, Western philosophy was in fact a choice made by the Western culture from the times of Parmenides and Plato. Although many histories of Western philosophy were written and entitled “The History of Philosophy”, this exclusiveness and arrogance arbitrarily set aside many other possibilities.

In this context, to study intercultural philosophy means not to enclose one’s own vision of philosophy within the limit of Western philosophy. This is especially necessary today when the type of rationality which was given foundation by Western philosophy and which was essential to the development of modern Western science and technology, is now much challenged and even collapsing. Now the world is open to other types of rationality, or rather, to more comprehensive functions of reason.

It is well recognized that we live now in an age of multiculturalism. As I see it, the concept of “multiculturalism” should mean, of course, but not only, a request for distinct cultural identities and respect for cultural difference, as Charles Taylor seems to be contended with. Charles Taylor’s interpretation limits his own concept

of multiculturalism to a kind of ‘politics of recognition’.¹ For me, multiculturalism means, of course, that each and every culture has its own cultural identity, and that we should respect each other’s cultural differences. But multiculturalism should mean, above all, mutual enrichment by cultural difference and search for more universalizable elements embodied in various cultural expressions. We can attain this “upgraded” meaning of multiculturalism only through conducting dialogues between different cultural worlds.

With the realization of a global village, now we are witnessing the deepening of a historical process in which, as F.S.C. Northrop said,

“The East and the West are meeting and merging. The epoch which Kipling so aptly described but about which he so falsely prophesied is over.”²

In this situation, different ways of doing philosophy in different cultures could enrich our vision of Reality. Especially in this time of radical change, a new philosophy capable of tackling this challenge has to include in itself the intercultural horizon of philosophy.

But what is an intercultural philosophy? This should not be limited to only doing comparative philosophy, as in the cases of comparative religion, comparative linguistics, etc., which are often limited to the studies of resemblance and difference between different religions or languages. Doing comparative philosophy in this manner could lead to relativism in philosophy, but it could not really help the self-understanding and practice of philosophy itself.

For me, the real objective of doing intercultural philosophy is therefore to put into contrast, rather than sheer comparing, different philosophical traditions. I understand ‘contrast’ as the rhythmic interplay between difference and complementarity, continuity and discontinuity, thus leading to real mutual enrichment of

¹ Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism*, edited and introduced by A. Gutmann, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp.25-36.

² F.S.C. Northrop, *The Meeting of East and West*, Woodbridge; Ox Bow Press, 1979, p.4; first published as: Northrop, R S. C., 1946-1947, *The Meeting of East and West: An Inquiry Concerning World Understanding*, New York: Macmillan.

different traditions in philosophy.³

I propose a philosophy of contrast as alternative to both structuralism and Hegelian Dialectics. Structuralism sees only elements in opposition but not in complementarity. Also it overemphasizes synchronicity to the negligence of historicity. On the other hand, historical movement is essential to Hegelian Dialectics. Hegel sees dialectics as both a methodology and an ontology, that is, as the historical movement of reality. It moves by *Aufhebung* understood in a negative way, and tends finally towards the triumph of negativity, thus overlooking the positivity in dialectical movement. But my concept of contrast rediscovers both complementarity and historicity and integrates both negative and positive forces in the movement of history.

The wisdom of contrast has its origin in Chinese philosophy. For example, the *Book of Changes* said, “The rhythmic interaction between Ying and Yang constitutes what we call the Way (道, Tao).” Also Lao Tzu in the *Tao Teh King* said something similar to this:

“All things carry Ying and embrace Yang, and through their blending interaction they achieve harmony.”

The traditional representation of *Tai Chi* 太極圖 can give us a concrete image of philosophy of contrast (Figure 1). Apparently, it represents only what I call “structural contrast.” But we can put it into movement on the axis of time and thereby we have the image of “dynamic contrast” (Figure 2).

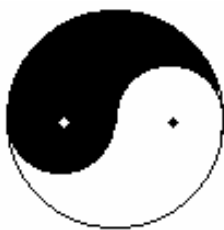


Figure 1.

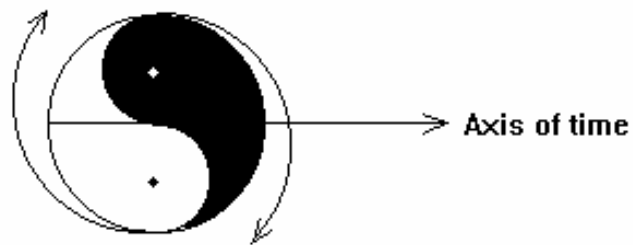


Figure 2.

³ I have worked out a philosophy of contrast in my works, especially in my *Essays in Contemporary Philosophy* (Taipei, Lih-ming Publishing Company, 1985).

By “structural contrast” I mean that in any moment of analysis, our perception, or any object under investigation, is constituted of interacting elements, different yet related, opposing yet complementing one with another. It is synchronic in the sense that these elements appear simultaneously to form a structured whole. Being different, each element enjoys a certain degree of autonomy. Being related, they are mutually interdependent.

On the other hand, by “dynamic contrast” I mean that on the axis of time, our individual life-story and collective history are in a process of *becoming*, through the interplay between the precedent and the consequent moments. It is diachronic in the sense that one moment follows the other on the axis of time to form a history, not in a discontinuous succession but in a contrastive way of development. Being discontinuous, the novel moment has its proper originality never to be reduced to any precedent moment. As continuous, it always keeps something from the precedent moment as residue or sedimentation of experience in time. Dynamic contrast could explain for example the relationship between tradition and modernity.

In this sense our position is different from structuralism for which the structure is anonymous, determining the constitution of meaning without being known consciously by the actor. For us, on the contrary, a system or a structure is always the outcome of the act of structuration by a certain actor or group of actors in the process of time.

But, on the other hand, the process of time can also be analyzed under a static gaze, in order to uncover its structural intelligibility. An historical action can be analyzed in terms of systematic properties and be integrated into a structural whole. This is especially true, for example, in communication, where system and agent are mutually dependent and promoting one another. The contrasting interaction between structure and dynamism leads finally to the evolution process of complexification. Structural contrast puts interacting elements into a kind of organized whole, but it is only through dynamic contrast that continuity and emergence of new possibilities can be properly understood.

A similar vision can be found in Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics. Setting up the text as model for hermeneutics, Ricoeur confers to the structural aspect of a text a certain “semantic autonomy”, as resulted from the act of distancing. But every

structure always calls for existential interpretation by an actor, interpretation that creates a dynamism in history as a form of co-belongingness. Distanciation and co-belongingness are two moments in dialectical interplay similar to the interaction between structural contrast and dynamic contrast.⁴

The wisdom of contrast reminds us always to see the other side of the story and the tension between complementary elements essential to creativity in time. For example, the wisdom of contrast will remind us of the contrasting situation between concepts such as agent and system, difference and complementarity, continuity and discontinuity, reason and rationality, theory and praxis, understanding and translatability, etc.

Now, let us consider what are the epistemological strategies we can adopt in view of an intercultural philosophy. Two consecutive strategies could be proposed here: First of all, the strategy of appropriation of language, which means more concretely learning the language of other traditions of culture and philosophy. Since, as Wittgenstein suggested, different language games correspond to different life-forms, appropriation of another language would give us access to the life-form implied in that specific language. By appropriating different languages of different cultural traditions, we could enter into different worlds and thereby enrich the construction of our own world.

Second, the strategy of *strangification*, which was in the beginning proposed by Fritz Wallner as an epistemological strategy for interdisciplinary research. I would propose to enlarge it into the intercultural context, thereby making it a strategy of intercultural philosophy. By “strangification” I mean the act of going outside of oneself and going to the other cultural context, to the stranger’s culture. In other words, in doing intercultural philosophy, we have to translate the main theses or *rationale* of one’s own philosophical tradition into a language understandable to other philosophical traditions, so as to make it universalizable. If the main theses or the *rationale* of one philosophical system or philosophical tradition could be

⁴ P. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, edited, translated and introduced by J.B. Thompson, London: Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp. 145-162; Cf. V. Shen, “The Problem of Meaning in Narrative and Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics”, in *The Journal of National Chengchi University*, Vol. 48, Taipei, 1983, pp. 33-49.

translated into language understandable to other traditions, and thereby become universalizable, we could say that it contains more *truth-content* in itself. If it could not be translated, this means that it is in some way or other limited within itself, and should therefore submit itself to critical examination through self-reflection, in respect to its own principle as well as its methodology.⁵ Language appropriation and strangification are thereby two epistemological strategies to be adopted by intercultural philosophy.

In the following, I will first of all try to put European philosophy and traditional Chinese philosophy into contrast on different levels of analysis. Then I will try to work out some important philosophical concepts for intercultural philosophy.

⁵ Here we have to notice the contrasting relation between translatability and understanding. Translation presupposes always understanding, and understanding should be spoken out in one's one language, as we could see in Gadamer's concept of application. Even though Gadamer in his *Wahrheit und Methode* explains that understanding is quite different from translation, and for me the horizon opened by understanding exceeds really translation, nevertheless understanding itself needs to be articulated by translation; alternatively, if anyone takes understanding and translatability in radical opposition, he will necessarily violate the concept of application.

II. Contrast of Origins: Theoria versus Praxis

In the beginning, Western philosophy can be traced back to its origin in the Greek notion of *theoria*, the disinterested pursuit of truth and sheer intellectual curiosity.⁶ Compared with this, Chinese traditional learning in general and Chinese philosophy in particular seemed to be short of such a theoretical interest and were more pragmatically motivated. Generally speaking, Western *episteme*, began as a result of the attitude of *wonder*, which led to the theoretical construction of scientific and philosophical knowledge; whereas Chinese learning and philosophy began with the attitude of concern, which led finally to a practical wisdom for guiding human destiny. Therefore, in the beginning, the difference between these two origins was a difference between *theoria* and *praxis*.

In the case of Western science, Aristotle pointed out in *Metaphysics* that the way of life in which knowledge began was constituted of leisure (*rastōnē*) and recreation (*diagōgē*), for example as in the case of Egyptian priests who invented geometry in such a way of life. Aristotle believed that in leisure and recreation, human beings needed no longer to care about daily necessities of life and could wonder about the causes of things, searching knowledge for knowledge's own sake. The result of wonder was theories. Aristotle wrote in *Metaphysics*:

“For it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to

⁶ Vincent Shen, *Disenchantment of the World*. Taipei: China Times Publishing Co., 1984, pp.31-37. Revised new edition by Taiwan Commercial Press, 1997.

philosophize; they wondered originally at the obvious difficulties, then advanced little by little and stated difficulties about the greater matters, (...) therefore since they philosophized in order to escape from ignorance, evidently they were pursuing science in order to know, and not for any utilitarian end.”⁷

According to Aristotle, the philosophical meaning of “theory”, was determined on the one hand with respect to praxis, – as Aristotle put it,

“not in virtue of being able to act, but of having the theory for themselves and knowing the causes.”⁸

On the other hand, with respect to a universal object, which was seen by Aristotle as the first characteristic of episteme,⁹ thus leading to philosophy and ending up with ontology.

As we know well now, the emergence of *theoria* in Greece had its religious origin. Originally, *theōroi* were the representatives from other Greek cities to Athens’s religious ceremonies. It was through looking at, and not taking action, that they participated in religious ritual. Furthermore, philosophy resulted from *theoria*: instead of looking at the altar or stage of performance, philosophers began to look at the universe in a disinterested way. Western philosophy was historically grounded in this Greek heritage of *theoria*, which regarded our human life no longer as determined by diverse practical interests, but as submitted itself henceforward to a universalizing and objective norm of truth. *Theoria* and philosophy, in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, culminate ultimately in ontology, which according to Aristotle investigates being as being (*to on he on*), as the most general and comprehensible aspect of all beings.

By contrast, Chinese philosophy in general was originated as a result of the attitude of *concern*, which led not to universalizable theorization but to *universalizable praxis*. It was because of his concern with the destiny of individual and society that a Chinese mind began to philosophize. The *Great Appendix* to the *Book of Changes*, attributed traditionally to Confucius, proclaimed that its author

⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982b 12-22.

⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 981b 6-7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 982a 3-10,20-23.

had to be facing anxiety and calamity with compassionate concern. Here we read:

“Was it not in the last age of Yin, when the virtue of Chou had reached its highest point, and during the troubles between King Wen and the tyrant Dzou, that the study of Changes began to flourish? On this account the explanations in the book express a feeling of anxious apprehension, and teach how peril may be turned into security, and easy carelessness is sure to meet with overthrow. The way in which these things come about is very comprehensive, and must be acknowledged in every sphere of things. If in the beginning there is a cautious apprehension as to the end, there probably will be no error or cause for blame. This is what is called the Way of Changes.”¹⁰

This text shows that in the eyes of Confucius, philosophy as a serious intellectual activity began with a concerned attitude in the situation of *anxiety* and *calamity*, not at all in the situation of *leisure* and *recreation*, as Aristotle seemed to suggest. The proposition that

“the way in which these things come about is very comprehensive, and must be acknowledged in every sphere of things”

would suggest that Chinese philosophy intended to be a practical wisdom that could serve as guidance for an universal, or at least universalizable, praxis.

But notice here that the term ‘*universalizable*’ shows us also a convergence between Western philosophy and Chinese philosophy: both of them are concerned with the universalizable aspect of their truth. Even if Western philosophy concerns more with the universality or universalizability of theories, whereas Chinese traditional philosophy concerns itself more about practical universalizability, nevertheless both of them try to criticize particular interest and to transcend the limit of particularity, in view of attaining the universalizability. Even if the question about whether there is universality pure and simple could still be debated, still this effort of criticizing particularity and of going from particularity to universality, might we call it the process of universalization, is common to both Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy.

¹⁰ *The Text of Yi Ching*. Chinese original with English translation by Z.D. Sung, Shanghai, 1935, p. 334.

III. Contrasting Epistemological Principles

Now let me proceed to put into contrast the epistemological aspect of both Western philosophy and Chinese philosophy. This part of contrast leads us from Greek philosophy to modern Western philosophy and science. The development of Western modern philosophy, which cherished the primacy of epistemological reflections, gives us an occasion to compare Western philosophy and Chinese philosophy, especially concerning their epistemological principles.

First, as we know well, rationalism since Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz, etc., has founded the rational side of modern European science. Geometry, algebra or more generally, *Mathesis Universalis* had well founded the rational side of modern European science, which is also a process of theory-construction using logical-mathematically structured language to formulate human knowledge.

Compared with this, Chinese traditional learning in general is quite different by the fact that it did not utilize any logico-mathematic structure for theory formation. It had never pondered upon its own linguistic structure to the point of having elaborated a logic system for the formulation and control of scientific discourse. Mathematics, although highly developed in ancient China, was used only for describing or organizing empirical data, not for formulating theories. Lacking in logical mathematical structures, Chinese quasi-scientific theories were principally presented through intuition and speculative imagination. They might have the advantage of being able to penetrate into the totality of life, nature and society, in order to give them reasonable interpretation, but these “theories” lacked somehow

the rigor of structural organization and logical formulation.¹¹

Second, the classical empiricism of Locke, Berkeley, Hume, etc., has founded the empirical side of Western Modern science, characterized by its well-controlled systematic experimentation. By elaborating on the sensible data and our perception of them, it assures itself of keeping in touch with the Environment, the supposed “Real World”, but in an artificially, technically controlled way.

In contrast, the “empirical data” in Chinese traditional sciences were established through very detailed but passive observations, with or without the aid of instruments. But it had seldom tried any systematically organized experimentation to the extent of effecting any active artificial control over human perception of natural objects.

Third, in Western modern epistemology, there is a conscious checking of the correspondence between the rational side and the empirical side in order to combine them into a coherent whole, so as to serve the human being’s objective in explaining and controlling the world. Both in the tradition from classical empiricism to Logical positivism which assumes that there is truth when there is correspondence of theory to empirical data, or along Kantian lines claiming that the world of experience must enter into the framework of our subjectivity in order to become known by us. Philosophical reflection, in checking the correspondence between these two aspects, assures us of their coherence and their unity.

Concerning the mode of relation between empirical knowledge and their intelligible ground of unity, Chinese traditional learning had not conceived of any interactive relation in the mode of falsification, verification, or confirmation. Although

¹¹ Joseph Needham suggests,

“Mathematics was essential, up to a certain point, for the planning and control of the hydraulic engineering works, but those professing it were likely to remain inferior officials

Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*. vol. II, p.30. For me, this social and political reason given by Needham explains partly the unimportance of mathematical discourse in Confucianism. A more internal reason for this might be that mathematics was considered as a technique of calculation and instrument of organizing empirical data, not as an objective structure of reality and discourse.

Chinese traditional learning did have its proper vision of science and knowledge in general, it did not have that type of epistemological reflection and philosophy of science which consists in checking the nature of, and the correspondence between, the empirical constructs and the rational constructs, as in the case of Western modern science.

But we should say that still there existed some sort of unity in traditional Chinese learning.¹² For example, the case of Confucianism. Once Confucius put the question to his disciple Tzu Kung:

“You think, I believe, that my aim is to learn many things and retain them in my memory?”

Tzu Kung replied, “Is that not so?”

The Master replied, “No, there is an unity which binds it all together.”¹³

Confucius seemed to affirm, as Kant did, the complementary interaction between empirical data and thought. He said,

“He who learns without thought is utterly confused. He who thinks without learning is in great danger.”¹⁴

These words of Confucius remind us of Kant’s proposition that sensibility without concept is blind, whereas concept without sensibility is void.

But we should be clear here that the mode of unity in traditional Chinese science was a kind of mental integration in referring to the Ultimate Reality through the process of ethical praxis. Here “praxis” or “practical action” was not interpreted as

¹² Concerning Confucianism, B. Schwartz is right when he says,

“To Confucius knowledge does begin with the empirical cumulative knowledge of masses of particulars, (...) then includes the ability to link these particulars first to one’s own experiences and ultimately with the underlying unity that binds this thought together.”

Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, p.89.

¹³ *Lun Yu*, XV 3.(tr. Waley).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, II 15.

a kind of technical application of theories to the control of concrete natural or social phenomena. It was understood rather as an active involvement in the process of realizing what is properly human in the life of individual and that of society. As to science and technology, they are not to be ignored but must be reconsidered in the context of this ethical praxis.

IV. Contrast of Reasonableness and Rationality

Now, let me shift to a discussion on the function of reason, though still in connection with the preceding epistemological discussion. Here I want to point out that the function of reason in Chinese philosophy is characterized by its reasonableness rather than rationality. From the above analysis, it is difficult to characterize traditional Chinese Learning in general and Chinese philosophy in particular as rational in the sense of Western science. They were rather reasonable in the hermeneutic sense. To be scientifically rational, Chinese traditional learning would be obliged to follow the model of modern Western science, that is, to appeal to *Mathesis Universalis* and empirical data, and to establish their correspondence through a well-controlled interaction process. But from the perspective of Chinese traditional learning, to be *reasonable*, it would be better to refer to the totality of existence and to its meaningful interpretation by human life as a whole. In this perspective, we could say that traditional Chinese learning as a whole tended always to be reasonable, while neglecting its own potentiality in scientific rationality.

Rationality in Western modern science envisages the systematic enlargement of our knowledge through the controlling procedures of theory formation and experimentation. For example, in the case of natural sciences, theories are presented either through steps of generalization or as outcomes of creative scientific imagination, and are then extended to new domains of experience through experimentation. Since the main theoretical instrument of the natural sciences is theoretical language, the progress of natural sciences depends much on the construction and development of their theories. But it is also very important to control the validity of these theories. This is normally done by the procedures of experimentation

which consist of identifying a specific phenomenon in order to effect what K. Popper defined as either corroboration or falsification of the theory in question. In other words, experimentation not only is the way by which natural sciences extend their theories to new domains of experience, it is also a way of controlling the validity of theories.

Since the above procedures are quite operational in kind, the cognitive side of scientific rationality is now very much related to its practical side. Although Western modern science, in its origin, was very much related to the Greek *theoria*, it is now related to action by the technical aspects of experimentation and the practical aspect of industrialization, even to the point of neglecting or even forgetting its original spirit of *theoria*.

On the practical side, science also has a deep involvement in action. It changes the construction of language meaning as well as that of the states of affairs through its operational character. We have to point out here that, on the one hand, the operation of formal reasoning and calculation in the logical structure of theories have transformed the meaning of language into an abstract and structural setting. On the other hand, the operation of experimentation intervenes also into the construction and organization of the state of affairs in specific context of space and time.

Generally speaking, the practical side of scientific rationality could be analyzed by the mutual relationship between means and end. Under the constraint of logical reasoning and calculation, this kind of rationality could be entitled, in the first instance, as “strategic rationality”, when in calculation it envisages logical connections between possible actions. In other words, it analyses large-scale action into smaller but feasible actions and then interrelates them by systematic logical connection. It could also be characterized, in a second instance, as “instrumental rationality”, when in experimentation or in application to technology it judges the problem of whether one action is rational or not only according to the criteria of efficiency, that is, the efficiency of utilizing a certain means by which we can attain the envisaged end.

As to reasonableness: on its cognitive side, reasonableness concerns the dimension of meaning – meaning of a literary or artistic work, meaning of a human behavior, meaning of a social institution, meaning of a certain culture, etc. The model of this cognitive activity could be found in the understanding and interpretation of a text.

This activity of understanding and interpretation is quite universal for mankind in the sense that it could be extended to any form of relationship that human beings entertain with the dimension of totality of existence.

In the understanding of meaning, we have to refer, not only to linguistic meanings, but also to the totality of my Self and the totality of relationships that I entertain with the world. In some sense, it has to start from myself as subject of my experience and my understanding in order to reconstruct the meaning of a text. This echoes Edmund Husserl's thesis that the constitution of meaning refers inevitably to the intentionality of he who understands. But we could also say with Heidegger that we understand when we grasp the possibilities of existence (*Seinskönnen*) implied in the text. In our understanding of the meaning of existence, there is also an ontological dimension in which truth reveals itself as the manifestation of Being in our understanding.

On its practical side, when we ask the question what are those actions which are subject to the function of reasonableness, the answer is: all actions concerned with subjective choice and personal as well as collective involvement in meaning constitution. For example, we could think of those actions concerned with the creation and appreciation of works of art, with the realization and evaluation of moral intention, and even those political actions concerned with the decision of historical orientation of a certain social group. All these kinds of actions are to be determined by reasonableness.

We have to notice that the first element of reasonableness (which refers itself to the totality of one's Self and that of the relation between the Self and the world), is still quite limited to human-centered orientation. The second element of hermeneutic reasonableness has a more speculative tendency. It concerns more the totality of Being and is not limited to human subjectivity, human experience and human meaningfulness.

Reasonableness is therefore caught in the tension between the reference to the totality of one's Self and the reference to the totality of Being. In Chinese philosophy, Confucianism insists upon the necessity to refer to the totality of human existence, whereas Taoism points out the necessity to get out of the human-centered tendency of Confucian humanism and to refer rather to the totality of Being exemplified by the concept of Tao.

First, Confucianism is a system of reasonable ideas which refers ultimately to the totality of human existence and its realization as the horizon within which the meaning of human actions, and even that of natural phenomena, is to be contextualized. With this spirit of reasonableness, Confucianism has established some principles of reasonableness upon which more particular function of human reason, such as rationality in science and technology, could base itself for more healthy use. Confucian reasonableness refers to the totality of human agent and his relation with the world.

Confucius himself lived in a period of political and social disorder. Confucius tried to revitalize the social order, first by proposing the concept of *jen* 仁, which signified and represented the sensitive interconnectedness between human being's inner self with other human beings, with nature and even with Heaven. *Jen* manifests human subjectivity and responsibility in and through sincere moral awareness, and meanwhile, it also refers to the intersubjectivity giving support to all social and ethical life. That is why Confucius said that

“*Jen* is not remote or difficult to Human beings, only when an individual wills for it, *jen* is there in himself.”

By proposing the concept of *jen*, Confucius had laid a transcendental foundation to human being's interaction with nature, with society and even with Heaven.

Then, from the concept of *jen*, Confucius deduced the concept of *yi* (義), ‘righteousness’, which represented for him the respect for and proper actions towards the other. Righteousness is also the criterion by which are discerned a good man and a base guy. Righteousness was the basis of all moral norms, moral obligations, our consciousness of them, and even the virtue of always acting according to them.

From the concept of *yi*, Confucius deduced the concept of *li* 禮, ‘ritual’, which represented the ideal meaning and practical codes of behavior, political institutions and religious ceremonies. You Tzu, one of Confucius' disciples, said that

“The function of ritual consists best in harmony.”

Li, ritual, as an overall concept of the cultural ideal, means a graceful order leading to harmony.

In short, therefore, for Confucianism, the dimension of meaning in human existence is to be understood within the context of totality, defined by the system of ideas constituted of *jen*, *yi* and *li*.

But with Taoism, the perspective of reasonableness changes quite differently. Taoism, especially when presented by its founding thinkers, Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, emerged with a vehement critique of Confucianism's anthropocentric interest. Lao Tzu proposed, instead of Confucian *jen*, a mindless spontaneous creativity coming exhaustibly from Tao (道) itself as the ontological ground upon which a meaningful human existence should be based.

The concept of "Tao" originally signified *ways* followed by human beings. It could also mean ways out for social, political, and even spiritual crises. But Tao meant something else for Lao Tzu; he would rather push the meaning of Tao to the extreme of speculative thinking. It means thereby the Way itself, the Ultimate Reality. In Taoism, the concept of Tao represents something like Heidegger's self-manifesting Being. Tao, when manifesting itself in myriad things, still lives in them and thereby becomes the spontaneous creativity of each and every being, including human beings. This spontaneous creativity of every being, the Tao in each one of us, is called by Lao Tze: 德 *teh* (virtue), not virtue in the moral sense as Confucianism would have it, but virtue as innate capacity or spontaneous creativity. Tao and *teh* are the really real reality, not merely concepts, because treating Tao and *teh* as mere concepts would reduce them to the status of a mere conceptual being, or *ens rationis*, and therefore to an ontic status. This is what Lao Tzu meant when he said,

"The Tao that could be told of is not the eternal Tao; the name that can be named is not the eternal name."¹⁵

The case of Taoist philosophy shows that, reasonableness, as the function of reason to understand itself in referring to the totality of Being / Tao, is also an exploitation of human reason itself to its extreme limit in a bid to thereby attain self-understanding.

In short, Taoist philosophy, as a philosophy referring to Tao and the totality of

¹⁵ *Lao Tzu*, Chapter 1.

Being, and Confucianism, as a philosophy referring to the totality of human existence, exemplify two complementary aspects of Chinese reasonableness.

V. Reality Itself, Constructed Reality and Life-world

Now I want to turn to some concepts fundamental for an intercultural philosophy. I would suggest, first, the distinction and relation between Reality Itself, Constructed Reality and Life-world. I think it is a basic truth to look on the Reality represented in our knowledge and language as a kind of Constructed Reality, which is different from the Reality Itself, though both have to be mediated and realized by us humans in the Life-world, in which our culture is situated.¹⁶

Each discipline of science or research program constitutes a micro-world of its own because of the particular methodology and language it uses and the life-form its language game corresponds to. We use the term “Constructed Reality” to designate the essential attribute of each micro-world as well as the sum total of all micro-worlds.

Further, when I say that there is Reality Itself, I do not mean by that a *Ding an Sich* in the philosophy of Kant or an unfathomable *noumenon* foreign to all human understanding. Nevertheless, all our scientific, cultural and everyday activities presuppose Reality Itself as the environment in which they take place and the

¹⁶ F. Wallner has made the distinction between *Wirklichkeit* and *Realität*, thus proposing a theory of two types of reality. But I think this theory of two types of reality is not enough to tackle with the problem of Life-world. That is why I have enlarged it into a theory of three connected levels of reality: Reality Itself, Constructed Reality and Life-world. Cf. Fritz Wallner, *Acht Vorlesungen über den konstruktiven Realismus* (Vienna: Vienna University Press, 1992); Vincent Shen, *Confucianism, Taoism and Constructive Realism* (Vienna, Vienna University Press, 1994).

ontological ground in which we live, act and know and that everything happens. This is just what I mean by Reality Itself.

As to the concept of Life-world, I mean by this concept the cultural world together with the natural world, in which we human beings lead our every-day life. It is constituted of Constructed Reality, because of our scientific and language constructions, and of Reality Itself, because of its grounding in the natural and cosmic process. Because of the fact that in the human Life-world there exist the double process of

1. transforming Reality Itself into Constructed Reality and
2. reference to Reality Itself in human production of Constructed Reality,

Life-world should be considered as the horizon in which we humans mediate Constructed Reality and Reality Itself.

In Chinese philosophy, it is necessary to ask the question about the relation we have with Reality Itself. I would say that Chinese culture is characterized by its intimacy with Reality Itself. It cherishes always communicative union with the Reality Itself, understood as Tao, as Nature or as Life. It recognizes the fact that all our knowledge and language are but human construction, to the extent that we should deconstruct them in order to let the Reality manifest itself. Deconstruction, in order to go beyond all human constructions, so as to let Reality manifests itself.

We can see this particularly in the case of Taoism, which already 25 centuries ago made the distinction between Reality Itself and Constructed Reality. Lao Tzu said (in a variation – for which the original Chinese text provides room – upon the translation presented above)

“Tao could be said, but that which is already said about Tao is not the Tao Itself.”¹⁷

The distinction between “Tao Itself” and “Tao said” corresponds to the distinction between Reality Itself and Constructed Reality. However, in Taoism, this distinction is posited, on the one hand, to point out the necessity of tracing back the

¹⁷ Lao Tzu, *Tao Teh Ching*, ch.1.

origin of Constructed Reality's to Tao, Reality Itself; on the other hand, this distinction points out also the insufficiency of all our languages, rather than the overwhelming power of language.**

For Taoism, Tao manifests itself in Nature, and Nature is seen as a spontaneous process not to be dominated and determined by human beings' technical intervention. Human beings are considered by Taoism as only part of nature, whose ontological status are just like plants, animals and others beings in nature, all taken to be sons of the same Mother, Tao. This vision of the relation between human beings and Nature is very different from modern science and technology. Modern science defines "nature" as the totality of phenomena to be explained and predicted by natural laws, and modern technology treats "nature" as the totality of material resources to be manipulated and transformed by technical processes. The consequence of this modern concept of nature is serious ecological disequilibrium, pollution and other environmental problems, even to the menace of human existence.

But Taoism teaches us how to respect the spontaneous process of nature. Human beings' knowledge should be constructed in such a way that it unfolds the spontaneous dynamism of nature.¹⁸ One should avoid any human-centered or even ego-centric construction of knowledge. This Taoist position is more ecological and it tends to construct knowledge and *Umwelt* in a more natural way. According to Taoism, human beings should not construct knowledge for construction's sake, on the contrary, we should construct in such a way that it manifest the structure and dynamism of Nature Itself.

According to Taoism, a human being should be aware of the limits of language and keep his mind open to the spontaneous dynamism of nature. A human being

** *Editor*: Note that this distinction manifests itself particularly on the plane of exegesis and translation. In the original Chinese text the same word, 道 *Tao*, is being used without the qualification 'Itself' being conspicuously articulated.

¹⁸ Vincent Shen, 'Annäherung an das taoistische Verständnis von Wissenschaft. Die Epistemologie des Lao Tses und Tschuang Tses', in: F. Wallner, & J. Schimmer ed., *Grenzziehungen zum konstruktiven Realismus* (Wien: WUV- Wiener Universitätsverlag, 1993), pp. 188ff.

should construct his knowledge and Life-world, not according to the structural constraints of his language, but according to the rhythmic manifestation of nature. Micro-worlds as constructed by different disciplines and languages, and even the Constructed Reality as the sum total of all micro-worlds, should not be taken for the Life-world. Chinese culture cherishes the Life-world, which is partly constructed by human beings, partly unfolding itself spontaneously in the rhythm of nature.

On the other hand, Confucianism would look upon human beings as the center of the cosmos, who nevertheless are open to the dynamism of nature. This openness is based upon the fact that human beings are interconnected with and responsive to others, to nature and Heaven. This responsiveness, this interconnectedness, which Confucianism expresses by the term “*jen*”, serves as the ontological foundation of the manifestation of Reality Itself and human’s original communicative competence.

The Confucian philosophy of language is somehow different from that of Taoism. According to Confucianism, language, as a human linguistic construction of reality, should also be seen as a mode of manifestation of Reality Itself. This could be achieved through semantic correctness and sincerity of purpose. Contrary to the Taoist critique of science and technology, Confucianism would look upon science and technology as capable of being integrated into the process of constructing a meaningful world. The process of human intervention into the process of nature is seen by Confucianism as humankind’s

“participation in and assistance to the creative transformation of Heaven and Earth”.

Confucianism proposes a kind of participative construction instead of dominative construction. This term “participative construction” could also be applied to Taoism, in the sense that for the Taoists, all human technical intervention should be promoted by Tao and act according to the rhythm of nature itself, in order to manifest the creative dynamism of both human nature and physical nature.

Today we are worrying about that fact that our scientific and technological construction of the world is an increasingly negative process resulting in the deterioration of our Life-world. It is now pertinent to listen to Taoism and Confucianism

for which the process of human construction should be an increasingly positive process. But what is the criterium for evaluation on this point? Taoism and Confucianism would say that the criterium lies in the principle that any human construction of *Lebenswelt* should participate in, rather than seeking to dominate, the creative rhythm of Nature (Heaven and earth). Therefore both Taoism and Confucianism distinguish participative construction from dominative construction. The human construction of the Life-world should be the participative one, not the dominative one.

VI. The Strategy of Strangification

In the beginning of my argument, I have spoken about the strategy of strangification, which, I would assume, is most important for our present world of pluralism. We are facing now not only multidisciplinarity, but also multiculturalism, not to mention the more and more conflicting differences in interests, ideologies and worldviews. In this pluralistic world, the search for self-identity, for respect of difference and for mutual enrichment becomes more and more imperative. Except in the domain of artistic creation, where there will be no room for compromise and consensus; for that domain we can accept Jean Francois Lyotard's suggestion of a radical respect for difference in language games in view of originality and creativity. However, in the public sphere, by contrast, we always need more communications and more effort towards consensus. Because, in the public sphere, life could not go without communication, and policy making would be impossible without consensus.

I accept Lyotard's view that we should respect each language game, and the differences between language games. But this does not mean that we should not try to understand the language games of others, and to appropriate them, or to translate our language games into language understandable to others. Otherwise we will not be able to really appreciate the difference of the other, and our respect for his difference will be deprived of an authentic appreciation of it. In fact, if a person P can really say that language game A is in such and such aspects different from language game B, even to the degree of incommensurability, it means that both language games are intelligible and understandable to P, and P understands them; which presupposes P's appropriation of both languages, and his execution, at least implicitly, of *strangification* between them.

That is why, in my opinion, Lyotard's respect for different language game remains very abstract. In order to understand the other's difference, language appropriation and strangification are needed, and these do not necessarily presuppose any attempt at unification. Strangification presupposes, methodologically speaking, language appropriation, but it does not presuppose the finality of unification. Not to appropriate other's language and no will for strangification means enclosure within one's own micro-world or cultural world.

The concept of strangification (*Verfremdung*)^{***} could be seen as a new paradigm of communication between different parts. Although it was proposed first by Fritz Wallner of Vienna University¹⁹ to envisage the need of an epistemological strategy for interdisciplinarity in science, the strategy of strangification (according to me consisting in an act of recontextualization, of going out of one's own cognitive context into the context of strangers, of others) could be applied to all kinds of communication, even to cultural interaction and religious dialogue.

There are three types of strangification: the first is linguistic strangification, by which we translate from one language in the context of one particular discipline or culture into the language of another discipline or another culture, to see whether, by such translation, it works or it becomes absurd. If absurd, reflection is needed concerning the methodology and principles of the first language.

The second type is pragmatic strangification, by which we draw a scientific proposition or cultural value from one social, organizational and cultural context, to put

^{***} *Editor:* Note that the author's use of the concept of *strangification* as a strategy of thinking is very different (in some respects almost the opposite) both from a common notion of *alienation* (the standard English translation of the Hegelian / Marxian term *Entfremdung*), and from the *Verfremdung* as 'illuminating defamiliarising distancing' in Bertold Brecht's artistic theory and in Russian formalism (*остранение / ostranyeniye*).

¹⁹ F.Wallner has initiated in recent year the philosophical movement of Constructive Realism, as an epistemology of interdisciplinarity, with which I myself has been in cooperation from the beginning. My contribution has been to introduce the dimension of interculturality into Constructive Realism and to apply my philosophy of contrast to Constructive Realism. See Fritz Wallner, *Acht Vorlesungen über den konstruktiven Realismus* (Vienna:Vienna University Press, 1992); Fritz Wallner / Joseph Schimmer / Markus Costazza(Eds), *Grenzziehungen zum konstruktiven Realismus*, o.c.; Vincent Shen, *Confucianism, Taoism and Constructive Realism*, o.c.

it into another social, organizational and cultural context, in order to make clear its pragmatic implications and to enlarge its social and organizational possibilities.

The third type is ontological strangification, which, according to Fritz Wallner, is the movement by which we transfer from one micro-world to another micro-world. But for me, there is ontological strangification when we appeal to the ontological condition of science and culture or we move from one micro-world or cultural world into another micro-world or cultural world through the detour of contact with or the manifestation of Reality Itself.

Among these three, the basic strategy is linguistic strangification, by which one translates propositions or cultural values from one micro-world or cultural world into other language understandable to other micro-world or cultural world. Even if in the process of translation, we inevitably lose some meaningful content, especially in the case of aesthetic values, moral values and religious values, this should not be an excuse for not attempting strangification. Even though it is a fact that in translation meaning is lost, this should not bring us to claim a radical intranslatability of different language games. We could say that there must be a minimum of translatability among different language games, so as to permit the act of strangification. The act of strangification also presupposes the will to strangify and the effort of strangification. Absence of the will to strangify and of the effort of strangification would mean simply the enclosure in one's own micro-world or cultural world. Strangification is the minimum requirement in interdisciplinary and intercultural situations.

I would say that strangification is a very useful strategy, not only for different scientific disciplines, but also for different cultures. It is even more fundamental than Habermas' concept of "communicative action". In fact, Habermas' communicative action is a process of argumentation in which the proposition-for and the proposition-against, by way of *Begründung*, search for consensus in a higher proposition acceptable for both parties. Although Habermas has proposed the claims for an ideal situation of communication such as understandability, truth, sincerity and legitimacy, unfortunately in the actual world of communication, what we very often see is either total conflict or compromise, without any real consensus. The Habermasian argumentation tends to fail if in the process of *Begründung* and in the act of searching for consensus, there is not in the first place an effort at

strangification. In this case, there will be no real mutual understanding and no self-reflection during the process of argumentation. Therefore, the strategy of strangification could be seen as prerequisite for any successful communication and coordination.

Philosophically speaking, that the strategy of strangification is possible at all springs from human communicative competence. In Chinese philosophy, Confucianism would propose *jen* as the original communicative competence, the ontological condition of possibility which renders feasible and legitimate the act of strangification as well as communication and self-reflection. From this original communicative competence, Confucianism propose the concept of *shu*, which could be seen as an act of empathy and strangification, which is a better strategy for fruitful communication than Habermas' argumentation. Confucianism, in positing the existence of a "sensitive responsiveness" as condition rendering strangification possible, has elevated strangification to the ontological level. According to Confucianism, there is ontological strangification when we conduct strangification upon our responsive interconnectedness with others.

The Confucian *liang chi* 良知 and its tacit consensus could serve as the pre-linguistic and therefore tacit basis for argumentative consensus. Also, during the process of argumentation, because of the difference in political languages and in concepts such as truth, sincerity, legitimacy, etc., Habermas' suggestion of four ideal claims would not work in actual political debates, to the point of leading towards total conflict. The Habermasian argumentation tends to fail if in the process of *Begründung* and in the act of searching for consensus, there is not first of all an altruistic effort of empathy and of using language understandable to others. There will be no real mutual understanding and no self-reflection during the process of argumentation, if we do not communicate our position in a way meaningful to the others, and speaking the other's language.

In Confucianism, the concept of *shu* 恕 represents this ability to go to the other in an sympathetic way and to communicate with him through language understandable to him. Especially under the postmodern condition, when any difference in race, gender, age, class and belief system will create total conflict, any party in difference should communicate with other parties with the spirit of *shu* 恕, together with the acts of empathy and strangification.

On the other hand, from the Taoist point of view, strangification presupposes not only appropriation of and translation into other languages. It is also necessary to render oneself present to the Reality Itself. In Lao Tzu's word,

“Having grasped the Mother (Reality Itself), you can thereby know the sons (micro-worlds). Having known the sons, you should return again to the Mother.”²⁰

Taoism posits an ontological detour to Reality Itself as condition *sine qua non* for the act of strangification into other worlds (micro-world and cultural world).

In terms of Lao Tzu, we understand the Reality Itself by the process of a “retracing regard” (*kuan*), an act of intuition of the essence of things by letting things what they are. The process of formation of our experience is therefore seen by Taoism as a process back and forth between the act of interacting with micro-worlds (sons) and the act of returning to Reality Itself (the Mother). The act of returning to Reality Itself and communicating with it is therefore considered by Taoism as nourishing our strangification with other micro-worlds. This act, consisting in an ontological detour to Reality Itself, bestows an ontological dimension to strangification. Ontological strangification in this sense is especially important for religious dialogue, when the relation with the ultimate reality is most essential to religious experiences.

This concept of ontological detour in Chinese philosophy is very suggestive not only in cultural and religious dialogue. I would point out also the fact that, according to the philosophy of contrast, which has its root in the philosophical wisdom of Confucianism and Taoism, the micro-worlds are in a situation of contrast. In the act of strangification and in the act of constructing Reality, various micro-worlds and cultural worlds, though different, are at the same time complementary. This ontological situation renders necessary the act of strangification. Furthermore, the original communicative competence, the responsive ability, as exemplified in the Confucian concept of *jen*, serves as the ontological condition of possibility of the act of strangification. In other words, it makes strangification possible.

²⁰ Lao Tzu, *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 52.

VII. Action and Its Criteria

Finally, I will speak a few words about action. All discourses lead finally to action. This is not only true in the case of science, but also in the case of culture and especially of intercultural interaction. Scientific construction, cultural construction, and the act of strangification among different sciences and cultures, all belong to the domain of action. That is why the philosophy of pragmatism is now quite pervasive in the domain of science, interdisciplinary research and intercultural interaction.

“Pragmatism” means a way of thinking which attaches itself to the dimension of human action (pragmata). But, in our philosophical reflection, we should ask: what are the criteria of action in science and culture? It is not enough to judge by the Criterium of efficiency. Although efficiency is important for measuring science, it fails in the domain of culture. The criterium of efficiency falls under the category of instrumental rationality. In the case of modern Western science and technology, the excessive and abusive use of instrumental rationality has led to man’s exploitative domination over nature and society. This is against the principle of conserving and constructing a better Life-world.

For me, a serious danger for science and technology today is that they are now losing their ideal. They have no long term goal for development. Science needs to renew some ideals to serve as idealizing incentives for its own actions. Otherwise, science and technology are falling down more and more into the darkness of nihilism, in which human beings have no ideal values for their existence, which thereby becomes meaningless. To help humankind go through this nihilist valley of darkness, we should work out an ideal dimension or criteria of action for the future development of science and culture.

In Chinese philosophy, two other kinds of criteria are all-important, ethical criteria and ontological criteria.

1. Ethical criteria: This means criteria which refer to ethical norms of action and to the ethical responsibility of human beings. It is the kind of criteria that Confucianism would emphasize. According to Confucianism, there are three most important ethical norms for human action.
 - First, all human action should be conducted in such a way that it leads to the fulfillment of human potentiality.
 - Second, all human action should be conducted in such a way that it leads to the unfolding of the object acted upon, either under scientific investigation or as a result of cultural creativity.
 - Third, action should be conducted in such a way that it leads to the harmonization of relationship between humans, and between humans and nature.
2. Ontological criteria: As suggested by Taoism, human actions should be conducted in such a way that it is not human-centered, but situated in the global context of nature and Tao. In other words, action should be conducted in respecting the dynamism of nature and in serving the manifestation of Tao, Reality Itself. In this way, ideal human action could hardly be called action. Compared with any ontic and dominative action, it is rather a kind of non-action, but one by which nothing is left undone.

VIII. Conclusion

As I see it, now when we are facing the end of this Century and the coming of the 21st Century, philosophy has three most important issues to tackle with:

First, the swift and enormous development of science and technology soon will become the leading factor of human historicity and cultural development. How to deepen and not to make shallow the development of science and technology through philosophical reflection? How to elaborate ethical reflection to make science and technology human? These will be very important issues in the future of human culture.

Secondly, the more and more frequent and intimate interaction between different cultures will lead us ever since to a world of multiculturalism. How to enrich ourselves and promote each other through cultural interaction in which we share with others the best part of ourselves, whilst aware of our own limitations through contrasting with others. This task becomes more and more urgent in the future. In this sense I think intercultural philosophy is a key to the future.

Thirdly, as we have seen, the philosophy of the 20th century was too much human-centered. Just think of phenomenology, existentialism, structuralism, critical theory, neo-Marxism, hermeneutics, post-modernism, contemporary neo-Confucianism, etc., etc, all these philosophical tendencies concentrate on the human condition in the first place. But as we can observe, the difficulties of humankind become unsolvable when thinkers are confined to this philosophical bottleneck jammed with all these human centered ways of thinking. Fortunately, the ecological movement and new discoveries in astronomic physics lead us too much more concern with Nature, and the religious renaissance in the end of the

20th century lead us also to a concern with the transcendent or the absolute other and also with inter-religious dialogue. In the 21st century, we will have to redefine the human experience in the context of nature and inter-religious dialogue.

In identifying myself very much with the idea of an intercultural philosophy, and inspired by my understanding of both Western and Chinese philosophies, I propose here to extend the philosophy of contrast, the philosophical distinction and relation between Reality Itself, Constructed Reality and Life-world, and the strategy of strangification, to the domain of the following three problematics:

- the relation of science and technology to culture,
- the situation of multiculturalism and
- the redefinition of human experience in both cosmic and in inter-religious context.

This will constitute the challenge of the 21st century for intercultural philosophy.

Abstract and key words / Résumé et mots-clé

Key words: Intercultural Philosophy, Confucianism, Taoism, multiculturalism, hermeneutics, language games, *strangification*, Theoria versus Praxis, Epistemology, Reality, Rationality, Life-world, Action

Mots-clé: philosophie interculturelle, confucianisme, taoïsme, multiculturalisme, herméneutique, jeu de langage, étrangification, théorie vs. pratique, épistémologie, réalité, rationalité, monde vécu, action

Abstract: This paper is the revised version of a key note address pronounced at the Ninth Annual Meeting of Dutch / Flemish Association of Intercultural Philosophy (NVVIF). Conversant with both Chinese and Western philosophy, the author seeks to define the needs for an intercultural philosophy, and the conditions under which such a philosophy may be realised. The necessity particularly has to do with the fact that the recognition of difference, laudable in itself, yet risks to freeze contemporary communication processes across positions of cultural difference into a paralysed check-mate. The author's philosophy of contrast, inspired by Taoism, promises to offer a way out – in a manner not dissimilar to modern Western hermeneutics. Here the author is particularly inspired by Wallner's strategy of *strangification* / *Verfremdung* for intercultural philosophy: 'By "strangification" [no to be confused with Hegelian / Marxian alienation / *Entfremdung*, nor with Brechtian *Verfremdung*] I mean the act of going outside of oneself and going to the other cultural context, to the stranger's culture. In other words, in doing intercultural philosophy, we have to translate the main theses or rationale of one's own philosophical tradition into a language understandable to other philosophical traditions, so as to make it universalizable' (p. 10). In a sustained oscillation between Chinese and Western philosophy, this programme is explored in the course of chapters on Theoria versus Praxis (II), Contrasting Epistemological Principles (III), Contrast of Reasonableness and Rationality (IV), Reality Itself, Constructed Reality and Life-world (V), The Strategy of Strangification (VI), Action and Its Criteria (VII), and Conclusion (VIII).

Résumé: Ce texte est la version révisée d'une allocution-clé délivrée devant la 9^{ième} Conférence Annuelle de l'Association Néerlandaise-Flamande pour la Philosophie Interculturelle (NVVIF). Aussi bien au courant de la philosophie chinoise que de la philosophie occidentale, l'auteur cherche à définir la nécessité d'une philosophie interculturelle, et les conditions sous lesquelles une telle philosophie puisse être réalisée. En particulier, cette nécessité se base sur le fait que la reconnaissance de la différence (un achèvement bien positif en soi-même), au même temps risque de paralyser, dans un état d'échec, les processus communicatifs à travers les positions de différence culturelle aujourd'hui. L'auteur offre, comme issue, sa philosophie de contraste (inspirée par le taoïsme) – ainsi s'approchant à l'herméneutique occidentale moderne. L'auteur est particulièrement inspiré par la stratégie d'étrangification / *Verfremdung* pour la philosophie interculturelle: 'Par "étrangification" [non pas à confondre avec l'aliénation / *Entfremdung* d'Hegel et Marx, ni avec le *Verfremdung* de Brecht] je vise l'acte de sortir de soi-même et d'aller à un contexte culturel d'autrui, à la culture de l'étranger. En autres mots, en poursuivant la philosophie interculturelle, nous devons traduire les thèses principales, l'essence, de notre propre tradition philosophique en un langage qui [peut être compris par des autres traditions philosophiques, et par cet acte nous la rendons capable d'être universalisée.]' (p. 10). Dans une oscillation soutenue entre la philosophie chinoise et celle de l'Occident, l'auteur explore ce programme à travers des chapitres sur Théorie versus Pratique (II), Des principes épistémologiques contrastives (III), Le contraste entre Raisonnable et Rationnel (IV), La Réalité en-soi, la réalité construite, et le monde vécu (V), La Stratégie d'Étrangification (VI), L'action et ses critères (VII), et Conclusion (VIII).