



Introduction

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- ¶1. This special edition of the International Journal of Field-Being presents seven essays on the theme of Heidegger, Derrida and Asian Philosophy. At the junction of continental and Asian philosophies, these essays offer a vision which demands us to readjust our concept of philosophy and eventually its relation to our time.
- ¶2. As Asian philosophy has become a familiar field in the scene of western philosophical discourse, comparative philosophy between Eastern and Western thought also has appealed to philosophers both in the East and the West. In other works I have discussed the development and gradual changes in the format of East-West dialogue that eventually brought it to its current form, especially in the case of Buddhism and deconstruction.[\[1\]](#)
- ¶3. One crucial influence on the development of East-West comparative study was the transformation of the orientation of Western philosophy from a substantialist to a non-substantailist mode of thinking. We notice this in various forms of recent Continental philosophy including, but not limited to, post-structuralism, hermeneutics, phenomenology, deconstruction and postmodernism. The seven essays in this issue comprehensively and effectively demonstrate their affinity with Asian thought and illustrate the philosophical orientation of our time.

- ¶4. Kwang-Sae Lee's "Being-in-the-World: Variations on Heideggerian, Wittgensteinian, and Confucian Theme" discusses Heidegger's concept of being-in-the-world together with Wittgenstein's unitary being and Confucian communal self. Raising a polemic against the Cartesian model which generates the problem of the external world and the related problem of other minds, Lee shows how both in Wittgenstein and Heidegger a being is understood as the embodied unitary human being who thinks, has sensations, moves, and has his/her being in the world, instead of being just a brain, a mind, or a body. The embodied individual who lives in the world together with other members of the world such as the sky and the earth is the locus in which Lee finds a Heideggerian affinity with Confucianism in which human beings perform the roles given to them by society and by heaven. Lee finds echoes of the Confucian concept of care (ren) in Heidegger's "Fürsorge" which resonates Mitsein (being-with). In this context, Lee's argument reminds us of the recent discussion on the connection between the Confucian concept of ren (humanity) and feminist care ethics. [2] The potential compatibility between Confucianism, feminist ethics of care and eco-feminism has introduced a new approach to Confucianism, revalorizing its potential role in gender discourse, defying the long-standing criticism of the patriarchal nature of Confucianism. Lee's essay stands out as unique in this stream of comparative study of Confucianism and Western philosophy by bringing Heideggerian and Wittgensteinian concepts of human existence in contrast with modern Cartesian Ego-Cogito. At the same time, Lee shares his idea with scholars who have increasingly noticed the Asian mode of thinking in Heidegger's philosophy. [3]
- ¶5. Simon James' "Awakening to Language in Heidegger and Zen" provides another occasion of revealing the affinity between Heideggerian and East Asian modes of thinking. Challenging the view that the Heidegger's concept of language is at odds with Zen language, James claims that both Heidegger and Zen Buddhism support a holistic vision of the world in which language functions to disclose both the "foreground and background" of a being. In Gelassenheit (release) in Heidegger and satori (awakening) in Zen Buddhism, James argues, a being is released from the confinement created by the substantialization of being. The opposite of the substantial mode of being is not Nihilism, James contends, in which things become completely resolved into the background of being. Instead, in Heidegger's "release" and Zen "awakening," things exist both by dissolving into reality and at the same time are intricately linked to every other thing in the world.

- ¶6. When we read Confucius in Heidegger and Wittgenstein as in Lee's case, or Zen in Heidegger as James does, are we actually reading them, or do we in some way fantasize such an encounter? Lee and James made convincing arguments for the former, enhancing our understanding of both Heideggerian/Wittgensteinian thought and Confucianism and Zen Buddhism through a comparative mode. Frank W. Stevenson's essay, "Derrida's Nietzsche: L'Operation Feminine and the Question of 'Seriousness'" would agree with Lee and James but demonstrate it in a different way. In this essay, Stevenson reveals how some themes in Buddhist and Taoist philosophy are echoed in Nietzsche's and Derrida's (or Derrida's reading of Nietzsche's) thought without explicitly bringing up Buddhist or Taoist philosophy in his essay. In Stevenson's reading of feminine imagery or style/trope in Derrida's reading of Nietzsche, one cannot help noticing the Taoist image of the nameless source of the world which Dao de jing describes as the feminine womb, the mystery of the mystery. [\[4\]](#) Further in his discussion on "the question," in which he articulates, "The question is its own answer," Stevenson echoes the Zen gong'an mode of thinking, which he has explored in detail in an other publication employing the framework of Derridean deconstruction. [\[5\]](#)
- ¶7. Jin Y. Park's "Note on Comparative Philosophy: the case of Buddhism and Deconstruction" concisely describes the changing relationship between Eastern and Western modes of thinking with a philosophical interpretation of the western response to Buddhism from the modern Continental to postmodern deconstructive philosophies. Park contends that the Cartesian Ego-Cogito in modernist philosophy stands in stark opposition to the Buddhist concept of dependent co-arising and no-self theory. With the emergence of deconstructive philosophy, especially in Derrida's *différance* and trace, the non-substantialist vision in Continental philosophy opens a door for a change of view on the Eastern mode of thinking imbedded in Buddhist philosophy. Park concludes her essay with an account of differences between Buddhism and deconstruction proposed by scholars in the field and interprets them as a lever to open the horizon of our concept of philosophy. The issue is further discussed in Maja Milcinski's essay later in this journal.
- ¶8. Chung-min Maria Tu explores the "middle" or the "in-between" in Derrida, Deleuze, and Nagarjuna. Despite the distinct terminologies, -- Derrida's "trace," Deleuze's "body without organs," and Nagarjuna's "devoidness"-- all three thinkers, Tu argues, search for the "'crossed-out space', the disseminated/dispersed field of nondiscursive forces, the beyond meaning." The middle, or "the middle-most" is not a determinate spatial point; instead it refers to the "indeterminate point(s) sliding between binary positions." According to Tu, in Derrida, the employment of the "middle-most" invalidates the binary nature of a sign, the signified and the signifier; and in Deleuze, the binary poles of the Body without Organs and the Desiring Machine are dissolved into an unending process instead of being synthesized as in Hegel. The Deleuzian "middle most" "deterritorializes all entities," for it is "a world ruled by pure becoming (energy and flow)." Likewise, Nagarjuna's devoidness invalidates the

binary opposition between being and non-being, illustrating the “relational” and “dependent” nature of them.

- ¶9. Youru Wang’s “The Deconstruction of Dao in the Zhuangzi” demonstrates how Zhuangzi’s discussion of Dao problematizes the metaphysical or quasi-metaphysical nature of Dao in Shendao and Laozi. Both in Shendao and Laozi, Wang argues, Dao is reified by their privileging of non-being over being, and preference of One over many. Employing the narrative strategy of self-effacement, Wang contends, Zhuangzi attempts to elude any metaphysical appropriation and reification of Dao. Zhuangzi’s strategy of dissolution of the attempted reification of Dao resembles, as aptly demonstrated by Wang, Derridean deconstruction. Like the *mis-en-abime*, Zhuangzi’s narrative leads the reader to abyssimal depth of language, demonstrating the impossibility of the reification of Dao. What we witness in Wang’s essay is the opposite approach from Stevenson’s. In Stevenson’s essay we read from between the lines the echo of Asian thought in his discussion of Derrida’s reading of Nietzsche; in Wang’s case, we notice the deconstructive operation in Daoist writings.[\[6\]](#)
- ¶10. In lieu of a conclusion, Maja Milcinski’s “Trans-rational Aspects of Asian Philosophies” explores the characteristics of Asian philosophical traditions on the theme of liberation. Unlike European thought in which the soteriological plan for the restoration and perfection of human nature has never been realized, Milcinski contends, in Asian philosophies, the path of salvation in the Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist, and Indian traditions begins with the “establishment and strengthening of moral and ethical principles,” the perfection of which leads the individual to a deeper level or salvation beyond rational aspects. Characterizing Asian thought as based on a “direct intuitive experience,” Milcinski challenges the “rigid intellectual and logical approach” of modern European philosophy and contends: “The way of achieving liberation in Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist and Indian philosophical tradition...can teach us of the illusion of the often supposed superiority of philosophical speculation as understood in the Judeo-Christian-Greek heritage.”
- ¶11. Milcinski’s discussion on the practice-salvation-oriented nature of Asian philosophies brings us back to the first essay in this volume in which Lee discusses the communal self and care ethics in Confucianism and its echo in Heideggerian and Wittgensteinian philosophies. It also reminds us of the (un)intentional violation of genre in the tradition of Asian philosophy -- as Park briefly discussed in her essay-- in which the traditional western division of philosophy and religion is constructively intermingled.

- ¶12. Further, Milcinski’s concluding remarks on the different orientation of philosophy in the East and the West takes us to one core element of comparative philosophy especially in the context of East-West dialogue: a question of the definition of philosophy. As Milcinski correctly points out, in our philosophical discourse, the Western mode of thinking with its emphasis on reason and logic has dominated and been accepted as the only “valid” form of philosophy until recently. In this form of philosophy, the discourses by certain groups, which the dominant power of a society has defined as being not qualified for “logical reasoning,” have been constantly excluded from the domain of philosophy. Among those excluded are discourses by women in terms of gender and philosophies from Asian, African, or Latin American traditions. Recently philosophers in these areas have pushed this issue forward as a way to demonstrate the limit as well as imperial dominance of the philosophy based on logical reasoning.^[7] Centralization of a certain form of argument as the only valid philosophical discourse, as has been established in European modernist thought with its emphasis on reason and logic, inevitably creates a margin of philosophy. However, as Jacques Derrida asks, if a philosophy has a margin, can such a philosophy tell us the truth, and above all, “The Universal Truth” which philosophers have claimed for centuries as the very task of philosophy?^[8]
- ¶13. Essays in this volume challenge the exclusive mode of philosophizing, bringing together diverse philosophical traditions from the East and the West.

- ¶14. In order to avoid complications in the internet publication, terminologies in Sanskrit and Pali (and some German vocabularies) are romanized without using diacritic marks. I would like to thank contributors for their patience and support for this volume. I thank Lik Kuen Tong, Curt Naser and the IJFB editorial group for their hard work. I also express my appreciation to Nick Webster who went through the tedious job of formatting and proofreading all the essays in this volume.

END NOTES

1. See Jin Y. Park, [Introduction](#) in J. Y. Park (Ed.), *Buddhisms and Deconstructions* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. (2004) (forthcoming).
2. See Chenyang Li, *The Sage and the Second Sex: Confucianism, Ethics, and Gender*, Chicago : Open Court (2000); Ranjoo S. Herr, [Is Confucianism Compatible with Care Ethics?: A Critique](#), *Philosophy East and West*, 53(4) 2000, 471-489.

3. See for example, *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, translated by Graham Parkes, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press (1987). As Lee notes in the endnotes, provides a convincing argument on Heidegger's introduction to Asian thought and its influence on Heidegger's philosophy. Also see Steven Heine, *Existential and Ontological Dimensions of Time in Heidegger and the East*, Albany: State University of New York Press (1985); Elisabeth F. Hirsch, *Martin Heidegger and the East*, *Philosophy East and West*, 20 1970, 247-263; Peter Kreeft, *Zen in Heidegger's 'Gelassenheit'*, *International Philosophy Quarterly*, 11 1971, 521-545; Jin Y. Park, *Notes on Comparative Philosophy: the Case of Buddhism and Deconstruction*, *International Journal for Field-Being*, 2(2) 2005.
4. See for example the Dao Te Ching, sections 1 & 6.
5. Frank W. Stevenson, *Sudao: Repeating the Question in Chan Discourse* in J. Y. Park (Ed.), *Buddhisms and Deconstructions* Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. (2004).
6. A comparative study between Daoist thought and Derridean deconstruction has attracted thinkers in Asia. See for example *From Laozi to Derrida: an Encounter Between Daoist Philosophy and Western Philosophy*, H. cheolhakhoe (Ed.), Seoul: Yemoon Seowon (2001); Hyeonghyo Kim, *Deconstructive Reading of Lao-Zhuang Thought*, Seongnam, Korea: Chunggye (1999).
7. See, for example, *Is Feminist Philosophy Philosophy?* E. Bianchi (Ed.), Evanston: Northwestern University Press (1999); James W. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press (2001); and Gereon Kopf, *Review of James W. Heisig's Philosophers of Nothingness*, H-Net Book Review for H-Buddhism 2004, <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showlist.cgi?lists=h-buddhism>. .
8. Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* , translated by Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1982), ix-xxix. On this theme, also see Jacques Derrida, *Who's Afraid of Philosophy?: Right to Philosophy I*, translated by Jan Plug, Stanford: Stanford University Press (2002).

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