

ON CONSTRUCTIVE-ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY OF COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY: A JOURNAL THEME INTRODUCTION

BO MOU

ABSTRACT: *In this journal theme introduction, first, I explain how comparative philosophy as explored in the journal *Comparative Philosophy* is understood and how it is intrinsically related to the constructive engagement strategy. Second, to characterize more clearly and accurately some related methodological points of the constructive-engagement strategy, and also to explain how constructive engagement is possible, I introduce some needed conceptual and explanatory resources and a meta-methodological framework and endeavor to identify adequacy conditions for methodological guiding principles in comparative studies. Third, as a case analysis, I show how the constructive-engagement reflective practice bears on recent studies of Chinese and comparative Chinese-Western philosophy, especially in the past decade, for two purposes: to illustrate the foregoing theoretic characterization of the constructive engagement strategy, and to identify and explain some constructive morals that might have general significance for comparative studies.*

Keywords: *comparative philosophy, constructive engagement, methodology*

One crucial feature of comparative philosophy, as understood in a philosophically interesting and significant way and as emphatically explored in the journal *Comparative Philosophy* ('Journal' for short), lies in its *constructive engagement* goal and methodological strategy, which constitutes the theme of the Journal and is highlighted in its full title '*Comparative Philosophy: An International Journal of Constructive Engagement of Distinct Approaches toward World Philosophy*'. The constructive-engagement goal and methodological strategy of comparative philosophy ('constructive-engagement strategy' for short), briefly speaking, is to inquire into how, via reflective criticism and self-criticism, distinct modes of thinking, methodological approaches, visions, insights, substantial points of view, or conceptual and explanatory resources from different philosophical traditions and/or different styles/orientations of doing philosophy (within one tradition or from different traditions) can learn from each other and jointly contribute to our understanding and treatment of a series of issue,

MOU, BO: Professor, Center for Comparative Philosophy & Department of Philosophy, San Jose State University, USA. Email: bo.mou@sjsu.edu

themes or topics of philosophical significance, which can be jointly concerned through appropriate philosophical interpretation and/or from a broader philosophical vantage point.

In this journal-theme-introduction essay, first, in Section 1, I introduce and briefly explain how comparative philosophy as explored in the Journal is understood and how it is intrinsically related to the constructive engagement strategy and goal. Second, in Section 2, to characterize more clearly and accurately some related methodological points of the constructive-engagement strategy, and also to explain how the constructive engagement is possible, I introduce a meta-philosophical meta-methodological framework via some needed conceptual and explanatory resources and endeavor to identify adequacy conditions for methodological guiding principles in comparative studies. Third, in Section 3, as a case analysis, I show how the constructive-engagement reflective practice bears on recent studies of Chinese and comparative Chinese-Western philosophy, especially in the past decade, for two purposes: to illustrate the foregoing theoretic characterization of the constructive engagement strategy, and to identify and explain some constructive morals that have general significance for other tradition-vs.-tradition (and/or orientation-vs.-orientation) comparative studies.

Among parts of this journal-theme introduction below, some are descriptive in nature and concern certain relevant reflective endeavors, some are interpretative elaborations of them, and some other parts are rather this author's prescriptive reflection on the involved issues. Also, note that some portions of the subsequent discussion are related to the papers included in this issue of the Journal in two ways: first, the suggested meta-methodological framework might be useful for thinking of how to understand the constructive-engagement relation between the distinct approaches under examination; second, some parts directly explore the involved methodological issues of comparative philosophy as addressed by some of these papers.

1

The label 'comparative philosophy' is not new. Historically speaking, its usage has been diverse.¹ My aim here is neither to give a review of the usage, nor to evaluate the reflective practice under the label in the past, nor to argue about which word or phrase would be better to label the philosophical scholarship that we currently use the label

¹ It has been used with the primary historical orientation by some with their primary focus on historical description of similarities and differences of figures or texts under comparative examination. Moreover, whether or not with the foregoing historical orientation, the label is sometimes used narrowly, being limited to comparative studies of different approaches from different ethnic/national traditions or groups; or, more narrowly, it is sometimes considered to focus merely on the works of "under-represented" ethnic/national groups.

‘comparative philosophy’ to identify.² For the purpose of this writing, I will positively and straightforwardly present and explain how comparative philosophy as explored in the Journal is understood and how it is intrinsically related to the goal and strategy of constructive engagement.

One strategic goal and basic methodological strategy of comparative philosophy as understood in a philosophically interesting and significant way can be summarized in this manner: to inquire into how, via reflective criticism (including self-criticism) and argumentation, distinct modes of thinking, methodological approaches, visions, insights, substantial points of view, or conceptual and explanatory resources from different philosophical traditions and/or different styles/orientations of doing philosophy (within one tradition or from different traditions) can learn from each other and jointly contribute to our understanding and treatment of a series of issues, themes or topics of philosophical significance, which can be jointly concerned through appropriate philosophical interpretation and/or from a broader philosophical vantage point. This strategic goal and basic methodological strategy might as well be called the ‘constructive engagement’ goal and methodological strategy of comparative philosophy (‘constructive-engagement strategy’ for short).³ The constructive-

² Indeed, the label ‘comparative’ can be misleading, as it appears to suggest that comparative philosophy focuses just on, and stops at, mere descriptive comparisons of similarities and difference of views under examination. Nevertheless, such cases in which involved labels for disciplines or subjects tend to be misleading are not odd. Consider the term ‘philosophy’, whose original meaning can be traced back to the literal sense of its Greek original ‘*philosophia*’—the love of wisdom. Surely, the love of wisdom is not the privilege of philosophical inquiry; reflective pursuers in any intellectual inquiries can possess the trait. But the label ‘philosophy’ (or its counterparts in the phonetic languages) can be, and actually is, used *referentially* (if not fully descriptively at the initial stage of using the term) to designate such a generic type of reflective inquiry: (1) philosophical inquiry can ask any fundamental questions, and can have various fundamental concerns, about the world and human beings; (2) philosophical inquiry is critical in nature in the sense that it does not *blindly* claim or accept anything and nothing is *absolutely* excluded from a philosophical inquirer’s gaze; (3) philosophical inquiry establishes its conclusion *intrinsically* and *primarily through argumentation, justification, and explanation* rather than being based on faith. The foregoing three crucial features of philosophical inquiry have *thus* become the due contents of the very notion of *philosophical* inquiry as held in the (worldwide) *philosophical* community. By the same token, the label ‘comparative philosophy’ can be used *referentially* (if not descriptively at the initial stage of using the term) as a conventional and convenient means to designate a kind of philosophical scholarship that is to be characterized here and explored by the Journal. With the foregoing clarification and explanation, the phrase ‘comparative philosophy’ can thus be rendered harmless but useful and convenient as a label for one significant kind of philosophical scholarship, specifically speaking, and for one significant methodological strategy of philosophical scholarship, generally speaking.

³ It is noted that exactly how to label this strategic goal and methodological strategy of comparative philosophy is a relatively unimportant thing; one can label it in some other ways one would reasonably prefer. The methodological strategy is characterized in terms of ‘constructive engagement’ with two major considerations. First, the key words in the phrase (‘constructive’ and ‘engagement’) and the phrase as a whole do literally capture some of its crucial features. Second, the label has been historically associated with the strategy both in some relevant documents in print and in recent reflective practice of comparative philosophy that have been guided by the methodological strategy (see the discussion in Section 3). It is also important to note that the key term ‘philosophy’ or ‘philosophical’ that appears in this passage is to be understood in the sense as identified in the previous note.

engagement strategy of comparative philosophy highlights a number of characteristic features of comparative philosophy and thus bears on the coverage, emphasis, orientation and goal of the Journal.

First, the constructive-engagement strategy of comparative philosophy emphasizes or is featured by the *philosophical-issue-engagement* that aims at how thinkers' ideas and texts under comparative examination can make a joint contribution to a series of issues, themes or topics of philosophical significance that can be commonly or jointly concerned through appropriate philosophical interpretation. The philosophical-issue-engagement actually constitutes one major methodological orientation in carrying out comparative philosophy. I will further elaborate and clarify the philosophical-issue-engagement orientation from the methodological point of view in a meta-methodological framework to be suggested in the next section.

Second, the constructive-engagement strategy of comparative philosophy emphasizes or is featured by *philosophical interpretation* that aims to enhance our understanding of (ancient or contemporary) thinkers' ideas/texts under a comparative examination and their relevance to the philosophical issue addressed in the comparative examination via relevant and effective conceptual and explanatory resources (including those from contemporary philosophy), whether or not those resources were actually used by those thinkers. This emphasis is intrinsically related to the foregoing philosophical-issue-engagement emphasis. On the one hand, *jointly-concerned* issues or topics in the philosophical-issue-engagement are identified and explained in comparative studies *through philosophical interpretation* and for the sake of enhancing our understanding and treatment of the issues and topics in philosophical inquiry, instead of being (exclusively) relied on or determined by what the (ancient) figures or texts under examination historically said. On the other hand, one's reflective efforts in the philosophical-issue-engagement often (though not always) motivate and guide one to carry out philosophical interpretations of thinkers' ideas or texts⁴ under a comparative examination in a certain direction, from a certain broad philosophical vantage point, and through certain conceptual and explanatory resources that are most relevant to the philosophical issue or topic involved in the comparative examination. The philosophical-interpretation concern actually constitutes another major methodological orientation in carrying out comparative philosophy.⁵ I will also further

⁴ Indeed, for the purpose of this writing, I intentionally leave it open whether we are trying to enhance our understanding of (ancient) thinkers' *ideas* or their *texts*, by using the phrase "ideas or texts" and being deliberately vague on it, although I have my own position on the issue, which will be elaborated in another writing, and although a thinker's ideas and her texts can be talked about in a compatible way in contrast to the position of (a certain form of) radical textualism to the effect that we simply cannot get behind a thinker's texts to interpret her ideas and that there can be no analysis of an ancient thinker's intentional states. In the subsequent discussion, I sometimes simply use the phrase 'a thinker's ideas' for short to refer to her ideas or texts. I am thankful to Marshall Willman for his helpful explanation of how he views the issue correctly pointing out that one can distinguish a thinker's ideas as were instantiated in her intentional states at the time when a given work was written from the ideas that are implied or determined by the text itself (given a certain relevant framework of interpretation).

⁵ Sometimes one can carry out philosophical interpretation of a thinker's idea or text (say, via some appropriate conceptual/explanatory resources of contemporary philosophy to enhance understanding)

elaborate and clarify the philosophical-interpretation-concerned orientation from the methodological point of view in a meta-methodological framework to be suggested in the next section.

Third, the constructive-engagement character of comparative philosophy places its joint emphasis on the philosophical-issue-engagement concern and the philosophical-interpretation concern without ignoring or dismissing the historical-description-giving approach that aims at collecting historical data and giving accurate descriptions of relevant historical matters of fact. What comparative philosophy, understood in a philosophically interesting way (through the foregoing constructive-engagement strategy), alerts us to is this: although historical descriptions provide necessary sources and data bases for further philosophical interpretation and elaboration, comparative philosophy (as *philosophical* inquiry) can neither stop at *merely* giving historical descriptions and being content with seeking apparent similarities and differences of thinkers' views or texts under comparative examination without further philosophical interpretation and philosophical-issue-engagement, nor even take the historical-description-giving approach as the *exclusively* legitimate approach in comparative studies. Likewise, I will further elaborate and clarify the relation between the three orientations or approaches addressed above when elaborating the philosophical-issue-engagement orientation and the philosophical-interpretation-concerned orientation from the methodological point of view in a meta-methodological framework to be suggested in the next section.

Fourth, as far as the coverage of comparative philosophy is concerned, the foregoing first methodological emphasis or feature determines that the coverage of the Journal is not restricted to, but can include, any particular comparative-engagement pairs of distinct approaches from distinct philosophical traditions⁶ or different

without explicitly or directly addressing some philosophical issue. In this way, the foregoing two concerns or orientations are distinct both at the conceptual level and at the level of reflective practice, though they are closely related especially when one carries out comparative studies in philosophical inquiry.

⁶ The term 'distinct (philosophical) tradition' narrowly means a distinct culture-associated philosophical tradition: generally speaking, it consists of (1) its various classical movements of philosophical thought in a collectively-distinctive cultural, linguistic and geographic setting and (2) their contemporary studies. For example, by 'Chinese philosophical tradition' here I primarily mean various movements of philosophical thought in China from the *Zhou* Dynasty (roughly eleventh century to 256 B.C.) through the early *Qing* Dynasty (1644 – mid 19th century) and their contemporary developments and studies ('Chinese philosophy' for short below). Due to the purpose of this writing, I neither intend nor pretend to be able to exhaustively identify other distinct philosophical traditions, such as the Indian philosophical tradition (Indian philosophy), Islamic philosophical tradition (Islamic philosophy) and Jewish philosophical tradition (Jewish philosophy). For their identities, the interested reader can look at, say, the relevant book titles on these traditions in the recently published *Philosophy A-Z* book series (such as Bartley 2006, Groff 2007, and Hughes 2006). Clearly, there are distinct approaches that are from the same culture-associated philosophical traditions but represent distinct styles/orientations of doing philosophy, such as the analytic and "Continental" approaches whose representative forms have been developed in the Western philosophical tradition. On the other hand, those approaches from different culture-associated philosophical traditions are often distinct approaches of different styles or

styles/orientations of doing philosophy (e.g., the East-West, North-South, or analytic-“Continental”, though such labels might be misleading out of context), so long as they contribute to our understanding and treatment of the issues and topics of philosophical interest and significance. Likewise, the emphasis of the Journal, regarding conceptual/explanatory resources and modes of thinking in philosophy, is not exclusive to any particular way of thinking (e.g., neither the Greek-style *nous* alone nor the Chinese-style *dao* alone) but inclusive and open-minded, generally speaking. However, the foregoing inclusive strategic attitude does not mean indiscriminately addressing any distinct approaches, whether they are relevant or irrelevant, without being sensitive to the nature and features of specific philosophical issues/topics and the demand of concrete situations. In comparative philosophy it is noted that as comparative-engagement pairs are typically from distinct traditions or styles/orientations of doing philosophy, their study typically demands or assumes a certain meta-philosophical and meta-methodological cross-tradition/style/orientation of understanding in philosophy. Such a cross-tradition meta-methodological understanding, explicitly or implicitly involved in a comparative-engagement pair, is one defining characteristic of the study of the comparative-engagement pair in comparative philosophy; the meta-philosophical exploration of such a cross-tradition meta-methodological understanding thus constitutes an intrinsic and important concern in general theory and methodology of comparative philosophy. This is one important way in which comparative philosophy can significantly contribute to philosophical inquiry in general.⁷

Fifth, the Journal is inclusive but not merely for the sake of being aware of views from other traditions or styles of doing philosophy or merely for the sake of tolerating different opinions. That bar would be too low, and would miss the point of philosophical inquiry. The inclusive character of the Journal is intrinsically related to its critical character. The critical engagement character of philosophy (generally speaking) and of comparative philosophy understood in the above philosophically interesting way (specifically speaking) has the Journal aim neither at indiscriminately celebrating any *ad hoc* work from any tradition nor at uncritically pre-setting its value. In this connection nothing is taken for granted without critical examination. Rather, the recognition and appreciation of the value and significance of any work under comparative-engagement examination, no matter from which ethnic groups or from which geographic traditions, should result from critical examination in the constructive engagement strategy; for the critical examination in the constructive engagement is not just for the sake of criticism without serious consideration of constructive, positive contribution (if any). Through critical examination, the Journal is to identify and explicitly emphasize the genuine value, significance and relevance (if any) of the thinkers’ ideas and their movements of thought to the common philosophical enterprise

orientations. In this way, the term ‘cross-tradition’ can be used in its broad sense, including cross-style, cross-orientation as well as cross-culture-associated-tradition.

⁷ For a thoughtful discussion of the relation between comparative philosophy and philosophy, see Allinson 2001.

and contemporary development of philosophy. In this way, what the Journal emphasizes and promotes is the reflective dialogue, mutual understanding and constructive engagement between distinct approaches from different traditions or styles/orientations of carrying out philosophical inquiry instead of indiscriminately celebrating and promoting any *ad hoc* distinct approach.

Sixth, comparative philosophy understood in the above philosophically interesting way is intrinsically related to *philosophical* scholarship of studies of any philosophical traditions, either Chinese philosophy, Indian philosophy, or African philosophy, just to name a few. For a philosopher in her philosophical inquiry of such an *ad-hoc*-tradition-related philosophy is to be intrinsically interested in distinct approaches (from other philosophical traditions and/or from different styles/orientation of doing philosophy) to those jointly concerned issues, problems, themes or topics. In this way, the contents of the Journal are to be intrinsically relevant to the philosophical interest and inquiry of philosophy scholars and students, no matter which specific traditions they study (e.g., Chinese or Indian philosophy) and no matter which style of philosophy they instantiate (e.g., analytic or “Continental” philosophy), given that they work on issues and topics under examination in the Journal. For a philosopher would be intrinsically interested in distinct approaches to the issues and topics under philosophical (instead of merely historical) examination and in their reflective relation to her current working approach, whether or not she takes some other distinct approach as her current working approach, which may be related to her training/specialty background, personal research interest or the need of the current study.

Seventh, as far as the relation between comparative philosophy and world philosophy is concerned, they are intrinsically related. For comparative philosophy, understood in the foregoing philosophically interesting way, considers philosophy in a global context and emphasizes the constructive engagement of distinct approaches and resources from various philosophical traditions and styles/orientations of doing philosophy. Generally speaking, world philosophy is construed as a world-wide joint-end endeavor of philosophical inquiry that crosses the boundaries of particular traditions, styles or orientations of doing philosophy for the sake of contributing to the common philosophical enterprise. Given that this is one primary goal of world philosophy, a central or crucial issue is how to implement this goal. One way is the constructive-engagement methodological strategy. World philosophy approached in this way is essentially comparative philosophy aiming at constructive engagement. That is why ‘Constructive Engagement of Distinct Approaches *toward World Philosophy*’ (highlighted in italics here) is emphatically stated in the subtitle of the Journal.⁸

⁸ Although sometimes the phrases ‘world philosophy’ and ‘global philosophy’ can be used interchangeably, the former is considered more inclusive, while the latter might imply globalizing a certain (particular or ‘universal’) mode of doing philosophy (cf., Searle 2008). To this extent, global philosophy, when associated with the foregoing agenda, might stand as an alternative way of doing world philosophy (at a certain stage).

In this section, I introduce some needed conceptual and explanatory resources and present a meta-philosophical methodological framework.⁹ The discussion in this section serves three purposes. First, it serves as an interpretation framework of how the constructive engagement of distinct approaches is possible and how such engagement can be adequately regulated.¹⁰ Second, as a view concerning the methodology of comparative philosophy, it is also taken as my contributing piece to the ongoing debate on several issues, some of which have been already addressed in the included research articles (such as Xianglong Zhang's article) and the reflective report (i.e., Steve Angle's report). Third, it is hoped that this would provide the reader with one useful meta-methodological framework on how to look at and evaluate the relation and engaging contribution of distinct approaches in philosophy. It is noted that a reader need not accept all of the elements of the framework; for one thing, one characteristic feature of this framework is its open-ended character: the six conditions for adequacy of a methodological guiding principle can be expanded and enlarged. For another thing, one can selectively employ some of the conceptual and explanatory resources introduced here, if they are considered useful and effective.

2.1

The suggested meta-philosophical methodological framework¹¹ has one basic, minimal metaphysical assumption or, actually and more accurately, one intuitive

⁹ Based on the preceding discussions and conceptual and explanatory resources, a methodological framework can be introduced for the sake of enhancing our understanding of relevant methodological issues concerning comparative philosophy and for the sake of cross-tradition understanding and constructive engagement in carrying out philosophical inquiries in a global context, generally speaking. The core portion of the methodological framework consists of the adequacy conditions for methodological guiding principles that are supposed to regulate how to look at the relation between (eligible) methodological perspectives and how to employ them in legitimate and constructive ways. The suggested framework is methodological in a dual sense. First, it is directly and explicitly concerned with cross-tradition understanding and constructive engagement of seemingly competing *methodological* approaches from different traditions. Second, the framework *per se* is methodological in nature: it is concerned with *how* to look at seemingly competing *methodological* approaches from different traditions. In the above second sense the suggested framework is *about philosophical methodology*; in this sense, the suggested framework is also meta-philosophical in nature.

¹⁰ I intend neither to imply that the prospective author is expected to indiscriminately follow this framework, nor to imply that it is to be imposed on the reader. Rather, I intend to use the resources and the framework to help elaborate some relevant general points made in the previous section, on the one hand, and extend a reflective framework to the reader in case she/he finds it helpful.

¹¹ An earlier version of the suggested meta-methodological framework, labeled 'transcendental perspectivism', has been systematically presented, and guided my work on the issue of the philosophical concern with truth, in Mou 2009d. By 'transcendental perspectivism' I mean a kind of objective perspectivism, instead of subjective perspectivism (or a radical "anything goes" version of conceptual relativism), which gives a meta-philosophical methodological framework of how to look at seemingly competing perspectives taken to approach an object of study for the sake of their constructive

understanding of the nature of an object of study that I believe most of us would have (let me call it, an intuitive ‘common-object’ understanding):

- (C) Given an object of study, there is a way that the object objectively is such that it is not the case that “anything goes”, and we can all talk about that same object of study even though we may say different things about it.

That is, in a more theoretically loaded manner of speaking, given an object of study, and given that the identity of the genuine aspects of the object are thus determined (regardless of whether it is a naturally produced object in physical reality, a socially constructed object in social reality, an abstract object out of theoretic construction, or just a ‘linguistic’ object which are introduced linguistically), there *is* the *same* object of study that can be linguistically [or, more exactly speaking, semantically in the sense of (iii) below] commonly addressed, though perhaps in different ways of focusing on its distinct aspects, and examined in a minimally objective way (i.e., not a “anything-goes” subjective way). In other words, upon a reflective analysis, the intuitive understanding, (C), can be elaborated into three related components or sub-theses, each of which is more or less intuitive and can be reasonably expected: (i) given an object of study, the object has an *objective* character in a certain sense so that the subjective perspectivism of “anything goes” cannot succeed; (ii) given an object of study, the object possesses its aspects, whether one or many, so that various agent-speakers who point to these aspects actually talk about the same object; (iii) an agent-speaker who talks about the same common object can semantically reach the common object as a whole,¹² whether or not she is currently able to epistemologically reach all the aspects of the object.¹³

It is known that the term ‘method’ or ‘methodological approach’ in philosophical inquiries can mean a number of things. Given that the term ‘method’ or

engagement. By ‘transcendental’ I highlight one crucial character of such a meta-philosophical framework to the effect of identifying adequacy conditions for adequate methodological guiding principles that transcend various (local or finite) perspectives to approach an object of study via regulating how to look at their status, nature and relation and render complementary those eligible perspectives that really capture certain aspects of the object of study.

¹² Given the standard sense of ‘semantics’ that means the study of the non-linguistic relations between the linguistic expressions and the extra-linguistic objects for which they stand, members of a linguistic community can reach the object that they semantically talk about (or rigidly designate) via a certain communication link (including but not being limited to a Kripkean causal-historical chain), no matter how much cognitive knowledge they would have about the object, and whether or not (some of) their (epistemic) descriptions of it are correct. There is the rich literature and remarkable research achievements on the issue in contemporary study of philosophy of language; cf., Martinich 2008.

¹³ In so understanding, one has reached a basic vantage point, indeed one due starting point of the constructive-engagement strategy, which Davidson intends to make in a more theoretic (and thus more or less controversial) terms: “No world views or conceptual schemes are truly incommensurable.” (Davidson 2001, p. v). As I see it, all the authors in this issue of the Journal have already substantially committed themselves to this vantage point when they are not limited to this or that *ad hoc* local or finite (methodological or substantial) perspective but transcend them in their reflective explorations as given here, whether or not they intend to explicitly recognize it.

‘methodological approach’ means a way of responding to how to approach an object of study, there is need, both conceptually and practically speaking, to make the distinction between three kinds of ways or methods, which constitute three distinct dimensions of methodology: a methodological perspective (or a perspective method), a methodological instrument (or an instrumental method), and a methodological guiding principle (or a guiding-principle method).

(1) A *methodological perspective* (or a perspective method) is a way responding to how to approach an object of study that is intended to point to or focus on a certain aspect of the object and capture or explain the aspect in terms of the characteristics of that aspect, together with the minimal metaphysical commitment that there *is* that aspect of the object or that the aspect is genuinely possessed by the object.

There is a distinction between eligible and ineligible methodological perspectives concerning an object of study. If the aforementioned minimal metaphysical commitment is true in the sense that the object does possess that aspect, the methodological perspective is considered *eligible* in regard to that object. Otherwise, the methodological perspective is considered *ineligible* in regard to that object. If a methodological perspective is eligible for capturing or characterizing (a certain aspect of) an object of study, then one’s reflective activity *per se* of taking that methodological perspective alone as one’s working perspective to look at the object is philosophically innocent, whether or not one also consciously takes some other eligible perspective as one’s working perspective, and whether or not one holds an *adequate* methodological *guiding principle* to be explained below. [For convenience, in the foregoing sense, it is just said that (taking) an eligible methodological perspective *per se* is philosophically innocent.]

It is noted that a methodological perspective as specified above is a methodological-perspective simplex, in contrast to a methodological-perspective complex, which either integrates two or more perspective simplexes into one (‘perspective-only complex’ for short) or combines a perspective simplex with a certain (adequate or inadequate) methodological guiding principle to be explained below (‘guiding-principle-associated perspective complex’ for short). In the following, unless otherwise specified, by ‘perspective’ I mean a methodological-perspective simplex.¹⁴

¹⁴ Here and below, for the sake of illustration of relevant methodological points, I use as examples of methodological perspectives two paradigm methodological-perspective models that appear to be so different but can be somehow complementary, i.e., the Socrates-style being-aspect-concerned methodological perspective, as suggested and illustrated through Socrates’ characterization of virtue, justice and piety in some earlier Plato dialogues, and the Confucius-style becoming-aspect-concerned methodological perspective as suggested and illustrated through Confucius’ characterization of *ren* (humanity) and *xiao* (filial piety) in the *Analects*. The two methodological perspectives respectively constitute the methodological-perspective dimensions of the two thinkers’ methodological approaches, besides their respective methodological-guiding-principle dimensions and methodological-instrument dimensions. Though there are various aspects or layers of any object, what Socrates was concerned with is the aspect of the object that is stable, definite, regular, constant, unchanged or invariant (stably and invariantly existing in all F-things) and thus inter-subjectively accessible by any rational mind, as illustrated in his specified three conditions for any adequate definition of piety in the *Euthyphro* (cf., 5c-

(2) A *methodological instrument* (or instrumental method) is a way in which to implement, or give tools to realize, a certain methodological perspective. If the methodological perspective that an instrumental method is to implement is eligible for characterizing the object, then the instrumental method is also eligible. On the other hand, if the methodological perspective that an instrumental method is to implement is ineligible for characterizing the object, it is not necessary for the instrumental method to be ineligible too; an instrumental method (such as a deductive-reasoning method, an argument-by-analogy method) might be neutral to various perspectives and thus can be used to implement some other eligible methodological perspectives.

(3) A *methodological guiding principle* (or guiding-principle method) is a way concerning a certain methodological perspective (or a group of perspectives), or a certain methodological instrument to implement the methodological perspective, in regard to an object of study, which is, or should be, presupposed by the agent who takes that perspective (or one or more among the group of the perspectives) and its related instrument for the sake of guiding and regulating how the perspective or the instrument should be evaluated (its status and its due relation with other perspectives or instruments) and used (how to choose among the group of perspectives or instruments), and how the purpose and focus that the perspective serves should be set. There is the distinction between adequate and inadequate methodological guiding principles concerning methodological perspective(s) in regard to an object of study. The six sorts of adequacy conditions for adequate methodological guiding principles are explored in Section 2.4 below.

For the sake of the reader capturing their distinctions in a vivid way, let me use the following “method”-house metaphor to illustrate the relevant points. Suppose that a person intends to approach her destination, say, a house (the object of study), which has several entrances—say, its front door, side door and roof window (a variety of aspects, dimensions or layers of the object of study). She then takes a certain path (a certain methodological perspective) to enter the house, believing that the path leads to the entrance of this side (say, the front door) or the entrance of that side (say, a side door) of the house. If a path really leads to a certain entrance of the house, the path is called an ‘eligible’ one; otherwise it is called ‘ineligible’ (thus the distinction between eligible and ineligible methodological perspectives). When she takes a certain path to enter the house, she holds a certain instrument in her hand (a methodological instrument) to clear her path, say, a hatchet if the path is overgrown with brambles or a snow shovel if the path is heavily covered with snow. She also has a certain idea in her mind (a methodological guiding principle) that explains why she takes that path,

d). For convenience, a blanket term, ‘the being-aspect’, can be used to cover those characteristics of the object, or to stand for the aspect of the object that is characterized in terms of the aforementioned characteristics. In contrast, what Confucius was concerned with in the *Analects* is the aspect of the object under examination that is particular, concrete, dynamic, ever-changing, as illustrated in his characterization of (filial) piety in the *Analects* (cf., 2.5. 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8); all those characteristics are intrinsically connected with various situations in which things reveal themselves. A blanket term, ‘the becoming-aspect’, is used here to refer to these characteristics of the object that essentially involve dynamic change or becoming.

instead of another, and guides her to have some understanding, adequate or inadequate, of the relation of that path to other paths (other methodological perspectives), if any, to the house. Surely such a guiding idea can be adequate or inadequate (adequate or inadequate methodological guiding principle): for example, if she recognizes and renders other eligible paths also eligible and thus compatible with her current path, then her guiding idea is adequate; in contrast, if she fails to recognize that and thus renders her current path exclusively eligible (the only path leading to the house), then her guiding idea is inadequate, though her current path *per se* is indeed eligible.¹⁵

Given the above specifications, there are two preliminary points concerning the relation between a methodological perspective and a methodological guiding principle that are especially relevant. First, generally speaking, the merit, status, and function of a methodological perspective (a methodological-perspective simplex) *per se* can be evaluated independently of certain methodological guiding principles that the agent might presuppose in her actual application of the perspective. One's reflective practice *per se* of taking a certain eligible methodological perspective as a working perspective is philosophically positive and innocent in the following senses, whether or not it is associated with or guided by an adequate or inadequate methodological guiding principle in one's application of the perspective. On the one hand, it is philosophically positive insofar as that perspective really points to or captures a certain aspect of the object and is thus eligible; on the other hand, it is philosophically innocent insofar as one's reflective practice *per se* of taking that perspective amounts neither to one's losing sight of other genuine aspects of the object nor to one's rejecting other eligible perspectives in one's background thinking nor to one's presupposing an inadequate methodological guiding principle that would render ineligible other eligible methodological perspectives (if any). In this way, even if an agent's methodological guiding principle is inadequate in her applying a certain eligible methodological perspective, the eligibility of the methodological perspective still needs to be recognized, and her reflective practice *per se* of taking that perspective still has its due value in philosophical inquiry.

Second, however, it is indeed important for the agent to have an adequate methodological guiding principle, which the agent is expected to presuppose in evaluating the status and nature of the eligible methodological perspectives, applying her methodological perspective, and looking at the relation between her current working perspective and other perspectives. For it does matter whether one's taking a certain methodological perspective is regulated by an adequate or inadequate guiding principle, especially for the sake of constructive engagement of seemingly competing approaches. When one's application of an eligible methodological perspective as one's working perspective is guided by some adequate guiding principle and thus contributes

¹⁵ It is noted that I do not intend to use this "method"-house metaphor here to illustrate, thus presuppose and advocate any *ad hoc* conception of philosophizing; in the context of the preceding inclusive characterization of the identities of comparative philosophy and its constructive-engagement strategy, one is expected to have one's inclusive understanding of this metaphor and the due meanings of its involved metaphoric terms like 'taking a certain path'.

to a holistic understanding of the object of study, one's application of that perspective would be philosophically constructive and sighted insofar as one would constructively treat other eligible methodological perspectives (if any) and their relation to one's working perspective and thus have a comprehensive outlook for the sake of a complete account of the object of study. Otherwise, it would be philosophically less constructive and less sighted (or even blind) in that connection—but, even so, the reflective practice *per se* of taking that eligible perspective can be still philosophically positive and innocent in the foregoing senses, as indicated before.¹⁶

In the context of philosophical inquiry, for one thing, there is the need to refine the notion of methodological approach into these three distinct but related notions of methodological approach for the sake of adequately characterizing the foregoing three distinct but related methodological ways (in philosophical inquiry). For another thing, in view of their distinction and connection at least at the conceptual level, we might as well regard the three methodological ways as three dimensions of (philosophical) methodology or of the concept of methodological approach, although this by no means takes for granted that any methodological way that has ever been historically taken was

¹⁶ Let me give an example to illustrate the points here. Consider analytic method/ methodology. Analytic methodology, understood broadly, is a general methodological approach in philosophical inquiry. It is not limited to a single and specific instrumental method (i.e., what 'analysis' means in its technical sense, in contrast to 'synthesis'), but collectively includes (i) a collection of "analytic" instrumental methods and their associated conceptual and explanatory resources, and (ii) a generic type of methodological perspectives that is intended to point to and capture something certain, stable, constant, regular, definite, universal, or unchanging (i.e., the *being*-aspect/dimension/layer, understood in the sense of 'being' in contrast to that of 'becoming') of an object of study (and/or its conceptual characterization). (The two are closely related: the analytic methodological perspective or analytic expectation demands such "analytic" instruments as meaning analysis, conceptual clarity, precise formulation, or rigorous argumentation, by means of which to implement the "analytic" being-aspect-concerned methodological perspective. In this sense, and to this extent, the generic type of analytic methodological perspective underlies various analytic instrumental methods.) It is important to note that analytic methodology as a generic type of methodological perspectives, together with a collection of instrumental methods, is not intrinsically or conceptually related to an *ad hoc* methodological guiding principle concerned with how to look at the relationship between such methodological perspectives and instruments and other types of methodological perspectives and instruments. Historically, analytic methodology was applied by philosophers who might hold or presuppose different methodological guiding principles, some of which were arguably adequate while some others were not. In this way, on the one hand, given an object of study (or its conceptual characterization) does have its being aspect as specified above, a certain analytic (or being-aspect-concerned) methodological perspective in regard to the object of study is to be eligible, and thus an agent's reflective practice *per se* of applying analytic methodology to examining the object of study is reflectively innocent, worthy and reasonable, no matter what kind of methodological guiding principle the agent actually assumes, since analytic methodology is not intrinsically or conceptually associated with any *ad hoc* (adequate or inadequate) methodological guiding principles. However, on the other hand, the application of analytic methodology needs to be regulated by adequate methodological guiding principles so that the agent can have a more holistic or complete understanding of various aspects of the object of study and can easily and adequately make her perspective shift when her current working purpose changes to some other working focus(es) on some other aspect(s) or layer(s) of the object of study than its being-aspect (alone).

actually presented in its agent's ideas and texts indiscriminately as an methodological approach that would manifestly reveal all the three dimensions.

With the above conceptual and explanatory resources, I will elaborate the two (aforementioned) methodological emphases of the constructive engagement strategy of comparative philosophy and thus of the Journal.

2.2

The first emphasis is on philosophical interpretation¹⁷ of the (ancient) thinker's ideas/texts instead of mere historical description. Note that, generally speaking, the primary purpose of this methodological orientation is to enhance our understanding of a thinker's ideas/texts and their implications of philosophical significance via relevant effective conceptual and explanatory resources, whether or not those resources were actually used by the thinker herself. It is clear that a purely historical approach does not fit here: to elaborate and understand the thinker's ideas/texts does not amount to figuring out exactly what resources the thinker actually used and exactly what she explicitly thought/wrote. Instead, such interpretation and understanding might include the interpreter's elaboration of the thinker's points and their subtle implications, which might not have been explicitly considered by the thinker herself, and/or the interpreter's representation of the thinker's point in clearer and more coherent terms or in a more philosophically interesting way, which the thinker herself may or may not have actually adopted.¹⁸ In both cases, given a thinker's ideas/texts (in one tradition or account) under interpretation, some effective conceptual and explanatory resources well developed in another tradition or account can be consciously used to enhance our understanding of, and to elaborate, the thinker's ideas/texts.¹⁹

¹⁷ I use the term 'interpretation' in a narrow or straightforward sense as specified in terms of elaborating and understanding to be explained below ('philosophical interpretation' for short) rather than in a broad or implicit sense in which any intellectual exploration (including the historical-description-concerned approach) could be somehow identified as an 'interpretation' or an 'interpretation-concerned' approach. As far as some sample explorations of philosophical interpretation in contemporary studies of Chinese and comparative Chinese-Western philosophy are concerned, see Ames and Hall 1995, Graham 1989, Hansen 1983, and Shun 1997, to name a few.

¹⁸ Then, can these implications be said to belong to the thinker's ideas in the text (and thus fall into what the thinker *truly* means/meant or what the thinker's ideas *truly* has/had)? In an important sense, the answer would be yes; for these implications are *truly* implied by the ideas delivered by the thinker, although one can surely say that these implications were not *actually* expressed by the thinker, and one thus might say that they are not what the thinker actually (truly?) means/meant. (At this point, one can see that such expressions as 'what a certain thinker truly means/meant' or 'what she truly has/had' tend to be ambiguous and vague and thus deserve clarification, especially when one intends to make claims about what a thinker truly means/meant or what her ideas truly has/had.)

¹⁹ From the viewpoint of comparative engagement, those conceptual and explanatory resources used are thus tacitly and implicitly, but constructively, in comparison and contrast to those original resources by means of which the insight or vision was somehow delivered, insofar as such comparison of the two distinct sorts of resources is not expressly and directly conducted. The term 'constructively' here means that such tacit comparative approach intrinsically involves how the interpreter of the thinker's ideas/texts could learn from another tradition or account regarding resources to enhance the interpreter's

In this way, the use of external resources might really enhance our understanding of a thinker's ideas/texts or clarify some original unclear or confusing expression of her ideas. Consequently, the endeavor *per se* of using external resources in this orientation is not automatically inappropriate, as it would be in the merely historical orientation. Note that when those explanatory and conceptual resources are used, they are not intended to assign the same degree of articulated systematization and mastering of some conceptual and explanatory resources to an ancient thinker but to enhance our understanding of her ideas delivered in the text. For this interpretative purpose, it is not merely legitimate but beneficial to employ more explicit or clearer conceptual resources to elaborate some otherwise implicit and hidden thing (say, coherence and connectedness) in a thinker's ideas that was sometimes less clearly delivered or expressed in some paradoxical way for lack of those contemporary explanatory and conceptual resources that were unavailable to the ancient thinker but are now available to us. Note also that, when a thinker's line of thought and ideas lack articulated systematicity in their language expressions, that does not amount to saying that the thinker's line of thought and ideas *per se* go without (implicit and hidden) coherence and connectedness deep in a thinker's ideas. Consequently, we cannot base ourselves merely on this lack of articulated systematicity in language expression and therefore judge that the thinker's text itself is not a philosophical work when the text was indeed intended to deliver her reflective ideas. At this point, with the previous and current methodological considerations, some further elaborations of the thinker's line of thought and surrounding reflective ideas via adequate conceptual and explanatory resources available to us are genuinely needed, instead of being the mere issue of preference, for the sake of enhancing our understanding of the thinker's ideas/texts including their due implications.²⁰

It is also important to note that an interpreter's project of studying a figure's thought or a movement of thought from a philosophical tradition with the interpretation-concerned orientation, instead of a mere historical orientation often focuses on a certain aspect, layer or dimension of a thinker's ideas based on the purpose of the project, the reflective interest of the interpreter, etc. Indeed, instead of a comprehensive coverage of all aspects or dimensions of the object of study, focusing on one aspect or dimension is a kind of simplification. Now the question is this: Is any simplification *per se* doomed to be indiscriminately a sin of *over*-simplification? Surely, when a project aims at accurately describing relevant historical matters of facts and pursuing what the thinker under description actually thought, and what resources

understanding of the thinker's ideas; therefore, some constructive philosophical engagement between distinct resources respectively from different traditions or accounts is tacitly involved in this orientation and its corresponding methodological approach.

²⁰ The "blurring" assimilation might result from "over"-use of external resources when interpreting one or both parties under comparative examination, especially when the external resources used to characterize one party come from the other party. But, for the purpose of interpretation, the resulting assimilation is not necessarily inappropriate but might illuminate the essential connection and common points between the assimilated ideas at the fundamental level so as to enhance our understanding of those ideas.

the thinker actually used, simplification is always *over*-simplification; any simplification is guilty of being negatively excessive and thus identical with falsification. Nevertheless, it should be clear that, if the purpose of a project is to focus on interpreting or elaborating one aspect or dimension instead of giving a comprehensive historical description, charging the practitioner of this project with *over*-simplification would be unfair and would miss the point.

Indeed, a comparative philosophy project should be guided by a comprehensive understanding or an adequate methodological guiding principle whose adequacy conditions are explored in the next sub-section. But a reflective project in philosophy (including those studies in comparative philosophy) that takes a certain methodological perspective by focusing on one aspect of the object of study can be totally compatible with a comprehensive understanding. At this point, what needs to be recognized is an important distinction between a methodological perspective as a current working perspective and a methodological guiding principle that an agent presupposes when taking the methodological perspective, where the principle would be used by the agent to guide or regulate how the current perspective would be applied and evaluated in view of some other eligible perspectives. As emphasized above, one's reflective practice *per se* of taking a certain methodological perspective amounts neither to reflectively rejecting some other eligible methodological perspectives nor to presupposing an inadequate methodological guiding principle that would render ineligible other eligible methodological perspectives (if any). What is at issue is whether the interpreter has assumed an adequate methodological guiding principle to guide and regulate how to look at the relation between the current methodological perspective used as a working perspective and other eligible methodological perspectives that would point to other aspects of the object of study. Consequently, when one evaluates a project in comparative philosophy, what really matters is for one to understand what kind of methodological guiding principle is held or presupposed behind the working perspective.

2.3

The other methodological emphasis of the constructive-engagement strategy is on the relevance and significance of the thinkers' ideas related to the common philosophical enterprise and contemporary development of philosophy. This emphasis is intrinsically related to one significant methodological orientation in comparative philosophy, i.e., the philosophical-issue-engagement orientation that aims to contribute to common philosophical concerns. The primary purpose of this orientation in studies of ancient or contemporary thinkers is to see how, through reflective criticism (including self-criticism) and argumentation, these thinkers could constructively contribute to the common philosophical enterprise and/or a series of issues, themes or topics of philosophical significance that can be jointly concerned through appropriate philosophical interpretation and/or from a broader philosophical vantage point ('joint

concerns’ or ‘common concerns’ for short below),²¹ rather than focus on providing a historical or descriptive account (or on interpreting some ideas historically developed in a certain tradition or account) merely for the sake of being aware of them. Typically, addressing a jointly concerned issue of philosophy, substantial ideas historically developed in distinct philosophical traditions are directly compared in order to understand how they could jointly and complementarily contribute to this issue in philosophically interesting ways. Insofar as the foregoing purpose of constructive-engagement in treating various joint concerns and issues of philosophical significance is most philosophically interesting, this philosophical-issue-engagement orientation and its methodological strategy directly, explicitly and constructively conducts philosophical engagement and is thus considered to be most philosophically interesting. To highlight the characteristic features of a reflective project with this as its primary orientation, let us examine the appropriateness of three sorts of worries or charges that have sometimes been put into doubt or brought against projects with this orientation in studies of comparative philosophy, i.e., the worries about, or the “sins” of, oversimplification, over-use of external resources, and blurring assimilation.

A typical procedure of conducting a philosophical engagement in such projects could be both conceptually and practically divided into three phases:

1. The pre-engagement phase, in which certain ideas from distinct accounts or from different traditions that are *relevant* to the common concern under examination and thus to the purpose of the project are focused on and identified;
2. The engagement phase, in which those ideas *internally* engage with each other in view of that common concern and the purpose to be served; and
3. The post-engagement phase, in which those distinct ideas from different sources are now absorbed or assimilated into a new approach to the common concern under examination.

The three alleged “sins” may be considered to be typically associated respectively with the three phases. The “sin” of over-simplification regarding a certain idea identified from a certain account or tradition may be typically associated with reflective efforts in the pre-engagement phase; the “sin” of over-use of external resources regarding elaborating a certain idea from a certain account or tradition may be typically associated with reflective efforts in the engagement phase; and the “sin” of blurring assimilation may be typically associated with reflective efforts in the post-engagement phase. Now let me briefly evaluate the appropriateness of the three charges respectively in the corresponding three phases; looking at them in this way will help highlight certain features of projects in comparative philosophy primarily with the philosophical-issue-engagement orientation.

²¹ It is arguably right that many issues that were traditionally identified as (some) “unique” issues in different traditions have turned out to be primarily concerned with different aspects, layers or dimensions of some jointly concerned, more general issues of philosophy, especially from a broader philosophical vantage point. This is one point that I have endeavored to make and illustrate in several of my writings mentioned above.

In the pre-engagement phase, it might be not only legitimate but also adequate or even necessary to provide simplification and abstraction of some ideas in one account or tradition through a perspective: this perspective *per se* is presented in most relevant terms to the joint concern addressed, and the purpose served in a philosophical-issue-engagement concerned project, while without involving those irrelevant elements in the account or tradition from which such a perspective comes, though the latter might be relevant to figuring out the point of those ideas. The reasons are these. First, the primary concern of the project is not with how such an idea is related to the other elements in the source account or tradition but with how it is relevant to approaching the jointly concerned philosophical issue. Second, while one needs to understand the point of an idea in the context in which it was raised, once one understands the point (either through employing data provided by projects with the historical-description-concerned orientation and/or the interpretation-concerned orientation or through one's own background project with one of the these two orientations), there would be no present purpose served by discussing the background. Third, it is clear that such an approach *per se* does not imply denying the social and historical integrity of the idea in the source account or tradition; the point is that the existence of such integrity cannot automatically guarantee an indiscriminate priority or even relevance of expressly addressing it in any projects in comparative philosophy without regard to their orientations and purposes.

In the engagement phase, relevant (eligible) perspectives from different source accounts or different traditions would constructively engage each other. From each party's point of view, the other party is something external without; but, from a broader philosophical vantage point and in view of the jointly concerned issue, the distinct views may be complementary within. In this context, the term 'external' would miss the point in regard to the purpose here: the pivotal point is not this or that distinct perspective but the issue (and its comprehensive approach) to whose various aspects those perspectives point; in view of the issue, all those perspectives become internal in the sense that they would be complementary and indispensable to a comprehensive understanding and treatment of the current philosophical issue.

In the post-engagement phase, some sort of assimilation typically results from the preceding reflective engagement; that is, such assimilation would adjust, blur and absorb different perspectives into one new approach as a whole. This would be what is really expected in this kind of reflective engagement in studies of comparative philosophy, instead of a sin.

It should be noted that, if a project in comparative examination, which explicitly has one of the previously mentioned orientations (the interpretation-concerned orientation, the philosophical-issue-engagement orientation, and the historical-description-concerned orientation), is considered a project-simplex, then a project in reflective practice concerning comparative philosophy might be a complex that goes with a combination of two or more orientations. A comprehensive project concerned with historical figures under comparative examination for the sake of their *philosophical* engagement often consists of such a combination of different stages of study with their distinctive focuses. Recognition of the characteristic features of the

above three distinct orientations/purposes and their respective methodological approaches would help us discriminatively treat and evaluate different stages or parts of a project-complex of comparative philosophy.

2.4

For the purpose of cross-tradition/style understanding and constructive engagement, it is especially philosophically interesting, relevant, or even crucial to have an adequate methodological guiding principle, which the agent is expected to hold in evaluating the status and nature of the eligible methodological perspectives, applying her methodological perspective, and looking at the relation between her current working perspective and other methodological perspectives. The suggested meta-methodological framework endeavors to identify six conditions for adequate methodological guiding principles. (Their illustrations via two representative methodological perspectives will be provided in footnotes.) The first four, (1)-(4), and one of the last two, (5) and (6), depending on situations, are expected for a methodological guiding principle to be adequate. This set of conditions does not pretend to be exhaustive, exclusive, or dogmatic; the conditions are open to critical examination for their validity and explanatory force.

(1) The perspective-eligibility-recognizing condition. A methodological guiding principle that is held or presupposed by the agent who uses some eligible methodological perspective as her current working perspective is considered adequate (in this connection) when this guiding principle renders other eligible methodological perspectives (if any) also eligible and somehow compatible with the application of the current working perspective. In contrast, it is considered inadequate (in this connection) if otherwise. This adequacy condition may be called a ‘minimal’ condition in the sense that it is presupposed by the remaining kinds of adequacy conditions.²²

²² As explained above, given an object of study, whether or not a methodological perspective is eligible or ineligible is to be determined based on whether or not the aspect, dimension or layer to which the perspective in question is intended to point is really possessed by the object. Consider the two samples of methodological perspectives briefly characterized in Footnote 14, namely, the Socrates-style being-aspect-concerned perspective and the Confucius-style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective. The two kinds of methodological perspectives point respectively to two most basic modes of existence (being and becoming) of things in the world that are typically possessed simultaneously by most things in nature. Now the object of study under Socrates’ and Confucius’ examination is (filial) piety. [Surely, it is through arguably appropriate philosophical interpretation, beyond being based merely on the translation of the Chinese term ‘*xiao*’ in the *Analecets* into the English term ‘(filial) piety’ or its Greek counterpart, that Socrates and Confucius are considered to have their joint concern with the issue of (filial) piety but take distinct approaches with regard to different aspects or layers of this jointly-concerned issue. It is philosophically interesting and significant to explore how such philosophical interpretation is possible. I cannot pursue this issue here due to the purpose of this writing; but one thing is certain: both Socrates and Confucius were concerned with the issue of how one should treat one’s parents in a morally adequate way.] If piety as the object of study genuinely possesses both its being and becoming aspects, Socrates’ and Confucius’ are both eligible in regard to our reflective examination of piety. In this way, a methodological guiding principle that renders both methodological perspectives eligible on the issue of piety would have the perspective-eligibility-recognizing adequacy.

(2) The agent-purpose-sensitivity condition. A methodological guiding principle is considered adequate (in this connection) if it guides the agent to have her choice of a certain working perspective, among eligible methodological perspectives, sensitive to the agent's purpose and thus renders the most applicable or the most appropriate (the best relative to that purpose) the perspective that (best) serves that purpose. In contrast, it is considered inadequate (in this connection) if otherwise.²³

(3) The equality-status-granting condition. A methodological guiding principle is considered adequate (in this connection) if it renders all the eligible methodological perspectives (perspective simplexes)²⁴ equal in the following two senses: being equally necessary for the sake of a complete account of an object of study and being equally local from the global point of view that transcends any local methodological perspectives; thus none of them *absolutely* superior (or inferior) to the others in the above senses. In contrast, it is considered inadequate (in this connection) if otherwise.²⁵

(4) The new-eligible-perspective-possibility-recognizing condition. A methodological guiding principle is considered adequate (in this connection) if it guides the agent to have an open-minded attitude toward the possibility of a new eligible perspective that is to point to some genuine aspect of the object of study but have yet to be realized by the agent because of the 'unknown-identity' status of that

²³ Again consider the two sample methodological perspectives, the Socrates-style being-aspect-concerned perspective and the Confucius-style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective. Given that the two methodological perspectives are both eligible in regard to the issue of piety, a methodological guiding principle that sets out to decide which methodological perspective among the two is to be taken by an agent herself as her working perspective, or how to evaluate the validity of some other agent's working perspective (either one) should be sensitive to the agent's purpose or her own focus on which aspect of piety to be captured in a certain context. The methodological guiding principle then has the agent-purpose-sensitivity adequacy. Otherwise, that is, when a methodological guiding principle demands the agent indiscriminately to choose one *ad hoc* methodological perspective without regard to the agent's purpose and focus in a certain context, the methodological guiding principle would fail to have this adequacy. Perhaps a most prominent ancient thinker who explicitly addresses the agent-purpose-sensitivity condition (and the equality-status-granting condition) is Zhuang Zi. For a recent discussion of Zhuang Zi's point in this connection, see Mou 2008b.

²⁴ Clearly, what is talked about here is not a methodological-perspective complex that can be a combination of multiple methodological-perspective simplexes.

²⁵ Again consider the two sample methodological perspectives, the Socrates-style being-aspect-concerned perspective and the Confucius-style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective and assume that both are eligible methodological perspectives that point respectively to the being aspect and becoming aspect both of which are really possessed by piety. When one resorts to a certain methodological guiding principle to guide one's evaluation of the status of the Socrates-style being-aspect-concerned perspective (or the Confucius-style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective) and thus render it indiscriminately and absolutely superior to the Confucius-style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective (or the Socrates-style being-aspect-concerned perspective), the methodological guiding principle thus fails to have the equality-status-granting adequacy concerning the aforementioned two methodological perspectives on the issue of piety. In contrast, if a methodological guiding principle renders one of the two better than another or most suitable only in view of a certain context and in regard to a certain aspect of piety to which the perspective in question points but without viewing it absolutely superior to the other, this methodological guiding principle will thus meet the equality-status-granting condition concerning the aforementioned two methodological perspectives on the issue of piety.

aspect. A methodological guiding principle is considered inadequate (in this connection) if otherwise.²⁶

(5) The complementarity-seeking condition. Given that multiple, seemingly competing eligible methodological perspectives concerning the object of study turn out to be complementary (in the sense that each of them points to one aspect of the object and is indispensable for a complete understanding of the object), a methodological guiding principle is considered adequate (in this connection) if it captures the complementary character of the involved aspects of the object and thus seeks the complementary connection and harmonious balance between those perspectives for the sake of enhancing the complementary unity of those eligible perspectives. In contrast, it is considered inadequate (in this connection) if otherwise.²⁷

(6) The sublation-seeking condition. Given that there are two seemingly competing guiding-principle-associated perspective complexes whose perspective parts are eligible (i.e., capturing distinct aspects of the object of study) but whose respectively associated methodological guiding principles are genuinely competing or incompatible (either because one of them is inadequate or because both are inadequate), such a methodological guiding principle would be considered adequate (in this connection) if it seeks a due solution through a Hegelian synthetic balance via sublation that keeps what are reasonable or appropriate from both guiding-principle-associated perspective

²⁶ Again consider the two sample methodological perspectives, the Socrates-style being-aspect-concerned perspective and the Confucius-style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective and assume that both are eligible methodological perspectives on the issue of piety. If, besides the two methodological perspectives, a methodological guiding principle has its open-minded attitude towards the possibility of new (yet-to-be-recognized) aspects, dimensions or layers of piety and thus the possibility of new eligible methodological perspectives that are to point to and explain them, the guiding principle thus enjoys The new-eligible-perspective-possibility-recognizing adequacy. In contrast, any methodological guiding principle that renders exclusive and exhaustive the current working perspective (or the current stock of methodological perspectives that are so far epistemologically available), the guiding principle is thus inadequate because it fails to meet the condition of the new-eligible-perspective-possibility-recognizing adequacy.

²⁷ Again, consider the two sample methodological perspectives, the Socrates-style being-aspect-concerned perspective and the Confucius-style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective. The two kinds of methodological perspectives point respectively to two most basic modes of existence, being and becoming, of things in the world that are typically possessed simultaneously by most things in nature. Now the object of study under Socrates' and Confucius' examination is (filial) piety. Suppose that piety as the object of study genuinely possesses both its being and becoming aspects and that both aspects are interdependent, interpenetrating, interactive and complementary in regard to the constitution of piety. Then the Socrates-style being-aspect-concerned perspective and the Confucius-style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective are complementary instead of being incompatible or opposed to each other on the issue of piety. In this way, any methodological guiding principle that renders the two methodological perspectives complementary and seeks their complementary connection and joint contribution to a complete understanding of the issue of piety thus meets the complementarity-seeking condition. If otherwise, a methodological guiding principle would be inadequate in this connection on the issue. The complementarity-seeking condition essentially reflects the point of the *yin-yang* model of interaction and transformation. For the *yin-yang* model, see Allinson 2003 and Mou 2003b. For a similar meta-methodological spirit of complementarity-seeking harmonization of seemingly-competing modes of philosophizing, also see Rescher 1994.

complexes (i.e., their eligible perspectives, maybe plus some adequate guiding principle from one perspective complex if any) while disregarding what are not, i.e., the inadequate guiding principle (or principles) in one (or both) of the perspective complexes. In contrast, it is considered inadequate (in this connection) if otherwise.²⁸

Among the foregoing six kinds of adequacy conditions, the minimal perspective-eligibility-recognizing condition is presupposed by the remaining kinds of conditions. Which one, between the last two kinds of conditions, needs to be maintained would depend on the nature of the object of study, the character of the involved perspectives and the purpose that a certain methodological guiding principle serves.

It is noted that, as indicated before, although comparative philosophy typically treats prominently cross-tradition/orientation comparative cases, the methodological points of the adequacy conditions are intended to be general concerning the constructive engagement of any distinct approaches in philosophical inquiry, whether they are from different traditions/orientations of doing philosophy or within the same tradition/orientation. That is one value of the meta-philosophical exploration of methodology of comparative philosophy.

3

It is important to note that the constructive-engagement strategy is not merely armchair speculation but has already been reflectively implemented in—and, indeed, has impacted—the reflective practice of comparative philosophy. This is the case with respect to philosophical studies of classical Chinese philosophy and comparative Chinese-Western philosophy²⁹, especially in the past decade. In this section, I intend to give a case analysis of how the constructive-engagement strategy effectively bears on studies of Chinese and comparative Chinese-Western philosophy³⁰ especially in the

²⁸ For example, there might be two seemingly competing guiding-principle-associated perspective complexes as two approaches to build up a social-economic community: the profit-seeking-only perspective complex (i.e., the profit-seeking perspective that is associated with a guiding principle which renders the perspective exclusively eligible) and the welfare-seeking-only perspective (i.e., the welfare-seeking perspective that is associated with a guiding principle which renders the perspective exclusively eligible). It might be the case that a social-economic community does, or should, have both its profit-seeking layer and its welfare-seeking layer for the sake of its well-being. In this case, what really makes the two perspective complexes competing or incompatible would be their respectively associated guiding principles that render their respectively guided perspectives exclusively eligible. Then, when a methodological guiding principle seeks a synthetic balance (via sublation) to bring about a new approach that keeps what is reasonable in the two perspective complexes (i.e., the two involved perspective simplexes *per se*) while disregarding what is not (i.e., the two involved inadequate guiding principles), the methodological guiding principle would be considered to be adequate because it meets the sublation-seeking condition in this case. Though labeled in terms of Hegel's ideology, the idea of the sublation-seeking condition can be traced back to Aristotle's method of saving the phenomena (cf., *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1145b1-7). For an elaboration of the Aristotelian method, see Yu and Bunnin 2001.

²⁹ For a survey of comparative Chinese-Western philosophy, see Wong 2005.

³⁰ Without the implication that one is superior to the other, the phrase 'comparative Chinese-Western philosophy', instead of 'comparative Western-Chinese philosophy', is used in view of the following

past decade for three purposes: (1) to illustrate the foregoing theoretic characterizations of the constructive engagement strategy; (2) to show how the constructive-engagement approach has effectively enhanced and promoted studies of Chinese and comparative Chinese-Western philosophy; (3) to illustrate how the constructive engagement in the reflective practice of comparative Chinese-Western philosophy can provide constructive morals and methodological templates that can be applied to other tradition-vs.-tradition (and/or orientation-vs.-orientation) comparative studies. Indeed, why this case analysis concerning comparative Chinese-Western philosophy instead of some other case is given here has two related considerations. Comparative Chinese-Western philosophy, through contemporary studies of Chinese philosophy, has been one significant and well-developed part of comparative philosophy. Theoretically speaking, both the Chinese and Western traditions of philosophy are several-thousand-year-long traditions with their distinctively rich resources in various philosophical subjects. Practically speaking, it seems that currently there are notably more research results in the literature, as well as research personnel, worldwide than any other tradition-vs.-tradition comparative studies in philosophy.

In contemporary studies of Chinese philosophy³¹ and comparative Chinese-Western philosophy, the label ‘the constructive-engagement trend/movement’³² can be understood in a weak sense and in a strong sense. In its weak sense, the phrase means a more or less collective trend in studies of Chinese philosophy and comparative philosophy as shown in the past few decades in the direction of the foregoing constructive-engagement strategy, whether or not its involved meta-philosophical and methodological issues have been consciously and systematically examined, whether or not the trend has its explicit systematic agenda in print, and whether or not it has been explicitly promoted by a certain academic organization with its articulated constructive-engagement purpose. Nevertheless, in its stronger sense, the term means a trend/movement that has emerged especially since the earlier years of the 21st century with its explicitly specified research agenda, some related academic organizations or institutions as a collective driving force, various coordinated systematic efforts for the constructive-engagement purpose, and some other distinct features to be addressed

historical fact: such studies have been carried out primarily by scholars whose primary areas of research include Chinese philosophy and through their studies of Chinese philosophy.

³¹ As indicated in Footnote 6, by ‘Chinese philosophy’ I primarily mean various movements of philosophical thought in China from the *Zhou* Dynasty (roughly eleventh century to 256 B.C.) through the early *Qing* Dynasty (1644 – mid 19th century) and their contemporary developments and studies.

³² As suggested in Footnote 3, exactly how to label the methodological strategy and its associated trend or movement is a relatively unimportant thing; one can label it in some other ways one would reasonably prefer. The point is this: the methodological strategy together with its associated movement is not merely an armchair strategy on paper; rather, it has already substantially implemented and through a variety of collective reflective practice that has resulted in solid scholarship. The methodological strategy and its associated movement are characterized in terms of ‘constructive engagement’ here with two major considerations, especially in view of the trend/movement in the mentioned strong sense. First, the phrase does literally capture some of their crucial features. Second, the label has been historically associated with them both in some relevant documents in print and in some prominent academic events and projects that have been guided by the methodological strategy.

below. Such systematic efforts have produced some major collective research programs and resulted in substantial outcomes. The nature and methodological features of the constructive-engagement trend/movement in the foregoing strong sense³³ can be characterized in the following ten connections.

First, generally speaking, the constructive-engagement trend as a whole has moved beyond some previous individual efforts, each of which typically featured this or that specific perspective in comparative studies, and has been guided under a broad vision or methodological guiding principle concerning how to look at the relation between various eligible but seemingly competing methodological perspectives in comparative studies of Chinese and Western philosophy: essentially it renders complementary those eligible perspectives that respectively capture some distinct aspects, layers or dimensions of objects of study, instead of indiscriminately subscribing to one single finite perspective or rendering it exclusively eligible without doing justice to other eligible perspectives. The constructive-engagement movement as a whole is not limited to that between Chinese philosophy and Western analytic philosophy³⁴ (or Chinese philosophy and “Continental” philosophy) but that between Chinese philosophy and any movement of thought in the Western philosophical tradition (or even any movement of thought in other philosophical traditions) in a global context.³⁵ In this connection, it is neither to *reform* the studies of Chinese philosophy exclusively in virtue of an analytic approach, nor to *reformulate* studies of Chinese philosophy exclusively by the resources of “Continental” philosophy. Nevertheless, that amounts to saying neither that any specific project that is part of the movement has to be comprehensive in its manifest current coverage nor that it has to take a comprehensive perspective complex as its current working perspective; what makes a difference lies in the foregoing sort of methodological guiding principle that guides the project with a broad vision concerning how to look at the relation between the current subject/concern and other subjects/concerns and between the current working perspective and other eligible perspectives.

Second, as far as the methodological dimension of the trend is concerned, a systematic, in-depth meta-philosophical discussion of the relation between the Western

³³ It is arguably correct that some of those indicated features are also applicable to characterizing the constructive-engagement movement in the weaker sense, whether they are shown in some explicit or implicit, manifest or obscure, ways.

³⁴ By ‘Western analytic philosophy’ or ‘Western philosophy in the analytic tradition’ I mean a Western mainstream philosophical tradition from Socrates, Plato and Aristotle to Descartes, British empiricism and Kant to the contemporary analytic movement. Note that, besides indicating a historical connection between Western philosophy in such a tradition and analytic methodological approach taken in this tradition, such phrases as ‘Western analytic philosophy’ used here are not intended to imply that analytic methodology is, intrinsically or conceptually, exclusively connected with Western philosophy. See Footnote 16 where a brief characterization of the identity of analytic methodology is given.

³⁵ At the most recent stage of the development of modern Chinese philosophy, one of its prominent features (at least in regard to one significant portion of modern Chinese philosophy) lies in its movement towards world philosophy via the constructive-engagement movement. In this sense, and to this extent, the context of the recent development of modern Chinese philosophy and the mentioned global context have merged essentially into the same context.

(especially analytic) philosophical tradition and Chinese philosophical tradition concerning philosophical methodology and the nature of philosophical inquiry has provided a necessary, theoretical and meta-philosophical preparation for a comprehensive, systematic constructive-engagement enterprise. For example, as analytic and classical Chinese philosophy have been considered by many to be less relevant or even alien to each other, some recent systematic and in-depth meta-philosophical discussions of how their constructive engagement is possible, especially in view of their respective methodologies, has provided an indispensable methodological preparation for subsequent in-depth investigations on how they can jointly make a contribution to our understanding and treatment of a series of concrete issues.³⁶ When a movement of thought in philosophy has its systematic meta-philosophical reflection on its own nature, direction and methodology, this reflective endeavor would be viewed as one mark of maturity and one necessary condition of its long-term healthy development.

Third, as far its subject coverage of the trend is concerned, the constructive-engagement trend or movement in contemporary study of Chinese philosophy is comprehensive, including the engaging examination of a series of fundamental or significant issues and concerns in those central areas of philosophy like metaphysics, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, epistemology, etc., instead of focusing merely on the issues in ethics and social & political philosophy. In the past, there has been one quite widespread stereotypical understanding of the nature and scope of traditional Chinese philosophy that renders it philosophically valuable only in regard to its thoughts on moral and social-political issues. Though also emphasizing the necessity of Western and Chinese philosophers learning from each other, some scholars consider such mutual beneficial engagement valuable and valid only or largely in regard to limited areas like ethics and social & political philosophy. But this view has turned out to be incorrect, as some individual scholars' explorations in the past decades and some recent collective engagement projects in those important areas like metaphysics, philosophy of language and philosophy of mind, together with their fruitful research results have already clearly and convincingly shown it.

Fourth, as far as its engagement mode is concerned, the constructive-engagement trend or movement emphasizes the direct and critical but constructive dialogue between the engaging parties (whenever situations allow) for the sake of effectively carrying out reflective criticism and self-criticism and jointly making contributions to the common enterprise of philosophy. Indeed, this is one of the meanings of the phrase 'constructive engagement' that captures one crucial character of philosophical inquiry, i.e., the critical engagement for the sake of making joint contributions to the understanding and treatment of common concerns. Such a critical engagement character, instead of mere celebration, has effectively motivated relevant engaging parties in participation. For example, two recent projects on constructive engagement, namely, Davidson's philosophy and Chinese philosophy, and of Searle's philosophy and Chinese philosophy, have well adopted such an approach to critical engagement.

³⁶ One of such systematic methodological examinations is presented in Mou 2001a.

Fifth, as far as collective and systematic character is concerned, the constructive-engagement trend in contemporary studies of Chinese philosophy is not some individual scholar's personal project but has already developed into a collective enterprise with its systematic character and extensive joint efforts. This shows the degree of its matureness, results from its in-depth theoretical preparation, and helps to bring about its related academic community that can provide decent critical examination of the works in the constructive-engagement scholarship. Especially, the movement is now well implemented through some effective organizational forces. Among others, one contributing force in this connection is an international academic association, i.e., The International Society for Comparative Studies of Chinese and Western Philosophy (ISCWP), which was formally established in 2002. The ISCWP has systematically planned and organized a series of academic events and projects explicitly for the sake of the constructive-engagement purpose and agenda. The foregoing conception of constructive engagement of Chinese and Western philosophy has been explicitly and formally documented in the ISCWP constitution as follows:

With the preceding general purposes, the Society emphasizes (but is not limited to) the constructive engagement between Chinese philosophy and Western mainstream philosophy (analytic tradition as well as continental tradition in the West in their broad senses); the Society stresses the sensitivity of such comparative studies to contemporary development and resources of philosophy and their mutual advancement; and, through the characteristic path of comparative studies of Chinese and Western philosophy, the Society strives to contribute to philosophy as common human wealth as well as to respective studies of Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy. The Society also emphasizes building up a channel and outlet for the academic exchange and communication between the homeland of Chinese philosophy and the Western world in philosophy.³⁷

The reader can see that the above citation from the ISCWP constitution, though in a concise way, reflects a number of key features of this movement and actually serves as the guiding line of the association for its agenda and organizational activities.

Sixth, as far as the constitution of the participants in the movement is concerned, they are limited to neither those who major in traditional Chinese philosophy nor those who are native Chinese philosophers, but also include scholars from other philosophical communities of the world (for example, the mainstream philosophical circle in English-speaking countries). In this aspect and to this extent, the constructive-engagement movement in contemporary studies of Chinese philosophy has already become an international enterprise (as one significant part of the constructive-engagement-oriented comparative philosophy worldwide or thus oriented world philosophy); it provides one effective channel by which scholars from different traditions and/or with distinct styles/orientations of doing philosophy carry out international cooperation, constructive dialogue and comparative engagement in studying Chinese philosophy towards world philosophy or doing philosophy in a global context. For example, in the past decade, some well-respected scholars in the

³⁷ The full text of the ISCWP Constitution (both in English and Chinese) is available from the ISCWP website whose current address is <http://sangle.web.wesleyan.edu/iscwp/>.

analytic tradition, such as Donald Davidson, Michael Krausz, Ernie Lepore, A. P. Martinich, Adam Morton, John Searle, Avrum Stroll, and Samuel C. Wheeler have been drawn to this enterprise. Although Chinese philosophy is not among their area of specialty, on the one hand, they have made contributions to studying Chinese philosophy either via their valuable works on some meta-philosophical and/or methodological issues involved in the constructive engagement of Chinese and Western philosophy, or directly through exploring some jointly concerned issues in such studies; on the other hand, they have also more or less benefited from the relevant resources in Chinese philosophy through such comparative engagement that have constructively contributed to their own studies.

Seventh, as far as its research outcomes are concerned, the constructive-engagement trend or movement, with the aforementioned systematic efforts, has already produced substantial results in research on a series of philosophical issues, neither merely stopping at some sort of armchair speculation of the mere possibility, nor merely remaining at the level of purely meta-philosophical discussion of how such constructive engagement is possible, though the latter discussion is necessary and has provided indispensable theoretic and methodological preparation for its healthy development, as emphasized before. Such in-depth detailed analysis of how distinct approaches (for example, Chinese and Western philosophy) to concrete issues can constructively engage with each other have been given not merely in some individual scholars' works that have contributed to the development of the constructive-engagement movement, but also in some remarkable research results from the recent collective efforts that have been made expressly for the constructive-engagement purpose.³⁸

Eighth, as far as its relation to contemporary philosophy is concerned, the movement is especially sensitive to various resources of the post-Kantian stage of modern philosophy, or sometimes labeled 'contemporary philosophy' in its broad sense, especially those of 20th century contemporary philosophy, in both the analytic and "Continental" tradition. The reason is this. One primary purpose of the constructive-engagement strategy in studying Chinese and comparative philosophy is to inquire into how to make contributions to the jointly-concerned issues in the common enterprise of philosophy; for this purpose, the movement as a whole has paid much attention to, and has been concerned especially with, two things: (1) distinct approaches to those issues that have been suggested from other traditions (especially those in contemporary analytic philosophy and "Continental" philosophy in the Western tradition), and (2) new developments of philosophy as explored in various areas of contemporary philosophy. The concern (1) renders the movement comparative in character, while the concern (2) renders the movement sensitive to the updated development of philosophy and conceptual-explanatory resources in contemporary

³⁸ Among others, two recent anthology volumes respectively on the constructive engagement of Davidson's philosophy and Chinese philosophy and of Searle's philosophy and Chinese philosophy, for the two aforementioned collective research projects, have already come out in print (see Mou 2006a and Mou 2008a). For my own explorations in these two connections, see Mou 2006b and Mou 2008b.

philosophy; both concerns (1) and (2) render the movement especially active in comparative engagement with various distinct approaches from other traditions or styles/orientations in contemporary philosophy and in adoption of various relevant conceptual-explanatory resources developed in contemporary philosophy.³⁹

Ninth, as far as its own standard for philosophical scholarship is concerned, the constructive-engagement agenda and fruitful research results of the movement with the preceding characteristics have raised a *higher* standard for the *philosophical* scholarship of studying Chinese philosophy and comparative (Chinese-Western) philosophy to this extent: the *philosophical* (instead of merely historical) studies of Chinese philosophy needs in-depth understanding and command (not merely introductory-level knowledge) of the developments of contemporary philosophy in various closely related central areas together with their conceptual and explanatory resources, instead of treating them as things irrelevant or alien. It has been realized that such understanding is not a mere preference but a must for the constructive-engagement purpose and agenda. In other words, when carrying out studies of Chinese philosophy for the sake of constructive-engagement, one cannot be satisfied merely with an introductory level of knowledge of relevant subjects and their related conceptual-explanatory resources in contemporary philosophy; rather, one needs to have an updated, in-depth understanding of them, including a careful reading of the relevant literature of contemporary philosophy and being sensitive to its new developments on relevant fronts.

Tenth, as far as its fundamental nature and direction is concerned, the movement is part of world philosophy (or part of comparative philosophy in general as doing philosophy in a global context), instead of a mere local one associated with Chinese philosophy alone or comparative studies of Chinese and Western philosophy alone, in the following two senses or connections. (1) As far as its fundamental direction is concerned, as already highlighted before, one fundamental agenda of the movement is a general constructive-engagement strategy: to inquire into how, via reflective criticism and self-criticism, distinct modes of thinking, methodological approaches, visions, insights, substantial points of view, or conceptual and explanatory resources from different philosophical traditions and/or from various styles/orientations of doing philosophy (including those from the complex array of distinct styles/orientations of doing philosophy within the same tradition), can learn from each other and jointly contribute to the common philosophical enterprise and/or a series of issues or topics of philosophical significance, which can be jointly concerned through appropriate philosophical interpretation and/or from a broader philosophical vantage point. In this

³⁹ For example, to jointly implement the two related concerns in this connection, the ISCWP as one contributing force to the movement has established its workshop-roundtable series, i.e., ISCWP's *Beijing Roundtable on Contemporary Philosophy*, which directly and explicitly address the two concerns in a joint way. Now the *Beijing Roundtable on Contemporary Philosophy* has already successfully held five workshops respectively in the summers of 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009 and well implemented the agenda in this regard.

way, the issues and concerns under its reflective examination are eventually general and associated with cross-traditions instead of idiosyncratically holding for Chinese philosophy alone. (2) As far as its basic methodological strategy is concerned, in view of its foregoing fundamental agenda, the constructive-engagement movement in modern Chinese philosophy is not limited to its constructive engagement with *Western* philosophy but also with other philosophical traditions, as well as constructive engagement between distinct movements within Chinese philosophy. To this extent, constructive engagement between Chinese and Western philosophy can serve as a methodological *template* for the constructive engagement between any two (or more than two) seemingly competing approaches in philosophical inquiries towards world philosophy, say, between the Chinese tradition and other non-Western philosophical traditions.

I contend that the foregoing ten characteristic features shown in the recent prominent case of the constructive-engagement trend or movement in contemporary studies of Chinese and comparative Chinese-Western philosophy have their general philosophical implications and morals for our colleagues whose primary expertise lie in other traditions or other styles/orientations of doing philosophy but who share the same fundamental constructive-engagement goal in their philosophical inquiries. Indeed, I hope that this case analysis has illustrated how, through the reflective practice of constructive-engagement, those (individually and/or collectively) whose primary research areas lie in one tradition (in this case, Chinese philosophy) or whose primary methodological approach focuses on one style/orientation (in this case, some representative style in Chinese philosophy) can learn from other traditions/orientations of philosophy and thus enhance the *philosophical* scholarship of their home area and/or their primary approach and contribute to the common philosophical enterprise. The same moral can be presented from the point of view of a philosopher from another tradition.⁴⁰

*

*

*

In this “Journal Theme Introduction”, first, I have characterized the identity and nature of comparative philosophy as understood in a philosophical way and as explored in this Journal. Second, through needed conceptual and explanatory resources and a meta-methodological framework, I have further elaborated some central methodological emphases of the constructive-engagement strategy of comparative philosophy and explained how the constructive engagement strategy is possible. Third, I have illustrated the strategy of constructive-engagement and drawn some morals and methodological templates that have general significance through a case analysis

⁴⁰ In this connection, we might take a real-life figure, John Searle, as example: the morals of such constructive engagement are well recorded in print through the engaging contributions by the participants of the foregoing two identities (those whose primary research areas include Chinese philosophy and those whose primary research areas do not include Chinese philosophy but analytic philosophy) in the monograph anthology *Searle’s Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy: Constructive Engagement* (see Mou 2008a).

concerning studies of Chinese and comparative Chinese-Western philosophy,

Now, with all the foregoing explanation, elaboration, clarification and illustrations, I summarize the orientation, emphasis, coverage and goal of the Journal in a way that prospective authors and readers can easily capture its points. The coverage of the journal *Comparative Philosophy* is not restricted to, but can include, any particular comparative-engagement pairs of traditions/styles of doing philosophy (e.g., the East-West, South-North, or analytic-'Continental'), in view of the common philosophical enterprise and series of issues or topics of *philosophical* interest and significance. Generally speaking, the emphasis of the Journal, regarding conceptual/explanatory resources and modes of thinking in philosophy, is not exclusive to any *ad hoc* way of thinking (e.g., neither the Greek-style *nous* alone nor the Chinese-style *dao* alone) but inclusive; but, specifically speaking, this emphasis is also sensitive to the nature and features of specific philosophical issues/topics and the demand of situations. On the other hand, the Journal is inclusive but not merely for the sake of being aware of views from other traditions or styles of doing philosophy without critical engagement. The Journal emphasizes critical engagement but does not go without serious consideration of positive constructive contribution. As highlighted at the outset, the Journal explicitly emphasizes the *constructive engagement* of distinct approaches in light of critical examination: it is to inquire into how, via reflective criticism (including self-criticism) and argumentation, distinct modes of thinking, methodological approaches, visions, insights, substantial points of view, or conceptual and explanatory resources from different philosophical traditions and/or different styles/orientations of doing philosophy (within one tradition or from different traditions) can learn from each other and jointly contribute to our understanding and treatment of a series of issues, themes or topics of philosophical significance, which can be jointly concerned through philosophical interpretation and/or from a broader philosophical vantage point. The international journal *Comparative Philosophy* sets out to make its substantial contribution to the common philosophical enterprise through this way.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Earlier versions of partial contents of this writing originally appeared in some of my previous publications: Mou 2001b, 2002, 2006c, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d. My thanks go to the publishers for the permission to reuse the materials here. I am grateful to the following colleagues for their helpful comments and feedback on this writing: Karin Brown, Albert Filice, Steve Geisz, Anand Vaidya, and Marshall Willman.

REFERENCES

Allinson, Robert E. (2001), "The Myth of Comparative Philosophy or the Comparative Philosophy *Malgré Lui*", in Bo Mou (ed.) 2001a: pp. 269-91.

- (2003), "Hegelian, *Yi-Jing*, and Buddhist Transformational Models for Comparative Philosophy", in Mou (ed.) (2003a), pp. 60-85.
- Ames, Roger T. and Hall, David L. (1995), *Anticipating China: Thinking Through the Narratives of Chinese and Western Culture* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press).
- Bartley, Christopher (2006), *Indian Philosophy A-Z* (Palgrave Macmillan).
- Confucius, the *Lun-Yü* [the *Analects*]. See *Confucius: The Analects*, translated with introduction by D. C. Lau (1979), New York: Penguin Books, 1979; bilingual edition, Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1983.
- Davidson, Donald (2001), "Foreword" [on analytic methodology and cross-tradition understanding] written for Bo Mou (ed.) 2001a, pp. v-vi.
- Graham, Angus C. (1989), *The Disputes of Tao: Philosophical Arguments in Ancient China* (LaSalle Ill.: Open Court).
- Groff, Peter S. (2007), *Islamic Philosophy A-Z* (Edinburgh University Press).
- Hansen, Chad (1983), "Methodological Reflection", in his *Language and Logic in Ancient China*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), Chapter 1.
- Hughes, Aaron (2006), *Jewish Philosophy A-Z* (Palgrave Macmillan).
- Martinich, A. P. (ed.) (2008), *The Philosophy of Language* (5th edition) (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Mou, Bo (ed.) (2001a), *Two Roads to Wisdom?---Chinese and Analytic Philosophical Traditions*, (Chicago: Open Court)
- (2001b), "An Analysis of the Structure of Philosophical Methodology—in View of Comparative Philosophy", in Bo Mou (ed.) (2001a), pp. 337-364.
- (2002), "Three Orientations and Four 'Sins' in Comparative Studies", in the *APA Newsletters* Vol. 02.2 (in its portion on comparative philosophy edited by Chenyang Li): 42-5.
- (ed.) (2003a), *Comparative Approaches to Chinese Philosophy*, Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003.
- (2003b), "Becoming-Being Complementarity: An Account of the *Yin-Yang* Metaphysical Vision of the *Yi-Jing*", in Mou (ed.) (2003a), pp. 86-96.
- (ed.) (2006a), *Davidson's Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy: Constructive Engagement*, Leiden, Netherlands: Brill.
- (2006b), "Truth Pursuit and *Dao* Pursuit: From Davidson's Approach to Classical Daoist Approach in View of the Thesis of Truth as Strategic Normative Goal", in Bo Mou (ed.) 2006a: 309-49.
- (2006c), Section 2 of "How Constructive Engagement of Davidson's Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy is Possible: A Theme Introduction", in *Davidson's Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy: Constructive Engagement*, ed. Bo Mou (2006a), pp. 9-19.
- (ed.) (2008a), *Searle's Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy: Constructive Engagement* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill).
- (2008b), "Searle, Zhuang Zi, and Transcendental Perspectivism", in Bo Mou (ed.) 2008a, pp. 405-430.
- (ed.) (2009a), *History of Chinese Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge).

- (2009b), “On Some Methodological Issues Concerning Chinese Philosophy”, in Bo Mou (ed.) (2009a), pp. 1-39.
- (2009c), “Constructive Engagement of Chinese and Western Philosophy: A Contemporary Trend Towards World Philosophy”, in Bo Mou (ed.) (2009a), pp. 571-608.
- (2009d), Section 6.2.2, Chapter 6 of *Substantive Perspectivism: An Essay on Philosophical Concern with Truth* (“Synthese Library” monograph series, vol. 344) (Netherlands: Springer), pp. 168-173.
- Plato, *Euthyphro*, in Steven M. Cahn (ed.) (1995), *Classics of Western Philosophy* (Hackett), pp.28-40.
- Rescher, Nicholas (1994), “Philosophical Methodology”, in Nicholas Rescher (1994), *A System of Pragmatic Idealism*, vol. III: *Metaphilosophical Inquiries* (Princeton University Press); reprinted in Bo Mou (ed.) 2001a, pp. 1-25.
- Searle, John (2008), “The Globalization of Philosophy”, in Mou (ed.) 2008a, pp. 17-29.
- Shun, Kwong-loi (1997), Section 1.2, “Some Methodological Issues”, of *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), pp. 5-13.
- Wong, David (2005), “Comparative Philosophy: Chinese and Western”, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/comparphil-chiwest/>).
- Yu, Jiyuan and Nicholas Bunnin (2001), “Saving the Phenomena: An Aristotelian Method in Comparative Philosophy”, in Bo Mou (ed.) 2001, pp. 293-312.