SPECIAL THEME (1):
COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY AS A GENERAL WAY OF DOING PHILOSOPHY THROUGH CROSS-TRADITION ENGAGEMENT TOWARD WORLD PHILOSOPHY

PART I: ON THE THEME

COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY
AS A GENERAL WAY OF DOING PHILOSOPHY THROUGH CROSS-TRADITION ENGAGEMENT TOWARD WORLD PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT: In this theme essay for the addressed special-theme section in this special issue of the journal Comparative Philosophy commemorating the first anniversary of the International Society for Comparative Philosophy toward World Philosophy (CPWP), I intend to give an elaboration of the theme “comparative philosophy as a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement toward world philosophy” (‘comparative philosophy toward world philosophy’ for short), which has been explicitly presented and formally stated through its recent academic-organizational channel CPWP and focuses on via the Journal’s and CPWP’s jointly organized international conference. The theme “comparative philosophy toward world philosophy” as a whole marks a momentous accumulating point of the significant development of comparative philosophy as a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement regarding its “direction” dimension, through the constructive-engagement strategy in theoretic exploration and reflective practice especially since the beginning of this century.

Keywords: a general way of doing philosophy, comparative philosophy, cross-tradition engagement, philosophical methodology, world philosophy

In this theme essay for the addressed special-theme section in this special issue of the journal Comparative Philosophy commemorating the first anniversary of the

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International Society for Comparative Philosophy toward World Philosophy (CPWP), I intend to give an elaboration of the theme “comparative philosophy as a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement toward world philosophy” ('comparative philosophy toward world philosophy’ for short), which has been explicitly presented and formally stated through its recent academic-organizational channel CPWP via its Constitution. Although all of its three dimensions (i.e., its “character” dimension as “a general way of doing philosophy”, its “approach” dimension as “cross-tradition engagement”, and its “direction” dimension as “toward world philosophy”) had been more or less suggested and explained before in an explicit or implicit way, the theme “comparative philosophy toward world philosophy” as a whole marks a momentous accumulating point of the significant development of comparative philosophy (no matter how to label it) as a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement regarding its “direction” dimension, through the constructive-engagement strategy in theoretic exploration and reflective practice especially since the beginning of the 21st century. The theme has been pointedly focused on in a recent international virtual conference (19-23 April 2022) co-organized by this journal and the CPWP and co-sponsored and hosted by the SJSU Center for Comparative Philosophy.

In the following, my strategy is this. In section 1, I give a general explanation of the identity of comparative philosophy under examination in this essay, which is essentially a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement toward world philosophy (whether all of its dimensions are explicitly or implicitly given, and no matter how it is labeled), as theoretically explored and reflectively practiced through a range of collective and individual research projects especially since the beginning of this century and via the journal Comparative Philosophy since 2010.

In section 2, instead of a comprehensive examination of all relevant endeavors, I focus on one representative “constructive-engagement” strategy of comparative philosophy as emphasized by this journal and the CPWP, highlighting its emphases; among others, I explain how its substantial development intrinsically points to a vision of world philosophy that is a forward-looking, dynamic, and multiple-layered process of development of philosophy worldwide (thus “toward world philosophy”), which demands a holistic guidance of adequate methodological guiding principles. In section 3, I explain why and how a holistic command of “adequacy” conditions for maintaining adequate methodological guiding principles with a higher and broader vision is crucial both in working out the constructive-engagement strategic account and in guiding the constructive-engagement-oriented worldwide efforts of comparative philosophy toward world philosophy. I first briefly present an enhanced version of a holistic account of “adequacy” conditions for maintaining adequate methodological guiding principles which constitutes a meta-methodological framework of how cross-tradition engagement is possible; I then explain how the overall holistic vision of this suggested meta-methodological framework points to the “direction” dimension of comparative philosophy as a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement toward world philosophy.
1. IDENTITY OF COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY UNDER EXAMINATION

Especially since the beginning of the 21st century, the significance and value of comparative philosophy (no matter how one would prefer to label it) as a general way of doing philosophy comparatively (in plain words but in a circular way, or, more explicitly in a non-circular way, through cross-tradition engagement) has been recognized and strengthened through both theoretic exploration and reflective practice. Furthermore, especially in the past decade, the “direction” dimension of comparative philosophy (as “toward world philosophy”), closely or intrinsically related to its “nature” dimension (“a general way of doing philosophy”) and its “approach” dimension (“through cross-tradition engagement”), has been addressed explicitly and emphatically, as shown by the subtitle of this journal (“Comparative Philosophy: An International Journal of Constructive Engagement of Distinct Approaches toward World Philosophy”) since its inception in 2010. Since 2021 when the CPWP was established in response to a range of genuine needs and challenges especially since the burst of COVID-19 worldwide, the theme “comparative philosophy as a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement toward world philosophy” as a whole (‘comparative philosophy toward world philosophy’ for short) has been explicitly presented and formally stated through its recent academic-organizational channel CPWP via its Constitution document. Although all of its three dimensions (i.e., its “character” dimension as “a general way of doing philosophy”, its “approach” dimension as “cross-tradition engagement”, and its “direction” dimension as “toward world philosophy” had been more or less suggested and explained before in an explicit or implicit way, the theme “comparative philosophy toward world philosophy” as a whole marks a momentous accumulating point of the significant development of comparative philosophy as a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement regarding its “direction” dimension as well as its character and approach dimensions.

It is noted that the phrase ‘comparative philosophy’ per se, just like the term ‘philosophy’, is ambiguous and vague; one can choose whichever term/phrase one would prefer to denote such a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement toward world philosophy. The label ‘comparative philosophy’ is used here for convenience and with consideration of a certain degree of historical and conceptual continuity; this can be partially shown by an alternative label ‘doing philosophy comparatively’, which as cited at the outset can be elaborated in a closely related way to the idea of “a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement toward world philosophy”. With the “use” and “mention” distinction, we focus on what the label is “used to talk about”, instead of the “mentioned” linguistic item per se. When addressing, examining, and emphasizing comparative philosophy understood in such a philosophically interesting and significant way, this implies neither rejection of (actual or possible) other specific usages of this linguistic label (at the “mention” level, either

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1 See this author’s brief explanation of them in “Editor’s Words” of this issue of the Journal.
the English phrase ‘comparative philosophy’ in English or its counter parts in other natural languages) nor indiscriminate denial of what the phrase has been ever used to stand for (at the “use” level). What is focus on is the nature, approach, and direction of such a (type of) general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement toward world philosophy and its significance and value, rather than mere verbal disagreement (such as how to use the linguistic label ‘comparative philosophy’, where the term ‘comparative’ and its cognates in English or in some other natural languages were from, what are their philological analyses are, etc.). That might be historically or linguistically interesting for certain other purposes but not what is focused on here.

It is neither accident nor imposed that “comparative philosophy as a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement toward world philosophy” constitutes the central theme of the addressed international virtual conference event on comparative philosophy, which was co-organized by the CPWP and this journal and co-sponsored and hosted by the Center of Comparative Philosophy, SJSU (19-24 April 2022): this is the shared mission and emphasis of the co-sponsoring parties, as highlighted in their respective constitutional documents.

The “mission” clause of the Constitution of the International Society for Comparative Philosophy toward World Philosophy (CPWP) states as follows:

The Society aims at: (1) promoting comparative philosophy as a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement toward world philosophy, which seeks dialogue, mutual understanding and learning, complementarity, and joint contributions by distinct approaches and resources from different philosophical traditions worldwide for the sake of the contemporary development of philosophy and society. (2) facilitating academic exchange and discussion of ideas among interested philosophers in various regions worldwide and providing them with effective channels and platforms in view of the foregoing goal.²

The goal of the journal Comparative Philosophy is both briefly highlighted in the journal subtitle “An International Journal of Constructive Engagement of Distinct Approaches toward World Philosophy” and stated in its “mission” statement as follows:

Comparative Philosophy is a peer-reviewed, open-access/non-profit international journal of philosophy, with emphasis on the constructive engagement of distinct approaches to philosophical issues, problems, themes from different philosophical traditions (whether distinguished culturally or by style/orientation) for the sake of their joint contribution to the development of philosophy and of contemporary society, and on general theory and methodology of comparative philosophy.”³

The strategic purpose of the Center for Comparative Philosophy, SJSU, is stated in its Charter as follows:

² Cited from the CPWP Constitution (approved in May 2021), Clause 2.1, as posted at the CPWP website <cpwponline.org>. [My italics for emphasis.]
It aims at promoting and enhancing the research and scholarship at SJSU in *comparative philosophy (doing philosophy in a cross-tradition engaging way)* for the sake of contributing to the academic mission of SJSU and the international scholarship of comparative philosophy. "Comparative philosophy considers philosophy in a global context and through the constructive engagement of philosophies from around the globe."

One central concern of comparative philosophy is to inquire into how, via reflective criticism (including self-criticism) and argumentation and with the guidance of adequate methodological guiding principle, distinct approaches and resources from different philosophical traditions (whether distinguished culturally or by style/orientation) can talk to, engage with and learn from each other and jointly contribute to a range of reflective issues and topics of philosophical significance and value, which can be jointly concerned under appropriate philosophical interpretation and from a broader philosophical vantage point.4

The theme “comparative philosophy [as a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement] toward world philosophy” is open to distinct elaborations in distinct terms or even with distinct focus on one or more than one of the addressed three major dimensions, which can be not only compatible literally but also substantively complementary given that they share the same normative bases of talking about the same world as a whole and of the truth pursuit (as conceived in, and in accordance with, people’s pre-theoretic “way-things-are-capturing” understanding of truth, rather than “anything goes”).5

2. A CONSTRUCTIVE-ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY: COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY TOWARD WORLD PHILOSOPHY

One representative strategic account of comparative philosophy as a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement toward world philosophy is what is often or sometimes labeled ‘constructive-engagement strategy’ or ‘constructive-engagement account’, which is (more or less) jointly shared by the co-sponsor parties of the addressed international conference event. The constructive-engagement strategy holistically addresses all the three dimensions of comparative philosophy as a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement toward world philosophy, explicitly or implicitly: i.e., its “nature” dimension as “a general way of doing philosophy”, its “approach” dimension as “through cross-tradition engagement”, and its “direction” as “toward world philosophy”. The constructive-engagement strategic account, generally and briefly speaking, can be summarized in this way:

One strategic goal and methodological strategy of comparative philosophy is to inquire into how, by way of reflective criticism (including self-criticism) and

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4 Cited from the Charter of the Center for Comparative Philosophy, SJSU, which was established in 2007. [My italics for emphasis.]
5 For a detailed examination of the normative bases for cross-tradition engagement in philosophy, see chapter 1 of Mou 2020.
argumentation and with the guidance of adequate methodological guiding principles, distinct approaches (even though not derivable from or reducible to each other) from different philosophical traditions (whether distinguished culturally or by style and orientation) or respectively from some (ancient) philosophical tradition and contemporary society (‘from different traditions’ for short) can talk to and learn from each other and jointly contribute (in a complementary way) to the development of philosophy and of contemporary society on a range of reflective issues of philosophical (or intellectual) value and significance, which can be jointly concerned and approached through appropriate philosophical interpretation and from a broader philosophical vantage point.

The constructive-engagement strategy has six emphases that are closely related. (1) It emphasizes critical engagement for the sake of truth pursuit (rather than “anything goes”). (2) It emphasizes constructive joint contribution of distinct approaches in critical engagement through their learning from each other (through their reasonable/appropriate parts if any: either eligible perspectives, or adequate guiding principles, or effective instruments) and making joint contribution to jointly concerned issues/topics (either actually/explicitly or potentially/implicitly addressed ones\(^6\)) in a complementary way. (3) It emphasizes philosophical interpretation of the addressed thinkers’ texts instead of mere historical descriptions. (4) It emphasizes the philosophical-issue-engagement orientation that aims at contribution to the contemporary development of philosophy on a range of philosophical issues that can be jointly concerned and approached through philosophical interpretation and from a broader philosophical vantage point. (5) It emphasizes being open-ended and adequately inclusive regarding various (eligible) perspectives from distinct approaches in different traditions, being sensitive to dynamic development of an object of study and thus the due coverage of eligible perspectives. (6) It emphasizes that the foregoing engaging exploration needs to be guided by adequate methodological principles in a holistic way and with a higher and broader vision.

The substantial development of the constructive-engagement strategy of comparative philosophy consists of, and lies in, its theoretic exploration and its reflective practice that is to implement and realize the foregoing closely related theoretic emphases; the relation between its theoretic exploration and its reflective practice can be, and actually is (a fact to be addressed below), mutually supportive and enhanced: on the one hand, the former is to provide a theoretic foundation, general methodological guidance, and strategic direction for the latter; on the other hand, the latter is not only to test the explanatory potency of the former but also provides further justification through evidence as explanans and further details of some theoretic points made in the former or even enhance the former by bringing about relevant new theoretic points and thus opening up some new fronts of theoretic exploration.

Three notes are due at this point. First, exactly how to label this strategic goal and methodological strategy of cross-tradition engagement in philosophy is relatively

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\(^6\) For this author’s detailed examination of this, see section 0.2.2 in Mou 2020.
unimportant; one can label it in some other ways that one would reasonably prefer. The methodological strategy is characterized in terms of ‘constructive engagement’ with two major considerations: <1> the key words in the phrase (‘constructive’ and ‘engagement’) and the whole phrase literally capture some of its crucial features and emphases; <2> the label has been historically associated with the strategy both in relevant documents in print (for example, the previously cited passages from the mission statements of this journal and the CPWP Constitution) and in the reflective practice of the “constructive-engagement” strategy (especially in the past two decades) through a range of international collective projects that have been guided by the strategy (such as the collective research projects entitled ‘Davidson’s Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy’, ‘Constructive Engagement of Analytic and Continental Approaches in Philosophy: From the Vantage Point of Comparative Philosophy’ and ‘Philosophy of Language, Chinese Language, Chinese Philosophy: Constructive Engagement’).

Second, similar to the case of comparative philosophy as a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement toward world philosophy that is open to distinct theoretic elaborations in distinct terms, the addressed constructive-engagement strategic account of comparative philosophy is also open to distinct theoretic elaborations in distinct terms or with distinct focuses with distinct emphases. The point here is related to the foregoing fifth emphasis to the effect that the “constructive-engagement” strategy as characterized above is open-ended and inclusive and is thus understood broadly to this extent: on the one hand, these key terms in the foregoing six emphasis connections (as highlighted in italics above) are constructively open to distinct explanations that are within their due conceptual rooms and could be compatible or even complementary; on the other hand, such inclusiveness certainly does not mean “anything goes” but needs to healthily maintain due restrictions and reasonable normative bases, although such due restrictions and reasonable normative bases per se need to be critically and justifiably identified and specified. To this extent, the constructive-engagement strategy can and does cover, directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, many specific cross-tradition engagement projects and some distinct theoretic accounts that would be more or less in line with the “constructive-engagement” strategy to explore the general issue of how cross-tradition engagement in philosophy is possible. The list can include those theoretic accounts that take a type of unifying pluralist approach and are thus more in line with the constructive-engagement orientation; it can also (more or less) cover some of variants (if not all of them) of the pragmatist approach (type) that can be more or less in line with the constructive-engagement strategy, though they sometimes do not appear so.\(^7\)

Indeed, as far as philosophical inquiries that are kindred in spirit with the constructive-engagement strategy are concerned, historically speaking, the reflective practice that explicitly or implicitly takes the constructive-engagement strategy in doing philosophy

\(^7\) For a further analysis of how the constructive-engagement strategy is related with some other theoretic accounts of the unifying pluralist approach and some variants of the pragmatist approach (type), see Mou 2020, section 0.1 (for their references, see endnotes 3 and 4 of chapter 1).
comparatively is not new; the theoretic endeavor intended to more or less explain some of the involved methodological emphases is not new either. However, remarkably in the past two decades (especially since the beginning of this century), there have come out more research works that are more explicitly in the direction of the constructive-engagement strategy (especially in the areas of moral philosophy and socio-political philosophy⁸). In this way, I treat my own comprehensive theoretic account of the constructive-engagement strategy as given in my recent monograph book as one theoretic elaboration of the constructive-engagement strategic account, instead of the exclusive one.⁹ It is a constructive sign that some of these previous theoretic endeavors in explaining the constructive-engagement strategy has positively impacted on some other scholars’ innovative contributions to the scholarship in doing philosophy comparatively both at the meta-methodological theoretic level and at the level of cross-tradition engaging examination of some specific topics.¹⁰

Three, the constructive-engagement strategy of comparative philosophy is neither merely arm-chair contemplation nor just imagined conjecture; especially since the beginning of this century, one prominent significant feature in the development of the constructive-engagement strategy of comparative philosophy lies in the close connection between its theoretic exploration and its reflective practice, instead of either developing alone. As indicated above, the substantial development of the constructive-engagement strategy of comparative philosophy consists of its theoretic exploration and its reflective practice that is to implement and realize the foregoing closely related theoretic emphases, because the relation between its theoretic exploration and its reflective practice can be mutually supportive and enhanced. The actual substantial development of the constructive-engagement strategy of comparative philosophy in the past two decades has well verified this. Among others, some prominent and substantial collective efforts both in theory and in reflective practice have been made on a range of jointly concerned issues in various areas of philosophy explicitly in the direction of the constructive-engagement strategy;¹¹ a range of research articles on the track of the constructive-engagement strategy have been published in the journal Comparative Philosophy since 2010.¹²

The last note above addresses the constructive-engagement-oriented worldwide efforts in theory and reflective practice in their combined and mutually enhanced way, which points to world philosophy, given that world philosophy in its full sense consists of both general theoretic guidance in cross-tradition engagement and worldwide

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⁸ For sample cases of this kind and their brief analyses, see Mou 2020, section 0.1 (for their references, see endnote 6 of chapter 1).
⁹ See Mou 2020 with its subtitle as ‘A Constructive-Engagement Account’, by which I mean what is given in the book is only one account of such a “constructive-engagement” kind.
¹⁰ See some good examples that have been published in this journal, whose contents are open-accessible at this journal’s website <www.comparativephilosophy.org>.
¹¹ These collective research anthology volumes include a range of anthology volumes edited by some other scholars and the anthology volume of which I am contributing editor (or co-editor) and which explicitly go with the constructive-engagement orientation: for their references, see endnote 7 of chapter 1 in Mou 2020.
¹² See many articles published in this journal.
reflective practice. This is not accidental or happens to be the case. Rather, the constructive-engagement strategy of comparative philosophy intrinsically points to a vision of world philosophy that is a forward-looking, dynamic, and multiple-layered process of development of philosophy worldwide (thus “toward world philosophy”). World philosophy of such a kind can be highlighted in the following distinct but complementary connections (neither exhaustive nor exclusive but open-ended) in theory and reflective practice.  

1. As far as its due coverage is concerned, it is worldwide covering distinct approaches from different traditions worldwide [via Features (2) and (3)].  

2. As far as its philosophical character is concerned, it is critical in character and requires justification understood broadly [via Features (1), (2), (3) and (5)].  

3. As far as its joint-starting-point connection is concerned, various jointly concerned issues/topics constitute a range of joint starting points of cross-tradition engagement [via Feature (4)].  

4. As far as its constructive and unifying ending point is concerned, it emphasizes the dialogue and mutual understanding of distinct approaches and resources from different traditions, their learning from and engaging with each other, and their make joint contributions in a constructive-engaging way or an overall complementary way to the development of philosophy worldwide [via Features (2) and (4)].  

5. As far as its dynamic character is concerned, it points to a thorough open-minded attitude and open-ended character that are sensitive to the dynamic development of the worldwide situation. [via Feature (5)].  

6. As far as the methodological-guiding-principle dimension of such worldwide philosophical enterprise is concerned, it points to a range of “adequacy” conditions for maintaining adequate methodological guiding principles (concerning how to look at the due relationship between distinct approaches/resources from different traditions) in a strategic holistic way [via Feature (6)].

Among these connections of the addressed “world philosophy” toward which constitutes the “direction” dimension of comparative philosophy, the six one is last but not least: a holistic command of “adequacy” conditions for maintaining adequate methodological guiding principles with a higher and broader vision, which is emphasized by the constructive-engagement strategy, is crucial in guiding the constructive-engagement-oriented worldwide efforts of comparative philosophy toward world philosophy. This point will be further elaborated in the next section.

3. A HOLISTIC COMMAND OF “ADEQUACY” CONDITIONS FOR METHODOLOGICAL GUIDING PRINCIPLES: TOWARD WORLD PHILOSOPHY

In the preceding sections, a general explanation of the identity of comparative philosophy as a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement toward world philosophy is made in section 1, and then a general characterization of the “constructive-engagement” strategic account of comparative philosophy toward world philosophy is given in section 2, both of which are open to distinct theoretic elaborations. In this section, I further elaborate the ending point that is made at the end of the previous section, i.e., a holistic command (understanding and characterization)
of “adequacy” conditions for maintaining adequate methodological guiding principles with a higher and broader vision is crucial both in working out the constructive-engagement strategic account and in guiding the constructive-engagement-oriented worldwide efforts of comparative philosophy toward world philosophy. My strategy in this section is this. First, based on my recent writings on this topic, I briefly present an enhanced version of a holistic account of “adequacy” conditions for maintaining adequate methodological principles and thus a meta-methodological framework of how cross-tradition engagement is possible, which constitutes one central part of this author’s theoretic elaboration of the “constructive-engagement” strategy of comparative philosophy; second, I then explain how the holistic vision of this suggested meta-methodological framework of how cross-tradition engagement is possible explicitly points to the “direction” dimension of comparative philosophy as a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement toward world philosophy.

3.1 A HOLISTIC ACCOUNT OF “ADEQUACY” CONDITIONS FOR METHODOLOGICAL GUIDING PRINCIPLES

As highlighted above, the constructive-engagement strategy of comparative philosophy emphasizes being guided by adequate methodological principles in a holistic way and with a higher and broader vision, which points to and brings about the holistic character of world philosophy. In the past decades, I have suggested, explained and kept refining a theoretic account of adequacy conditions for how to maintain adequate methodological guiding principles in looking at the due relationship between distinct (eligible) methodological perspectives (given an object of study), due to the open-ended character of such a set of adequacy conditions and being sensitive to the substantial development of the constructive-engagement scholarship. In the following, a most recent version of this theoretic account is briefly presented after some conceptual/explanatory resources are introduced.

This account needs some conceptual/explanatory resources and their lexical distinctions for a clear and concise characterization which are briefly given here. Given that the term ‘method’ or ‘methodological approach’ means a way of responding to how to approach an object of study, there is the distinction between three kinds of ways or methods, which might constitute three distinct dimensions of a methodological approach. (1) A methodological perspective (or perspective method): a way approaching 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. There is the important distinction between eligible and ineligible methodological perspectives: given an object of study, a (methodological) perspective on the object that does capture a certain aspect really possessed by the object is eligible

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13 The “Conclusion” chapter of Mou 2020 and Mou 2022.
14 These conceptual and explanatory resources and their associated distinctions were first introduced and explained in Mou 2001. For a recent refined account of them, see section 0.2.3 of Mou 2020.
There is also the distinction between a methodological-perspective simplex and a methodological-perspective complex: a simplex is a single discernible methodological perspective, and a complex is either a combination of multiple simplexes (multiple perspective complex) or an association of one perspective simplex with a certain methodological guiding principle (guiding-principle-associated perspective complex). (By ‘perspective’ I mean a methodological-perspective simplex unless indicated otherwise.)

(2) A methodological instrument (or instrumental method): a way in which to implement, or give tools to realize, a certain methodological perspective. They are largely neutral in character and serve for different methodological perspectives, though there is the distinction between more and less effective ones on a certain perspective. (3) A methodological guiding principle (or guiding-principle method): a way concerning a certain methodological perspective(s) regarding an object of study, which is presupposed by the agent who takes that perspective (or one or more among the group of the perspectives) for the sake of guiding and regulating <1> how the general purpose and specific focus that the perspective serves should be set; <2> how the current perspective should be evaluated and used, <3> how to look at the relation between the current perspective and other perspectives. [The above <2> and <3> are combined into “how to look at the relation between distinct methodological perspectives regarding an object of study”]. There is the important distinction between adequate and inadequate methodological guiding principles concerning how to look at the relation between distinct methodological perspective(s) regarding an object of study.

There are three quite straightforward morals here. First, the merit and status of one’s methodological perspective per se can be evaluated independently of certain (adequate or inadequate) methodological guiding principles that one might presuppose in one’s actual application of the perspective. [One implied point of this moral is this: taking a bad (inadequate) guiding principle does not imply assuming a bad (ineligible) perspective.] Second, the reflective practice per se of one’s taking a certain methodological perspective as one’s working perspective implies neither that one loses sight of other genuine aspects of the object nor that one ignores or rejects other eligible perspectives in one’s background thinking. [One implied point of this moral is this: taking a limited (finite and one-sided) perspective does not imply assuming a bad (inadequate) guiding principle.] Third, on the other hand, it does matter whether and how one is adequately guided in evaluating the status of one’s own working perspective and some other perspectives and their relationship and in applying one’s working perspective.

A most recent version of the addressed holistic account of adequacy conditions for maintaining adequate methodological principles is briefly presented below.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{15}\) Historically speaking, being sensitive and in response to the substantial development of comparative philosophy as a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement, the addressed account of adequacy conditions has undergone its development via three major stages, which are presented respectively in Mou 2001, 2010 and 2020. In Mou 2001, four adequacy conditions are implicitly suggested through some distinct sample cases (see pages 354-363); in Mou 2010, six adequacy conditions are explicitly presented and explained (see section 2.4). In Mou 2020, eleven adequacy
(1) The adequacy condition of recognizing the same object as a whole (‘the same-object-whole-recognizing condition’ for short): A methodological guiding principle is considered adequate (in this connection) if, given an object of study, it enables the agent to recognize that there is a way that the object objectively is such that it is not the case that “anything goes”, and people can all talk about that same object as a whole even though they may say different things about the object (concerning its distinct aspects), neither resulting in “anything goes” nor thus bringing about radically different objects on their own. In contrast, it is considered inadequate (in this connection) if otherwise. This adequacy condition may be called the normative “way-thing-are-capturing” condition in the sense that it is presupposed by the remaining types of adequacy conditions for the sake of capturing the way the object is (or is to be) if the truth pursuit is one strategic goal.

(2) The adequacy condition of recognizing perspective eligibility (‘the perspective-eligibility-recognizing condition’ for short): A methodological guiding principle that is presupposed by the agent who uses some eligible methodological perspective as her current working perspective is considered to be adequate 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. It is noted that, in comparison with the subsequent adequacy conditions, this adequacy condition may be called a ‘minimal’ condition in the sense that it is to be minimally presupposed (or pursued) by the subsequent types of adequacy conditions and that this adequacy condition is minimally needed by any adequate methodological guiding principle.

(3) The adequacy condition of being sensitive to the agent purpose (‘the agent-purpose-sensitivity condition’ for short): A methodological guiding principle is considered to be adequate if it has its choice of a certain working perspective, among eligible methodological perspectives, sensitive to the agent’s purpose and focus 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.

(4) The adequacy condition of granting equality status (‘the equality-status-granting condition’ for short): A methodological guiding principle is considered to be adequate if it renders all the eligible methodological perspectives (perspective simplexes) equal: being equally partial and being equally needed for the sake of a complete account of an object of study, though one eligible perspective can be rendered more needed or in focus than others only relative to its associated purpose; 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.

(5) The adequacy condition of recognizing new eligible perspectives (‘the new-eligible-perspective-possibility-recognizing condition’ for short): A methodological guiding principle is considered to be adequate if it takes an open-minded attitude
towards the possibility of a new eligible perspective concerning an object of study that is to point to some genuine aspect of the object but has yet to be realized by the agent because of the ‘unknown-identity’ status of that aspect. A methodological guiding principle is considered inadequate in this connection if otherwise.

(6) The adequacy condition of being sensitive to dynamic development of an object of study and thus the due coverage of eligible perspectives (‘the dynamic development-sensitivity condition’ for short): A methodological guiding principle is considered adequate (in this connection) if it guides the agent to be sensitive to the dynamic development (if any) of an object of study for the sake of realizing and understanding which aspects are (still or currently) genuinely possessed by the object and thus which methodological perspectives are still eligible, on the one hand, and which previous aspects are lost and thus which previous perspectives not currently eligible anymore, on the other hand. In contrast, it is considered inadequate (in this connection) if otherwise.

(7) The adequacy condition of capturing concordant complementarity (‘the concordant complementarity-capturing condition’ for short): Given that multiple distinct yet eligible methodological perspectives concerning an object of study turn out to be (or able to be) mutually supportive and supplementary in a manifest consistent way (thus called ‘concordantly complementary’), a methodological guiding principle is considered adequate (in this connection) if it guides the agent to capture (or seek and promote) such concordant complementarity of these perspectives for the sake of their working together and make joint contribution. In contrast, it is considered inadequate (in this connection) if otherwise.

(8) The adequacy contradiction of capturing restrictive complementarity (‘the restrictive-complementarity-capturing condition’ for short): Given that there are two (multiple) different methodological perspectives concerning an object of study which are eligible (i.e., capturing distinct aspects of the object) but which are genuinely contradictory (i.e., the captured distinct aspects are genuine internal contradictory aspects possessed by the object) and that this object with its internal contradictory constituent aspects exists still in a constructive way (rather than in destructive tension up to sublation), a methodological guiding principle would be considered adequate (in this connection) if it guides the agent to <1> recognize the genuinely contradictory state of the involved aspects of the object and thus the eligibility of these “contradictory” perspectives that capture these aspects, and <2> capture the “restrictive” complementarity of these contradictory yet eligible perspectives with their recessive mutual support for the sake of a complete understanding of the complete identity of the object. In contrast, it is considered inadequate (in this connection) if otherwise.

(9) The adequacy condition of seeking sublation and post-sublation complementarity (‘the post-sublation-complementarity-seeking condition’ for short): Given that two (or more than two) seemingly competing contraries as a whole (say, two contrary approaches to a jointly-concerned issue, either one of which or both are “guiding-principle-associated perspective complexes) somehow cannot be mutually supportive and supplementary (neither in a manifest way nor in a recessive way) and need their sublation (understood broadly, to be explained below) so that reasonable and
valuable elements need to be sublated respectively from the two contraries and incorporated into a new unity and that they can be mutually supportive and supplementary (either in a concordant way or in a restrictive way), a methodological guiding principle is considered adequate if it guides the agent to <1> sublates these reasonable and valuable elements from the two original contraries, incorporates them into a new unity as new contraries and <2> understand and capture their post-sublation complementarity (in a concordant or restrictive way). In contrast, it is considered inadequate (in this connection) if otherwise.

(10) The adequacy condition of overcoming excessiveness and achieving constructive balance (‘the excessiveness-overcoming condition’ for short): Given that there are multiple distinct yet eligible methodological perspectives concerning an object of study which are mutually supportive and thus complementary, whether in a manifest way (thus concordantly complementary) or in a recessive way (thus restrictively complementary) and whether such a complementarity is achieved directly by recognition or indirectly through sublation, a methodological guiding principle is considered adequate (in this connection) if it guides the agent to maintain already-achieved complementarity by overcoming what is excessive (if any) and supplementing what is insufficient (if any) in treating these distinct eligible perspectives and thus bringing about their constructive balance (either in the form of “concordant” or “harmonious” balance for concordant complementarity or in the form of “restrictive” balance for restrictive complementarity). In contrast, it is considered inadequate (in this connection) if otherwise.

(11) The adequacy condition of holding a thorough open-minded and self-critical attitude towards the agent’s own approach (‘The open-mind-oriented self-criticism condition’ for short): A methodological guiding principle is considered adequate (in this connection) if it guides the agent to have a thorough open-minded and self-critical attitude towards the agent’s own approach. In contrast, it is considered inadequate (in this connection) if otherwise.

(12) The adequacy condition of holding an overall-holistic vision that coordinates the preceding adequacy conditions in distinct connections into a whole and captures the due relationship between them (‘the overall-holistic-vision-capturing condition’ for short): A methodological guiding principle is considered adequate (in this overall-holistic connection) if, given an object of study, it guides the agent to strive for a (more) complete understanding of various aspects of the object together with its intrinsically related normative bases, its relevant background, and its possible development and thus have an overall-holistic vision that reflectively coordinates the preceding meta-methodological adequacy conditions [(1) through (10)] in distinct connections into a whole and captures the due relationship between them. In contrast, it is considered inadequate (in this connection) if otherwise.

Though “adequate” condition (12) is the last one, it is not least. If the preceding adequacy conditions (1) through (10) are meta-philosophical in nature, this adequacy condition, like the adequacy condition (11), is meta-meta-methodological in nature because it is about how to look at these meta-methodological adequacy conditions. This adequacy condition is significant in the sense to be explained in the next subsection.
Three notes are due here. First, to the extent and in the sense as explained before, given an object of study, the adequacy condition (1) (i.e., the same-object-whole-recognizing condition) is meta-methodological due to the “presupposition” relation between the adequacy condition (1) together with the adequacy condition (2) and the other meta-methodological adequacy conditions (3) through (10) on how to look at the relation between various (methodological) perspectives; in this way, the apparent holistic character of the adequacy conditions (1) and (2) is thus at the meta-methodological level. In contrast, the overall-holistic-vision-holding condition is overall-holistic in character at the meta-meta-methodological level, which is to guide the agent to see (say) the previously addressed intrinsic relation between the adequacy condition (1) and the other meta-methodological adequacy conditions (2) through (10), etc.

Second, in the previous presentations of some of those preceding “adequacy” conditions (1) through (10), some meta-meta-methodological remarks regarding their status and relations with some other adequacy conditions have been made, though these remarks are not parts of these adequacy conditions per se; rather, they are actually implied parts of the overall-holistic vision addressed in the current overall-holistic-vision-holding condition.

Three, the overall-holistic-vision-holding condition and the open-mind-oriented self-criticism condition are intrinsically complementary. On the one hand, the addressed open-minded self-criticism attitude needs to closely work with the holistic condition as one solid compass: one’s being open-minded does not mean no direction but needs to go with the aid of a holistic vision of a due direction, due coverages/limits of the preceding meta-methodological adequacy conditions in distinct connections, and how to across boundaries. On the other hand, a holistic vision does not mean indiscriminate inclusion; rather, a holistic vision in philosophy intrinsically points to a reflective or self-critical attitude toward itself. To this extent, the two meta-meta-methodological adequacy conditions are mutually supportive, supplementary, and interpenetrating. They are thus complementary in jointly guiding and regulating how to look at the preceding adequacy conditions. It is arguably correct that, more generally speaking, the adequate conditions (11) and (12), an open-to-criticism attitude and a holistic vision, actually constitute two distinct but complementary trade-mark features of the adequate guidance for any philosophical exploration.

With the joint guidance of the adequacy conditions (11) and (12), one substantial point regarding the set of meta-methodological adequacy conditions is this: any condition on the meta-methodological “adequacy-condition” list per se is open to criticism, instead of being dogmatically imposed, and should be guided in an overall-holistic vision. Indeed, the set of meta-methodological adequacy conditions (1) through (10) have been suggested to serve two purposes. For one thing, it is to explain how it is possible to have adequate methodological guiding principles in cross-tradition philosophical inquiries. For another thing, it is to provide readers with an engaging starting point or an effective stepping stone, which per se is not intended to be dogmatically imposed on readers but expected to be a target of critical examination in
their own reflective explorations of the issue. The set of adequacy conditions (1) through (10) are thus open-ended with an overall-holistic-vision guidance in two connections: first, any of these adequacy conditions per se is open to be further criticized, modified, or enhanced; second, this set of adequacy condition is open to be further expanded to cover more well-established ones if in need.

3.2 COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY TOWARD WORLD PHILOSOPHY: AN OVERALL-HOLISTIC VISION OF ADEQUACY CONDITIONS

Comparative philosophy as a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement, when holistically guided by adequate methodological guiding principles in various relevant connections, is essentially a general way of doing philosophy toward world philosophy. The reason is this.

For one thing, one crucial characteristic feature of world philosophy lies in its intrinsic holistic vision that is somehow to bring together distinct approaches/resources from different traditions and unify them in an overall complementary way. For another thing, a constructive-engagement-oriented account of adequacy conditions for how to maintain adequate methodological guiding principles is expected to be holistic at the two levels. First, given an object of study, at the meta-methodological level regarding how to look at the due relationship between distinct eligible methodological perspectives that are to respectively capture distinct aspects of the object, a holistic treatment of such various distinct eligible (methodological) perspectives is expected. The adequacy conditions (1) through (10) as a whole, especially through the adequacy conditions (1) [i.e., the same-object-whole-recognizing condition] and (2) [i.e., the perspective-eligibility-recognizing condition] that are more or less presupposed by the others, presents such a holistic character at the meta-methodological level.

Second, at the meta-meta-methodological level regarding how to look at the due relationship between distinct meta-methodological adequacy conditions, a holistic vision is also expected. Let me employ a sample case for illustration. It might be the case that one takes an adequate methodological guiding principle in one connection (i.e., meeting one adequacy condition) but fails to do so in another connection (i.e., failing to meet another adequacy condition): for example, given an object of study, one might adopt a methodological guiding principle that meets, say the “agent-purpose-sensitivity” condition but fails to meet, say, the “new-eligible-perspective-possibility-recognizing” condition. The constructive sentiment and expectation for the agent is to strive for a (more) complete understanding of various aspects of the object together with its relevant background so that the agent can have a holistic vision that reflectively coordinates the preceding adequacy conditions in distinct connections into a whole and recognizes the due relationship between them. The overall holistic vision and expectation is explicitly captured by the adequacy condition (12) [i.e., the overall-holistic-vision-capturing condition] together with the adequacy condition (11) [i.e., the open-mind-oriented self-criticism condition] at the meta-meta-methodological level.

Through its overall-holistic character, the adequacy condition (12) explicitly points to and contributes to the “direction” dimension (“toward world philosophy”) of
comparative philosophy (as a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement toward world philosophy).

As shown above, I call an “overall holistic account” a constructive-engagement-oriented account of adequacy conditions that explicitly and emphatically addresses the foregoing distinct types of holistic character at the meta-meta-methodological level as well as at the meta-methodological level. It is noted that a constructive-engagement-oriented account of adequacy conditions that does not explicitly addresses the foregoing holistic character at the meta-meta-methodological level is still manifestly holistic at the meta-methodological level, and such an account can be implicitly holistic at the meta-meta-methodological level (thus implicitly overall holistic).\(^{16}\) In this way, comparative philosophy as a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement, when guided by an (explicitly or implicitly) overall holistic account of adequacy conditions for \textit{adequate} methodological guiding principles in various relevant connections, is essentially a general way of doing philosophy \textit{toward world philosophy}. In other words, a holistic account of adequacy conditions on “how cross-tradition engagement is possible” is essentially a holistic account of adequacy condition on “how cross-tradition engagement \textit{toward world philosophy} is possible”.

* * *

In sum, in this theme essay for the addressed special-theme section in this special issue of the journal \textit{Comparative Philosophy}, I have given an elaboration of the theme “comparative philosophy as a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement toward world philosophy” (‘comparative philosophy toward world philosophy’ for short), which has been explicitly presented and formally stated through its recent academic-organizational channel CPWP and focused on recently by the CPWP’s and this journal’s co-organized international conference. Although all of its three dimensions (i.e., its “character” dimension as “a general way of doing philosophy”, its “approach” dimension as “cross-tradition engagement”, and its “direction” dimension as “toward world philosophy”) had been more or less suggested and explained before in an explicit or implicit way, the theme “comparative philosophy toward world philosophy” as a whole marks a momentous accumulating point of the significant development of comparative philosophy as a general way of doing philosophy through cross-tradition engagement regarding its “direction” dimension, through the constructive-engagement strategy in theoretic exploration and reflective practice especially since the beginning of this century. In section 1, I have given a general explanation of the identity of comparative philosophy under examination in this essay, which is \textit{essentially} a general way of doing philosophy through cross-

\(^{16}\) So to speak, in the above senses, the suggested version of the constructive-engagement-oriented account of adequacy conditions suggested in Mou 2020 [covering “adequacy” conditions (1) through (11)] is implicitly overall holistic, while the suggested version in Mou 2022 which explicitly identified and explained “adequacy” condition (12) [i.e., the overall-holistic-vision-capturing condition] is explicitly overall holistic.
tradition engagement toward world philosophy (whether all of its dimensions are explicitly or implicitly given, and no matter how it is labeled), as theoretically explored and reflectively practiced through a range of collective and individual research projects especially since the beginning of this century and via the journal *Comparative Philosophy* since its inception in 2010. In section 2, I have focused on one representative “constructive-engagement” strategy of comparative philosophy as emphasized by this journal and the CPWP, highlighting its emphases; among others, I have explained how its substantial development intrinsically points to a vision of *world philosophy* that is a forward-looking, dynamic, and multiple-layered process of development of philosophy worldwide (thus “toward world philosophy”), which demands a holistic guidance of adequate methodological guiding principles. In section 3, by presenting a most recent account of adequacy conditions for how to adequately maintain methodological guiding principles and analyzing its overall holistic character, I have explained why and how a holistic command of “adequacy” conditions for maintaining adequate methodological guiding principles with a higher and broader vision is crucial both in working out the constructive-engagement strategic account and in guiding the constructive-engagement-oriented worldwide efforts of comparative philosophy toward world philosophy.

With these ideas explained in this essay in the first part of this special-theme section on the theme, in the following second part of this special-theme section that presents and evaluates the addressed illustrating cases of cross-tradition engagement worldwide, the authors of the three essays, Nevad Kahteran (2022), Joseph Kaipayil (2022), and Hongyin Zhou & Jiabin YE (2022), respectively give their reflective observations and thoughtful evaluative analyses of the situations of doing philosophy comparatively in three different regions of the world, respectively Southern Europe, Indian, and China, with their distinct focuses. Their essays well show how distinct approaches from some representative philosophical traditions in each of these regions can constructively talk to, engage with, and learn from each other and make their joint contributions to the development of philosophy on a range of shared concerns and topics toward world philosophy.

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REFERENCES

SECTION 1:
*Comparative Philosophy* (since 2010), “About This Journal”, posted at the website of the journal *Comparative Philosophy* <www.comparativephilosophy.org>.

SECTION 2:
Notes: with consideration of the focus of this section and to save space, for the references of some relevant sample cases (including the author’s ones) that are indirectly cited in some footnotes in this section, the reader is referred to their direct citations and references in Mou 2020. Almost all the publications in this journal can (more or less) serve sample examples for the points made in this section regarding the constructive-engagement strategy for comparative philosophy toward world philosophy, which (titles and contents) are open-accessible at the journal website <www.comparativephilosophy.org>.

SECTION 3: