Preliminaries— Philosophy and Language

Do We Need a Universal Notion of Philosophy?

Narrow and Broad Definitions of Philosophy

For more than a century, there have been controversies as to whether it is justified to use the epithet "philosophy" with respect to non-Western traditions. Volume 2 of the *Encyclopédie philosophique universelle* (*Universal Philosophical Encyclopedia*), published in 1991 with support of UNESCO, consists of three parts: (1) *philosophie occidentale* (Western Philosophy); (2) *pensées asiatiques* (Asian Thinking); (3) *conceptualization des sociétés traditionnelles* (Conceptualization of traditional societies).[1] This UNESCO encyclopedia displays a typical Western mentality in reserving philosophy to "Western Philosophy." Its choice of terminology contrasts with that in a range of handbooks, anthologies, and journals, where such terms as "Comparative Philosophy," "World Philosophy," or "Chinese Philosophy" appear in their titles.[2] In doing so, parts of Asian thinking and other modes of non-Western thought are taken self-evidently to be philosophy.[3]

These two tendencies co-exist with such paradoxical phenomena: on the one hand, as yet it has been difficult for a department of philosophy in the West to include a required course of Asian or intercultural (or comparative) philosophy into a standard program of philosophy.[4] Therefore, Ames (2005: 35) formulates the motivation for comparative philosophy as follows: "We are seeking to overcome the seemingly invincible prejudice prevailing within the academy that has precluded the inclusion of Chinese philosophy as philosophy, not merely as 'thought.'" On the other hand, the idea and contents of Chinese, Indian, Japanese, African

philosophy has often been taken for granted in such marginal fields as comparative philosophy and world philosophy, as well as in philosophy departments in non-Western countries.

Let us call the conception of philosophy embodied in the first tendency Eurocentric or narrow definition of philosophy. The cornerstone of this definition is the belief that undoubtedly philosophy originated in ancient Greece. As Heidegger puts it:

> The often-heard expression "Western-European philosophy" is, in truth, a tautology. Why? Because philosophy is Greek in its nature; Greek, in this instance, means that in origin the nature of philosophy is of such a kind that it first appropriated the Greek world, and only it in order to unfold. (1956: 29/28)

As late as 2001, Derrida repeated this view during his visit to China, saying something to the effect that "China has no philosophy, only thought."[5] Derrida's remark led to widespread discussion in the Chinese philosophical circle.

Certainly, there may be positive considerations in being reluctant to call thinking outside of the West "philosophy." Heidegger claims that using the Western term philosophy and Western philosophical expertise to write on Asian thought would distort its authenticity.[6] Derrida suggests that classical Asian traditions are free of the contamination of Western logocentrism (which, according to Derrida, has characterized Western philosophy). There is no need to contaminate Eastern thinking with such wrongly oriented expertise.[7] However, neither Heidegger nor Derrida has provided any realistic guidance regarding the future of non-Western thinking. In any case what assumes priority on their agenda is the question how to salvage Western philosophy from its current crisis.

Apart from an insistence on the unique Western origin of philosophy, a common understanding of philosophy shared by most Western philosophers treats it as systematic theory constructed by valid arguments or reasoning, forgetting that important philosophers in the Western traditions often do not easily meet these criteria. A number of Chinese philosophers in the early twentieth century accepted the criteria of philosophy as systematic and argumentative. However, they added a subject matter to philosophy, namely, fundamental reflections on the important questions of human life in order to include both Chinese and Western philosophy and speak of *zhongguo zhexue* 中国哲学 (Chinese philosophy). For example, Hu Shi 胡适 wrote (in 1919): "In general,

a discipline that studies the most important questions of human life, a fundamental reflection that wants to find a fundamental solution to these questions: this is called philosophy" (Hu: 1). Feng Youlan 冯友兰 defines philosophy as "systematic, reflective thinking on life" (1931: 2). Somewhat later, Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, one of the most important neo-Confucian philosophers of the twentieth century, expressed a similar view: philosophy is that which "touches on the activities of humanity, and that [which] is pondered and explained by means of reasons and concepts."[8] These philosophers did not take for granted that Western and Chinese philosophy would be the same in every respect. For a Chinese philosopher, "to live in accordance with his philosophical convictions was part of his philosophy" (Feng: 10), which is not true of most Western philosophers.

It should be noted that the word *zhexue* 哲学 (wisdom learning?) was a neologism. It was created by Nishi Amane in 1873, and entered Chinese at the beginning of the twentieth century as a translation of the Japanese word *tetsugaku*. *Zhexue* was stipulated to mean the same as the word philosophy meant in Europe, but it was an open question whether parts of the writings in the classical Chinese traditions could also be called *zhexue*.

We call those working conceptions of philosophy that have made it possible to include non-Western philosophies "broad definitions of philosophy." Certainly, one reason for tending toward a broad conception of philosophy is connected with the concern of finding a place for one's own tradition in philosophy. Hu Shi, Feng Youlan, and other Chinese philosophers obviously set as their goal to make Chinese traditions *visible* as part of a universal endeavor. In their work on the history of Chinese philosophy, they either present classical Chinese traditions in the way that meet the criteria and classifications of philosophy as prevalent in the West, or show elements that are different but comparable to what is called philosophy in the West. Thus one can say that Hu Shi and Feng Youlan, among others, have created Chinese philosophy. They agreed that foreign terms are indispensable tools for rediscoveries of forgotten treasures in their own tradition.

A broad view of philosophy is also evident in the development of African philosophy in the 1970s.[9] For example, Gyekye states,

> Philosophy of some kind is involved in the thought and action of every people. . . . To deny African peoples philosophical thought is to imply that they are unable to reflect on or conceptualize their experience. (1987: 8–9)

For Gyekye, the conception of philosophy should be broadened to include oral traditions as reflected in proverbs: "the proverbs that, as I shall argue below, can be used with other materials as a source of African philosophical ideas are the undeniable results of reflection on their experience in the world" (8). According to Oruka, leader of the *philosophic sagacity* movement,[10]

> Some sages . . . attain a philosophic capacity. As sages, they are versed in the beliefs and wisdoms of their people. However, as thinkers, they are rationally critical and they opt for or recommend only those aspects of the beliefs and wisdoms which satisfy their rational scrutiny. (1990: 44)

Other African philosophers focus on precolonial African experience and notions such as *ubuntu*, which means something like: "I am a human because I belong. I participate. I share" (Tutu: 31). We discuss the notion of *ubuntu* further in chapter 8.

Some scholars emphasize that African philosophers should shape their own thinking independent of outside influence:

> African philosophers need to formulate their differing positions in confrontation and dialogue [with one another], and on their own, that is, minus foreign mediators/moderators or meddlers. (Serequeberhan 1991: xviii)

Relevant scholar-politicians with such a tendency include the nationalist-ideological philosophies of Nkrumah, Nyerere, and Senghor,[11] all of whom are connected to the so-called African renaissance movement that seeks African modernity and "a place for Africans equal to other peoples of our common universe."[12]

A middle-ground view is that African philosophy should aim at a synthesis of different resources. Wiredu is representative of this view:

> African philosophers are active today, trying (in some cases, at any rate) to achieve a synthesis of the philosophical insights of their ancestors with whatever they can extract of philosophical worth from the intellectual resources of the modern world. (1992: 61)

Some other scholars have argued that African philosophy is a misnomer. Philosophy can only be *professional* philosophy done in Africa

and/or by people of African descent. An early representative of this view is Bodunrin: "If a problem is philosophical it must have a universal relevance to all men. . . . Our culture may be dear to us, but truth must be dearer" (1991: 78; 82). On this view, the content of African philosophizing is not significantly different from that done in other places of the world. One can say that this view professes a narrow definition of philosophy insofar as it only considers philosophy in Africa, not African philosophy, showing an urge to become active participants in the established world of Western philosophy.[13] African philosophers and philosophers in Africa would simply join (Western) philosophy.

However, there are different ways of "joining" (Western) philosophy. According to some, African philosophy is not a misnomer, because African philosophers can make a unique contribution to the development of philosophy. Even if Western concepts are used, a fundamental outsider's critique is possible of the narrow view of philosophy. As Bernasconi writes:[14]

> The powerful critiques of Western philosophy by African and African-American philosophers exceed Western philosophy and cannot simply be reinscribed within it, even when they rely on the idiom of Western philosophy for their presentation. This is because these critiques spring from the prephilosophical experience of racism and colonialism to which neutral reason is inevitably deaf, just as it is deaf to the role of tradition within philosophy. (1997: 183)

Zhexue and Philosophia

In a review of Feng Youlan's *History of Chinese Philosophy* (in Chinese) in 1934, Jin Yuelin 金岳霖 introduced the distinction between Chinese philosophy (*zhongguo di zhexue* 中国底哲学), meaning philosophy (*zhexue*) that is an integral part of Chinese traditions, and philosophy of China (*zhongguo de zhexue* 中国的哲学), meaning philosophy as done in China (Jin 1995: 627–628). Since the twentieth century, there has been such a thing as *zhexue* in China, but there has been continuing debate as to the nature and existence of *zhongguo (di) zhexue*.[15]

No matter what discord may exist between African philosophers, they have no doubt in using the word philosophy in connection with their reflections. In contrast, given its long and rich intellectual written

history, there have been objections to giving the title *zhexue* or philosophy to China's traditional learning. One can say that the Chinese scholars who reject the term *zhexue* (considered to be a translation of the Western-European word philosophy) are actually in agreement with Western philosophers in embracing a *narrow* vision of philosophy. In connection with such backgrounds, there have occurred waves in recent years in China for the purpose of rejuvenating "Chinese National Learning" (*guoxue* 国学 [國學]).[16] A common view of these advocates is that what is called Chinese philosophy, Chinese literature, Chinese history, and so on, has been constructed with the conceptual tools and systems of disciplinary divisions borrowed from the Western world, and thus has distorted the true nature of Chinese traditional learning. The recently established academic and educational institutions such as Faculty of *Guoxue* and Confucius Institute are united in trying to recover relevant traditional learning in its authenticity.[17] However, it is doubtful whether "real" authenticity is still possible in the era of globalization. Doing academic work *without* using "authentic" Western concepts has become (nearly) impossible. We address this issue further in chapter 8.

Suppose we stipulate that *philosophia* (φιλοσοφία) is exclusively Western philosophy, which originated in Greece and Asia Minor. Let us say that its basic motivation is wonder. Further, we stipulate that *zhexue* names classical Chinese texts that are considered to be philosophical by many Chinese philosophers today (and by sinologists as well),[18] as well as their historical and contemporary interpretations and elaborations. One of its basic concepts is *dao* 道 (path, the Way, proper course of action, the principle that brings the myriad things to life). In addition, we assume that contemporary *zhexue* and *philosophia* include the critical study of one another on the basis of their own conceptual schemes.[19] Then the question can be raised whether *philosophia* and *zhexue* are the same.

Our answer is that this question is not relevant.[20] There is no need for *philosophia* to be *zhexue*, and vice versa, there is no need for *zhexue* to be *philosophia*. Nonetheless, the FR-concept *zhexue* can be extended to include parts of *philosophia* and the FR-concept *philosophia* can be extended to include parts of *zhexue*. Suppose two scholars X and Y encounter one another, coming from the traditions of *philosophia* and of *zhexue* respectively. They can always find some similarities, apart from differences, between their traditions. That is to say, they can recognize each other's tradition as, to some extent, in certain respects, a part or extension of *philosophia* or of *zhexue* respectively. Hence, there is room for intercultural philosophical dialogue, interpretation, or comparison.

It is not necessary that X and Y share the *same* notion of philosophy or *zhexue*. Substantial criteria for what philosophy is need not be presupposed.[21] Similarly, no sharp boundaries between philosophy and other reflective practices are needed. Partitions such as philosophy, history, religious studies, and literature are conventional and classifications may be different, as in the history of the Chinese traditions, which has such classical divisions as Confucian scripture scholarship (*jingxue* 经学), history scholarship (*shixue* 史学), scholars of the one hundred schools (*zhuzixue* 诸子学), Neo-Confucian learning of principles (*lixue* 理学), Buddhist theories (*foxue* 佛学), or traditional methods of study, such as the division between reason and good sense (*yili zhi xue* 义理之学), textual research (*kaoju* 考据), and rhetoric and skill of writing (*cizhang* 辞章).

In this book, we tend toward a synthetic and pragmatic view of philosophy. In the present age, Western philosophy is not a tautology any more, as Heidegger announced half a century ago. The use of the word philosophy to include non-Western thought within the modern academic system does not necessarily distort the authenticity of either, nor does this betray the distinctive features of contemporary philosophy/*zhexue*. One must assume an open and inclusive stance toward the wide range of definitions of philosophy as well as its varied translations in the global discourse. There is no need to urge for a single univocal and shared notion of philosophy.

Philosophical Traditions

We have already made frequent use of the word tradition in the previous section. Generally speaking, when one uses this word, one has in mind a web of beliefs, customs, common behavior, and material products that are passed down within a society or within one section of a society. The German word for tradition, *Überlieferung*, which literally means "what is carried down," conveys very well the aspect of historicality and of inheritance of a tradition. A tradition is never a homogeneous and static totality, but internally heterogeneous, dynamic, and without sharp boundaries. Hence, a philosophical tradition is a historically heterogeneous entity subject to constant change. It should not be taken as a collection of fixed doctrines and teachings buried in scriptures and classics. Traditions (as well as languages and concepts) are (re)constituted as evolving events in history.

We use the capital letters X, Y, and Z to refer to philosophical traditions and their representatives and/or their works. The context will

make clear whether we refer to an individual scholar, a work, a corpus, a school, or a tradition; X and Y may engage in dialogue with one another or may be compared by Z.

We use "tradition" in a broader sense than usual, covering cases where epithets like school, community, or culture are conventionally used. We try to avoid the word "culture" and use "community" in the colloquial sense (referring to a group of people having some interests in common). Philosophical traditions can be situated in the past as well as in the present. They can be more or less extensive or comprehensive. The larger the tradition, the more heterogeneous it usually is. For example, expressions such as "Asian [or Eastern] philosophy or thinking (or thought)" should be used with great care. One needs to be aware that placed under these rubrics are various philosophical traditions.[22] For example, in stating its aim and scope, the journal *Asian Philosophy* speaks of "such philosophical traditions as Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Buddhist, Persian and Islamic."

Furthermore, within each of these philosophical traditions, there are still further differentiations of schools and lineages. It is very hard to provide a single set of neat characterizations of the "house" of Chinese philosophy, let alone to proffer the essential features of "Eastern thinking." There is no consensus as to whether the Daoist privileging of "nothingness" should be taken to be a fundamental character of the Chinese traditions. Furthermore, not only is it highly disputable whether Heidegger's nothing and the Eastern nothing or emptiness are "the Same," it is also notable that the Buddhist nothing/emptiness (*śūnyatā* in Sanskrit, *kong* 空 in Chinese) is not the same as the Daoist nothing/emptiness (*wu* 无 [無]). Moreover, there have always been alterations and modifications of the nothing within each tradition. Nāgārjuna's *śūnyatā* is not the same as the Zen-Buddhist *śūnyatā*; the nothing (*kū*) of the Kyoto School philosophers is again distinct from these two.[23] One needs to avoid a monolithic understanding of philosophy, thought, or tradition.

We can say that phenomenology and Daoism are heterogeneous traditions, as are European and Chinese philosophy. "Heidegger" and "Laozi 老子" (including their interpreters) also form two heterogeneous traditions. Hence philosophical traditions can be "big" (e.g., "the East") or "small" (e.g., the Heidegger of *Being and Time*). In principle (though not possible in practice), reference to a work, say the *Daodejing* 道德经, should include reference to all commentators of this work.

We distinguish between three interconnected "dimensions" of a philosophical tradition: [i] language(s) used, [ii] philosophical content

of relevant conceptual schemes or theories,[24] and [iii] surrounding culture(s) or forms of life.[25] In general, different traditions employ different languages; even within one tradition different languages may be used. Forms of life primarily refer to the cultural and everyday environment of the philosophers. Conceptual schemes refer to philosophical reflection in a tradition. We explicate the notions of conceptual scheme(s) and form(s) of life in chapter 6.[26] We often use the words background and practices as congeners of form(s) of life. Forms of life are the background of utterances, inscriptions, language games, and other practices.

Occasionally we also use the word *Umwelt* ("the world around"), borrowed from Jakob von Uexküll. We restrict its denotation to the meaningful aspects of the world(s) for a human being.[27] A human being, or a group of human beings, creates and reshapes his or her or their *Umwelt* when interacting with the world and other humans. In communicative interaction two parties, X and Y, will share part of their *Umwelt*, as seen from a third point of view, Z. Although each of X and Y (or both) can take on the role of Z, the shared *Umwelt* will be different for X and Y (or any other Z). The shared *Umwelt* should not be thought of as shared meanings of X and Y. Shared meanings are, strictly speaking, zero.[28] Ascribing meaning to a text or an utterance tacitly assumes ascribing an *Umwelt* to the writer(s) or speaker(s). The focus of forms of life is on language games and other human practices. The focus of *Umwelt* falls on meaningfulness of reality-input. Meaningfulness is grounded in forms of life. Reflection requires language games and conceptual schemes.

Greek's Confrontation with the Asiatic

As a matter of fact, the narrow definition of philosophy has gradually shaped modern Western philosophical traditions since the time of Descartes, Kant, and Hegel.[29] This process is accompanied by a change from recognizing the role non-Western traditions played in the origination of ancient Greek philosophy to dismissing this aspect and excluding non-Western traditions from the history of philosophy. Until the middle of the eighteenth century, it had been a prevalent assumption in Europe that the wisdom of the Greeks owed a large debt to non-Western traditions. References were made to such facts as Pythagoras studied in Egypt and brought philosophy to Greece. Johann Ernst Schubert's *Historia Philosophiae* (pars prima) of 1742 began with the philosophy of the Chaldeans, the Persians, the Phoenicians, the Arabs, the Jews, the Indians, the Chinese, the Egyptians, the Ethiopians, the Druids or Celts,

the Scythians, the early Romans and the Etruscans. Only after recounting all these traditions did Schubert turn to the Greeks.[30]

Even in the nineteenth century, the discussion continued concerning the early Greeks' involvement with what was called "the Asiatic." According to Scheiffele (1991), Nietzsche strongly believed that the Greek culture, in having incorporated "the living culture of other peoples," is *not* "autochthonous" (39). It is a quintessentially Greek practice "not to create forms, but to borrow them from abroad and transform them in the fairest appearance of beauty."[31] The well-known historian Jacob Burckhardt shared Nietzsche's view of the relationship of Greek culture and cultures of the Middle East. However, Scheiffele seems to have placed too much emphasis on Nietzsche's occasional positive remarks on Egyptian, Persian, and other "Asian" traditions. In *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Nietzsche does say that "it is doubtless true that [the Greeks] picked up much there [i.e., the Orient]" and that "their skill in the art of fruitful learning is admirable" (1873: 29–30). However, in spite of his compliments for Asiatic civilizations, Nietzsche always emphasizes the uniqueness and supreme importance of Greek culture.[32]

The story of philosophy as a single-handed product of Greece began to take hold toward the end of the eighteenth century. The restriction of the history of philosophy to its alleged origin in Greece is connected with the emergence in modern philosophy of a conception of philosophy as systematic, rationalistic, argumentative, separated from science and religion, with subdisciplines such as logic, metaphysics, epistemology. Hegel advocated that Greece is the birthplace of philosophy and excluded Persian and Indian philosophy in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. After Hegel, it is Heidegger's work that has played the most crucial role in promoting the popularity of a narrow definition of philosophy confined to a unique history originating in ancient Greece.

According to Heidegger, one does not need to take into account "empirical" matters, because what is truly historic should be adjudicated on the basis of relevance to Being, instead of empirical scrutiny. Paying attention to miscellaneous historical facts amounts to a reduction of true history to an "objective" scientific theory. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger quotes from letters of Count Yorck several times, in which the latter illustrates his idea of history. Writing to Wilhelm Dilthey, Count Yorck von Wartenburg writes on August 5, 1886:[33]

We must keep wholly aloof from all such rubbish, for instance, as how often Plato was in Magna Graecia or Syracuse. On this

nothing vital depends. This superficial affectation which I have seen through critically, winds up at last with a big question-mark and is put to shame by the great realities of Homer, Plato, and the New Testament.

After quoting various such remarks, Heidegger makes positive comments on Yorck's ideas,

Yorck gained his clear insight into the basic character of history as "virtuality" from his knowledge of the character of the Being which human Dasein itself possesses, not from the Objects of historical study, as a theory of science would demand. (1927: 453/401)

In agreement with Count Yorck, Heidegger does not attach importance to such stories as Plato once being in Syracuse. He refuses to explore the historical and symbolic significance of these stories, as told by the Greeks themselves, about how their sages traveled abroad, especially to Egypt, to learn wisdom. These stories that tell against the unilateral story about the uniqueness of Western philosophy with its unique origin with the early Greek thinkers, for Heidegger, should be treated as trivial anecdotes that would become pale by the side of those great figures from Greek civilization.[34]

In a later work from the 1960s, Heidegger makes enigmatic statements (without any elaboration) such as:

The confrontation [*Auseinandersetzung*] with the Asiatic was a fruitful necessity for the Greek *Dasein*. For us today, and in an entirely different way and to a far greater extent, it is the decision about the destiny [*Schicksal*] of Europe, and that, which calls itself Western world. (1962: 26/228)

In speaking of the "confrontation with the Asiatic," Heidegger may be entertaining the idea that European peoples follow the model set up by the early Greeks and conduct a new round of confrontation, not with what is the Asiatic for ancient Greece, but with what has become the Asiatic in the present age.[35]

Language (Preliminaries)

Features of Language and Cross-Cultural Interpretation

Common views of human language that are often enumerated include:

- Language is a means for communicative interaction. As such it has a variety of functions such as: informative, imperative, manipulative, performative, expressive, appellative, poetic, phatic, metalingual, and other uses.
- Thinking requires language.[36]
- The medium and the signs of language used are conventional. As to the medium, think of Braille, various sign languages, as well as the distinction of spoken and written language. As to signs think of *chat* (chatter), *chat* (cat), and *mao* 猫 (cat).
- Utterances are unpredictable and abstracting from situation or context.[37]
- Language is "productive" (compositional): there is no end to saying new things.
- Linguistic interaction takes place against the background of nonlinguistic interaction in a partly shared *Umwelt*.
- "Language is not just one of man's possessions in the world, but on it depends the fact that man has a *world* at all. The world as world exists for man as for no other creature that is in the world." (Gadamer 1989: 440)

We restrict our discussion of communication and language to that of human beings only. Following such scholars as Wittgenstein and Gadamer, our notion of language includes *all* other signs involved in communicative interaction; that is, we use "language" in the broad sense, but restrict it to humans. All kinds of signs are included as language games; for example, showing a sample or a facial expression. Reticence or talking past one another are also forms of communication. We do *not* assume that there is such a thing as a universal body language.[38]

Following Wittgenstein, we consider language to consist of an indefinite number of language games. Wittgenstein speaks of language *games* in order to stress the nature of language as social activity and the variety of language uses. "I shall [call] the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, a 'language-game'" (*PI* §7). Most often Wittgenstein uses invented language games, primitive but

complete languages (games), as part of his philosophical method. They are useful because they are surveyable, allowing us to see connections, analogies, and disanalogies, which are difficult to isolate from the complexities of natural language. However, he also mentions natural language games (e.g., *PI* §23), that is fragments of actual linguistic practice. The latter include: the language game of greeting, the language game of translating one language into another language, the language games involving the use of the Chinese word *qing* 情.³⁹

Contrary to some readers of Wittgenstein we assume that the rules governing language games are not strict rules. Language games are not fragmented and discontinuous, not hermetically sealed off from one another, but inwardly as well as outwardly porous. Furthermore, we historicize Wittgenstein's prenotional notion of language game by emphasizing the extension by family resemblance (as explained in later chapters) for the change of language games over time, as well as for their extension by family resemblance to language games in other traditions.⁴⁰

Consider the following excerpt of intercultural or cross-cultural communication between a doctor, a patient, and an interpreter.⁴¹ The text inside square brackets is a "literal" translation of the Navaho utterances, which conveys some of the feel of the original language.

DOCTOR: What is the color of the spit?
INTERPRETER: [I would like to know then, how is it, he says.]
PATIENT: [This particular nasal mucus up in here, usually there is just lots of it.]
INTERPRETER: [Mucus in your nose?]
PATIENT: [Yes.]
INTERPRETER: [Then do you haul it out (as mushy matter)?]
PATIENT: [Yes.]
INTERPRETER: He said there is a lot of stuff in his nose and he has to blow it.
DOCTOR: What color is it?
INTERPRETER: [How is it usually, either what you spit out time after time, or your nasal mucus which you haul out (as a load) time after time?]
PATIENT: [The nasal mucus, that is usually nasty *yoo*; usually a little blood is red within it.]
INTERPRETER: [Is your nose not sore inside?]
PATIENT: [Yes, it is not.]
INTERPRETER: [What about your particular spit, how is that usually, you being the one who spits out time after time?]

> PATIENT: [That too is just the same. It looks kind of like nasty yoo.]
>
> INTERPRETER (addressing doctor): His spit is kind of yellowish in color and also from the nose and usually there is some blood in it.

This conversation illustrates the following basic facts concerning cross-cultural communication. Communicative interaction is taking place to a lesser or greater extent without "literal" or exact translations of even the most simple words (such as the word color). What is salient is not the same for all humans. However, quasi-universals need to be presupposed. For example, in the cited exchange, assent ("yes"), nose, morning, and a few more words are assumed to have a rather precise translation for the language pair Navaho-English. However, strictly speaking, the quasi-universal for, say, assent is not identical in Navaho and English, although they may have a close family resemblance. Sometimes the interpreter has to take some detour to obtain the relevant answer to an English question from the patient. There are numerous uncertainties. However, underdetermination is constrained by the objectivity of the partly shared *Umwelt*. Furthermore, it is constrained by such necessary preconditions as the other person being sincere and speaking the truth. We address these issues in subsequent chapters. Here we emphasize that communication can be successful, even if it takes more time than may have been expected to get a clue for such apparently simple questions as "what is its color?"

Consider statements such as:[42]

> Just those action norms are valid to which all possibly affected persons could agree as participants in rational discussions.
>
> How can citizens treat their differences as a resource as they seek to join with one another in a union that does not silence any of their distinct voices?

Such statements share the tacit assumption that all involved speak the same language.[43] This assumption shows itself in virtually all recent publications concerned with the (global) public sphere. The issue of different traditions having *different* languages is either not taken seriously or reduced to a discourse of "many voices." However, these many voices are assumed to express themselves in the same language, which usually coincides with American English.[44] The phrase "many voices" stems from Bakhtin.[45] However, Bakhtin himself had little to say about

cross-cultural communication and is more concerned about the heteroglossia of literary texts and the internal workings of a certain given speech community (in his case that of Russian) than with communication across speech communities of different traditions.[46]

Similarly, writings in intercultural philosophy do not give due attention to the issue of different languages. For example, Mou Bo's "constructive-engagement movement in comparative studies of Chinese and Western philosophy" emphasizes critical engagement (via reflective criticism and self-criticism) so as to contribute to the common philosophical enterprise (2009: 572–573). The author offers long descriptions of this type of intercultural studies without ever mentioning the issue of fundamental differences in the language(s) used by different traditions.

The issue of the language in which (alleged) similarities and differences could be discussed is also rarely addressed. Jean-Paul Reding is one of those who takes the issue of language seriously. His goal is to "rehabilitate the comparative method as a more rigorous way of doing philosophy with a cross-cultural perspective" (2004: 1) in order to place it among empirically orientated comparative disciplines. In a comparative study of classical Chinese and classical Greek, he argues that significant differences ensue from the difference in grammatical structures of classical Chinese and classical Greek. Nevertheless, Reding suggests that different philosophical traditions (with different histories and no shared origin) react differently to "the same problems" (5), because of a postulated "basic unity of philosophical thinking" (3) and "the postulate of the fundamental unity of cultures" (5n14). "There can be no radical and unbridgeable difference" (5). We tend to agree with the conclusion of his study: "The same cognitive insight may turn up as a philosophical theory in one culture and as a grammatical rule or a semantic structure in another" (13), provided that "the same" is understood in terms of our notion of family resemblance (to be elucidated in chapter 4) and our notion of similarity (elucidated in the last section of chapter 6). However, we argue that it is mistaken to assume the existence of "the same problems" (5) that can be talked about independently of the particular traditions (i.e., unrestricted by particular languages).

No matter what philosophy is, it cannot be expressed independently of a *particular* language. The philosopher may try to overcome this limitation by claiming nonconceptual thinking,[47] but it remains a fact that he or she uses a *particular* language when making these views known to others. Therefore, we propose that results of intercultural philosophy should be expressed in at least two unrelated languages. This is an ideal

(and may not be realistic), because in the twenty-first century there are no "unrelated" languages left. For example, when using modern Chinese one should be sensitive to the numerous neologisms, the meanings of which have been imported from Europe, some via Japan.[48]

The Unsayable

Communicative interaction may hint to or touch on something called "the unsayable," but the unsayable is yet to be brought to light via (conceptual) language. However unique thought or experience is, in order to have communicative significance, it has to be expressed in language. Heidegger may hint toward an as yet inexpressible "other thinking," for which we can at best only prepare ourselves,[49] but he uses quite a number of concepts to tell us about this other thinking; and his commentators even more.[50] We suggest that all language uses concepts. But it is not the case that (some) concepts have essentialistic definitions.

In a study of the *Zhuangzi*, Møllgaard writes: "Impromptu words [*zhiyan* 卮言] are not dialogical. . . . They nevertheless contain the possibility of an encounter with the other that opens up a universal dimension" (2006: 44).[51] In contrast, Allinson ascribes to Zhuangzi a "step by step, coherent argument structure consisting of sophisticated techniques to effect a transformation of consciousness on the part of the reader" (1989: 4).[52] Our view is that both interpretations (in terms of the uniqueness of impromptu words or in terms of a coherent argument) are prima facie permissible, even if on further study one may find one interpretation more permissible than another (or prefer a third one). However, to claim Zhuangzi's uniqueness without telling us something about how Zhuangzi uses concepts (i.e., uses words) does not lead us anywhere. In fact, sophisticated use of conceptual language is needed to get across the idea of impromptu words. Moreover, this feature of unsayableness has to be preserved in translation. New philosophical concepts or "unique" nonconceptual thought can only be grasped if there is a graspable context that supports them. And the same is true for the impromptu words.

With reference to Daoism and Buddhism in particular, it has often been suggested that Chinese philosophy downgrades language. But how could one know this, if not via language? Zhuangzi might be interpreted as being dismissive of certain kinds of *argumentative* language (the kind of language Hui Shi 惠施 uses). However, he does not dismiss *language* in all its variations. If the unique thought of Zhuangzi or Heidegger cannot be grasped or hinted at in words, how could one be aware of it?

Moreover, uniqueness is only unique relative to already known "ordinary" similarities and differences.

Both Heidegger and Zen use reason and empirical observation to demonstrate the limitations of a certain kind of reason. Wang Youru addresses the so-called Zen critique of language and notes that the Zen masters, at some point, may display a positive attitude to language. He argues convincingly that,

> what Zen Buddhists claimed as the inadequacy of language is nothing but the limits or inadequacy of a particular language game, a particular system of expression or a particular use of language. This particular game, system, or usage of language can be characterized as descriptive, cognitive, or entitative language that is not suitable to Buddhist practices . . . [turning instead to] a kind of suggestive, evocative, or edifying language. . . . (2004: 49)

In defense of the unsayable, sometimes Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is cited as support. However, the *Tractatus* is presenting an ideal language view, involving propositions such as: "What can be said can only be said by means of a proposition, and so nothing that is necessary for the understanding of all propositions can be said" (Wittgenstein, *NB*: 25). However, not all statements are propositions in the sense of the *Tractatus*—hence cannot be said in the sense of the ideal language criteria of the *Tractatus*.[53] When one shows sympathy toward nonconceptual thought, this in fact boils down to opposition to the (narrow) ideal language assumption (to be addressed in the next chapter), and can hardly constitute a dismissal of all modes of using (conceptual) language.

Understanding, Interpretation, Translation, Exposition

Such notions as language (games), communication, dialogue, interpretation, explanation, description, translation, understanding, exposition, and comparison are closely related. It is impossible to give exhaustive explanations, but we provide some stipulations concerning our use of these words.

The notion of understanding cannot be defined in terms of more fundamental concepts. All language use involves understanding. Criteria for understanding are constitutive of the human life-forms. We focus on understanding meaning, significance, language, texts, and people. We do not address understanding oneself, morality, mathematics, visual

representation, religions, or aesthetics.[54] Our notion of understanding will prove to be related to the notions of hermeneutic understanding, scientific explanation, and human capacities for social interaction.

We use the words interpretation and understanding interchangeably. "All understanding is interpretation" (Gadamer 1989: 390). Gadamer also says that the situation of the translator and the interpreter is essentially the same; "translation is at the same time an interpretation" (386).[55] This is a common view. It is true that every translation is always already an interpretation: it lets the utterance or text appear in a new light (Heidegger 1942: 80). However, we shall restrict the label translation to particular utterances, which are translated, that is carried across, from one language to another language.[56] Interpretation includes beliefs and everything else wherein utterances are embedded. Still, the distinction between translation and interpretation remains somewhat artificial.

Graham has argued that a translation should use concepts that are independently supported and cannot be a paraphrase that uses concepts internal to the *particular* interpretation or exposition. In contrast, an exposition is an interpretation that takes into account a broader background than a translation does. On this view, the translation of a passage is, as it were, halfway between original text and interpretation. Graham (1991: 288) criticizes Ames (1991) for confusing translation and exposition when the latter renders the opening line of the *Zhongyong* 中庸 as "the relationships that obtain between man and his world [*tianming* 天命] are what is meant by *xing* [性]" (154). For Graham, this imposes a particular interpretation (exposition) upon a translation.[57] A customary translation of this sentence is: "What is decreed by heaven is called the *xing*." Graham insists that the phrase "decree of heaven" should not be missing in the translation.[58] He takes it as self-evident that there is reasonable consensus about the translation of key concepts. This is not the case. Therefore, translation and exposition cannot be separated as neatly as Graham suggests.[59]

It is not uncommon in intercultural and Chinese philosophy to attempt to separate translation and interpretation by, for example, making a strict distinction between philology and philosophy.[60] However, judging the "relevance of characters to the one in question and of looking to the use of that character in other comparable texts" (i.e., philology) and "engage in conceptual analysis of the terms and ideas present in the text" (i.e., philosophical translation) are inseparable.[61] It does not make sense to say that one first translates a classic text and then interprets it. Translation always already involves interpretation and vice

versa. It is never the case that one first settles on the English (or French, or Japanese, or modern Chinese, etc.) "equivalents" and then engages in philosophical analysis of these "equivalents." The so-called equivalents (better: family resemblances) are always the result of interpretation. Similar considerations apply to the attempt of separating interpretation and comparison.[62]

Linguistic translation is not a *necessary* condition for understanding. At the most basic level of radical translation or radical interpretation, it is possible to interpret other people without anything linguistic having been translated. Translation, interpretation, and understanding are primarily based on "data," but descriptions of these data are value-laden. A theory of interpretation should not focus on "the" interpreter, but on a community of interpreters. We address these issues in chapter 9.

It has been argued by Feng Youlan that it is characteristic of Chinese philosophy (and of all Chinese art) that it conveys its message in a suggestive rather than an articulate way (1931: 12). According to Feng, articulateness and suggestiveness are incompatible (14), because he assumes articulateness requires "*fixed* denotations or connotations" (ibid., emphasis added). This is an expression of the ideal language assumption (see chapter 2). Feng is right to say that a translation cannot be as "good" as the original (in terms of suggestiveness), but a good translation can partly convey the suggestiveness. This does not mean that the original text is disposable, but that a good translation can do good service in academic research.

Linguistic Relativism

The Sapir–Whorf Hypothesis

If language is placed in the center of discussions about the methodology and preconditions of intercultural philosophy, then there is no way to avoid addressing the issue of linguistic relativism, which today is often referred to as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. We use these two phrases interchangeably.

It is only from the end of the eighteenth century onward that scholars in Europe have considered the possible dependence of philosophical thought not only on language in the abstract sense but on *particular* languages. Linguistic relativism took definitive shape as a result of the work of the nineteenth-century colonial ethnologists and linguists.[63] The

discovery of radical differences in grammatical structure led to the suggestion that to speak another language is to live in a different world. Thus the question arises of how "living in a different world" is to be understood.

Von Humboldt is often cited as saying: "There resides in every language a characteristic *world-view*"; "language is the formative [*bildende*] organ of thought" (1836: 60, 53). However, his final goal is to present a universalistic theory of human language, relating the language of the individual, the language of a community, and language as a totality grounded in the "original talent" shared by all human beings (256).[64]

> Every language has a structure worthy of study and every language has the infinite resources to assimilate the richest and loftiest ideas. (256)

> We may say with equal correctness that the whole of human species has but one language and that each human being has a particular language. (51)

Perhaps Nietzsche was the first well-known philosopher who connected the idea of linguistic relativism with the evolvement of Western philosophy. According to Nietzsche possible philosophies are constrained by presumably universal features such as inborn taxonomy. However Nietzsche also wrote:

> Wherever linguistic affinity, above all, is present, everything necessary for an analogous development and sequence of philosophical systems will inevitably be on hand from the beginning, thanks to the shared philosophy of grammar. (1886: 20)

This would explain the "resemblance of all Indian, Greek, and German philosophizing," whereas philosophers who are not "Indo-Germans or Muslims" will be found on other paths and "will most probably look differently 'into the world'" (ibid.).

Perhaps the most extreme formulations of linguistic relativism can be found in Sapir:[65]

> Language and our thought-grooves are inextricably interwoven.

> The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached.