

# Looking Back on Problems of Transcultural Methodology in *Asian Studies*: A Short Historical Reflection

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Since its inception in 2012, the journal *Asian Studies* has consistently sought to showcase critical thinkers in the cultural sciences, social sciences, and humanities—including philosophy, which is the focus of this double issue.

In previous issues of the journal, its authors have often made it clear that creative philosophers will always seek to improve their own methods. Even those who sincerely respect other cultural values, epistemologies, and methodologies will always retain some of their own preferences, subjective insights, and blind spots (Bunnin 2003, 352). What really matters is only their equality of opportunity, their evaluation regardless of the seemingly pervasive economic, political, and cultural power relations. Regardless of where they originate, and of their individual originators, such subjective inclinations should be checked by an equally reliable culture of academic critique and discussion, rather than silenced by demands for strict conformity in methods, theories, and doctrines.

This problem is of special importance for the actual understanding of philosophy, which is basically not a tool for finding truth, but rather a means for the endless search for ever-changing truths. The task of philosophy is not to establish an objective and eternally valid truth. Because of the situational and emotional nature of human understanding, these truths necessarily always remain partial. Therefore, philosophy must constantly re-open old questions and pose new ones. Rather than being a “hard science” that implies simple justifications and monotonous confirmations of what already exists, it is and should be a constructive, creative, and unending critique of reality.

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In such a framework, human understanding is not conditioned by the normative standards of some objectivity, but by the object of knowledge itself, including the situational context in which it is embedded. Such approaches start from the awareness that our existence is necessarily permeated by dynamic interactions between our confinement to our individual, subjective, and most intimate world on the one hand, and the tangled, continuous mergers of all our individual worlds into one on the other. Thus, none of these new forms of transcultural and post-comparative philosophies presented in *Asian Studies* can be the only “most appropriate” or even “most correct” method for studying Asian philosophies. In the field of transcultural methodology, they simply represent a few of the many possible ways to reconcile universality with particularity.

By unceasingly seeking new methods and simultaneously by developing, upgrading and changing the existing methodological procedures, we might gradually obtain an insight into some new, challenging approaches to the understanding of our world (Rošker 2021, 138–39). Someday, such approaches might even help us to confront differences by transcending the schemas, defined by deep-seated, ingrown prejudices, against so-called “Oriental thought”. Seeking such new approaches and methodologies was always one of the main interests that guided the editorial board of the journal *Asian Studies* in its criteria of selecting contents and creating special issues centred on special themes.

Most of the previous publications that focused on elaborating existing, or creating new methodologies were proceeding from the field of logic, and they were mainly dealing with Chinese<sup>1</sup>, but also Indian (see Ditrich 2022; Škof 2021) or comparative (e.g. Vörös 2012) logic. New methodologies were also developed by many authors who worked in literary or cultural studies (Ceciu 2013), as well as by those who investigated Asian art history (Vampelj Suhadolnik 2021; Berdajs 2019), different forms of metaphysics (Ames 2020), or human cognition and epistemology (Lee 2012; Vörös 2016; Ditrich 2022; She 2022). We have previously published several important papers dealing with different fundamental questions of transcultural studies, covering various areas of historical (Shirasi 2018), literary (Kang 2016; Ahmadipour 2016), and philosophical (Bartosh 2017; Heubel 2020; Silius 2020) discourse. The journal has also throughout its history welcomed studies in comparative theory: its previous publications on these issues encompassed a wide scope of contents and disciplines, reaching from Buddhist (Hashi 2016) and Islamic (Katheran 2014) studies, through aesthetics (Sernelj 2017) to epistemology and phenomenology (Hashi 2015).

1 See for instance several articles published in the last issue, as for instance Hu and Hu (2022), Liu and Li (2022), Zou and Li (2022), and Rošker (2022), but also many papers that were published in earlier issues, such as Cui (2021), Hashi (2016), as well as Thompson (2017).

This extraordinarily rich variety of contributions in the manifold fields related to the topic of this double issue has led the editorial board to its decision to invite several competent scholars who have helped us to delineate a new field of study which arises—in its permeable and dynamically changing framework—from the diverse approaches included in this, and the next volume of the double issue. It also points to another important feature that is common to all new transcultural philosophical methods—namely their explicit relational nature. This feature is not only connected to their paradigmatic bases, i.e. to different frameworks of reference, but also to its crucial function that enables us to link particular elements from different systems under investigation into new, mutually transformed entities of information, ideas, knowledge, or even wisdom.

On the other hand, this variety of contributions that have played an important role in the publishing policies—and even the very conceptualization of contents that have been at the forefront of the journal's basic interests—prove that conscious approaches to transculturality and the so-called post-comparative methods belong to the most important groundworks of all European (or Western) theories that aim to deal with non-Western cultures.

In this sense, it is important to see that Asian methods of thought, as represented through Asian philosophical, literary and artistic discourses, have—similar to other theoretical discourses all over the world—been the central driving force for creating ideas and shaping knowledge which forms and develops human understanding, launches human curiosity, and inspires human creativity. Therefore, the previously “absurd” assumption that the “Western” theory of knowledge does not constitute the sole, universally valid epistemological discourse, something which would have been unthinkable for the majority of “Western” theorists less than a century ago, is gradually becoming a generally recognized fact among most present-day cultural exponents and communities. It has become clear to most people that “Western epistemology” represents only one of many different forms of historically transmitted social models for the perception and interpretation of reality.

Hence, polylogues among different forms of such intellectual creativity are not only possible, but also a most sensible thing to do (Ames 2015, 109–10). If we consider their value and significance within the framework of contemporary global developments, we can with an easy conscience ask ourselves what role will be played, and what share more modern and appropriate reinterpretations of classical Asian philosophies will have in this process.

Such questions have, of course, no definite and universally valid answers. Their elaboration instead leads to the reopening of new questions. Therefore, they will

doubtless continue to remain in the centre of our interests which will define the future scopes and thematic guidelines of *Asian Studies*.

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