

Re-inventing Chinese Philosophy through the Method of Sublation: Introducing a New Methodology for Research in Chinese Philosophy from the Perspective of Transcultural Comparisons

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Abstract

In this article, I will introduce and describe my current research work, which centres on re-interpreting Chinese philosophy by implementing an innovative approach suitable for transcultural philosophical comparisons. To commence this undertaking, I was compelled to address certain issues, leading me to seek a novel methodology for transcultural research.

This article will begin by briefly addressing the still existing general problems of transcultural philosophical comparisons. I will then examine the recent and current landscape of research in the field of Chinese comparative philosophy, with a specific focus on emerging paradigms referred to as “post-comparative” approaches.

In the latter part of this paper, building upon a concise overview of my previous research findings, I will elucidate the current stage of development of the method of sublation. Furthermore, I will provide a theoretical framework outlining the subsequent phases of investigation.

Keywords: sublation, methodology, post-comparative research, Chinese philosophy, comparative philosophy

Preporod kitajske filozofije s pomočjo metode sublacije: predstavitev nove metodologije za raziskovanje kitajske filozofije z vidika transkulturnih primerjav

Izvilleček

V tem članku bom najprej predstavila in opisala svoje trenutno raziskovalno delo, ki se osredotoča na reinterpretacijo kitajske filozofije z uporabo inovativnega pristopa, primerne za transkulturne filozofske primerjave. Kot sinologinja sem se pri svojem raziskovalnem

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delu namreč nenehno srečevala z mnogimi problemi, povezanimi z metodološko problematiko medkulturnih raziskav. Le-ta me je privedla k iskanju novih metodoloških rešitev za primerjalne transkulturne študije.

Članek se prične s kratkim opisom še vedno obstoječih splošnih problemov na področju medkulturnih filozofskih primerjav, nadaljuje pa se s predstavitvijo nedavnega in trenutnega stanja raziskav na področju kitajske in primerjalne filozofije, s posebnim poudarkom na trenutno nastajajočih paradigmah, ki so znane kot »postprimerjalni« pristopi.

V zadnjem delu tega članka bom na osnovi kratkega pregleda svojih dosedanjih raziskovalnih izsledkov predstavila trenutno stopnjo razvoja metode sublacije. Poleg tega bom v njem vzpostavila nov teoretski okvir za nadaljnje faze raziskovanja.

Ključne besede: sublacija, metodologija, postkomparativne raziskave, kitajska filozofija, primerjalna filozofija

Introduction

Against the bleak backdrop of a globalized but increasingly fragmented world, today's academia has a crucial role to play in developing and promoting new models of exchange that can foster a more stable and interconnected global community that embraces and values diversity. This is especially important given the current state of the world, where issues such as social and political divisions, economic inequality, and environmental degradation are increasingly pressing. By imagining, crafting, and advocating for new models of exchange, academia can play an important role in addressing these challenges and working towards a more just and equitable world.

Therefore, the main objective of the proposed method is to enhance and promote the exchange of ideas and knowledge between different cultures and traditions by elaborating and improving existing models for intercultural comparisons of different theories embedded in the domains of different cultures. In this regard, my primary goal is to improve and complete various elements and approaches of the so-called transcultural philosophical sublation which has been tentatively elaborated and schematically demonstrated in my previous research (see e.g., Rošker 2020; 2021; 2022a; 2022b). To provide context for this endeavor, I will begin by examining the key issues related to traditional forms of ideational exchange between Europe and East Asia, especially China.

When European and, more generally, "Western" scholars engage with the so-called "Eastern" philosophical traditions, their interpretations are often embedded in the cognitive frameworks of their own cultures – that is, the cultures in which they were born and educated. As a result, their understanding of the various ideational

traditions tends to be Eurocentric and inextricably linked to the intellectual heritage of their own sociohistorical backgrounds, without fully accounting for the multiple and complex differences in culturally divergent patterns of philosophical language and thought.¹ All these problems occur in any type of intercultural research, which is always embedded in the diverse cultural backgrounds of the subject and the object of interpretation. As such, it is by no means coincidental that—without a thorough reflection of cultural characteristics which defines any particular culturally conditioned subject matter in the realm of intercultural research—all histories of ideas and all cultural discourses are ethnocentric. In such an unreflected ethnocentric view, one's own people “historically stand for civilization and its achievements, whereas the otherness of the others is a deviation from these standards” (Rüsen 2004, 62–63). In this sense, Eurocentrism as a formally and informally institutionalized discourse, which represents a psychological foundation and a central approach of Orientalism, is simply a form of ethnocentrism, one among many others. Nevertheless, and the same as Orientalism as such, Eurocentrism is also a discourse of power. Since the colonial era, it is therefore more influential than most of the other ethnocentrisms. It is an approach, based upon a “higher” position of economic and political supremacy, which is the result of specific social, ideational, and historical developments. Although the economic and partly political rise of Asia in recent decades has shifted the global political landscape, the lingering effects of colonialism continue to shape intercultural discourse, including in philosophy. The reason for this persistence lies in the historical development of modernization, which began in Europe and subsequently spread worldwide. This history has led to the present state of globalized international relations, in which the standards and criteria used in theoretical analysis are primarily determined by Western or European principles. This is no accident, but rather the result of the historical and cultural context in which modernization took place. This process also brought about a “modernization” of knowledge and created an asymmetrical relationship between the two sides, in which European indifference to Asia and Asian interest in Europe were anything but balanced.

1 The issue of the legitimacy of non-European philosophies is a highly relevant topic in this context. In recent years, there have been ongoing debates and discussions about whether traditional East Asian thought, particularly Chinese thought, should be considered as a form of philosophy. These debates have been quite intense and have been entered into from multiple perspectives. Due to the complexity of the issue, it may not be possible to address it fully within the limited scope of this project proposal. However, readers who wish to gain a deeper understanding of these controversies can find an in-depth examination of the topic, including some crucial arguments in favour of recognizing Chinese thought as philosophy, in the prologue of my book *Interpreting Chinese Philosophy: A New Methodology*, published by Bloomsbury Academic in 2021. The prologue is titled “Chinese Philosophy: Fact or Fiction?” and provides a comprehensive overview of the topic, shedding light on the different perspectives and arguments surrounding the problem.

Defining Central Concepts

In order to gain a deeper (and much needed) understanding of non-Western philosophical theories, it is necessary to acknowledge and move beyond these Eurocentric perspectives and instead approach them using their own unique methodologies. This project posits that Western epistemology is just one of many ways to understand the world, and aims to present and critically evaluate the various methodological approaches used in transcultural philosophical research. If they want to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the focal issues, scholars working in the field of comparative philosophy must try to overcome any potential divergencies in thought and intellectual history between different philosophical traditions.

In my investigation of new modes of interpretation that could arise from applying the method of sublation, I therefore proceed from the presumption according to which different philosophical discourses from various traditional cultures are, *inter alia*, products of different (culturally conditioned) paradigms, or of theoretical frameworks deriving from divergent cultural and linguistic environments. Western researchers who work in the field of non-Western thought and philosophy still tend to lack a conscious reflection of the analytical and interpretative procedures they are applying. These procedures are usually the results of particular (and specifically Western) historical developments and the associated, emblematic social orders and structures. Much too often such techniques and the corresponding methodological apparatus prove themselves to be misleading and dangerous. Notions, ideas, categories, and concepts, which have been shaped in a certain sociocultural or ideational context, can hardly be simply transferred into other, differently structured cultural or traditional contexts.

Numerous concepts that work well in a processual paradigm that is typical of Chinese and most traditional East Asian philosophies make absolutely no sense (or are simply invalid) in a static formal-logical framework. The dynamic paradigm which underlies the dominant East Asian streams of thought causes many problems for most Western scholars, who are not trained in Chinese, Japanese, or Korean conceptual history.

Here we must consider the subtle but significant differences between cross-cultural, intercultural, and transcultural approaches. While the term cross-cultural is the most general and refers to the comparison or study of different cultures, interculturality (especially philosophical interculturality) is a specific type of communication or interaction between different intellectual, linguistic, and cognitive traditions in which differences in cultures and corresponding linguistic structures decisively influence the shaping of meaning. In this sense, intercultural

interactions certainly involve the process of transferring meanings, implications, and connotations between different cultures. Nevertheless, numerous current theoreticians (e.g., Welsch 1999) criticize the very notion of interculturality with its problematic embeddedness into a static and one-dimensional understanding of cultures as fixed “realms”, “spheres”, or “islands”. In such a view, the very idea of culture is being defined by a separatist character. Therefore, many contemporary scholars advocate a transcultural approach instead, for the suffix “trans-”, which is included into the notion of transculturality, proposes that it is able to transcend the borders and limits of a fixed and static idea of culture. In this sense, it suggests the possibility to step beyond the very fragmentation and separateness of various cultures and philosophies. As such, a transcultural view of cultures enables us to gain a multi-perspective attitude, which implies inclusion rather than an exclusion or isolation. Transcultural approaches to the study of intercultural phenomena—including philosophical concepts, categories, and methodologies—help us overcome obsolete, static, and fixed concepts of culture. This does not imply, however, that there is no culture. Cultures, the same as their various elements, such as customs, religions, rituals, symbols, or languages, are still real things. Just like different languages, they all belong to dynamic, historically grown and constantly changing entities without fixed limitations.

In such a dynamic image of different cultural-linguistic traditions there is no place for cultural essentialism, nor for any static and durable individual or group identities that are based upon a “cultural substance”. What this image shows is only that we are formed in different, but always concrete symbolic, linguistic and epistemological worlds. On such bases people have throughout history produced a series of different forms of knowledge, which are connected with the world and Earth itself in different ways and through diverse, specific multifaceted relations that cannot be measured only with the criteria of linear progress of modern science and technology. Only an insight into the existence of such heterogeneity will allow us to resolve the tensions between reality and understanding.

Transcultural Comparisons: Theoretical Models, Paradigms, and Frameworks of Reference

Against this background, I start from a critical problematization of traditional intercultural exchanges and, within this framework, focus on theoretical models of comparison. In recent years not only the methods but even the very concept of comparative philosophy have become somewhat controversial. Many researchers (e.g. Griffiths 2017, 473; Ouyang 2018, 244) believe that comparison is an elementary

function of any form of genuine philosophical thinking. It is doubtless true that our reasoning is based upon contrasting between different phenomena, ideas, forms and concepts. Such principles underly and guide the elementary procedures of human perception and interpretation of the external world. In such models, of course, comparison is more than simply juxtaposing certain elements of comprehension and identifying similarities and differences between them. It is a much more complex procedure, but one that is also increasingly seen as problematic because it involves several serious methodological problems. These problems are especially troublesome in the field of transcultural philosophies, i.e., when comparing different philosophical schools or currents of thought that originated in different cultural traditions and are embedded in frames of reference that differ from one another.

The development of transcultural sublation as a method of comparison is therefore based on the assumption that comparative philosophy requires different methodological approaches than philosophical studies that focus exclusively on one philosophical system or a single tradition of thought. If it aims to go beyond their respective limitations and produce a unifying discourse that valorizes both *comparata*, it must take into account possible incommensurabilities between different traditional contexts and the semantic or referential frameworks in which they were developed. Even the very relationship between comparative methods and the objects of comparison themselves is highly problematic, because in such procedures we employ a unified methodology built on culturally discrete material. On the basis of such assumptions, Rafal Banka (2016, 605) explains why it is important to treat the material of philosophical comparisons as arising from culturally discrete linguistic and conceptual contexts.

However, the problems regarding comparative philosophy go even further, particularly regarding comparisons of Chinese and Euro-American philosophies. They are not limited to the fact that we work with a unified methodology which has been built upon culturally divergent concrete resources (*ibid.*). In our view, the crucial difficulty in intercultural comparative philosophy is linked to the fact that the abovementioned “unified methodology” is a system underlying one of the philosophies under comparison, namely the traditional European or “Western” one. There is no third, external methodology that could provide us with objective criteria for comparison. In other words, the *tertium comparationis* is part of one of the *comparata*. The same is true for understanding and evaluating concepts and categories. The cognitive processes in such a transcultural comparative procedure apply one (usually “Western”) philosophical language,²

2 In this context, the notion of a “philosophical language” is applied in the widest sense. It encompasses a broad range of elements including terminology, concepts, and specialized vocabulary. This language is used not only to convey specific philosophical ideas, but also to reflect the complexity

even though the material they investigate is culturally discrete, which means that it is usually written in different languages and relies on different thought patterns. Numerous traditional comparative methods were based on such an idea of a universal philosophical language, referring not only to the specific disciplinary terminology, but also (or even more) to the concepts and categories used and expressed in it. These theories are united in the assumption that there can in principle be an “impartial” (Shen 2003, 357) language in which comparative or intercultural philosophy can be conducted. In contrast to such views, we agree with Ma Lin and Jaap van Brakel (2013, 298), who argue that different cultures produce different philosophical languages. However, a single language is not necessary for intercultural philosophical dialogue and comparative philosophy to work.

In addition to the awareness of the lack of such an “ideal language”, we must also be aware of the supposition that any coherent philosophical comparison should not be limited to the level of paralleling and describing differences and commonalities of different abstract entities, for philosophical comparisons, more often than not, separate and connect at the same time what are very likely or unlikely pairs of, or entire sets of, *comparata* (“that which we set out to compare”) (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016, 2). Hence the usual understanding of comparative philosophy as a simple one-dimensional discourse which erects meaningful bridges between different traditions, and creates new possibilities for “intercultural dialogues”, is naïve and outdated.

Based on thorough reflection and analysis of such axiological and conceptual issues inherent in traditional comparative methods, many scholars have elaborated new methodological tools that could overcome such problematic approaches. Such experiments and new models of transcultural philosophizing, based on a thorough awareness of the problems described above, have often been called post-comparative philosophies.³

Another problem that arises in traditional intercultural comparisons is related to the fact that many of their authors have not recognized the significant role that referential frames and discursive translations play in this context.

and nuance of the concepts being discussed. It includes not only abstract and technical terms, but also the categorical framework used to understand and explore ideas such as the nature of reality, knowledge, and morality. Additionally, it is specific to certain branches of philosophy such as metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics.

3 At this point it should be mentioned that some scholars use the term post-comparative differently. Ralph Weber, for example, uses it to refer to a certain stage of the comparative process itself. See, for instance, Weber (2014, 162).

By applying different languages and different patterns of reasoning that are linked to their individual grammatical structures, different cultures continuously create different frameworks of reference. However, understanding the basic structure and applying the concepts included in these frameworks is not an issue limited to transcultural philosophies, and not even to transcultural studies in a wider, more general sense. In fact, what we are confronting here is a universal phenomenon, which has been discussed by a broad range of Western theoreticians (e.g. Lakatos, Feyerabend, Kuhn, Quine, etc.). The Chinese analytical philosopher Fung Yiu-ming from Hong Kong reminds us in this context of the well-known example of the relation between Newton's and Einstein's theories: even though both of them were written in Indo-European languages, and although they apply the same concepts and notions, they are in practice mutually incompatible (Feng 1989, 123). Because they represent different referential frameworks, the functions and semantic connotations of the same notions applied in them are also different.

Frames of reference are an important aspect in theoretical frameworks, as they serve to organize and structure the concepts and terms within it. These frames of reference act as relational semantic networks, which define each term and establish the connections between them. By doing so, they shape the overall composition and structure of the theory, making it a comprehensive and coherent system of knowledge.

Such frameworks of reference therefore assume a defining role in human understanding and interpretation of a given reality. In this context, it is important to note that this defining role not only pertains to the meaning of particular notions, but also to their mutual relations. As such, referential frameworks are comprehensive tools that filter perceptions and create meanings. Different referential frames can lead to different descriptions and interpretations of the same objective reality. This is also the reason why transcultural research can sometimes produce misunderstandings between different cultures instead of eliminating or at least diminishing them. The greater the historical, semantic, structural and axiological differences between two languages and cultures, the more likely the occurrence of such misunderstandings.

However, the existence of different frames of reference does not at all mean that different culturally conditioned philosophical worldviews are incommensurable. The basic structures of the human perception of reality are universal, as is the human capacity to generate language and thought. In this respect, our commonalities far outweigh the culturally conditioned differences in the general understanding of our existence. While there may be culturally specific variations in how people understand and interpret their experiences, these differences do not necessarily

hinder our ability to understand one another. Recognizing and acknowledging the existence of culturally conditioned frames of reference is important, but it should not be taken as a barrier to mutual understanding between people and societies. On the contrary, they are bridges that connect us in ways that reduce the possibility of mutual misunderstanding. Nevertheless, in order for these connections to be productive it is essential to have a thorough understanding of the fundamental principles that underlie the frames of reference of all the philosophies being considered.

These questions are crucial for both understanding and interpreting Chinese and wider East Asian philosophies, and they play an important role in creating a diverse and comprehensive global philosophy that includes non-Western concepts and perspectives. Reliable and intelligible interpretations require discursive translations, which are based on a thorough understanding of the original texts, as well as their historical and social contexts, to ensure a hermeneutically sound and analytically flawless transfer of content. They must be able to convey the multiple connotations of concepts and categories across different semantic and referential networks. In other words, such “discursive translations” of different philosophies belonging to different semantic frames, different linguistic structures, and different methodological paradigms can never be limited to merely rendering one language into another. They must also involve the transfer of different discourses, as well as interpretations of individual textual and linguistic structures, categories, concepts, and values that differ according to sociocultural contexts. In this work, which relies on both analytical and hermeneutic methods, researchers often encounter a discrepancy between the etymological and functional understanding of a given expression. In some cases the same notion may even be understood completely differently, depending on the general socio-historical context of the different societies in which it appears (see Rošker 2012).

Towards a New Approach

Based on the awareness of the above problems and the need to develop methodologies that allow for genuine transcultural exchange and dialogue, the main goal of my current research is to develop an appropriate methodology for further, less culturally biased intercultural (post-)comparative studies, which could lead to new understandings of reality. Such a culturally sensitive approach aims to transcend the limitations of traditional comparative methodologies, which often rely on one-dimensional mechanisms and simplistic evaluations based solely on similarities and differences of the *comparata*. Instead, it should allow for a more

nuanced and holistic understanding of the cultural contexts and perspectives being compared, without being constrained by fundamental biases or deep-rooted prejudices.

In other words, the methodology of post-comparative philosophical sublation I am developing in my current research is not solely based on identifying commonalities and differences between different philosophical systems or theories, but should rather lead to a deeper understanding and new insights into the underlying content of the comparison through the increased exchange of knowledge and ideas. What I am aiming at is a theoretical model for philosophical comparison that will enable scholars working in Chinese and comparative philosophy to shape new forms of philosophical theory, rather than being limited to the simple results of one-dimensional comparisons. This implies working on a theoretical model that will enable (and create the conditions for) new forms of philosophizing rooted in new paradigms of transcultural knowledge exchange. Such exchanges can potentially lead to innovative ideas through the application of new or upgraded methods. I believe that the improved and accomplished method of transcultural philosophical sublation can enable researchers in the field of transcultural philosophy to gain new insights and provide new explanations for the particular research questions that underlie the comparisons they are working on. The development of foundational elements for such new methodological approaches can also be facilitated through the creation of new paradigms and principles that form the basis of the method of sublation. These paradigms and principles will be explained in more detail in the subsequent sections of this paper.

The proposed method of transcultural philosophical sublation is a new approach that is still under development and will be substantially improved and completed during the ongoing research. The application of the sublation method needs to be extensively tested and verified on a larger number of cases, including the contrastive conceptual analyses of numerous ideas, systems, and procedures from the comparison between particular East Asian and European theories. This will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the method's applicability and potential.

In this way I am able to explore uncharted territories of transcultural philosophy, in order to offer a preliminary, but comprehensive and substantiated analysis of the sublation method. In a more general and fundamental sense, my main goal is to improve and promote the transcultural exchange of knowledge and ideas, because I believe that it is high time to balance the above-mentioned epistemological asymmetry in intercultural studies and global exchanges.

In this regard contemporary Chinese and East Asian philosophy deserves special attention from a European perspective, because through the reception and

transformation of Western sources (which it was actually forced to do two centuries ago) it has accumulated a transcultural potential that philosophy in Europe has yet to develop. This fact is of immense importance not only for the global exchange of knowledge, but also for Europe and our efforts to free it from the relics of its colonial history, which often still block its understanding of different cultures and the deeper levels of their traditional discourses. Indeed Europe, composed of different cultures that use different languages and have developed in different historical traditions, urgently needs to find a way to reflect self-critically on the notion of its own heterogeneous cultural identity. Therefore, better knowledge of transcultural interactions is important not only for Europe's international relations at the global level, but also internally, i.e. with regard to the interactions between individual European countries.

Before going into the novel approach intrinsic to the method of transcultural philosophical sublation, let us briefly examine the current state of the field under consideration. This domain is characterized by vigorous debates and a continuous quest for inventive methods and approaches. As previously highlighted, various issues and deficiencies persist within conventional methods of intercultural comparative philosophy, encompassing both formal and substantive inconsistencies. Given these challenges, I will propose some fresh, “post-comparative” approaches designed to address and resolve these issues. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that these new approaches remain the subjects of ongoing scholarly debates within the realm of transcultural comparative philosophy.

State-of-the-art in the Proposed Field of Research and Relevant Problems

“Transcultural philosophy” is a relatively new approach with continuously evolving principles and patterns of thought. It began with Eduardo Valera's construction of its methodological foundations (Valera 1972a; 1972b), and in the following decades it has also increasingly been applied in the framework of philosophical dialogues between different cultures.⁴ Vytis Silius (2020, 275), for instance, highlights that transcultural philosophies rest on a cluster of interrelated ideas and concepts, focusing thereby on the dynamic (i.e., transitional and transforming) elements of cultures and ideas. In this context, he upgraded Pablo Blitstein's approach, who critically examined the problems linked to the static ontology of culture, emphasizing that transculturality “assumes that everything moves and changes; it posits

4 See, for example, Fredericks (1988, 299–315), Nielsen (1995, 803–35), Siegel (1999, 387–409), Heubel (2011, 584–601), Heubel (2020, 211–30), Lee (2013), Dai (2020) and many others.

that stasis is only the momentary interruption of motion, and that the actual flows of persons, things, and ideas across the world prevent the definitive consolidation of any boundaries” (Blitstein 2016, 139). Hence, in the framework of transcultural philosophy all terms make sense only as relational, and not as essential notions,⁵ describing fundamentally static and stable phenomena (Silius 2020, 274).

Within the framework of such an understanding of culture and transculturality, numerous interesting and significant approaches have also been developed in the narrower area of comparison between Western and East Asian philosophies and ideas. Since this area also represents the focus of our project-related work, we will concentrate our presentation of the relevant background literature on the main works that have been of great importance for the development of the discourse in question.

In this particular field of research, the search for an applicable, effective, and creative post-comparative model of philosophizing has resulted in several new theoretical presumptions and proposals for new approaches and methods, mostly based upon or following Robert Neville’s distinction between objectivist and normative approaches (Neville 2001).

Already in 1987, David Hall and Roger Ames aimed to demonstrate to researchers “whose scholarly sensibilities have been formed in the West what they must acknowledge about their own traditions before they can engage Chinese thinkers constructively” (Frisina 2016, 563). Purushotama Bilimoria (2000), on the other hand, emphasized that any new methods we seek to employ should offer us a means of surpassing the very othering entailed in such processes, remaining therefore a “disturbing presence” for mainstream postcolonial cultures and the corresponding modes of thought.

Proceeding from the goal of “de-essentializing” intercultural philosophy, Ma Lin and Jaap van Brakel (2013, 298) suggest that we should consciously follow the crucial procedures defining contemporary humanities and apply the principle of mutual attunement (Ma and Van Brakel 2016, 12). Li Chenyang aims to further develop the positive aspects of comparative philosophy by deepening the understanding of specific philosophies, thereby enhancing our ability to do creative philosophy, and he emphasizes the importance of understanding cultural patterns in intercultural philosophy (Li 2016, 534). In the search for the most suitable and

5 Transcultural language then speaks about how we see ourselves in the Other. Such a reciprocal vision of different entities of the relation between the self and Other has been expressed in many phenomenologies arising from very different intellectual traditions, starting with the traditional African concept of *ubuntu*, through the Confucian virtue of humaneness (*ren*), to those of the contemporary Euro-American phenomenologies that are based on Heidegger’s idea of the Being-with (*Mitsein*).

achievable method in this context we cannot ignore the approach elaborated by Arindam Chakrabarti and Ralph Weber. Proceeding from the need for a “philosophy of comparison” (Weber 2014) that could surpass the limitations of a mere “comparative philosophy”, and provide new theoretical grounds for creating new transcultural philosophies, their analyses resulted in the idea of “fusion philosophy” (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016, 2). In order to exceed the limitations and fix the inconsistencies of traditional comparative philosophy, they suggested its application as an inventive method of transforming simple comparative approaches. In fact, the “fusion philosophy” method has also been proposed and advocated by several other scholars. Among the more radical “fusionists” are Mark Siderits (2023, xi), who claims that comparative philosophy has been superseded by what he terms fusion philosophy, Graham Priest (2015, 55), Owen Flanagan (2020, 23) and perhaps Bo Mou.⁶ Chakrabarti and Weber highlight that this method surpasses the customary comparative attitudes, and implies a completely different methodology, which is based on and results in a new transcultural mode of philosophizing. What this proposed method suggests is a philosophical comparison in the sense of a new form of philosophical theory rather than a simple comparison of (different) philosophies. In other words, it is a new form of philosophizing and not merely a method, based on identifying differences and similarities in various philosophical systems. Indeed, Chakrabarti’s and Weber’s proposal offers us a “sound and ambitious definition” (Coquereau 2016, 152) for new forms of transcultural post-comparative philosophy. However, irrespective of the discrete content of this methodological proposal, which is significant and will doubtless contribute to the emergence of a new shift in the construction of new models of transcultural philosophies, it is precisely this “definition”—or, in other words, its naming—which is somewhat troublesome. These problems have been critically analyzed by different theoreticians, for instance by Michael Levine (2016) and others, and among alternative approaches we should mention the “philosophy of confluence” (Kirlokar-Steinbach, Ramana, and Maffie 2016) and “synthesis philosophy” (Dewey, Radhakrishnan, and Santayana 1951; for an upgraded version, also see Deutsch 2002).

In September 2022 and January 2023, a special double issue to this topic was also published in this journal (Vol. 10, issue 3, and Vol. 11, issue 1). The issue was entitled *Transcultural (Post)Comparative Philosophy*. The first part of the double issue (<https://journals.uni-lj.si/as/issue/view/782>) was subtitled *Methods and*

6 See Mou Bo (2022a, 5). Although Bo Mou never explicitly uses the term or refers to “fusion philosophy”, some scholars believe that what he calls the “constructive-engagement strategy of comparative philosophy”, or CCEP for short, is at times sufficiently similar to fusion philosophy to warrant the same appellation (see Levine 2016, 3).

Approaches. It dealt mainly with purely theoretical and methodological issues, but also proposed some innovative practical approaches. The second part of this double issue (<https://journals.uni-lj.si/as/issue/view/810>) dealt with more concrete examples or demonstrations of the theory presented in the first. The contributions in this volume contrastively analyze philosophers, theories, methods, and exchanges between East Asian and European philosophical discourses. The subtitle of the volume is therefore *Philosophical Dialogues between Asia and Europe: from Plotinus to Heidegger and Beyond*. Many internationally renowned and influential scholars in the field of Asian and comparative philosophy contributed their works to this double issue, such as Eric S. Nelson (2023), David Chai (2023), Steven Burik (2022), Bo Mou (2022b), Hans-Georg Moeller (2022), Dimitra Amaratidou and Paul J. D'Ambrosio (2022), Robert A. Carleo (2022), Li Chenyang (2022), Jaap van Brakel and Ma Lin (2022), Fabian Heubel (2023), Geir Sigurðsson (2023), Jay Hetrick (2023), Abe Hiroshi (2023), and Vytis Silius (2022), to name just a few.

Sublation Method – Research Background and General Description

The method was first introduced in one of my recent monographs, *Interpreting Chinese Philosophy: A New Methodology* (Rošker 2021) and further discussed in my paper “Chinese and Global Philosophy: Postcomparative Transcultural Approaches and the Method of Sublation” (Rošker 2022a) published in *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*. The method has been demonstrated through various contrastive analyses and further developed through presentations at international academic conferences, invited guest lectures, and publications in high-impact factor journals.

The sublation method has attracted significant attention in the international academic community. It has been extensively presented in book reviews of the aforementioned monograph (e.g. DeLapp 2023; Ditrich 2022), widely discussed at several conferences and symposia, and featured in a series of interviews.

In a post-comparative context, our understanding cannot remain limited to objective normative standards, but is necessarily also shaped by the historical, conceptual and even social contexts in which the objects of our inquiry are embedded. Therefore, the philosophy of sublation with its dynamic relational structure, its broad discursive context, and its consideration of the referential frameworks underlying our investigations,⁷ is only one among many different approaches

7 All these abovementioned features of the sublation method will be explained in greater detail and further elaborated in the upcoming section.

defining new transcultural philosophical research. In the broad and rich arena of transcultural methodologies, it simply represents one of the many possible ways to reconcile different philosophical approaches, forms and contents. It is a method which can transform inspiration to contemplation, thereby helping us to shape new ideas and to gain new forms of knowledge and understanding. It is thus well worth being further developed, improved and upgraded. The sublation approach has demonstrated its potential, but for it to be suitable for widespread use in international (post-)comparative studies, it needs to be supplemented with comprehensive additional materials and research. This will enhance its capabilities and make it applicable to a wider range of research scenarios. Given the keen interest in the initial drafts of this innovative approach, the sublation method undoubtedly warrants dedicated elaboration and further research to establish itself and gain widespread recognition as a valuable and inventive approach that addresses certain inconsistencies in traditional comparative systems. Therefore, in the near future, my research will center on advancing, enhancing, and finalizing this method, along with introducing it to a broad spectrum of international scholars engaged in the study of comparative intercultural philosophy.

But how does this method function, and what are its fundamental characteristics? Despite the complexity that makes it challenging to describe its foundational structure and how it functions in a concise manner, I will attempt to outline its operation in the following sections. The method of transcultural (post)comparative sublation is a novel dialectical method aimed at enhancing our comprehension of diverse philosophical ideas, theories, and principles originating from different cultural traditions. It aims to facilitate the development of innovative ideas and theories based on this foundation. Its primary objective is to foster a productive dialogue among various ideas, philosophical currents, and intellectual traditions, leading to fresh insights through this exchange.

The term “sublation” itself is, of course, derived from Hegelian dialectics, yet it diverges significantly from it in various aspects. To highlight these differences it is important to note that the sublation method is rooted in dynamic paradigms of processual philosophy. It veers away from adhering to the formal laws of identity, contradiction, and the excluded middle. Unlike the conventional Hegelian model, it does not yield an entirely new, distinct, qualitatively different synthesis as the fusion of two opposing ideas engaged in dialectical interaction.

In contrast, the zenith of this process manifests in a pivotal stage termed “sublation”, encompassing a transformative shift that can be understood as sublation in a narrower context. Although merely one among the eight constituent phases of this method, this stage is of paramount importance. It emerges from the tension

inherent in the *comparata* and engenders a decisive shift, propelling our cognition toward fresh and innovative insights.

Precisely within this context lies what could arguably be considered the most significant and decisive divergence that sets sublation dialectics apart from the Hegelian model. The phase of sublation, which pushes us toward a shift in perspective and consequently a new idea, distinguishes itself markedly. Unlike the Hegelian framework, this phase is not a product of automatic structural principles governing our thought processes. Instead, sublation's transformative shift emerges autonomously and creatively through the unfettered subjectivity of the individual employing the method.

However, this subjective shift does not stand alone as the sole function of human subjectivity within the sublation method. It also assumes a critical role in several preceding phases. For example, it is our subjectivity that determines what should be discarded and what should be retained in the process of our dialectical comparison. Similarly, subjectivity guides decisions on how and where the *comparata* can complement each other.

Now some people might interject by contending that such a method lacks scientific rigor due to its absence of objectivity, rendering it seemingly arbitrary. Critics could also argue that its outcomes lack universal validity. However, when looking into these objections more deeply we must recall that, from a Heideggerian perspective, even the act of thinking itself lacks a truly scientific nature. According to Heidegger, "science does not think" (Heidegger 1954, 4). A scientific theory that merely validates existing states of affairs lacks the capacity to engender novelty or to foster positive change in the world. This resonates with the Marxist critique of philosophy—a critique that advocates for the discipline to transcend its role as a mere interpreter of the world and instead embrace its potential as an agent of transformation.

In this context, the sublation method transcends the boundaries typically assigned to the operations of scientific methodologies in a fundamental sense. Sublation, much like philosophy itself, occupies a space that is simultaneously scientific and unscientific. It conforms to scientific principles through its logical coherence, systematic structure, and verifiability at each operational step. However, it surpasses the confines of scientific methods as it operates as a tool of thought woven into the fabric of free, autonomous, and often temperamental human subjectivity.

Nonetheless, the sublation method remains inherently dialectical, although this dialectic does not adhere exclusively to the Aristotelian or Hegelian models. Instead, it refers to dialectics in a broader context as a method of thought and discernment. It arises from a dialogical or contrastive engagement, where two

distinct ideas, theories, or systems of thought are brought into confrontation and mutual evolution.

Sublation encompasses a dynamic and process-oriented method of dialectical interaction involving two or more *comparata*. These *comparata* manifest within diverse philosophies, philosophical systems, discourses, paradigms, or ideas. The method comprises eight distinct yet interconnected phases. Progressing through the initial six phases is relatively straightforward, as we more or less adhere to the designated steps. During this procedure, we move into the unique phases defined by family resemblances, construct relational research inquiries, discern similarities, differences, referential frameworks, and shortcomings, and identify prospects for potential mutual enhancements between the *comparata*.

However, in the subsequent seventh phase—the phase where we apply sublation in its narrower sense, the sublation that signifies a transformative shift from preexisting knowledge to novel ideas—we must grapple with the tension arising from a sequence of preceding contrastive analyses and the quest for coherently woven interpretations. This tension, resulting from the preceding analyses and interpretations of the mostly contrasting elements, serves as a catalyst for generating fresh ideas, novel insights, or intriguing avenues for further exploration.

For a clearer comprehension of the entire process that leads to this crucial stage, I will now offer a concise description of all eight phases of the dialectical development inherent in the method of sublation.

The Eight Phases

In its basic structure, the sublation method can be implemented in eight distinctive phases, which are summarized below:

- I. Relational research question (enabling conceptual comparisons)
- II. Similarities (in the framework of family resemblances)
- III. Differences (within similarities)
- IV. Linkages (of differences) to referential frameworks and paradigms
- V. Identifying insufficiencies (elimination)
- VI. Mutual complementarities (preservation)
- VII. Sublation (shift)
- VIII. New insight (uplifting our ideas to a new, higher level)

These phases constitute dynamic components within an ever-evolving process, wherein each phase builds upon and enhances the insights gained from the preceding one. The overall trajectory is characterized by accumulation and refinement. Let us now move onto a more comprehensive description of each phase:

I. We start from a particular philosophical problem or idea that was treated in two (or more) distinct philosophical discourses under consideration. To initiate our investigation, we formulate a research question that is not merely fixated on comparing isolated concepts, but instead emphasizes the establishment of relationships among them. This relational approach opens up possibilities for engaging in conceptual comparisons and going deeper into the nuances of the problem. Such an approach allows us to transcend a superficial analysis that solely focuses on identifying disparities or similarities between concepts. Instead, we embark on a journey of intellectual exploration, allowing us to uncover the varied connections between various philosophical perspectives.

II. After carefully selecting the *comparata* that deal with the chosen research question, our next step is to identify the similarities in how these *comparata* address the question. During this phase, where we analyse and compare the treatment of the question in different *comparata*, the concept of family resemblance becomes an invaluable tool. By acknowledging the fluid and context-dependent nature of categories, we can approach transcultural comparisons with heightened sensitivity and refrain from imposing a rigid framework from one *comparata* onto another. In this second phase, we aim to uncover and examine the similarities that emerge in the elaborations of the *comparata* under observation, despite their diverse cultural backgrounds. Moreover, the concept of family resemblance prompts us to consider the contextual nature of categories and avoid the presumption of a fixed or exclusive understanding. It encourages us to explore the nuanced meanings and associations carried by concepts within their respective cultural and historical contexts. As we engage in this comparative analysis, we can more easily map out the network of connections and associations among the concepts, uncovering patterns, divergences, and interactions. When engaging in (post-)comparative philosophy in particular, the concept of family resemblances allows us to focus on the shared similarities and interconnectedness of concepts in a broader, relational way, rather than attempting to find universal definitions or essential characteristics.

III. In the third step of the sublation method, we engage in the process of identifying differences within similarities in how our *comparata* treat a philosophical research question. This might initially seem paradoxical or counterintuitive, but it becomes possible through a nuanced analysis that explores the subtleties and unique perspectives within each philosophical discourse. To begin with, while

two philosophies may share a basic position towards a common research question, they often approach it from different angles or employ distinct frameworks, methodologies, or conceptual lenses. These differences manifest in the various interpretations, emphasis, or underlying assumptions that each philosophy brings to the table. By closely examining the treatment of the research question in each philosophy, we can uncover subtle variations in how they conceptualize and approach the problem at hand. These differences may arise from disparities in historical contexts, cultural influences, philosophical traditions, or the perspectives of individual philosophers. This process of identifying differences within similarities demands a comprehensive and open-minded analysis that transcends a simplistic binary of agreement or disagreement. It necessitates a deep understanding of the underlying philosophical concepts, the historical context of the discourses, and the subtleties of philosophical arguments.

IV. In the subsequent phase of the sublation process, we establish connections between the identified differences within the treatment of the research question in different philosophies and the diverse referential frameworks that underlie the perspectives being compared, including the distinct paradigms by which they are defined. This enables us to identify the various basic paradigms under which the research question has been treated by each of the *comparata*. As we have seen before, these frameworks are semantic networks that serve as the intellectual scaffolding upon which the philosophies are built, providing the basis for their conceptualization and analysis. When examining the differences within the treatment of the research question, we explore how these dissimilarities align with or reflect the underlying referential frameworks of the respective philosophical theories or ideas. By analysing the foundational principles, theoretical orientations, or epistemological and ontological assumptions within each discourse, we can discern the roots of these divergent perspectives. This process involves a deep dive into the philosophical traditions, historical contexts, and intellectual heritage that have influenced the development of each *comparata*. We consider how the philosophies draw upon different schools of thought, engage with varying philosophical paradigms, or integrate distinct conceptual frameworks to shape their respective perspectives on the research question. Connecting the identified differences with the referential frameworks allows us to uncover the relationship between the philosophical paradigms underlying these frameworks and the treatment of the research question. In this way we might gain a clearer insight into how these paradigms influence the interpretation, analysis, and conceptualization of ideas within each discourse. Moreover, this part of the procedure illuminates how the chosen paradigms implicit in the referential frameworks shape the reasoning, argumentation, and theoretical contributions of each *comparata*.

V. Building upon this foundation, our next step involves identifying and examining the inadequacies present in each of the approaches we have investigated. These weaknesses become apparent through a contrastive perspective that highlights the differences and their connection to the referential frameworks underlying the philosophical theories under scrutiny. By juxtaposing and comparing the various philosophical approaches, we gain a clearer understanding of their limitations and shortcomings. This process allows us to critically assess the elements or aspects within both *comparata* that have proven ineffective or unproductive in addressing the primary research question and generating novel insights within the realm it explores. In this phase of the sublation process, we aim to eliminate those aspects that hinder the satisfactory resolution of the research question or are simply redundant. By identifying and eliminating these unproductive or displaced elements, we can refine our understanding and focus on the more constructive and fruitful components within each approach. This step enables us to shed light on the gaps, contradictions, or methodological weaknesses that may exist within the investigated approaches. By revealing these insufficiencies, we create an opportunity for intellectual growth and the generation of new knowledge.

VI. Moving into the sixth phase, our focus turns towards mutual complementarity, aiming to combine the preserved productive elements from each comparatum while simultaneously compensating for the eliminated elements. This process of mutual complementarity allows us to explore uncharted territory and gain fresh insights into the treatment of the philosophical question under examination. By bringing together the productive elements that have withstood critical assessment, we harness their potential and seek to integrate them in a synergistic manner. This integration involves reconciling and synthesizing the preserved elements from each comparatum, taking into account their inherent strengths and compatibility. Through this process of mutual complementarity, we unlock new possibilities and paths of exploration. By combining the strengths of the preserved productive elements and compensating for the eliminated elements, we can transcend the limitations of individual *comparata* and uncover novel approaches to addressing the focal philosophical question. Ideally, the resulting framework benefits from the enriched perspective and integration of diverse insights. It goes beyond the confines of any single comparatum, incorporating a more comprehensive and multi-faceted understanding of the research question. The interplay between the preserved and the compensated elements opens new perspectives and contributes to a more comprehensive exploration of the philosophical problem we are dealing with.

VII. Following the sixth phase, a significant shift emerges in the seventh, and as these constructive elements of both (or all) *comparata* converge and mutually fulfil one another, a transformative process unfolds. This transformative phase can be

understood as a form of sublation in a narrower sense. This sublation phase is driven by the inherent tension between the synthesized unity of combined elements and the distinct perspectives and conceptual boundaries found within each individual comparatum. Rooted in the elimination of insufficiencies, the preservation of productive elements, and their mutual fulfilment, this phase propels our thinking towards the discovery of new ideas or insights into the fundamental nature of the initial research question.

VIII. Sublation, which manifests as a pivotal shift occurring in the seventh phase, marks a critical turning point in the overall process. It serves as the foundation for the eighth and final phase, which holds the potential for novel discoveries and the expansion of our intellectual horizons. This transformative phase relies solely on the inspirations provided by the *comparata*, the very sources that ignited our deep curiosity through their similar yet distinct approaches to solving the initial philosophical problems. This curiosity, guided by the process of sublation, has the potential to propel our thinking through the logically coherent phases of the entire process, leading us to an unexplored realm of potential discoveries. The eighth phase is thus characterized by the pursuit of knowledge expansion and the development of new ideas.

In essence, the sublation process, coupled with the inspirations derived from the *comparata*, propels us towards new intellectual landscapes. It fosters an environment where curiosity flourishes and logical coherence guides our exploration. Here, it is important to emphasize that, in contrast to the Hegelian model, the sublation method is not a rigid apparatus that proceeds automatically, linearly, and hierarchically from one stage to another. This process is not controlled by any transcendent or divine power like the absolute spirit. A significant characteristic of the sublation method is its subjective nature. The individual engaging with the method must maintain an open mind throughout the entire process. The methods, procedures, and outcomes of the analyses are always subject to our own choices, as long as those choices adhere to a reasonable degree of coherence.

Conclusion

Collectively, these phases can be viewed as a productive dialogue between two distinct ideas or philosophies originating from diverse cultural contexts. This dialogue takes shape as a dialectical perspective, yielding more than mere small talk. Irrespective of the novel insights that surface upon the culmination of any dialogue, the conversation itself stands as a potentially enriching confrontation. From this engagement, we can glean valuable lessons on the art of addressing and

attentively engaging with the Other. In this process, we cultivate the capacity to remain receptive in our responses to the perspectives we have encountered and absorbed from our interlocutor.

In my view, it is sublation that empowers our thinking to execute such transformative shifts, engendered by diverse viewpoints concerning identical questions. Sublation can thus serve as a methodology that can elevate our ideas to higher levels, granting us the capability to transcend the confines of and transit through existing horizons and unveil novel perspectives. This paper was written with the modest hope of illustrating to both myself and its readers one of the many potential approaches to achieving this.

I am acutely aware that the sublation method, which holds a special place in my heart, is not the only way to uncover fresh perspectives or foster new ideas through the comparative, dialogical, and dialectical examination—or encounter—of culturally distinct philosophies or systems of thought. It is a method that resonates with me and has proven effective, potentially offering assistance to fellow scholars who share a similar approach. However, it stands as merely one among various paths that can facilitate thinking—all following distinctive routes, all contributing to the same aim. The journey toward novel knowledge is inherently multifaceted, achievable through the diverse contributions of many individuals engaging in a pluralistic manner. However, it is always through collective action and creation, by gazing upon new, shared horizons, that this endeavour unfolds.

Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges the financial support from the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS) in the framework of the research core funding *Asian Languages and Cultures* (P6-0243) and in the scope of the research project (J6-50208) *New Theoretical Approaches to Comparative Transcultural Philosophy and the Method of Sublation*.

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