

Transcultural philosophical method of
sublation and the cultural conditionality of
semantic frameworks of reference
超文化哲學的揚棄方法與語義參照
框架的文化條件性

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Abstract: This paper presents the transcultural philosophical method of sublation as a novel approach to intercultural post-comparative philosophy. The method challenges the limitations of traditional comparative philosophy by emphasizing the importance of culturally conditioned semantic frameworks and referential contexts. It critiques the assumption of a universal philosophical language and instead promotes a dynamic, dialectical interaction between philosophical systems. The paper explores the structural complexity of referential frameworks and their influence on philosophical comparisons, highlighting how the sublation method fosters a productive dialogue among diverse philosophical traditions. Through a multi-phased process, it reveals how tensions between contrasting elements can generate new insights and innovative theories. This methodological framework contributes to a deeper understanding of intercultural philosophy, advocating for a processual and relational approach to philosophical inquiry.

Keywords: transcultural philosophy, sublation method, transcultural comparisons, referential frameworks, semantic problems, dialectical methodology, comparative philosophy, philosophical language

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摘要：

本文提出「揚棄的跨文化哲學方法」，作為一種新的跨文化後比較哲學取徑。此方法突破傳統比較哲學的侷限，強調語義框架與參照語境的文化條件性，批判普遍哲學語言的預設，轉而倡導哲學系統間動態、辯證性的互動。本文探討參照框架的結構性複雜性及其對哲學比較的影響，指出揚棄方法如何促進多元哲學傳統間的建設性對話。透過多階段的過程，此方法揭示對立元素間的張力如何轉化為新的理解與創新理論。此一方法論框架有助於深化對跨文化哲學的理解，主張一種過程性與關係性的哲學探究方式。

關鍵字：超文化哲學、揚棄方法、跨文化比較、參照框架、語義問題、辯證方法、比較哲學、哲學語言

I. Sublation method and problems of intercultural philosophical comparisons

In this paper, I will shortly present the transcultural sublation as a new method of intercultural postcomparative philosophy. The method is 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. (Silus 2020: 258) If it aims to go beyond their respective limitations and produce a unifying discourse that valorizes both *comparata*. Therefore, 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,¹ 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.

¹ 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 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.

II. Frames of reference

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.

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. (Silius 2022: 59) 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. (Sernelj 2017: 280) 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.

III. A contrastive analysis of two frameworks

All the issues associated with the aforementioned remnants of Eurocentrism and Orientalism are, as previously discussed, rooted in the fact that different theoretical models are embedded within distinct referential frameworks. When analyzing traditional Chinese theoretical texts, it is

essential to acknowledge that these texts are situated within a specific referential framework. The particular characteristics of this framework are shaped by the use of different concepts and categories, along with the varying relationships between them. These distinctions give rise to different referents and, consequently, to divergent methodological procedures required for their examination, organization, and communication. As already noted, this results in a fundamental incommensurability between these systems or frameworks. However, this does not imply that “questions and answers in one tradition cannot sustain meaningful statement in the other tradition” (Wong 2017, 1). Nevertheless, cross-cultural (or cross-traditional) references to a shared subject matter must always be assessed in relation to the respective backgrounds of the fundamental conceptual frameworks, justification practices, and methodological approaches employed in both traditions under consideration.²

We are all born into a society that is shaped by established norms, values, laws, rules, institutions, as well as particular modes of thought and expression. To a certain extent, we are therefore conditioned by the set of cultural meanings within which we learn to speak, perceive reality, and articulate our feelings and opinions (Sprintzen 2009, 40). The philosophical background that informs and contributes to the formation of these factors in the cognition of Euro-American researchers (and, through the Western-dominated process of globalization, in the understanding of most modern and post-modern theoreticians as well) remains anchored in the paradigms and parameters of modern Western philosophy. This philosophy, which traces its roots to the 17th and 18th centuries, is characterized by a scientific—namely, rational and analytical—worldview, while also being

2 Except recent developments in comparative (especially Chinese West) philosophy (see for instance Wong 2017), many fruitful contributions to the improvement of such multifarious perspectives and dimensions have been elaborated by the pioneers of intercultural philosophy, e.g. Ram Adhar Mall (see Mall 1989; 2000) or Franz Martin Wimmer (see Wimmer 2004).

deeply shaped by the ideas of the Enlightenment and the European form of humanism. In a sense, we still inhabit the intellectual landscape that began with Kant (Willaschek 1992, 13–15). During this period, the entire philosophical agenda and the fundamental philosophical questions were reformulated in a manner that continues to resonate with us and remains relevant to our lives. In many respects—beyond the purely academic sphere and extending to our general understanding of the world and our place within it—the philosophers of European modernity have played a decisive role in redefining the core issues of Western philosophy. Despite the many significant innovations and critical shifts that emerged in the sciences and philosophy throughout the 20th century and in the so-called postmodern era, modern Western philosophy continues to serve as the principal reference point for the thought and sensibility of the majority of contemporary individuals. It provides the fundamental paradigms with which we begin our intellectual engagement and to which we are accustomed to respond. This philosophical background can also be understood as a referential framework, one that may be contrasted with alternative philosophical frameworks from other cultures. For the purposes of the present discussion, we will juxtapose it with the theoretical referential framework associated with Confucian philosophy, which has profoundly shaped the entire structure of traditional Chinese society.³ According to Paul Gregor’s fundamental principles of intercultural philosophy, any form of intercultural philosophy (or intercultural understanding in general) must begin with the explicit identification and formulation of similarities, followed by the recognition, description, and explanation of differences (Paul 2008, 23). In line with this

³ Here, we should by no means commit the sin of mistaking one parts of a tradition for the whole. Although Confucianism is a very influential stream of Chinese philosophy, and in spite of the fact that it cannot be clearly separated from Daoism and several other streams of thought, it cannot be identified with Chinese philosophy – just the same as modern European enlightenment philosophy cannot be identified with the entirety of Euro-American philosophical discourses, albeit both of them are representative for the respective traditions and ideational histories.

approach, we will start by outlining some of the essential characteristics of two distinct referential frameworks. The first framework (designated as framework A) will encompass the fundamental paradigms representative of modern European Enlightenment philosophy, while the second framework (framework B) will be composed of those paradigms characteristic of classical Confucian philosophy.

The following contrastive analysis of these two referential frameworks is necessarily based on broad generalizations and is therefore inherently essentialist. No philosophical system associated with either framework fully adheres to the “pure” characteristics of framework A or B, nor does any single system embody all the attributes ascribed to them. Consequently, neither framework should be regarded as a precise and exhaustive representation of the defining features of Confucian or modern European thought. Rather than relying on fixed empirical criteria, this schematic differentiation is intended to highlight theoretical tendencies and dominant orientations of thought, which are not necessarily present in all theoretical systems within the respective traditions. As such, this schematic overview is intended solely as a heuristic tool to enhance our understanding of the challenges and complexities inherent in any comparative or intercultural philosophical inquiry.

- The foundational structure of framework A is inherently static, whereas framework B operates in a dynamic and fluid manner. This fundamental distinction not only shapes the overall theoretical system embedded within each framework but also affects every individual component constituting these systems, along with the interrelations among these components. The same principle applies to the core paradigms of these two contrasting frameworks, their prevailing patterns of thought, and their respective epistemological and interpretative methodologies.
- Hence, the inner logic of argumentation and the central modes of processing the content are, to a great degree, abstractly formalized in

framework A whereas in framework B, they are rather functioning in accordance with variable semantic and axiological connotations.

- The formal logic behind framework A is tightly linked to normative analyses of fixed and stable objects of investigation, i.e. of precisely defined objects excluded from the variable continuum of time and space, whereas the semantic logic applied by framework B is highly contextual and relational (i.e. focused upon relations rather than upon individual isolated objects), and the objects of inquiry are continuously modified. Hence, one of the central methods applied in this framework is the method of semantically specified analogies.
- Concepts contained in framework A are chiefly based on the notion of absoluteness (or the presumption of the absolute truth), whereas in B they are rather relational, implying a relativity of reality and suggesting its relativistic understanding.
- While categories are often applied in dual oppositions in both of the two frameworks,⁴ the basic structures and modes of interaction of these binary oppositions are fundamentally different.
- While in framework A, the mutually oppositional objects are (due to their following of the three classical laws of Western logical thought) mutually exclusive, in framework B they appear in the form of binary categories,⁵ which function in correlative, interdependent, and complementary interaction.

4 This is probably due to the fact that binary contrasts and patterns are an elementary condition and characteristic of human cognition, as well as of the fact that a dialogue or confrontation between two different ideas is a precondition for the evolution of any thought or understanding.

5 Binary categories (*duili fanchou* 對立範疇) belong to the basic features of traditional Chinese philosophy. Such categories can be seen as dualities that seek to attain a state of actuality through relativity, which is expressed through the relation between two oppositional notions. The mutual interactions between the two poles that form such a category are governed by the principle of correlative complementarity, which belongs to the fundamental paradigms of Chinese reasoning and which, inter alia, led to the formation of patterns of specific Chinese analogous reasoning. Some

- This dissimilarity is also reflected in the respective models of dialectical thought that evolved from the two frameworks in question. The model belonging to framework A can be historically followed back to Ancient Greek philosophy and is in its modern forms rooted in dual representation models like Cartesian dualisms, in which oppositional notions (body and mind, matter and idea, substance and phenomena, subject and object, etc.) negate and exclude each other and are thus strictly and radically separated both formally and logically.
- Although in Hegel's theory the two oppositional concepts still form a correlative unity, they are seen as static momenta within this entirety; in the ultimate instance, this unity is nothing more than the sum of its parts, which, as momenta, condition but also contradict and hence exclude each other. In such models the two oppositions are often denoted thesis and antithesis. The tension that results from the mutual negation and contradiction of both poles leads to the synthesis (which can be reached through *Aufhebung* or sublation in Hegel). This third stage is a qualitatively different and "higher" stage of development, in which parts of the previous opposition are preserved and other eliminated. In essence the dialectical thought in framework A is conceptual (i.e. containing fixedly defined contents), while in framework B it is a process, based on categories (the concrete content of which is exchangeable and replaceable, not only in the semantic but also in the axiological sense). In its earliest form this latter model goes back to the oldest Chinese proto-philosophical classic, the Book of Changes (*Yi jing* 易經), where it appears as a model of "continuous change" or "continuity through change" (*tongbian* 通變) (Tian 2019, 15). It functions by applying binary categories and the principle of

of the generally best known Chinese binary categories are: *yinyang* 陰陽 (sunny and shady), *tiyong* 體用 (essence and function), *mingshi* 名實 (name or concept and actuality), *liqi* 理氣 (structure and phenomena), *benmo* 本末 (roots and branches), etc.

correlative complementarity. The oppositions it contains are interdependent and do not negate but rather complete each other. They are oppositional dualities, but not dualistic contradictions. Hence, the model of their mutual relationship and interaction cannot be denoted as an abstract form of dualism, but rather as a process of a dynamic duality. Furthermore, each of them represents the very essence of the other and none of the two can exist without the other. In contrast to the synthesis belonging to framework A, the totality or unity of both oppositions in framework B is to be found in the very process of their interaction as such; hence, it does not lead to a qualitatively new and “higher” stage or form of reality, idea, or even its understanding (which is the tendency of framework B).⁶

- Framework A presupposes a metaphysic of transcendence; in framework B it is not possible to distinguish between noumenon and phenomena. Although both are recognized as specific states of being, the demarcation line between immanence and transcendence is blurred and subjected to a dynamic process of all-embracing change.⁷ Instead, there is an omnipresent unity of culture and nature, of human beings and the cosmos and of transcendence and immanence in the Unification of Heaven and Humans (*tianren heyi* 天人合一).

6 In the process of the intensive Sinification of Marxism, this feature of the dialectical model, belonging to framework B (which was typical for traditional China), was highly problematized by Maoist theoreticians. Hence, they used to call this form of dialectics “simple” (see Lü Xiaolong 1993, 58) or “primitive” (see Pan Tianhua 1995, 14) dialectics (*pusu bianzheng fa* 朴素辯證法, *yuanshi bianzheng fa* 原始辯證法) and criticized it for its conservative nature, i.e. for its lacking of the component of progress.

7 Many modern Chinese philosophers have focused upon this difference, aiming to solve the alleged contradiction of simultaneous immanence and transcendence in Chinese philosophy; here, we could mention the controversial Modern Confucian paradigm of “immanent transcendence,” which is also linked to Mou Zongsan’s concept of “double ontology,” or the “one-world” view proposed by Li Zehou.

- In its epistemological aspects, framework A proposes a distinction between knowable and the unknowable reality. While the latter is represented, for instance, by the thing in itself, the knowledge of the former can be obtained either through experience or through a-priori mental forms. In framework B the realm of the unknowable is also accepted, but it does not represent an object of investigation or any kind of elaboration. However, there is also in framework B—similarly as in framework A—a distinction between innate knowledge (which mostly pertains to axiological contents) and external knowledge, which is mainly empirical. The main distinction between the a-priori (A) and innate (B) knowledge lies, once again, in the static (A) and dynamic (B) nature of their respective forms. Framework B shows that knowledge about both external and internal reality is obtained through the structural compatibility of human mind and external world. Knowledge within the constructs of framework B can never be separated from practice. Meanwhile in framework A reason is the main method for gaining knowledge; framework B allows for it to be additionally obtained through intuition, emotions, and intentions.

- Ethics in framework A is closely related to the notions of freedom and moral responsibility. This framework suggests that to act morally is to act from a principle. Freedom, responsibility, and ethics can mainly be maintained through the regularity and rationality of universal rules. Ethics here is a social reality, a spiritual entity, or a fact of reason, i.e. it is something external to human inwardness.⁸ In framework B, ethical rules are less normative and much more contextual and situational. This framework views the universe as

8 In several philosophical systems belonging to framework A—for instance in Kant's philosophy—it could of course be claimed that ethics is an important part of the human self. But even in such contexts, it is only a part of the noumenal nature of the Self, whereas in framework B it is part and parcel of the self that pertains to a concrete human being in any particular situation of a given human life.

permeated with meaning and therefore also as encompassing ethical implications reflected in the humanness (*ren xing* 人性) as a central virtue of humaneness (*ren* 仁). In a concrete human life this humaneness must be properly learned and cultivated through social customs and especially through rituality, which rationalizes the instinctual essence of human natural feelings. However, since humans are seen as being in unity with heaven, nature, or the universe (*tian ren heyi* 天人合一), humaneness is both the basis of ethics and the core of individual morality; hence, its external cultivation simultaneously means the realization of one's own individual and personal self.

- In framework A contents pertaining to the abovementioned fields of philosophical investigation are structured and ordered into mutually distinct disciplines (logic, ontology, metaphysics, and epistemology). There are on the other hand no strictly defined disciplines in framework B, but rather contexts (or discourses) belonging to these fields. In this framework epistemological thought, for instance, is intermingled, blended, and mixed with ideas from many other fields of philosophical inquiry, particularly with ontology, ethics, and phenomenology. (Rošker 2021, 32-5)

After this brief overview of the fundamental differences, let us examine a key relationship that underpins the central paradigms of each semantically defined referential network: the relationship between logic and language.

IV. Logic and Language

Many scholars agree that the distinctive features of classical Chinese were shaped by its unique linguistic structure. The evolution of classical Chinese characters corresponded with the ancient Chinese thought system, which in turn influenced the development of Chinese logic. As a result,

Chinese logical reasoning was profoundly shaped by the specific forms and representations inherent in the language (Shen Youding 1980, 90).

Most researchers also concur that the structure of classical Chinese played a crucial role in fostering a system of logical reasoning that was far less formalized than those developed in ancient Greece. Since classical Chinese conveyed meaning primarily through variations in word order and sentence structure rather than morphological changes, these linguistic features significantly influenced the development of informal reasoning. Wang Xexi (2005, 30ff) has demonstrated that the Chinese method of comprehension depends on distinguishing meanings independently of grammatical form. To fully grasp the meaning and semantic structure of a Chinese sentence, it must be analyzed within its broader contextual framework. This flexible approach to language determined the mode of informal thought in Chinese.

Furthermore, classical Chinese does not possess grammatical features such as case markers, inflection, or morphological variation. Instead of using morphological forms to indicate semantic differences, meaning is conveyed through word order and sentence structure. Due to this fundamental distinction, classical Chinese sentences cannot always be analyzed according to the grammatical rules of Indo-European languages, as they adhere to a completely different epistemological framework (*ibid.*, 32). Another significant characteristic of classical Chinese is the absence of a copula, as the language developed alternative syntactic structures to express judgments. A detailed examination of texts from the Warring States period (*ibid.*, 30ff) demonstrates that only a small number of sentences feature linking verbs and predicates.

In general, the interdependent and interconnected relation between language and logic is still a controversial, rather than a settled issue. Some scholars believe that the Chinese language has little impact on deep linguistic structures as elaborated by Chomsky (1968, 8) and hence it may have little impact on patterns of logical reasoning. However, Zhang

Dongsun's (1886–1973) interpretations were tightly linked to this cognitive-linguistic, interconnectedness.⁹ In his comparison between Indo-European languages and Chinese, he pointed out that the latter (especially ancient Chinese) made no clear distinction between subject and predicate, while in morphological terms it did not add suffixes to express time, gender or number (Zhang Dongsun 1964, 360). Furthermore, in Chinese, the subject is not distinguished and thus, the predicate is not indicated either. The Chinese language also does not generally use sentential subjects, as opposed to Indo-European languages, which omit sentential subjects only in exceptional cases. Thus, the Chinese quite often omits the subject entirely, which implies that, for the Chinese speaker, the subject is not necessary (ibid., 363). Another difference is that Chinese lacks the equivalent of the expression "it" or the form "it is," which expresses the existence of something, but not its attributes. And yet this distinction is a basic precondition for forming the concept of substance. However, the most important difference Zhang identified was the lack of the expression "to be" in Chinese, which means that it is difficult to form the subject-predicate propositions of "standard" (i.e. Western) logic.

A. C. Graham (1986, 323) emphasized that the verb "to be" has been the source of numerous metaphysical problems throughout the history of Western philosophy. Beyond serving as a copula, it also conveys notions of unchanging identity and existence.

Because both ancient and modern Chinese lack the linguistic—and consequently cognitive—category of "subject" as well as the expression "to be," traditional Chinese philosophy never developed an explicitly

⁹ This assumption appears in classical Chinese epistemology which, on the basis of the relation between language and reality, tried to standardize (*chang*) linguistic structures "rationally" (i.e. in accordance with the most appropriate structural regulation (*dao*) of language as an expression of all that exists) in order to improve and harmonize political and social relations within society (Hansen 1989, 75). Zhang Dongsun's approach here can also be compared to some recent researches in linguistic logic, which focus on linguistic pragmatism (Li Xiankun 2001, 353–354).

formalized concept or discipline of ontology. Rooted in an implicit, dynamic, and ever-changing conception of being, classical Chinese philosophy did not cultivate a formal system of logic based on fixed, static theorems or adopt the foundational laws of traditional European logic. As a result, the Law of Identity was foreign to Chinese thought. Zhang Dongsun (1964, 364) argued that Aristotelian logic, which is founded on the Law of Identity, established a structure of dichotomies based on mutually exclusive contradictions of the form "A and not-A." However, Chinese thought operated differently. While it also employed dichotomies, their relationships were structured in a fundamentally different manner: rather than being mutually exclusive, opposing elements in Chinese modes of thinking were seen as interdependent and mutually defining, governed by the underlying principle of complementarity or correlativity.¹⁰

The classification of the type "A and B" makes it possible for something to be neither A nor B. Such non-exclusionary distinctions were quite common in Chinese logic.¹¹ Logical definitions in the Aristotelian sense are statements of identity, in which the symbol of identity connects the definiendum and the definiens. Jiang Xingyan (2002, 75) demonstrates that in ancient Chinese logic, the meaning of a word is best understood through its opposite. As a result, the precise definitions characteristic of Western logic do not exist in Chinese logic. For example, a "wife" is defined as "a woman who has a husband," and a "husband" as "a man who has a wife." This approach does not conform to the Aristotelian definition, which

¹⁰ Here, it may be argued that that Chinese logic is more consistent with modern predicate logic.

¹¹ See for instance the Mohist passage on cows and horses (*Mozi* s.d., Jingxia: 168) in which they have introduced the problem of antinomy. While a herd can consist of cows and horses (A and B), it cannot be regarded as a herd of cows (A), nor as a herd of horses (B). Another example can be drawn from Gongsun Long's famous *White Horse Dispute*: Something which is white colour (A) and horse (B) is neither (only) a white colour (A), nor (just) a horse (B) (see *Gongsun Longzi* s.d., Bai ma fei ma: 1–14).

requires both a genus and a specific difference. Instead, Chinese logic was relational, relying on relational propositions, much like Western logic was built upon subject-object structured propositions.

The correlation between dual yet complementary opposites (e.g., above–below, before–behind) represents a distinctive feature of ancient Chinese logical thought. Thinkers from the Mohist school and the School of Names formulated judgments through comparisons, causal relations, enumerations, and explanations. Due to the absence of strictly structured judgments with linking verbs and predicates, ancient Chinese scholars struggled to fully conceptualize generality and particularity. Unlike Aristotelian logic, where a concept serves as the predicate of its higher-order "umbrella concept," and the latter acts as the subject, ancient Chinese logicians prioritized exploring "resemblance" (analogies) and the characteristics of the concept of "kind" (*lei*). However, the Chinese notion of "kind" extended beyond mere classification; it also encompassed similarities between events or actions. This explains why Aristotelian-style logical analysis remained underdeveloped in ancient China, and why analogism emerged as the dominant form of classical Chinese logic.

In recent decades, there has been a renewed interest in these issues among both Western and Chinese theorists. Chad Hansen (1983) presents a provocative and innovative theory concerning the nature of classical Chinese. He argues that the semantics of classical Chinese nouns closely resemble those of mass nouns. As a result, Chinese logicians tended to conceptualize external reality using a "stuff-whole" model, in which objects were understood in terms of the relationship between parts and the whole.

Hansen's hypothesis is still controversial and has been challenged by many scholars. For example, Christoph Harbsmeier (1989) argues that there is a clear grammatical distinction between count nouns and generic or mass nouns in classical Chinese, and demonstrates this view based on the semantics of counting. Bo Mou (Mou 1999, 45) basically concurs with Hansen's mereological approach, but argues that the implicit ontology

revealed and reflected by the semantics and syntax of Chinese nouns is a nominalist ontology of collection-of-individuals, rather than a mass-stuff model of reality. Chris Fraser (2007, 420) instead acknowledges that most classical Chinese nouns indeed function as mass nouns (though with certain essential distinctions), but then goes on to say that this does not necessarily mean that one is obliged to accept Hansen's hypothesis. Based on an exhaustive analysis of pre-Qin logical sources he argues that their authors did not appeal to part-whole relations in order to explain the use of general terms. Still other scholars, such as Cheng Chung-ying (1987), Robert Hall and Roger Ames (1987), criticize Hansen's model through the lens of classical Chinese relational structured worldview, i.e. by exposing that in this worldview, particular, concrete things interact within continuous, dynamic patterns, and the universe behaves as an organic entirety with the parts reflecting the structure of the whole. This ontological feature of combining universality and particularity, abstractness and concreteness, activity and its result was also reflected in the structure of the classical Chinese language (see Rošker 2012). Many Chinese researchers apply the term "field" (*chang*) to define these relations between "parts" and "wholes" (Luo and Zheng 1994, 1–3).

Although interpretations of the relationship between language and thought in classical Chinese logic vary widely, scholars generally concur that pre-Qin logic prioritized the (social) regulatory function of language over its descriptive role.

The study of ancient Chinese reasoning practices and theories holds significant cross-cultural relevance. The proper approach to classical Chinese logic has long been a subject of debate, reflecting different stages in the reception of Western logic within Chinese scholarship. This ongoing discourse, as evidenced by the diversity of perspectives (Liu, Seligman, and van Benthem 2011, 2), highlights both the depth and complexity of the field. The reconstruction of classical Chinese logic exemplifies the epistemic

transformations that continue to shape interpretations of China's intellectual history, making it a crucial area of research in contemporary Sinology.

V. A General Description of the Method

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

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

Within post-comparative philosophy, understanding is not limited to objective normative standards but is also shaped by the historical, conceptual, and social contexts in which objects of inquiry are embedded. The philosophy of sublation, with its dynamic relational structure, broad discursive context, and focus on the referential frameworks underlying philosophical investigations, represents one of many evolving approaches in this field.

Within the broad and multifaceted landscape of transcultural methodologies, the method of sublation represents one of many possible approaches to integrating diverse philosophical traditions, forms, and content. This approach facilitates the transformation of inspiration into contemplation, fostering the emergence of new ideas and deeper knowledge. As such, it remains a method worthy of further refinement and development. While the sublation method has demonstrated significant potential, its

broader adoption within international (post-)comparative studies necessitates the expansion of supporting materials and additional research to enhance its applicability across different research contexts.

Given the growing interest in the initial stages of this approach, the method of sublation merits further exploration to establish itself as a valuable and innovative tool for addressing some of the inconsistencies inherent in traditional comparative frameworks. My forthcoming research will focus on refining and advancing this method while introducing it to a wider international audience engaged in comparative and intercultural philosophy.

But how does this method function, and what are its defining features? Despite its complexity, which resists a concise summary, I will attempt to outline its essential aspects in the following sections. The method of transcultural (post-)comparative sublation is a novel dialectical approach designed to deepen engagement with philosophical ideas, theories, and principles emerging from different cultural traditions. Its central aim is to facilitate meaningful dialogue between diverse intellectual traditions, generating new insights through this dynamic exchange.

The concept of "sublation" is, of course, rooted in Hegelian dialectics, but this method diverges significantly from the traditional Hegelian model in several ways. Unlike the Hegelian dialectic, which often leads to a completely new and distinct synthesis arising from the fusion of two opposing ideas, the sublation method is grounded in dynamic paradigms of processual philosophy. It intentionally moves away from rigid adherence to the formal laws of identity, contradiction, and the excluded middle. Instead of producing a qualitatively different synthesis, the sublation method fosters an ongoing process of dialogue and exchange that continually enriches our understanding without necessarily resolving into a single, unified outcome.

The culmination of this process is marked by a crucial stage known as "sublation," signifying a transformative shift in its most precise sense. Though it constitutes just one of the eight key phases of this method, it holds

central importance. Emerging from the inherent tension within the comparata, it drives thought toward new and innovative insights.

This is where the sublation method most clearly diverges from the Hegelian model. The sublation phase, which triggers a shift in perspective and the generation of new ideas, is fundamentally distinct. Unlike the Hegelian framework, where such shifts result from automatic structural principles in thought, the transformation in sublation arises independently and creatively from the free subjectivity of the individual employing the method.

However, this subjective shift is not the only role of human subjectivity in the sublation method. Subjectivity is also crucial in earlier phases, where it guides decisions about what to discard and what to preserve in dialectical comparison. Likewise, it influences how and where the compared elements can complement one another.

Some may argue that this method lacks scientific rigor due to its reliance on subjectivity, potentially making it seem arbitrary and devoid of universal validity. Critics might claim its results lack objectivity. However, a deeper examination of such objections reveals that, from a Heideggerian perspective, even thinking itself is not inherently scientific. Heidegger famously asserted that "science does not think" (Heidegger 1954, 4). A scientific theory that merely reinforces the status quo lacks the capacity to generate new ideas or drive meaningful change. This critique resonates with the Marxist perspective, which calls for philosophy to transcend mere interpretation and embrace its transformative potential.

Within this framework, the sublation method transcends conventional scientific methodologies. It occupies a unique space that is simultaneously scientific and non-scientific. While it adheres to scientific principles through logical consistency, systematic structure, and verifiability, it also extends beyond these constraints by serving as a tool of thought deeply intertwined with free, autonomous, and inherently subjective human reasoning.

Despite its distinct approach, the sublation method remains fundamentally dialectical, though it does not strictly conform to Aristotelian or Hegelian models. Instead, it offers a more flexible and dynamic framework for understanding and generating philosophical insights.

Rather than viewing dialectics as a rigid structure, it conceives it as a broader method of thinking and discernment that emerges through dialogical or contrastive engagement. This approach involves the interaction and mutual development of distinct ideas, theories, or systems of thought. Sublation, in this context, represents a dynamic, process-oriented mode of dialectical interaction between two or more comparata—elements drawn from various philosophical traditions, discourses, paradigms, or concepts.

The method consists of eight interconnected phases. The first six follow a relatively structured process, encompassing the exploration of family resemblances, the formulation of relational research questions, and the identification of similarities, differences, referential frameworks, limitations, and opportunities for mutual enhancement among the comparata.

However, the seventh phase—where sublation occurs in its narrower sense as a transformative shift from established knowledge to new ideas—is more complex. Here, engagement with the tensions produced by previous contrastive analyses becomes essential, requiring the synthesis of these elements into a coherent interpretation. This tension, generated by prior stages of contrast and reflection, acts as a catalyst for the emergence of fresh ideas, novel insights, and promising directions for further inquiry¹².

¹² In the following, I will outline the eight formal steps (or phases) of the sublation method, which—due to space limitations—necessarily remain purely theoretical. Although the method culminates in a new idea or fresh insight, it cannot provide a unified definition of what kind of idea will emerge from the diverse perspectives involved in the sublative turn. Since we engage with different philosophies and conceptual frameworks, the inspirations they generate also vary, as do the ideas born from them. To gain a more concrete understanding of the kinds of insights this method can produce and the directions in which it can enrich our own philosophizing,

To provide a more detailed understanding of the process leading to this crucial stage, I will now outline each of the eight phases involved in the dialectical development within the sublation method.

VI. The Operation Process

The sublation method is structured around eight distinctive phases, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Relational research question (enabling conceptual comparisons)
2. Similarities (in the framework of family resemblances)
3. Differences (within similarities)
4. Linkages (of differences) to referential frameworks and paradigms
5. Identifying insufficiencies (elimination)
6. Mutual complementarities (preservation)
7. Sublation (shift)
8. New insight (uplifting our ideas to a new, higher level).

These phases function as dynamic components within an ongoing, evolving process, where each stage builds upon and refines the insights gained from the previous one. The overall trajectory is characterized by continuous accumulation and refinement of understanding. Let us now examine each phase in detail:

see my book *Chinese Philosophy in Transcultural Context: Comparative Approaches and the Method of Sublation* (Rošker, 2025a). The second part of this book, titled “Demonstrations,” presents seven different examples of the method’s application, each resulting in distinct new insights. For additional examples, see my articles, e.g.: Rošker 2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2025b, 2025c, etc.

1. The process begins with identifying a specific philosophical issue or concept that has been explored within two (or more) distinct philosophical traditions. To initiate the inquiry, a research question is formulated—one that extends beyond a mere comparison of isolated concepts. Instead of focusing solely on differences or similarities, this question seeks to establish meaningful relationships among them, facilitating deeper conceptual exploration. This relational approach moves beyond superficial analysis, guiding the investigation toward uncovering intricate connections between philosophical perspectives.

2. Once the relevant comparata have been selected in alignment with the research question, the next step is to identify similarities in how they address the issue. This phase, which involves analyzing and comparing different treatments of the problem, relies on the concept of family resemblance. Recognizing the fluid and context-dependent nature of conceptual categories enables a more nuanced approach to transcultural comparisons, avoiding the imposition of rigid frameworks from one comparatum onto another. The objective here is to identify and examine similarities in the elaboration of concepts, despite their diverse cultural origins. The idea of family resemblance allows for a flexible understanding of conceptual meanings within their respective historical and intellectual contexts. By engaging in this comparative analysis, patterns of connection, divergence, and interaction among the concepts emerge. Within the framework of (post-)comparative philosophy, family resemblances emphasize relational similarities rather than universal definitions or essential characteristics.

3. The third phase of the sublation method involves identifying distinctions within the similarities observed in how the comparata address the research question. While this may appear paradoxical at first, it becomes feasible through an in-depth analysis that reveals the unique perspectives embedded in each philosophical discourse. Even when two philosophical traditions share a general stance on a common research question, they often

approach it from different angles, employing distinct conceptual frameworks, methodologies, or epistemologies. These differences manifest in interpretations, emphases, and underlying assumptions. By closely analyzing the ways in which each philosophy engages with the research question, subtle variations in conceptualization and approach can be discerned. These variations may stem from historical contexts, cultural influences, philosophical traditions, or the distinctive perspectives of individual thinkers. Identifying these differences within similarities requires a nuanced analysis that transcends a simplistic binary of agreement versus disagreement, demanding careful attention to historical context and conceptual intricacies.

4. In the next phase, the focus shifts to establishing connections between the identified differences and the distinct referential frameworks that shape each comparatum's approach to the research question. This step involves examining the foundational paradigms within which each tradition has developed its conceptualization of the issue. These paradigms function as semantic networks, structuring the intellectual foundation upon which philosophical perspectives are built. By analyzing the theoretical orientations, epistemological premises, and ontological commitments embedded in each discourse, it becomes possible to trace the underlying reasons for the observed divergences. This investigation requires an understanding of the philosophical traditions, historical contexts, and intellectual influences that inform each comparatum. Furthermore, it highlights how different schools of thought, conceptual frameworks, and theoretical approaches shape the interpretation and articulation of ideas. Through this analysis, the role of referential frameworks in shaping philosophical reasoning, argumentation, and theoretical development becomes evident.

5. Having identified the referential frameworks, the next step involves assessing the shortcomings of each philosophical approach. These limitations become visible when examined in contrast to one another,

revealing how the observed differences relate to their underlying frameworks. A comparative evaluation allows for a clearer understanding of the conceptual weaknesses within each approach, identifying elements that prove ineffective or unproductive in addressing the central research question. This phase of the sublation process involves eliminating aspects that obstruct meaningful resolution or contribute redundantly to the inquiry. By identifying and discarding these unproductive elements, the investigation refines its focus on the more constructive aspects of each perspective. This critical evaluation exposes gaps, contradictions, or methodological shortcomings, thereby creating an opportunity for intellectual progress and the generation of new insights.

6. The sixth phase centers on mutual complementarity, wherein the retained productive elements from each comparatum are synthesized to address the gaps left by the eliminated components. This synthesis facilitates the exploration of new conceptual ground and generates fresh insights into the philosophical question. By integrating the preserved elements in a way that maximizes their potential, a synergy is created that transcends the limitations of any single comparatum. This process involves reconciling and synthesizing the strengths of each perspective while ensuring their compatibility. Through this dynamic interplay, new possibilities emerge, offering alternative approaches to the research question. The resulting framework benefits from an enriched perspective that integrates diverse insights, moving beyond the constraints of any one tradition to achieve a more comprehensive and multifaceted understanding.

7. The transformative phase follows in the seventh step, as the constructive elements from both (or all) comparata converge, complementing and fulfilling one another. This stage represents a form of sublation in which the tension between the synthesized unity of elements and the distinct perspectives of each comparatum propels the process forward. Having eliminated inadequacies, preserved productive components, and facilitated their mutual integration, this phase fosters the emergence of

new conceptual insights. The transformation that occurs here is not merely an additive process but a reconfiguration that generates novel ways of thinking about the original research question.

8. The culmination of the sublation process occurs in the eighth and final phase, which serves as a turning point for intellectual discovery. Here, new ideas and expanded conceptual horizons emerge, driven by the inspirations drawn from the comparata. The very sources that prompted inquiry through their similar yet distinct engagements with the philosophical problem now serve as the foundation for further exploration. The logical coherence of the sublation process enables the systematic development of new insights, allowing curiosity to guide the search for deeper understanding.

The process of sublation, in conjunction with the insights derived from the comparata, opens up new intellectual possibilities. It fosters an environment in which curiosity flourishes and logical coherence structures the inquiry. Importantly, unlike the Hegelian model, this method does not operate as a rigid, linear, or hierarchical mechanism. It is not driven by an external or transcendent force, such as absolute spirit. Instead, a defining characteristic of the sublation method is its subjective nature. The individual employing the method must remain open-minded throughout, recognizing that the methods, procedures, and conclusions of the analysis are shaped by conscious choices—choices that must, nonetheless, maintain a reasonable degree of coherence.

VII. Conclusion

In conclusion, the transcultural philosophical method of sublation offers a significant advancement in the field of intercultural philosophy by emphasizing dynamic dialectical processes that account for the cultural conditionality of semantic frameworks of reference. By recognizing the influence of culturally distinct philosophical languages and frameworks, it addresses the limitations of traditional comparative approaches and challenges the notion of a universal philosophical language. The method not

only facilitates a more nuanced understanding of philosophical systems but also promotes the creation of innovative ideas through dialectical engagement and mutual enhancement. Acknowledging the existence of referential frameworks as relational semantic networks helps prevent misunderstandings while underscoring the potential for productive intercultural dialogue. Ultimately, the sublation method fosters a deeper philosophical collaboration across traditions, highlighting both the shared cognitive foundations and the transformative potential of cultural diversity in philosophical inquiry.

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