World Philosophy: A Perspective of Philosophical Investigation

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Part 1

We may adventure upon different planes to understand the relationship between Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy. In a relatively static sense, the two are firstly related in terms of their differences and similarities. When Western philosophy and Chinese philosophy first encountered one another, we often saw such planes of comparative analysis upon which the following type of questions were ordinarily raised: How is Chinese philosophy done? What is Western philosophy like? What points in common do they have? At what point do they differ? The list goes on in a point by point manner. Obviously, according to such a perspective what is of predominant concern is nothing other than a comparison of their differences and similarities. The first Chinese thinkers to encounter Western philosophy all manifested this characteristic, though to different degree. Moreover, comparative research continued well after such thinkers, and the same tendency can be seen time and again. This type of comparative research undoubtedly has had positive significance for concretely grasping the unique characteristics of each, but if we were to stop here it seems philosophy would simply devolve into a flat spread sheet of static comparisons.

Differing somewhat from the flat plane of static comparison is the interactive horizon, which is the plane upon which the relationship between Chinese and Western philosophy is understood at the very level upon which their reciprocal interaction is manifested. This first involves the significance which Western philosophy has for the study of Chinese philosophy, which we could again examine from different perspectives. The understanding of classical Chinese philosophy always involves a multifaceted background or context, and after the mutual encounter of Chinese and

Western philosophy, the latter offered an important plane of reference. For example, pre-Qin texts such as the infamous *Book Ten* and *Book Eleven* of Mo Zi were simply declared "indecipherable" for ages. This indecipherability is of course due to various factors, among which the most important is the fact that these texts involve many issues scientific and logical. The modern age was the witness of an upwell of thinkers who adopted the formal logic of Aristotle as a plane of reference in order to reconsider this classic from a new angle, and who gradually made sense of the so-called "indecipherable" *Book Ten* and *Book Eleven* of Mo Zi as a consequence. It is not absurd to suppose that at least some of the content of these books would remain indecipherable mysteries even up till today were it not for this plane of reference.

On the other hand, whether it is Chinese philosophy or Western philosophy, both will form some of their own problems in their respective courses of development, problems which may be rather concrete and specific or rather something occurring on the universal level. Chinese philosophy, as Feng Youlan, a Chinese philosopher in the 20th century, pointed out, unfolds as a system rich in content at the universal level, but seems relatively weak when considering it as a formal system. A so-called "formal system" would comprise conceptual analysis and the logical deduction of arguments. Historically speaking, the systems of Chinese philosophers all have an intrinsic aim, and their thought and ideas all revolve and unfold around this aim, however, the logical relations intrinsic to such philosophical systems were never demonstrated at the formal level. At the same time, the concept and categories within systems of classical Chinese philosophy undoubtedly have rich implications and profound intensions but the latter were never clearly defined at the formal level. The interpretation of classical philosophy always involves conceptual analysis, conceptual explanation and a systematic grasp of philosophical ideas. In the process of reconsidering and reflecting on classical Chinese philosophy, if western philosophy and its emphasis on the research approach of logical analysis were to be made use of, this would not only help us with understanding the meaning of traditional philosophy at the level of content, it would also catalyze our clarification of the intensions of these traditional concepts and categories at the formal level, which would furthermore

catalyze the grasping of their intrinsic logical relations.

Similarly Western philosophy has problems such as how to resolve the theoretical conflicts emerging throughout its own development, and in the process of resolving these problems, it likewise needs different philosophical systems as planes of reference. In the case of ethics, Hume put weight on the status of the passions, whereas Kant took an interest in form and his moral philosophy is often seen as a formalist ethics. In contrast with the *Critique of Pure Reason*'s concern with the role of sensibility, Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* distances itself quite a bit from the issue over the substantial content of sensibility, suspending it in favor of the one concerning pure form, which again shows the tendency of ethical formalism. Max Scheler aimed his criticism at Kant's ethics, and put forward his own non-formal ethics of value, turning value into one of the central concerns of ethics. But, while emphasizing the substantial role of values, Scheler seems to have neglected the aspect of form. Overcoming "form" with "content" logically entails some derogation of formal determinations. In the 20th century, analytic philosophy and existential philosophy continued this conflict between form and content in another sense. Relatively speaking, analytic philosophy set its sights predominantly on meta-ethics, which predominantly involves the logical analysis of moral language at the level of form, while existentialist systems connected ethics to human freedom, values, and the meaning of being, that is, existentialism focused predominantly on the level of substantial content. So how is this tension between form and substantial content resolved? This obviously involves a multifaceted theoretical problem, and different philosophical traditions may provide different perspectives for resolving this problem. The tradition of Chinese philosophy offers its own unique approach. Since the pre-Qin age, the philosophers espousing the Confucian system continuously emphasized the unity of "being-humane" (*ren* 仁) and "what is righteous" (*yi* 义). "Being-humane" mainly concerns the meaning of the being of humans, which intrinsically manifests human values; "what is righteous is what is appropriate" — here, "what is appropriate" means "what ought to be" and by extension the principles

of what ought to be and systems of norms. As what ought to be, "what is righteous" simultaneously concerns aspects of form. For traditional Confucians, there is an intrinsic link between "being-humane" and "what is righteous." Mencius once asserted, "being-humane is man's secure dwelling; doing what is righteous is man's just path; lay to waste the secure dwelling and there is nowhere to reside; abandon the just path and there is nothing to follow." "Secure dwelling" is a metaphor, meaning a stable foundation and ground; "just path" refers to the correct direction, the right road, which means to guide. Here, the humane way of being (*rendao* 仁道), which consists in the confirmation of the value of the being of humans, constitutes the ground of the moral system, and "what is righteous" which is expressed in the normative form of "ought" manifests the role of human values in guiding actions. As stated, as the manifestation of what ought to be or what should be (what is appropriate), "being-righteous" (*yi* 义) has its aspect of form, while "being-humane" which consists in confirming the value and meaning of man's being manifests much rather the aspect of substantial content, so that which affirms perfect moral action is the unity of "being-humane" and "being-righteous" which entails that neither the determination of form nor that of substantial content may be discarded in moral practice. The unity of "being-humane" and "observing ritual propriety" (*li* 礼) similarly expresses this tendency. The unity of "being-humane" and "observing ritual propriety" is an extremely important notion in early Confucianism. *The Analects of Confucius*, for example, states "[b]eing-human but not being-humane already precludes the possibility of observing ritual propriety…", which emphasizes the inseparability of being-humane and observing ritual propriety. Ritual propriety at once refers to a political-ethical institution and simultaneously a system of norms, which has meaning at the formal level. In summary, from the perspective of moral philosophy, that which the unity of being-humane and being-righteous and the unity of being-humane and observing ritual propriety entails is the following notion: general norms at the level of form must remain grounded in the substantial content of a humane way of being; and in turn, the notion of a humane way of being itself must

universalize as behavioral norms and provide guidance for action. Clearly, there was no mutually exclusive relationship of conflict between the level of form and the level of substantial content in traditional Chinese philosophy (primarily traditional Confucianism); rather, the two were presented as intrinsically unified. This path of thought integrating the two sides—being-humane and being-righteous as well as being-humane and observing ritual propriety—obviously provides a train of thought and thinking resources filled with enlightening significance for the sublation of the opposition between form and content in Western ethical theories; in this respect, it proves: Chinese philosophy has indispensible meaning as regards responding to Western philosophical problems.

Of course, philosophical thought is by no means limited to either the simple historical reconsideration of philosophy or reflection upon the various questions accompanying the historical evolution of philosophy. In the more original sense, philosophy always simultaneously faces the problem of how to explain and grasp the actual world and the being of man himself; Chinese philosophy itself always attempts to provide an explanation and understanding of the world by different means, and furthermore, remains directed at the construction and contemplation of reason. This is to say that, in thinking about and resolving problems in history, Chinese and Western philosophy provide each other with contextual planes of reference, which in the end always leads to the problem of how to explain and grasp the world. Considered in this respect, the relationship between Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy is inadequately conceived in the simple comparison of their similarities and differences and stops short of fulfilling itself in simply providing one another with planes of reference for dealing with their respective problems; rather, this relationship ought to lead to a constructive theoretical thought through which the world we face may be more profoundly grasped. In contrast to the past historical evolution of philosophy, the philosophical contemplation unfolding in the context of Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy interacting has the meaning of constituting a "world philosophy" in the historical and logical senses. Here, the study of Chinese and Western philosophies forms an intrinsic link to world philosophy.

Part 2

World philosophy may be understood at different levels. To understand philosophy as world philosophy is firstly linked to this broader context in which history has already become world history. Interconnected to this, world philosophy means overcoming territorial cultural traditions and specific cultural backgrounds, and understanding and considering this world itself from the perspective of "the world." From the perspective of the past development of history, the Chinese and Western systems of philosophy were limited to their own spheres of being and cultural traditions. These different cultural spaces and historical contexts left specifying marks on their respective lines of philosophical thought. As is widely known, in the ancient Greek city-state or polis, the agreement of the polis had some sore of priority such that how to make just relations form between the determinate members of the polis in political and economic terms constituted an important problem of philosophical focus, and Plato taking the idea of justice as the central theme of his *Republic* shows this point.   Comparatively speaking, in the early Chinese patriarchal clan system, human beings were firstly members of a clan, and connected to this basic recognition of status were such social demands as filial piety, and such concepts as being-humane and being-righteous could also be traced back to this (originally, Confucianism took observing filial piety as the root from which the humane sensibility grows). Here, we can see the constraining effect of different settings and backgrounds of being upon philosophical thought. In some sense, before history becomes world philosophy, people possess different worlds, and by contrast, after history becomes world philosophy people start to step into the same world. "World philosophy" means thinking and understanding the world in a common world. Of course, prior to the modern age, it seems there has emerged some ideas which transcend specific territories like the concept of "all under Heaven" (*tianxia* 天下) in the history of Chinese thought, which connotes the common world. However, in traditional

philosophy, this concept of "all under Heaven" involved the "distinction between the civilized Han and the barbarian tribes" which entails splitting up and demarcating the world culturally and territorially, so the concept of "all under Heaven" also carries with it its historically limited horizon.

World history mainly determines the worldly dimension of philosophy from the background of being. As for philosophy itself, to move towards world philosophy simultaneously means returning to the original form of philosophy. From the moment of its birth, philosophy is inseparably tied to the pursuit of wisdom; as a way of grasping the world, wisdom must be distinguished from knowledge: knowledge is directed towards specific domains and objects in the empirical world, whereas wisdom demands overcoming the limits of the empirical domain by grasping the world as a whole. According to the original meaning of the term, philosophy understands its own distinctive characteristic as overcoming the limits of knowledge and reaching the wholeness of the world. Historically speaking, due to constraining factors such as territorial isolation, separate cultural traditions and distinct cultural backgrounds, the philosophical approach of overcoming the horizon of knowledge and grasping the world at the level of the unified whole also has its own limitations. However, as history transcends territorial limitations, and particularly today, gradually moves towards globalization, the limitations of the contextual aspects of being have in some sense been overcome; this has actually provided the historical precondition of truly overcoming particular boundaries (including the limits of knowledge) and moving towards an understanding of the whole of being. At the same time, the different forms of knowledge in the sense of different fields of study have gradually obtained relatively independent forms in the tendency towards professionalization and specialization in accompaniment with the continuous division of knowledge. This gradual division of knowledge simultaneously provides the conditions of possibility of returning to the original form of wisdom while also exposing the increasingly urgent necessity to overcome limitations and understand the world at the unified level. In terms of rational thought, the division of knowledge makes it easier for human beings to grasp the world by cognitive means, and in fact, understanding beings by

means of cognitive thought has proceeded in sync with the continuous division of knowledge since the dawn of the modern age. After passing through the division of knowledge, how do we truly return to that grasping of the world as a whole in the form of wisdom? This is the unavoidable problem today's philosophical contemplation faces, and the process of responding to this problem is simultaneously the process of moving towards world philosophy. In this sense, "world philosophy" could also be understood as the modern form of wisdom, or rather, the wisdom of modern form. Here, it seems a distinction is called for between the original, undivided form of wisdom and the form of wisdom recovered after undergoing this division since the modern age. In this respect, world philosophy is obviously more than just a concept concerning space, since it encompasses temporal and historical dimensions as well.

As the form of wisdom, philosophy at once both transcends the limitations of knowledge in the expression of a universal dimension while also intrinsically including a concern for values, so doing world philosophy means understanding the meaning of the world for human beings from the more universal perspective of human values. In broader terms, whether as the early form of wisdom or as the modern form of wisdom, philosophy is always in some sense "seeing through the human perspective," and "seeing through the human perspective" here means unfolding knowledge and understanding of the world out of the background of the being of humans or out of human related preconditions. "Seeing through the human perspective" in this sense does not conflict with seeing through "the perspective of *dao*": "seeing through the perspective of *dao*" is nothing other than the human being grasping the world through the dimension of *dao*. There are different ways of "seeing" through the human perspective, and humans "seeing" under the constraint of such conditions as cultural traditions and territorial boundaries is entirely different from the human being "seeing" after continuously overcoming such limitations. Ever since the modern age in the context of history moving towards world history, philosophy has gradually come into possession of the possibility of providing explanations about the world on the more universal ground and precondition of

common human values, and this includes elucidating the meaning which the world presents to human beings. Here, particularly worth attention is Kant's conception of philosophy. Though he never explicitly spoke of world philosophy as such, Kant did however mention the idea of philosophy under a "world concept" in *Critique of Pure Reason*. In the work entitled *Logic*, Kant continued, asserting that "in the sense of world citizen" the field of philosophy may raise 4 questions, which include: "What can I know?" "What should I do?" "What can I expect?" "what is man?" Kant specifically emphasized that the first three questions were related to the last one, and it makes sense to say that the final point of practicability of "world citizen" is "what is man" for human understanding, which implies understanding the world from the perspective of the universal human being. In another respect, in discussing philosophical problems under a "world concept" Kant also touched on the meaning of philosophy at the level of practical value, and although he never directly or explicitly expressed this, his concrete exposition certainly implies it. When discussing the quality of philosophy, Kant insists, "according to its world concept, [philosophy] is the science of the ultimate ends of human reason. (Kant, Immanuel. *Logic*. Dover. p.27)" "Ends" are tied to the issue of values, and "the ultimate ends of reason" is a formulation whose intent is to link philosophy's grasp of the world to the issue of values. Kant also distinguishes between philosophy as it is understood under the scholastic concept and philosophy as it is understood under the world concept. For him, to understand philosophy from the scholastic perspective predominantly involves "skill" but to understand philosophy under the world concept involves usefulness. While "ends" involve the issue of values at the abstract level, "usefulness" more concretely points to the sphere of values. According to the intension of the term, technicality involves formalization. 20th century analytic philosophy in some sense shows the tendency to lead philosophy deeper in to the sphere of technical skill, whose underside is an interest in form and logic. Although analytic philosophy emerged after his time, Kant in a certain sense presaged the fact that philosophy will gradually tend to become a technical and formalized system after excessive scholastic treatment. Opposed to this, the world philosophy he mentions concerns the issue of

usefulness, which more concretely involves the sense of value the world has for human beings, or rather we should say it involves the value and role of philosophy for human beings and the world, which emphasizes the normative meaning of philosophy at the level of knowing the world. As for the relationship between philosophy and the world, this normativity of philosophy contains the possibility of understanding at a more universal level. In summary, Kant's understanding of philosophy under its world concept concretely unfolds into two sides: understanding the meaning of the world for human beings from the perspective of universal human values and emphasizing the normative meaning of philosophy for human beings.

In the context of history moving towards world history, the common values and universal good of humankind gradually comes to the fore, and the issues of identifying with humankind (affirming oneself as a member of humankind) appears more necessary and more possible than in past historical ages. Even though various differences and conflicts still exist in such domains as the economic, political, cultural and ideological spheres, these differences and conflicts are also intrinsic to the process of globalization and their alleviation is inseparable from the universal, global horizon.

As a whole, under the historical precondition of globalization, the more such issues as economic prosperity, ecological balance, environmental protection as well as social stability and safety transcend territorial, nationalistic and ethnic domains and become world problems, the more the fate of humankind is integrally linked. The posing of problems like universal ethics, global justice and other such concepts and theories reveals the concern for universal values from different perspectives and concretely reflects the tendency of humankind to move towards unity. As stated, rooting world philosophy in the historical background mentioned above also means examining the meaning that the world has for human beings from the perspective of universal human value; this meaning not only emerges by means of explanations of the world, because it also continuously acquires actual confirmation through the historical practice of transforming the world.

The universal horizon through the world perspective is simultaneously connected

to philosophy's own construction and development. In this respect, the development of world philosophy involves the issue of multiple resources and multiple wisdoms. World philosophy in this sense means overcoming the one-sided confinement of self-enclosed traditions and utilizing the different forms of wisdom that human beings formed with different cultural backgrounds, which further catalyzes the deepening of philosophical thought itself and understandings of the world. As far as philosophy goes, Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy developed relatively independently in their respective traditions for a considerable period of time, and in the context of history becoming world history, philosophy may for the first time overcome one-sided traditions and partial theoretical resources. Here, genuinely utilizing the multiple wisdoms of humankind promotes humankind's understanding of the world.

From the perspective of the construction of philosophical theories, the mutual encountering of different philosophical traditions not only provides a richer source of thought for the development of philosophy, it also provides a broader space of possibility for brain storms forming out of the mutual affecting and being affected of different ideas and thoughts. Historically speaking, there are common points of connection between philosophical questions, but the approaches and means of thinking and resolving these questions may express different characteristics. In the questioning of being, western philosophy splits into different tendencies. Ancient Greek philosophy is ordinarily narrated as beginning with Thales, whose gaze was so entranced with the starry heavens that he lost sight of the earth while falling back into a well. This story is filled with allegorical meaning: focusing on the heavens above and forgetting the earth below is like departing from the physical realm and meditating on being; this metaphysical approach emerged in more theoretical form later on, for instance with Parmenides who posited being as first principle. In contrast to this, Chinese philosophy shows another tendency. *The Book of Changes*, the early classic of Chinese philosophy, for instance, states "to look up and see the images in the heavens, but to look down and see the forms of the earth," which intrinsically connects them together. In contrast to focusing on the heavens above and forgetting the earth below, the unity of looking up to the heavens and looking down at the earth

shows in a metaphorical sense the tendency to bridge the gulf between the metaphysical and the physical and make them communicate, which concretely unfolded in the following development of Chinese philosophy as "finding *Dao* in the everyday" and "not splitting substance and function into two." Evidently, different philosophical traditions express different emphases in the process of investigating and understanding the world, and the process of running into one another, engaging in dialogue and communicating undoubtedly enables philosophical thought to acquire more multifaceted resources in the "world" horizon, which furthermore tends to deepen philosophy's grasp and understanding of the world.

Of course we should carefully avoid the reduction of world philosophy into one single form of philosophy as well as dogmatically understanding it as a system so vast that it encapsulates the whole of philosophy, leaving nothing outside of it. A single solitary form of philosophy is not the true meaning of world philosophy. On the contrary, world philosophy is intrinsically consistent with the diversification and individualization of philosophy. In the context of stepping into world history, the works of philosophers of different cultural traditions and walks of life will still possess unique individuality, and becoming individual does not conflict with becoming world, or rather we should say, the becoming world of thought is realized precisely through the path of individualization. In the process of moving towards world philosophy, the unique background of every philosopher and the tradition he or she adopts always manifests in his or her unique consciousness and thought of philosophical questions and in his or her understanding and selection of different philosophical resources, and so the philosophical thought effectively produced will show its unique individuality. Therefore, the becoming world of philosophy is just the other side of the same process of which diversification and individualization are the other.

Historically speaking, western philosophy and Chinese philosophy once presented diverse forms in the process of their development. From the perspective of historical ages, what is homogenized as "western philosophy" splits into ancient

Greek philosophy, medieval philosophy, modern philosophy and contemporary philosophy in the course of historical evolution; furthermore, in the same age, for instance the modern age, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke and Hume all present different forms of philosophy. Similarly, Chinese philosophy in terms of historical ages splits into such eras as that of pre-Qin, Han, Wei-jin, Sui-tang, Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing, and in the same age, for instance that of pre-Qin, there is also Confucius, Mo Zi, Zhuang Zi, Meng Zi and others each of whom show their own unique characteristics. Under the concept of world philosophy, the diversity and individuality of philosophy will likewise not disappear. On the one hand, in the context of history completely transforming into world history, philosophers might also transcend specific regional traditions, and by proceeding from a universal perspective, make use of multiple sources of wisdom, and furthermore, make more profound and reasonable explanations and concepts of the world; on the other hand, their understandings of problems and approaches to and means of resolving such problems all possess unique characteristics. In fact, the very essence of philosophy is meditation on the individualization and diversification of wisdom. This meditation will never conclude into some single form; rather, it will unfold as an endless and inexhaustible process. Under the concept of world philosophy, this characteristic of philosophy does not change. Worldness and diversity, openness and processuality will continuously attain internal unity in the historical development of world philosophy, and Chinese and western philosophy will also integrate with one another and manifest their respectively unique meanings in this very process.