

Unity Through Diversity: Inter-world, Family Resemblance, Intertextuality

JAY GOULDING

Department of Social Science, York University, Canada (jay@yorku.ca)

Kwok-Ying Lau, *Phenomenology and Intercultural Understanding: Toward a New Cultural Flesh*, Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2016, pp. 256 + xi;

Lin Ma and Jaap van Brakel, *Fundamentals of Comparative and Intercultural Philosophy*, Albany: SUNY Press, 2016, pp. 420 + x;

Eric S. Nelson, *Chinese and Buddhist Philosophy in Early Twentieth-Century German Thought*, London: Bloomsbury, 2017, pp. 344 + x.

This is a composite review of three intriguing and provocative books that address the interconnections between East Asian and Western philosophy. Firstly, in Phenomenology and Intercultural Understanding: Toward a New Cultural Flesh, Kwok-Ying Lau thinks that phenomenology can help construct a “cultural flesh” between civilizations that encourages East-West philosophical dialogues, and that China needs to adopt Western terminology to facilitate an intercultural engagement. Merleau-Ponty’s “inter-world” can help this bridge. Secondly, in Fundamentals of Comparative and Intercultural Philosophy, Lin Ma and Jaap van Brakel argue that Chinese thinkers of the modern world invent “Chinese philosophy” in order to engage with Western thought. In a distinct fashion, they incorporate a Wittgenstein-inspired scenario whereby the necessary precondition for comparative intercultural philosophy is the “attitude-toward-a-soul principle” alongside the “family resemblance principle” which includes the “no need to speak the same language principle” or no need for one tradition to adopt another’s terminology. Thirdly, in Chinese and Buddhist Philosophy in Early Twentieth-Century German Thought, Eric S. Nelson proposes that intertextual analysis opens multi-dimensional spaces of interpretation to situate changing views of East-West encounters in Germany ranging from Hegel and Kant to Buber and Heidegger. Daoism, Confucianism, Chan and Zen Buddhism are sites for examination by Western thinkers that open portals to East Asian culture and philosophy.

Key words: phenomenology; hermeneutics; Merleau-Ponty; inter-world; *epoché*; disenchantment; cultural flesh; Wittgenstein; attitude-toward-a-soul principle; family resemblance principle; language game; intertextuality; Heidegger; Daoism; Chan/Zen Buddhism

Kwok-Ying Lau 劉國英 is professor of philosophy at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. In 1993, he received a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Paris I at Panthéon-Sorbonne with a dissertation entitled: *Merleau-Ponty on la tension entre Husserl et Heidegger* (Merleau-Ponty or the tension between Husserl and Heidegger). Between 1996 and 2006, he delivered conference papers and lectures in a dozen countries. The book *Phenomenology and Intercultural Understanding: Toward a New Cultural Flesh* is a reworking of those papers and lectures which are blessed with “the fruits of intercultural understanding.” As Lau relates, “Phenomenology is a rich garden of cultural diversity. This book is the witness of the author’s humble contribution to its irrigation” (v). Indeed, Lau’s book lives up to its expectations.

In a global era, it is increasingly important to engage in intercultural thinking. For Lau, phenomenology offers an entrance into “the horizon of another culture.” As he explains, “Only by cultivating a new cultural flesh can we accord ourselves to the situation of another culture, which provides us with the minimum condition of accessibility to other cultural horizons” (19).

Given “the hegemonic position” of the Western world, Lau believes that China and the Far East must relinquish some of their national identities by adopting Western language and culture to allow interpenetrations of philosophical thinking. This is where phenomenology comes into play. Relying on the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), Lau suggests a multi-pronged strategy whereby Chinese thought must—at least in the interim—give up its reliance on Chinese language by enacting a “double *epoché*” (bracketing) whereby it (1) embraces an “international language” such as “American English” and (2) adopts Western philosophical language (10-1). As difficult as this might seem, Merleau-Ponty’s idea of “inter-world” (*l’entremonde*) comes to the forefront as he describes in *The Visible and the Invisible*: “two entries to the same Being, each accessible to but one of us, but appearing to the other as *practicable by right*, because they both belong to the same Being” (33). Lau continues with a quote from Merleau-Ponty:

[...] that the other’s body which I see and his word which I hear, which are given to me as immediately present in my field, *do present to me in their own fashion what I will never be present to*, what will always be invisible to me [...] a certain absence and a certain difference in terms of dimensions [...] which are responsible for the fact that we do not have two images side by side of someone and of ourselves, but one sole image in which we are both involved, which is responsible for the fact that my consciousness of myself and my myth of the other are not two contradictories, but rather each the reverse of the other (33).

Throughout the book, Lau tries to separate Edmund Husserl’s (1859-1938) theory from practice by leaving aside obtuse propositional endeavors in favor of clearer methodological considerations, namely *epoché*. According to Lau, Husserl’s bracketing of “unexamined opinion or judgment” acts “as a gateway to philosophical reflection,” resulting in “a change of attitude toward the entire mundane world” (147). In Lau’s view, Husserl’s *epoché* helps bring shape to intercultural understanding through a comparison with the contemporary Chinese philosopher Lao Sze-Kwang’s 勞思光 (1927-2012) most unique idea of “orientative philosophy” (*yin dao de zhexue* 引導的哲學) (126) which aims to manifest both “self-transformation” and “world transformation” (127).

Lau sees that the grip of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) as the mainstay Western view of China has long been released. Hegel’s refrain is that Chinese philosophy is at best an infantile stage of thinking versus the superior Western focus on reason. Even renowned Chinese philosophy translator A.C. Graham (1919-1991) sides with a rationalism versus anti-rationalism outlook (36-7). Lau recognizes the potential impact of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) on Chinese-Western intercultural thinking through the writings of Reinhard May and Graham Parkes (35-42) who have “drawn interesting parallels between the latter Heidegger’s formulations about the relation between Being and Nothing and those expressed by philosophical Daoism and Zen Buddhism” (38). In reference to *Dao* 道, Lau writes: “Some people interpret it as Being in the sense of Parmenides, because the *Dao* is changeless, whereas some others compare it to the Greek term *Logos*, as the literal meaning of the word ‘*dao*’ (道) is ‘the way’ or ‘to speak’” (42). Lau chooses to move in a different direction. In this respect, he is more favorable to both Husserl’s *epoché* and Merleau-Ponty’s inter-world. *Dao* as the unfathomable origin of the myriad of things assumes many names such as Being or Nothing. As such, *Dao* is “inchoative Nature” which generates both form and substance: “The *Dao* remains undifferentiated and indistinct, because as primordial and pre-objective order of Being

it is neither object of direct experience nor does it come forth in the phenomenal world right away” (44). Similarly, Merleau-Ponty observes that: “Nature is not simply the object [...] it is an object from which we have risen” (45). Hence, Lau develops the idea of “cultural flesh” throughout the book as grounds of intercultural exchange. As Lau explains: “In the language of Heidegger, it is to accord oneself to the cultural mood (*Stimmung*) of the others [...] to graft a new cultural flesh on oneself in order to have the cultural sensibilities of the other” (190). An additional idea to Merleau-Ponty’s “coiling over” of others as new flesh (*la chair*) upon our own is that of “cultural flesh” which Lau describes as encapsulating the essence of intercultural experience, “namely interpenetration, intertwinement, encroachment, promiscuity and chiasm on the one hand; and on the other hand, convergence with *écart* [divergence], reversibility without complete coincidence, ipseity amid intersubjectivity and intercorporeity, identity in difference” (194). As a “constellation” of ideas, flesh involves the sensible-in-general as the “carnal nature of pre-objective Being.” It also entails reversibility which means “the movement of reflexivity initiated by the visible to become the seeing, the tangible to become the touching, and the audible to become the hearing; in short, the sensible in general to become the sensing” (216).

According to Lau, in order for intercultural analysis to work, we need what the pioneering sociologist and political economist Max Weber (1864-1920) calls “disenchantment of the world” (*die Entzäuberung der Welt*), especially in relation to religion, which often confines thinking (107). Rather than using Christianity as the “yardstick” of world culture, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), Christian Wolff (1679-1754), and Voltaire (1694-1778) in their respective ways become “great pioneers of anti-Eurocentrism and promoter[s] of intercultural communication” (124). Leibniz reveres China’s practical philosophy and moral life as natural theology; Wolff maintains that China’s virtue emanates from atheistic reason; Voltaire praises China’s emperor for religious tolerance and cultivation of a rational Confucian court. Lau summarizes: “The world is an inter-world. This means: there is not first of all my own world and then the world of others. We find ourselves always already in a world which is at the crossroads of myself and the others” (188).

In *Fundamentals of Comparative and Intercultural Philosophy*, Lin Ma 馬琳, who is professor of philosophy at Renmin University of China (中國人民大學), and co-author Jaap van Brakel, professor emeritus of philosophy at the University of Leuven, explore the “necessary and *not-so-necessary* pre-conditions of intercultural philosophy” (2). An attempt to find a common ground for world thinking develops in 1873 when the Japanese scholar Nishi Amane 西周 (1829-97) uses the characters 哲學 to mean “philosophy” as understood by the Japanese *tetsugaku* and later the Chinese *zhexue*. Nishi introduces Western philosophy into the Japanese educational system, although he is not sure that East Asia has a “philosophy” as such but hopes the two modes of thinking could be reconciled. Ma and van Brakel quote the famous philosopher and diplomat Hu Shi 胡適 (1891-1962) from 1919: “In general, a discipline that studies the most important questions of human life, a fundamental reflection that wants to find a fundamental solution to these questions: this is called philosophy” (15-6). Likewise, they cite philosophy historian Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 (1895-1990) who calls philosophy a “systematic reflective thinking on life” and the neo-Confucian Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909-95) who says that philosophy “touches on the activities of humanity, and that [which] is pondered and explained by means of reasons and concepts” (16). Hence Hu Shi, Feng, and Mou, amongst others, are the thinkers that “created Chinese philosophy” to interact with the rest of the world. They bolster Ma and van Brakel’s argument for a structured, systematic philosophy that “renders Chinese traditions *visible* as part of an universal endeavor” (16).

Ma and van Brakel have an expanded view of “tradition” which includes three “dimensions”: “[i] language(s) used, [ii] philosophical content of relevant conceptual schemes or theories, and [iii] surrounding culture(s) or forms of life” (21-2). “Forms of life” generally “refer to the cultural and

everyday environment of the philosophers,” including “background of utterances, inscriptions, language games and other practices” (22). Expanding on Ludwig Wittgenstein’s (1889-1951) “form of life” (*Form des Lebens*) as synonymous with “culture” (*Kultur*), Ma and van Brakel argue that “[a]ll language-mediated inquiry is dependent on the tacit contingencies of forms of life” (169). They go on to say: “The certainties or secure attunements associated with particular form(s) of life have a similar relation to Gadamer’s *Vorurteil* (prejudice) and Heidegger’s fore-conception [*Vor-griff* ‘what we grasp in advance’] (1927: §32)” (169). But these are not “a fixed rock bottom.” As Wittgenstein explains in regard to the flux of empirical propositions (fluid propositions become hard while hard propositions become fluid):

I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself; though there is not a sharp division of the one from the other [...]. And the bank of the river consists partly of hard rock, subject to no alteration or only to an imperceptible one, partly of sand, which in one place and now in another gets washed away or deposited (170).

For Ma and van Brakel, Wittgenstein’s “river-bed of thought” points to dynamic forms of life or at least ones that are not static. This understanding is crucial for intercultural analysis.

They explain that until the middle of the 1700s, non-Western traditions are generally recognized by major thinkers of Europe. For example: Johann Ernst Schubert’s 1742 *Historia Philosophiae* “began with the philosophy of the Chaldeans, the Persians, the Phoenicians, the Arabs, the Jews, the Indians, the Chinese, the Egyptians, the Ethiopians, the Druids or Celts, the Scythians, the early Romans and the Etruscans” (22-3). Only after addressing these traditions does Schubert then speak of the Greeks. Schubert illustrates a broad view of philosophy. But Hegel instigates a narrow view that shapes European thought from that point onward as he makes Greece the “birthplace of philosophy” while neglecting Persia and India (23).

Ma and van Brakel outline several scholars influenced directly by Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology and ontology who try to generate intercultural philosophy: Calvin Schrag (1928-), who studied with Heidegger *aficionados* John Wild (1902-72) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002); Hwa Yol Jung (1931-2017), who studied with Wild and Schrag; and Wu Kuang-ming 吳光明, who studied with Wild and George A. Schrader (1917-98). Schrag introduces the idea of “transversality” as a cross-cultural communication; Jung enhances it with the “lateral movement of ideas and values” as a “republic of philosophy”; and Wu extends it with “inter-versal sensitivity” to manifest “China-West differences” (48). Ma and van Brakel see that these philosophers are committed to an “overarching” or “in-between language” for intercultural analysis. Also inspired by Heideggerian and Gadamerian hermeneutics, or what Ma and van Brakel call “Hermeneutics across Traditions,” is the work of Cheng Chung-ying 成中英 (founder of the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*). His “onto-hermeneutics” (*bentiyong* 本體用) aims at what Ma and van Brakel call “a critical mutual engagement of Eastern and Western thinking in order to rehumanize humanity” (246). *Benti* 本體 includes both heaven (*tian* 天) and naturalness (*ziran* 自然) as a union of ontology and cosmology that Cheng otherwise names “onto-cosmology,” with onto- from the root (*ben* 本) and cosmology from the organic system (*ti* 體). Cheng’s onto-cosmology is attractive to Ma and van Brakel as a platform for world philosophy with its “sense of empathy across traditions” and “language independent accessibility” (246).

For Ma and van Brakel, there is no need for φιλοσοφία (*philosophia*) as a Western philosophy and 哲學 as a compilation of classical Chinese texts to be identical or subsumed under each other insofar as they can be mutually exclusive and yet still “recognize” each other’s traditions “for intercultural philosophical dialogue, interpretation, or comparison” (19). Quite frankly, “there is no

need to speak the same language” (49) and “there is no need for universals” (296). For Ma and van Brakel, “[a]ll interhuman communication should be understood as *praxis*, as interactive communion [...] there is no *essential* difference between inter- and intracultural communication. Rather, communication just *happens*—be it in an intercultural or an intracultural setting” (122). The “most fundamental necessary precondition” for comparative intercultural philosophy is the “attitude-toward-a-soul principle.” Wittgenstein’s “mutually recognizable human practices” tell us of the other: “My attitude [*Einstellung*; also meaning: approach] toward him is an attitude toward a soul [*zur Seele*]. I am not of the *opinion* [*Meinung*] that he has a soul (PPF §22) [...]. The human body is the best picture of the human soul (PPF §25)” (136). Ma and van Brakel see similarities between Wittgenstein’s view of attitude-toward-a-soul (*Einstellung zur Seele*) and the idea of empathy that occurs in wide ranging thinkers as far apart as Heidegger and the Harvard logician Willard Quine (1908-2000). In respect to making “communication possible,” Heidegger writes: “The ideas of empathy and projection always already presuppose being-with the other and the being of the other with me. Both already presuppose that one has already understood the other as another human being” (138). Likewise, Quine ponders: “Perception of another’s unspoken thought—up to a point—is older than language. Empathy is instinctive” (138).

Paramount for successful intercultural philosophy is not only Wittgenstein’s “attitude-toward-a-soul” but also his “family resemblance” (*Familienähnlichkeit*). Ma and van Brakel argue that a necessary pre-condition for interpretation is the *family resemblance principle* (FR-principle) which includes the *no need to speak the same language principle* (NNSSL-principle) (261). As they argue, analytic philosophy boils down to two beginnings: “ideal language” as the struggle to “making language perfect” and “ordinary language” which “dissolves” philosophical problems. Referring to the logician and mathematician Gottlob Frege (1848-1925), Ma and van Brakel describe ideal language as “objective,” “exact,” “structured,” and “calculated,” whereby “each sentence is true or false” (41). In their view, the rigidity of this approach gives way to ordinary language as entertained by the later Wittgenstein. As they relate: “Philosophical problems arise, as Wittgenstein says, ‘when language goes on holiday’; that is to say, when the philosopher forgets ordinary language and creates pseudo-philosophical problems” (93). In regard to family resemblance and language games, Ma and van Brakel quote Wittgenstein: “The word must have a family of meaning [...]. We twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres” (98-9). Hence, different uses of the word game illustrate family resemblances by seeking out similarities (*Ähnlichkeiten*), affinities (*Verwandtschaften*) and connections (*Zusammenhänge*). And because there is as Wittgenstein suggests “a family of structures more or akin to one another,” one must search for “connecting links” (*Zwischenglieder* as “intermediate cases”) to otherwise dissimilar games (99). In accord with Wittgenstein’s family resemblance, Ma and van Brakel state that “in order to keep away from the ideal language assumption and essentialization, we advocate de-essentialization” (96). Most definitively for Ma and van Brakel: “There is no need for horizon fusion, no need for a shared language or a language in-between, no need for cognitive or linguistic universals (at least not the ones that are often mentioned) in order for cross-cultural interpretation to work” (300).

The third book, *Chinese and Buddhist Philosophy in Early Twentieth-Century German Thought* is written by Eric S. Nelson, Professor of Humanities at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Nelson explores the reception of East Asian philosophy in Germany. As he states, “[t]he history of Western philosophy is historically already intercultural and intertextually bound up with non-Western philosophy. The word ‘intercultural’ in this context should be distinguished from ‘multicultural’ and ‘comparative.’ It is not a juxtaposition of differences or a search for an underlying identity” (3). He continues to say that: “Intercultural signifies the multidimensional space of

encounter between philosophies of different social-historical provenience each of which is a complex dynamic formation” (3). Drawing on the post-structuralist Julia Kristeva’s semiotic and literary idea of intertextuality as “allusions, citations, reappropriations, rifts on, and misinterpretations of other texts,” Nelson adds hermeneutic and phenomenological reference to “the intersection of argumentative and interpretative strategies, images, metaphors, and ideas occurring between different discourses” (3). Examples of intercultural and intertextual analysis include Heidegger’s Laozi 老子-inspired discussion of nothingness, emptiness, and the empty cup as a sheltering of a void rather than a simple material container, as well as the theologian Martin Buber’s (1878-1965) Zhuangzi 莊子-inspired bestiary and natural interactions with humans (121-26). Nelson’s book concentrates on the reception of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism in contemporary era Germany. He distinguishes between the classical Chinese thinker Confucius (551 BC–479 BC) and the “European Confucius.” He states “[...] we can speak of a European Confucius, formed in the European reception and appropriation of ‘Confucius,’ just as we might speak of a Chinese Marx, a Japanese Heidegger, or a German Heraclitus” (17). And he continues, “These figures, and what their associated discourses say, do not and cannot belong exclusively to one tradition. Thinking mutates, spreads, and traverses multiple divergent discourses in which unique configurations of interpretation and contestation unfold” (18). Hence, “Confucius” and “Confucians” are forged under an “interpretive discursive formation” that takes shape by means of “imaginative projections,” “constructions,” “encounters,” and “communicative interactions” (18). For example, early European thinkers such as Leibniz or Voltaire fashion Confucius as “an exemplar of philosophical and ethical Enlightenment” from which all can benefit. On the contrary, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), and Hegel view Confucius as a “reactionary,” as a “fossilized form of customary moral life” (19) and a political ideologue of “Oriental despotism.” Since Hegel believes that world history becomes the record of the spirit’s attempts to gain knowledge of what it is in itself, he writes brashly, with a heavy Eurocentric haughtiness:

The Orientals [for Hegel including Egypt, Persia, India, China, and Arabia] do not know that spirit, or the human being as such, is intrinsically free; because they do not know this, they are not themselves free. They only know that one [person] is free, but for this very reason such freedom is mere arbitrariness, savagery, and dull-witted passion, or their mitigation and domestication, which itself is merely a natural happenstance or something capricious. This one is therefore a despot, not a free human being (20).

Oriental despotism is later espoused by Frankfurt political theorist Karl A. Wittfogel (1896-1988) in a more positive Weberian and Marxian way as a “hydraulic” societal model (263). For Weber, Confucian “religious ethics” within bureaucracy is “optimistic” and a “practical rationalization” or what Nelson describes as “pragmatic appropriateness, accommodation, tolerance, and passive harmony” (23). Similarly, Weber characterizes Buddhism as what Nelson calls “a redemptive religion without God,” in contrast to Confucianism as a “religion lacking transcendence and redemption beyond the immanence of this life” (23).

The religious philosopher Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) views Confucius as “a boring man” in what Nelson refers to as “the banality of sagehood.” As Nelson relates, “Rosenzweig caricatured the Chinese as devoid of individual life, and lacking ethical and spiritual depth; their qualities of life are deemed to be only those of mass humanity engaged in practical pursuits” (24). In the early 1920s, the literary *avant-garde* led by poet and critic Ezra Pound (1885-1972) and Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908), the Harvard art historian who taught in Japan, “reversed Rosenzweig’s

negative essentialist assessment of the characterless lack of personality and individuality of the Chinese” (26) with the understanding of Chinese ideographic characters (*hanzi* 漢字) as possessing what Nelson calls “expressions of movement and elemental feelings in relation to nature” that lead to “aesthetic and ethical virtues” (26). On this account, the critical theorist and writer Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) re-interprets Rosenzweig’s Chinese characterlessness as “a very elemental purity of feeling” expressed through Chinese opera and theatre. Hence, as Nelson ironically attests, “The ‘leveled’ and ‘cold’ naturalness and objectivity of the person without character and qualities linked the traditional Chinese aesthetic with the modern Western aesthetic avant-garde [such as Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956)]” (26). Whereas Kant coins the expression “the Chinese Socrates” in relation to Confucius, the idealist philosopher Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854) sees Confucius as the “anti-Socrates” who could not connect everydayness to the divine (27). In Nelson’s words, Richard Wilhelm (1873-1930), the renowned translator of *Yijing* 易經 and *Zhuangzi* 莊子 “initially traveled to China as a Protestant Christian missionary in 1899 and would return to Germany as a missionary of Chinese philosophy” (66). Collaborating with neo-vitalist Hans Driesch (1867-1941) and philosophers Zhang Junmai 張君勱 (1886-1969) and Qu Shiying 瞿世英 (1900-76), Wilhelm composed a German-English-Chinese philosophical dictionary as a “fusion” (*ronghe* 融合) connecting Eastern and Western thought that would, as Nelson states, “serve as a basis of a new common philosophy of humanity” (66). Wilhelm established the China Institute at the University of Frankfurt from 1925 to 1932, which sponsored Chinese scholars including “[...] the Buddhist Tai Xu 太虛 [1889-1947], the poet Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 [1896-1931], and the philosopher Hu Shi 胡適 [1891-1962]” (66), who engaged in intercultural philosophizing with Buber and the analytical psychologist Carl Jung (1875-1961). From Kant and Hegel to Weber and Rosenzweig, the philosophical Daoism of Lao-Zhuang 老莊 is generally understood in German thought as “overly materialist and mystical” (111) and “much less developed” than that of Confucianism and Buddhism. Nelson quotes Kant’s description of Chinese aesthetics as another blatant example of Eurocentric smugness:

What ridiculous grotesqueries do the verbose and studied complements of the Chinese not contain; even their paintings are grotesque and represent marvelous and unnatural shapes, the likes of which are nowhere to be found in the world. They also have venerable grotesqueries, for the reason they are of ancient usage [...] (111).

In the twentieth century, Heidegger’s engagement with Daoism, according to Nelson, utilized translations of Buber’s “poetic and narrative presentation of the Zhuangzi,” which stands against the views of “mystical escape and quietist withdrawal,” and instead relies on parables “with a free and easy meandering comportment (*xiaoyao you* 逍遙遊)” (116). Heidegger also consults Wilhelm’s translations of the “uses of the useless” in chapter twenty-six of the *Zhuangzi* (*waimu* 外物) that, as Nelson states, “signals an alternative to the restless accumulation, consumption, and reduction of thinking to calculation that is distinctive of technological modernity” (121). Heidegger’s description of Laozi’s empty handless cup (*zhong* 盅) as the sheltering of the void (*Leere*) reads:

[W]hat is impermeable is not yet what does the holding. When we fill the jug, the pouring that fills it flows into the empty jug. The emptiness, the void, is what does the vessel’s holding. The empty space, this nothing of the jug, is what the jug is as the holding vessel (123).

The above example reflects a “significant difference” between Heidegger and Buber:

While Heidegger drew on the more abstract quasi-metaphysical imagery of empty vessels and empty spokes from the *Daodejing* and the uselessness of the useful from the *Zhuangzi*, the early Buber embraced the *Zhuangzi*'s bestiary of animals and the concrete images of natural phenomena. While Heidegger posited an 'abyss' separating the human and the animal, there is a continuity, mutuality, and reversibility of the human and the animal in the stories and parables of *Zhuangzi* and Buber. Here the human can be perceived, suddenly and unexpectedly, from a non-human perspective in order to illumine what is genuine in life (125).

As such, Nelson argues that the alternative views of Heidegger and Buber "entail divergent possibilities for spiritually and poetically responding to modernity and its scientific and technological character" (129). Similarly, with Chan/Zen 禪 Buddhism, Nelson writes, "Despite the limits of Heidegger's approach to Asian thought [...] his philosophy offers a genuine point of departure for dialogue freely wandering beyond the self-imposed borders and great walls of Western philosophy" (251). Heidegger's nothingness (*das Nichts*) and Chan emptiness (*kong* 空) cross paths in "the originary groundlessness and temporal impermanence of humane existence" (247).

Keeping with the main theme of intertextuality in its hermeneutic and phenomenological forms, this review focuses on key topics moving recursively throughout Nelson's book rather than chapter by chapter synopsis. Nelson concentrates on the impact of Richard Wilhelm and Martin Buber as primary German translators of Chinese classical texts. Whereas Kant and Hegel are mostly suspicious and dismissive of East Asian traditions, Heidegger embraces them. As Nelson summarizes, "Heidegger reversed the standard Western account [...]. This thinking of the nothing resonates with Daoist nothingness and Chan/Zen Buddhist emptiness" (251). Nelson's final judgment reads, "Heidegger's reversal of the Western denigration of the nothing remains a significant moment in the history of Western philosophy's opening to Eastern philosophy" (252). As Nelson explicates in familiar Heideggerian terminology with a Daoist resonance:

The nothing is not another something; it is not and, as not, is the abysmal non-ground (abyss) opening up being (*Sein*) as openness and the clearing (*Lichtung*); the invisible that grants things being seen, and silence that grants speaking and hearing. The clearing or openness of *being* is an emptiness in which *things* disclose themselves from themselves and call us to receptively see, listen, and respond (251).

In conclusion, each of the three books chosen for the review attempt to map out unique but complementary avenues to intercultural philosophy. Firstly, Kwok-Ying Lau promotes a Merleau-Pontyan "inter-world" of cultural flesh whereby it is recommended that China adopt Western language and ideas; secondly, Lin Ma and Jaap van Brakel embrace a Wittgensteinian strategy of "family resemblance" whereby no adoption of alternative languages is necessary as communication just happens; thirdly, Eric S. Nelson illustrates the hermeneutic engagement of contrasting discourses through "intertextuality" for the purpose of generating "multidimensional spaces of encounter" inspired by the pioneering exegesis of Heidegger. Together, these three varied philosophical strategies—phenomenological, Wittgensteinian, and hermeneutic—aim to reach the same interconnected destination: comparative thought, East and West; hence, all three books, as distinct as they are, support an intercultural goal of unity through diversity.

Jay Goulding is a professor in the Department of Social Science, York University, Canada, where he was Programme Coordinator for Social and Political Thought. With expertise in classical Chinese

and Japanese philosophy, hermeneutics, and phenomenology, he participated in the 2001 official return of philosophy to China with the *International Society for Chinese Philosophy* and contributed an article to Beijing University's journal *Gate of Philosophy* (哲學門), celebrating the ninetieth anniversary of the Department of Philosophy (2004). He wrote for *Scribner's New Dictionary of the History of Ideas* encyclopedia (2005) on East Asian philosophy, culture, language, and history. In 2006, he delivered visiting lectures at Beijing Foreign Studies University's Foreign Literature Institute and at Beijing University's Institute of Foreign Philosophy, explaining Daoism and phenomenology—Laozi and Zhuangzi compared with Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger. In December 2008, he edited *China-West Interculture: Toward the Philosophy of World Integration, Essays on Wu Kuang-ming's Thinking* (Global Scholarly Publications) for the Association of Chinese Philosophers in America. Recently, he was recognized by *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* as a distinguished scholar in Chinese philosophy and comparative thinking, contributing to the fortieth anniversary volume with "The Forgotten Frankfurt School: Richard Wilhelm's China Institute" (41, no. 1-2 [2014]: 170–186). He has published in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *Sociological Analysis: A Journal of Comparative Religion*, *Canadian Review of Sociology*, *Political Theory*, *Catalyst*, *Anhui Normal University Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*, *International Journal for Field-Being*, *China Review International*, and *Asian Cinema*.