

## Through Heidegger's Philosophy to Comparative Studies

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It is well known that Heidegger chose as the motto for his collected works (*Gesamtausgabe*) the phrase "Ways, not Works (*Wege, nicht Werke*)."<sup>1</sup> This phrase precisely characterizes the nature of his writings. In fact, the largest portion of the collected works consists of Heidegger's university lecture courses, along with papers, lectures, and notes. Moreover, even his major work, *Being and Time*, is, as is well known, an unfinished work. Therefore, it is inappropriate to call the collected works "works."

In fact, in assembling his collected works, Heidegger did not intend to present all his writings merely in a philological or archival sense. Rather, he sought to disclose, in a philosophical manner, the unfolding path of his thinking as a whole. To this end, Heidegger provided explicit instructions concerning the editorial principles that should guide the publication of his works.<sup>2</sup> The expression "ways" does not indicate a collection of finished products but the trajectory of the journey of his thinking in movement. And on that journey, the way is not a mere passage to be traversed swiftly and left behind in order to arrive at a predetermined destination. On the contrary, as Heidegger emphasizes in several of his writings, thinking attends to the way itself.<sup>3</sup> This kind of walking does not mean hastening forward while looking solely ahead. It means walking slowly and deliberately while looking down at the path.

Yet sometimes one can also walk by lifting one's eyes from the path and looking around at one's surroundings. Then, one can look at the different landscapes on both sides of the path. For example, on the country path (*Feldweg*) of Heidegger's hometown of Meßkirch, one can see, to the right, the

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Frühe Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1978), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Franz Josef Wetz, "Wege: Nicht Werke. Zur Gesamtausgabe Martin Heidegger," in *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, 41 (1987), 444.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Die Frage nach der Technik," *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), 7; Martin Heidegger, "Der Satz der Identität," in *Identität und Differenz* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2006), 33.

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wide fields stretching to the horizon, and, to the left, the mountain range of the Vogesen (Vosges). Thus, one can naturally walk while comparing two different landscapes. If so, the path of thinking that Heidegger, the thinker of the country path, walked may also be a path of comparison.

It is widely known that Heidegger showed deep interest in Daoist thought as well as Japanese philosophy. Therefore, when one searches for papers and monographs comparing Heidegger's philosophy with Daoism, one can confirm that a considerable amount of research results has already been accumulated.<sup>4</sup> Yet this research landscape reflects a certain Eurocentric presupposition. Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States are taken to constitute one philosophical cultural sphere, while the rest of the regions are classified as another philosophical cultural sphere. Within such a framework, comparative philosophy is naturally understood as the comparison of Western philosophy with non-Western philosophy.

However, it would be preferable to understand the designation "comparative philosophy" not as limited to the dichotomous framework of Western and non-Western, but as a concept encompassing all research that deals together with two different traditions of thought or philosophical positions. From this broader perspective, Heidegger's writings of developing his own hermeneutic phenomenology through confrontation with Husserl's transcendental phenomenology also possesses a comparative philosophical character. The same applies to his critical interpretations of philosophies of Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche. His confrontations with French philosophers such as Descartes and Bergson can be understood as comparative research between German and French philosophies. Moreover, Heidegger's reinterpretations of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle may also be seen as comparative studies between ancient Greek philosophy and German philosophy. Yet his comparative research does not end here. He also attempted intellectual dialogues with various poets and painters. Such dialogues, too, possess a comparative philosophical character, insofar as they constitute encounters between two different forms of thinking, namely philosophy and art. In this way, Heidegger's thinking always unfolded through philosophical confrontation and dialogue, and it can be said that the path of his thinking was itself a path of comparative philosophy. In fact,

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<sup>4</sup> Rolf Elberfeld, "Laozi-Rezeption in der deutschen Philosophie. Von der Kenntnisnahme zur Wiederholung," in *Philosophieren im Dialog mit China*, ed. by Helmut Schneider (Köln: Ed. Chōra, 2000), 152–153; Bret W. Davis, "Heidegger and Daoism: A Dialogue on the Useless Way of Unnecessary Being," in *Daoist Encounters with Phenomenology. Thinking Interculturally about Human Existence*, ed. by David Chai (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 161–195.

among Heidegger's collected works, most of them possess a dialogical philosophical character.<sup>5</sup>

Just as a human being walks upright by alternately stepping forward with two legs, thinking advances only through a reciprocal movement between two different intellectual positions. It would be difficult to go far on one leg, without the aid of the other leg or other walking aids. Similarly, a philosophy confined to a single tradition finds it difficult to extend or deepen itself. Thinking namely requires countermovement, resistance, and exchange. In this sense, Heidegger was able to walk a long path of thinking, because he placed one foot in his own philosophical questioning and the other foot in sustained engagement with thinkers and poets. His thinking moved forward not in isolation, but in dialogue.

Since Heidegger himself walked the path of comparative philosophy in this way, scholars who study his writings naturally become accustomed and open to comparative philosophical research. So, following Heidegger, they themselves come to carry out comparative philosophical research.

The first academic conference devoted to comparative philosophical research on Heidegger's philosophy was held in Hawaii from November 17 to 21, 1969. The organizers of the conference invited Heidegger, but due to his advanced age he was unable to attend and instead sent a letter to the organizers. In that letter, he emphasized the importance of comparison with Eastern philosophy as follows: "Again and again it has seemed urgent to me that a dialogue take place with the thinkers of what is to us the Eastern world."<sup>6</sup> Heidegger also pointed out that European and American researchers were not proficient in Eastern languages. The papers presented at this Hawaii conference were later published in an academic journal, and many of them compared Heidegger's philosophy with Indian philosophy and Buddhist philosophy.

Thereafter, comparative research on Heidegger's thought expanded to include engagements with the ancient Chinese thinkers of Laozi and Zhuangzi.<sup>7</sup> In this development, the center of comparison gradually shifted from West Asia to East Asia. In the German-speaking world, Heidegger scholars at the University of Hildesheim and the University of Vienna formed

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<sup>5</sup> Marcel recalls Heidegger as a thinker who was "engaged in a perpetual dialogue with the philosophers that preceded him." See Gabriel Marcel, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 8.

<sup>6</sup> Winfield E. Nagley, "Introduction to the Symposium and Reading of a Letter from Martin Heidegger," in *Philosophy East and West*, 20 (1970), 221.

<sup>7</sup> Kah Kyung Cho, *Bewußtsein und Natursein: phänomenologischer West-Ost-Diwan* (Freiburg: Alber, 1987).

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a current of comparative philosophical research.<sup>8</sup> More recently, Western scholars who have conducted research activities in Japan and China have been leading comparative philosophical studies.<sup>9</sup> Having resided in Asia for a long period of time, they acquired the conditions necessary in order to overcome, at least in part, the linguistic barrier that Heidegger had pointed out. As a result, whereas the research of the previous generation tended to interpret Eastern thought from a Western perspective, it has now become possible to look more deeply at Eastern thought from an Eastern perspective. This change can be regarded as a sign that comparative research has taken a step further forward.

Parallel to this research trend, Eastern scholars and students also went to Germany to study Heidegger's philosophy systematically and deeply. After completing their studies, they returned to their home countries and attempted research comparing their own tradition of thought with Heidegger's philosophy.<sup>10</sup> In order to share the research achievements of such scholars, the Heidegger Circle in Asia (hereafter referred to as HCIA) was founded in 2018.

The idea of the HCIA was conceived along the country path in Meßkirch, during a Heidegger conference hosted there in 2014 by Professor Holger Zaborowski. During the conference, Wei-Ding Tsai and I first started dreaming of founding an Asian circle about Heidegger's philosophy. Four years later, in 2018, we organized a round table titled "Heidegger and Asia" at the 24<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Philosophy in Beijing. The lively discussions and shared enthusiasm of the round table made the dream come true. In 2019, Tsai hosted the 1<sup>st</sup> international conference of the HCIA at National Chengchi University in Taipei. The 2<sup>nd</sup> conference, delayed by the pandemic, was eventually held online in 2022, hosted by Ewha Womans University in Seoul. After the conference, several presentations were selected and later published in a special issue of the journal *Kritike*, edited by Remmon Barbaza and Federico José Lagdameo.<sup>11</sup> In 2023, Tsai once again hosted the 3<sup>rd</sup> conference. In the following year, another round table, "Heidegger Circle in Asia," was

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<sup>8</sup> Rolf Elberfeld, *Philosophieren in einer globalisierten Welt: Wege zu einer transformativen Phänomenologie* (Freiburg and München: Alber, 2017); Georg Stenger, *Philosophie der Interkulturalität: Erfahrung und Welten* (Freiburg and München: Alber, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Lin Ma, *Heidegger on East-West Dialogue: Anticipating the Event* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Mathias Obert, *Tanzende Bäume, sprechende Steine: zur Phänomenologie japanischer Gärten* (Freiburg and München: Alber, 2019); Fabian Heubel, *Gewundene Wege nach China. Heidegger-Daoismus-Adorno* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2020).

<sup>10</sup> Simon Ebersolt, Tae-hee Kim, Choong-su Han, Ni Liangkang, and Fang Xianghong, "PART V Phenomenology in the world: Eastern Asia," in *The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, ed. by Daniele De Santis, Burt C. Hopkins and Claudio Majolino (New York: Routledge, 2021), 768-775.

<sup>11</sup> See *Kritike*, 16:3 (April 2023), <<https://doi.org/10.25138/16.3>>.

organized as the 4<sup>th</sup> conference of the HCIA at the 25<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Philosophy in Rome. There, many European and American scholars expressed genuine interest in the HCIA. In continuation of this, the 5<sup>th</sup> conference was held in Seoul in 2025. It was attended by 23 presenters from 11 countries (Japan, China, the Philippines, Taiwan, Iran, India, Germany, Spain, Poland, the United States, and Korea). Among those presentations, 16 papers were selected through a peer-reviewed process as well as deliberations by the scientific committee and are found in this special issue of the journal *Kritike*.

The papers are grouped according to five themes. The first group titled “Heidegger and Asia” includes seven papers in total and constitutes the largest portion of this issue. In this group, Remmon E. Barbaza examines the modern city of Manila in light of Heidegger’s concept of oblivion. Choong-Su Han elucidates Heidegger’s interpretation of Zhuangzi’s notion “the necessity of the unnecessary.” Four Japanese scholars—Yohei Kageyama, Yuta Okada, Hoko Nakagawa, and Motoki Saito—offer comparative studies that place Heidegger’s philosophy in dialogue with various Japanese thinkers. This group concludes with Hongjian Wang’s account of the reception of Heidegger’s philosophy in China.

The second and third groups provide diverse interpretations of Heidegger’s earlier and later thoughts. Peter Ha examines Heidegger’s concept of the will within the framework of fundamental ontology. Ahmad Rajabi compares Heidegger’s concept of Dasein with Plotinus’ concept of nous, focusing on the theme of ecstatic self-determination. Mathias Obert elucidates the relationship between Heidegger’s concepts of saying and showing, particularly in relation to art. Suh-Hyun Park explores the possibility of self-transformation in view of Heidegger’s concept of releasement.

Falling under the group “Heidegger and Ethics,” Chop Ig Ng reveals the possibility of a hermeneutic ethics grounded in Heidegger’s thought, while Wei-Ding Tsai attempts to articulate a Heideggerian account of normative ethics. The final group “Heidegger and Europe” broadens the horizon of comparative studies. Matthias Ernst Bähr brings Heidegger into dialogue with Bergson, examining the themes of time, experience, and knowledge. Esmeralda Balaguer García places Ortega and Heidegger in conversation, in order to address the question of technology in the age of artificial intelligence. Finally, Hyun Jung Park defends Heidegger’s ontology in the face of the contemporary speculative turn.

Now I would like to conclude this introduction with a few words of gratitude. Having majored in mechanical engineering as an undergraduate, I came to study philosophy relatively late. I therefore wish first to express my heartfelt thanks to my academic advisors in Korea and in Germany, namely

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Professor Chankook Park and Professor Hans-Helmuth Gander, who guided this late-blooming student on the path toward becoming a scholar of philosophy. I am very grateful to Professor Holger Zaborowski, who hosted the Heidegger conference in Meßkirch where I had the good fortune to meet Professor Wei-Ding Tsai and Professor Yohei Kageyama with whom I could share the dream of founding the HCIA. And our collaboration has continued ever since. In December of last year, we organized the first HCIA winter course for students.

I truly thank the students of Ewha Womans University who wholeheartedly assisted in preparing the 5<sup>th</sup> conference, which serves as the foundation of this issue. I also extend my deep gratitude to Ewha Womans University, the Thaumazein Foundation, and the Kim Hee-Kyung Scholarship Foundation for European Humanities for their financial support at that time. I would further like to thank my co-editors, Professor Mandel Cabrera, and the Ph.D. candidate Ka Young Do, who worked together with me in the process of producing this issue. My true gratitude also goes to the editorial team of *Kritike* for their invaluable assistance and support throughout the publication process.

At present, the HCIA is preparing for the 6<sup>th</sup> conference to be held in the Philippines in September 2026. And its 7<sup>th</sup> conference is scheduled to take place in Japan in March 2027. What began as a small conversation along the country path has grown into an ongoing international academic exchange. It is my sincere hope that this dialogue will continue to expand and deepen, fostering thoughtful encounters across nations and traditions and contributing to a more genuinely dialogical future for philosophy and perhaps for our shared world.

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