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Preface

In recent years, Western debates about methodology in the field of Chinese (and other East Asian) philosophies have revolved around two dominant approaches: the comparative and the transcultural. The study of Chinese and Asian philosophies inevitably touches on the problem of cultural identities and differences. In contemporary "Western" discourse on China the continuing relevance of cultural comparison is obvious. The widespread opposition between "China" and "the West" relies heavily on a comparative framework that allows one to identify "Western values" and distinguish between different political "systems." The "comparison" thus serves as a discursive basis for competing normative orders and/or ideological positions. More broadly, comparative philosophy tends to develop relatively stable or fixed frames of identity and difference.

Recent controversies over comparative philosophy, however, have shown that the notion of "comparison" as such is highly problematic. The same frameworks that link different philosophical discourses tend to hinder their intercultural communication. The process of comparing different philosophies necessarily involves numerous methodological problems that have not yet been comprehensively reflected upon and are therefore far from being resolved. Despite increasing criticism, comparative philosophy still seems to be a very important and useful tool for gaining new insights into numerous fundamental philosophical questions. New forms of comparison that may emerge from ongoing debates and investigations will hopefully lead to innovative approaches that are "postcomparative" in the sense of the problem that the tendency to determine identities and differences easily leads to the imposition of "frames" blocking rather than enabling the possibility of intercultural communication.

The development of contemporary philosophy is closely intertwined with developments that go beyond a philosophical discourse of modernity that is Western/Eurocentric. Transcultural philosophy offers a multi-perspective and inclusive rather than an exclusive and isolated approach. Transcultural approaches thus aim to overcome a static, immobile, and rigid understanding of "culture" and instead emphasize perspectives of "cultural transformation" that are open and dynamic. The prefix "trans-" in the term "transcultural" indicates not only the transcending of one's own boundaries and positions, but also the (self-)transformation that is crucial not only for the possibility of translation and mutual learning, but also for the creation of new forms of global philosophy. However, a transcultural philoso-

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phy that eliminates the distinction between identity and difference can also prove problematic. Transculturality often creates the illusion that the problem of "identity" can be overcome in a hybrid world without fixed identities and borders.