

Paths to Dialogue:  
Interactions of Eastern and Western Cultures

Ed. H.-C. Günther

**East and West.**  
**Philosophy, ethics, politics**  
**and human rights**

**Band 1**

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# Paths to Dialogue

## Interactions between eastern and western cultures

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## Preface of the Editor

The present volume contains a selection of lectures focusing on the dialogue of Asian and Western cultures, which were given at two conferences in the PR of China, which I co-organized. The first was held in Beijing in 2013 (De Gennaro, Gu, Günther, *Enlightenment ...*), the second in Changsha in 2015 (Cheng, Yamaguchi). Moreover, the volume includes an individual lecture by myself (*Crisis ...*) and an external contribution by Monika Kirloskar-Steinbach.

Müllheim, October 2016

H.-C. Günther





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Ivo De Gennaro

The Way We Speak\*

Preparatory Considerations on the Colloquy of  
European and East Asian Thinking

[...] einiges, das immer noch zu fragen oder zu  
bemerken bleibt bei diesem wunderbarsten worte  
unsrer sprache.\*\*

*Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob und  
Wilhelm Grimm, entry "GE-"*

### *1. Setting the Theme*

A comparative study requires that what is to be compared should  
previously be put on a level with each other. Putting on a level that

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\* This is a substantially revised and expanded version of a paper given at the  
„First International Conference of Comparative Study of China and the West”,  
held at Peking University, Beijing, in July 2013. Thanks to Sara Bassighini for  
copy editing this text.

\*\* “A few things that are still to be asked or remarked with respect to this most  
wonderful word of our language.”

which is to be compared is the presupposition of the comparison. Only what is already in this sense levelled can subsequently be found to be similar or dissimilar. The act of levelling consists in identifying the terms of the comparison so as to constitute these terms as such, that is, as comparable items. The identification itself is achieved by means of an implicit or explicit assumption, or hypothesis. For instance, in order to compare East Asian and European culture, we must first assume a certain concept of culture, thanks to which we can identify, respectively, an “East Asian culture” and a “European culture”. The phenomena that eventually enter the comparison can do so only thanks to the assumption that identifies them as “cultural” phenomena in the first place. While providing the identity of what it determines, and thus laying the ground for a comparison, the identifying term itself (in our example: culture) is not interrogated in its sense, but rather taken as given as the comparison proceeds.

An identifying assumption is the condition of possibility of a comparative study. The identity assures, for the purpose of comparison, that what is to be compared be identical both with itself and with what it is to be compared to. In this manner the identity assures the operative possibility of comparison. An identity that assures an operative possibility is itself an operative identity. The latter is a derivative concept. In fact, it derives from

an original dimension, wherein that which is assumed as a cultural phenomenon appears before eventually reappearing as a comparable item. However, that original dimension is surrogated by the derived identity, which occupies its place with itself and with its space of operative possibilities, for instance the possibility of synchronic or diachronic comparison. As a consequence of that subrogation, the original dimension remains forgotten.

We call the forgotten original dimension that precedes the identifying determination “the Same”. The Same is other than the identical. The latter excludes the former. On the other hand, no matter how definite the exclusion, the Same remains ensconced in its earliness and thus cannot be revoked or unsaid by an identifying shortcut. *The Same is irrevocable, in fact, it is the irrevocable itself.* All thinking is, in the first place, for the sake of the Same. While the Same gathers that which appears in it into the space of a colloquy, what is operatively identified is excluded from entering a colloquy. Having been cut short of its reference to the Same, and reduced to a historically scrutinized matter of fact, the identical can only be computed as to its similarities and dissimilarities with what it is being compared to.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [The following note is rather technical and draws on previous research results; skipping it will not impair the understanding of the remaining text.]

Here we interrogate the condition of possibility of the colloquy of European and East Asian thinking. Because the very notion of that colloquy appears as something vague and remote, and, in its vagueness, such as to interrogate *us* in the first place, we are in no position of interrogating its condition of possibility in a comparative perspective, in which everything constitutive is already settled by way of identifying assumptions. As a consequence, any assumption or hypothesis that sustains our interrogation is not an identifying surrogate of the Same in which the colloquy unfolds. Rather, what we assume is to some extent

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“Absconded” (Ge. *verborgen*, It. *nascosto*) is here heard as a word of thinking. It implies at once the sense of being withdrawn and ensconced in itself; of haltingly withholding itself; of being inconspicuous, ungraspable, and hidden; freeing, refusing, and preserving; attuning, claiming, and puzzling. What is absconded is, in a sense, fugacious, however, absconding is not a fleeing or hiding away of something with regard to something else. In fact, “abscondedness” is said of what is never a given “something” or “someone”: what is absconded ends in the ensconcement of the sameness of the Same. The notions of absconding and absconded apply to what refrains from appearing, insofar as it is, and bears in itself, the free origin of all letting appear. We say that the absconded letting appear is “schismed” (and, in this sense, “different”) from all that appears, in that it is itself the inceptually schisming schism, or the schismatic inception, whose schisming(-itself) grants an appearing in the first place. The schismatic inception *is* the Same itself in its sameness.



analogous to what Plato in his *Politeia* (Book VI) calls a “true hypothesis”. According to Plato, a true hypothesis is a “steppingstone”, or a “springboard”, toward an onset, or inception, which is an-hypothetical, that is, free from hypotheses. A true hypothesis is itself attuned by the an-hypothetical Same, which in the first place interrogates our thinking, and claims its answering endurance for the grounding of its (namely, the Same’s) own truth. Therefore, such hypothesizing is not a way of surrogating the Same with an operative identity, so as to establish an effective ground on which to draw conclusions concerning the identified terms; rather, the hypothesis is a run-up for the leap into the Same, that is, a provisional answer which sets the interrogation up for the leap by which it gets off the hypothetical ground and commits itself to the inceptual word of the Same. In fact, the hypothesis’ truth is *already* the truth of the Same itself, which in its turn is on the verge of swaying freely as the inceptual “being” of that truth, grounded in thinking. In this manner, the Same, too, is a ground, but one that, by virtue of its own grounding, is “off ground” with respect to all hypothetical grounds. As a consequence, we call the ground that the Same of the colloquy itself is, the “off-ground”, while its manner of grounding is, accordingly, an “off-grounding”.

Our initial hypothesis is the following: what is in store for European and East Asian thinking, and asks to be prepared by way

of an interrogation of its condition of possibility, is a colloquy tuned to the inceptual word of the Same to which both European and East Asian thinking, together, belong. “Colloquy”, here, translates the German word *Gespräch*, which, grammatically speaking, is a collective of the noun *Sprache*, formed through the prefix *ge-*. A more common, and ordinarily equivalent, translation of *Gespräch* is “dialogue”. For instance, the question of a possible understanding between different cultures or traditions of thinking is typically addressed in terms of a *Gespräch*, or *Dialog*, or “dialogue”, that may take place between these cultures or traditions. However, in the present context the word *Gespräch* speaks differently, in that in its very speaking the sphere of *Gespräch* scinds itself from, and thus *is* itself a schism with regard to the sphere of *Dialog*.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, in our considerations on the *Gespräch* between European and East Asian thinking, in English we say “colloquy” instead of “dialogue”, in order to mark a

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<sup>2</sup> This is to be understood as follows: the way in which the word *Gespräch* speaks *is* the schisming-itself of the sphere of *Gespräch* with respect to the sphere of *Dialog*.

difference with respect to the dialogical sphere, even though the word “colloquy” does not speak in the same way as *Gespräch*.<sup>3</sup>

The dialogical sphere defines the scope of the thinking and speaking of the philosophical tradition. In this tradition, a dialogue is a speaking (*logos*) that talks-through (*dia*) that which constitutes a being as such, namely its identical being-ground, or identity. Dialogical speaking is gathered on and responsive to identity, while at the same time attempting to gather (that is, to think and, in turn, ground) that identity as such. A derivative form of the identity of the original dialogical sphere is the operative identity which is the basis of a comparative study. The greatness of Humboldt’s comparative study of languages is that, while pertaining to the dialogical sphere, it leaves the identity of language open to the Same that speaks through language itself, though in that sphere the Same cannot say itself in its own truth.

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<sup>3</sup> What is the actual scope of saying “colloquy” instead of “dialogue”? While on the one hand “colloquy” is not merely a terminological marker used for the purpose of establishing or highlighting a given difference, on the other hand the question of the extent to which the same (though not an identical) schisming that is indicated in *Gespräch* is also heard in the word “colloquy”, must for now remain unsettled. In other words, it is yet undecided whether or not “colloquy” is a sufficient translation of *Gespräch*.

On the other hand, according to our hypothesis, the manner of thinking and the relation to language thanks to which an understanding between European and East Asian thinking is possible do not lie within the scope of the dialogical tradition of philosophy. The words *Gespräch* and, tentatively, “colloquy” indicate a thinking and a relation to language that are not dialogical any more, but imply an openness to the origin of language that the dialogical sphere (that is, the sphere of identity) does not admit as such. In what we call *Gespräch*, thinking is claimed and drawn upon by language *itself* and responsive to language *itself* – namely, its original trait – in a way that is precluded to a dialogue, even though in the dialogical tradition we find unsurpassable examples of a speaking that has an ear for language and its genius.

By saying “colloquy” instead of “dialogue” we have already taken a certain path with regard to the “matter” whose condition of possibility we have set out to interrogate. However, given that this “matter”, being a colloquy and not a dialogue, does not pertain to the domain of the hitherto tradition of philosophy, it becomes questionable to what extent the very concept of “condition of possibility” actually applies to what is provisionally hinted at with that name. In fact, “condition of possibility” is the common translation of *Bedingung der Möglichkeit*, a concept Immanuel

Kant introduced into the tradition of philosophy, and therefore a concept that belongs to the sphere in which that tradition unfolds, namely the sphere of identity. Moreover, given the distinction we have made, with regard to European thinking, between a dialogical and a non-dialogical (or, as I would suggest to say, a “colloquial”) thinking, the equivalence of what the word “thinking” implies, respectively, in the phrases “European thinking” and “East Asian thinking” can *a fortiori* not be taken for granted. Finally, the very notions of “European” and “East Asian”, too, are not obvious, given that the geographical or cultural definitions of these notions bear the character of identity, while their “colloquial” meaning is not only as yet not clear and settled, but barely interrogated. Thus, we must conclude that none of the words that compose the formulation of our thematic question – “What is the condition of possibility of the colloquy of European thinking and East Asian thinking?” – can be used without precautions, and that, from the very outset, the path we have taken appears to be strewn with precarious and, possibly, downright insufficient and misleading concepts, that is concepts that preclude a *Gespräch*. Therefore, if our proposed way of interrogation consists in an attempt to bail from the dialogical ground (and its operative derivatives) towards the off-ground of a colloquy attuned by the Same, then, rather than relying on those concepts as operative terms, we must keep these

concepts open for becoming words of the Same, that is words that let us attain the Same that concerns us.

However, a path of interrogation such as the one we have just outlined has already been taken. We know this path as the *Denkweg*, that is the “think-way”, of Martin Heidegger. A think-way is an often clear often obscure way that opens for a thinking and is kept open by that thinking, while it remains attentive to the ways of advertence and attunement that are afforded by the absconded and way-giving concern, or “sake”, by which that thinking is claimed in the first place. On this way, thinking itself becomes a “way of thinking”.

Our own attempt at preparing such a way will find its guiding reference in the *Denkweg* itself, notably in a collection of essays first published in 1959 under the title *On the Way to Language*, and, within that collection, especially in a text that has itself the form of a colloquy, and whose German title reads: “Aus einem Gespräch von der Sprache / Zwischen einem Japaner und einem Fragenden”, that is: “From a Colloquy From Language / Between a Japanese and an Enquirer”.<sup>4</sup> The fact that Heidegger

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<sup>4</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Aus einem Gespräch von der Sprache / Zwischen einem Japaner und einem Fragenden”, in: id., *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, Gesamtausgabe Bd. 12 (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1985), p. 79 sqq. (hereafter quoted as