

# INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY AND TRADITIONALISM: PERSPECTIVES OF THE DIALOGUE OF CULTURES

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**Abstract** This paper explores the potential for synergy between the philosophy of traditionalism and intercultural philosophy. The author reviews the origins and evolution of comparative philosophy, the methodology of which laid the groundwork for the development of intercultural philosophy. Furthermore, the potential for collaboration between the philosophy of traditionalism and intercultural philosophy within the context of an ongoing dialogue of cultures is also examined.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary philosophical scholarship, a growing interest in the *comparative study of diverse cultures and civilisations*, as well as the phenomenon of *intercultural dialogue*, is noticeable. Throughout the history of philosophy, the *dichotomy of East-West* has been considered by various thinkers from antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Modern Age. As a result, various ideas and concepts were shaped, and efforts were made to undertake *comparative cultural studies*. However, comparative philosophy as an independent subset of philosophical research only began to take shape in the late 19th century. The groundwork for this was laid by various philosophical studies (G.Hegel, A.Schopenhauer, F.Nietzsche, etc.), as well as Oriental studies (P.Deussen, T.Colebrooke, F.M.Müller and others). In the 20th century, the formal establishment of comparative philosophy occurred, with P.Masson-Oursel and P.T.Raju as its pioneers. Other prominent scholars in this field include S.Radhakrishnan, F.Youlan, N.Kitaro, M.Iqbal, R.Rorty, among Eastern and Western academics. A unique position among the representatives of comparative philosophy is held by Rene Guenon and his *philosophy of traditionalism*, aimed at criticising the West and advocating for the East. At the close of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, a fundamentally new branch of philosophy was formed on the foundation of comparative philosophy, known as *intercultural philosophy*. Its founders were R.A.Mall,

H.Kimmerle, R.Fornet-Betancourt, and F.M.Wimmer. Unlike comparative philosophy, which pursued a synthesis of cultures, intercultural philosophy declares the equality of all cultures, the impossibility of synthesis, but the necessity of their interaction, the fostering of conditions for intercultural dialogue. In this context, the traditionalism of Rene Guenon stands at the crossroads of comparative and intercultural philosophy, since tradition is the principle on which not only comparison of cultures can be based, but also the establishment of their dialogue, a consideration especially crucial in the context of contemporary globalisation.

## 2. METHODS

In the progression of this research, we utilised methods of comparative analysis, historical analogies, and a systematic approach. The method of *comparative analysis* is divided into gnoseological, logical, methodological, worldview, axiological, and practical elements. The primary purpose of the *gnoseological function* is to gain fresh insights about the objects of comparison; the *logical function* of comparative analysis is centred around instructing the subjects of cognition to observe the principles of formal and dialectical logic; the *methodological function* is dedicated to translating the phenomena and knowledge derived from comparison into tools for addressing practical issues. If the *worldview*

*approach* is perceived as a system of views constructed in the mind of an individual regarding the world in its entirety, influencing their relationship with reality and directions of activity, then the involvement of an individual's worldview in the comparative analysis process becomes evident; comparative analysis is inherently *axiological*, that is, its content comprises an evaluation of the phenomena being compared, in terms of their resemblances and distinctions among each other; comparative analysis truly proves fruitful only when it serves a practical purpose. This is its primary aim. It is accomplished through the *practical function*, established on the foundation of the content, essence, and specific quality of comparative analysis. Therefore, comparative analysis requires its subjects to consider the features that determine the similarities and differences of its objects when viewed in static states. That's on one side. On the flip side, comprehensive comparative analysis necessitates understanding and identifying the similarities and differences of its objects in their changing states, in their perpetual evolution.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Comparative philosophy was constructed on the foundation of various scholars employing the method of comparative analysis in their studies. Therefore, comparison as a methodology was utilised in Chinese philosophy, particularly in late Mohism. F.Yu-lan states that Mozi was Confucius's first adversary, critiquing his philosophy [Fung Yu-lan. (1958) , 49]. This criticism demonstrates the application of the comparative method. Later Mohists defined comparison as "the measurement of quantity" [Alieva Ch.E. (2006), 127], thus forming two streams with different interpretations of these concepts. The first, led by Hui Shi, highlighted the "confluence" of sameness and difference, while the second, headed by Gongsun Long, stressed their "separation". Intriguingly, late Mohist logic, in the context of the comparative method, asserted that only like objects could be compared, and "objects of disparate bases cannot be compared" [Alieva Ch.E. (2006), 132], as the prerequisite for a logical conclusion is the existence of a fundamental similarity. In the ancient Indian philosophical school Nyaya, comparison, or "Upamana", is considered a distinct source of genuine knowledge, alongside perception ("Pratyaksha"), inference ("Anumana"), and testimony ("Shabda") [Chatterji S. (1955), 42]. In the Nyaya system, comparison is targeted at establishing

"a link between an entity and its name or between a term and its precise meaning" [Chatterji S. (1955), 175]. Beyond the Nyaya system, comparison as a source of knowledge is suggested in Mimamsa, where "knowledge through comparison arises when, based on the similarity of the perception of a current object with an object previously perceived, we transition to the understanding that the recalled object resembles the currently perceived one" [Chatterji S. (1955), 176, 268]. With this stance, Mimamsa refutes Nyaya's claim that comparison is a new source of knowledge, as it's merely a logical deduction from previous knowledge and nothing more.

In ancient philosophy, the method of comparison through a mathematical lens is found in Pythagoreanism, where "comparison is primarily a relationship, specifically, a ratio, the mathematical harmony of things, elements of the cosmos" [Alieva Ch.E. (2006), 38]. Additionally, comparison is present in Heraclitus's dialectic in his discourse on the "one and many". In Plato's works, the issue of comparison is examined in the context of his theory of forms [Plato's Timaeus. 2020] and socio-political philosophy, as depicted in the dialogue "Republic" [Plato. Republic2004]. Aristotle, being a historian of philosophy, also used the comparative method in his "Metaphysics", examining the doctrines of the philosophers who came before him [Aristotle. 2002]. He compared animal and human cognition as well as sensory and rational cognition, scrutinised various forms of governmental authority [Aristotle. 2010], and critiqued Plato's theory of forms. It's essential to highlight Aristotle's logic, where focus is given to the analogy through which the general principles of natural entities such as form, deprivation, and matter are understood [Lukanin P.K. 1984].

A notable precursor to comparative philosophy in antiquity is Diogenes Laertius, whose work "Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers" also includes cross-cultural comparison motifs. Specifically, Diogenes wrote, "Philosophy, as some believe, began for the first time among the barbarians: namely, the Persians had magicians, the Babylonians and Assyrians had the Chaldeans, the Indians had the gymnosophists, the Celts and Gauls had the so-called druids and semnofeis" [Diogenes Laertius. 1986, 55].

During the Middle Ages in Europe, there was a crisis in science and philosophy, but in the East, culture flourished. Here, we can observe comparative philosophy themes in Al-Farabi's works, where he compared the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, and the

Neoplatonists [Al-Farabi. 1972], attempting to synthesise them. Moreover, Farabi advanced the method of commentary, a part of hermeneutics, which is inseparably tied to the methodology of comparative philosophy. The comparative method is also present in the work "India" by Abu Rayhan Biruni, where the scholar highlighted the shared aspects of Indian, Ancient Greek, Christian, and Sufi philosophies [Biruni. 1995, 60].

In the contemporary era, we witness an upsurge in the discourse of comparison, coupled with the study of various cultures. This is exemplified in Voltaire's philosophy of history [Voltaire. 1868] and Ch.Montesquieu's geographical determinism [Montesquieu. 2018]. Interest in Eastern culture is also notable in the philosophy of G.Hegel, who established that the East represents the "infancy of history" [Hegel G.V.F. 1993, 253], exemplifying a Eurocentric perspective. The work of philosophers such as A.Schopenhauer and F.Nietzsche was integral to the institutionalisation of comparative philosophy, given their exploration of Western and Eastern comparisons in their work. The formation of comprehensive comparative philosophy in the 20th century can be attributed to thinkers like P.Masson-Oursel and P.T.Raju, who emphasised that the scope of comparative philosophy encompasses general history and culture [Raju P.T. 1962, 283]. P.Masson-Oursel suggested that the primary methodology of comparative philosophy is analogy, whilst acknowledging that "no truth exists that is not relative" [Masson-Oursel P. 1926, 37, 39]. From this perspective, L.Skof characterises comparative philosophy as a "universal positive science of analogy" [Skof L. 2008, 123]. Whereas P.Masson-Oursel envisages the methodology of comparative philosophy as an analogy, P.Raju shifts his approach towards cultural synthesis [Raju P.T. 1962, 288]. It's intriguing that future discussions at the Hawaiian Conference on Comparative Philosophy and in the publications of the "Philosophy of East and West" journal would debate the feasibility of cultural synthesis. Ch.Moore proposed the concept of a "global synthesis of philosophies" [Moore Ch. 2021, P.1-14]. S. Radhakrishnan and J.Santayana countered attempts at "cultural amalgamation", advocating for the preservation of each culture's distinctiveness and intrinsic values. J.Dewey dismissed the notion of cultural homogeneity and the reduction of East to West, but simultaneously noted the presence of intercultural connections in the historical process [Dewey J., 1951, 5].

In contemporary comparative philosophy, the discourse on cultural synthesis continues. A.Chakrabarti and R.Weber, discussing "comparative philosophy without borders", underline the need to transcend the foundation of a specific culture or philosophy to "facilitate penetration, if not fusion" [Chakrabarti A., 2016, P.1]. M.Siderits presents the notion of "fusion philosophy", viewing it as a fresh style of philosophical thought that leans on the resources of various philosophical traditions for enhanced intercultural comprehension [Siderits M. 2015, 3]. However, both Siderits's "fusion philosophy" and the concept of Chakrabarti and Weber inevitably lead to a synthesis of cultures. Within the discourse on cultural synthesis in the sphere of comparative philosophy, a new direction – intercultural philosophy – is evolving. F.Wimmer asserts that it is "the aspiration to articulate the numerous and frequently marginalised voices of philosophy within their respective cultural contexts and thereby engender an equitable discussion, a polylogue" [Wimmer F.M. 2002]. This suggests that intercultural philosophy, via comparison, strives for a dialogue of cultures rather than their synthesis. The fundamental standpoint of intercultural philosophy, as R.A.Mall outlines, includes the concept of "unity without uniformity" [Polushina L.V. 2010, 135] and the principle of cognitive modesty [Stepanyants M.T. 2020, 47].

Hsueh-I Chen, contemplating the notion of "intercultural", highlights that the prefix "inter" here signifies "what is in-between" [Hsueh-I Chen. 2014, 72-73]. From this, it can be inferred that intercultural philosophy is situated between cultures, not above them. Broadly speaking, as per R.A.Mall, every philosophy should be intercultural by its nature, necessitating tolerant pluralism when studying another culture and during intercultural interaction [Mall R.A. 2000, 1]. Nevertheless, R.A.Mall distinguishes between multiculturalism and interculturalism. According to the philosopher, multiculturalism is merely an illusion, an attempt to maintain "cultural purity", despite the fact that no culture exists in absolute isolation or overlaps perfectly with another culture [Mall R.A. 2000, 14]. Consequently, interculturality reflects the interaction of cultures, the need for their coexistence, and intercultural dialogue. F.Wimmer, in turn, expands the notion of intercultural dialogue to an intercultural polylogue [22].

Rene Guenon, a notable figure in comparative philosophy, explores the commonalities and

disparities between Eastern and Western cultures. Guenon posits that ancient philosophy owes a great deal to Eastern thought [Guenon R. 1945, 28]. Yet, "official Orientalism" views the "Greek miracle" solely as a product of Western civilisation [27, 297], negating the role of intercultural relations with the East. Guenon identifies a unique aspect of the contemporary West, describing this civilisation as possessing a "purely material character" [Guenon R. 2003, 82], embodied in secularisation, or the marginalisation of religion from public and personal life, as well as the pursuit of material prosperity. Conversely, the East maintains its spiritual and religious culture, setting it apart from the West. Guenon characterises the East through three cultures: Chinese, Hindu, and Islamic [Guenon R. 2003, 22], which coincide with each other and preserve their intrinsic traditions. For Guenon, tradition is most vividly demonstrated in religion, since "everything authentically traditional is shaped by the influence of a 'non-human' element" [Guenon R. 2004, 19]. Therefore, the safeguarding of religion equates to the preservation of tradition. However, in the West, the onset of the Renaissance and Reformation heralded a profound spiritual deterioration, "a severance from the traditional spirit" [Guenon R. 2003, 19-20]. As a result, Guenon observes a barrier, even conflict, between Eastern and Western peoples [Guenon R. 2003, 21]. Intriguingly, Guenon's philosophy leans towards the past, for it was in the epoch of antiquity that cultural unity existed, underpinned by a unified primordial tradition. Generally, Guenon perceives the historical process as a systematic involution [Karimov R., Bekbaev R. 2022, 201], a regression from tradition to anti-tradition. Nonetheless, this process is uneven, as while the West has forfeited the tradition, local traditions (such as Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism, Sufism, etc.) persist in the East.

The traditionalist philosophy of Rene Guenon, contrasting the East and the West, uncovers fundamental divergences between them and deduces that contemporary Western civilisation is in crisis, whereas Eastern culture perseveres in its traditional state. Guenon details a confrontation between the East and West, instigated by the West. But how can intercultural dialogue occur under such circumstances? To tackle this question, one needs to consider the concept of tradition. Eastern and Western philosophies have their distinct traditions of thought, which can be strikingly similar or fundamentally different. However, pantheism might be identified as a key similarity. Despite being a European, Guenon converted to Islam at the age of 24

in 1910, adopting the name "Abdel Wahed Yahia" [Sedgwick M. 2004, 8]. He later joined the Shadhili Sufi tariqa and became a sheikh. F.Schuon suggests that Guenon's transition from Catholicism to Islam was a personal decision, as the Christian tradition was lost to him, and the Hindu tradition was inaccessible due to the caste system [Schuon F. 1985, 1]. Nonetheless, Guenon's personal choice serves as an example of cultural integration. In Sufism, Guenon found common ground with Hinduism, Taoism, ancient metaphysics, and Christianity, where pantheistic tendencies also exist. For example, Guenon notes that the "perfect man" in Sufism ("al-insan al-kamil") aligns with the highest state of man in Taoism ("cheun-jen") [Guenon R. 2003, 36]. Intriguingly, Biruni also emphasised the pantheistic similarities across different cultures [Biruni. 1995, 60]. Moreover, it's worth noting that Sufism became the conduit through which traditionalism proliferated not only throughout Europe but also in the Americas. For instance, M.Sedgwick highlights that traditionalism, facilitated by Sufism, permeated South America and influenced the literary and artistic landscape of Argentina in the 1920s [Sedgwick, M]. Hence, one can observe the interaction of Eastern and Western pantheistic philosophy and, consequently, intercultural connections.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Contemporary globalisation processes task philosophy with devising methods of interaction between the East and West, fostering an environment conducive to their communication and dialogue. Consequently, comparative philosophy has emerged as a philosophical branch that, through the juxtaposition of diverse cultures, seeks commonalities to facilitate future intercultural dialogue. However, the methodology of comparative philosophy hinges on cultural synthesis, which is evident in the concepts proposed by P.Raju and Ch.Moore, and the investigations of A.Chakrabarti and R.Weber, as well as in M.Siderits' "fusion of philosophies". Drawing from the assertions of P.Masson-Oursel and grounded in comparative philosophy, a new area of philosophical enquiry—intercultural philosophy—has been established. This perspective highlights the necessity not for the synthesis of cultures, but for their interaction, thereby refuting the possibility of the Eastern civilisation assimilating to the Western one. Within the comparative philosophical framework, Rene Guenon's traditionalism contrasts the East and the

West, labelling the latter as a crisis-stricken, "material" civilisation. Simultaneously, traditionalism envisages the potential for an intercultural dialogue between the East and West through pantheistic philosophical concepts, which essentially bear a similar character. This lays the groundwork for a possible interaction between traditionalism and intercultural philosophy.

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