**Transcendence and Immanence in Intercultural Philosophy**

**Participant Abstracts**

**William Franke,** *Classical Chinese Thought and the Sense of Transcendence*

A crucial focal point in debates today on intercultural philosophy is the question of transcendence versus immanence. Particularly with regard to Chinese philosophy, Western scholars have very often stressed the lack of transcendence and the inappropriateness of importing Western metaphysical concepts into this realm of thought. However, the exclusion of transcendence has become problematic, too, in recent research. Itself a typically Western maneuver, such an exclusionary gesture contradicts the holistic thinking characteristic of Chinese classical thought. I employ negative theology as a method of mediating between the two traditions without totalizing either one but rather opening each to the other and to the unlimited possibilities for thinking in between all definable paradigms.

**Roger T. Ames**, *Indeterminacy, Apophatism, and Emergence in Chinese Natural Cosmology*

William Franke in his new publication, *A Philosophy of the Unsayable*, stakes out a position for apophatic thinking between the sometimes shrill dialectic of what he describes as a kind of radical secularized immanentalism on the one hand, and the Anglo-Saxon and Continental resurgence of a Radical Orthodoxy on the other. Hegel in the introduction to his *Encyclopaedia Logic* observes that one of the most difficult problems for evaluating philosophical positions is the question of where they begin. Secularized immanentialism in embracing Nietzsche’s death of God rejects utterly transcendentalism and the “theo-ontological thinking” that grounds it. Franke avers that “Starting from the world in its actuality—*this* world as it reveals itself in human life and society without externally imposed metaphysical and a fortiori theological constructions—is the bottom line for secular theology.” (p. 273) Radical Orthodoxy on the other hand insists that “it is necessary to start from theological revelation as expressed in the Christian vision and its narrative in order to understand the world—and not the other way round.” (p. 273) Franke argues that while both positions tend to reject apophatic thinking, apophatism is in fact the common root or “radicality” that they share.

How can Chinese cosmology join this conversation? In the absence of ontological commitments, the radical transcendence/immanence dualism of Western theology has been neither a positive nor a negative possibility for an emergent, processual Chinese cosmology. But indeterminacy is a major factor in the primacy of vital relationality that serves as its starting point, whether it is the *wu* 無–forms that are defining of optimal relationality in Daoism or the role of deference (*shu* 恕) in Confucian role ethics and the project of cultivation for relationally-constituted persons. What then is the relationship between this radical indeterminacy and the radicality of apophatic thinking?

**Karl-Heinz Pohl**, *Immanent Transcendence in the Chinese Tradition – Thoughts about a Chinese Controversy*

The concepts of God in Eastern teachings are hardly comparable with those of the Abrahamic religions, that is, speaking about God is not an issue in the Chinese tradition. In Confucianism, a metaphysical connection to a transcendent "Heaven" (*tian*), responsible for the ethical functioning of the universe, does play a role. But Confucius explicitly refrained from discoursing on this topic, hence we find little in Confucian literature that discusses the nature of Heaven. In recent neo-Confucian discourse, the topic "immanent transcendence" (*neizai chaoyue*) has become an issue, but this is to be understood quite differently from its treatment in modern Western philosophy, such as Husserl or Bloch. Rather, the idea behind it is: Although there is a supreme good in Confucianism (attributed to a transcendent Heaven as the metaphysical origin of a fundamentally ethically good human nature), this highest good is not considered to be outside the ways of man but immanent. That is, it manifests itself in the fulfilment of interpersonal obligations or in the practice of the virtue of humanity (*ren*). The paper explores the controversy that arose about the idea of “immanent transcendence” in Chinese (i.e in the writings of Yu Yingshi) and Western Sinological circles.

**Hans-Georg Moeller,** Niklas Luhmann on Immanence and Transcendence

In the context of his general theory of society, the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann (1927-1998) has identified the distinction between immanence and transcendence as the basic code of religion as a social system. According to Luhmann, modern society can be conceived of as a complex whole of various “functionally differentiated” communication systems. From this perspective the conceptual pair immanence/transcendence does not indicate an ontological or metaphysical division, but rather a communicative or social construct which enables the formation and evolution of particular social structures and corresponding semantics. The presentation will focus primarily on outlining Luhmann’s understanding of religion as a specific social system operating with the code immanence/transcendence and its implications for the role of religion in contemporary society. It will also discuss the questions if the immanence/transcendence code is applicable to Chinese religions or if it betrays a certain “Eurocentrism” of Luhmann’s theory.

**John W. P. Phillips,** *A Telephone to the Beyond*

This paper is concerned with the motifs of penalty, credit, and death, as well as the telephone, and with a comparison of a classical conception of transcendence with the alternative proposed by Levinas. Maintaining a sense of what is at stake by outlining the structure of immanence and transcendence as established by Husserl, my aim is to open these questions towards discussions of the death penalty throughout Derrida’s works but particularly in the late seminars.

**Hans-Rudolf Kantor**, *Emptiness of Transcendence – The Inconceivable and Invisible in Chinese Buddhist Thought*

The present paper deals with those Chinese Buddhist sources which develop a view on emptiness (*kong*空) that contravenes the ontological sense of transcendence. According to Mahāyāna thought in China, “emptiness” denies the notion of intrinsically existing things, which conveys a sense of ontological indeterminacy. This further conforms to the insight that the conceptualizing manner in which we conceive of the nature of reality does not reach beyond the reifications, constructions, and unreality that usually mark our epistemic-propositional references. Here, ‘ontological indeterminacy’ addresses a type of falsehood which ineradicably shapes the manner in which we relate to our world, and thus highlights the ontological status of an illusiveness which constitutes the way we exist. Hence, emptiness implies a sense of being, evading and defying our conventional awareness, precisely due to the falsehood implicit in all references to our world. To understand the true sense of emptiness is to realize the existential relevance of such unreality and thus to differentiate (illusory) existence from realness. This entails the sense of ontological indeterminacy expressed by means of paradoxical language. The present paper discusses, in particular, Seng Zhao’s (僧肇374-414) and Fazang’s (法藏643-712) approaches to that sense of emptiness of transcendence.

**Nahum Brown**, Transcendent and Immanent Conceptions of Perfection in Leibniz and Hegel

Hegel’s *Science of Logic* includes a complex modal ontology. This ontology culminates in what Hegel calls “absolute necessity,” the thesis that nothing can be otherwise because all possibilities are already included in existence. At first glance, the term absolute necessity associates Hegel with the kind of Spinozistic necessitarianism that Leibniz would whole-heartedly reject. By claiming that this is the best of all possible worlds, Leibniz consciously distinguishes himself from the fatal determinism that he attributes to Spinoza, where every possibility is already actual. This paper offers a defense of Hegel’s modal ontology by exploring the contingency consequences of absolute necessity. I argue that by forming a dialectic between necessity and contingency, Hegel saves himself from the position attributed to Spinoza and also presents an alternative conception for why this actual world is the best of all possible worlds. Leibniz’s conception of perfection can be described as transcendent in the sense that God chooses the most perfect world from an infinite series of incompossible worlds, which are merely projections in God’s mind and do not enjoy the status of existence. In contrast to Leibniz, Hegel’s modal ontology offers an immanent-transcendent conception of perfection. This world is perfect because every possibility already exists within it. Hegel nevertheless avoids the threat of Spinoza by claiming that although all incompossible worlds exist immanently within this world, they are not all immediately accessible but must be produced from necessity.

**Antonia Pont,** *An Exemplary Operation – articulating the practice of Shikantaza via Deleuze*

In the Soto Zen tradition, shikantaza, or 'just sitting' is the cornerstone of practice. This paper argues that 'just sitting', due to its sparseness, is *the* exemplary mode of the latter wherein practice-*in-itself* can be observed. Involving as it does, and most transparently, two main criteria of practice, 'just sitting' serves to clarify the very peculiar operations of practice more generally. These can then be applied to other examples of practice (golf, bee-keeping, serious music appreciation, and so on) to propose a general theory of 'strange doing': that is, of practice-in-itself. In the aftermath of Gilles Deleuze's work in *Difference and Repetition*, this paper argues that we can now propose an account of why practice (a kind of repetition) courts transformation (subtractive difference) while at the same time founding a new kind of stability that eschews dependence on regimes of identity.

**Fabian Heubel**, Critique as Exercise: On Negative Dialectics and Materialistic Metaphysics

This paper takes its start from the remark by Jürgen Habermas that negative dialectics is nothing more than a kind of (spiritual) exercise. In contrast, I propose a re-reading of Theodor W. Adorno’s conception of critique from a perspective that mainly has been opened up by Michel Foucault’s work on aesthetics of existence and self-cultivation. However, Foucault could only locate the ethical significance of ascetic practices in an aesthetic freedom of self-transgression. The normative content of negative dialectics as an exercise also arises from an interpretation of freedom. But the aesthetic exercise emerging thereby is nourished by a paradigm of transformative subjectivity, which is characterized by an aporetic communication between the subject of identity and non-identity of the subject with itself. Negative Dialectics as a way of cultivation thus is inextricably linked to the experience of the “failure of culture”. This leads to Adorno’s “meditations on metaphysics” and to the question how his idea of a materialistic, experience-based metaphysics opens up interesting perspectives to rethink the relation between immanence and transcendence.

**Mario Wenning**, The Fate of Transcendence in Postsecular Societies

There are good reasons to expect that modern societies, East and West, will continue to be shaped by an increase of religious, spiritual and secular worldviews, practices and forms of life. What consequences can be drawn from this unprecedented condition? How does the acknowledgment of irreducible religious and nonreligious diversity transform membership and experience in these societies? Rather than simply accommodating religion within the modern state, the version of postsecularism put forward calls for a productive engagement and mutual critique between immanent and absolute conceptions of transcendence.