



Heidegger and Intercultural Philosophy

Heidegger's work covers a broad range of different philosophical themes and while he is principally known for *Being and Time* his thought extends well beyond this text. The inter-cultural focus in Heidegger's writings centres on the possibility of dialogue between the West and the 'Eastasian world' (*ostasiatische Welt*) that is discussed in Heidegger's later works, notably 'A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer'. The dialogue should be understood in the context of Heidegger's later thought, particularly his concerns about technology and nihilism, which he sees as emerging from the western tradition of thought.

Heidegger never defines the 'Eastasian world': However, considering Heidegger's conception of 'world' in his other works, primarily the 'Greek World' in his 'Origin of the Work of Art', it can be inferred that the 'Eastasian world' is not simply a geographical term, but is rather based on a tradition of history, thought and art, Chinese and Japanese ways of thinking including Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, as well as senses of the sacred, such as Shinto and Chinese folk religion. These can be inferred to be foundational to the 'Eastasian world', just as Heidegger sees Greek philosophy as foundational to the western world. Heidegger's interest specifically in Daoism is principally attested to by Paul Xiao Shiyi a visiting scholar from the republic of China who, working with Heidegger in 1946, attempted to translate the Dao De Jing. Heidegger also encountered Buddhism through his meetings with the Kyoto School philosophers Nishitani Keiji and Tanabe Hajime. For further information on Heidegger's various encounters with East Asian thinkers see *Heidegger's Hidden Sources* by Reinhardt May.

Heidegger further links world with language, which he sees as fundamental to the disclosure of the world. The problem of translation is critical to 'A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer', with Heidegger being particularly concerned about the use of words taken from the western metaphysical tradition to interpret Eastasian notions. His concern is not merely that such translations might fail to understand Eastasian thought, but more significantly there is the danger of imposing western meanings onto non-western traditions. In 'A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer' the focus is on *iki*, a Japanese sensibility relating to life and art, which he is keen to avoid interpreting in western aesthetic terminology. This Heideggerian problem of interpretation by implication extends to other Eastasian terminology, notably to Laozi's Dao, which Heidegger discusses in 'The Nature of Language' (see Heidegger 1971b, 92). By highlighting this problem of translation Heidegger emphasises the limited capacity of western thought to understand non-western conceptions and as such radically rejects the Hegelian position that western thought can claim privileged access to understanding non-western traditions. This does not mean he rejects the possibility of dialogue between the Eastasian world and the West, but rather he holds that any such dialogue, in order to be truly a dialogue must be aware of this basic danger of imposing meaning.

This relates to Europeanisation (*Europäisierung*), which is a central concern in ‘A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer’. While the term Europeanisation was used by Husserl to imply the positive spread of western philosophy, for Heidegger it is an unambiguously negative term associated with the marginalisation or appropriation of non-western traditions that prevents the possibility of a real encounter. Hence Heidegger states the ‘Europeanization of man and of the earth attacks at the source everything that is of an essential nature’ (Heidegger 1971a: 16). ‘A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer’ is an attempt to resist this process, which Heidegger associates with the Hegelian view of history as the ascent of European reason.

The text ends, however, inconclusively with the claim that they have ‘tried to take some steps along the course’ (Heidegger 1971a: 54). What Heidegger aims to do is not to provide answers to the questions of the figure of the inquirer, but rather to lay the foundation for a future, further dialogue. Both the Japanese and the inquirer talk about dialogue as that which ‘endures’ (ibid.). This ties in with Heidegger’s claim that his dialogue with the Greek world stands as ‘the precondition of the inevitable dialogue with the East Asian World’ (Heidegger 1977b: 158). Thus while Heidegger’s dialogue with the Eastasian world remains a relatively overlooked aspect of Heidegger’s thought, often being marginalised by commentators who are more likely to focus on his interest in Pre-Socratic Greece, his later thought can be read as preparation for this dialogue that is yet to come. The question that Heidegger’s work leaves us with is therefore how to continue this dialogue. It is conceivable that the Heideggerian foundation might be extended to other worlds encompassing possible dialogues between Indian and African Worlds.

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