

AN INTERPRETATION OF HEIDEGGER'S DIALOGUE
WITH EASTERN THOUGHT

by

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A thesis submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of Philosophy
Memorial University of Newfoundland

December, 1997

St. John's

Newfoundland



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0-612-34183-6

Abstract

This thesis is an investigation of the significance of Heidegger's dialogue with Eastern thought. I attempt to show that this dialogue is primarily concerned with a unique subject matter, namely, overcoming the forgetfulness of Being. The forgetfulness of Being, characterized by Heidegger as the essence of Western metaphysics, has become the destiny of the world in the form of global technologization. As basically non-metaphysical, traditional Eastern thought can exemplify the consequences of the "end of philosophy" or the "overcoming of metaphysics". However, I argue that Heidegger's dialogue with the East is not meant to seek an alternative to Western philosophy, but to bring about a critical reflection of both Western and Eastern thought in regard to their different ways of "forgetfulness of Being". My discussion throughout the thesis focuses on the question how Being in the primordial sense, which transformed into a metaphysical concept in Western philosophy, vanished in the "ontological indifference" of Eastern thought from the very start. The linguistic comparison of both Western languages and Chinese, and the discussion of two major philosophical notions in Heidegger and Eastern thought - "the nothing" and "releasement" - make it plain that the true meaning of Being and of ontological difference is not only covered by Western metaphysics, but also dissolved in the distinctively non-metaphysical thinking of the East.

Acknowledgements

I want first of all to thank my mentor, Professor Peter Harris, who devoted so much time and energy in the attempt to teach me how to write and think philosophically, and offered warm and patient advice that made possible to bring this thesis to its final form. My thanks also go to Professor Peter Trnka, from whom I have learned much in both writing and thinking, and whose constructive criticism and suggestions helped me to improve this thesis. I would like to express my gratitude to Professor James Bradley for insistently demanding clarity, consistency and philosophical rigour. Professor Thompson deserves credit for giving me much encouragement. I am grateful to Professor John Scott for commenting on a draft of the second chapter. I want to thank Professor Welsh for his generosity of being my external examiner. I also wish to thank the School of Graduate Studies for awarding me fellowships during the 1996-97 terms. Last but not least I thank my wife Wei for her unfailing support and for her insight on the matter of inter-cultural interpretation which helped to developed the ideas in this thesis. To her this thesis is dedicated with gratitude and love.

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Introduction

The main issue of this thesis is the Heideggerian attempt to seek the way to “future thinking” through a meaningful dialogue with Eastern thought. The “future thinking” (*Das künftige Denken*), according to Heidegger, is a planetary concern, a world building, which as the response to the threat of the global dominance of technology can give rise to a new historical destiny. I want to show in this thesis that Heidegger’s dialogue with Eastern thought makes this fundamental concern in Heidegger’s thinking rather explicit. I argue that the “future thinking” as beyond the difference between East and West is in fact grounded in Heidegger’s understanding of the primordial meaning of Christian theology which for Heidegger is neither “Eastern” nor “Western”.

Taking its origin in the Western philosophical tradition, Heidegger’s thinking moves at the limits of this tradition and tries to step out of it to encounter the kind of thinking that is entirely outside the “history of Being”. For Heidegger, the East is to some extent the antithesis of the West, and Eastern thinking, as basically non-metaphysical and of course non-Western, can exemplify the consequences of the “end of philosophy” or the “overcoming of metaphysics”. It is certainly true that Heidegger’s personal interest in Eastern thought, and particularly Chinese thought, lies in that fact that, as Jean-François Mattéi points out, “Chinese thought presents rather unexpected analogies with the secret intuition of the Heideggerian path.”¹ However, what the “future thinking” concerns is not the alternative to, or the substitute for, Western philosophy but rather the attainment of a

place that is beyond the duality and difference between the East and the West. This might offer the possibility of a discussion adapted to the situation of global technologization.

To overcome metaphysics, for Heidegger, is ultimately to overcome the forgetfulness of Being, or the forgetfulness of the ontological difference. Heidegger's dialogue with Eastern thought bears a twofold task: it is not only a rethinking of the Western philosophical tradition, but also a critical reflection on Eastern thought. The latter, though never becoming the principle concern of Heidegger's thinking, is an important hint afforded by the Heideggerian attempt at planetary construction. Overcoming metaphysics, understood as the deconstruction of metaphysical thinking, does not necessarily lead to recovering from the forgetfulness of Being, characterized by Heidegger as the essence of nihilism, allowing us to stand in the nearness of Being. I argue that the non-metaphysical thinking of the East, as in some sense opposed to Western metaphysics, is nevertheless another version of the forgetfulness of Being. If Heidegger's call for future thinking lies beyond the duality of East and West, it must be conditioned by the ontological critique of both Western and Eastern traditions, the one as the eclipse of the ontological difference and the other as the abandonment of the ontological difference respectively. Although Heidegger constantly denies the theological significance of his ontology, I shall argue that his fundamentally Christian perspective becomes more evident and striking when his non-metaphysical thinking is compared with the equally non-metaphysical thinking of the East. To a large extent, "the West" understood by Heidegger is distinctively Greek, and the primordial Christian world view for Heidegger is something beyond the East and the West. His rethinking of the question of Being in terms of kairological temporality and

eschatological historicity,² and his analogical treatment of the Christian motifs, reflect the substantial Christian ground of his thinking. This ground, for Heidegger, also sustains a meaningful dialogue between East and West. In other words, I argue that the influence of Christian theology is still to be found and is indeed of crucial importance in understanding the difference between Heidegger and Eastern thought.

In the first chapter, I will discuss the legitimacy of such a dialogue. If the dialogue is possible and meaningful, it must be clarified on two levels: (1) The meaning of dialogue in general; (2) The peculiarity of the East-West dialogue. Opposed to the “transcendental pretense”³ and the pragmatic “trick”,⁴ dialogue presupposes the Other, it takes place in the I-Thou relationship, involving listening and silence. Since, according to Heidegger, the East and the West presumably live in different language houses, a dialogue between them is more complicated in that it involves a different understanding of the nature of language. However, Heidegger’s conviction of the possibility of a genuine East-West encounter is grounded on his basic idea of the pre-ontological and pre-linguistic understanding of Being, the “single source” that wells up in the different traditions.

Taking up the notion that language is “the house of Being”, I shall undertake a relatively detailed linguistic comparison of both Western and Eastern languages in chapter 2. In this chapter, I will compare Western languages in general (represented by Greek and German) and Eastern languages (mainly Chinese) with regard to the grammatical opposition of inflection and non-inflection. On the common ground of the hermeneutic as-structure - the pre-ontological and pre-linguistic understanding of Being - Western

languages, defined by Heidegger as basically metaphysical languages, have transformed the hermeneutic as-structure into the apophantic as-structure,⁵ and thus gave rise to the metaphysical understanding of the ontological difference. The Chinese language, on the other hand, took the opposite road; not only has it eliminated the “natural” tendency toward the metaphysical dyad of Being and beings, but also erased the primordial understanding of ontological difference, which as Heidegger maintains, underlies the nature of all languages.

In chapter 3, I will conduct a Heideggerian dialogue between East and West on the notion of “the nothing”. Given the linguistic determination of the concept of Being which is peculiar to Western philosophy, the access to a dialogue between East and West cannot be found in Being, but in its opposite, i.e. “the nothing”. Semantically, “the nothing” can be either the negation of Being, or the negation of beings. Its free move between these two senses might enable us to overcome linguistic constraints and hence to provide the field in which a dialogue can be effective and successful. Heidegger’s introduction of the nothing in his thinking of Being is in fact meant to “deconstruct” the metaphysical understanding of Being and thus release it from the context of Western philosophical discourse. To a large extent, Heidegger’s thought on the nothing has much in common with the Eastern idea of *wu* (translated as “nothing”, or “nothingness”). The most striking similarity between them is that both are considered as not deriving from the negation of Being. The mutual dependence and sometimes even the identification of Being and the nothing no doubt approximate the Eastern way of thinking *yu* (something) and *wu* (nothing). Such an Eastern tendency in Heidegger’s thought culminates in his affirmation of the paradoxical nature of

Being, which tends to dissolve Being altogether. For Eastern thought, there is no need to pose the idea of Being in addition to that of beings (something, *yu*) and nothing (*wu*), for Being can be no more than an empty, useless assumption. However, Heidegger's insistence on the ontological difference, the difference between Being and beings, makes it clear that the nothing is the "not" between Being and beings and the meaning of Being is more than the relation between beings and nothing as in Eastern thought. His analogical appropriation of the theological notion of the nothing as referring to God Himself in the sense of "wholly other" than beings (creatures), keeps him far from the leap into the abandoning of Being and of the ontological difference.

The increasing awareness of the indispensable dimensions, especially the divine dimension, of Being in the later Heidegger, shows us clearly the incommensurability of Heidegger's "nothing" and the Eastern *wu*. Although Being for Heidegger is unambiguously not God, and the Heideggerian ontology is not Christian theology, his stress on the divine dimension of Being still suggests a possible link between the question of Being and the question of God. I will not develop a discussion on this intriguing and fascinating problem in this thesis. It is so important that it needs a rather extensive and detailed study under another title. What I want to show is that this link can be disclosed explicitly when Heidegger's elaboration of Being and the nothing is compared with Eastern thought.

In the final chapter, I will discuss Heidegger's notion of releasement in regard to its affinity to the Eastern idea of *wu wei* (no action). Releasement (*Gelassenheit*) is described by Heidegger as primarily an attitude of man toward the world, especially the world

dominated by modern technology. Heidegger borrows this term from Meister Eckhart but strips it of the theological significance which the term originally bears. In emphasizing its character as belonging to the nature of thinking, and hence to the relation of Being and nothing, Heidegger moves close to the Eastern idea of *wu wei* (no action) which concerns *yu* (beings, or something) and *wu* (nothing). Heidegger draws a distinction between two kinds of thinking, the calculative and the meditative, which parallels the distinction between philosophy and thinking in the announcement of “the end of philosophy and the task of thinking”. Since, inasmuch as Heidegger insists on the Western nature of philosophy, he tends to regard Eastern thought as basically belonging to thinking rather than philosophy (as the synonym of metaphysics). Since Heidegger defines calculative thinking as essentially a kind of willing, or the “will to power”, releasement for him is to be understood as no-will, or more precisely beyond will and no-will. But to attain such no-will, it is necessary at first to deconstruct the self as *ego cogito*. As a matter of fact, the fundamental ontology in *Being and Time* is an attack on the Cartesian ego and Kantian transcendental subjectivity. But it is still trapped in a certain kind of transcendentalism from which the later Heidegger tries to move away. Although it is arguable whether the meditative thinking the later Heidegger proposes is not a transcendental thinking, the later Heidegger tends to dissolve the self even more radically than he does in *Being and Time* and hence approximates to the Eastern, particularly Zen’s, way of destructing the self (no-self). Nevertheless Heidegger does not make the final Zen leap that could lead to the total abandonment of the notion of Dasein -- the abandonment of the “Da” as the “right place” of Being’s revelation. Although Heidegger sees the forgetfulness and the recollection of

Being as historical events of Being itself, rather than human deeds, he still appeals to the poet, “the most mortal among mortals” as decisive for a turn in the world history. The distinction drawn by Heidegger between the thinker (not philosopher) and the poet when he claims that “The thinker utters Being. The poet names what is holy” (*EB*, p.360) But this claim is often complemented by Heidegger’s constant stress on the intimate relation between the thinker and the poet. Both of them are committed to the same task. Meditative thinking is close to poetic thinking in that the “matter of thinking” as Being contains an indispensable dimension which, however, only the poet can discern. The uniqueness of the poet, as something different from the thinker is that he stands in the nearness to Being in which Being discloses itself as the holy. Thus what Heidegger calls for by the name of thinking (meditative) is rather a thinking that concerns Being in respect to its divine dimension, or the holy. This constructive aspect of thinking which Heidegger constantly dwells on in relation to “building” and “dwelling” is the ultimate goal of the overcoming of metaphysics. It finds no echo in the non-metaphysical world of the East.

It is my conviction that the development of a dialogue between East and West can shed enormous light on the Heideggerian issue of overcoming the forgetfulness of Being, and the overcoming of nihilism understood in a rather broad sense.

Notes:

- ¹ Dominique Janicaud and Jean-François Mattéi: *Heidegger from Metaphysics to Thought*, trans. Michael Gengre, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 1995, p.128.
- ² Tillich distinguishes five interpretations of history: (1) Chinese Tao doctrine; (2) the Indian Brahma doctrine; (3) the Greek nature doctrine; (4) late-European life doctrine; and (5) the Christian doctrine of Kairos. They can be reduced to two main types: the non-historical and the historical. Only the Christian doctrine of Kairos, according to Tillich, is the historical interpretation of history. Cf. Paul Tillich: *The Protestant Era*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1948.
- ³ Robert Solomon uses this term to designate the universalist impulse associated with Western rationality which, however, is paradoxically the expression of the Western provincialism. See Robert Solomon: *The Bully Culture: Enlightenment, Romanticism, and the Transcendental Pretense 1750-1850*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 1993.
- ⁴ According to Rorty, “the other” in any dialogue is nothing other than that which can be used to express ourselves. See Chapter 1 p. 15 of this thesis.
- ⁵ See “hermeneutic as-structure” and “apophantic as-structure” in Glossary.

Chapter One

Dialogue or Language Game: Heidegger's Encounter with the East

One of the most intriguing and enigmatic issues in Heidegger's lifelong philosophical project is his lengthy engagement in the dialogue with Eastern thought.¹ No doubt, such an engagement is primarily motivated by an attempt to think Western philosophy as a whole. But the stepping out of the "history of Being" is itself an epoch of the "history of Being": it belongs to the "destiny of Being", which as originally revealed in the West has become the destiny of the world. An adequate examination of this engagement, I believe, can shed enormous light on the major questions of our time. Before undertaking such an examination, I would like to discuss the legitimacy of Heidegger's call for such a dialogue, since it has been called into question by many contemporary philosophers, and particularly neo-pragmatists.²

In this chapter I attempt to provide a preliminary discussion of dialogue in general and the East-West dialogue in particular.³ I maintain that the Heideggerian-Gadamerian hermeneutics provides an access to an appropriate understanding of the nature of dialogue and the peculiarity of the East-West dialogue. According to Gadamer, a genuine dialogue is one in which each participant is concerned entirely with the subject matter (*die Sache*) and with arriving at the truth with regard to it. In order to do so, each participant must be concerned with discovering the real position of the other. One must eliminate the tendency of trying to reduce the views of the other to those of one's own.⁴ To put it succinctly, (1) the goal of dialogue is clearly the pursuit of truth; (2) the sound of the interlocutors is not

neutralized. Clearly, dialogue presupposes the “irreducible” and “infinite distance” between different interlocutors. But the difference does not result in a fundamental separation and incommensurability, for dialogue aims at the “fusion of horizons”, in which arises the shared truth, “the same and the one”. In such a dialogue there is always involved openness and surprising spontaneity, and even “turns”. In other words, the truth finally attained through dialogue cannot be anticipated by some criteria set up in advance. However, the neo-pragmatist attack on totalization and “transcendental pretense” results in total abandonment of the notion of “the other”, which, in turn, leads ultimately to denying dialogue in the genuine sense and precluding the possibility of the East-West encounter. The following tries to show that such an attempt to liberate discussion from the final constraints of metaphysics is itself trapped in the metaphysical discourse which the later Heidegger has vehemently criticized.

1. Other than “the West”

The trend of adopting the determinative “Western” to demarcate what was simply called philosophy in the West suggests a strong awareness of the limitation of the kind of thinking which until now had claimed universality, an awareness of the need to re-appropriate the notion of “the other” from theological discourse for the interpretation of the nature of philosophy. But to think “The West” as a whole as different from other worlds, real and possible, does not necessarily suffice to identify “the other”.

Western philosophy, through its culmination in the science-technology which

dominates the whole world, has assumed a universal importance and ceaselessly extends the frontiers of its domination, to such an extent that every corner of the world seems inescapably to undergo Westernization.⁵ That technology has become the destiny of the whole world might seem to help prove the superiority of Western thinking which regarded itself as a meta-narrative couched in the languages with the subject-predicate structure. Its alleged kinship to *logos*, understood as reason, *ratio*, or “rationality” seems to endow it with “universal validity”, to enframe the world, and thus to eliminate all other modes of thinking real and possible. This contemporary situation as a reality was adumbrated by Hegel in his ambitious encyclopedia, wherein the Spirit, as the transcendental Idea like the sun moving from east to west, culminates in his own philosophy which accomplishes the final synthesis. The difference between East and West is simply negated in the movement of the “negation of negation”. However, such claim for universal validity in philosophical discourse and the tendency of totalizing the world meet the vehement attack launched by the postmodern movement, which sees all of this as “transcendental illusion” or “transcendental pretense”. The Spirit, or the Absolute, as the “meta-narrative” or “final vocabulary” which is taken to overarch all human intellectual achievements remains in historically embedded Western discourse. As one of the philosophical sources of, and as a parallel with, the postmodern critique, Heidegger’s project of overcoming metaphysics contains the most powerful articulation of such an attack. For Heidegger, the Hegelian Absolute, is only a historical epoch of Being. In other words, it can never freely travel outside “the West”. Indeed, the East, in Hegel, as in many other great Western thinkers, is a projection of their own thinking, no more than a dreamland, which is enframed by the

Western paradigm.⁶ For Heidegger, a genuine dialogue is conditioned by the appearance of “the other” which must not be canceled or reduced.

However, as Heidegger observes, a true encounter of the East and the West in the sense of hermeneutic dialogue has not hitherto taken place, in spite of all assimilations and intermixtures, including the Eastasians’ chasing after European conceptual systems (*OWL*, p.3), and the translation and incorporation of Eastern thinking in the West. For the central concern in Heidegger’s dialogue with Eastern thought is not to find something which is simply lacking in his own tradition as, for example, Leibniz, who was fascinated by the hexagrams of *I-Ching* when he was searching for a universal language.⁷ Nor is it the need for an alternative to his own tradition because of his dissatisfaction with the general tendency in which he takes his start, as in the cases of Schopenhauer and the young Nietzsche. It is still far from being motivated by exotic fantasy or the idea of “cultural diplomacy”. As Mehta points out,

Heidegger’s thinking has little to do with “cultural synthesis” or with the notion of a “planetary culture”, or with the idea of a “universal philosophy” for the man of today, gathering together the complementary insights of the philosophies of the West and the East. His thinking is post-philosophical, in the sense of being no longer “metaphysical” and no longer operating on the presuppositions implicitly at work in all “philosophy”.⁸

In this connection, his notorious claim that “Western European philosophy is, in truth, a tautology” (*WP*, p.31) and his denying of the existence of non-Western philosophies e.g. Chinese and Indian philosophies (*WCT*, p.224) are not the repetitions of what is presented in Hegel’s encyclopedia, which considers Eastern thought as pre-philosophy, “pre-” in the sense of “immature. His claims also differ from the observation that Eastern

thought is basically “un-philosophical” for the analytic tradition, according to which language analysis, which is fundamental to philosophy, is lacking or at least weak in Eastern thought.. Heidegger’s insistence on the identification of philosophy and the West is not meant to restate Western superiority but rather to arouse the awareness of “the other” -- “other than the West” and “other than philosophy”.⁹

2. Difference and “Otherness”

Heidegger’s identification of philosophy and “the West” as a claim for difference is also shared by many spokesmen of postmodernism, who constantly attack any assumption of universal paradigm or totality. Jean-François Lyotard in his seminal book *The Postmodern Condition* announces “a war on totality” and promises to “activate the differences and save the honor of name”.¹⁰ According to him, the postmodern world or the post-industrial Western society is a world of difference and heterogeneity. Any attempt to find the same is to level everything into the dull uniformity of the equal or identical. The emphasis on difference finds in the concept of heterotopia “the most famous image” of “pure difference”, “a name for the whole centerless universe of the postmodern”.¹¹ Foucault claims that “difference” is an insurmountable gap which can divide these different worlds or cultural systems as mutually incomprehensible. Foucault quotes a passage from a story by Borges to illustrate comically such total and irreducible difference. The order of things described in the so-called “Chinese encyclopaedia” is rather unthinkable and absurd to the

extent that any attempt to find the principle for such ordering or categorization is doomed to fail.¹² Foucault remarks, this Chinese “order” (disorder) of things is conceivable only in heterotopia. Heterotopia is an inconceivable space that undermines the very possibility of description in language; it repels and attracts at the same time, displaying the “exotic charm of another system of thought,” while showing “The limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking *that*.”¹³ However, Zhang argues that this conception of the East (China) is precisely a Western fiction. He says,

... by citing that fiction as a representation of the Chinese mind, Foucault does not disengage from the tradition of creation of cultural myths of the Other - myths which have always presented the Other as pure difference, a foil to the West, either as an illusion and exotic dreamland, a utopia where the West has its ideals imaginatively realized, or the land of stagnation, spiritual purblindness, and ignorance, against which the higher values of Western progress and civilization stand out for everyone to see.¹⁴

The East, or the other, is just a conceptual monstrosity. As a fiction, “the East” is still created in Western discourse; it is an invented “other” through Western imagination. Conner remarks that once such a heterotopia “has been cited and re-cited, it is no longer the conceptual monstrosity which it once was, for its incommensurability has been in some sense bound, controlled, and predictively interpreted, given a center and illustrative function.”¹⁵ In other words, the falsity of the “otherness” defined in this way cannot avoid being finally exposed. The different other is evoked by and for the West to facilitate its self-knowledge or self-critique, and the heterotopia is created only to be metaphorically colonized from the very start. The predicament is well observed by Jean-Luc Nancy, who in the introduction to *The Birth to Presence*, asserts that “the irrepresentable, pure presence

or pure absence, is also an effect of representation (just as 'the East', or 'the Other World' are effects of 'the West') ... [The] coming of another that the West always demands, and always forecloses."¹⁶ Thus the West, as synonymous with philosophy in the sense of representational thinking, is not limited by its relation to others, but by itself alone. it "opens the world to the closure that it is."¹⁷

It seems to me that the call for radical difference or heterotopia leads inevitably to a pragmatist conclusion which Rorty embraces and explicates in a rather straightforward way. According to Rorty, truth is invented rather than discovered.¹⁸ The same can be said for "the other". We can never discover the other, but only invent it. Since any account of the other is always a projection of one's own thinking or imagination, it is necessary to abandon such "pretense of otherness" just as we must abandon the "transcendental pretense". Thus, according to Rorty, the person who engages in a dialogue with the other only seems to be relating to the other. The other is virtually nothing *other* than himself. He remarks, "for edifying discourse is *supposed* to be abnormal, to take us out of our old selves, by the power of strangeness, to aid us in becoming new beings."¹⁹ In other words, our encounter with the other is for the sake of becoming a "new being". The relation to the "other" is a self-relation in the sense of self-transformation. Thus the "other" is not really other but is actually a moment in one's own self-becoming. Gadamer maintains that in a dialogue, "[b]oth partners must have the good will to try to understand one another."²⁰ However, the hermeneutic "good will" (*der gute Wille*) in Gadamer thus transforms to a pragmatist "trick". "The trick of conversation", says Mark Taylor, "is to turn around (i.e.,

con-verse) in such a way that one rediscovers *self* in other.”²¹ But for Gadamer, dialogue is a communion, which involves a sharing that unites rather than divides. “To reach an understanding with one’s partner in a dialogue is not merely a matter of total self-expression and the successful assertion of one’s own point of view, but a transformation into a communion, in which we do not remain what we were.”²² However, the “new being” in Rorty does not imply such communion and sharing with “the other”; it is virtually the fulfillment of the “will to will”. To a certain extent, Rorty’s pragmatist “trick” is a re-appropriation of Hegel’s “cunning of reason”. Hegel maintains that to become itself, the subject must enter into relation with others in such a way that their differences become constitutive of the subject’s own being. Rorty states that Hegel, if read in a certain way (a pragmatist way for sure), is right. Rorty’s return from Gadamer to Hegel is a return from dialogue to monologue while the Absolute is displaced by “the will to will”.²³

A sketch of the itinerary from Foucault’s “heterotopia” to Rorty’s “trick” can show how the distinctive postmodern call for radical difference and plurality transforms into the assertion of the unavoidable “one-sidedness”. As Conner puts it,

[Western postmodernist theory] names and correspondingly closes off the very world of cultural difference and plurality which it allegedly brings to visibility. What is striking is precisely the degree of consensus in postmodernist discourse that there is no longer any possibility of consensus, the authoritative announcement of the disappearance of final authority and the promotion and recirculation of a total and comprehensive narrative of a cultural condition in which totality is no longer thinkable. If postmodern theory insists on the irreducibility of the difference between different areas of cultural and critical practice, it is ironically the conceptual language of postmodern theory which flows into the trenches that it itself gouges between incommensurabilities and there becomes solid enough to bear the weight of an entirely new conceptual apparatus of comparative study.²⁴

The affirmation of the fundamental difference and incomparability of the East and the West as originally aiming at the rejection of totalization becomes the reason for the pragmatist utilization of the other. "One-sidedness", though, with a "universal" disguise in Hegel, reappears in the form of confessed sheer "will to power". Rorty thus declares himself as a "cultural imperialist" with great sincerity. He says, "Hoping to avoid cultural imperialism by rising to that level seems to me as vain as the hope of avoiding monologue by anthropomorphizing, or ratifying, the Other."²⁵

3. The Same as the "Single Source"

Heidegger's emphasis on difference does not lead to ultimate separation and division, but rather to dialogue in the sense of sharing, wherein arises the one and same, which, nevertheless, does not result from abstraction nor is it thus able to subsume what is abstracted. Heidegger puts it quite clearly,

The same never coincides with the equal, not even in the empty indifferent oneness of what is merely identical. The equal or identical always moves toward the absence of difference, so that everything may be reduced to a common denominator. The same, by contrast, is the belonging together of what differs, through a gathering by way of the difference. We can only say "the same" if we think difference. It is in the carrying out and settling of differences that the gathering nature of sameness comes to light. The same gathers what is distinct into an original being-at-one. The equal, on the contrary, disperses them into the dull unity of mere uniformity. (*PLT*, p.219)

Here the sharp distinction drawn by Heidegger between "the same" and "the equal" or "the identical" is of great significance. The same is not that which could be conceptually

abstracted or reached by way of reduction; rather, it should be understood as that which makes possible such a relation as the self and the other, i.e., the relation of I-Thou (*Ich-Du*); it still makes possible the very awareness of “otherness”. The “I-Thou” relationship, as the starting point of Gadamer’s hermeneutics, by no means amounts to the subject-object relationship in the Cartesian sense.²⁶ Gadamer’s description of the I-Thou relation is largely based on Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein as being-in-the-world. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger clearly differentiates Dasein’s being-with-others (as a particular mode of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world) from his being with things as equipment. In Dasein’s primordial relation to the world as equipment ready-to-hand he encounters others. In other words, as Dasein one recognizes that equipment as ready-to-hand is also serviceable to other Daseins. However many pragmatist implications Rorty could draw from the notion of “ready-to-hand”, it is still extremely difficult to see how “The other Daseins” in Heidegger’s analysis of “Being-in-the-world” can equally be reduced to mere equipment. Dasein, through its use of the world as equipment, comes across other Daseins who also use beings as equipment and who themselves are not equipment. Only in the derivative way would other Daseins become objects and equipment. In this regard, Dasein’s relation to other Daseins is radically different from his relation to beings as equipment. But the other must not be confused with “the they” (*das Man*), which is surely not the *other* than the Dasein that I am, but, to a certain extent, determines the mode of my existence, and of any other’s existence. “The they” is exactly what Heidegger means by “the equal” or “the identical” that levels down of all differences into dull uniformity, which virtually

characterizes Dasein's inauthentic mode of existence. "The same", in contrast, lies in the authentic mode of existence in respect to Dasein's relation to other Daseins in a way that he recognizes others as the same as himself in the sense they are also Dasein, not equipment.

This analysis of Dasein's Being-with-others is also applicable to the problematic of the East-West encounter inasmuch as the latter is equally of the I-Thou structure. The West's relation to the East (or the non-West) should not be a relation to that which is put in use as equipment, the means for self-reflection and self-critique. However, the dialogue between the East and the West is never a safe play, it is constantly exposed to the danger of slipping into one-sided monologue which will ultimately suffocate openness, spontaneity, and unexpected discoveries. Even in his dialogue with the Japanese, the possibility of failure of attaining a genuine dialogue, such as Heidegger assumes, is in sight.²⁷ In fact, the failure seems to be already anticipated by Heidegger in the progress of that dialogue itself: "a dialogue from house to house remains nearly impossible." (*OWL*, p.5) This likelihood of failure arises from the fundamental difference and the infinite distance between one and the other, the East and the West. It is worth noting that the response of the Japanese interlocutor to Heidegger's doubts really catches its subtle implication that a dialogue is still possible however much danger there may be.²⁸ But where lies the "same" that would possibly bring the East and the West together? For the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, the possibility of Dasein's encounter with other Daseins is conditioned by their relation to Being. The preliminary understanding of Being is the

common ground for their mutual understanding and communication. In a similar way, the later Heidegger claims that the understanding of Being in the more primordial sense is a prerequisite for a dialogue between East and the West. Being in the primordial sense as the truth of Being is what Heidegger calls the “single source” that gives birth to and sustains different traditions. But what is the “primordial meaning” of Being as the ground for such a dialogue? Rorty suggests that Heidegger’s attachment to the question of Being forces him to face the alternatives: either referring Being to a “transcendental signified” which, as the one and same, transcends history and language (signifier); or thinking Being as historically and linguistically determined in the sense that Being is meaningful only if it can be reduced to beings. In other words, Heidegger’s claim for a regress to the origin appears to be incommensurable with his sketch of the history of Being. According to Rorty, much of the confusion and contradiction in Heidegger’s thought lies in his dogged effort to find a stance which is beyond the contrast between the metaphysical tradition and the sheer postmodern perspective of the Rortian irony. Rorty claims,

The reader of *Being and Time* is led to believe that the Greeks enjoyed a special relationship to Being which the moderns have lost, that they had less trouble being ontological than we do, whereas we moderns have a terrible time keeping the difference between the ontological and the ontic in mind. The reader of the later work, however, is often told that Descartes and Nietzsche were as adequate expressions of what Being was at their times as Parmenides was of what Being was at his time. This makes it hard to see what advantage the Greeks might have enjoyed over the moderns, nor how Parmenides and Nietzsche could be compared in respect of the “elementariness” of the “words of Being” with which they are associated.²⁹

Since, according to Rorty, such a stance (beyond metaphysics and Rortian pragmatism) presents real difficulty, Heidegger is often in a situation of hesitation and

sometimes prone to go back to metaphysics. Rorty shares Derrida's critique of this Heideggerian *nostalgia*. Thus in order to save Heidegger from this situation it is necessary to read the pragmatist reduction into Heidegger's conception of the history of Being by abandoning the ontological difference, which is a metaphysical remnant, the last evaporating presence of the Platonic distinction of the real world and the apparent world. For Rorty it is impossible to make a real distinction between the ontic and the ontological. In other words, the various epochs of Being can be nothing other than the ordinary history of man's activities.³⁰

However, as Mark Okrent argues, Rorty is mistaken in his accusation against Heidegger simply because he overlooks Heidegger's repeated claim concerning the distinction between the truth of Being and Being.³¹ The truth of Being is thought as the opening or clearing which allows Being as presencing to appear and manifest itself, but it remains unthought. The various epochs of Being which constitute the history of Being, or more precisely, the history of Western existence, are determined by what is absent, held back. Okrent puts it succinctly: "The history of Being is a history of hiddenness, not of presence. It is a history of the specific ways in which the place and truth of Being have been forgotten, not of Being in the ontological sense, itself."³² The truth of Being, in holding back, grants not only the history of Western existence but also the history of Eastern existence. It is the hidden source from which well up the language worlds of the West and the East. It is the "the same" (as neither "the equal" nor "the identical"), "the belonging together of what differs, through a gathering by way of the difference." (*PLT*, p.219) It

grants and sustains the dialogue between different language houses. Heidegger calls it the “single source” (*eine einzige Quelle*).

... in the end -- which would also be the beginning -- a nature of language can reach the thinking experience, a nature which would offer the assurance that European-Western saying and Eastasian saying will enter into dialogue such that in it there sings something that wells up from a single source. (*OWL*, p.8)

The single source is by no means “a general concept under which both the European and the Eastasian languages could be subsumed.” (*OWL*, p.24) It consistently resists any conceptual grasp and remains concealed not only to the Western language world but also to the Eastern language world. Heidegger’s major task, as he describes it, is an interpretation of the history of Western philosophy. In attempting to step back to the single source from which Western metaphysics has sprung up, Heidegger wants to show that in this source a wellspring hides in itself much that has remained unthought though it sustains the foundation of Western philosophy. This stepping back to the single source is brought about through dialogues with the Greek and Eastern thinkers who were “thinkers” rather than “philosophers” and whose relation to that single source was, Heidegger believes, closer than those of modern Western man. That is why Heidegger speaks of the pre-Socratic *Logos* as a parallel of the Chinese *Tao* (*ID*, p36) and tries to find in both of them the prototype of *Ereignis*. But for Heidegger a dialogue with the Greeks must be prior to a dialogue with the East for the former is the precondition of the latter. (*QCT*, p.157)

However, Rorty sees “the same” or the “single source” as still a “transcendental signified”; he chastizes Heidegger’s regress to the source as a metaphysical “nostalgia” for

the source is nothing other than an equivalent of Plato's real world. He says,

The Heideggerian counterpart of Plato's world of appearance seen from above is the West seen from beyond metaphysics. Whereas Plato looks down, Heidegger looks back. But both are hoping to distance themselves from, cleanse themselves of, what they are looking at. This hope leads both men to the thought that there must be some purificatory askesis which can render them fit for intercourse with something Wholly Other -- for impregnation by the form of the Good, for example, or for Openness to Being.³³

Is it really impossible to differentiate Plato's real world and the single source (the truth of Being)? A strikingly undeniable difference between Heidegger's source and Plato's real world is apparent. The source in Heidegger's understanding is not something which can be separated from what it gives rise to and sustains. So a regress to the source cannot be seen as distancing ourselves from and cleansing ourselves of what we are pondering. In fact, Heidegger never admits the stance of standing back from the passing show and looking at it from outside with detachment. Dasein's historical nature and its "thrownness" makes any such attempt impossible [and the attempt itself is somehow bound up with its historical facticity]. To understand history and historical events we must be on a certain horizon which cannot be eliminated or reduced to an ahistorical one. Understanding is interpretation in the sense that it always involves certain historical fore-structures. But it does not amount to any arbitrary use of history. Rorty's pragmatist reading of *Being and Time* simply misses the crucial point that the fundamental ontology is to make possible "our access to those primordial 'sources' from which the categories and concepts handed down to us have been in part quite genuinely drawn." (*BT*, p.43) Thus interpretation is not violent appropriation according to our unbounded freedom, but rather a dialogue which must

involve a “wholly other” as that which has its own horizon and hence is beyond our horizon. The later Heidegger is more critical of any merely pragmatic use of history. He says that we have been cut off from Being “because we only know, and only want to know. history in the context of historiography which explores and exposes elements of the past for the purpose of using them for the present.”³⁴

As against historical relativism which insists that history consists of disjunctive, incommensurable epochs without any coherence, Heidegger’s conception of history sees history as a unified totality filled with significance; and hence it is close to Hegel’s view, although Heidegger emphasizes the unpredictable nature of the history of Being. Rorty’s reading of the later Heidegger in respect to the history of Being overlooks the meaning of history in Heidegger’s understanding. Guignon puts the issue this way,

Heidegger’s picture of history as a meaningful totality contrasts sharply with the vision of history Rorty draws from Kuhn and Foucault. On Rorty’s view, history appears as a series of ruptures and revolutions, resulting from accidental shifts in central metaphors, with neither continuity nor coherence. If history seems to tell a story, that is largely the result of imposing our contemporary world view on what has come before; it is retroactive mythologizing. Because there is no unity in history, there can be no lasting standards or constraints passed on to us by our forebears to regulate our inquiries.³⁵

It is necessary to point out that Heidegger’s conception of history is rooted deeply in the Judeo-Christian understanding of time as *kairos* (or *Augenblick*) and in the related eschatology. Based on the notion of kairological time and the eschatological understanding of history, Heidegger initiates his criticism of the metaphysical theory of “presence” and the Platonic “real world”. Such a criticism is radically different from that of the post-

structuralists, e.g. Derrida, for whom history is, using Guignon's words, "merely mythology, an illusion we can live without",³⁶ and is endless, undetermined, open to any decision we make on it. So when Heidegger speaks of epochs of Being (e.g. Parmenides and Nietzsche) he is concerned with the ontological difference, a view that Heidegger never abandoned, but is rather a crucial aspect of his philosophy from the early to the later years. As Guignon puts it, "even this later vision of history as 'the destining of Being' is teleological: as Heidegger says, 'Being is, as destining, itself eschatological.'"³⁷ Rorty is not simply wrong in his observation of Heidegger's sketch of the history of Being that each epoch of Being is an adequate expression of what Being is at its time.³⁸ But his obvious unwillingness to acknowledge the fact that the theme of the "forgetfulness of Being" is central to Heidegger's sketch leads to a mistake. The strong eschatological implications in the idea of the "forgetfulness of Being" are thus overlooked or minimized.

Since, as Heidegger claims, the dialogue with the Greek thinkers is the precondition for dialogue with the East (*QCT*, p.158), Rorty advances his criticism from the former to the latter. According to Rorty, Heidegger's dialogue with the East, like his dialogue with the pre-Socratic Greeks, is an attempt to set his thinking free from the West, "free of the will to power as a result of having seen through its last disguise,"³⁹ and to escape to the East as the "Wholly Other" than the West in order to look at the West as a whole. Yet, the East in this dialogue can offer nothing more than another version of the conception of the "Wholly Other" which is still, in essence, the same as the Platonic "real world" as separated from the apparent world. He says,

This thought [about the Form of Good, or Openness of Being] is obviously an important part of the Western tradition, and it has obvious analogues (and perhaps sources) in the East. That is why Heidegger is the twentieth-century Western thinker most frequently “put into dialogue” with Eastern philosophy.⁴⁰

According to Rorty, the East for Heidegger, as for anyone else, can only be his own projection, his pragmatic use of a culture, that is, the very expression of the will to power which he tries to escape. Thus any attempt to dialogue with the East or any non-Western world is merely a symptom of contemporary Western self-hatred, which, in the Nietzschean sense, is the inversion of the will to power. There is no such thing as “fusion of horizons”, but only the single Western will to power. However, Heidegger never takes “the East” as a remote resort where one can find the “splendor of simplicity” in order to escape the “busyness” of the West. Quite the contrary, Heidegger explicitly rejects the idea of taking the road east. In the *Der Spiegel* interview, Heidegger maintains that the same Western metaphysical tradition, which has inevitably grown into a world destiny, still contains the possibility of bringing about a turn in this destiny, a turn which could never take place by simply replacing it with another tradition, for example, the tradition of the East. He asserts:

It is my conviction that a reversal can be prepared only in the same place in the world where the modern technological world originated, and that it cannot happen because of any takeover by Zen Buddhism or any other Eastern experiences of the world.⁴¹

It is unlikely that Heidegger simply wants to downplay the impact of Eastern thinking on the German philosophical tradition as Zimmerman suggests.⁴² Rather, Heidegger attempts to clear off the kind of European hallucination of “the East” which pervaded the fifties and the sixties under the influence of Suzuki’s English publications

which strongly attracted Heidegger himself.⁴³ Moreover, Heidegger wants to eliminate the very thought of “taking over” or “displacement” which remains in every aspect “one-sided” like an inverted Western “will to power” or what Rorty calls the “contemporary Western self-hatred”. In calling for another beginning which may lie in the unthought of the Western tradition. lying beyond metaphysical thinking, as Mehta points out, “The thinking of the unthought of this imperishable Western beginning, however, is also the liberation of thought from the parochial mould and its meeting with the unthought of the other few, really great beginnings in human history.”⁴⁴ Thus, Heidegger’s rejection of a replacement is clearly a rejection of the escape from the “busyness” of the West to the “simplicity” of the East, the escape by which Rorty characterizes Heidegger’s dialogue with the East. For Heidegger, such a dialogue aims at working out a response to the global threat of technology; it can help the preparation of the dawn of the new beginning in the world’s history. As Mehta puts it, “In no case can it be just a return to those beginnings but only the gathering of resources for a novel beginning in the realm of thinking, for which perhaps, as Heidegger hopes, the initiative and the preparation can come from Europe.”⁴⁵ In the same interview Heidegger raises a significant question which sounds really like an expectation:

... who of us can say whether or not one day in Russia and China the ancient traditions of a “thought” will awaken which will help make possible for man a free relationship to the technical world?⁴⁶

In this regard, a dialogue with the East is inevitable. (*QCT*, p.158) Presumably, the call for such a dialogue might be motivated by a deeper concern which has never been explicated by Heidegger himself and is still overlooked by many commentators. Since the

subject matter (*die Sache*) of such a dialogue concerns the world's destiny, it is necessary to think the essence of technology not from the Western metaphysical tradition alone, but from the tradition of the Eastern world, from its own necessity, since the metaphysical mode of thinking has invaded and become part of this tradition. Rorty's criticism of Heidegger's engagement in the dialogue with the East simply overlooks the real motivation of this engagement and the subject matter of the dialogue.

4. The Question concerning the Nature of Language: Anticipating a Dialogue from "House" to "House"

The problematic pertaining to this particular dialogue, namely, the dialogue between the East and the West, is greatly different from other dialogues for it involves the question concerning the nature of language. Heidegger says when recalling his earlier conversations with Count Kuki, "The danger of our dialogue was hidden in language itself." (*OWL*, p.4) This is the case because the nature of language for Europeans may be not adequate for Eastasians. Heidegger asserts, "If man by virtue of his language dwells within the claim and call of Being, then we Europeans presumably dwell in an entirely different house than Eastasian man." (*OWL*, p.5) Given that we can never transcend language, how can the dialogue take place? Heidegger's skepticism about such a dialogue, expressed in his claim that "a dialogue from house to house is almost impossible", gives an impression that he moves close to linguistic relativism.

To some extent, Heidegger belongs to the generation that takes the so-called “linguistic turn” (more properly “hermeneutic turn” for German philosophers) which characterizes the main stream of Western philosophy in this century. Heidegger’s conception that language constitutes our sense of reality is indeed in harmony with that of people like Rorty and Derrida. Rorty says, there is no way to evaluate “language-as-a-whole in relation to something else to which it applies.”⁴⁷ Derrida holds, “There is nothing outside of the text.” However, Heidegger’s unique understanding of language is still different from various trends that belong to the same generation. This can be made plain by discerning the connection between Heidegger’s thought and the German philosophical-linguistic tradition. To be sure, Heidegger’s conception of language is prompted by the German linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt, who prompted by the very idea that language is the outer expression of the inner thought was taken for granted, declared that language is a world and world view. Heidegger comments, “Humboldt puts language into language as *one* kind and form of the world view worked out in human subjectivity.” (*OWL*, p.119) In fact, Kant’s transcendental philosophy is already at work in Humboldt’s linguistics in that language is viewed not only as the activity of the subject, but also as something like the Kantian transcendental categories through which the world is constituted and experienced, that is, that it has a certain resemblance to a possibility or a condition of thinking and knowing. It is this aspect of Humboldt’s theory of language that became one of the major sources of Heidegger’s conception of language and still exerts its invisible influence on Heidegger’s sometimes elusive though unwilling inclination towards transcendentalism. But

Humboldt's theory of language, especially his comparative study of world languages, has a twofold significance. On one hand, if language is like a transcendental category for human thinking, we are led to the conclusion that different languages result in different thoughts which are at bottom incommensurable. Obviously, it anticipates what is called "linguistic relativism" in our century.⁴⁸ On the other hand, Humboldt's comparative study of languages aims to find the possibilities of man's language. (For example, Indo-European language and Chinese are seen by him as two extreme realizations of human possibilities.) Language seems to be subordinate to some other more general forms which determine their possibility. Thus, as Heidegger points out, Humboldt conceives of language as a particular "intellectual effort", "Yet the intellect -- in Humboldt's sense, too -- lives in other activities and achievements as well. If, however, language is counted as one of these, the speaking is not experienced in its own terms, in terms of language, but rather is referred to something else." (*OWL*, p.117) Thus Humboldt's conception of language is still confined by metaphysical thinking. It fails to work out a new conception of language insofar as he defines the nature of language as *energeia*, as the activity of the subject. (*OWL*, p.119)

It seems to me that Humboldt's linguistic quasi-transcendentalism leads inevitably to a linguistic relativism which betrays its initiative. He is forced to take the step back to the traditional conception of language. Heidegger, presumably well aware of this inner tension and unsolvable contradiction, tries to think language as neither a faculty which human beings possess nor as the transcendental category, though his remarks on language, especially his claim that "a dialogue from house to house remains nearly impossible", are

often identified as linguistic transcendentalism and linguistic relativism. However, for Heidegger, language is the house of Being. Here the image “house” plays a subtle and important role. Clearly, a house is neither a prison which jails whoever is thrown into it, nor a simple motel which as a mere tool of accommodation is indifferent to those who stay there. It is rather a shelter that protects and more importantly raises those who live there. Language is the field in which our sense of what it is to be is articulated and disclosed; it is a “Saying”(German *Sage*, cp English *Saga*) “the soundless gathering call” of Being itself. (*OWL*, p.108) Language and Being interpenetrate and form a unity, such that any designation of language as a transparent vehicle to convey meanings still takes language in derivative sense. If we keep in mind the image “house” as different from “prison”, which seems to be implied by linguistic relativism, we can avoid such an identification of Heidegger’s conception of language with linguistic transcendentalism and linguistic relativism. However, this difference is neglected by Rorty.

For Rorty, linguistic relativism must be abandoned because of its transcendentalist nature. He says the linguistic turn “was an attempt to find a substitute for Kant’s ‘transcendental standpoint’”.⁴⁹ Following the later Wittgenstein, Quine, and Davidson, Rorty announces the end of the attempt to make language the transcendental topic. To clear up any metaphysical remnant in the conception of language is to “deconstruct” language itself. Rorty wholeheartedly accepts Davidson’s claim that “there is no such thing as language, not if a language is anything like what philosophers ... have supposed. ... We must give up the idea of a clearly defined shared structure which language users master and

apply to cases.”⁵⁰ Accordingly, Heidegger’s conception of language is still trapped in linguistic relativism. For Rorty there is no difference between house and prison, both of which are constraints on our liberty. By following Wittgenstein, Rorty sees “language as referring simply to exchange of marks and noises among human beings for particular purpose, as no more denoting a real essence than does ‘game’”.⁵¹

Rorty sees language as a game people play, a language game devised by men, a tribute to the resourcefulness and inventiveness of the beings which we are.⁵² Language is nothing more than we put into it. Thus so-called “language” in Rorty corresponds to Davidson’s “human behavior” or Derrida’s “text”. To be sure, there is no need to retain the word “language” which, viewed by Davidson, has too much metaphysical implication. For Rorty, the word “language”, if meaningful, can only refer to the act of speech. The distinction between language and speech, like the ontological difference between Being and beings, must be abandoned. It is worth noting, however, that when Heidegger speaks of language as “Saying” (*Sage*) he is not trying to reduce language to speech as a kind of human behavior in the Davidsonian sense. He says, “Language is not a work of human beings: language speaks. Humans speak insofar they co-respond to language.” (*PT*, p.25) It is language that endows the capacity of speech on human beings. Only in the response to the call of Being in language, that is, “to mark an effort to live properly with language” and to learn “to hear what language really says when it speaks” (*WCT*, pp.118-119) do people speak properly and authentically. The difference between authentic and inauthentic speech is crucial to Heidegger’s conception of language. In *Being and Time* Heidegger

presents “idle talk” (*Gerede*) as one of the manners (along with “curiosity” and “ambiguity”) in which the inauthentic they-self takes the place of and hides genuine speech which can disclose things as what they are to be. Insofar as we are trapped in this inauthentic talk of the “they” we are alienated from our most authentic possibilities of understanding and speech. “That which has been uncovered and disclosed stands in a mode in which it has been disguised and closed off by idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity. Being towards entities has not been extinguished, but it has been uprooted.” (*BT*, p.264) The recognition of the falsity of the idle talk awakens our longing for a genuine conversation. In idle talk we do not even talk to each other. Since there is no ontological difference between language and speech and no difference between authentic conversation and “idle talk” Rorty’s language game inclines to embrace idle talk rather than authentic conversation. Rorty mocks Heidegger’s call for a turn from idle talk to genuine conversation as another metaphysical remnant. “As I see it, they [Wittgenstein and Heidegger] both started from a need to escape from what they both called ‘chatter’ (*Geschwätz*), a need for purity, a need to become authentic by ceasing to speak the language of the philosophical tribe within which they had been raised.”⁵³ Rorty is right when he says that the term language (*Sprache*) plays a very little role in *Being and Time*, and when it does occur, in section 34, it is subordinated to talk (*Rede*) and thus to Dasein⁵⁴ Indeed, the anthropocentric aspect of *Being and Time* at times overshadows its genuine goal as reaching the question of Being. To be sure, language as discourse or talk in *Being and Time* lacks the importance and power asserted in the “Letter on Humanism” and other later

works. But the very distinction between genuine conversation and idle talk is very clear. Perhaps Rorty is ready to read *Being and Time* in the Sartrean way.⁵⁵ Derrida is well aware that to eliminate the difference between *langage* and *parole* is at the same time to eliminate the difference between idle talk and genuine conversation, hence also the very notion of “fallenness”, which constitutes the difference.

Now, is not the opposition of the *primordial* to the *derivative* still metaphysical? Is not the quest for an *archia* in general, no matter with what precautions one surrounds the concept, still the “essential” operation of metaphysics? Supposing, despite powerful presumptions, that one may eliminate it from any other provenance, is there not at least some Platonism in the *Verfallen*?⁵⁶

The leveling down of the distinction between authentic and inauthentic talk results in the tendency to privilege contemporary language-games as the ultimate locus of truth and justification. Guignon points out that “For Heidegger, this apotheosis of idle talk and its authority would sever us from any background of enduring meanings and values from which we could criticize contemporary life and its language games. There would be no longer any way to identify the symptoms of ‘forgetfulness of Being’ in our current world.”⁵⁷ For Rorty, there is no question about “forgetfulness of Being”, nor the difference between genuine conversation and idle talk in such a “language-game”. The notion of “language-game” in Rorty is held to be drawn not only from Wittgenstein, but also from Gadamer. But Rorty’s pragmatist adoption of Gadamer’s “play” simply ignores the real meaning of this term in hermeneutic tradition. In *Truth and Method* Gadamer claims that “play” is the “clue to the ontological explanation of the work of art and its hermeneutic significance. ... Play is really limited to representing itself. Thus its mode of being is self-representation.”⁵⁸ That

is to say, play cannot be of any purpose, it refers to nothing else than itself. This very character of “play” as self-referential and autonomous attests against the pragmatist notion of language as mere instrument. Peter Harris draws our attention to the inner connection between Gadamer’s view of language as play with Kant’s aesthetics:

Gadamer expresses the common characteristic of language as it occurs in poetry and philosophy when he talks about language “coming to stand”, in its different ways, in the poem and in the philosophical text. In much the same way that Heidegger recognizes the autonomous subsistence of the “work of art”, Gadamer recognizes that in both these instances language emerges from the instrumental role it plays in some other forms of communication to have an independent and autonomous status. Both writers here, I suspect, are attempting to draw out the implications of the celebrated “ohne interesse” characteristic of the aesthetic judgment in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*.⁵⁹

It is this self-referential and autonomous nature of language that characterizes language as essentially poetic and that leads us to recognize Heidegger’s claim that the essence of language is poetry. Only in the light of the recognition of language as poetry can we make a difference between what is genuine discourse and what is idle talk, the former of which is the “play” in the Gadamerian sense. In genuine discourse there is always “a matter for concern” (Harris) or “something at the core” (Guignon). Human speech is the response to language which is the gift of Being. We belong to language and this belonging is essentially the way of being toward Being and world. Rorty’s “language game” is fundamentally different from and even opposed to Gadamer’s play not only in that “play” for Gadamer characterizes the nature of genuine discourse whereas for Rorty it is idle talk.⁶⁰ The “core” in a text or the “matter” in idle talk is simply dissolved into nothingness. However, in genuine discourse, the “core” or “matter” is the inner necessity which governs the play and

keeps it going. The play-nature of genuine discourse as self-referential and autonomous lies in the fact that we can never distinguish “what is said and words in saying it”,⁶¹ as Peter Harris points out:

The words, the language is a “matter” for concern. They *must* be these words and not some others. Nor is the fact that “I wandered lonely as a cloud...” exists in more than one version, or that Kant wrote two introductions to the *Critique of Judgment* or that Cézanne painted Mt Ste Victoire scores of times an argument against this. This kind of repetition and revision attests to the importance of “getting it right”. In such writings and works of art, the formulation is governed by an internal “necessity”. The words and the brush strokes matter for their own sake in projects of this kind. What Kant had to say in his introduction to the third *Critique* “mattered”, not with regard to sales of the book, but because of the essential importance of relating it to the already existent works in the project of the critical philosophy it was essential that it should “fit”.⁶²

Since, for Rorty, there is no core or matter in any discourse and text, “writing leading to more writing, and more and still more”, nothing could be privileged as “fitter” than anything else. Rorty says, [a strong textualist] “is in it for what he can get out of it, not for the satisfaction of *getting something right*.”⁶³ Rorty adopts Derrida’s view on writing to serve his pragmatist purpose, namely, to clear off what he calls the metaphysical remnant, the subject matter (*die Sache*) in the Heideggerian and Gadamerian conception of language. He writes:

For Derrida, writing always leads to more writing, and more, and still more -- just as history does not lead to Absolute Knowledge or to the Final Struggle, but to more history, and more, and still more. The *phenomenology*’s vision of truth as what you get by reinterpreting all the previous reinterpretations of reinterpretations still embodies the Platonic ideal of the Last Reinterpretation, the *right* interpretation at last. Derrida wants to keep the horizontal character of Hegel’s notion of philosophy without its teleology, its sense of direction, its seriousness.⁶⁴

However, Rorty's Sartrean illusion of ultimate directionless freedom leads him not only to dissolve any subject matter (*Sache*) in our discourses but also to deny "background codes" which, as "mighty inhuman forces", regulate our play and master our discourse. Rorty not only rejects the Heideggerian-Gadamerian insistence on the "matter" of speech, but also distances himself from the view of the post-structuralists' (Derrida and Foucault) on the "background codes" as the indispensable factors in any discourse, although they also deny the "core" or "matter". This is what Rorty calls another difference between textualism and pragmatism. The dream of achieving ultimate freedom is still trapped in the will to will which Rorty accepts as the destiny of human being, yet criticized by both Heidegger and Derrida as the end-stage of metaphysics. But Rorty, in order to free discourse from being the substitute for "the transcendental" language must be viewed as a tool, or an instrument humans use and use up in their human disposal. Thus to restate his notion of language as "tool", Rorty criticizes both Heidegger and Derrida,

Heidegger and Derrida share a tendency to think of language as something *more* than just a set of tools. The later Heidegger persistently, and Derrida occasionally, treat language as if it were a quasi-agent, a brooding presence, something that stands over and against human beings.⁶⁵

This view, for Heidegger, is obviously a metaphysical conception of language. In the constant, unbroken and unlimited continuation of discourse, idle talk -- words leading to words and more and still more, ... there is no rift (*Riss*), no noise-free and speechless interruption which could allow us to listen, listen to the language that addresses us. A genuine discourse is at the same time a listening. Yet only in the silence are we capable of a genuine listening. The "stillness of silence", as Gadamer points out, is the center of

Heidegger's theory of the relationship between language and Being.

Everything spoken stems in a variety of ways from the unspoken, whether this be something not yet spoken, or whether it be what must remain unspoken in the sense that it is beyond the reach of speaking. (*OWL*, p.12)

Rorty sees this as contradictory to what is asserted in *Being and Time* that Dasein is linguistic through and through; he takes Heidegger's claim that "conscience discourses solely and constantly in the work of keeping silent" to be not a doctrine of inexpressibility but rather the doctrine that the realization that one must change one's life cannot be backed up with reasons -- for such reasons could only be voices from one's past life."⁶⁶ The "unspoken" for Heidegger is not simply the opposite of language, or beyond language, but rather the other side, the constitutive of language, like the voidness of the jug described in "The Thing". The "unspoken" is the echo of the "stillness of silence", which as the source of language moves language from its ground and supports it. It is the "original announcement" of the world reality which can exist only inside the silence which is not in itself "something linguistic". It is above all in the soundless "saying" which precedes every utterance that Heidegger sees the non-human occurrence. The true nature of language is "not saying, and at the same time saying or silent indication." (*N*, 471f) Man who speaks must listen to the sound of silence which constantly emanates from the depths of the inexpressible. It is this silence that constitutes the nature of language which is adequate not only for Western language but for Eastern language, and could offer some assurance to the East-West dialogue. In this silence, arise all languages. However linguistically different or incommensurable they may be, they all belong to this original silence, as the single source

that gives birth to them and sustains them. It is the common ground where various language houses are built. The capacity of listening to the call of Being in this silence conditions our listening to each other, it makes possible any translation not only between, for example English and German, but also between Western languages and Eastern languages which are alleged to have no traceable common historical origin; it makes possible a dialogue from house to house, the dialogue that can disclose the inexhaustible possibilities of language engaged in the dialogue.

To be sure, thinking is bound up with its tradition, its historical language world. Yet, the regress to its earliest germination, and taking from there a leap, might convert "this land of the evening, away beyond Occident and Orient and cutting straight through the European, into a place from which there may emanate a new historical destiny, (a history governed by the mutuality of man and Being rather than by the withdrawal of the latter, as thus far) in the time to come."⁶⁷ In listening to the voice of silence, the thinker can take the task of building a home for humanity. This building is a construction of planetary thinking. In this sense, Heidegger's dialogue with the East is the first pioneering step toward such building.

Here too no prophetic talents and demeanor are needed to realize that there are in store for planetary building encounters to which participants are by no means equal today. This is equally true of the European and of the East Asiatic languages and, above all, for the area of a possible conversation between them. Neither of the two is able by itself to open up this area and to establish it. (*QB*, p.107)

The above remarks clearly show that Heidegger's strategy of the destruction of metaphysics is aimed at such ultimate building. The end of philosophy is followed by the

task of thinking. However, as Caputo points out, “Rorty is interested in the destruction of the history of ontology in its negative sense; its positive sense [for Rorty] is Heidegger’s final illusion.”⁶⁸ Rorty follows Heidegger in declaring “the end of philosophy” but he rejects the “task of thinking”. In the essay “Building, Dwelling, Thinking”, Heidegger attempts to uncover the inner relationship between building, dwelling and Being.⁶⁹ For Heidegger, the truth of Being must not be understood as presence as in traditional metaphysics, nor does it refer to the endless “wandering” in the sense of deconstruction. It is building for the sake of dwelling, the belonging together of Dasein and Being, it is *Ereignis*.

Notes:

- ¹ German philosophy has a long tradition of engagement with Eastern thought, beginning with Leibniz and continuing through Nietzsche and Jaspers. But it is remarkable that Heidegger, distancing himself from all of them, who are at times eloquent in addressing alien thought with true insight, left little in print about Eastern thought which he engaged in through various ways (personal conversations, interviews, seminar discussions, and cooperation with others in translating philosophical literature) over fifty years. Gadamer gives an answer to the question raised by Graham Parkes regarding why Heidegger through his over fifty year engagement with Eastern thought left so little in print, "You have to understand a scholar of the generation to which he belongs would be very reluctant to say anything in print about a philosophy if he were himself unable to read and understand the relevant texts in the original language". (See *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, University of Hawaii Press, 1987, p.5.) This seeming over-caution is not due to the kind of academic or scientific rigorism which should be more properly called "exactness" in contrast to *Strenghe* (rigor) which, he claims, is only adequate for thinking. The rigorousness presented in Heidegger's reluctance to talk about Eastern thought directly is based on an assumption that it is difficult and almost impossible to hear in translation what the words could possibly signify in the original language, as Heidegger does in reading Greek philosophy. In this connection Heidegger is often charged as violating the original meaning of Greek words in the name of "exactness".
- ² Rorty criticizes Heidegger's dialogue with Eastern thought as an attempt to escape from the West in order to look at it with detachment. See Richard Rorty: "Heidegger, Kundera, and Dickens", in *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, 1991.
- ³ It is worth noting that Heidegger left only two dialogues ("A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer", and "Dialogue on Releasement") among his huge number of philosophical writings. But the dialogical nature is apparent in many other writings, especially those of his later period. Professor Harris pointed out in a seminar that the procedure of argument in "The Origin of the Work of Art" is in the distinctively Platonic dialogical form. Furthermore, Heidegger's thinking as a whole could be seen as a series of dialogues with the history of Western philosophy. When he said in the *Der Spiegel* interview that his whole work in the past 30 years had been in the main only an interpretation of Western philosophy, he was not pretentious, but rather honest and right, given interpretation in the hermeneutic sense is dialogue. The history of Being can also be seen as a constant dialogue between Dasein and Being, whose mutual appropriation is well expressed in a single word *Ereignis*. It, though as destiny, is still open to "turn" (*Kehre*).

- ⁴ Cf. Gadamer: *Truth and Method*, trans. Garrett Barden and John Cumming, Seabury Press, New York, 1975, pp.326-328.
- ⁵ J. L. Mehta observes that “One consequence of the ‘all-consuming Europeanization’ ... is that even Eastern scholars are tempted to adopt, even outside the scientific sphere, European conceptual thinking as the measure by which to judge, and naturally find deficient, their own non-representational ways of saying, that is, showing, the truth of things.” See J. L. Mehta: *Martin Heidegger: The Way and the Vision*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1976, p.480n.
- ⁶ The best example can be found in Hegel’s interpretation of the Chinese *Tao* in his *Lectures on History of Philosophy*. Hegel interprets *Tao* as reason and abstract Being, the Idea in the initial stage of its evolution. He writes, “... to the Chinese what is highest and the origin of things is nothing, emptiness, the altogether undetermined, the abstract universal, and this is called *Tao*, or reason. when the Greek say that the absolute is one, or when men in modern time say that it is the highest existence, all determinations are abolished. and by the merely abstract Being nothing has been expressed excepting this new negation. only in an affirmative form.” See G. W. Hegel: *Lectures on History of Philosophy*, Vol.1, trans. E. S. Haldane, The Humanities Press, Inc., NY, 1963, p.125.
- ⁷ It is rather interesting that quite opposite to Heidegger, what Leibniz found in the East was not the so-called “meditative thinking” that would more attract Heidegger, but the sheer “calculative thinking” which, to some extent, gave rise to computer science, given the fact that Leibniz as the father of computer science was inspired greatly by the binary system of the hexagrams in *I-Ching*.
- ⁸ J. L. Mehta: “Heidegger and Vedānta: Reflection on a Questionable Theme”, p.24.
- ⁹ It seems to me that by this identification of “the West” and philosophy such an attitude towards the East-West relation undermines so-called comparative philosophy insofar as its presupposition of a universal valid notion of philosophy, which in fact as everywhere “Western” blocks the way of reaching to “the other”, is unquestioned. Such a universal valid notion is caught in a “colossal one-sidedness” (Deussen’s words).
- ¹⁰ Jean-François Lyotard: *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota, 1984, p.82.
- ¹¹ Steven Conner: *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989, p.9.
- ¹² The Chinese encyclopaedia, described in the passage Foucault quotes from Borges’ story, divides all animals into the following categories: (1) belonging to the Emperor, (2) emblemed, (3) tame, (4) sucking pigs, (5) sirens, (6) fabulous, (7) stray dogs, (8) included in the present classification, (9) frenzied, (10) innumerable, (11) drawn with a very fine camel hair brush, (12) et cetera, (13) having just broken the water-pitcher, (14) that from the very long way off look like flies. See Michel Foucault: *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, New York, Vintage, 1973, p.xv.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p.xv.

- ¹⁴ Longxi Zhang: *The Tao and the Logos: Literary Hermeneutics, East and West*, Duke University Press, Durham & London, 1992, p.xvi.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p 9.
- ¹⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy: *The Birth to Presence*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1993, p.1-2.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.2.
- ¹⁸ Richard Rorty: *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, 1989, p.12.
- ¹⁹ Richard Rorty: *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1979, p.360.
- ²⁰ Gadamer: "Text and Interpretation" in *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer Derrida Encounter*, edited by Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1989, p.33.
- ²¹ Mark Taylor: "Paralectics", in *On the Other: Dialogue and/or Dialectics*, ed. Robert P. Scharlemann, University Press of America, Lanham, New York, London, 1991, p.17.
- ²² Gadamer: *Truth and Method*, p.341. Taylor draws our attention to the theological implications here. To be sure, what Rorty tries to dismantle are such serious theological implications which are more distinctive in Heidegger.
- ²³ The transformation from "good will" to the "trick" is almost already carried out by Derrida, who substitutes "good will" with "good will to power". A full discussion of this issue can be found in Josef Simmon's "Good Will to Understand and the Will to Power: Remarks on an Improbable Debate" in *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer Derrida Encounter*, edited by Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1989.
- ²⁴ Conner: *Postmodernist Culture*, p.9.
- ²⁵ Richard Rorty: "Comments on Taylor's 'Paralectics'" in *On the Other: Dialogue and/or Dialectics*, p.78
- ²⁶ Gadamer: *Truth and Method*, p.323.
- ²⁷ As Cho observes, the dialogue as an attempt to confront the world-experience of the East is "quite dilettantish and disappointing: what is confronted seems little more than an image projected by Heidegger's own thought." (Quoted in "Phenomenology Beyond the Spirit of Revenge", by Karl Harries, in *Research in Phenomenology* p.276. Originally from Kah Khung Cho: *Bewusstsein und Natursein, Phänomenologischer West-Ost Diwan*, Feiburg und München: Karl Alber, 1987.)
- ²⁸ The Japanese interlocutor responds: "You are right to say 'nearly'. For still it was a dialogue, and, I should think, an exciting one, ..." (*OWL*, p.5)
- ²⁹ Richard Rorty: "Heidegger, Contingency and Pragmatism", in *Heidegger: A Critical Reader*, pp.217-218.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.216.
- ³¹ Mark Okrent: "The History of Being and the History of Philosophy", in *Heidegger: A Critical Reader*. ed. Hubert Dreyfus and Harrison Hall, Cambridge, Mass., Blackwell,

1992. p.143.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Richard Rorty: “Heidegger, Kundera, and Dickens”, in *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, pp.70-71.
- ³⁴ Charles Guignon: “On Saving Heidegger from Rorty” in *Philosophy Today* Vol. XLVI, No.3, March 1986, p.407.
- ³⁵ Ibid., p.406.
- ³⁶ Ibid., p.406.
- ³⁷ Ibid., p.407.
- ³⁸ Richard Rorty: “Heidegger, Contingency and Pragmatism”, p.219.
- ³⁹ Richard Rorty: “Heidegger, Kundera, and Dickens”, in *Essays on Heidegger and Others*. pp.70.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.71.
- ⁴¹ Heidegger: “Only a God Can Save Us”, trans. Maria P. Alter and John Caputo, in *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1993, p.113.
- ⁴² Michael Zimmerman: “Heidegger, Buddhism and Deep Ecology”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles Guignon, Cambridge, New York, 1993, p.251.
- ⁴³ William Barrett relates a story which, however, has never been approved by Heidegger himself, “A German friend of Heidegger told me that one day when he visited Heidegger he found him reading one of Suzuki’s books; ‘If I understand this man correctly,’ Heidegger remarked, ‘this is what I have been trying to say in all my writings.’” See William Barrett: *Introduction to Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D. T. Suzuki*, Doubleday and Company, Garden City, NY, 1956.
- ⁴⁴ J. L. Mehta: “Heidegger and Vedānta: Reflection on a Questionable Theme” in *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, p.23.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., p.23.
- ⁴⁶ Heidegger: “Only a God Can Save Us”, p.111.
- ⁴⁷ Richard Rorty: *Consequence of Pragmatism*, p.xix.
- ⁴⁸ The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is based on Humboldt’s assumption.
- ⁴⁹ Richard Rorty: *Consequence of Pragmatism*, p.50.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., p.50.
- ⁵¹ Richard Rorty: “Heidegger, Wittgenstein and the Reification of Language” in *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, p.35.
- ⁵² Richard Rorty: *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. p.378.
- ⁵³ Richard Rorty: “Heidegger, Wittgenstein and the Reification of Language” in *Essays on Heidegger and Others*. p.63.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., p.63.
- ⁵⁵ Caputo is right in pointing out that “Rorty comes closer to early Sartrean ‘existentialism’ than to Heidegger.” See John Caputo: “The Thought of Being and the Conversation of Mankind: The Case of Heidegger and Rorty” in *Review of Metaphysics*, 36, March, 1983, p.673.

- ⁵⁶ Derrida: “*Ousia and Gramme: A Note on a Footnote in Being and Time*” in *Margins of Philosophy*, The University of Chicago Press. p.63.
- ⁵⁷ Charles Guignon: “On Saving Heidegger from Rorty” in *Philosophy Today* Vol. XLVI, No.3, March 1986, p.410.
- ⁵⁸ Gadamer: *Truth and Method*, p.97
- ⁵⁹ Peter Harris: “Poetry, Philosophy and Language” in *Concerning Heidegger*, unpublished papers, p.112.
- ⁶⁰ He at times confesses his preference of novel to poetry, (for example, in “Heidegger, Kundera, and Dickens”, in *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, pp.71) for poetry in its essence resists idle talk despite the fact that many poems are also idle talk.
- ⁶¹ Peter Harris: “Poetry, Philosophy and Language”, in *Concerning Heidegger*, p.112
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, p.112.
- ⁶³ Richard Rorty: *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p.152. emphasis mine.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.94-95.
- ⁶⁵ Rorty: *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, p.3.
- ⁶⁶ Richard Rorty: “Wittgenstein, Heidegger and the Reification of Language”, p.51n.
- ⁶⁷ See J.L.Mehta: *Martin Heidegger the Way and the Vision*, University of Hawaii Press, 1967, p. 480
- ⁶⁸ John Caputo: “The Thought of Being and the Conversation of Mankind: The Case of Heidegger and Rorty” in *Review of Metaphysics*, 36, March, 1983, p.673.
- ⁶⁹ According to Heidegger, in the German word *bauen* there is an etymological link between “to build”, “to dwell” and “to be”. See *PLT*, p.146-148.

Chapter Two

Ontological Difference and Languages

In this chapter, I will undertake a brief survey of the major characteristics of Eastern (Chinese) and Western languages in regard to their relations to the respective philosophical traditions. The metaphysical nature of Western languages and the non-metaphysical nature of Chinese will be made plain when the comparison of their major grammatical features is worked out. The linguistic investigation of both Eastern (Chinese) and Western languages is meant to show how the primordial meaning of ontological difference as Heidegger understands it is either concealed in Western languages and or dissolved in Eastern languages. It may help to prove my central contention in this thesis, namely, that Heidegger's dialogue with the East, which is deeply concerned with the nature of language and its relation to Being, is not an attempt to find an alternative to Western tradition, but a way of revealing the origin, or what Heidegger calls "the single source", that gives rise to different traditions.

Let us start with an interesting passage from Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*,

The wonderful family resemblance of all Indian, Greek and German philosophizing is easily enough explained. In fact, where there is affinity of language, owing to the common philosophy of grammar - I mean owing to the unconscious domination and guidance of similar grammatical function - it cannot but be that everything is prepared at the outset for a similar development and succession of philosophical systems: just as the way seems barred against certain other possibilities of world interpretation. It is highly probable that philosophers within the domain of the Ural-Altai languages (where the conception of the subject is least developed) look otherwise into the world and will be found on paths of thought different

from those of the Indo-Europeans and Musulmans.¹

Nietzsche wrote these words in the 1880's when Humboldt's monumental work on comparative linguistics was already available.² What sounded as an insightful conjecture had in fact been taken to be a basic hypothesis formulated in a rather systematic way and demonstrated through extensive empirical studies by Humboldt. The thesis that every language possesses a distinctive inner form that shapes subjective experiences, worldview and culture was carried on and further developed by Sapir and Whorf, who ultimately put forward the doctrine of "linguistic relativity": that different thoughts are determined by the structures of different languages. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Nietzsche offered nothing new. Instead, what he tried to focus our attention on is the relation between language and a particular mode of thinking, philosophy, whose alleged destiny of striving toward universality includes at the same time an effort to transcend any particular linguistic constraints. Thus a linguistic question with philosophical significance becomes a question concerning the philosophy of language. In this sense, Nietzsche is the first philosopher who announces "linguistic relativity" in the philosophical context, with which the present study is concerned.³

Although by now the intrinsic relationship between language and thinking has been accepted as almost common knowledge, the answers to the question in what way language and thinking are related to each other diverge among both linguists and philosophers. Linguistic relativism simply reverses the traditional statement that thinking determines language in the sense that language functions merely as a tool in service of the presentation of thinking. But the reversal of this characteristically metaphysical statement remains

metaphysical in essence; it still fails to think the nature of language. The failure results in the new pragmatist return to the instrumentalist conception of language.⁴ Linguistic relativism, in setting up the formula that language shapes thought, presupposes a separation of language and thinking in the sense that there must be language (at least logically) prior to thinking, especially prior to philosophical thinking. Furthermore, the pre-thinking language determines thinking to such an extent that every thought aspect (e.g. philosophical notions) could be reduced to linguistic factors. In his remarkable essay “Categories of Thought and Language”, Benveniste shows the striking parallel between Aristotle’s ten metaphysical categories and the grammatical categories in Greek and concludes that the former are simply the projection of the latter. This study which has inspired the further explorations undertaken by Kahn, Graham and others is truly illuminating for our account of Heidegger’s dialogue with the East inasmuch as the central concern in this dialogue is the nature of language. However, as I have claimed, Heidegger is not a linguistic relativist. His notion of language as “the house of Being” is not simply a modification of the linguistic relativist tenet “language shapes thought”. It is certainly true that language and thinking are essentially related and thus penetrate each other to the effect that it is impossible to find a pre-thinking or non-thinking language. Language is not merely a complex of structures governed by various grammatical rules and thinking is not simply reducible to the exercise of abstract concepts. It is only for our theoretical investigations that there arises the separation of language and thinking. In this sense, linguistics as a positive science cannot break through its technological understanding of language as an object. For Heidegger, the relation between language and thinking must be thought in their

relation to the question of Being.

Given that the equiprimordiality of language and thinking has been historically displaced by their outer relation through the separate development of both, linguistic relativism, though under the basically metaphysical assumption, establishes in various ways the parallels between language and philosophical thinking, which helps to retrieve their original inner relation. For example, the parallel between Aristotle's ten metaphysical categories and the grammatical categories in Greek shown by Benveniste can certainly lead to the linguistic relativist conclusion (as in Benveniste himself). But the idea of the derivation of philosophical thinking from language still implies the existence of pre-philosophical thinking, the original world experience of the early Greeks, which can never be regarded as derivative. Heidegger's regress to the pre-Socratic thinkers is an attempt to retrieve such an equiprimordiality of language and thinking.

Chinese may be the most perfect antithesis to Western languages; it may consist of all the "East", would mean to Heidegger.⁵ No doubt, Heidegger's conviction that Western languages are fundamentally metaphysical prompted him to see how very different a language can be from western languages, yet nevertheless possesses a great power of thinking. For this reason Heidegger "deliberately steers clear of the tradition of Indian thought."⁶ Certainly, Sanskrit and Bali, belonging to Indo-European language family, are close to Greek in many aspects and thus, potentially, are equally metaphysical in nature. In fact, Indian philosophy, though entirely independent of Western philosophy, still has a great number of family resemblances to it. One may allude the striking similarity between the Indian "Brahman" and the Greek "One".

It could well be assumed that Humboldt's influence on Heidegger lies not only in his notion of language in general, but also in his concrete comparative studies of various languages. According to Humboldt, all languages hitherto known could be classified into four types: (1) the "isolating" type; (2) the "inflecting type"; (3) the "agglutinating type"; (4) the "incorporating type".⁷ From his transcendentalist perspective, Humboldt contrasts Indo-European languages (Sanskrit as its typical representative) with Chinese as two extreme realizations of the possibilities of human language structure "in a state of greatest antithesis".

The Chinese and Sanskrit⁸ languages constitute in the entire linguistic area familiar to us two extremes, unequal to each other in fitness for intellectual development, but certainly equal in inner consistency and thorough application of their system. The Semitic languages cannot be regarded as lying between them. They belong, in accordance with their definite inflectional bent, in one and the same class with the Sanskritic dialects. However, all of the remaining languages may be considered as occupying a medial position between the foregoing extremes, inasmuch as all must approach either the Chinese isolation of words from their grammatical relationships or the fixed association of phonemes designating such grammatical functions.⁹

Though each language is unique in its expression of thought, it may be more or less imperfect according to the principle of mental development. For Humboldt, the inflecting type exemplified by Greek and Sanskrit is the most perfect one standing at the top of the language scale with regard to the organic nature of its grammatical structure which is the most adequate to the development of the mind. From this it follows that the extent of the development of thinking depends on the degree of inflection. In other words, the development of a language is a long-term striving toward inflection. Since Sanskrit and (ancient) Greek which were the most inflected had become the dead languages, German

turned out to be the most philosophically powerful language in comparison with any other modern language. This contention, though never explicated, is implicit in Humboldt's theory of language types, and it has readily joined the stream of various claims for the philosophical superiority of the German language. Even before Humboldt, Hegel, for example, exalted German for having "an abundance of logical expressions" and "many advantages over other modern languages."¹⁰ This notorious remark has its even magnified resonances in Heidegger. In *An Introduction to Metaphysics* he declares that German and Greek are "the most powerful and most spiritual of all languages." (*IM*, p.57) Indeed, there is clearly an ethnocentric inclination in this claim¹¹, but it would be mistaken to reject it as merely an ethnocentric view with no justification. To be sure, in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger was still committed to the task of the reconstruction of metaphysics, which he believed at that moment is universal and central to all human beings. Thus it is not impossible that his exaltation of German is also based on the assumption of the intrinsic relation between metaphysical thinking and inflected language.¹²

Admittedly, a highly inflected language easily attains a state of articulation with great clarity, accuracy and strictness and thus has the least possibilities of being bogged down in vague, ambiguous expressions. The following comparative observation of a highly inflected language, German, and a much less inflected Asian language, Japanese, brings their respective characteristics to the fore.

It (Japanese) is of a loosely related, agglomerative nature, admirably suited to the expression of ambiguous, infinitely suggestive nuance of feeling-tone, and frustratingly indeterminate to a Westerner. Contrast this with German, for example, with its ordered grammatical structures in which each words is strictly held in its proper place in a sentence so that it may deliver

its bit of meaning clearly and accurately to its hearer.¹³

The major characteristics of Japanese described above are also shared by most Far Eastern languages, and more are distinctive in Chinese, especially in classical Chinese whose flexible grammar and undetectable syntactic structures perfectly fit understatement with subtle indirectness and allusiveness which, as pregnant play of multiple meanings, have been regarded as the only adequate way to reflect reality.¹⁴ It is remarkable that although Humboldt ranks Greek and Sanskrit at the top of the language scale he does not place Chinese at the bottom as the most inferior in regard to its total lack of inflections. He writes:

... at the first glance, the Chinese language ought to be deemed the one most greatly digressing from the natural requirement of language, that is, the most imperfect of all. This viewpoint vanishes, however, upon closer inspection, for Chinese possesses a high degree of excellence and exerts a mighty -- even if one-sided -- effect upon intellectual capacity.¹⁵

For Humboldt, Chinese, unlike all other languages which are on the way, though at different stages, toward inflection, completely abandons this course and develops under an entirely different principle. Its great intellectual capacity is proved by the fact that Chinese is the only language outside the Indo-European family with a rich philosophical tradition entirely independent of Europe. For Heidegger, Chinese could exemplify perfectly the fundamentally non-metaphysical language. In what follows I attempt to compare Chinese with Western languages in respect to their distinctive features and to show how linguistic characteristics of Chinese function in every aspect as a contrast to the way metaphysical thinking takes its shape in Western languages.

1: Ontological Difference and Indo-European Languages

I should like to take Lohmann's remarkable essay "M. Heidegger and Ontological Difference"¹⁶ as a point of departure for my further discussion. In this essay, Lohmann, from his Heideggerian perspective, takes the issue of the linguistic opposition between Indo-European languages and non-Indo-European languages, mainly Chinese, in terms of the question of "ontological difference" to see how Western thinking would possibly meet its limitations. His central contention is that in the Indo-European languages the ontological difference is made explicit in their linguistic structures; while in Chinese it is suppressed or worn away.

a. An Interpretation of Ontological Difference

It is of great significance to start with this vantage point because the question of ontological difference, for Heidegger, is central to understanding Western metaphysics, which is repeatedly characterized by Heidegger as the "forgetfulness of Being", namely, the "forgetfulness of the ontological difference between Being and beings". The "ontological difference" is mentioned for the first time in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, but the interpretation of its meaning is in fact already fully developed in *Being and Time*, though not under the term that is explicitly used in *The Essence of Reasons*, to which Lohmann makes substantial references. It must be pointed out in advance that the term "ontological difference" used by Lohmann may cause considerable

confusion. For Lohmann, ontological difference is a difference between “the Being of a being” and “a being in its Being”. It seems in agreement with Heidegger’s understanding of the term in his critique of metaphysics for its forgetfulness of Being. In the “Letter on Humanism” Heidegger states: “Metaphysics does indeed represent beings in their Being, and so it thinks the Being of beings. But it does not think the difference of both.” (*BW*, pp.202-203) By this Heidegger does not mean that metaphysics draws no distinction of any kind between Being and beings. Quite the contrary, the fundamental distinction between Being and beings is the central concern of metaphysics from Plato onward. The point is, metaphysics does not think the difference in the primordial sense that guided the pre-Socratic thinkers. It is this primordial sense of the difference that metaphysics has covered and forgotten. In this sense, the distinction that metaphysics persistently strives to work out fails to differentiate Being from beings insofar as Being is understood either as Beingness or as the highest being. Thus what Lohmann really means by the statement that in the Indo-European languages the ontological difference is made explicit is that the ontological difference between beings and Being in the primordial sense is transformed into an opposition of beings as ontic reality and their mode of Being. Understood this way, the Indo-European languages bring forth this transformation and actualize the forgetfulness of Being. Accordingly, Lohmann’s “ontological difference” must be translated as the “modified or secondary ontological difference” in contrast with the “primordial ontological difference” on the ground that the former is derived from the latter which is rooted in Dasein’s existence.

The central concern of the fundamental ontology in *Being and Time* is to lay bare

the possibility of our access to the meaning of Being which lies exclusively in Dasein whose nature is to transcend beings toward Being. Heidegger argues that the existential analytic can show how the manifestation of beings is conditioned by Dasein's prior understanding of Being. The disclosure of Being in Dasein makes possible the manifestation of beings. It is Heidegger's contention that Dasein's understanding of Being is pre-ontological in the sense that before any formulation is worked out we are already to a certain extent within an understanding of Being. "The question of the meaning of Being becomes possible at all only if there *is* something like an understanding of Being. Understanding of Being belongs to the kind of being which we call 'Dasein'." (BT, p.200)

The fact that we are already in a certain state of understanding of Being assures us of the possibility of undertaking an inquiry into the meaning of Being in various ways. This pre-ontological understanding is described in terms of the "as-structure". As the basic mode of Dasein's Being-in-the-world which is prior to and underlies any inquiry into the meaning of Being, such understanding is not a grasping of Being. In *The Essence of Reason*, Heidegger states clearly:

To address something *as* something does not necessarily mean to *grasp* that which is addressed *in its essence*. The *understanding* of Being (*logos* in very broad sense), which from the outset clarifies and guides every way of behaving toward some being, is neither a grasping of Being as such nor even a comprehending of that which is grasped (*logos* in the narrowest sense = "ontological" concept). The sort of understanding of Being that has not yet been conceptualized we call "preontological" or "ontological in the broader sense." (ER, p.22)

The pre-ontological understanding of Being shows that the ability of differentiating Being and beings has its roots in the essence of Dasein. This is what Heidegger takes as a

presupposition that guides his philosophical investigation in his early period, especially in *Being and Time*.¹⁷ Guignon argues that Heidegger in *Being and Time* is seeking the transcendental conditions for the possibility of any interpreting or understanding whatsoever. In other words, the goal of *Being and Time* “is in fact to find *transhistorical* and *transcultural* structures that underlie any possible interpretation.”¹⁸ Thus, Chinese thinking, however fundamentally different from and even opposite to Western thinking, arises from the same ground, that is, the pre-ontological understanding of Being. But, according to Guignon, the result of Heidegger’s “description of everydayness seems to undermine the prospect of finding any sort of transcendental essential structures underlying interpretation in general.”¹⁹ The intention of resolving the tension in the “existential analytic” of *Being and Time* presumably gives rise to Heidegger’s turn. But the question of ontological difference is not simply given up, instead it is addressed in a rather radical way. In “Time and Being”, for example, Heidegger states that he wishes to think about Being without any reference to beings. Moreover, if all the effort of finding transcendental structures in *Being and Time* were abandoned it is still hard to see that the maintaining of the conception of pre-ontological understanding of Being is simply impossible. The question for Lohmann is how this preontological understanding of Being or the awareness of the ontological difference is realized in different languages, or how Being is conceptualized in different languages.

b. Ontological Difference and the Nature of Language

According to Heidegger, the ontological difference is well expressed in the bifurcation of two types of truth, primordial truth and propositional truth, the latter of which is elaborated by Leibniz under the term of “first principle”. Heidegger argues that this “first principle” is in fact derivative and is rooted in a more primordial truth. But when propositional truth is derived from primordial truth, there is a fundamental shift, a shift of the as-structure from the world of the ready-to-hand to the world of the present-at-hand, a change from seeing something as it is used or available to seeing something as it is known theoretically. They are called by Heidegger the hermeneutic “as-structure” and the apophantical “as-structure” respectively. (*BT*, p.196)

... a predicate, or consequent, is always contained in a subject, or antecedent, and in this fact consists the universal nature of truth, or the connection between the terms of the assertion, as Aristotle has also observed.²⁰

It should be well noted that the term “predication”, which is interpreted in a new way in *Being and Time*, is used in *The Essence of Reason* in the old sense which is equivalent to “proposition” as opposed to non-propositional “unconcealment”.

... as the possible “subject” of a predicative definition, being must already be manifest both *prior to* and *for* our predications. Predication, to become possible, must be able to establish itself in the sort of manifesting which does *not* have a *predicative* character. Propositional truth is rooted in a *more primordial* truth (unconcealment); it is rooted in that pre-predicative manifestness of *being* which we call ontical truth. (*ER*, pp.19-21)

The conception of supposition as purely logical and grammatical construction is derived from the original meaning of supposition which all languages possess as a necessary property. In this sense, all languages could be seen as “supposing”, for all languages must in one way or another represent the hermeneutic as-structure. “Insofar as

each speaking, seen from the viewpoint of language, is a speaking in concepts, whereas, nonetheless, the 'thing itself' is meant, one can say that all languages taken as speech must be 'supposing', that they must contain the 'ontological difference' as structure moment."²¹ This is, according to *Being and Time*, precisely what "assertion" originally means. Heidegger's analysis of assertion clearly shows how assertion understood in the metaphysical sense as proposition is derived from its primordial meaning. The three elements of assertion, namely, (1) pointing out (2) predication (3) communication, show that assertion is primarily within the primordial realm of ready-to-hand. Here predication means to give something a definite character, thus, it still means "pointing out", but in a more specific way. What is determined by the predicate is not a representation of the thing, but the thing in its primary meaning as ready-to-hand. By this, however, Heidegger is not trying to claim that the apophantical, or theoretical, understanding of assertion is simply wrong or useless; quite the contrary, it is rather important for scientific investigation. The point is, it can never be regarded legitimately as primary or as isolated from its hermeneutic source. Thus predication understood in this fashion is not only universal but also necessary to all languages, insofar as it seems impossible to conceive of a language without predication. Heidegger says:

Let us suppose that this indeterminate meaning of Being does not exist and that we also do not understand what this meaning means. What then? Would there merely be a noun and a verb less in our languages? No. *There would be no language at all.* No being *as such* would disclose itself in words, it would no longer be possible to invoke it and speak about it in words. For to speak of a being as such includes: to understand it in advance as a being, that is, to understand its Being. Assuming that we did not understand Being at all, assuming that the word "Being" did not even have its vaporous meaning, there would not be a single word. (*IM*, p.82)²²

The essential determination of language as “supposing” or “predication” - which is prior to or is more primordial than any particular grammatical construction that diverges among various languages - illustrates the very meaning of “the house of Being”. Nevertheless, the intrinsic relation between language and Being in *Being and Time* is mediated by Dasein’s existence, or more precisely, is determined by Dasein’s transcendence. (This, of course, is abandoned in favor of the priority of Being itself in the later Heidegger. This prepredicative “predication”, or pregrammatical construction of language, though not identical with the hermeneutic as-structure, is nevertheless in the structure of understanding as something, of understanding something under something, or of meaning something with something.

c. Ontological Difference and the Indo-European Inflection

It is precisely the Indo-European languages that actualize a fundamental shift from the supposition shared by all languages to the purely logical, conceptual supposition. For Lohmann, the subject-predicate relation as *inesse* of predicate in subject and this, in turn, as *idem esse*, articulates the logical form of the assertion as found in the grammatical structures of the Indo-European proposition; the logical inherence of the predicate concept in the subject concept is expressed as objective identification. But this structure of the assertion is necessary only if it presupposes a continuous “supposition”, which, according to Lohmann, is “the transformation of the merely conceptual meaning of words (for instance, “mortal”) into a meaning that is objectively founded (“a mortal [man]”, “the

mortal [man]”).²³

Here “supposition” is crucial in that it determines the metaphysical character of Western thinking through linguistic construction. Supposition, in establishing the relation between the conceptual meaning of words and a meaning objectively founded, at the same time presupposes the continuous “ontological difference” in the sense that each word in the sentence is taken to signify explicitly a being in its Being, or the Being of a being. This is successfully realized in the grammatical form of Indo-European languages, namely, the morphological inflection. Lohmann points out that the stem suggests “conceptual expression” and the ending suggests expressions of the relation of the concept in regard to an “object” which is given in the context of the sentence. Thus he concludes,

Each ancient Indo-European nominal or verbal form as such therefore contains as expression of the relation of a “Being” (the “Being horse” or the “Being white”) to a “being” (a determinate “horse” or “white thing”, or determinate “horse” or “white things”). Indo-European speech thus, from the beginning moves exclusively within the realm of the “absolute ontological difference”. ... it is, rather, a fundamental, specific characteristic of the Indo-European language structure, a characteristic which determines in a very fundamental way not only the position of the Indo-European languages within the totality of the types of language structures which are either factually available or apriorically possible, but also the Indo-European language taken in and for itself. The Indo-European language is primarily a language that makes use of supposition.²⁴

Here supposition should be understood as a function of the individual word, the subject of the sentence, which “lays” its “significations” (instead of the really meant object) “under” the predicate of the proposition. Although Indo-European languages are not the only inflecting languages - the Bantoid, Semitic or Hamito-Semitic (which are defined as “string” and “root inflecting”, respectively) are also inflecting at different degrees and in

a different mode only Indo-European languages stand out as the extreme realization of inflection and in a distinctive way, namely, stem inflection, which is intrinsically related to the “supposition”. The bifurcation of stem and ending in Indo-European languages suggests the relation between concept and object.

The Indo-European stem is logically the expression of a concept, which is referred to the “object” that the word signifies within the context of the sentence by means of the “ending”, that is to say, by means of the inflection. The Indo-European word form, which is thus divided into two parts, was described above as the reflection of the logico-ontological difference of Being and being.²⁵

But how is inflection in Indo-European languages necessarily related to the logical-ontological difference of Being and being? Here we should take into account Heidegger's view on inflection. According to Heidegger, inflection originally had two different modes, namely, *enkklisis* and *ptosis*. They are the inflection of the verb and the inflection of the noun, yet both of them mean falling, tipping, inclining. “This implies a derivation from standing upright and straight. But this erect standing-there, coming up <zum Stande Kommen, coming to stand> and enduring <im Stand bleiben, remaining in standing> is what the Greeks understood by being.” (*IM*, pp.59-60) Thus the stem represents what is erect standing-there, coming up and enduring, yet it tends inevitably to inclining by means of the ending. This inevitability is to be understood as the necessity of its own limit. “Coming to stand accordingly means: to achieve a limit for itself, to limit itself.” (*Ibid.*, p.60) To add the ending to the stem is to achieve such a limit. In this sense Heidegger describes the fundamental characteristic of the being (essent) as *to telos*, which means not aim or purpose but end. “End is ending in the sense of fulfilment <Vollendung>.” (*Ibid.*,

p.60) Inflection is a linguistic form, as far as form here is understood in its original sense: *morphē*, that is, that which places itself in its limit.

Comparing stem inflection with root inflection, the intrinsic relation between stem inflection and "ontological difference" may be made more apparent. The root, unlike the stem, is "nothing intuitively imaginable, but something purely conceptual."²⁶ As Fink puts it:

Just as difficult as it is to imagine clearly and distinctly a triangle which is neither rectangle nor oblique-angled, neither equilateral nor nonequilateral, and at the same time is nonetheless all of this and even more, so difficult is it for an Arab to make intuitively present to himself a *k-t-b* which signifies neither the representation indicated by *katib* nor that indicated by *kitab*, and nonetheless implies both and even more.²⁷

That is to say, the stem inflection tends to differentiate Being from beings much more easily and directly than root inflection. The Indo-European inflection is in fact the modification of a concept which is already available.

Beginning with Greek grammar, "inflecting" (*klisis*) has been used as the expression of the morphological declensions whose purpose is to express the grammatical propositional relations.²⁸

Inflection thus reflects the grammatical congruence or correspondence serving as the principle for the structure of the sentence; as the indication of the syntax, it makes manifest the inner form of the sentence. In other words, the structure of the sentence is in one way or another marked out by words, or more precisely by morphemes. In so doing, the "congruence" or "correspondence" between subject and predicate is established such that propositional truth in terms of the inherence of the predicate in the subject is guaranteed and is made explicit. To be sure, all inflecting languages share this features, yet Indo-

European languages show it most distinctively.

d. The Verbalized Nominal Sentence and the Nominalized Verbal Sentence

The distinctness of inflection in the Indo-European languages is further strengthened by another grammatical characteristic, according to Lohmann: the nominal sentence and verbal sentence are built into one another. Generally speaking, a nominal sentence is a sentence that contains no verb, but mainly nouns, while a verbal sentence must have a verb. The distinctive use of “be” in Indo-European languages brought about a mutual effect on the structure of both nominal and verbal sentences. Accordingly, as Lohmann says, “The nominal sentence (with the *verbum is* as copula) in a sense assumes verbal character, while the verbal sentence adapts itself in its structure to the nominal sentence.”²⁹ The nominal sentence is the mold of a purely logical and conceptual relation, and, therefore, the expression of a merely “subjective” movement and relation, a movement of thought itself, while the verbal sentence expresses the “objective” movement and relation. What is the significance of this union of nominal and verbal sentences? On one hand, the verbal sentence, in its approximation to the nominal sentence, obtains the subject-predicate scheme such that the outer and “objective” relations in some sense become inner, and logical. On the other hand, the nominal sentence obtains the character of the verbal sentence by making use of the verb “to be” as the copula which functions in the similar way as any other verb in the verbal sentence. But it does not follow that the nominal sentence would be reduced to a verbal sentence since it is still easy to differentiate “to be”, though

treated as a verb, from any other verb in a verbal sentence. This is true particularly in highly inflected languages like Greek and Latin, in which case plays the role of such a differentiation.³⁰ Nevertheless all of this cannot eliminate the analogy of “to be” with real verbs. We may better call “to be” a copulative verb as different from non-copulative verbs (i.e., real verbs) insofar as what functions as a copula could be anything other than “to be” which could be devoid of any verbal character or analogy as in the case of many languages.

Benveniste points out:

The creation of a “to be” which is used to predicate that two terms are identical was not a linguistic inevitability. In a number of languages at different periods of history, the junctive function, usually established by a pause between the terms, as in Russian, has tended to be realized in a positive sign, in a morpheme. But this is not the sole and necessary solution. Several other processes have been employed; the creation or adaption of a verbal form is only one of these processes.³¹

Obviously what is linguistically inevitable is the function of the copula. Even in Russian and Hungarian, the pause, the “zero morpheme”, is still a minimum element of a sentence which has the same value as any other copula, serving the sign of assertion. This linguistic inevitability indicates the equiprimordiality of language and the hermeneutic “as-structure” in the sense that any language *inevitably* makes assertions. The question we are concerned with here is how the “verbalized” nominal sentence determines the way Indo-European makes assertions. More particularly, how does it give rise to the structure of propositional truth, or, as Benveniste puts it, “how is it that there is a verb ‘to be’ which gives verbal expression and lexical consistency to a logical relationship in an assertive utterance?”³² As Lohmann observes, this approximation of the nominal sentence to the verbal sentence results in an identification of the subject in the subject-predicate structure

with the subject in the relational structure, the latter of which is virtually the agent and the ego. Lohmann goes on to point out, “this identification characterizes the modern European way of thinking, in which ‘subjective’ immediately becomes identical with ‘related to an ego.’”³³ The inner, subjective relations of the subject-predicate scheme in the nominal sentence are not only marked out but also guaranteed by the outer, objective relations, and it, therefore, factually becomes objective. Furthermore, the subject of the nominal sentence is assigned the character of an agent or an ego as the subject in the verbal sentence. Consequently, the propositional truth assertion conflates the relational scheme of the verbal sentence and the subject-predicate scheme of the nominal sentence.

2: “Ontological Indifference” -- Chinese³⁴

Assuming that the metaphysical understanding of the ontological difference is intrinsically related to inflection, and particularly the Indo-European inflection, the total lack of inflection in Chinese makes any allusion to such an ontological difference impossible. This is clearly shown in the following aspects: (a) Noun and verb, (b) Universal and Particular, Ontological Indifference and *Différance*

a. Noun and Verb

The distinction between noun and verb is so fundamental to Indo-European languages that it would be impossible to construct a sentence without it. As Heidegger says,

“verb and substantive, are among those which were first recognized at the beginnings of Western grammar, and which today are still regarded as the fundamental forms of words and grammar.” (*IM*, pp.55-56.) According to the generally proposed definitions, noun indicates an object while the verb indicates a process, and thus involves time which is represented in the tense inflection. Such definitions of noun and verb are taken for granted and underlie the understanding of the origin and the nature of language. Certainly, these definitions are derived from what the Greeks understood by the terms *onoma* and *rhēma*. “... the crucial differentiation of the fundamental forms of words (noun and verb) in the Greek form of *onoma* and *rhēma* was worked out and first established in close connection with an exegesis and interpretation of being, which was to exert a determining influence on the whole West.” (*IM*, p.57) But, according to Heidegger, these two terms originally covered an equally broad field, and they were intrinsically related to each other.

Onoma meant the linguistic appellation in distinction to the named person or thing, and took in the utterance of a word which was later designated grammatically as *rhēma*. And *rhēma* in turn meant speech, discourse; *rhēōr* was the speaker, the orator, who employed not only verbs but also *onomata* in the restricted sense of substantive. (*IM*, p.57)

That is to say, both *onoma* and *rhēma* originally designated all speech in the sense of naming. Their difference could be drawn only in terms of the different aspects of speech in respect to the named and in respect to the speaker, respectively. The fundamental differentiation of these two terms into two main classes of words was carried out through a digression from, or a misinterpretation of, the original reflection of the Greeks on the Greek language. According to Heidegger, it was Plato in the *Sophist* who first gave an interpretation and explanation of this differentiation. The differentiation between *onoma*

and *rhēma* corresponded to the differentiation between *pragma* and *praxis*. “*Pragmata* are the things with which we have to do, with which we are always concerned. *Praxis* is action and activity in the broadest sense, which also includes *poiēsis*.” (*IM*, p.58) Thus *onoma* and *rēhma* are *dēlōma pragmatos*, revelation of things, and *dēlōma praxeōs*, revelation of an action. Even so, the inner bond of *pragmata* and *praxis* is not entirely concealed in their differentiation.³⁵ It was only through Aristotle’s interpretation that the current definitions of noun and verb were ultimately established. Aristotle “differentiates between *onoma* as *sēmantikon aneu chronou* and *rhēma* as *prossēmainon chronon* (*De Interpretatione*, c.2-4). This interpretation of the essence of *logos* was taken as a model in the subsequent development of logic and grammar.” (*IM*, p.58) However the definitions of noun and verb were embedded at the very outset in the Indo-European languages. Benveniste argues:

An opposition between “process” and “object” cannot have a universal validity, a fixed criterion, or even a clear meaning in linguistics. The reason for this is that notions like process or object do not reproduce objective characteristics of reality but result from an expression of reality which is itself linguistic, and this expression can only have a limited validity. These notions are not intrinsic properties of nature recorded in language; they are categories that have been formed in certain languages and projected onto nature. The distinction between process and object is recognized only by someone who starts with the classifications of his native language and then transposes them into universals; and this person himself, when questioned about the basis of this distinction, will quickly come to see that if “horse” is an object and “to run” is a process, it is because one is a noun and the other a verb. A definition that seeks a “natural” justification for the manner in which a particular idiom organizes its notions is condemned to circularity.³⁶

The correspondences between noun and object, and verb and process belong to Indo-European linguistic construction, they are not necessary and universal. But such changes of correspondences constantly presuppose the distinction between noun and verb,

which cannot be applied to Chinese since Chinese has no grammatical forms (like verbal form and nominal form) as the ground for any such changes of correspondence. In other words, the difference between Chinese and Indo-European languages is radical in the sense that not only the definitions of noun and verb, but also their differentiation in terms of word classification, are invalid. Strictly speaking, to identify nouns and verbs in Chinese is in fact to project the framework of Western languages (morphology, syntax, etc.) onto Chinese by means of semantic parallels in translation. If the Western system of grammatical categories is taken as the reference, we may regard all Chinese words as either nouns or verbs. Thus what parallels the verb in Indo-European languages could be understood as the *name* of a process (which is pretty much like the substantive verb or gerund in English regardless of its clearly grammatical function as opposed to the real verb from which it derives), hence a noun. In this regard, Hall and Ames are right in claiming the dominance of the noun in Chinese as far as Western grammatical categories are employed to describe Chinese. The advantage of such a claim is to show the lack of verbal function in Chinese, which is crucial for the Indo-European languages for propositional assertions.

The dominance of the noun function precludes limiting meaningful statements to those possessing the sentential, subject-predicate form. The tendency of classical Chinese philosophers to be concerned with the ordering of names is a consequence of the dominance of the noun function. The striking claim that classical Chinese doesn't depend upon sentences and propositions for the expression of semantic content entails the consequence that all Chinese words are names and that compound terms, phrases and sentences are strings of names. This consequence, in turn, requires that one appreciate the lack of interest on the part of the early Chinese in questions of "truth" and "falsity". Words, as names, may be judged appropriate or inappropriate; only propositions may, in the true sense, be true or false.³⁷

But the "Chinese noun" can never be the same as what represents an object as in

Western languages; it should be treated as the name of a *process* rather than the name of an object, for, to the Chinese mind, nothing *is* but process, which can be named but can never be defined. Thus, we are also tempted to treat all Chinese words as more like verbs than nouns, or to recognize the dominance of verb rather than that of noun, insofar as that which can be named for the Chinese are processes which are devoid of substantial cores. In this regard, Graham suggests, the thesis of Hall and Ames that the noun function is dominant in Chinese contradicts their major contention that Chinese thinking assumes a “process” rather than a “substance” ontology. According to Graham, the dominance of noun function is greater in Indo-European languages than in Chinese. “The Indo-European sentence is noun-centered in that the main verb has to be predicated of a noun, its subject, from which it takes person and number; in the Classical Chinese verbal sentence the subject is an optional element and the minimal form is the verb by itself.”³⁸

Tense inflection is so crucial to the verb form in Indo-European languages that even English, which has lost many other inflections, still remains rich in its tense inflection. The inborn relation between verb and time in Indo-European languages determines the way Western thinking moves. (But, as we have seen, in some languages tense inflection belongs to nouns rather than verbs.) Tense inflection, unlike other inflections such as number and person, belongs exclusively to verbs. It seems to have nothing to do with syntactic congruence. In other words, the tense form of the verb is not taken from its subject-noun, as in the case of number or person, rather, it is determined by itself. In other words, the noun is excluded from time and becomes atemporal, or at most it is in an outer relation to time. In this sense, Lohmann describes the verbal sentence as in an outer relation.

Accordingly the fundamental separation of object and process is fulfilled. As Lohmann points out, in Indo-European languages the verbal sentence is built into the nominal sentence. It means also that tense is brought into the nominal sentence which is originally atemporal. However, it is remarkable that in propositional sentences (truth assertions) only the present tense is admitted. It seems to me that the tense function in the nominal sentence plays a role that underlies the formation of the metaphysical understanding of time and Being. The priority of the present is built into the nominal sentence and time is thus understood as a series of presents. Being gains the meaning of presence inasmuch as the verb “to be”, used as a copula in truth assertion, is exclusively used in that favored present tense. However, the fact that in Chinese there is no tense inflection at all³⁹ suggests a distinctive tense indifference in any assertion. It might be inconceivable for Western thinking that process could be free of tense determination and thus atemporal. But if there is nothing static and unchanging why should process necessarily be marked out by tense? The absence of tense inflection in Chinese should not be understood as an expression of atemporality such as might be ascribed to the Platonic Ideas. It only represents the fundamental temporal indetermination of the process, because any tense involved would introduce temporal determination.

The thesis that Chinese is a verb-centered language is acceptable inasmuch as the Chinese counterpart of the subject-noun of the Indo-European languages is basically devoid of the power of determining the verb (in respect to its number and person inflections). In other words, the subject should not be understood as the determinate factor, the agent or the ego. As Lohmann points out, “The ‘subject’ concept, if we wish to employ it in the

Chinese manner, is to be conceived of in a broader sense than we are accustomed to doing.”⁴⁰ The elasticity of the “subject” function in Chinese lies in the fact that what occupies the subject position⁴¹ is not necessarily the agent or an ego.⁴² Cheng’s remarkable comments on the status of “subject” in Chinese remain unsurpassed:

Since activity, change, or relation are regarded as self-contained as well as natural or spontaneous, there is no need to attribute a change or activity to an object itself. ... Of course, one can always assign a subject to such sentences, but any assignment need not be uniquely determinable; therefore, the virtual subjects of such subjectless sentences are basically or essentially indeterminate.⁴³

The fact that the special meaning of “subject” as agent or ego in Indo-European languages is lacking in Chinese gives rise to the fundamental rejection of the philosophical notion of “subject” or “subjectivity” as a necessary presupposition, as in Western metaphysics. The indeterminacy of “subject” conditioned, so to speak, Zhuangzi’s radical skepticism. The question he asked about his butterfly dream could never be formulated properly in Western languages without a certain modification. The sentence “Am I sure that I am the man who had a dream of becoming a butterfly, not a butterfly that is dreaming of becoming me?” must have a single grammatical subject. This is inadequate and even contradictory to what is meant by the original Chinese sentence. However, in classical Chinese the subjectless structure can easily avoid this bothersome problem. The striking contrast between Zhuangzi’s dream allegory and Descartes’ dream argument seems to exemplify the fundamentally different treatments of “subject” in Chinese and Western languages.⁴⁴ Indeed, the self or the ego that is questioned in the Western postmodern movement has never arisen in the Eastern world due to the absence of its linguistic

determination, as Nietzsche anticipated in that interesting passage.⁴⁵ The assignment of a subject to Chinese sentences is possible only when it understood differently. Lohmann suggests:

[I]f we conceive of “subject” (*hypokeimenon*) in its original meaning as the “substratum”, or the “fundament”, of the relationship expressed in the sentence, then the subject concept can also be applied to the Chinese sentence, in which one finds first and foremost, in addition to the *I* subject, the place and time determination.⁴⁶

In this regard, Lohmann seems to come close to Graham in contending the verb-centered character of Chinese sentence, especially when the question of the proposition is concerned. The copula “to be”, used as an indispensable element in the propositional form has the character of a verb, but a very special verb; as different from any other verb, it marks out an inner, not an outer, relation. But in Chinese what corresponds to this copula is sometimes the word “to have”.⁴⁷ Thus according to Lohmann, the relation of ontological difference in Indo-European languages becomes the relation of ontological indifference, or, purely ontic relation, for the verb “to have” indicates a relation of “coexistence”, i.e., outer relation, rather than of “inherence” in the sense of “*in esse*” of predicate in subject. Thus the Indo-European “selfsameness” or “correspondence” of the subject-predicate proposition cannot be established in Chinese. Lohmann concludes, “The ‘truth’ taken as the ‘unity of what belongs together’ is ... ‘intramundane’ (*in esse qua coexistere*) and not, as in Indo-European, ‘transcendental’, transcending the ‘world of things present-at-hand’ (*in esse qua idein esse*).”⁴⁸

We seem to have arrived at a paradox. On the one hand, the description of the Chinese sentence as verb-centered is due to the lack of the subject in the strict sense (as in

Western languages); on the other hand, a verb without its determinator would no longer be a verb. Thus the verb-centered sentence could at the same time be understood as a noun-centered sentence. In this regard, Hall and Ames' thesis about the dominance of the noun function in Chinese is proved to be right. But if we admit that the distinction between noun and verb is not necessary but merely arbitrary in regard to the reference to the Indo-European languages the paradox would become of great significance. Indeed, the realization of the absence of any fundamental distinction between noun and verb would make the character of the Chinese sentence as "ontological indifference" clearly. In other words, the absence of such a distinction hinders the formation of supposition which makes possible the ontological difference as in Indo-European languages.

b. The Universal and the Particular

The metaphysical conception of the ontological difference is presented most clearly in the thinking of Being as the most universal concept. In other words, metaphysics thinks the ontological difference between Being and beings in terms of the difference between the universal and the particular. In the very beginning of *Being and Time*, Heidegger attacks this traditional understanding of Being. (*BT*, p.22) In contrast to this Western metaphysical thought on the universal and the particular, the Chinese has never posed such a bifurcation. For the traditional Chinese mind it is almost inconceivable that what is universal or general can be totally separated from the concrete, or the particular.⁴⁹ This distinctive "Chinese thinking" is indeed already reflected in the Chinese language. Since in Chinese articles are

rarely used, and there is nonnumber inflection, what could be identified as nouns are often seen as more like the mass noun (such as “water”, “wind”) rather than the numerable noun (for example, “a man”, “trees”) of Indo-European languages. In this regard, Hansen claims that Chinese thought tends to think in terms of whole/part rather than class/member.

The mind is not regarded as an internal picturing mechanism which represents the individual objects in the world, but as a faculty that discriminates the boundaries of the substances or stuffs referred to by names. This “cutting up things” view contrasts strongly with the traditional Platonic philosophical picture of objects which are understood as individuals or particulars which instantiate or “have” properties (universals).⁵⁰

From this Hall and Ames draw a radical conclusion that “in the absence of classes of particulars to be picked out by index words, language will be non-referential, no ontological referencing serves to discipline the act of naming,” “names ‘reference’ functions or roles which are themselves other names”, “there can be neither connotative nor denotative definition in the strict sense.”⁵¹ Obviously since the fundamental distinction between the abstract or the general and the concrete or the particular is lacking in Chinese thinking, the quantified individual which is the starting point of abstraction is inadequate. Here we may consider the quantificational theory of existence to see how it would be conceived in Chinese. According to James Bradley, the quantificational theory of existence, which he calls the weak theory of existence, claims that “statements of the form ‘X exists’ are not statements about X, i.e., not predicates of X but rather quantificational statements about the term X, namely that X refers to a class which is not empty but has instances or examples.”⁵² But it seems that the weak theory of existence is irrelevant, or at most trivial in Chinese insofar as the quantificational statements which are based on the presupposition

of individuals or instances cannot be articulated naturally and unequivocally in Chinese. Unlike the weak theory of existence, the Chinese would treat the term X not as a class which has members, but as a whole, the whole that is made of parts. For example, the word “horse” in the sentence “[a] white horse is not [a] horse” can refer to either a single horse, or some horses, or all horses; yet it can still refer to “horseness”, which from the Western perspective would be regarded as a pure concept. Lohmann claims:

The ancient Chinese monosyllable word is ... purely conceptual expression; but this expression is taken in “ontological indifference”, so that it is not in need of a formal “objectification” in the sense (“supposition”). It thus stands in absolute opposition to the “word” of the three “supposing” types, particularly to the ancient Indo-European “word”, which shows in its form an explicit obligatory supposition (by means of the “ending”) and usually a complex articulation of the conceptual expression represented by the “stem” (or also, an articulation through “roots” and deriving elements).⁵³

The so-called “purely conceptual expression” should not be understood in terms of universality and abstractness, in the way that the West conceives a concept. In fact, as Cheng points out, Chinese words in general have the feature of combining universality and particularity, abstractness and concreteness, activity and the result of activity. The basic lexicon (e.g. *ying-yang*, *tai-ji*, *wu*) of Chinese philosophy, therefore, “denotes neither the universal abstract nor concrete particulars”.⁵⁴

c. Ontological Indifference and *Différance*

The opposition between Indo-European languages and Chinese as two extreme realizations of possible human languages is in every aspect an opposition between “ontological difference” and “ontological indifference”. To put it in another way, from the hermeneutic “as-structure”, the common ground for making linguistic assertion of any kind. Chinese apparently took the road opposite to that of Indo-European languages which have carried out a transformation from the hermeneutic “as-structure” to the apophantic “as-structure”, namely the transformation from primordial truth to propositional truth.

For Derrida, it is the “ontological difference” of Western languages that determines the fundamental character of Western philosophy, which he calls the “metaphysics of presence” or “logocentrism”. The fact that each Indo-European word (nominal or verbal) as such contains an expression of the relation of a “Being” to a “being” by means of inflection gives rise to or reinforces the tendency of thinking beings as referring to Being, the final referent, which can be fully present, be it Form, *ousia*, *essentia*, etc.. Derrida’s strategy of overcoming the metaphysics of presence is to make a shift, the shift from ontological difference to *différance*. *Différance*, according to him, “is the systematic play of difference, of the spacing [*espacement*] by which elements relate to one another.”⁵⁵ It conflates difference and deferral, and alludes to fundamental undecidability and indeterminacy such that the full presence of Being can never occur. But in order to practice *différance*, it is necessary to deconstruct Western languages themselves, that is, to eliminate the natural tendency of their grammar to generate the “ontological difference”.

But all this seems to lack importance when it is applied to Chinese thought, for, as Hall and Ames point out, “there is no need to overcome the ‘logocentrism’ of a ‘metaphysics of presence’ grounded in ‘ontological difference’ if no distinction between Being and beings is urged by the classical Chinese language.”⁵⁶ The “ontological indifference” of Chinese indeed hindered at the very outset the formation of the “metaphysics of presence”. All the grammatical characteristics of Chinese, e.g. lack of inflection, no essential distinction between word classes, no strict subject-predicate “sentencehood”, etc. leave its referential function as basically one of deferral. As Hall and Ames put it:

Language which does not lead one to posit ontological difference between Being and beings, but only a difference between one being and another, suggests a decentered world whose centers and circumstances are always defined in an ad hoc manner. The mass of classical Chinese philosophical discourse, then, is already deconstructed.⁵⁷

The so-called “transcendental *signifié*” is irrelevant to the Chinese language insofar as the “string of Chinese words” is wholly contextual without reference to structures that are constantly established in Western languages by inflection. For inflection is essentially constructive, it sustains the reluctance of Western languages to be submitted to endless deferral.

The “ontological indifference” of Chinese is still attested by its being free from phonocentrism, the “debasement of writing”, which is seen by Derrida as the major aspect of logocentrism. It is certainly true that Chinese nonphonetic writing differs from Western alphabetical writing in such a significant way that it can never fit the characterization of writing as a recording of speech. Derrida, while insisting that logocentrism is a property of

the West, sees in the nonphonetic Chinese writing “the testimony of a powerful movement of civilization developing outside all logocentrism.”⁵⁸ Although it is still arguable whether Chinese, as Derrida conceives it, can totally suppress or choke off the desire to posit a “central” presence, the non-logocentrist tendency was from the very start inherent in the Chinese language. Zhang Longxi, for example, while suspecting Derrida’s conception of Chinese as no more than another “European hallucination” (just as that of Leibniz), contends that Chinese may overturn the metaphysical hierarchy more easily and efficiently than Western phonetic writing does, and there is something in the Chinese scripts that does appeal to the Derridean grammatology.⁵⁹ He explains:

In the Chinese tradition, therefore, the power of writing as such avenged itself the very moment it was debased; the metaphysical hierarchy was thus already undetermined when it was established. ... it hardly needed to wait until the twentieth century for the dismantling of phonetic writing, for the Derridean sleight of hand, the strategy of deconstruction.⁶⁰

What the present study is more concerned with is whether Heidegger, when attempting to engage in a dialogue with the East, would possibly appeal to Chinese as exemplifying the non-metaphysical language just as Derrida does. It can be assumed at this point that the particular form of deferral in Chinese, though different from sheer postmodern deconstruction, would certainly draw Heidegger’s attention. The Chinese deferral, according to Hall and Ames, “involves a yielding to the appropriate models of the received tradition, and to the behaviors of those who resonate with those models.”⁶¹ Or as Zhang explains, “While a deconstructive intertext is a trace without origin, a Chinese intertext is always a trace leading back to the origin, to the fountainhead of tradition”⁶² If the question of ontological difference is to be retained and explained in a rather radical

way as Heidegger attempts, “origin” may be the adequate substitute for the “transcendental *signifié*” or the “final reference”, although such a substitution has been suspected by Rorty as making no difference. But it is still hard to see how the “ontological indifference” of Chinese can possibly yield the ontological difference between Being and beings in its primordial sense which Western metaphysics, due to the languages in which it is couched, has forgotten and covered. In other words, whereas Being has become obscured in oblivion in the West, it simply has not arisen in Eastern thought whose essentially other “other” characteristics could not suggest the ontological difference in the first place. The question I now raise is whether the relics and debris of Western metaphysical thinking which are preserved in technological culture will suggest such a difference to contemporary Eastern thought.

Notes:

- ¹ Nietzsche: *Beyond Good and Evil*, Translated by H. Zimmern, Edinburgh and London. T. N. Foulis, 1907, p.29.
- ² Humbolt's three-volume work *On the Kawi Language on the Island of Java* was published in 1836. The original reflection on the relationship between language and thought is mainly addressed in detail in its lengthy introduction "Linguistic Variability and Intellectual Development" which constitutes the first volume of the whole work.
- ³ However, I am not trying to identifying Nietzsche's perspective with the Sapirian-Whorfian linguistic relativism.
- ⁴ See Chapter 1 of this thesis, particularly pp.31-40.
- ⁵ The "East" in the context of Heidegger's remarks (mostly he uses "Eastasia") unequivocally is referred to as what is more properly called "far East", a region in both the geographic and the cultural sense, which includes China, Japan, Korea and other countries whose culture and tradition have been embedded in the strong Chinese tradition. Although German philosophy has a long tradition of engagement with Eastern thought, what has been taken into account with great enthusiasm and seriousness was mainly Indian philosophy. Far Eastern thought, particularly Chinese thought, remained dubious as to its worth for exploiting on account of the fact that in it the least comparable characteristics have been found. But, it is this relatively inconceivable world that exerted considerable attraction to Heidegger and became "the other" in his thinking of Western philosophy as a whole.
- ⁶ Mehta: "Heidegger and Vetānta: Reflections on a Questionable Theme", in *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, p.24.
- ⁷ Similar classifications can be found in Friedrich von Schlegel and August Wilhelm von Schlegel who propounded the former three to which Humboldt added the "incorporating type", which contains a mixture of agglutinating and inflectional features, and thus is not regarded as a separate typological category by some linguists. Cf. *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, Ed. R. E. Asher, Pergamon Press, Oxford, New York, 1994, p.223.
- ⁸ Humboldt freely use the term "Sanskrit" in either a general sense (as referring to all Indo-European languages) or a particular sense (referring to an old Indian language). Here it is used in the former sense.
- ⁹ Wilhelm von Humboldt: *Linguistic Variability and Intellectual Development*, Translated by George C. Buck and Frithjof A. Raven, University of Miami Press, Coral Gables, Florida, 1971, pp.212-213.
- ¹⁰ G. W. F. Hegel: *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller, Humanities Press, New York, 1976, p.32.
- ¹¹ The ethnocentric tendency in Heidegger's claim is enhanced by his appeal to the vocation of Germany announced in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* and remained unchanged in the *Der Spiegel* interview.

- ¹² Heidegger at times denigrates English as basically unphilosophical. One of the reasons is probably that it has the least features of inflection among modern Western languages to such an extent that it is sometimes considered as more similar to isolating languages like Chinese than German or Greek, for there are few inflectional endings, and word-order changes are the basis of the grammar. This is somehow confirmed by Heidegger's preference of French and Spanish translation of *Sein und Zeit* to the English one, for the merit of the former two, which are regarded as more appropriate for representing his thought, is their much more developed inflection in comparison with English. In echoing Heidegger, Petzet remarks, "However rich English is in terms of vocabulary, it suffers a significant lack when it comes to words of thinking." (H. W. Petzet: *Dialogue and Encounter with Heidegger*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993, p.167.)
- ¹³ Winston L. King: "Forword" to Nishitani's *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. Jan van Bragt, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1982, p.12.
- ¹⁴ These shared features in most Far Eastern languages cannot be explained in terms of the resemblance of a language family as in the case of German and Greek which could be classified as belonging to the same Indo-European language family, since genetically and typologically most Far Eastern languages are independent of each other (that Japanese and Korean may belong to the same Altaic family and agglutinating type is still not accepted by many linguists) despite how strong the influence of classical Chinese as the model for learned speech was in shaping the vernaculars.
- ¹⁵ Wilhelm von Humboldt: *Linguistic Variability and Intellectual Development*, p.210.
- ¹⁶ In *On Heidegger and Language*, ed. Joseph J. Kockelmans, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1972.
- ¹⁷ This presupposition is still maintained in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, in which Heidegger claims that metaphysics is essential to all human beings. See p.57.
- ¹⁸ Charles Guignon: *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 1983, p.63
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Leibniz: *Opuscles et fragments inédits de Leibniz*, edited by L. Couturat, quoted by Heidegger in *The Essence of Reason*, p.15.
- ²¹ *On Heidegger and Language*, p.311.
- ²² I have consistently modified Mannheim's translation to conform with the general usage of being and Being for translating *Seiendes* and *Sein*.
- ²³ *On Heidegger and Language*, p.309.
- ²⁴ Ibid., pp.309-310.
- ²⁵ Ibid., p.317.
- ²⁶ Ibid., p.318.
- ²⁷ Quoted by Lohmann in "M. Heidegger and Ontological Difference", *On Heidegger and Language*, p.318.
- ²⁸ Ibid., p.313.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p.315.

- ³⁰ Although English has lost most inflections it does have devices to distinguish “to be” and other verbs. For example, a verbal sentence can easily change its active voice into passive voice while the nominal sentence cannot. Cf. C. J. F. Williams: *What is Existence*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1981, p.5.
- ³¹ Emile Benveniste: *Problems in General Linguistics*, p.164.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p.164.
- ³³ *On Heidegger and Language*, p.316.
- ³⁴ What concerns the present study is mainly classical Chinese.
- ³⁵ “The Greeks had an appropriate term for ‘Things’: *pragmata* – that is to say, that which one has to do with in one’s concerned dealings *praxis*.” (*BT*, pp.96-97)
- ³⁶ Emile Benveniste: *Problems in General Linguistics*, p.132. Benveniste also shows that in some languages a verb might designate an object (as in Hupa and Zuñi), that is, a verbal form might be used as a noun. Moreover, tense might be expressed in nouns or others instead of verbs (as in Tübatulabal).
- ³⁷ Hall and Ames: *Thinking Through Confucius*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1987, p.298f.
- ³⁸ *Disputers of the Tao*, p.394.
- ³⁹ It does not follow that Chinese does not have tense expression. Quite the contrary, tense variations can be efficiently marked out by various particles.
- ⁴⁰ *On Heidegger and Language*, p.332.
- ⁴¹ Word order is the only way of grammatical determination in Chinese.
- ⁴² For example, in the sentence *Haishang sheng mingyue* (“The moon rises over the sea.”), the word *Haishang* (“the sea” or more literally, “the surface of the sea”) can be made “subject” for it precedes the verb *sheng* (“rise”) and the whole sentence has exactly the same structure as the sentence *Jingcha zhua xiaotou* (“Policemen catch thieves”). But in Indo-European languages, only the word “moon” can be the subject, “the sea” would be easily excluded as not being a subject according to case, number and other inflections. Although in English, whose grammatical determination highly depends on the word order (as in Chinese) its retained inflections clearly make clear the Indo-European “subject”. “There comes a duck.” is admitted as the same as “A duck comes.” What precedes the verb in the first sentence “there” can not be the subject for the inflection of the verb is determined by the “duck” as in the second sentence, rather than “there” though it occupies the same position as the “duck” in the second sentence. Moreover, in Chinese “subject” can be left out as in the sentence *Chu taiyang le* (“The sun has arisen”, *Chu* = “arise”, *taiyang* = “[the] sun”, *le* = the particle indicating the perfect tense.)
- ⁴³ Chung-ying Cheng: “Logic and Language in Chinese Philosophy”, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 14 (1987) p.289.
- ⁴⁴ The indeterminacy of the difference between dream and wakefulness is, at first glance, crucial to the Cartesian doubting in the dream argument: One knows that if one knows something then one is not dreaming, in which case if one really knows something then one must know one is not dreaming. However, one does not know one is not dreaming. Why does one fail to know one is not dreaming? Because in order to know it one would

need to know that one has passed some test, some empirical procedure to determine whether one is dreaming. But any such supposed test could just be part of a dream, and dreaming one passes the test would not suffice to show one was not dreaming. In other words, in order to know something needs prior knowledge of one's wakefulness. But in order to know of one's wakefulness one needs prior knowledge of the results of the test procedure. But this in turn requires prior knowledge that one is awake and not dreaming. Thus we cannot get out of the circle. It is not difficult to find the principal difference between these two dream theories. In the Cartesian dream argument, what is doubted and cannot be assured is the demarcation between dream and wakefulness, whereas "one", the ego, is constant and undoubtful. The constant ego as "the transcendental" is the very starting point for any philosophical inquiries whatsoever. However, in Zhuangzi, the constant ego itself is called into question.

⁴⁵ See p.46 of this thesis.

⁴⁶ *On Heidegger and Language*, p.333.

⁴⁷ For example, *Ta yu bing* ("He is ill.") would be literally translated as "He has diseases."

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.342.

⁴⁹ Gernet states, "The fact is that in Chinese, it is, for example, so difficult to express how the abstract and the general are different *fundamentally, and not just occasionally*, from the concrete and the particular. This was an embarrassment for all those who had, in the course of history, attempted to translate into Chinese concepts formed in inflected language such as Greek, Latin or Sanskrit." See Jacques Gernet: *China and the Christian Impact : A Conflict of Cultures*, p.239. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁰ Graham: *Disputers of the Tao*, p.401.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp.401-402.

⁵² James Bradley: "The Nature of Existence: Strong or Weak", p.1 (unpublished paper)

⁵³ *On Heidegger and Language*, p.335.

⁵⁴ Chung-Ying Cheng: "Logic and Language in Chinese Philosophy" in *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 14(1987) p.288.

⁵⁵ Derrida: *Positions*, p.38.

⁵⁶ Hall and Ames: *Anticipating China*, SUNY Press, Albany, 1995, pp.227-228.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.306.

⁵⁸ Derrida: *Of Grammatology*, p.90.

⁵⁹ Zhang Longxi: *The Tao and the Logos*, p.32.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.33.

⁶¹ Hall and Ames: *Anticipating China*, p.229.

⁶² Zhang Longxi: *The Tao and the Logos*, p.33.

Chapter Three

The Nothing

Based on the preliminary linguistic-philosophic investigations of both Western and Eastern (Chinese) languages undertaken in the previous chapter, which is meant to bring about an open space for a meaningful dialogue between Heidegger and Eastern thought, the present chapter will focus on a single philosophical idea, “nothing”, as a vantage point from which such a dialogue can be developed. The main reasons for this option are: (1) Given the basic claim asserted in the previous chapter that the lack of those linguistic determinations that give rise to the idea of “ontological difference” and the concept of Being are the reason why Eastern thought keeps itself far from the question of Being as raised in Western philosophy, “nothing” is introduced to play the role of breaking the language barrier, for “nothing” is a common idea which is available in both Eastern and Western philosophical discourses. After all, “nothing”, it would seem, is not Being, which belongs solely to Western ontology. (2) The notion of “nothing” is highly esteemed in Eastern thought, notably in Taoism and Buddhism. Much philosophical literature has been devoted to contemplation of this awe-inspiring “concept”.¹ Its predominance in Eastern philosophy is comparable with that of Being in Western metaphysical philosophy. The view that the pursuit of Being is the central theme of Western philosophy while the inquiry into Nothingness is the primary task of Eastern philosophy has been widely accepted as a basic observation on the issue of East-West comparative study.² Thus the relation between the question of Being and the question of nothing still invokes the question concerning the so-called duality of East and West. (3)

Heidegger's innovative interpretation of "nothing" belongs to his task of rethinking the Western philosophical tradition. The discussion of "the nothing" plays an important role in his attempt to step out of Western metaphysics.³

1. "Nothing" as a Metaphysical Question

As a Western philosopher *par excellence*, Heidegger describes his whole work as "in the main an interpretation of Western philosophy."⁴ To be sure, such an interpretation does not merely add a footnote to the history of Western philosophy; rather, as a part of the history it aims to unfold, it brings to light what is still unthought in that tradition. Given the fundamental philosophical question for Heidegger is the question of Being (*Seinsfrage*), his interpretation of Western philosophy focuses on the interpretation of the question of Being. The question of Being, according to Heidegger, constitutes the essence of Western philosophy and at the same time marks its limitation. Thus, we must first ask how Western philosophy raises the question of Being, i.e., in what way Being becomes thematized.

It is Leibniz who for the first time formulates in a rather succinct way the very thrust of Western philosophy which gives rise to the various contemplations on Being: "Why are there beings, rather than nothing."⁵ In both "What Is Metaphysics?", and *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, which are meant to clarify the nature of metaphysics in a positive and constructive manner, Heidegger takes Leibniz' formulation as the fundamental question of metaphysics. In agreement with Leibniz, Heidegger asserts that it is the first of

all questions in the sense that it is the most far-reaching, deepest and most fundamental of all questions. (*IM*, pp.1-2) The “why” in the question asks about the ground of beings. The “first question”. for Leibniz, is asked according to the “first principle”, “Nothing is without ground (reason)”. Only in light of this principle can we ask the question. It is worth noting that the interpretation of the “first question” is somehow intrinsically related to the interpretation of the “first principle”, each of which plays a significant role in Heidegger’s turn, although Heidegger treats them separately as different themes – the former is mainly addressed in “What Is Metaphysics?” and *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, while the latter in *The Essence of Reason*. The first principle concerns the ontological difference in the sense that the ground of that which is must be understood as the Being of beings. However the relation between the ground of what is grounded in Leibniz, and in traditional metaphysics in general. is essentially a causal relation. That is, Being as ground is understood as a cause, the first cause of beings. Insofar as Being is the first cause, it is still treated as a being although the highest being, because the relation between a cause and what is caused is thought as a relation between one being and another.⁶ The first principle seems to pre-determine the answer to the “why” in the first question, and thus marks forgetfulness of Being. Heidegger says:

This question inquires into the first cause and highest existent ground of beings. It is the question of the *theion*, a question that had already arisen at the beginning of metaphysics in Plato and Aristotle; that is to say, arisen from the essence of metaphysics. Because metaphysics, thinking the being as such, is approached by Being but thinks it on the basis of and with reference to beings, metaphysics must therefore say (*legein*) the *theion* in the sense of the highest existent ground. (*N*, vol.4, p.209)

But how can we get away from this seemingly unavoidable way of thinking Being

as a being? How can we really differentiate Being from beings? Heidegger thinks that the possibility of getting away from the metaphysical treatment of Being is still contained in the first question, “Why are there beings, rather than nothing?” First of all, the question is concerned with all beings. Thus it pushes the frontiers of our thinking to the verge, the limit that is found only in nothing. But the nothing which first enters the scope of metaphysics by means of the “first question” is merely functional in the sense that it is meant to present beings as a whole, namely, all that is *not* nothing. As Heidegger puts it:

What follows in the interrogative sentence, “rather than nothing”, is only an appendage, which may be said to turn up of its own accord if for purpose of introduction we permit ourselves to speak loosely, a turn of phrase that says nothing further about the question or the object of questioning, an ornamental flourish. Actually the question is far more unambiguous and definite without such an appendage, which springs only from the prolixity of loose discourse. “Why are there beings?” The addition “rather than nothing” is dropped not only because it says nothing. For why should we go on to ask about nothing? Nothing is simply nothing. Here there is nothing more to inquire about. And above all, in talking about nothing or nothingness, we are not making the slightest advance toward the knowledge of the being. (*IM*, pp 22-23)

The above observation shows how the metaphysical question, “Why are there beings, rather than nothing?”, introduces “the nothing”. Metaphysics as the foundation of sciences seeks the ground of beings which sciences deal with in various ways. Thus metaphysics in this context is prohibited from talking about nothing, for to talk about nothing simply means to cease to talk. No doubt, only something rather than nothing can keep talking going. “In speaking of nothing he makes it into a something. In speaking he speaks against what he intended. He contradicts himself. But discourse that contradicts itself offends against the fundamental rule of discourse (*logos*), against ‘logic’, To speak

of nothing is illogical". (*IM*, p.23) If metaphysics goes so far as to speak of nothing, it would immediately undermine its status as the foundation of sciences. But Heidegger attempts to have metaphysics speak of nothing. In "What Is Metaphysics?" "nothing" is "metaphysically" thematized; it is taken as a particular metaphysical question that concerns the nature of metaphysics itself.

2. Nothing and Negation

Heidegger, in "What Is Metaphysics?", claims that "the nothing is more original than the 'not' and negation." (*BW*, p.99) How is this possible? It seems that we cannot eliminate the "natural" tendency of thinking of the "nothing" as "no-thing" or "non-thing", namely, the negation of "thing". As far as affirmation is considered to be more original than negation, the "no-" of the nothing indicates its derivative nature from the "not", i.e. the negation. Can we get rid of this "no" and encounter the nothing itself without a "*via negativa*"? Heidegger's claim seems to counter the main stream of Western philosophy and even Western languages, which treat the nothing as a result of the negation of Being.

"Nothing is the negation of the totality of beings." This definition indicates: (1) the primacy of Being over nothing; (2) the priority of the act of negation to nothing as its result. The Greeks understood "nothing" or non-being as *steresis*, (Latin, *privatio*), namely, the privation of being, *me on*. The first attempt to address nothing was made by Parmenides, "the thinker of Being", who, in doing so, actually broke his own rule that it is impossible to speak of nothing. He asserted: "What is, is; what is not, is not. . . Plato modifies this

position by insisting that Nothing is conceivable only in terms of a privation of Being. Otherwise, anything that can be talked about must “be there” in some sense. Tillich points out, “Being precedes nonbeing in ontological validity, as the word ‘nonbeing’ itself indicates.”⁷ “Nonbeing is dependent on the being it negates. ‘Dependent’ points first of all to the ontological priority of being over nonbeing.”⁸ What Tillich seems to be saying here represents, in Heidegger’s view, a basic assumption which has been taken for granted by many Western philosophers.⁹

Since the nothing is thought to be fundamentally parasitic on Being, the meaning of the nothing is determined by the meaning of Being which must be given in advance. Western ontology is based on the peculiar use of the verb “to be” which envelops various senses that may be roughly divided into the existential and the copulative.¹⁰ In correspondence with the various senses of “to be”, there must be, so to speak, various senses of “not to be” insofar as any negation is dependent on what it negates. But in Western philosophy, the nothing is thought as the negation of the *totality* of beings in the sense of the totality of all things, and also the totality of all the senses of “to be”. The logical problem arises from the contradiction between “is” and “is not”: To think the nothing as the negation of the totality of beings is to think nothing as derived from the negation of the totality of the various senses of “to be”. It is illogical in that it contains inevitably an assertion “nothing (non-existence and not-is) is”. That is, in such a stating of nothing, nothing still is, is so and so, namely, the negation of the totality of beings. But nothing is not! Nothing can not be articulated in an “x is y” sentence, simply because nothing is not only the negation of the existential “to be” but also of the copulative “to be”.

Is there any possibility for us to avoid violating logic? Yes, but only by distinguishing between the existential and the copulative senses of “to be”. That is to say, if the “is” in question is treated only as a copula with no allusion to existence, we can still say that “nothing is such and such”. This can be made clear when we look to the East where “nothing” does not constitute a dilemma, not because the East has a different “logic”, but because assertion or the use of copula does not contradict “nothing” in so far as this nothing is not derivative from “is not” -- actually it is not derivative at all.

The attempt to avoid logical difficulty in thinking of nothing was first made by Plato, who distinguished “what is not” into *me on* as the relative negation of being and *ouk on* as the absolute negation of being.¹¹ It seems that he tried to distinguish the negation of the copulative “to be” from the negation of the totality of “to be”. According to Plato, *eidōs* or form, which determines an actual existence, is “being”, whereas *hulē* or matter, which is informed by *eidōs*, is “non-being”, because it is undetermined and formless in itself. *Hulē* or matter is nothing only in the sense that it is not *anything* -- anything (with form). “It is nothing” equals “It is”, for “nothing” here should be literally understood as pure absence: “It is ___.” (the lack of predicate) The absolute construction of “to be” in Greek, from which the modern sense of existence expressed in this archaic expression “x is” is derived,¹² is paradoxically identical with nothing -- the relative nothing in the Platonic sense. This identity of Being and nothing is, in fact, the linguistic basis for Hegel’s opening assertion in the *Science of Logic*, “pure being and pure nothing are the same”.¹³ But the Being in this identity only concerns the copulative sense of “to be” and avoids the totality of the various sense of “to be”, the negation of which yields Plato’s *ouk on*. The Christian doctrine *creatio*

ex nihilo, on the other hand, holds that God did not create the universe out of some given matter, but created everything including matter itself. Christianity understands nothing as absolute nothing, not relative nothing in the sense of the formless matter. In this regard, the Christian understanding of nothing (*ouk on*) presupposes the unified “to be”. As Tillich puts it, “The *me-ontic* matter of Platonism represents the dualistic element which underlies all paganism -- Christianity has rejected the concept of *me-ontic* matter on the basis of the doctrine of *Creatio ex nihilo*. Matter is not a second principle in addition to God.”¹⁴

Undoubtedly, Heidegger does not want to think nothing in Plato’s way which implies the distinction of various senses of “to be” as unrelated, for such a distinction would undermine the legitimacy of the question of Being.¹⁵ The nothing for Heidegger is not the relative nothing, *me on*, but absolute nothing *ouk on*, the nothing as in *creatio ex nihilo*. It is this absolute nothing that causes the logical problem, so that theology often keeps silent about this nothing. Heidegger says, “... no one is bothered by the difficulty that if God creates out of nothing precisely He must be able to relate Himself to the nothing. But if God is God he cannot know the nothing, assuming that the ‘Absolute’ excludes all nothingness.” (*BW*, p.110) Thus Heidegger feels it necessary to “tamper with” logic. (*BW*, p.99) But certainly what Heidegger is doing here is not to go against logic, but rather to go beyond logic, that is, go beyond the region of propositional truth, for, as Heidegger maintains, logic is concerned with propositional truth which is derived from a primordial, non-propositional, truth. Nothing can not be formulated in a proposition like “nothing is the negation of the totality of beings”. Heidegger asks, “Is the nothing given only because the ‘not’, i.e. negation, is given?” (*BW*, p.99) Obviously, if we contend that nothing is a

result of the negation of being, the result of a particular act of intellect (*BW*, p.99), we are still trapped in the sphere of propositions, and can never get away from self-contradiction. Nothing must be thought in a non-propositional way, that is, not in terms of the “not”. The nothing understood as the complete negation of the totality of beings, according to Heidegger, is merely the formal concept of the imagined nothing but never the nothing itself. The nothing itself, or the “genuine” nothing must be prior to negation, to the “not”. The negation and the “not” are given only because the nothing is given. Thus Heidegger states, “the nothing is the origin of negation, not vice versa.” (*BW*, p.107) By this, Heidegger undoubtedly moves close to the East. In Eastern thought the nothing is never regarded as the negation of being, but as the complement of being. As Abe Masao puts it,

Unlike Western ideas of being and non-being, *yu* [being] and *wu* [nothing] are of completely equal force in relation to one another. They are entirely relative, complementary and reciprocal, one being impossible without the other. In other words, *wu* is not one-sidedly derived through negation of *yu*. ... One has no logical or ontological priority to the other.¹⁶

The distinction between East and West with regard to their respective treatment of nothing is from the outset indicated by the different languages themselves. In Western languages, all terms that express “nothing” are in the derivative form indicating the privation of being: *me on*, non-being, *non-être*, *Nichtsein*, etc..¹⁷ The one-sided dependence of nothing on Being is somehow determined by the morphological construction, namely, the negative prefix, such as *me*, no-, non-, and *Nicht-*, which in turn alludes to a particular propositional structure, i.e., negation. In other words, the sentence with “not” is always viewed as the prototype of the word with “no-”. This exemplifies the fact that in highly inflected languages words are constructed syntactically. However, in Eastern languages,

Chinese for example, the words *yu* [being] and *wu* [nothing] are only semantically contrary, and have no morphological link indicating that one derives from the other. It is remarkable that although Indian languages (Sanskrit and Bali), belonging to the same Indo-European family, have the same way of expressing “nothing” in negative form (*abhāva* or *asat: bhāva* or *sat*) as Greek and other Western languages; the negative form is conceived not only negative but also positive and affirmative. According to Hajime Nakamura, “in Indian logic the universal negative judgment (E) is not used, and it is discussed after being changed into the universal positive judgment (A); e.g. ‘All the speeches are non-eternal’ (*anityah abah*).”¹⁸ Insofar as the morphologically negative form of the nothing alludes to negation expressed in propositional structure, the West perceives the nothing as “naturally” derivative from the negation of being. But in India, the negative nature of the “nothing” (*asat* or *abhāva*) seems to be diminished or weakened, because the negation to which the “nothing” is supposed to allude is nevertheless expressed in the form of affirmation instead of negation. In other words, the “nothing” cannot find in propositional structure the “not” as its prototype, as in the West. Accordingly, *sat* and *asat*, *bhāva* and *abhāva* are treated as mutually dependent in a way strikingly similar to the Chinese understanding of the relation between *yu* and *wu* rather than the Western treatment of Being and nothing.¹⁹ The intimate relation between indigenous Chinese thinking and Indian Buddhism lies in the similar treatment of “nothing” which had become the basis for the development of the Indian Buddhism in the Chinese context.

Heidegger’s thinking of nothing without any reference to negation indeed finds a rather congenial source in the Eastern world. But the question is whether the Eastern

understanding of nothing can be finally identical with, or integrated into Heidegger's own thought. The remainder of this chapter will attempt to answer this question.

3. Nothing, Emptiness, Clearing, Way

How can the non-derivative and non-negative nothing be "given"? It seems that Heidegger has two related meanings of nothing: existential and ontological. When he says that "anxiety reveals the nothing", he is referring to the existential nothing which is already disclosed in *Being and Time*. According to Heidegger, in an average, everyday mode of existence, one is preoccupied exclusively with beings. Only through anxiety can one be torn out of one's everydayness. Anxiety reveals beings to be fundamentally meaningless in the face of radical mortality and finitude. The nature of nothing reveals itself to Dasein in the anxiety of Dasein's being toward death, in which "Dasein finds itself face to face with the 'nothing' of the possible impossibility of its existence." (*BT*, p.331) In "What Is Metaphysics?" Heidegger continues his existential analysis of anxiety as the disclosure of the nothing. He says: "Anxiety robs us of speech. Because beings as a whole slip away, so that just the nothing crowds round, in the face of anxiety all utterance of the 'is' falls silent." (*BW*, p.103) To be sure, the existential nothing is not derived from logical negation, but is given directly through a particular state of mind, i.e. anxiety. By facing nothing, Dasein is forced to deal with an entirely foreign realm which eludes Dasein's ordinary relation to beings, which is determined exclusively by "the they". Dasein's experience of, or encounter with, nothing conditions Dasein's liberation from the hegemony of "the they"

and hence his turning from inauthenticity of everydayness to authenticity. Thus the nothing can be understood as an entrance through which Dasein becomes capable of his own transcendence toward Being. However, in existential nothing one does not see the belonging together of Being and nothing which the later Heidegger explicates. The ontological nothing in the sense of its intrinsic relation to Being itself, as Heidegger himself admits, is still obscure in his discussion of the existential nothing in *Being and Time*. Although Heidegger holds that “the Being of being ‘is’ not itself a being”. (*BT*, p.26) he maintains that “Being is always the Being of a being.” (*BT*, p.29) In other words, Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, emphasizes the relation of Being and beings, rather than Being and nothing. It is Being not nothing that determines what *is*. In “What Is Metaphysics”, Heidegger continues his existential analysis of nothing; but he moves from the phenomenological description of anxiety as the horizon of the appearance of the nothing to the nothing itself, namely, the ontological meaning of the nothing, which, as Heidegger himself admits, is still obscure in *Being and Time*. (*BT*, p.310) The ontological meaning of the nothing that underlies the existential meaning of the nothing is disclosed in Dasein’s grasping itself as opening to its potentiality, and finally to Being itself, which is the ontological state of Dasein’s freedom. This is most clearly expressed in the following:

In the clear night of the nothing of anxiety the original openness of beings as such arises: that they are beings – and not nothing. But this “and not nothing” we add in our talk is not some kind of appended clarification. Rather it makes possible in advance the revelation of beings in general. The essence of the originally nihilating nothing lies in this, that it brings Da-sein for the first time before beings as such. (*BW*, p.105)

Heidegger goes on to state that “Nothing does not remain the indeterminate opposite of

beings but reveals itself as belonging to the Being of beings.” (*BW*, p.110) Obviously nothing’s nihilation is ontologically prior to and makes ontologically possible the existential transcendence of Dasein as the “seat-holder for the nothing” (*BW*, p.108).²⁰

The ontological meaning of the nothing shows that the nothing belongs to Being itself. The question of the nothing is precisely the question of Being. In other words, to think the ontological meaning of the nothing is in fact to think the nothing as an ontological issue, and hence to think its relation to Being. It is a basic view that Heidegger holds from the very start: “The Being of beings ‘is’ not itself a being.” (*BT*, p.26)²¹ In *Being and Time*, Being is always expressed in negative way, that is, in the form of “is not”. For example, “Being is not a universal concept”, “Being is not indefinable”, “Being is not self-evident”. (*BT*, pp.22-23) But what is Being? The direct answer to this question that Heidegger gives in an affirmative form are: “It [Being] is It itself.” (*BW*, p.210) and “Nothing is ... Being itself.” (*QCT*, p.154) Referring to the lecture “What Is Metaphysics?”, Heidegger says.

The Nothing that is talked about there refers to that which in relation to what-is [*das Seiende*] is never any kind of being, and “is” thus Nothing, but which nevertheless determines what-is as such and is thus called Being.²²

The nothing that determines what is is prior to what is. Such a view on the nothing is strikingly close to Laozi’s idea of nothing. Laozi says,

Ten thousand things in the universe are created from being (*yu*)
Being (*yu*) is created from non-being (*wu*).²³

For both thinkers, it is the nothing rather than being (something) that gives rise to various beings (things). The nothing is the source of beings (things). The emphasis on the primacy of the nothing can be further illustrated by two jugs described respectively by

Heidegger in “The Thing” and Laozi in *Dao De Jing*. Heidegger writes,

The emptiness, the void, is what does the vessel’s holding. The empty space, this nothing of the jug, is what the jug is as the holding vessel. (*PLT*, p.169)

Here Heidegger shows that what is important in a jug is not its being as traditionally understood as “form” or “essence” that can be abstracted from the jug, but rather the “emptiness” or “the nothing” by virtue of which the jug has all form, from which arises the usefulness of the jug. This description of the jug is almost a paraphrase or a translation of what Laozi wrote more than two thousand years ago:

Lumps of clay are shaped into a vessel (jug),
From their non-being arises the function of the vessel.²⁴

Laozi sees the usefulness of the jug in the appropriateness of its serviceable emptiness. The “hidden source” of Heidegger’s thought on the nothing is almost completely revealed in this archaic vessel. Cho comments, “Heidegger’s description of the ‘emptiness’ of the container seems to echo, both in the choice of motif as well as in the choice of words. Laozi’s lines in Chapter 11 of the *Dao De Jing*.”²⁵ Like Laozi, Heidegger reverses the customary way of thinking nothing in terms of something and thus posits nothing as more primary than something.²⁶ The voidness or the emptiness of the jug is the open place that gathers beings. It is intrinsically related to Heidegger’s interpretation of the German word *Lichtung* (clearing). Heidegger’s notion of nothing, whether in its existential sense as defined in terms of Dasein’s existence in *Being and Time* or in its ontological sense as Being itself, has the meaning of “openness” and “clearing”. The nothing is the clearing in which beings appear. In fact, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger already uses the word

“clearing” (*Lichtung*) to elucidate the existential meaning of nothing. “To say that it is ‘illuminated’ [*erleuchtet*] means that *as* Being-in-the-world, it is cleared [*gelichtet*] in itself, not through any other entity, but in such a way that it *is* itself the clearing [*Lichtung*].” (*BT*, p.171) The shift from the existential meaning of the nothing to the ontological meaning of the nothing is also reflected in the account of clearing. In “The Origin of the Work of Art” Heidegger asserts:

In the midst of beings as a whole an open place occurs. There is a clearing, a lighting. ... This open center is therefore not surrendered by what is; rather, the lighting center itself encircles all that is, like the Nothing which we scarcely know. (*PLT*, p.53)

Now there is much to say about this clearing, especially in respect to the similarity between Heidegger and Eastern thought. Reinhard May draws our attention to the Chinese graph (written character) *wu* (无), in which he has found “a rich starting point for the identification of the clearing and nothing”.²⁷ He writes, “*wu* refers to a place that was originally covered in luxuriant vegetation, as in a thicket in a wood, but where trees have been felled so that there is now an open space, a clearing. *Wu* thus means ‘there, where there is nothing’, a place where formerly there were trees.”²⁸ In “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” there is a passage which is rather like an etymological interpretation of the Chinese character *wu*.²⁹

The forest clearing (opening) is experienced in contrast to dense forest, called “density” (*Dickung*) in older language. The substantive “opening” goes back to the verb “to open”. The adjective *licht* “open” is the same word as “light”. To open something means: To make something light, free and open, e.g., to make the forest free of trees at one place. The openness thus originating is the clearing. What is light in the sense of being free and open has nothing in common with the adjective “light”, meaning “bright” -- neither linguistically nor factually. This is to be obscured for the difference

between openness and light. Still, it is possible that a factual relation between the two exists. Light can stream into the clearing, into its openness, and let brightness play with darkness in it. But light never first creates openness. Rather, light presupposes openness. (*OTB*, p.65)

The nothing as clearing or the open place, is Being itself. But the nothing which is Being itself, though analogous to the nothing the medievals referred to as God, is different from the “darkness of ignorance”; for as clearing, the nothing is beyond “brightness” and “darkness”. From this point of departure, Heidegger comes to see the paradoxical nature of Being itself. In other words, Being is nothing not only in the sense of “no-thing”, i.e., other than beings, but also no-Being, in the sense of Being’s self negation. In *The Question of Being*, Heidegger introduces the strategy of crossing out Being, (~~Being~~), (a strategy Derrida will further develop to elucidate the “notion” of “trace”, i.e., writing *sous rature*.) Heidegger says:

It is no longer “Being” at all if we try to think fully and completely of “Being” as it is fated to hold sway, namely as being present, in which way alone we refer to its destined essence. (*QB*, p.77)

This crossing out of Being can not be explained in terms of the Hegelian dialectic of self-negation; yet it does not involve “becoming” as the synthesis. It is certainly true that Heidegger at this point comes close to the Eastern thinkers. In Taoism and Zen, although the nothing is often treated as prior to beings. Its priority is in fact functional and pedagogical in the sense that such priority is to be ultimately transformed into the identity of “something” and “nothing”. In fact, the affirmation of the priority of nothing already implies the negation of this priority because the affirmation of the priority of nothing can be understood as (1) the negation of the priority of being (something), or (2) the negation

of priority of any kind. (“nothing prior to others”). The nothing in Laozi and Taoism in general is sometimes identical with Tao itself, which is said to be beyond dualisms and distinctions, and thus is absolute nothing, not the nothing relative to something as merely an absence. As the culminating representation of the Chinese “logic”, namely *ying-yang* dynamic, Tao is an interplay of nothing and something; it is beyond nothing and something insofar as it is the primordial nothing-which-is-something that grounds both nothing and something. The Tao as absolute nothing is itself a paradox, which Zhuangzi expresses in a rather distinctive way,

There is being. There is nonbeing. There is a not yet beginning to be being. There is a not yet beginning to be a not yet beginning to be nonbeing. Suddenly there is nonbeing. But I do not know, when it comes to nonbeing, which is really being and which is nonbeing. Now I have just said something. But I don't know whether what I have said has really said something or whether it hasn't said something.³⁰

This passage refers to two kind of nothing (non-being). The first is a pure absence; it is relative nothing as opposed to something (being): “There is being, there is non-being.” The second is not opposed to being: “There is a not yet beginning to be a not yet beginning to be non-being.” It is absolute nothing in the sense that it is neither being nor non-being; but originates both. However, absolute nothing is not a synthesis of being and nothing (non-being), but the identical relation of both, and hence a true paradox. We can see in the above passage that Zhuangzi tries to convey such a paradox --- the Tao as absolute nothing is neither being nor non-being, but is paradoxically both. In a similar way, Heidegger's crossing out of Being is also an attempt to show the paradoxical nature of Being.

The Black Forest granted Heidegger not only the image of *Lichtung* (“clearing”)

which he employs to express the nothingness of Being, but also the image of *Holzwege* (woodpaths). Certainly, these two images are related to each other and in fact refer to the same "matter of thinking", namely, Being itself as nothing, or as Being.

Wood is an old name for forest. In the wood are paths that mostly wind along until they end quite suddenly in an impenetrable thicket.

They are called "woodpaths".

Each goes its peculiar way, but in the same forest. Often it seems as though one were identical to another. Yet it only seems so. Woodcutters and foresters are familiar with these paths. They know what it means "to be on a path". (*BW*, p.34)

As the "clearing", which has a far-Eastern counterpart, the "woodpath" or the "way" echoes the *Tao* (Way) in Laozi's enigmatic lines. This time Heidegger makes a direct reference to Laozi,

The word "way" probably is an ancient primary word that speaks to the reflective mind of man. The key word in Laozi's poetic thinking is *Tao*, which "properly speaking" means way. But because we are prone to think of "way" superficially, as a stretch connecting two places, our word way has all too rashly been considered unfit to name what *Tao* says. *Tao* is then translated as reason, *raison*, meaning, logos.

Yet *Tao* could be the way that gives all ways, the very source of our power to think what reason, mind, meaning, logos properly mean to say -- properly, by their proper nature. Perhaps the mystery of mysteries of thoughtful Saying conceals itself in the word "way," *Tao*, if only we will let these names return to what they leave unspoken, if only we are capable of this, to allow them to do so. Perhaps the enigmatic power of today's reign of method also, and indeed pre-eminently, stems from the fact that the methods, notwithstanding their efficiency, are after all merely the runoff of a great hidden stream which moves all things along and makes way for everything. All is way. (*OWL*, p.92)

The function of woodpaths, which the woodcutters leave behind, is not to lead someone from one point to another, rather, the path is almost a necessary by-product of the woodcutters' activity. The French translation, "*Chemins qui ne mènent nulle part*" (ways

that lead nowhere) catches perfectly what the German *Holzwege* implies. The woodpaths are not given in advance so that those who walk on them can follow. As “by-products” they are “traces” of walking. Those who walk on the way should have given up their primary aim to arrive at some definite destination -- there is no destination, or more precisely, the way and the destination are identical. But Heidegger’s woodpath is not simply a reiteration of a quasi-aesthetic attitude. Tao or way is not reason, mind, *raison* and the like because it leads to nowhere -- the “nowhere” that is described in *Being and Time* as what *Dasein* experiences as the uncanny and homelessness. Accordingly, the way or the Tao is like the Derridean “trace”. In this respect, we can see that the crossed Being tends to be identical with the Tao or absolute nothing. For Zen, nothing or emptiness (*śūnyatā*) not only transcends but also embraces both nothing and something (being), emptiness and fullness. Nothing *is* something (being). It is certainly true that Heidegger’s Being, to some extent, is of the similar paradoxical nature as the Tao or the absolute nothing. Magliola maintains that “Heidegger does much more than approximate the law of complementary contraries, as found in most Eastern philosophy and indeed some Western philosophy. ... he approximates a more radical Taoist and centric Buddhist principle, called by Laozi ‘the unification of affirmation and negation,’ and illustrated by Laozi’s phrase, ‘Great white is as if it is black.’”³¹ The Tao or emptiness (*śūnyatā*) indeed is not merely the principle of complementary contraries (the *yin-yang* dynamics), it is rather the principle of contradiction, which means that, for example, “x is y” and “x is not y” are both valid not in the sense that they are asserted in different ways, but in the sense of being asserted in the same way. In other words, two contradictory assertions can be simultaneously valid. This

is what Zen refers to as the “logic” of *śūnyatā*: “is/is not” (“affirmation/negation”). Thus we can see that Taoist and Buddhist accentuation of the primacy of nothing (*wu*) over something (*yu*) is a strategy for the final affirmation of the non-differentiation and equalization of something and nothing, “the sameness of all”. One may legitimately ask, with Derrida, “why does Heidegger still retain the doctrine of ontological difference since Being seems to have dissolved altogether after its being crossed?” The Taoist and Zen disciple might ask the same question. For the Taoist or Zen follower, since Tao is nothing other than an interplay of being (something) and nothing, it is precisely both being (something) and nothing, there is no need to posit the capital Being as “other than beings” and ontological difference between Being and beings. In what follows we can see that the elaboration of the meaning of “otherness”, which constitutes the most pre-eminent aspect of Heidegger’s notion of the nothing, is entirely missing in both Taoism and Zen.

4. Nothing, Ontological Difference, and Otherness

In the postscript to “What Is Metaphysics?” which Heidegger added in 1943, 14 years after the inaugural address was delivered, Heidegger states, “Nothingness as the ‘other’ than beings is the veil of Being.” (*EB*, p.360) This is made more explicit in the preface to the third edition of *The Essence of Reason*,

The nothing is the Not of being and thus is Being experienced from the point of view of being. The Ontological Difference is the Not between being and Being. Yet Being, as the Not to being, is no more a nothingness in the sense of a nihil negativum than the Difference, as the Not between being and Being, is merely a distinction of the intellect (*ens rationis*). (*ER*,3)

Thus the relation between Being and nothing is understood in terms of “ontological difference”: Nothing as the veil of Being is no more than the withdrawal from appearing or presencing of Being itself, which temporo-historically manifests and conceals itself, yields and withdraws itself at the same time. In 1949, the same year when Heidegger added a preface to *The Essence of Reason*, an introduction was also added to “What Is Metaphysics?” in which Heidegger interprets Leibniz’ question “why are there beings, rather than nothing?” in a different manner.

How did it come about that beings take precedence everywhere and lay claim to every “is” while that which is not a being is understood as Nothing, though it is Being itself, and remains forgotten? How did it come about that with Being It really is nothing and that Nothing really is not? Is it perhaps from this that the as yet unshaken presumption has entered into all metaphysics that Being may simply be taken for granted and that Nothing is therefore made more easily than beings? That is indeed the situation regarding Being and Nothing.³²

The ontological indifference of the belonging together of beings and nothing which underlies the essential understanding of nothing or emptiness in Eastern thought in general is certainly the final step toward non-metaphysical thinking which Heidegger could never take, because to take such a step is at same time to exclude the ontological difference. Heidegger’s introducing nothing is his painstaking endeavour to make explicit the ontological difference. In the “Letter on Humanism”, Heidegger asserts, “Being nihilates -- as Being. ... The nihilating in Being is the essence of what I call the nothing. Hence because it thinks Being, thinking thinks the nothing.” (*BW*, p.238) Being nihilates itself in the sense that it is none other than the withdrawal from presencing of Being, instead of nothing’s nihilating itself in and through anxiety -- let alone anxiety’s revealing nothing. Thus the

analysis of the existential meaning of nothing which may lead to an account of nothing in terms of ontological indifference is ultimately transformed into the thinking on Being itself. The nothing is the veil of Being, but Being is not the veil of nothing. As many commentators have contended, Heidegger's elaboration of the mutual relation of Being and nothing has much in common with the Eastern thought on *yu* and *wu*, yet the priority of Being over nothing is never weakened.³³ When Heidegger says that "Being and nothing do belong together", (*BW*, p.110) he is struggling to convey that Being is *not* a being. He emphasises the "Not", the "Not" that marks the ontological difference between Being and beings. It becomes clear at this point that Heidegger's introduction of the nothing is meant to destroy the metaphysical conception of Being which is always thought in terms of beings. As the veil of Being, the nothing in Heidegger is ultimately assimilated into Being.

Thus Heidegger's nothing, from the view of Eastern thought, particularly that of Zen, is still a "relative" nothing. The "Not" which marks the ontological difference between Being and beings makes Heidegger's nothing opposed or relative to beings. Thus it is different from Zen Buddhist absolute nothing, or emptiness (*śūnyāta*), which is said to embrace both beings and nothing. The identification of *yu* and *wu* in Zen leads to the non-differentiation of *nirvana* (the final cessation) and *samsara* (the endless circulation of birth and death). Thus by absolute nothing or emptiness, Zen means not only a radical negation of everything, but also a radical affirmation of everything. Nothing or emptiness is at the same time beings (*yu*), or more precisely, as Suzuki renders it, "suchness".³⁴ Following Suzuki, Abe says, "... I think that 'everything is empty' may be more adequately rendered in this way: 'Everything is just as it is.' A pine tree is a pine tree; a bamboo is a bamboo;

a dog is a dog; a cat is a cat; you are you; I am I; she is she.”³⁵ Zen must speak in tautologies so that the “be” can be diminished to nothing, for the copula “be” as reflecting the hermeneutic “as-structure”, implies the ontological difference. The famous Zen story about the stages of enlightenment depicts quite accurately how “suchness” can be finally reached: Before one learns to practice Zen, mountains are mountains; at the moment of enlightenment, mountains cease to be mountains; after one is enlightened, mountains become mountains once again. The difference between the first stage and the last stage is that at the first stage, “mountains are mountains” indicates a predication (i.e. “mountains are so and so”) -- the second “mountains” in the sentence is a substitute of various possible predicates of the subject “mountains”. At the final stage, “mountains are mountains” is a pure tautology, the “be” (“are”) in the sentence has no allusion to the assertion of “beings in Being”. It means that things appear by themselves and in themselves without involving the real “be”, which as a “rift” (*Riss*) would break the simplicity of the “suchness”, which must not allude to “the (wholly) other”. The “suchness” of things is well presented in Zen poems, especially the Japanese *haiku*. For example,

A branch shorn of leaves
A crow perching on it --
This autumn eve.³⁶

One may find a typical “Zen poem” in Heidegger’s writings.

Forests spread
Brooks plunge
Rocks persist
Mist diffuses

Meadows wait
Springs well

Winds dwell
Blessing muses (*PLT*, p.14)

These lines seem to suggest a tendency in Heidegger's thinking toward Zen's "naturalism". The "natural" things (forests, brooks, rocks, mist, meadows, springs, winds, etc.) presented in this poem are simply there; they are "just as they are". This tendency culminates in Heidegger's phrases, "the world worlds" or "the thing things".³⁷ But his ultimate commitment to the question of Being makes the "Zen enlightenment" impossible. For Heidegger, there is no being without Being; that is, the mountains can never be mountains without the light of Being. Thus the seeming "Zen poem" is still "Being's poem" (*PLT*, p.4); there must be the light of Being shining above the mountains,

When the early morning light quietly
grows above the mountains ... (*PLT*, p.4)

In his explication of the way of attaining suchness, Abe remarks:

Plants and animals are living in their suchness. But we human beings are separated from our suchness, are never "just as-we-are". So far as we are moving between here and there, between inside and outside looking at ourselves from the outside, we are always restless. This restlessness or anxiety is not accidental to man, that is, peculiar to some individuals and not others.³⁸

The above passage suggests that only when man lives in the way plants and animals live can he attain his suchness. The idea of suchness not only counters the objectification of the self, but also rejects what Heidegger calls Dasein's transcendence and ek-sistence ("standing out"). For Heidegger, Dasein's intrinsic relation to Being endows human being with priority to other beings (including plants and animals). This priority is also shown in Dasein's capability of death insofar as death is "the shelter of Being". (*BW*, p.178) In "The

Thing” Heidegger claims that only human beings can be called mortals because “Only man dies. The animal perishes.” (*BW*, p.178) However, it is precisely this priority that Zen means to undermine. The anxiety which in Heidegger is the possible way of Dasein’s being toward authenticity is for Zen simply a block to one’s self-enlightenment.

If by nihilism Heidegger refers to the forgetfulness of Being, Zen’s total negation and total affirmation, or the identification of beings (somethingness) and nothingness without any reference to ontological difference, from Heidegger’s point of view, is undoubtedly a kind of nihilism and perhaps in the most radical form. The Japanese reading Zen’s emptiness into Heidegger’s nothing in “What Is Metaphysics?” in the name of defending Heidegger’s thought against the charge of nihilism in effect imports sheer nihilism into Heidegger’s account of the nothing.³⁹ Certainly, there are abundant dissimilarities between Zen Buddhism and European nihilism, the latter of which is characterised by Nietzsche as the devaluation of the highest value. Zen Buddhism is more profound than European nihilism in that its primary concern is not value, but being and non-being. But Zen’s fundamental rejection of ontological difference by means of the ontic indifference of beings and nothing, does inevitably yield an extreme version of nihilism. It seems that there is no ground to support the argument proposed by many contemporary Eastern philosophers (notably Japanese professors⁴⁰) that Zen’s view of the nothing has nothing to do with nihilism, because it is not solely concerned with nothing as the relative nothing, but the absolute nothing as the negation of the bifurcation of nothing and beings.⁴¹ Nevertheless, this absolute nothing is definitely not “the veil of Being”. Heidegger says, “To forget Being and pursue only beings -- that is nihilism. Nihilism thus understood is the

ground of the nihilism which Nietzsche exposed in the first book of *The Will to Power*. By contrast, to press inquiry into being explicitly to the limits of nothingness, to draw nothingness into the question of Being -- this is the first and only fruitful step toward a true transcending of nihilism.” (IM, p.203) Of course, unlike European nihilism, Zen never pursues beings, for such a pursuit presupposes the difference between beings and nothing, which must be negated in the absolute nothing, namely, *sūnyatā*. But Zen rejects the ontological difference.. The total freedom that Zen strives to bring about through various *koan*⁴² is the forgetfulness of any kind of differences -- not only ontic difference, but also ontological difference.⁴³ This forgetfulness or abandonment of any difference whatsoever is at the same time the acceptance of the parity of authenticity and inauthenticity, suffering and salvation, enlightenment and ignorance, *samsara* and *nirvana*, emptiness and fullness, nothingness and suchness. Thus for Zen, any attempt to transcend the phenomenal world in order to become “enlightened” is profoundly misguided. The longed-for *nirvana* is no other than the world of everyday life, which is precisely what Heidegger describes as the average everydayness, that is, Dasein’s fallenness. In the Zen classics, we can find many examples that illustrate such everydayness: “carrying water and chopping wood” (Pangyun), “when tired, go to bed” (Linji), “walking or staying, sitting or lying: all these are nothing but Tao” (Huihai).⁴⁴ Of course, the everydayness described by Zen is not exactly what Heidegger means by *Alltäglichkeit*. The average everydayness is defined by Heidegger in terms of the hegemony of the “they” (*das Man*). For Zen, the “they” is simply an illusion. But the same can also be said for Being. Dasein’s authenticity in the sense of its transcendence toward Being is meaningless because Being or ontological difference is

also an illusion. In short, Zen's "self-enlightenment" is to shatter all these illusions and thus to attain absolute indifference. Heidegger would never accept such a claim. The difference between authenticity and inauthenticity in *Being and Time*, and the difference between the forgetfulness of Being and the thinking of Being in the later Heidegger cannot be erased, or transformed into the interplay of *yu* and *wu* in Taoism and Zen Buddhism. Even his claim to abandon the attempt to overcome metaphysics in "Time and Being" is not a step toward Zen's enlightenment, although it sounds really like a Zen stance, especially when it is related to his notion of "releasement". Such a claim aims at the truth of Being, at the thinking of Being in a radical way. It is undeniable that Heidegger still gives priority to Being in the sense of letting beings *be*. Heidegger's nothing, despite its primordial ontological status, despite its radicality compared with traditional metaphysics, is still a relative nothing, not the Taoist Tao or Zen's absolute nothing. As Steffney puts it, "Although Heidegger's thought is often referred to as paradoxical in the light of traditional metaphysics, one could not refer to Heidegger's thought as paradoxical in the light of Zen."⁴⁵ From Zen's point of view, Heidegger has never been enlightened because his inquiry into the question of Being and his insistence on the ontological difference block the way to becoming the "true man of Tao".

If we remove the Taoist and Zen clouds from Heidegger's nothing, which is indeed amenable to Taoism and Zen, an important aspect of his thought on the nothing would become clear. This aspect is the meaning of "otherness". The nothing is basically an expression of the otherness of Being. It is the meaning of otherness that is totally lacking in Zen or Taoist accounts of the nothing or emptiness. "This wholly other to every being

is a non-being. But this nothing has Being as its essence.” (EB, p.353) The ontological meaning of nothing as the “Not” between Being and beings refers to the otherness of Being. Here we can see that this account of the nothing in terms of the “wholly other” is close to the medieval mystical characterisation of God *via negativa*. For example, in Eckhart, nothing refers to God Himself, to “He who is”. As Caputo puts it, “What is essential about God for Eckhart, and Being for Heidegger, is that each differentiates itself from beings, is *other* than beings.”⁴⁶ Eckhart’s characterisation of God as nothing is in fact an attempt to bring about a true understanding of the “other” that can convey the infinite distance between man and God.⁴⁷ To be sure, the notion of the wholly other is rooted in a long theological tradition. Since the time of pseudo-Dionysius, theologians (mainly neo-Platonists) had been teaching the doctrine that God is *hyperousia*, “beyond being”. Even thinkers who belonged to the camp of Thomas Aquinas also acknowledged the “otherness” of God - although God is still understood as Being. For Aquinas, the terms *ens* used to refer to God must be defined in such a way as to indicate that it is not another *ens* in addition to all worldly *entia*, but an entirely different *ens* that must be regarded as “wholly other” to finite beings. The distinction between the neo-Platonic and Thomistic conceptions of God lies in whether God’s “otherness” can be fully expressed in terms of His being, that is, whether God as the “wholly other” can still be thought ontologically. The fundamental abandonment of natural theology announced by some contemporary theologians, notably Karl Barth and his followers is, to some extent, rather an attempt to return to this history of the conception of the “wholly other”; it results in a rejection of the question of Being and the ontological difference as “foolishness”. The influence of such a

new theology is strongly reflected in Heidegger's thought, especially in his sometimes radical way of speaking about the sharp distinction between thinking and faith.⁴⁸ Insofar as the task of thinking is an inquiry into the question of Being, it must from the outset suspend the question of God, keep the theological issue at a distance and confine itself to the ontological difference. But the way of characterising God as "the wholly other" is taken by Heidegger as a "conceptual scheme" to apply to the thinking of Being. Being is "the wholly other" to beings in the same sense that God is "the wholly other" to His creatures. Thus the nothing in Heidegger, as in Eckhart, functions as the radical expression of "otherness". If negative theology is a name to express the right way of speaking about God, Heidegger's approach to the question of Being through nothing can by analogy be called "negative ontology", -- it is still an ontology, not a "meontology". It is the meaning of nothing as the otherness of Being to beings that has no parallel in the Eastern understanding of the nothing.

The ontological difference and the "otherness" of Being correspond to Heidegger's understanding of time and temporality as essentially eschatological. The history of Being as the epochal sending of Being itself is described as a stretching between the oblivion of Being and recollection of Being, which parallels the flight of gods and their return. The double negation in Taoism or Zen, in fact, from the outset has already deconstructed time itself. The selfsame or identity of something and nothing excludes any temporal structure in the Heideggerian sense. For Heidegger, Being must be thought together. But Zen's conception of time is not to think Being as time since there is no question of Being at all, but to think beings (something) as time. Thus Zen's "deconstruction" of time parallels its

rejection of the question of Being. The well-known Japanese Zen master Dōgen claims, “The time we call spring blossoms directly as an existence called flowers. The flowers, in turn, express the time called spring: This is not something with time; something itself is time.”⁴⁹ Dōgen talks about the “absolute present” not in the sense of what the medievals understood by *nunc stans*, a standing now, which is timeless, but in the sense that there is never the flying away or passing by of time for anything that exists is time itself. The *nunc stans* is timeless in that it excludes past and future, whereas Zen’s “absolute present” includes all time -- past, present and future. Dōgen writes:

... Similarly, when human beings die, they cannot return to life; but in Buddhist teaching we say life changes into death. ... Likewise, death cannot change into life. ... Life and death have absolute existence, like the relationship of winter and spring. But do not think of winter changing into spring or spring into summer.⁵⁰

The “absolute present” as the unity of past, present and future can be realized only in the identity of being (something) and time. Because being (something) is time, it cannot change or perish. For Zen, Heidegger’s understanding of Dasein’s existence as *ek-sistence*, “standing out” is still dualistic, for such an understanding presupposes the difference between inside and outside and the difference between past, present and future. Zen’s “absolute present” is the non-differentiation of past, present and future. But for Heidegger, time can only be said to be identical with Being, rather than beings (something) on the ground of the ontological difference. Heidegger would never accept the identity of emptiness and suchness simply because such an identity is a fundamental rejection of the eschatological notion of time, which is essential to Heidegger’s thinking of Being (*Seinsdenken*). If Being is understood as “clearing”, an open space, it is a preparation for

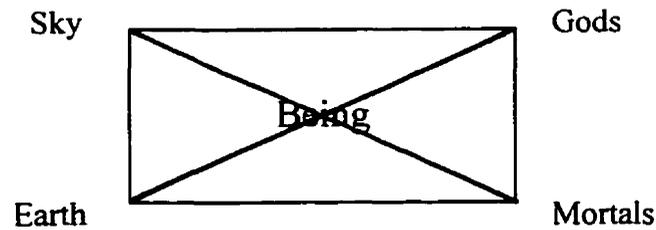
the fulfillment, for the light that will shine through the forest. Although Heidegger rarely talks about the light itself he does have two kinds of light in mind when he refers to the light as that which “rests upon something open”: the “light of reason” (*lumen naturale*) (*OTB*, p.66) and the “divine radiance” (*lumen gratiae*): “How could there ever be for the god an abode fit for a god, if a divine radiance did not first begin to shine in everything that is?” (*PLT*, p.92) Thus “waiting” and “expectation” become the final words for Heidegger to elucidate Being and time. The crossed (-out) Being, if understood as “trace”, is eschatologically temporal, it implies the “traces of the fugitive gods” or “the track of the fugitive gods”. (*PLT*, p.93, and p.94)

5. Being, Nothing, the Holy ...

The paradoxical nature of Being does not lead to the dissolution of Being itself and the ontological difference. Heidegger’s crossed-(out) Being is different from Laozi’s Tao in that the temporal structure of the crossed(-out) Being shows its essence as “letting”, understood as “sending” and “giving” which are totally alien to Tao’s interplay of *yu* and *wu*. Moreover, in Being’s “letting” beings be lies its capacity to “gather”, the gathering of earth, sky, mortals and immortals. Heidegger himself explains:

The symbol of crossed lines can, to be sure, according to what has been said, not be a merely negative symbol of crossing out. Rather it points into the four areas of the fourfold and of their gathering at the point of intersection. (*QB*, p.83)⁵¹

David Krell visualises Heidegger’s own interpretation by a pictogram:⁵²



Clearly, this crossing out of Being is not to dissolve Being, and thus to transform it into Zen's absolute nothing; rather it gathers the "four areas" and ultimately lets beings *be*. The direct reference Heidegger himself makes to "The Thing" leads us back to the juxtaposition of two jugs. The utility that arises from the void, the emptiness of the Chinese jug is what Laozi understands the way the vessel "is", the fullness of the vessel -- this illustrates the Chinese mode of thinking the contrary of nothing (*wu*) not as Being, but as "having" (*yu*, "on hand", "usefulness"), the usefulness that is fundamentally contextual, relative and indeterminate, like a pragmatic "trace". But the usefulness of the vessel and the readiness-to-hand of the hammer described in *Being and Time* lie in the absence of the "care" in the former, the "care" from which the later Heidegger develops a new attitude toward things. In "The Origin of the Work of Art", Heidegger further asks about the usefulness of things. Usefulness, according to Heidegger, rests in the reliability of things. The notion of reliability is crucial in our comparison of Heidegger's nothing as the "clearing" and Tao or *sūnyatā*. Reliability is more primordial than usefulness in that it sustains the crossing through of Being, and in fact it is the gathering of the fourfold itself. The utility of Laozi's jug does not need to be accounted for because it is devoid of any particular end (*telos*) in

favour of the radical flexibility. Nor does it have allusion to any kind of gathering like the fourfold. Heidegger's jug, on the other hand, is a sacrificial vessel; it is not just pouring wine but specifically pouring a libation, that is, celebrating gods. The gods in the interplay of the four, if not privileged, are indispensable in that they are what the jug is to celebrate. the *telos* of the jug. It remains open what "the gods" really means to Heidegger. Heidegger uses the word "gods" in many different ways. But here, in the "fourfold", it most probably stands for what might be called the divine dimension in all reality, something holy in which everything participates. Why does Heidegger introduce the fourfold to "define" Being? For the Taoist or Zen follower doing so inevitably substantiates the *Tao* (way) as "trace", or the emptiness. Why should the crossed Being have such dimensions, especially the dimension of the divine?

The conception of the divine dimension is intrinsically related to one of the most intriguing and fascinating issues in Heidegger's thought, that is, the question of God. The divine dimension is essentially the abode of the gods (the messengers of God) and God. It is the dimension in which gods and God can appear. It is this divine dimension that the question of Being and the question of God are related. Heidegger explicitly asserts in the "Letter on Humanism" that Being is not God, but he never speaks about how Being can be different from God. Of course, he does time and again elaborate how Being is different from the onto-theo-logical God, the "God of philosophers", but he never explicates how Being is different from the non-onto-theo-logical God, the "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob", since both are considered as "the wholly other". Metaphysics as "onto-theo-logy" gave birth to the supreme idea of Being-God (*causa sui*), and it has, thus, marked the

forgetfulness of Being and the withdrawal of God. However, for Heidegger, the overcoming metaphysics which can bring us face to face with Being itself does not necessarily lead to an encounter with the truly divine God. Certainly, Being is described by Heidegger with most of the attributes that have been traditionally assigned to God. Consider, for example. Dasein's "surrender" as a "sacrifice" (*Opfer*) of its being to the simple necessity, the "thanking" (*Danken*) of Being, the "grace" (*Gunst*) and the "favour" (*Huld*) of Being. (*EB*, p.358)

All this quasi-religious phraseology cannot be explained as mere stylistic or poetic wordings. It would be really strange and inconceivable that a Taoist wiseman can thank Tao's favour, that a Zen master would listen with piety to *śūnyatā*.⁵³ or that a Derridean deconstructionist can surrender himself as a sacrifice to "trace". The deification of Being seems to suggest that Being itself already contains something which is not purely ontological. But Heidegger's radical negative attitude toward philosophical theology fundamentally rejects the question of God in the ontological context. The question of God must be suspended -- a quasi-phenomenological epoche, or "indifference" in any ontological inquiry into the meaning of Being. Heidegger's neutrality in regard to the affirmation as well as the negation of God is further asserted in the following celebrated passage:

Only from the truth of Being can the essence of the holy be thought. Only from the essence of the holy is the essence of divinity to be thought. Only in the light of the essence of divinity can it be thought or said what the word "God" is to signify. (*BW*, p.230)

This really sounds like a phenomenological reduction, the reduction from the meaning of

“God” to the meaning of Being. In other words, to speak about God in respect to His existence and essence in a meaningful manner, one must be able to understand what the word “God” really means, which presupposes the understanding of the essence of divinity which in turn presupposes the understanding of the essence of the holy.⁵⁴

However, “the gods” that appear in the fourfold, on the other hand, seems to suggest a different approach to the relation between Being and God. “The gods”, which refer to the divine dimension of Being, are an indispensable element that constitutes the truth of Being. Thus the phenomenological reduction seems to shift to a hermeneutic circle between Being, “the holy”, “divinity” and “God”. For Heidegger, the recollection of Being is the precondition of the thinking of God in a meaningful way, it is still a preparation and cannot decide whether God will possibly reappear. However, Heidegger seems to suggest that such a preparation is not equal to the concern of a transcendental condition. Pöggeler is keenly aware of this subtlety in Heidegger’s thought. He points out, “Being or its truth can be not only a neutral structural openness, but possibly also that which brings Dasein into salvation and thereby shows itself through the unapproachable mystery as the Holy.”⁵⁵ It is this divine dimension that makes Heidegger’s Being fundamentally different from various Eastern ideas which tend to omit any allusion to what can be called “holy”. Heidegger himself contends that the difficulty in his conversation with Eastern thinkers lies in the total lack of the idea of “the Holy” in the East.⁵⁶

As we have seen, Heidegger’s thought on the nothing is a radical way of re-raising the question of Being and of bringing into light the ontological difference in its primordial sense which has been covered over by Western metaphysics. In this regard, it certainly

moves very close to Eastern, non-metaphysical, way of thinking of nothing. However, the distinctiveness of Heidegger's notion of nothing as different from both Western metaphysical conception of nothing and the Eastern idea of nothing becomes apparent when its intrinsic relation to the ideas of "divine dimension" and "the holy" is uncovered. We will see in the next chapter that Heidegger's fundamental perspective which underlies his unique understanding of nothing is shown even more clearly in another related notion: "releasement".

Notes:

- ¹ "The Nothing" (*wu*) entered philosophical discussion in the East as early as the history of Eastern philosophy itself. Ever since Laozi, almost every thinker has touched upon this "concept". It became the most favored notion in 3th-5th centuries, and thereafter was integrated into the Buddhist conception of "emptiness" (*sūnyatā*).
- ² This observation is held originally by the members of the Kyoto School. Nishida Kitaro, the founder of Kyoto School, writes, "I think we can distinguish the West to have considered being [*yu*] as the ground of reality, the East to have taken nothing [*wu*] as its ground. I will call them reality as form and reality as the formless, respectively." See Nishida Kitaro: *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy: the World of Action and the Dialectical World*, trans. David A. Dilworth, Sophia University, Tokyo, 1970. The Japanese interlocutor in "A Dialogue on Language" says: "For us emptiness is the highest name for that which you would like to speak of with the word 'Being'". The fact that Heidegger's philosophy has received an extraordinary sympathy and unprecedented enthusiasm in the East, particularly among those Taoist and Buddhist oriented thinkers, is to a large extent due to his extensive dealing with "nothing" in a way that reflects Western philosophical tradition and at the same time has many affinities to Eastern thinking.
- ³ This question remains open insofar as the Christian doctrine of "Creation ex nihilo" thinks Being and nothing in a way which metaphysical thought did not.
- ⁴ Heidegger: "Only a God can Save Us", in Richard Wolin, ed., *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, Cambridge Mass. and London, 1993, p.109.
- ⁵ It appears in section 7 of the *Principles of Nature and of Grace, Founded on Reason* (1714).
- ⁶ Medieval Christian thought was aware that "cause" and the Being of the highest being are viewed analogically and that causality must be completed with emanation. I am

indebted to Professor Harris for pointing this out to me.

- ⁷ Paul Tillich: *Systematic Theology*, Vol.I, p.189.
- ⁸ Paul Tillich: *The Courage to Be*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1957, p.34.
- ⁹ There is certainly a tendency in Christian theology which thinks nothing as prior to Being for God Himself as the creator is beyond Being and nothing, or is nothing, as the mystics bluntly put it. But in the form of onto-theo-logy, the radical difference between the Greek and the Christian conceptions of Being and nothing has somehow been covered. *Ex nihilo, nihil fit* still holds true for the Christian doctrine *Creatio ex nihilo*, for God as a supernatural cause, is the Being of beings. "Creation ex nihilo is God's production of the world without any natural and material cause, but involves a supernatural cause, and so it would not violate the principle [nihil ex nihilo fit]." -- The Cambridge Dictionary to Philosophy, 1995, "Nothing".
- ¹⁰ See Appendix "'To Be' in Indo-European Languages and Its Parallels in Chinese", p.169.
- ¹¹ Cf. Plato: *Parmenides*, 160b, and *Sophist*, 237-238. Tillich suggests that Plato's *ouk on*, namely, the absolute nothing, is what "nihilo" means in the Christian doctrine "Creation ex nihilo". See Paul Tillich: *Systematic Theology*, Vol.I, University of Chicago Press, 1951, p.188.
- ¹² See Appendix, p.152.
- ¹³ W. F. Hegel: *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. W. H. Johnston, and L. G. Struthers, Humanities Press, London, New York, 1966.
- ¹⁴ Paul Tillich: *Systematic Theology*, Vol.I, p.188.
- ¹⁵ Cf Appendix, section 2.
- ¹⁶ Abe Masao: *Zen and Western Thought*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1985, p.127. I have changed *u* and *mu* in the original text quoted here to *yu* and *wu* in accordance with the general translation in this thesis.
- ¹⁷ The same can be said from the Latin word "*nihil*" (nothing). It seems to be derived from "*ne-*" "*hilum*" where "*hilum*" appears to mean "a tiny bit" hence "*nihil*" means "not even a tiny bit" hence "nothing". I am indebted to Professor Harris for pointing this out to me.
- ¹⁸ Hajime Nakamura: *The Ways of Thinking of Eastern People*, Honolulu, East-West Press, 1964, p.24.
- ¹⁹ It is a distinctively Indian way of approaching the notion of nothing.
- ²⁰ No doubt, it is the existential sense of nothing that constitutes the starting point of the Sartrean existentialist interpretation of nothing (or nothingness) as the precondition of human freedom. However, what is missed or deliberately cancelled by Sartre is the ontological sense of nothing.
- ²¹ I have changed "entity" and "entities" in Macquarrie and Robinson's translation of *Being and Time* to "being" and "beings".
- ²² Heidegger: *Begegnung: Zeitschrift für Literatur, Bildende, Kunst, Musik und Wissenschaft*, (1965): 2-7,6 Quoted by Reinhart May in *Heidegger's Hidden Source*, p.25.

- ²³ Translated by Chung-yuan Chang in *Tao: A New Way of Thinking*, Harper and Row, NY, 1975, chapter 40, p.112.
- ²⁴ Laozi also takes “wheel”, “chamber” to illustrate the “emptiness” of things. The whole chapter 11 of *Tao De Jing* runs: “Thirty spokes are joined at the hub. From their non-being arises the function of the wheel. Lumps of clay are shaped into a vessel (jug), From their non-being arises the function of the vessel. Doors and Windows are constructed together to make a chamber, From their non-being arises the function of the chamber. Therefore, as individual beings, these things are useful materials. Constructed together in their non-being, they give rise to function.” Translated by Chung-yuan Chang in *Tao: A New Way of Thinking*, p.35.
- ²⁵ Kah Kyung Cho: *Bewusstsein und Natursein*, p.302, quoted by Reinhard May in *Heidegger's Hidden Source*, p.30n. It is not impossible that Heidegger draws this example directly from Laozi, given the fact that the essay was delivered just five years later after his attempt to translate *Dao De Jing* during the summer of 1945.
- ²⁶ For example, “A hole is always a hole *in* something: take away the thing, and the hole goes too; more precisely, it is replaced by a bigger if not better, hole, itself relative to its surroundings, and so tributary to something else.” *Philosophical Encyclopedia*, “Nothing”.
- ²⁷ Reinhard May: *Heidegger's Hidden Source: East Asian Influences on His Work*, Rutledge, London and New York, 1996, p.32
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.32.
- ²⁹ The striking similarity between Heidegger's nothing as clearing and the old Chinese character *wu* even stimulates May to seek evidence that can show that Heidegger's reading of some books on Chinese language available to him might have influenced his formulation of these ideas about nothing and clearing. According to May, it is most likely that Heidegger could have come across Leon Wieger's book *Chinese Character, Their Origin, Etymology, History, Classification and Signification: A Thorough Study from Chinese Documents* first published in 1915.
- ³⁰ *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, translated by Burton Watson, Columbia University Press, New York, 1968, p.43
- ³¹ Robert Magliola: *Derrida on the Mend*, Purdue University Press, West Lafayette, Indiana, 1984, p.70.
- ³² Heidegger: “The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics”, in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, Cleveland, 1965, p.221.
- ³³ Cf. Nishitani: *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. Jan van Bragt, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1982. Masao Abe: *Zen and Western Thought*. Evan Thompson: “Planetary thinking/Planetary Building: An Essay on Martin Heidegger and Nishitani Keiji”, in *Philosophy East and West*, 36, no.3 (July, 1986).
- ³⁴ “Suchness” is an English translation (by Suzuki) of the Sanskrit *tathatā*, which literally means that “everything is truly as it is”.
- ³⁵ Masao Abe: *Zen and Western Thought*, p.223.
- ³⁶ Composed by Basho (1643-1694) a famous *haiku* poet. See Suzuki, D. T.: *Zen Buddhism*, Selected Writings of D.T. Suzuki, Double day and Company, Inc. Garden

City, NY, 1956, p.286.

- ³⁷ As we have seen in chapter two, in Eastern languages, Chinese for example, the non-differentiation of noun and verb makes such word play much easier, and hence expresses “suchness” more properly than in Western languages. For example, Zhuangzi speaks of *wu wu* (thing things).
- ³⁸ Masao Abe: *Zen and Western Thought*, p.224.
- ³⁹ See *On the Way to Language*, p.19.
- ⁴⁰ For example, Keiji Nishitani, Masao Abe, Akihiro Takeichi. The extensive discussion of the nothing and nihilism can be found in Nishitani’s *Religion and Nothingness*(trans. Jan van Bragt, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1982) and Akihiro Takeichi’s “On the Origin of Nihilism” in *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, p.175-186. I think that Heidegger is mistaken in his own observation of the Eastern reception of his discussion of the nothing in “What Is Metaphysics?” He says, “That lecture [‘What Is Metaphysics?’] which was translated into Japanese as early as 1930, was understood immediately in your country, in contrast to the nihilistic misunderstanding of what was said [about Nothing] which is prevalent to this day in Europe.” See Heidegger: *Begegnung: Zeitschrift für Literatur, Bildende, Kunst, Musik und Wissenschaft*, (1965): 2-7,6 Quoted by Reinhart May in *Heidegger’s Hidden Source*, p.25.
- ⁴¹ Cf. Nishitani: *Religion and Nothingness*.
- ⁴² A *koan* originally means “a public document setting up a standard of judgment.” A Zen *koan* is generally some statement made by old Zen master or some answer of his given to a questioner. It is used to test the correctness of one’s understanding of Zen. Cf. Suzuki, D. T.: *Zen Buddhism*, Selected Writings of D.T. Suzuki, p.134 ff.
- ⁴³ In fact, “forgetfulness” is a central notion in Zhuangzi’s Taoist theory of liberation, which played a crucial role in the transformation of Indian Buddhism into Zen. Kuang-Ming Wu observes that the difference between Heidegger and Taoism, particularly Zhuangzi, lies in their different attitude toward “forgetfulness”. See Kuang-Ming Wu: *Chuang Tzu: World Philosopher at Play*, The Crossroad Publishing Company and Scholars Press, NY, 1982, p.61.
- ⁴⁴ Cf. Chung-yuan Chang (trans.): *Original Teachings of Ch’an Buddhism*, Patheon Books, A Division of Random House, NY, 1969.
- ⁴⁵ Steffney: “Nothingness and Death in Heidegger and Zen Buddhism”, *Eastern Buddhism*, Spring, 1992, p.99.
- ⁴⁶ Caputo: *The Mystic Elements in Heidegger’s Thought*, Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio, 1978, p.22.
- ⁴⁷ John Macquarrie draws our attention to a possible link between Heidegger’s thought of Being as “wholly other” to beings and Otto’s notion of “wholly other”. “It is interesting to speculate whether at this point Heidegger owes something to Rudolf Otto, one of his colleagues at Marburg with whom he sometimes had discussions. The phrase ‘wholly other’ was used by Otto to designate the ‘numinous’, the suprarational reality which human beings experience in profound religious moments. The possibility of a connection to Otto is increased when we consider some of Heidegger’s remarks about

the holy later in this postscript [of “What Is Metaphysics”] and his use of the word ‘uncanny’ (*unheimlich*) in his descriptions of the mood of anxiety.” See John Macquarrie: *Heidegger and Christianity*, Continuum, New York, 1994, p.51.

- ⁴⁸ For example, Heidegger says: “From the standpoint of faith our question [‘why are there beings, rather than nothing.’] is foolishness.” Heidegger’s *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, p.7.
- ⁴⁹ Masunaga Reiho: *The Soto Approach to Zen*, Layman Buddhist Society Press, Tokyo, 1958. Quoted by David Loy in “The Mahayana Deconstruction of Time”, *Philosophy East and West*, 36, no.1, p.18-19.
- ⁵⁰ Dogan: *Shibogenzo*, p.2. Quoted by David Loy in “The Mahayana Deconstruction of Time”, *Philosophy East and West*, 36, no.1, p.19.
- ⁵¹ I have changed the original translation of *Geviert* into “fourfold” in accordance with the common translation.
- ⁵² David Krell: “Analysis” in Heidegger’s *Nietzsche*, Vol.4, p.289.
- ⁵³ It is worth noting that the Kenotic Christology of Altizer reinterprets the Biblical idea of kenosis in terms of the Buddhist emptiness (*sunyata*) and thus ultimately rejects the notion of the “wholly other”. In this respect, it is radically different from *via negationis* of the medievals. See Thomas J. J. Altizer: *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1966, p.62.
- ⁵⁴ It is precisely referring to this passage in particular that Jean-Luc Marion in his *God without Being* launches a criticism against what he calls the second idolatry, namely, the Heideggerian posing of the question of God (as different from the “first idolatry”, i.e.. the onto-theo-logical idea of God) -- “God according to Being”. In restating the neo-Platonic idea of *hyperousia*, or the “wholly other”, Marion tries to expose the Thomist tendency in Heidegger’s thinking, which indeed contradicts Heidegger’s own claim regarding the radical difference between Being and God. See Jean-Luc Marion: *God without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1991.
- ⁵⁵ Otto Pöggeler: *The Paths of Heidegger’s Life and Thought*, trans. John Bailiff, Humanities Press, NJ, 1997, p.143.
- ⁵⁶ See Petzet: *Dialogue and Encounter with Heidegger*, p.65.

Chapter Four Releasement

Apart from “the nothing”, there is another term in the later Heidegger which shows even greater affinity to Eastern thought: “releasement” (*Gelassenheit*). Heidegger borrows this term directly from the medieval mystics, particularly Meister Eckhart, but applies it analogically to his account of Being and Dasein. That is, Heidegger takes it out of the theological context and deprives it of its god-centered features and deals with it as a theme of the alleged “god-less” thinking, in much the same way as his treatment of “the nothing”. In downplaying the “god-centered” implication the term originally carries, Heidegger’s thought on “releasement” seems to approximate strikingly the Eastern idea of *wu wei* (non-action), which is certainly devoid of any theological significance. However, what I want to show is that the undeniable approximation of Heidegger’s releasement to the Eastern understanding of *wu wei*, which in fact carries out Heidegger’s call for “god-less” thinking is underlain by his implicit, yet never weakened tendency to eschatological expectation. Such a tendency becomes apparent when Heidegger’s thought on releasement is compared with the Eastern idea of *wu wei*.

1. Releasement and *Wu Wei*

Releasement (*Gelassenheit*) ordinarily means “self-possession”, “calmness”, “composure”, and “resignation”, referring to an attitude of not being concerned about anything. It was originally used by Meister Eckhart interchangeably with other related terms, mainly

detachment (*Abgescheidenheit*), in the sense of letting go of things and giving oneself to God.¹ For Eckhart, releasement makes the soul receptive of nothing other than God. In his German sermons, we read:

You should know this: to be empty of all creatures is to be full of God; and to be full of creatures is to be empty of God.²

Thus releasement comprises two aspects, negative and positive: (1) detachment from things; (2) submission to God. The comparability between Heidegger and Eckhart lies in that Dasein is to Being as the soul is to God. For Heidegger, releasement concerns how Dasein as the Da of Sein can be the real place of the revelation of Being itself. However, the switch from the relation of the soul to God to that of Dasein to Being marks a fundamental difference between these two thinkers inasmuch as Being, for Heidegger, can never reveal itself except in Dasein. Dasein and Being mutually appropriate to the extent that Being can no longer be said to be the “wholly other” of Dasein as it is to beings in general. The self-sufficiency and transcendence of God in respect of His relation to the soul is greatly different from the mutual appropriation of Being and Dasein. Being appropriates Dasein because the Da is the “right place” of Being itself, and Dasein appropriates Being in that Being is Dasein’s own Being. In contrast, Eckhart would never say that God needs the soul to reveal Himself. If the negative aspect of Heidegger’s releasement is the releasing from beings, its positive aspect is not submission (to Being), but appropriation (with Being). As Reiner Schürmann thoughtfully puts it: “Thus we have seen releasement turn into its contrary: appropriation. ... Releasement and appropriation, now, are names for one and the same event.”³ This fundamental difference is decisive in giving an account of Heidegger’s claim that Being is not God. As far as Heidegger’s

releasement concerns how Dasein is related to Being, it remains essentially ontological. Unlike Eckhart, Heidegger defines releasement as neither an ethical nor a religious category, but exclusively or primarily as a matter of thinking. In *Discourse on Thinking*, Heidegger makes this much clearly:

... what we have called releasement evidently does not mean casting off sinful selfishness and letting self-will go in favor of the divine will. (*DT*, p.62)

Apparently, Heidegger takes releasement from its original theological context and yet deprives it of its theological implications. For Heidegger, its ontological meaning is more primordial than, or prior to, any religious and ethical meanings. In this regard, Heidegger's releasement indeed in some sense approximates the Eastern idea of *wu wei*. As one of the principle terms, *wu wei* is conceived primarily not in any religious or ethical sense, but in the ontological or quasi-ontological sense.⁴ *Wu wei* is a contraction of *wei wu wei*, which literally means "the act of non-act", or "the action of non-action". Although it is usually translated as "taking no action" as it might originally and literally designate, it does not refer to act or action as opposed to thinking or meditation; rather it is a state of mind that is prior to any distinction between theory and practice as understood in Western philosophical tradition. As a state of mind, it is still not in the psychological sense, but is more like what Heidegger understands by the word "*Befindlichkeit*". The *locus classicus* of the interpretation of *wu wei* is found in chapter two of Laozi's *Dao De Jing*,

... Thus, the wise deals with things through non-interference [*wu wei*] and teaches through no-words.

All things flourish without interruption.

They grow by themselves, and no one possesses them.⁵

As non-interference, *wu wei* means the fundamental giving up of all anthropocentric

effectiveness, strategic rationality, and forced representationalism; in short, ceasing to intervene in things, such that we no longer will, legislate, or constitute, possess, or control things. It is non-violent in the sense that it does not forget that “each present thing, modestly compliant, fits into its own being.”⁶ Similarly, Heidegger’s “releasement”, as opposed to the technological attitude toward the world, is basically a withdrawal from humanistic dominance of things and letting things be as they are. As Heidegger puts it, “In the sowing of grain, [the farmer] places the seed in the keeping of the forces of growth and watches over its increase.” (*QCT*, pp.14-15)

The difference between taking care of and maintaining, on one hand, and challenging, on the other, is the difference between releasement and the technological relationship between man and things. As such, releasement only follows things as they emerge into their world, lets them be in their own world, leaves them an open field in which to be themselves. In this regard, it is almost in the same sense as *wu wei*, which is mainly considered as the precondition on the side of human beings for the realization of the “suchness” of things. If the negative aspect of “releasement” and *wu wei* is non-attachment in the sense that in releasement and *wu wei* one gives up all humanistic claims – whether ideational, representational, or willful – on things, the positive aspect is that both, unlike Eckhart’s submission to God, imply “letting things appear by themselves”. The comparability between Heidegger’s releasement and the Eastern *wu wei* is often taken as the common ground for the development of the global deep ecology.⁷

However, for Heidegger, the positive aspect of releasement as “letting be” must be understood in terms of the revelation of Being itself in beings, while in *wu wei* the spontaneous appearance of things in the sense of “suchness” has no allusion to Being or ontological difference.⁸

Insofar as Heidegger defines releasement as belonging to thinking, it is necessary at

first to clarify what thinking means and what it has to do with releasement.

2. Philosophy and Thinking

Heidegger's central thesis is that releasement is the nature of thinking which underlies any human activity whatsoever, whether practical or theoretical. He explains this near the beginning of the conversation in *Discourse on Thinking*:

Scientist: What has releasement to do with thinking?

Teacher: Nothing if we conceive thinking in the traditional way as re-presenting. Yet perhaps the nature of thinking we are seeking is fixed in releasement [*in die Gelassenheit eingelassen*]. (*DT*, p.62)

Here the non-traditional way of thinking is considered as an immediate encounter with things, without conceptualization and categorization or any mediation. In this regard, it is more like mystical experience than philosophical thinking. Heidegger says,

Everything that might interpose itself between the thing and us in apprehending and talking about it must first be set aside. Only then we yield ourselves to the undisguised presence of the thing. (*PLT*, p.25)

The traditional way of thinking which Heidegger characterizes as "re-presenting" is exactly what philosophy means to him when he announces "the end of philosophy". Thinking, according to Heidegger, arises out of "the end of philosophy". However, Heidegger tells us that by "the end of philosophy" he does not mean to say that the history of philosophical speculation is over; rather, the end is not "mere stopping", but the "completion" of philosophy in the sense that philosophy has realized all of the possibilities which inhere in its essence. Philosophy, for Heidegger, is a mode of thinking which began with Socrates and was passed

on to Plato and Aristotle and to the subsequent Western tradition. Thus Heidegger insists on the basically Greek character of Western European philosophy and hence there is no other philosophy, either Chinese or Indian philosophy. (*WCT*, p.224) Philosophy is an essentially Western phenomenon, as distinguished from the “thinking” of the East and from the “thinking” which has found expression outside the central “philosophical” mainstream, in, for example, poetic and mystical domains. As Heidegger puts it, “The often heard expression ‘Western European philosophy’ is, in truth, a tautology.” (*WP*, pp.29-31) No doubt, this philosophy which is essentially Western is what Heidegger more often calls metaphysics. In *What Is Philosophy*, Heidegger interprets “philosophy” as a striving (*philia*) towards the *sophon* which is the Being of beings. (*WP*, pp.45ff) In other words, philosophy is an attempt to think beings in their Being understood as Beingness and thus marks the forgetfulness of Being. It follows, then, that the end of philosophy or the overcoming of metaphysics entails stepping out of Western philosophy itself, to encounter the non-Western, hence non-metaphysical thinking which is certainly outside all possible philosophizing. Toward the end of the “Letter on Humanism”, Heidegger asserts,

It is time to break the habit of overestimating philosophy and of thereby asking too much of it. What is needed in the present world crisis is less philosophy, but more attentiveness in thinking. ... The thinking that is to come is no longer philosophy, because it thinks more originally than metaphysics – a name identical to philosophy. (*BW*, pp.241-242)

Philosophy or metaphysics is what Heidegger calls in *Discourse on Thinking* calculative thinking (*rechnendes Denken*)⁹, as opposed to meditative thinking (*besinnliches Denken*), which as the “essential thinking” is thinking proper. Calculative thinking obtains its name from the fact that it is the thinking of technology, which is the culmination of

metaphysics. Calculative thinking is essentially re-presenting, hence it is also called “representational thinking” (*das vorstellende Denken*). According to Heidegger, representational thinking arose through the transition from the Greek understanding of *legein* and *noein* (which mean “letting-lie-before-us” and “taking-into-heed”, respectively) to the Roman sense of proposition and reason. (*WCT*, p.203) Things are re-presented, literally, set before us, through being conceptualized and categorized. Representational thinking places before itself what is to be known; as such it is a proposing, a representation. It is a way for the knower to fit the “subject” of the proposition into one of his own categories. Technology simply affirms the world as existing on its behalf, a place in which it can assert its domination. Thus it has come about that all beings are submitted to human calculation and controlled by the fact that they are regarded as objects. Heidegger, therefore, sees technology as the final step of that subjectivism which originates in Plato. Philosophy is, then, permeated with subjectivism. According to him, even Kant is not excluded from subjectivism since he takes over uncritically from Descartes the subject/object dichotomy. In *Being and Time* Heidegger criticizes Kant for following Descartes and for his failure to provide a “preliminary ontological analytic of the subjectivity of the subject”. This critique seems to be made even more radical in *Discourse on Thinking*, in which Heidegger not only opposes meditative thinking to calculative thinking, but further distinguishes calculative thinking into two different types. The first and the most ordinary kind of thinking is subject-object thinking, the kind of thinking represented most eminently by Descartes. But this presupposes a second, a transcendental, preconditional thinking which sets the horizon for subject-object thinking, “the horizon which encircles the view of a thing [object] – the field of vision.” (*DT*, p.63) This is the Kantian *a priori*, the transcendental precondition

for the experience of objects. The Kantian transcendental thinking influenced Heidegger so greatly that when he started his ambitious program of constructing fundamental ontology he seemed to take for granted that the main task of the work was to find the transcendental structures of human existence. Charles Guignon, in his book *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge*, a systematic examination of Heidegger's transcendentalism in *Being and Time*, points out:

It seems that *Being and Time* fails because it is still caught in the kind of "representational-calculative thinking" that characterizes the tradition. It attempts to free us from our myopic understanding of Being as that which is representable for a subject by offering a new and better model of our situation in the world. But it is precisely the preoccupation with finding a "correct model" or "correct representation" which is at fault.¹⁰

To a certain extent, Heidegger's celebrated turn could be seen as an attempt to go beyond the transcendental kind of thinking towards a third type. With regard to this third type of thinking, Heidegger emphasizes its relation to the second as that of the second to the first. He says:

Teacher: Horizon and transcendence, thus, are experienced and determined only relative to objects and our re-presenting them.

Scholar: Why do you stress this?

Teacher: To suggest that in this way what lets the horizon be what it is has not yet been encountered at all. (*DT*, p.64)

The question may be put this way: the horizon lets objects be; then what lets the horizon be? Thus, thinking about objects means relating objects in terms of causality. Thinking about the horizon means relating the horizon to objects as transcendental precondition. And thinking in the third sense thinks the relation between what is beyond the horizon and the horizon in neither causal nor transcendental terms but in terms of "letting be". Apparently, the

analysis of the transcendental structures of Dasein's existence in *Being and Time* is replaced by an analysis of the higher activity of meditative thinking which involves Being directly. In this regard, Heidegger's critique of Kant in *Being and Time* is still valid for his self critique which Heidegger tries to work out in his later works. The later Heidegger wants to get neither objectively nor subjectively to the Being which transcends both beings (objects) and Dasein . To the question, "what lets the horizon be?" he answers, "It strikes me as something like a region. an enchanted region where everything belonging there returns to that in which it rests." (DT, p.64) This enigmatic and intriguing explanation still invokes further questioning, yet it seems to resist any penetrating understanding. Heidegger himself admits, "I don't understand it either, if by 'understanding' you mean the capacity to represent what is put before us as if sheltered amid the familiar and so secured; for I, too, lack the familiar in which to place what I tried to say about openness as a region." (DT, p.65) In other words, whatever is representationally intelligible is so by being placed in an intelligible place, region, field; but the region of all regions is not itself in a region; therefore it cannot be intelligible in the way everything else is. It remains open whether this region of all regions is not transcendental, and whether the "meditative thinking" as Heidegger understands it is not transcendental thinking. Indeed, the later Heidegger sometimes shows an even stronger tendency toward the kind of thinking which, as Peter Harris points out, can be seen as a return from the formalism of Kant's concern with transcendental conditions of possibility to the greater realism of medieval view of transcendental attributes of Being.¹¹ His characterization or description of the region of all regions seems to bear an inescapably transcendental character. But the question here is whether any articulation of this region is possible if articulation refers to the certain way of

philosophizing understood in the Western manner. Heidegger as an essentially Western thinker who inherits the great tradition of Western metaphysics can not simply cast off all metaphysical remnant without any possible return to the core of metaphysics. In fact, Heidegger admits that thinking in “the mode of conceptual representation insinuates itself all too easily into every kind of human experience. ... the metaphysical manner of forming ideas is in a certain respect unavoidable.” (*OWL*, p.25) Nevertheless, Heidegger insists on the necessity of overcoming metaphysics in the sense of a call for the meditative thinking which is an awareness of the limitation of metaphysics, or an awareness of the horizon of the knowing of objects. Meditative thinking is an opening to what is beyond the horizon of such knowing.

For Heidegger, to be open to what is beyond the horizon, to what “gives” the horizon is to overcome the subjectivism which lies in the core of metaphysical thinking. He therefore construes metaphysics in terms of “willing”, or the “will to power,” whose most extreme expression is the contemporary technologizing of man and world, as the culmination of the history of the forgetfulness of Being. “But thinking, understood in the traditional way, as representing, is a kind of willing.” (*DT*, p.58) Why? Because it is my thinking: my ego does it. The primary act of ego is will, desire. But will is more than this. For Heidegger, will is not only to do with human being, but rather the Being of beings itself. The task of thinking was now identified as not willing. Here “willing” was taken in a general sense to mean not only choosing and willing in the determinate sense but all conceptual or “representational” thinking, which is the very essence of the Western metaphysical tradition. Thus to overcome metaphysics is to overcome the will. Nevertheless, the difficulty of such an overcoming becomes apparent immediately.

Teacher: ... I want non-willing.

Scientist: Meanwhile this formulation has proved ambiguous.

Scholar: Non-willing for one thing, means a willing in such a way as to involve negation, be it even in the sense of a negation which is directed at willing and renounces it.

Teacher: Non-willing means, therefore: willingly to renounce willing. And the term non-willing means, further, what renounces absolutely outside any kind of will.

Scientist: So that it can never be carried out or reached by any willing. (*DT*, p.58-59)

Apparently, what Heidegger seeks does not reside in the realm of willing (or seeking) at all. That is why “releasement lies -- if we may use the word lie -- beyond the distinction between activity and passivity ... because releasement does not belong to the domain of the will.” (*DT*, p.61) Thus Heidegger, like Zen, does not teach quietism or non-willing in the sense of passivity: something still in the realm of will. This could well explain why Heidegger, toward the end of “Time and Being”, claims to cease overcoming metaphysics and leave it alone, because to overcome metaphysics is to overcome the will, hence it still remains in the realm of will. If we are not to will, we cannot will willessness; if we are not to do, we cannot do non-doing. What can we will or do? What is the way to non-willing? It is obviously a self-contradiction that “I want non-willing.” “Wanting” and “getting” both entail willing: how can I get not-willing if not by willing? “The transition from willing to releasement is what seems difficult to me.” (*DT*, p.61) Here, indeed, Heidegger confronts the paradox which has been one of the major theses in various trends of Eastern thought, which to a large extent could be seen as responses to this paradox, though not always in the same fashion.

3. Dasein and No-Self

By stressing the inevitability of the metaphysical mode of representation, Heidegger seems to suggest that the origin of representational thinking does not exclusively lie in the Western tradition. Man as man, regardless whether he is Occidental or Oriental, has the inherent tendency toward interpreting Being in terms of beings by representing and conceptualizing it. Certainly, this view does not counter Heidegger's basic observation that "the style of all Western-European philosophy -- and there is neither Chinese nor an Indian philosophy -- is determined by this duality, 'beings in Being'". (*WCT*, p.224) Assuming such an inherent tendency in all human beings, the Orientals, however, have developed a contrary propensity which was at work from the very beginning, due to their own languages which tend to choke off the "natural" transformation from hermeneutic as-structure to apophantic as-structure that has taken place in Western languages.

In Eastern thought in general, the final realization of reality (enlightenment) is said to be conditioned by a radical rejection of the self, which is seen as the origin of all dualities and distinctions. The experience of the nothing or emptiness of everything is primarily an experience of the nothing or emptiness of the self which generates the illusion of all beings. In Taoist tradition, particularly in Zhuangzi, the so-called "forgetfulness" (or "sitting forgetfulness") is the forgetfulness of the self. Buddhism, on the other hand, teaches that enlightenment occurs when we are liberated from the delusion that we are permanent substance (selves, ego) over against other enduring objects. Thus enlightenment is a revelation of the fact that the true self is "no-self" or "no-mind". As the overcoming of the "metaphysics" of

Brahmanism which insists on the permanent self (*Atman*) underlying all incessant changes of inner world, Buddhism aims at a radical “deconstruction” of the self. The Buddhist doctrine of no-self (*Anatman*) as the opposite extreme of the substantial “self” is meant to show that the self, if there is such a thing, can never be substantiated and become certain and unchanging. This view, in fact, had already been held by Zhuangzi. His “butterfly dream” is intended to show the fundamental indeterminacy, and elusiveness of the self, which is found nowhere. This Eastern account of the self is in striking contrast to the Cartesian constitution of the ego. For Descartes, to deny a substantial self involves an intrinsic contradiction. “I think, therefore, I am”. To doubt the self is just another way to assert its existence because there must be a doubter (a self) who exerts the doubting. But for the Taoist or the Buddhist, this counter-argument is invalid because “doubting” or “thinking” does not necessarily entail a doubter or a thinker as a substantial self, or as an irreducible transcendental starting point, the foundation. “Doubting” or “thinking” is like a mere happening of something which is devoid of an agent, or a pure predication without subject. David Loy points out that intuition as the translation of the Buddhist term *prajna* is always misleading in that intuition is understood in Western philosophical context is a faculty of mind apart from the intellect. But *prajna* for Buddhism refers to knowing in which there is no distinction between the knower, that which is known, and the act of knowing.¹² The tendency to substantiate the self and to make the impermanent permanent seems so natural that it determines any linguistic articulation (including the non-propositional Eastern languages). The strategy that Zen employs to eliminate this “natural” tendency is to “deconstruct” language itself through non-linguistic practices or language paradox. A famous Zen *koan* reads: A monk is worried over the question of immortality, asking

“How can I escape the boundary of *samsara* (birth and death)?” Replies the master, “Where are you?”¹³ In fact, all Zen *koans* ask the same question, “who and where is the self?” Self-enlightenment is factually not an enlightenment of the self, but rather an enlightenment of no-self. Thus releasement for Zen must not be understood as the self being released from something else, but the dissolution of the self.

If *wu wei* as non-action is the negation of willfulness, it is not merely the opposite of willfulness; rather, it is a paradoxical play of *yu wei* (action, willfulness) and *wu wei* (non-action, non-willfulness) which is based on the ultimate deconstruction of the self, as the subject of action or non-action. Accordingly, the final detachment is a detachment from any idea about detachment, because the latter is derived from attachment by means of the negation of the attachment. Zen refers to such a detachment or releasement (*wu wei*) as absolute liberation, the boundless freedom, which arises from the realization of the absolute nothing (emptiness, *śūnyatā*).

The original Buddhism attempted to attain such non-willing through a rather sophisticated method of demonstrations. That is, to attain thoughtlessness (no-mind), willessness requires the greatest thoughtfulness, will and activity. This, to be sure, is full of willness. Yet, with the abandonment of the speculative method in original Buddhism, early Zen was still committed to a certain way of practicing meditation which indeed remained illegitimate. A radical “effort” was made by the late Zen which claimed that the difficulty in attaining non-will rather lies in the very distinction between will and non-will (which corresponds to the distinction between Being and nothing). As a result, non-will could be at the same time the very will. Our attitude toward the world, then, can be both “yes” and “no”.

Heidegger sometimes plays a quasi-Zen paradox of will and non-will, which culminates in the following remarks:

We can use technical devices ... and also let them alone as something which does not affect our inner and real core ... But will not saying both yes and no this way to technical devices make our relation to technology ambivalent and insecure? On the contrary! Our relation to technology will become wonderfully simple and relaxed. We let technical devices enter our daily life, and at the same time leave them outside, that is, let them alone, as things which are nothing absolute but remain dependent on something higher. I would call this comportment toward technology which expresses “yes” and at the same time “no” by an old word, *releasement toward things* [die Gelassenheit zu den Dingen]. (DT, p.54)

It seems that Heidegger's understanding of releasement is strikingly akin to Zen's *wu wei*. For Zen, the absolute liberation is to say “yes” and “no” simultaneously. “Letting be”, if understood in the Zen manner, is letting everything be, not only “good” things but “bad” things, for there is no distinction between “good” and “bad” – the distinction itself is an attachment. Heidegger seems to move far from being an old fashioned romanticist who blames the technological world for its destruction of the earth, and his “nostalgia” seems to fade away altogether.

The relinquishing of distinction between will and non-will is determined by the fundamental abandonment of the self, or the ego. In short, egolessness is the precondition of willlessness. Thus, the state of non-will is like a predication without the subject. Like the Eastern thinkers, Heidegger's thinking began with an attack on the metaphysical notion of the self. The fundamental ontology addressed in *Being and Time* targets the Cartesian notion of the *ego cogito* and the Kantian subjectivity, the latter of which, for Heidegger, takes for granted the presupposition of Cartesian subjectivism. However, as Guignon has shown, Cartesian

foundationalism and Kantian transcendentalism still underlie Heidegger's fundamental ontology. In his later works, Heidegger gradually abandons such an idea of pursuing the fundament. Dasein's transcendence toward Being is replaced by the mutual appropriation of Being and Dasein in the sense of releasement. Now releasement, which is to some extent consistent with the early idea of resolution (*Entschlossenheit*) for both imply "letting be". becomes rather impersonal and seems to exclude any volitionistic element. Heidegger comes to see that the will ("the will to power") which characterizes the nature of metaphysics, does not belong to human being, or Dasein, but rather to Being itself; hence, releasement or non-will cannot take place as Dasein's possible attainment, but in appropriation in which, to be sure, there is no subject, it is simply a happening or a pure predication ("letting be") – the predication without subject. By reaching this point, Heidegger seems to enter the core of Eastern thought, and distances himself far away not only from the mainstream of Western philosophical tradition, but also from its deviation, the medieval mystics, especially Meister Eckhart, by whom he is strongly influenced. Thus, Heidegger reaches the conclusion that Zen masters have reached. Even in his explanation of "waiting", which, as his answer to the question, "What, then, am I to do?" sounds quite foreign to the East, still has something of a Zen overtone.

Heidegger says:

Teacher: Waiting, all right; but never awaiting, for awaiting already links itself with representing and what is re-presented.

Scholar: Waiting, however, lets go of that; or rather I should say that waiting lets re-presenting entirely alone. It really has no object.

Scientist: Yet if we wait we always wait for something.

Scholar: Certainly, but as soon as we re-present to ourselves and fix upon that for which we wait, we really wait no longer. (*DT*, p.68)

So we are waiting for nothing, though nothing here must be literally understood as no-

thing. We have no object to wait for, but we must wait. Indeed, the strong Zen flavor and rather obscure assertion about “waiting” results in a sense of disorientation which increases in the following statement:

Scientist: Then what are we to wait for? And where are we to wait? I hardly know anymore who and where I am.

Teacher: None of us knows that, as soon as we stop fooling ourselves. (*DT*, p.62)

Like all Zen masters, Heidegger asks the same question, “Who and where is my self?” But is this the final word of Heidegger to the question of what “waiting” means? It is certainly true even in his later works Heidegger never reduces Dasein into no-self in favor of Being or claims that Dasein is nowhere. The mutual appropriation of Being and Dasein is possible on the ground that Dasein is privileged among beings. Being needs Dasein and calls Dasein to think. As far as Dasein is needed by Being, it cannot be simply dissolved like the Zen no-self. Heidegger claims, “We genuinely incline toward something which in turn inclines toward us, toward our essential nature, by appealing to our essential nature.” (*WCT*, p.1) Dasein’s essential nature is its intrinsic relation to Being which is described in *Being and Time* as Dasein’s transcendence, and in his later works as Dasein’s inseparability from Being. For the later Heidegger, Dasein is still at the heart of the ontological difference, it is the “place” where the revelation of Being can occur. However, it is this “place” (Da) that Zen means to dissolve. Since for Zen there is no ontological difference, and to find a place (Da) to reveal the difference is fundamentally absurd. The self is no-self, it is nowhere – not only is it thrown nowhere, but also nowhere does it become openness. Zen would regard Heidegger’s thought on Dasein as still remaining in a certain mode of substantiation of the self. If we discern with great caution

the seeming Zen spirit in Heidegger's notion of "releasement" displayed in *Discourse on Thinking* and never neglect the integrity of Heidegger's thought, the hallucination or fallacy of the Eastern conclusion in Heidegger's thought will fade away.

4. Releasement and Waiting

Although the later Heidegger minimizes the volitionist character of Dasein's being toward authenticity described in *Being and Time* and recognizes the "overpowering force" of Being in the sense of using Dasein for its own revelation, he does not come to see that Dasein is nothing other than the mere "tool" of Being. The mutual appropriation of Being and Dasein presupposes that neither of them can be simply dissolved in favor of the other. It is true that Heidegger maintains that the forgetfulness and the recollection of Being are the historical events of Being itself. That means, while technology brings danger, it also contains within itself the possibility of rescue. Heidegger speaks of this in a prophetic manner:

Assuming that a turn still remains open for this destitute time at all, it can come some day only if the world turns about fundamentally -- and that now means, unequivocally: if it turns away from the abyss. (*PLT*, p.92)

However, this turn or rescue will not take place unless "there is a turn with mortals in their essence." (*PLT*, p.118) In other words, Dasein's being toward authenticity is decisive for world history. This view echoes the following remarks which refer to Eckhart from whom Heidegger derives his own conception of releasement:

Unless man first establishes himself beforehand in the space proper to his essence and there takes up his dwelling, he will not be capable of anything essential within the destiny now holding sway. In pondering this, we pay heed

to a word of Meister Eckhart, as we think it in keeping with what is most fundamental to it. It reads: "Those who are not of a great essence, whatever work they perform, nothing comes of it." (*Reden der Unterscheidung*, no.4) (*QCT*, p.39-40)

If man becomes Zen's no-self, that is, with nothing essential to himself, the establishment of himself would be impossible and absurd. If the "great essence" refers to the capacity to say both "yes" and "no" simultaneously in the face of the danger, there is no need to expect a turn that will bring about the end of the destitute time. The "great essence" for Heidegger is the capacity for the turn in man himself as the precondition for the fundamental turn of the world history. It is first of all the capacity of experiencing the abyss. Abyss in German is *Abgrund*, meaning the complete absence of ground. This reminds us what Heidegger elaborates about the nothing in "What Is Metaphysics". The nothing, as the veil of Being, is that which we must confront and experience through our existential anxiety in order to reach into the Open. Thus Heidegger asserts, "In the age of world's night, the abyss of the world must be experienced and endured. But for this it is necessary that there be those who reach into the abyss." (*PLT*, p.92) Those who reach into the abyss are the poets, the overman-like chosen ones, who will bring about the turn in the world history although they are not the creators of the new destiny. But how is the "great essence" which the poets possess related to the destiny of Being? That is, how will the poets possibly bring about the turn? Heidegger says: "The Being of beings is the will ... Every being, as a being, is in the will. It is as something willed, ... Only by virtue of being willed is each being that which, in its own way, does the willing in the will." (*PLT*, p.100-101) The Being of beings as will, reveals itself in the history of Western metaphysics, and culminates in the will to will, wherein, with the dawn of world's night, man

himself and his things are thereby exposed to the growing danger of turning into mere material objectification. It is the Being, the will that ventures and endangers man. The will to power, the will to security results in unshieldness which is the greatest danger. According to Heidegger, to see this danger and point it out, there must be mortals who reach sooner into the abyss. But in order to reach sooner into the abyss, the poets. “the most mortal among mortals, must be the most daring, the most venturesome. They would be still more daring even than self-assertive human nature which is already more daring than plant and beast.” (*PLT*, p.118) That is to say, the poets will even more than the Will (the Being of beings) does. In other words, in order to overcome the Will, we must will more willingly. Heidegger calls this will the highest form of will as beyond the normal dichotomy of willing and non-willing. He says:

Man is at times more venturesome than the venture, more fully (abundantly) being than the Being of beings. But Being is the ground of beings. He who is more venturesome than that ground ventures to where all ground breaks off – into the abyss. But if man is the ventured being who goes with venture by willing it, then those men who are at times more venturesome must also will more strongly. (*PLT*, pp.118-119)

This (quasi Rilkean) claim seems to be very different from, even opposed to, releasement, which, as the ultimate abandonment of will in the sense of the absolute non-will, is taken by Heidegger in *Discourse on Thinking* to be the final attitude we could have in face of the danger. Does Heidegger suggest a kind of Hegelian doctrine of negation of negation? That is, by negating the non-willness of animals and plants, man wills in accordance with the Will, the Being of beings, hence puts himself in danger; then, by negating the willfulness and the Will, he reaches into the nothingness, the abyss. To be sure, Heidegger, unlike the Eastern sages who advocated a return to the non-willfulness of animals and plants by negating the

willfulness, claims a more willing will despite the fact that he accepts the point that plants and animals, because of their unwillingness, are admitted into the Open. But the second negation, as the more willing will, is not the Hegelian synthesis either, it is by no means the continuation of the will, but rather “the other” as beyond the Will. “Those, then, who are at times more venturesome can will more strongly only if their willing is different in nature.” (*PLT*, p.119) Thus, we may conclude that the more willing will is at the same time releasement. The following passage expresses the relation between these two different wills:

Modern man, however, is called the one who wills. The more venturesome will more strongly in that they will in a different way from the purposeful self-assertion of the objectifying of the world. Their willing wills nothing of this kind. (*PLT*, p.140)

Although Heidegger often appeals to the destiny of Being to describe the history of Western metaphysics, and defines the Being of beings as the Will which is beyond human disposal, he still persistently calls for poets, the more venturesome mortals. In this regard, Heidegger is definitely not a determinist, as some suggest, because man’s venture can transcend the venture itself.

If releasement is understood as the fundamental abandonment of the self (which could be in “a right place” and in “a right way”), such as the Eastern thinkers maintained, the claim for the more venturesome venture would be entirely absurd. To some extent, releasement in the late Heidegger’s thinking is consistent with his early claim of resoluteness of turning to authenticity. Zimmerman rightly observes that “The theme of authentic existence ... was vitally important in his thinking to the very end”, although the later Heidegger apparently grew to regard the entire issue of “selfhood” on which the notion of authenticity depends as intrinsically

colored by subjectivistic thinking. He goes on to remark, "One of his concerns was to explain such existence in non-subjectivistic, non-anthropocentric terms. In his effort to find such an explanation, he pushes against, and sometimes beyond, the limits of Western thinking."¹⁴ However, Heidegger's "non-Western" thought of the self does not ultimately lead to Zen's "no-self". When compared with the Eastern way of radical attack on the self - not only as the ego but also the place of "clearing" - Heidegger's insistence on the real individual existence makes his implicit but fundamental Christian perspective more apparent. Caputo is right in pointing out a difference between Heidegger and Eckhart on one hand, and Zen on the other; that "Heidegger does not want to say that the death of the individual is ultimately unreal, nor would Eckhart want to deny that each soul is a unique creation of God. Both are, on this point at least, very Western. Zen, on the other hand, teaches that 'from the first nothing is,' that the 'being' (*ein Seiendes*) is an epiphenomenon."¹⁵ This difference is crucial in understanding Heidegger's releasement, which, indeed, has much in common with the Eastern *wu wei* or "no-mind", but is still incomparable in spirit with the latter. Even in his later years when he attempted to think Being without reference to beings, Heidegger never denied the reality of Dasein and always put emphasis on the "Da" - "the right place" - and maintains the priority of Dasein among beings in regard to the mutual appropriation of Being and Dasein. This, for Zen, is still an attachment. To be sure, Heidegger never took the ultimate Zen leap and thought his releasement as in the same sense as the Eastern *wu wei* which is based on the radical abandonment of the self. What he wanted to deny or overcome is the *ego cogito*, the subject as opposed to the object. Quite the opposite to Zen, man's will, for Heidegger, is the historical condition of the revealing of the truth of Being, insofar as it is capable of transcending the destiny of Being. The theme of

authentic existence, which Zimmerman considers as “vitaly important in his thinking to the very end,” is deeply influenced by Kierkegaard’s Christian notion of human existence. Heidegger would never regard Kierkegaard’s call for the free-will as still a kind of metaphysical account of the self. The real individual existence which is meant to be denied in Eastern thought, must, for Heidegger, be affirmed.

It is remarkable that the later Heidegger, in contrast to his attempt to find transcendental structures of Dasein’s being-in-the-world which underlie the essence of all human beings in *Being and Time*, appeals to poets as the chosen ones, the most daring and most venturesome mortals. The poet in the later Heidegger plays a subtly different role from the thinker (not philosopher). In the postscript of “What Is Metaphysics?” Heidegger draws a distinction between the thinker and the poet by saying, “The thinker utters Being. The poet names what is holy.” (EB, p.360) Although such a distinction is often complemented by the stress on their kinship in terms of the same task as overcoming the forgetfulness of Being both are committed to, the poet has a unique relation to Being because of his extraordinary capacity for experiencing the divine dimension in Being, the holy. Heidegger speaks of the poet as “the most mortal among mortals”. By this, it is possible, Heidegger wants to emphasize the intrinsic relation between the poet and the gods because the mortal implies his heavenly counterpart, the immortals, i.e., the gods which indicates the divine dimension of Being. The poet as “the most daring” and “the most ventured” who can reach into the abyss must be essential to the abyss, the essence of the world’s night.

The world’s night, or the destitute time, is characterized by Heidegger as the “default of God”, which means that not only have the gods and God fled, but the divine radiance has

become extinguished in the world's history. Moreover, "the time of the world's night is the destitute time, because it becomes ever more destitute. It has already grown so destitute, it can no longer discern the default of God as a default." (*PLT*, p.91) The loss of the capacity of discerning the default of God is the extreme forgetfulness of Being. Here Heidegger does not see the forgetfulness of Being, the extinction of the divine radiance and the default of gods and God as different events; rather, they refer to the same event -- the age of the destitute, the world's night, yet described from different aspects. Heidegger's appealing to the poet lies in his conviction that the possibility of regaining the capacity of discerning the default of God is still contained in the essence of the poet.

The gods who "were once there," "return" only after the "right time" -- that is, when there has been a turn among men in the right place, in the right way. (*PLT*, p.92)

In contrast to his "*koan*" given in *Discourse on Thinking*, Heidegger here unequivocally claims "the right place" and "the right way", which are undoubtedly the "Da" of "Da-Sein". But such a "right place" and a "right way" can be found nowhere except in the poet. The poet's capacity of experiencing the holy, the divine dimension of Being is at the same time the capacity of discerning the default of God and the extinction of the divine radiance, the unholiness. That is why Heidegger, following Hölderlin, speaks of the world's night as paradoxically the "holy night". (*PLT*, p.94)

Heidegger's appealing to the poet is in fact in accordance with his understanding of Being. As I have suggested in the previous chapter, Being, for Heidegger, involves the divine dimension which is irreducible in thinking of the truth of Being. The poet is different from the thinker in that he is concerned with not only the forgetfulness of Being in the general sense, but

particularly with the loss of the divine dimension in Being, for only the poet has the capacity of naming the divine dimension. The intrinsic relation between the poet and the divine dimension shows clearly in the nature of the poetry, which, according to Heidegger, is a heavenly “measuring”. Poets express the nature of poetry, or as Heidegger puts it, “gather in poetry the nature of poetry”. (*PLT*, p.94) In “... Poetically Man Dwells ...”, Heidegger remarks, “Man, as man, has always measured himself with and against something heavenly. ... ‘Man measures himself against the godhead.’ The godhead is the ‘measure’ with which man measures out his dwelling, his stay on the earth beneath the sky.” (*PLT*, p.221) If by measuring Heidegger means to say Dasein’s standing out in Being, it points out the divine dimension of Being which constitutes the measuring. It becomes clearer at this point that Heidegger’s appealing to the poet is a new way of thinking Dasein’s being toward authenticity. However, the ontic and ontological priority of Dasein among beings in terms of his understanding of Being in his existence is replaced by the priority of the poet, the special kind of Dasein, “the most mortal among mortals” for his essential relation to the holy, the divine dimension in Being.

The kinship of the poet and the thinker invokes and in fact is coincident with the intriguing relation between the question of Being and the question of God in Heidegger’s thinking, which is presented most explicitly in the following *locus classicus*:

Only from the truth of Being can the essence of holy be thought. Only from the essence of the holy is the essence of divinity to be thought. Only in the light of the essence of divinity can it be thought or said what the word “God” is to signify. (*BW*, p.230)

Indeed, it looks like a kind of transcendental thinking. The truth of Being in question

seems the transcendental condition for the thinking of the holy, the divinity and God. It is consistent with the following claim which is made even more explicit in regard to Heidegger's insistence on the primacy of the ontological question, i.e., the question of Being over the ontic questions (including the question of God):

In such nearness, if at all, a decision may be made as to whether and how God and the gods withhold their presence and the night remains, whether and how the day of the holy dawns, whether and how in the upsurge of the holy an epiphany of God and the gods can begin anew. But the holy, which alone is the essential sphere of divinity, which in turn alone affords a dimension for the gods and for God, comes to radiate only when Being itself beforehand and after extensive preparation has been illuminated and is experienced in its truth. Only thus does the overcoming of homelessness begin from Being, a homelessness in which not only man but the essence of man stumbles aimlessly about. (*BW*, p.218)

However, the understanding of such a claim as a transcendental schematization may not be adequate because the question of Being for Heidegger is certainly not the scheme for our thinking or talking of the holy and God. Heidegger would not be in agreement with Rudolf Otto who, in his discussion of the holy, claims the need for "schematization", that is, the indefinite must be made definite if man is to assume a meaningful stance toward it.¹⁶ For Heidegger, without the preliminary experience of the holy which only the poet is capable of, Being remains vacuous and obscure since the forgetfulness of Being cannot be overcome without regaining the lost divine dimension.

The holy, as the divine dimension of Being, refers to "The essential space of the divinity ... the dimension of the gods and God." (*BW*, p.234) The holy as both the divine dimension of Being and the abode of the gods and God makes the question of Being and the question of God essentially inseparable because Being contains in itself the divine dimension

which in turn alludes to the gods and God. It is the poet who points out this inseparable link. However, the poet who names the holy cannot name God. With Hölderlin, Heidegger suggests that the question “Who is God?” is too hard for man. The only question we can ask is “What is God?” or “What may be said about God?” (*PLT*, p.225). Gadamer points out that this refers to “the dimension of the hallowed and the holy”.¹⁷ The poet can only sing songs without words, which merely indicates the traces of the fugitive gods and God, and cannot put into language who God is.

The thinker informed by the poet can only watch and wait, remaining open to the possible advent of the gods and God. Thus understood, releasement is open to and attends on what we are waiting for. Thinking, or meditative thinking, accordingly, is a watching for, a vigilance. All of this, to be sure, determines the nature of Heidegger’s thinking as fundamentally eschatological. His account of the existential resolution of Dasein in regard to the truth of Being is essentially a way of preparation, and has nothing to do with “schematization”. As a waiting, it aims at the final fulfillment.

Caputo claims in regard to the nature of the later Heidegger’s thinking that, “Heidegger’s later writings are more suggestive of a kind of Buddhism, a kind of meditative, silent world reverencing, than of Judaism or Christianity.”¹⁸ Such a claim simply misses the fundamental perspective in the depth of Heidegger’s thinking which can be adequately characterized as “waiting” or “expectation” which is radically different from, and even opposed to, the Eastern idea of *wu wei*, or as Caputo terms it, “a kind of meditative, silent world reverencing.” In Eastern thought, particularly in Zen Buddhism, the so-called “waiting” as an act of “no-act” refers to “nothing at all” ; it does not involve anything that will come in the

future. In short, it does not contain a temporal structure as in Heidegger's waiting. When Heidegger defines his notion of releasement as "waiting", he cautiously differentiates "waiting" from "awaiting". Awaiting "already links itself with representing and what is represented," while waiting "really has no object." (*DT*, p.68) In other words, what is waited, as radically different from what is awaited, can never be represented as an object (*Gegenstand*) present-at-hand and ready to be encountered at the end of waiting.¹⁹ As the nature of releasement, "waiting" contains Heidegger's unique understanding of Being and time. In "Time and Being", Heidegger renders Parmenides' "*esti gar einai*" ("For Being is") as "It is capable." He goes on to explain that "To be capable of Being means: to yield and give Being." (*OTB*, p.8) The giving of Being is also, identically and simultaneously, a giving of time, and hence is far from the metaphysical notion of Being as permanent presence. The identity of Being and time affirmed by Heidegger in "Time and Being" shows the fundamental integrity and continuity of Heidegger's thinking, for it is a restatement in radical way of what is already asserted in *Being and Time*, i.e., to think Being in terms of temporality. Being absences into future and past even as it presences in the actual moment; it is never the metaphysical substantiated, atemporal, presence. In the epilogue of "The Thing", Heidegger says,

"Being" is in no way identical with reality or with a precisely determined actuality. Nor is Being in any way opposed to being-no-longer and being-not-yet; these two belong themselves to the essential nature of Being. Even metaphysics already had, to a certain extent, an intimation of this fact in its doctrine of the modalities -- which, to be sure, has hardly been understood -- according to which possibility belongs to Being just as much as do actuality and necessity. (*PLT*, p.183)

We can see at this point that Heidegger's notion of "releasement" understood as "waiting" or "expectation" is intrinsically related to his thought on the identity of Being and

time, and particularly to his unique understanding of the possibility of Being. The possibility of Being in Heidegger is essentially eschatological in that it holds sway beyond Dasein's power of determination. Gadamer points out that such an eschatological understanding of the possibility of Being arose from Heidegger's fascination with the early Christian community's experience of time. He says, "Measured time, calculations about time and the whole background of Greek ontology, which governs our concept of time in philosophy and science, breaks down in the face of this experience."²⁰ It is this early Christian experience that Heidegger views as something "non-Western" for its radical difference from Greek ontology which, for Heidegger, determines exclusively the metaphysical nature of the subsequent Western philosophy. In "the End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking", Heidegger writes:

... the thinking ... remains slight because its task is only of a preparatory, not of a founding character. It is content with awakening a readiness in man for a possibility whose contour remains obscure, whose coming remains uncertain.
(*OTB*, p.60)

Heidegger here describes thinking in much the same way the early Christians expressed their experience of *Parousia*, *Kairos* and wakefulness. The emphasis on the possibility in Heidegger's thinking does not suggest the kind of Kantian transcendental condition of schematization, because the possibility of Being is essentially obscure and uncertain. It parallels the Christian experience of the second coming, 'like a thief in the night' (First Epistle of St. Paul to the Thessalonians), and hence excludes the notion of permanent presence which underlies the thought of transcendental condition and of schematization. Thus "waiting" is a preparation without any power of determination. Heidegger says:

Guardianship of Being is not fixed upon something existent. The existing thing, taken for itself, never contains an appeal of Being. Guardianship is

vigilance, watchfulness for the has-been and coming destiny of Being, a vigilance that issues from a long and ever-renewed thoughtful deliberateness, which heeds the directive that lies in the manner in which Being makes its appeal. (*PLT*, p.184)

It is this fundamental attitude as “expectation’ and “waiting” in Heidegger’s thinking that Zen would mean to reject. For Zen, the eschatological understanding of the possibility of Being is still an attachment to the certain kind of differentiation: the difference between past, present and future. Although Heidegger stresses the unity of gathering of past, present and future, such a unity of gathering, in Zen’s view, presupposes their separation in terms of three different dimensions. Zen’s “absolute present” precludes this difference and embraces past, present and future as non-differentiated. All the secrets of Heidegger’s thinking lie in his unique understanding of time and Being, in his eschatological experience of reality, from which he launches the radical attack on the metaphysical notion of Being, and which keeps him from the tendency toward the Eastern conclusion about man and world. This underlying Christian perspective in Heidegger’s thinking is neither Eastern nor Western, it directs and sustains Heidegger’s dialogue with the East. Heidegger’s final “definition’ of Being as *Ereignis* in the sense of the appropriation of Being and time refers to the ultimate possibility of Being whose final coming remains beyond our choice and control. It is this eschatological understanding of Being and time that makes possible the meaningful relationship between the question of Being and the question of God. As we have seen in the previous discussion about the divine dimension in Being and the unique task of the poet, what Heidegger does is not simply takes the Christian experience as a specific model from which to formalize the notion of Being.

Hühnerfeld points out in regard to the difference between Heidegger and Eckhart that whereas Eckhart abandons himself to the loving arms of God, Heidegger abandons himself to the abyss of "Nothingness".²¹ However, he is mistaken in concluding that there is no God in Heidegger. It is certainly true that releasement in Heidegger is not a mystical leap to the arms of God as in Eckhart, but the reaching into the abyss. In this regard, Heidegger's radical attitude toward non-will is closer to and almost the same as Eastern thought. Yet this reaching to the abyss in its nature is the preparation for the turn. For only in the abyss are there the traces of the fugitive gods. "Only within reach of this site, if anywhere, can traces of the fugitive gods still remain for god-less men." (*PLT*, p.93) Heidegger must have regarded Eckhart's releasement, the mere negation of the will, as a too easy way to attain the divine radiance in that it is still far from the experience of the absolute nothing, the abyss, which, however, is necessary for men in a destitute time (not for the men in Eckhart's day perhaps) to find the traces of the fugitive gods and God. Thus the following statement made by Heidegger is really like a sheer confession without any pretentiousness: "I do not deny God. I state his absence. My philosophy is a waiting for God."²² It is impossible that the God in such an eschatological expectation is simply an empty word, or, as some suggest, a mere poetic god that "has virtually nothing to do with the God whom Jesus called *abba* or with the religion of the cross that Heidegger found in Luther."²³

Although Heidegger's thinking on releasement is in many aspects akin to the Eastern idea of *wu wei*, his understanding of releasement as a waiting, and moreover a waiting for God, makes the fundamental difference between his thinking and Eastern thought quite explicit. Heidegger's thinking, in other words, has features in common, at least by analogy, with both

Eckhartian mysticism and with Taoism and Zen Buddhism. But it is reducible to neither. The elements of “Kairological” expectancy” ensures this independence.

Notes:

- ¹ Eckhart used a number of Middle High German terms, such as *abgescheidenheit* (detachment), *gelâzenheit* (letting-be), *âne war umbe* (without why), *âne wise* (without way), *âne mittel* (without means) and *âne eigenschaft* (without property) to express this basic attitude. Cf. Sonya Sikka: *Forms of Transcendence, Heidegger and Medieval Mystical Theology*, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 1997, p.127.
- ² *Meister Eckhart*, trans. Raymond Blakney, Harp and Row, New York, 1941, p.164.
- ³ Reiner Schürmann: *Meister Eckhart, Mystic and Philosopher*, Indiana University Press. Bloomington and London, 1978, p.212.
- ⁴ I use “ontological” loosely referring to any account of existence and non-existence.
- ⁵ Chang Chung-yuan: *Tao: A New Way of Thinking*, p.8
- ⁶ Watson: *Source Book*, pp.240-41
- ⁷ Michael Zimmerman: “Heidegger, Buddhism and Deep Ecology”, in *Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, pp.240-269.
- ⁸ See chapter three of this thesis, especially part 3.
- ⁹ The German “*rechnendes Denken*” is usually translated as “calculative thinking”. But, as Professor Peter Harris points out, English “reckoning thinking” may better captures its original meaning.
- ¹⁰ Charles Guignon: *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge*, Hackett Publishing Corporation, Indianapolis, 1983, p.241.
- ¹¹ Peter Harris: “Transcendental Thinking in ‘Zeit und Sein’: A Return to Metaphysics”, in *Concerning Heidegger: Essays in Interpretation*, p.169.
- ¹² David Loy: “Nondual Thinking”, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 13 (1980) p.294-295.

- ¹³ Cf. Suzuki, D. T.: *Zen Buddhism*, Selected Writings of D.T. Suzuki, Doubleday and Company, Inc. Garden City, NY, 1956, p.210.
- ¹⁴ Michael Zimmerman: *The Eclipse of the Self: The Development of Heidegger's Concept of Authenticity*, Ohio University Press, Athens and London, 1981, pp.xxvii-xxviii.
- ¹⁵ John Caputo: *The Mystic Elements in Heidegger's Thought*, Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio, 1978. p.213.
- ¹⁶ Cf. Ruldof Otto: *The Idea of the Holy*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1958.
- ¹⁷ Gadamer: *Heidegger's Ways*, trans. John W. Stanley, State University of New York Press, Albanu, 1994, p.180.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., pp.283-284.
- ¹⁹ In other words, Heidegger's "objectless waiting" can be seen as analogous to Schleiermacher's "feeling of absolute dependence", which is essentially "relational" yet without possibility of naming its term. I am indebted to Professor Harris for pointing out the influence of Schleiermacher in this respect to me.
- ²⁰ Gadamer: *Heidegger's Ways*, p.169.
- ²¹ John Caputo: *The Mystic Elements in Heidegger's Thought*, p.219.
- ²² Stefan Schimanski: "On Meeting a Philosopher", *Partisan*, 15(1948), p.511.
- ²³ John Caputo: "Heidegger and Theology", in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles Guignon, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, 1993, p.283 .

Conclusion

This thesis, as its title indicates, is an investigation into the significance of Heidegger's engagement in a dialogue between the East and the West. However, it is not meant to present Heidegger as simply a spokesman of Western philosophical tradition and hence a proper interlocutor on the part of the West, although he, as a Western thinker *par excellence*, is surely qualified to play such a role as he sometimes actually did.¹ Nor is it a comparative study of Heidegger's thought and Eastern thought in the strict sense, despite the fact that it involves a considerable amount of comparison in terms of their similarities and dissimilarities. What I try to do through the whole thesis is to set up a dialogue between the East and the West on the Heideggerian topic or the Heideggerian matter of thinking, namely, the question of Being (*Seinsfrage*). I believe that the thrust of Heidegger's rethinking of this awe-inspiring Western metaphysical question lies in his extraordinary sensibility and intuition of the primordial meaning of the question itself, which is prior to any kind of philosophizing and thinking be it "Western" or "Eastern".

Heidegger's critical reflection on Western philosophy as a whole allows him, in some sense, to step out of Western philosophy itself to which his own thought belongs. As Caputo claims, Heidegger's thought is far more radical than any of the previous revolutions taking place in the history of Western philosophy. "Revolutions in philosophy in the past have been a matter of finding a new way to give a 'rationale' for one's views -- whether that

rationale be a priori or posteriori, pragmatic, or phenomenological. But Heidegger calls for a leap beyond the realm of giving reasons in order to take up a non-conceptual, non-discursive, non-representational kind of 'thinking' which is profoundly divided from any of the traditional varieties of 'philosophy'.² One may discover in Heidegger's thinking not only mystical elements but also some distinctively Oriental characteristics that are rarely found in other Western thinkers. It is clearly possible that Heidegger's encounter with Eastern, particularly Chinese, thought during the period of his celebrated turn exerted an extraordinary influence on his thinking to the extent that, as Pöggeler states, it "transformed Heidegger's language in a critical situation and gave a new orientation to his thinking."³ However, what Heidegger draws from this unstated "hidden source" is conditioned by a "pre-established harmony" between his radical non-metaphysical thinking and the Eastern way of thinking, which can be uncovered in the writings that antedated his contact with Eastern philosophical literature.⁴

Needless to say, Heidegger's affinity to Eastern thought originates in his fundamental concern to overcome the forgetfulness of Being, which, he believes, is the nature of Western metaphysics. The East, for Heidegger, can provide a kind of non-metaphysical thinking which may help overturn the dominance of metaphysical thinking. However, as I have shown in the preceding chapters, Heidegger's stepping out of Western metaphysics is not followed by a stepping into Eastern thought, as many commentators readily admit.⁵ This cautious reluctance to plunge into the Eastern world affords the greatest indication of Heidegger's thinking on the East-West dialogue. As a hint, it is unstated in Heidegger's writings, like his unstated affinity to Eastern thought. I

try through the whole thesis to bring into light this Heideggerian hint: to unfold a critique of Eastern thought in respect to its distinctively non-metaphysical way of forgetfulness of Being. If the ultimate goal of overcoming metaphysics is to overcome the forgetfulness of Being which is characterized by Heidegger as the essence of nihilism, the dialogue with the East makes it plain that non-metaphysical thinking is by no means equivalent to the thinking of Being itself. The Heideggerian dialogue between the East and West shows us clearly that nihilism as originally defined by Heidegger as the consequence of Western metaphysics has another history found in the East. And Heidegger's affinity to Eastern thought in respect to the non-metaphysical nature of his thinking allows us to carry out a penetrating rethinking of the Eastern tradition.

Although Heidegger never gave a definition of “the West”, he had a unique understanding of the term which may be different from that of many others. For Heidegger, “the West” is basically metaphysical and of the Greek nature. By lumping the varieties of philosophy and theology together under the same name “onto-theo-logy” for their submission to Platonism, Heidegger neglects, as some criticise, the Christian roots of Western tradition. By this, however, Heidegger seems to preserve the primordial meaning of Christianity as something “non-Western”, and “non-metaphysical”. Heidegger's thinking of Being which involves the divine dimension and his basically eschatological understanding of time and history cannot be regarded as merely an analogical application of Christian motifs to his ontological context. I suggest that Heidegger's fundamental Christian perspective can be shown more clearly when his thinking is put in the background of Eastern thought. For such a perspective underlines his reception of Eastern ways of

non-metaphysical thinking as well as his refusal of a total agreement with the Eastern conclusion about man and world. Thus, his call for the leap of thinking is ultimately a call to think Being in a more primordial way which is neither “Western” (as the synonym of philosophy or metaphysics), nor “Eastern” (as contrary to metaphysics), but “Christian” (understood in a rather primordial sense) . Due to the limited space of this thesis, I cannot develop an extensive exploration of the Christian themes in Heidegger’s thinking although it is certainly within the area broached by the present study. It may ultimately prove crucial to a full account of Heidegger’s confrontation with the East.

There are certain aspects in Heidegger’s thought on the issue of the East-West dialogue that appear ambiguous and even contradictory. For example, his delineation of the history of Being as exclusively Western without mentioning other possible way of “Being’s sending” seems to suggest that the East, due to its lack of the metaphysical notions (like *ousia*, *Idea*, *energeia*, ... will to power), has found nowhere for Being’s revelation and concealment. He simply overlooks that Being could possibly reveal and conceal itself in a way that is entirely different from the West. This brings us back to the difficult question of the transcendental character of Heidegger’s reflection on the question of Being. When Heidegger asserts that language is the house of Being, and that the Europeans and the Eastern Asians presumably live in different houses, he contends that there is still Being dwelling in the Eastern house. But he might find it difficult to name the various Eastern, non-metaphysical, “concepts”, such as *Tao*, *wu*, emptiness, *yin-yang*, etc. Are they still the traces of Being, since they show no allusion to ontological difference in any sense? He sometimes admits the approximation of his *Ereignis* to the Chinese *Tao* (*ID*, p.36). But can

anyone find in *Tao* the Being that necessarily appears in *Ereignis* as the counterpart of Dasein for their mutual appropriation? This thesis nevertheless leaves these Heideggerian ambiguities unsolved. Its primary concern has been to characterise the measure of agreement with Eastern thought but also of fundamental and insuperable difference.

Notes:

- ¹ Apart from the well-known dialogue with a Japanese (“A Dialogue on Language”), Heidegger was involved in conversations with professional philosophers and religious figures from the East in many other occasions. For example, the dialogue with a Buddhist monk from Thailand in 1960. Cf. Petzet: *Dialogue and Encounter with Heidegger*.
- ² John Caputo: *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*, Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio, 1978, p.4.
- ³ Otto Pöggeler: *The Paths of Heidegger's Life and Thought*, trans. John Bailiff, Humanities Press, NJ, 1997, p.270.
- ⁴ According to Graham Parkes, Heidegger's early works, and *Being and Time* in particular, already contain a number of Eastern (Taoist) themes. See Graham Parkes: “Thoughts on the Way: *Being and Time* via Lao-Chuang”, in *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, pp.105-144.
- ⁵ Although many commentators on the issue of Heidegger's relation to the East admit the differences between Heidegger and Eastern thought, they fail to realize such differences are essential to Heidegger's thinking. Cf. *Heidegger and Asian Thought*.

Appendix

“To Be” in Indo-European Languages and Its Parallels in Chinese

In what follows I will focus on a particular linguistic phenomenon in Indo-European languages, the verb “to be”, with regard to its extraordinary career in Western philosophy, and its parallels in Chinese, which seem to make the raising of any real ontological question impossible within that linguistic culture. I attempt to answer the question as to whether the question of Being is in any sense bound to the particularity of Indo-European languages and thus is merely a language game played under Western grammatical rules; whether the East, due to the confinement of its own languages, is closed *a priori* to any ontological concern; and whether Heidegger’s inquiry into the truth of Being makes sense only in Western philosophical discourse and hence has no relevance to Eastern thinking and existence.

I. The Peculiarities of the Verb “To Be”

It has been generally recognized that Western ontology to large extent depends on the peculiarities of the Indo-European verb “to be”. Benveniste writes:

Beyond the Aristotelian terms, above that categorization, there is the notion of “being” which envelops everything. Without being a predicate itself, “being” is the condition of all predicates. All the varieties of “being-such,” of “state,” all the possible views of “time,” etc., depend on the notion of “being.” Now again, this concept reflects a very specific linguistic quality. Greek not only possesses a verb “to be” (which is by no means a necessity in every language), but it makes very peculiar uses of this verb. It gave it a logical function, that of the copula (Aristotle himself had remarked earlier that in that function the verb did not actually signify anything, that it

operated simply as a synthesis), and consequently this verb received a larger extension than any other whatever.¹

Needless to say, without this special verb which embraces various senses (roughly divided into existential and copulative senses) there could be no ontology at all. So the question of Being is, so to speak, necessarily related to the verb “to be”. Under the influence of Benveniste’s pioneering studies, which led to a sustained enthusiasm for the investigation of the single verb “to be”, an enormous research project *The Verb “Be” and Its Synonyms* was launched to find the different expressions in different languages around the world for the various senses of “to be”.² Such empirical linguistic studies were certainly philosophically, or more precisely, ontologically motivated. They have opened the realms for our rethinking the significance of the question of Being.

As “the other pole of the whole realm of languages” opposite to the Indo-European family, Chinese provides ideal examples that show how far the various senses of “to be” can be distributed differently, but are still related to each other in one way or another. All of these are reflected in philosophical terms. The preeminent notion of *yu* in Eastern thought is comparable to Being in respect to its undeniable ontological connotation which has attracted the attention of Western philosophers from Hegel to Heidegger. But any identification between *yu* and Being is always shattered by the frustrating difficulties in translating Western ontology into Chinese.³ The difficulties arise mainly in the free move between the existential “to be” and “to be” as copula in the philosophical texts, for the Western philosophers usually take their consistency for granted although they are always aware of their difference.

Aristotle is the first philosopher who draws the distinction between the existential and the copulative senses which are embraced by the single verb “to be” (*einai*). He renders the existential sense of “to be” as “being *haplos*”, that is, “being without qualification” or “being *tout court*”. (“Whether or not it simply is, not whether it is white or not.”⁴) Thus existence is seen in this way as an incomplete predication. Or the difference between the two uses of “to be” in sentences as “Socrates is wise” and “Socrates is” is merely a difference between transitive and intransitive verbs.⁵ Their semantic consistency is constantly assumed. But Aristotle also remarks that “to be” as copula operates simply as a synthesis -- apart from its synthetic function of connecting two terms there could be no semantic account of it. The “emptiness” of the copula is attested by the fact that in many languages it can be simply omitted or may be totally lacking.⁶ Aristotle seems to hesitate on whether the copula “to be” is a part of predicate. The alternative treatments of “be” in sentences like “Socrates is wise” can be expressed as “subject + predicate” and “subject + to be + predicate”. As far as “be” is a transitive verb, it should be regarded as a part of a predicate just like any other verb. Yet when its mere synthetic function is stressed it tends to be treated as beyond the dichotomy of subject-predicate.

However, the Indo-European copula “to be” is undoubtedly a verb; it possesses all the features of a verb (tense, person, etc.); yet it can still be differentiated from all other verbs. In a number of languages outside the Indo-European family, words other than verbs are employed as copulas. It is the peculiarity of Indo-European languages that they assign to the copula, which may be otherwise a pronoun or a particle, verbal characteristics. As a verb, heard as a part of a predicate, “be” constantly resists its “emptiness”. But the verbal

character of the copula “be” seemed to be weakened after the Latin *existere* was introduced to replace the existential use of “be”. That is, with the emergence of “to exist”, the copula “to be” tended to be cut off from its connection to “existence”.⁷ One may legitimately ask with Benveniste⁸, Why is it still a verb?

II. “To Be” and the Copula

It is alleged that the downplay of ontology in the Anglo-American philosophical tradition started with John Stuart Mill’s notorious remark on the contrast between the existential and copulative functions of “to be”. He argues:

The frivolous speculations concerning the nature of Being ... which have arisen from overlooking this double meaning of the word to be; from supposing that when it signifies to exist, and when it signifies to be some specified thing ... it must still, at bottom, answer to the same idea, and that a meaning must be found for it which shall suit all these cases.⁹

Following Mill, Russell declares that it is “a disgrace to the human race” that it uses the same word for the two entirely different senses of identity and predication. Thus, according to Russell, there are at least four senses of “to be”, each of which can be symbolized as: (1) \exists , a quantifier indicating existence, (2) $f(x)$, predication, (3) $x = y$, identity, (4) $x \subset y$, class inclusion. If there is still a philosophical account of existence, it would not be the same as the inquiry into the question of Being which is a result of the confusion of various senses that happened to be gathered in the single word “be”. The lack of a deep logical connection between these different senses is the very reason to abandon this “pseudo” question altogether.¹⁰

Instead of the question of Being, analytic philosophy talks about the question of existence. But it approaches the question in terms of quantification. Existence, expressed by a quantifier, becomes a propositional function. The strong verbal character of “existence” is omitted or intentionally neglected. The debate between two basic types of theories concerning the nature of being or existence, i.e. “strong” and “weak” theories, as James Bradley terms them respectively, is to some extent a debate on whether or not the nature of Being or existence should be understood in terms of its verbal character. In contrast to “strong” theory which has been held by “speculative metaphysics” and the like, “weak” theory, represented by various empiricism, naturalism, pragmatism, and neo-transcendentalism, is concerned solely with the quantificational nature of existence, i.e., with the possibility of transforming statements with the active verb “to exist” or “to be” in their existential sense into propositional statements. In other words, “weak” theory, in defining existence in reference to quantification, makes allusion to the copulative sense of “to be”. This is made explicit in Frege’s doctrine of existence. According to Frege, existence is analogous to number. Affirmation of existence is in fact nothing but denial of the number naught. Thus “Just men exist” means the same as “The number of just men is not naught.” Note the verb “exist” in the first sentence is replaced by a copula “is” in the second sentence with a modification of the subject (from “just men” to “the number of just men”). Frege carefully draws a distinction between a property of x and the property of the concept x in order to differentiate existential statement from predication. As Bradley puts it, “statements of the form ‘ x exists’ are not statements about x - i.e. not predicates of x - but rather quantificational statements about the term x , namely that x refers to a class which

is not empty but has instances or examples.”¹¹ But the statement of existence as “The number of just men is not naught” is essentially a statement of denial of identity ($n \neq 0$) which uses “be” in exactly the copulative sense. Accordingly the consistency between the existential and the copulative senses of “be” which Mill and Russell strive to dismantle sneaks back into the account of existence.

As an advocator of the basic tenets of “weak” theory and the forerunner of Frege, Kant draws a distinction between “to be” as copula, i.e. the logical use of “to be” (*respectus logicus*), as in statements like “God is omnipotent”, and the existential use of “to be” in statements like “God is” (in the sense “God exists”). Yet he does not disconnect the relation between the copulative use and the existential use of ‘to be’ as entirely inconsistent. According to Kant, the copula serves to posit the predicate in its relation to the subject, while the existential function of “to be” is to posit an object corresponding to a concept, namely, to submit instances to the concept. Obviously, there is something still in common between these two functions. Both of them add nothing to the concept and they function as equally “positing” though in different ways. By emphasizing the strong verbal character of “positing”, Heidegger takes Kant’s thesis about Being as a testimony for “strong” theory.¹² Frege, on the other hand, in asserting that “existence is analogous to number”, is committed to transform the verb “exist” into a pure copula. In this regard, we may say that the non-verbal character of the copula “be”, which became stable and explicit after it was cut off from its existential function, is now imported into existence. The initially alleged two incomparable functions of “be” are therefore reconciled, but under the dominance of the copula. Existence, as Bradley points out, “is now through and through describable in

terms of its predicates, with no mysterious residue.”¹³ But it becomes “a silent, featureless pendant of the propositional function.”¹⁴ The richness of “to be” for the “strong” theory is thus dissolved into a logical symbol which says nothing about itself.

III. “To Be” and “To Exist”

Against this general tendency of reduction, Gilson sees “to be” in its existential sense as the primary intransitive verb, the expression of the most fundamental “subjective action”, that is, an intransitive action which determines something about the subject and does not involve an object.¹⁵ At this point, Gilson would agree with Mill and Russell in separating the existential sense and the copulative sense of “to be”. Nevertheless, by this he wants to protect “to be” in the existential sense from being reduced to the featureless quantifier, which is certainly infected by the inert character of the copula. For Heidegger, it seems necessary to take a further step, that is, the primary verbal character of “to be” must be preserved not only in its existential use, but also in its copulative use. Unlike Gilson, who might take Mill and Russell as his analytic counterparts for separating the existential and the copulative functions of “to be”, Heidegger is more sympathetic to Kant and Frege in insisting on the unified “to be”. But, contrary to the Fregean attempt to reduce existence to pure propositional function, Heidegger intends to carry the strong verbal character of “to be” in the existential sense into its copulative function. In other words, Heidegger is more interested in how the verbal sentence is built into the nominal sentence, rather than *vice versa*.

There are devices for transforming nominal sentences and verbal sentences into each other. The opposite directions of logically motivated transformation form two different schools: the “NV’s” (N = noun, V = verb) school and the “S is P” (S = subject, P = predicate) school. Inasmuch as “S is P” is the only accepted sentence form in the operation of logic in the traditional syllogism, all verbal sentences (“NV’s”) are intended to be transformed into nominal sentences (“S is P”).¹⁶ The interpretation of existence as quantification belongs to this general trend, yet with a modification of the subject (from “X” to “the number of X”). But there are still a great number of thinkers who take the contrary option, namely, to transform all nominal sentences into verbal sentences.¹⁷ We may take a brief look at the following examples which, repeatedly cited by Heidegger, actually cover both the existential and the copulative uses of “to be” in various ways.

“God is.” “The earth is.” “The Lecture is in the auditorium.” “This man is from Swabia.” “The cup is of silver.” “The peasant is to the fields.” (*Der Bauer ist aufs Feld.*) “The book is mine.” “Red is the port side.” “There is famine in Russia.” “The enemy is in retreat.” “The plant house is in the vineyard.” “The dog is in the garden.” “He is dead.” (*Er ist des Todes*, literally, “He is of death.”)¹⁸

Heidegger transforms most of the above sentences containing the single “to be” into sentences in which various non-be verbs are employed.

“God is”; i.e. he is *really present*. “The earth is”; i.e. we experience and believe it to be *permanently there*; “the lecture is in the auditorium”; i.e. it *takes place*. “The man is from Swabia”; i.e. *he comes from there*. “The cup is of silver”; i.e. it *is made of* ... “The peasant is to the field”; he has gone to the fields and is *staying there*. “The book is mine”; i.e. it *belongs to me*. “Red is the port side”; i.e. it *stands for port*. “The dog is in the garden”; i.e. he is *running around* in the garden. (*IM*, pp.89-90)

In this regard, Heidegger might be said to belong to the “NV’s” school which claims

to be able to transform even the sentence “James is a soldier” to “James soldiers”.¹⁹ By such a transformation, Heidegger wants to show the richness of “to be”. But it is worth noting that the transformation of the first two sentences seems to take the opposite direction. For “is” in “God is” and “The earth is” is exactly what “exists” means, that is, it is a verb *par excellence*. Heidegger transforms it into a temporal copula (“is present”) and a locative copula (“is there”) respectively.²⁰ However, this is by no means the reduction of the verb “to be” into a logical symbol, for Heidegger never regards the copula as merely a synthesis, a featureless propositional function word. Copula for him is essentially the expression of “pointing out” even when it is not a verb or is simply omitted, as in some languages. While stressing the richness of “to be”, Heidegger also admits its “emptiness” and “indeterminacy”, not in the sense of a lack of semantic constant, but rather in the sense of being “unlimited”. “That the ‘is’ has the character of the copula shows clearly enough the extent to which its meaning must be characterized by emptiness and indeterminacy. For only thus can the ‘is’ suffice for the various uses that are constantly demanded of it in discourse.” (BC, p.30) Thus understood, Heidegger belongs neither to the “S is P” school, nor to the “NV’s” school. Not only does he disagree with the general tendency of analytic philosophy to reduce “to be” to the copula (as mere logical synthesis), but he also distances himself from all existentialists who try to cut off the existential function of “to be” from its copulative function in order to address the priority of existence over essence.

IV. Beyond Existence and Copula

Kahn's comprehensive study of the Greek *einai* ("to be") has shown that the original meaning of this extraordinary verb was rather rich and beyond the simple dichotomy of the existential and the copulative. In fact, our understandings of "to be" as either "to exist" or as copula are derived from those original meanings which, though still implied in modern languages, are overshadowed by the explicit existential-copulative division. But in these original meanings we can find the deep connection between the various uses of "to be" that are seen otherwise as arbitrary and accidental.

According to Kahn, it might be more proper to speak of absolute and predicative construction instead of the existential and copulative uses of "to be" in sentences like "X is" and "X is Y", namely, sentences with and without a predicate insofar as the Greek *einai* is concerned. Kahn focuses on three features of *einai* which "are largely indifferent to the syntactic variation between absolute and predicative construction"²¹: (1) the veridical, (2) the durative, and (3) the locative, values of *einai*. They are the most fundamental senses of the original "to be" that still underlie the modern understanding of the verb. In Chinese, on the other hand, there is no single word like "to be" which functions in both existential and copulative senses; the copula, for example, as a mere synthesis, seems to make no allusion to "existence". However, a cautious etymological study may show that there is still a traceable connection between copula and "existence" in Chinese.

The treatment of the Indo-European verb "to be" as a mere linguistic accident in linguistic relativism is based on the observation of the basic existential-copulative

dichotomy, which is certainly peculiar to the Indo-European family. But a retrieval of the origin of language can show that various languages that diverge from one another have a striking resemblance and similarity in respect to “to be”. A brief survey of the original meanings of “to be” and its Chinese parallels will shed light on this issue.

1. “To Be” and “To Be True”

The most general sense of *einai*, according to Kahn, is the sense of verity or the veridical usage. “There is absolutely no doubt that this meaning of ‘to be’ (namely ‘to be so, to be true’) is one of the oldest idiomatic uses of the verb in Greek, and indeed in Indo-European.”²² Such an intimate connection between the copulative and the veridical senses, according to Kahn, can still be heard in English when “is” is compared with “seems” or when the pronunciation of “is” is emphasized.²³ In modern Chinese, *shi*, like the English “to be”, indicates identity (=), predication $f(x)$, and class membership (\in).²⁴ But it also means “true”, “being true”, or “truth” (as opposite to *fei*, “false”, “being false, or “falsity”).²⁵ Thus the copulative sense always suggests the veridical sense. In other words, *shi*, as a copula, is not merely a neutral synthesis, it already contains certain degree of value (truth value). But it is remarkable that the mediator that connects these two different senses is the sense of “this”, the original use of “*shi*” as a pronoun. Graham translates it as “aforementioned”, or “the thing in question”,²⁶ while Lohmann renders it as “(being) such”.²⁷ That is to say, it also means “to be so” or “to be the case”. But in regard to the Greek *einai*, Kahn goes on to claim that “to be so” or “to be the case” is logically not the

same as “to be true”. “What is true or false is normally a statement made in words; what is the case or not the case is a fact or situation in the world.”²⁸ Without any doubt such a distinction drawn by Kahn is based on a presupposition of a truth norm which is exclusively propositional. The same norm is also used by Hall and Ames in claiming the lack of interest in questions of truth and falsity in Chinese philosophy. But, according to Heidegger, the propositional truth is derived from a more primordial truth, which is exactly what “to be so” expresses. A statement that is claimed to be true must be so on the ground that what the statement is about has already been revealed. The original meaning of truth as “unhiddenness” or “disclosedness” that Heidegger argues lies behind propositional truth is not exclusively Greek, it is also relevant to the early Chinese understanding, from the linguistic point of view.

However, the original meaning of truth in Heidegger’s view has been transformed into propositional truth with the development of metaphysics in Western thinking. Chinese, on the other hand, took the entirely different route which led to a pragmatist and relativist idea of truth. The usual interchangeability between *shi* (“is”) and *ke* (“appropriate”), and, moreover, the substitution of *shi* (“is”) with *zuo* and *dang* (which literally mean “do”, “perform”, or “pretend”) in many cases of predication²⁹ enforce the tendency of moving from the original meaning of “being” and “being true” as “pointing out” or “revelment” toward the “appropriateness” of correlations. What *is* (true) becomes what *functions* (properly).

2. The Durative

The second major aspect of the original Greek “be” (*einai*), according to Kahn, is the durative sense, which he calls the “intrinsically stable and lasting character of Being in Greek.”³⁰ What is or exists must have the capacity of lasting, and of duration. To be or to exist is at the same time to sustain and to endure. In Chinese *cun* (“exist”, “live”) means “persist”, “preserve” and “save”, it implies being constantly protected from perishing. But the Greeks took the durative sense as the starting point to develop the idea of Being in contrast to Becoming. The durative aspect of *einai* became dominant especially when *einai* was nominalized. It is worth noting that the modern expression “existence” which always suggests the dynamic and unstable character of “to be” has no Greek etymological origin. The Latin *essentia* (“essence”) as a derivative form of *esse*, the Latin translation of the Greek *einai*, finally accomplished the medieval interpretation of the durative aspect of *einai* in terms of stability and unchangingness.³¹ But in Chinese thought, on the other hand, the original durative sense of *cun* was simply neglected and did not play a role that was compatible to *yu* or *shi* until it emerged as a component of modern coinage *cun-zai* (“Being”, “existence”) to translate Western ontology.

3. Existence and Location

The third fundamental value of *einai* is its locative sense. Kahn shows that its locative sense is closer to what is usually called the existential rather than the copulative

sense of the verb – in fact, the copulative use of “to be” was derived from the locative use. The intimate connection of these two senses of “to be” conditioned Greek thought on existence and location, which, though not identical, are at least equivalent. The locative sense was cut off from its connection to the existential sense in philosophical contemplation after Plato introduced non-spatial Forms. Thus in modern European languages the locative use of “to be” is more like a copula rather than the verb “to exist”, that is, the locative use of “be” is usually treated as merely “copulative” rather than existential.³² The link between existence and location in Greek has become blurred and indirect. But in a number of non-Indo-European languages, it is preserved and is made more explicit, or as Kahn puts it, the expressions which serve to translate “there is” involve some allusions to place or location.³³ This can well be illustrated by the Chinese word *zai*. *Zai* emerged in modern speech to express “existence”, but it was initially an indication of location, and is still used in this way. It can be used in “X *zai* Paris” (“X is in Paris”) and “X *zai*” (“X exists” or “X is alive”). In other words, a single word embraces both existential and locative senses. Nevertheless, even in the Indo-European languages the existential and the locative expressions are still related to each other. “Not only is *existere* itself a spatial metaphor, vaguely implying some local context, but expressions like “*there* is” and “il y a” make explicit use of the adverb for definite place.”³⁴

It could be assumed at this point that Heidegger’s rethinking of the question of Being intends to uncover the original connection between existence and location. In *Being and Time* not only the locative sense of existence, “standing out”, is emphasized; further, spatiality is understood in terms of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world. More importantly, the

“Da” of Dasein addresses the locative sense of Being, it points out the place where Being comes to pass. The late Heidegger emphasizes the “Da” by breaking down Dasein into two components, “Being” and “there”, and calls for a “topology of Being”. The notion of “*Ereignis*” also suggests the place where Being and Time gather and appropriate each other. The essential correlation of existence and location in many languages, whether it is expressed explicitly in Chinese or implicitly in European languages, calls our attention to the nature of language as essentially related to the hermeneutical “as-structure”, as “pointing out”.

4. “To Be” and “To Have”

In addition to the three major senses above, the original Greek “to be” also contained the sense of “to have”, (although it is true that the Greeks also used “to have” (*echein*) in this context). According to Kahn, *einai* used in the form of “is to” clearly meant “to have”.³⁵ This is what Kahn calls the “possessive construction” with *einai*, as a supplement to the three fundamental values. The existential use of “to be” was in fact derived from this sense of *einai*. Such a connection between existence and possession in Greek has its striking parallel in Chinese. The principal term *yu* in Chinese philosophy which is often translated as Being designates existence as well as “to have”. In other words, the single word *yu* can be used to indicate both “there is” and “have” in sentences like “There *yu* X” and “One *yu* X”. In modern European languages, on the other hand, existence alludes to the copula, instead of possession, but the connection between existence and

possession does not vanish altogether, it is still implicit in the understanding of some expressions. When Kant gives the example of his financial position for his argument about the ontological argument, he is virtually establishing a connection between “there is” and “to have”, for “There is a hundred thalers in my pocket” says exactly the same as “I have a hundred thalers”. But a more significant way of establishing the connection is found in the French idiomatic expression for “there is”: *il y a*.

In the French “*il y a*” “have” (“*a*”) functions as the “be” in the English “there is”. But the English “there is X” clearly indicates its derivation from “X is” or “X exists”. “There” as a dummy-subject is employed only for the reason of mitigating the oddness of the inverted verb-subject order. That is to say, X as the real subject is constant whether in “X is” or “There is X”.³⁶ In the French “*il y a X*”, on the contrary, X becomes the object of the verb “have” (“*a*”), while an impersonal subject “*il*” is introduced. This implies that existence is somehow possessed by something outside “X”. This French idiomatic expression has a striking German counterpart “*es gibt*”, in which the meaning of “possession” in the French *il y a* gives way to “endowment” and “giving”. Nevertheless, both of them are usually understood in the form of “X is” or “X exists”. Graham observes:

Thus in Chinese one approaches existence from something outside, usually undefined, which has, in which there is, the thing in question. The same is true of ordinary English and French, in which one says “there is X” rather than “X is”, “*il y a X*” rather than “X est”. But Western philosophy, grounded in Greek and Latin rather than ordinary modern speech, has generally approached the question from the opposite direction, from the thing which “is” or “exists”. The object of *yu* corresponds to the subject of “is”.³⁷

That is, “have” in the French “*il y a*” and “give” in the German “*es gibt*” which

might alter the paradigmatic understanding of existence are overshadowed by the dominance of “to be” and “to exist”. It must be pointed out that Graham’s observation is still imbued by the underlying Western grammatical and philosophical norms. For in Chinese sentences, especially in *yu*-sentences (affirming existence) a subject is not needed, not in the sense of omission (which assumes the pre-existence of that which is omitted), but in the sense of total absence. Thus the “something outside” which is still traceable in the French “*il y a*” and the German “*es gibt*” is irrelevant in the Chinese *yu*-sentences. Graham’s claim that the object of *yu* corresponds to the subject of “is” is inadequate insofar as Chinese signals nothing outside or other than what is possessed or is given. We must not understand “*yu X*” as “something has X” or as “X has”. In other words, X is neither a subject nor an object of *yu*.³⁸ That existence is an action of a subject (an agent) as Gilson emphasizes, or a predicate applied to a concept (in the sense of quantification) is inconceivable for the Chinese mind, which regards existence as essentially self-originating in things.

It has been debated whether Heidegger’s notion of *Ereignis* should be understood in terms of self-origination, which is indeed close to the Chinese conception of existence expressed by *yu*. Yet the fact that *Ereignis* in Heidegger depends largely on the interpretation of the German idiomatic expression “*es gibt*” which focuses on the meaning of “sending” and “giving” seems to suggest that it is rather more Medieval than Oriental in spirit. The question Peter Harris puts forward touches upon the core of this issue: “why does Heidegger not allow this idiomatic expression to wither away in its use?”³⁹

The connection between the existential and the copulative senses, as we have shown

above, can be found in both Indo-European and Chinese languages. However, such a subtle, yet intimate connection, while being stabilized in a particular way in Indo-European languages, is dissolved entirely in Chinese.

V. From "To Be" to the Concept of Being

The question of Being as raised in Western philosophy was not only due to the verb "to be" which persistently embraces the two senses - the existential and the copulative senses which are disconnected in many languages - but also conditioned by a particular linguistic device in Indo-European languages, namely, the transformation of the verb "to be" into a noun (substantive) "Being", a crucial step toward the ultimate establishment of the Western ontology. Benveniste points out:

... In addition, "to be" could become, thanks to the article, a nominal notion, treated as a thing; it gave rise to varieties, for example its present participle, which itself had been made a substantive, and in several kinds (*to on, oi ontes, ta onta*); it could serve as a predicate itself, as in the locution *to ti en einai* designating the conceptual essence of a thing, not to mention the astonishing diversity of particular predicates with which it could be construed, by means of case forms and prepositions ... Listing this abundance of uses would be endless; but they really are facts of language, of syntax, and of derivation. Let us emphasize this, because it is in a linguistic situation thus characterized that the whole Greek metaphysics of "being" was able to come into existence and develop -- the magnificent images of the poem of Parmenides as well as the dialectic of *The Sophist*. The language did not, of course, give direction to the metaphysical definition of "being" -- each Greek thinker has his own -- but it made it possible to set up "being" as an objectifiable notion which philosophical thought could handle, analyze, and define just as any other concept.⁴⁰

Such a transformation seems inevitable as far as anything that is to be thought or

spoken of, that is, to be the subject matter of discourse, must be in the noun form, or treated as a noun. But the nominalized “to be” obtains new meaning that seems lacking in its verbal form. Like all verbs, “to be” is transformed into “Being”, a noun, through a definite form of the verb, infinitive (*modus infinitivus*). Heidegger writes:

It is easy to see that in the formation of the word from “das Sein” <Being> the decisive preliminary form is the infinitive “sein” <to be>. This form of the verb is transposed into the form of a substantive. Verb, infinitive, substantive are accordingly the three grammatical forms which determine the word character of our word “Being” <das Sein>. (*IM*, p.55)

Infinitive is a mode of “unlimitedness”, and “indeterminateness”; it is opposed to its various finites. “To be” is infinitive, while “am”, “is”, “are”, “was”, “were”, “have been”, etc., are finites. Infinitive is that from which all finites derive. We talk about “to be”, instead of “am”, “is”, etc., for the basic meaning of all the finites is presented in the infinitive. But, according to Heidegger, the original function of inflection (*enklisis*) is showing or pointing out - the manifestation of person, number, tense, voice, mood, along with its basic meaning. Thus what in Greek is a deficiency gains a privileged position in the sense of “not limited” instead of “not manifested”. Heidegger remarks:

According to the Latin term the infinitive is a form that may be said to cut off the meaning from all definite relations. The meaning is drawn out (abstracted) from all the particular relationships. In this abstraction the infinitive yields only what is represented by the word as such. Hence present-day grammarians say that the infinitive is the “abstract verbal concept.” It comprehends and formulates the meaning only in a general sense. It designates only this general meaning. In our language the infinitive is the form by which one refers to a verb. And there is a lack, a deficiency in the form and mode of meaning of the infinitive. The infinitive *no longer* manifests what the verb otherwise reveals. (*IM*, pp.67-68)

The infinitive, while underlying all inflections of the verb, is at the same time an abstraction

of finites. In other words, the infinitive, as an independent word form opposed to the finites, actually gives rise to, or at least reinforces the fundamental separation of, the universal from the particular.

The next step is to transform the infinitive into the substantive (noun). This is done in Greek and in many modern languages by prefacing the infinitive with an article: *to einai*, *das Sein*, *l'être*.⁴¹ According to Heidegger, the article “signifies that the object indicated stands as it were for itself, and is.” (*IM*, p.69)⁴² In such a way, “to be” finally becomes an entity, or an object submitted to our analysis. The transformation results in emptying the rich meanings of “to be” and hence giving rise to the emergence of “Being” as the most universal, yet emptiest concept of all. Heidegger writes:

If we say only “sein”, what is named is already indefinite enough. But the transformation of the infinitive into a verbal substantive further stabilizes as it were the emptiness that already resided in the infinitive; “sein” is set down like a stable object. The substantive “Sein” <Being> implies that what has thus been named itself “is.” Now “Being” itself becomes something that “is,” though manifestly only beings are and not Being in addition. But if Being itself were something being in a being, then we should have to find it, particularly as the Beingness <das Seiendsein> of a being confronts us even when we do not definitely apprehend its particular properties. (*IM*, p.69)

For Heidegger, *Sein* (Being) should never be thought of as an abstraction, or as an entity. It is not merely “the last cloudy streak of evaporating reality.” Thus to keep the “to be” in its abundant meanings, is to fight with the grammar which persistently tends to reduce Being to emptiness. The linguistic peculiarity of Indo-European languages is certainly the obstacle of our access to Being itself, the true meaning of “to be”.

No doubt, metaphysics or metaphysical thinking is tied up with a particular mode of

discourse, a kind of language, which to some extent is already “metaphysical”. But it does not follow that the nature of a language may properly be revealed by such reflection, that the possibilities of the language can simply be exhausted by various “language games”. If thinking, according to Heidegger, is a response to language which addresses us, what we can hear from language is not merely grammar, but that which gives grammar, which still allows us to free ourselves from the constraints of grammar.

It is worthwhile to note that Heidegger, after listing almost all the uses of “to be” that conform to grammar, presents a verse containing “to be” which seems alien to all aforementioned common understandings of the verb.

Über allen Gipfeln
ist Ruh.
(Over all the summits
is rest.) (*IM*, p.89)

The “to be” that occurs in the verse does not fit any of the elucidations of the “to be” drawn from everyday speech, nor is it the sum of them. “Hence the ‘intelligibility’ of the ‘is’ that precludes all elucidation, the ‘intelligibility’ that has perhaps a completely different mode than that familiarity in which the ‘is’ otherwise occurs to us constantly unthought, in everyday discourse. ... in this ‘is’ speaks of the uniqueness of a gathered wealth.” (*BC*, p.28) It is precisely what Heidegger refers to as “a liberation from grammar into a more original essential framework” which “is reserved for thought and poetic creation.” (*BW*, p.194) However, such a liberation cannot be carried out by human endeavor, it is rather the possibility of language itself. In this sense, Heidegger claims:

It must remain an open question whether the nature of Western languages is in itself marked with the exclusive brand of metaphysics, and thus marked

permanently by onto-theo-logic, or whether these languages offer other possibilities of utterance, and that means at the same time of telling silence. (*ID.* p.73)

Apparently, Heidegger does not draw the linguistic relativist conclusion that the question of Being, due to the peculiarity of Indo-European languages in which it has been raised, is merely a provincial, arbitrary speculation. For although Heidegger unequivocally contends that the formation of the question of Being as the central concern of Western philosophy is somehow determined by Western languages in respect of their grammar and semantics, he asserts that the languages still contain the capacity of transcending their own confinement. That is why Heidegger constantly appeals to the poets who articulate Being in a rather primordial way. Yet a dialogue between different languages can lead to the origin of language that can show how the (derivative) ontological difference of Indo-European languages determines the metaphysical nature of the question of Being and thus covers in a particular way the primordial meaning of Being, and how Chinese, on the other hand, erases it altogether. As far as Being concerns the nature of language, we can still trace the fugitive Being in different languages and find the various ways it addresses us. The original meanings of Being which, as we have shown, can be found in both Western languages and Eastern languages (Chinese), the “two extreme realizations of human languages” (Humboldt), constitute the common ground which sustains a meaningful dialogue between East and West.

Notes:

- ¹ Emile Benveniste: *Problems in General Linguistics*, pp.61-62.
- ² *The Verb "Be" and Its Synonyms, Philosophical and Grammatical Studies*, edited by John W. M. Verhaar. Part 1: "Classical Chinese, Athapaskan, Mundari" (1967); Part 2: "Eskimo, Hindi, Zuni, Modern Greek, Malayalam, Kurukh" (1968); Part 3: "Japanese, Kashmiri, Armenian, Hungarian, Sumerian, Shona" (1968); Part 4: "Twi, Modern Chinese, Arabic" (1969); Part 5: "Urdu, Turkish, Bengali, Amharic, Indonesian, Telugu, Estonian" (1972); Part 6: "Ancient Greek" (1973); Part 7: "Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Greek"; Part 8: Concluding Volume: "An Assessment of the Linguistic and Philosophical Impact of All the Contributions".
- ³ For the analyses of the Chinese translations of Plato's *Republic*, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, and Hegel's *Science of Logic*, see A. C. Graham's "'Being' in Western Philosophy Compared with Shih/Fei and Yu/Wu in Chinese Philosophy" in *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*, pp.351-357, "Modern Translation of Western Ontology into Chinese", in *Disputes of the Tao*, p.412-414. The same problems are found in all Chinese translations of Heidegger's works. See the translator's appendix to the Chinese translation of *Sein und Zeit*, Sanlian Bookstore, Beijing, 1986.
- ⁴ Aristotle: *Posterior Analytics*, 89 b33, 90a 10.
- ⁵ The so-called nominal sentence is a sentence that contains no verb. In this sense, there is no nominal sentence in English for according to English grammar, a sentence without a verb is ungrammatical. The name is loosely applied to those English sentences containing "be" as they parallel genuine nominal sentences in other languages. Pure nominal sentences can be found in a number of languages. In Greek and Latin, a copula is unnecessary. *Justus Dominus* is enough to express "The Lord is righteous." In Hebrew, on the other hand, the insertion of a copula between *Tsaddiq* and *Jahweh* is not only unnecessary but impossible. Cf. Williams: *What Is Existence*, pp.7-8.
- ⁶ Strictly speaking, a transitive verb is one which has a grammatical object. For example, the word "drinks" in "Socrates drinks wine" is a transitive verb because it has "wine" as its object. Due to its verbal character, "to be" is treated by Aristotle analogically as either a transitive verb or intransitive verb although it is classified as a special verb in linguistics and thus what follows it is called predicate, not object.

- ⁷ In modern European languages, “X is” is not a common expression for “X exists”, it is preserved only for its archaic flavor. According to Kahn, over 90% of the occurrence of “be” in current English are instances of copula in the broad sense. Cf. Kahn: *The Verb Be in Ancient Greek*, p.24.
- ⁸ Emile Benveniste: *Problems in General Linguistics*, p.163.
- ⁹ John Stuart Mill: *A System of Logic*, Book I, chi. iv, sec., “Nature and Office of the Copular”.
- ¹⁰ However, there are still logicians, Lesniewski, for example, who try to find logical necessity in the various senses of “be”. See C. J. F. Williams: *What Is Existence*, p.20.
- ¹¹ James Bradley: “The Nature of Existence: Strong or Weak”, p.1.
- ¹² Heidegger: “Kant’s Thesis about Being”, in *Thinking about Being*, p.15.
- ¹³ James Bradley: “The Nature of Existence: Strong or Weak”, p.1.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.2.
- ¹⁵ E.Gilson *L’être et l’essence*, J Vrin, Paris 1954 quoted by Charles F.Kahn: *The Verb “be” and Its Synonyms*, D.Reidel, Dordrecht/Boston 1973 p. 23.
- ¹⁶ For example, “Every husband snores” could be transformed into “Every husband is a snorer.” Cf. Williams: *What Is Existence*.
- ¹⁷ According to Williams, Plato and Aristotle were the first exponents of the “NV’s” school.
- ¹⁸ Heidegger: *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, p.89. They reappear *mutatis mutandis* in *Nietzsche* vol.4 and *Basic Concepts*.
- ¹⁹ Williams: *What Is Existence*, p.7.
- ²⁰ “Be” followed by a word indicating location is called locative copula, while it followed by a word indicating time is called temporal copula. See Kahn: “The Greek Verb ‘To Be’ and the Concept of Being”, *Foundations of Language*, 2(1966), p.256.
- ²¹ Kahn: “The Greek Verb ‘To Be’ and the Concept of Being”, *Foundations of Language*, 2(1966), p.260.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p.250.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p.250.
- ²⁴ But it can never be used with words that are equivalent to what in English are called adjectives. For example, “The follower red.” Cf. the first part of the present chapter.
- ²⁵ Used in this sense, *shi* and *fei* (along with *yu* and *wu*) became a basic couple of philosophical terms.
- ²⁶ A. C. Graham: *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1990, p.324.
- ²⁷ *On Heidegger and Language*, p.342.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.252.
- ²⁹ For example, the sentence “He is a professor” is usually translated as “He *zuo* (or *dang*) a professor.” (Literally, “He does, or pretends to be a professor.”)
- ³⁰ Kahn: “The Greek Verb ‘To Be’ and the Concept of Being”, *Foundations of Language*, 2(1966), p.256.

- ³¹ Graham suggests, Arabic played a very important role that sharply separated the existential and copulative functions of “to be”, and gave rise to the distinction between existence and essence. Cf. “Being in Linguistics and Philosophy”. Verhaar (ed.) *The Verb “Be” and Its Synonyms*, 5, 1972, p225.
- ³² Cf. Kahn: “The Greek Verb ‘To Be’ and the Concept of Being”. *Foundations of Language*, 2(1966), p.257.
- ³³ Ibid, p.257.
- ³⁴ Ibid, p.257. It is certainly true that the locative sense of these expressions remains purely latent and is hard to be heard in their ordinary use. I am indebted to Professor Harris for pointing this out to me.
- ³⁵ The example Kahn gives is, “*Oude moi esti pater kai potnia meter*” from *Iliad* 6.413. The literal translation of this is, “Nor to me is father and honored mother” which simply means, “I have no father and honored mother.” Cf. Kahn: *The Verb “Be” in Ancient Greek*, p.267.
- ³⁶ In English the number of “be” corresponds that of “X” whether it is before or after “be”.
- ³⁷ A. C. Graham: *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1990, p.324.
- ³⁸ The “*yu X*” paradigm still effects the “*I yu X*” structure where “*I*” is to be understood as a location, rather than an agent. Cf. the first part of the present chapter.
- ³⁹ Peter Harris: “Are Events Self-Originating?” in *Concerning Heidegger, Essays in Interpretation*, p.229.
- ⁴⁰ Emile Benveniste: *Problems in General Linguistics*, pp.61-62
- ⁴¹ The English “Being”, however, is not in the form of “article + infinitive”, but of participial origin. Such an expression as “The To Be” is prohibited in English although it is what the Greek *to einai*, the German *das Sein*, or the French *l’être* really mean. The English Being is more like the Latin *esse* in respect to its lack of definite article although as in the form of the infinitive is still not the exact equivalent of Being. I indebted to Peter Harris for pointing this out to me.
- ⁴² The use of the article in English has a different significance than in other languages.

Glossary

Hermeneutic “As Structure” and Apophantic “As Structure”: philosophical terms used by the early Heidegger to designate two ways of Dasein’s encounter with beings. They parallel with the notions of “readiness-to-hand” and “presence-to-hand”. The hermeneutic “as” is more primordial than the apophantic “as” in that before any theoretical assertion (apophantic “as”) about beings is made Dasein is already in a certain kind of understanding of beings. “The primordial ‘as’ of an interpretation which understands circumspectively we call the ‘existential-hermeneutical ‘as’ in distinction from the ‘apophantical “as”’ of the assertion.” (BT, p.201)

“The House of Being”: a term used by the later Heidegger to designate language. “Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells.” (BW, p.193) It is meant to show the intrinsic relation between Being and language.

Nirvana: a term used primarily to refer to the state of release or salvation in Buddhism. It is the final cessation of the circulation of birth and death.

The Nothing: The word is used in these in two senses: (1) relative nothing, and (2) absolute nothing. The first as opposed to being simply means pure absence or nullity. The second refers to the non-differentiation of being and nothing (relative nothing); it is used interchangeably with “emptiness” and “*śūnyatā*”.

Ontological Difference: The difference between Being and beings. According to Heidegger, traditional metaphysics thinks Being as the highest being and hence still a being among other beings, thus it fails to realize the real difference between Being and beings. The fundamental ontology in the early Heidegger tries to think Being through an analysis of Dasein’s existence. The existential analysis is conceived by Heidegger as a proper way to reveal the meaning of Being which is different from the metaphysical conceptualization of Being. The later Heidegger attempts to think Being in a more radical way, that is, “to think Being without any reference to beings.” [It should be noted, as Professor Cyril Welch points out, that the rendering of *Seiendes* as “being” is itself ambiguous in that it seems to limit its reference to ‘entities’, whereas it may include almost anything determinate]

Samsara: Sanskrit, it means the cycle of birth and death, referring to an individual’s series of lives, analogous to the lighting of successive lamps, one lamp from another.

Suchness: The English translation of the Sanskrit *tathata*. It means that everything is in itself, or that everything is as it truly is.

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- BW* *Basic Writings from "Being and Time" (1927) to "The Task of Thinking" (1964)*, ed. David Farrell Krell, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1978.
- DT* *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund, Harper & Row, NY, 1966.
- EB* *Existence and Being*, trans. D. Scott, R. F. C. Hull and A. Crick, with an introduction by Werner Brock, Vision, London, 1949.
- EP* *The End of Philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, Harper & Row, NY, 1973.
- ER* *The Essence of Reason*, trans. Terrence Malick, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1969.
- ID* *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, Harper & Row, NY, 1969.
- IM* *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim, Doubleday, Garden City, NY, 1961.
- N* *Nietzsche Vol. 1-4*, trans. David Farrell Krell, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1979.
- OWL* *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz, Harper & Row, NY, 1971.
- PLT* *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, Harper & Row, NY, 1971.
- PT* *The Piety of Thinking*, trans. James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 1976.
- QB* *The Question of Being*, trans. Jean T. Wild and William Kluback, College & University Press, New Haven, CT, 1958.
- QCT* *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt, NY: Harper & Row, 1977.
- TB* *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, Harper & Row, NY, 1972.
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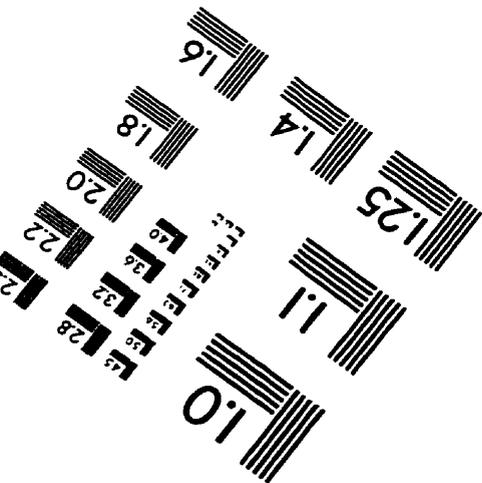
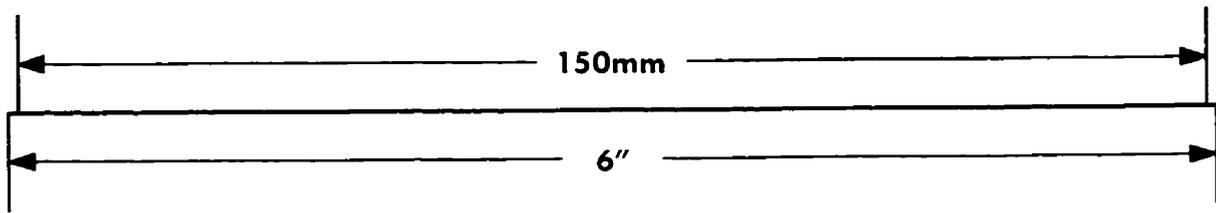
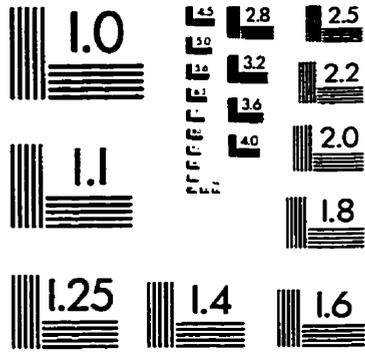
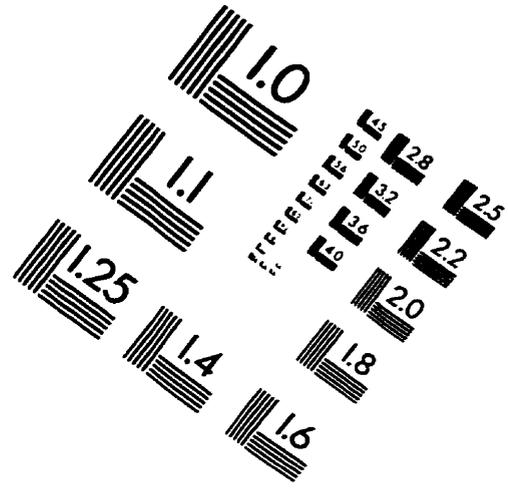
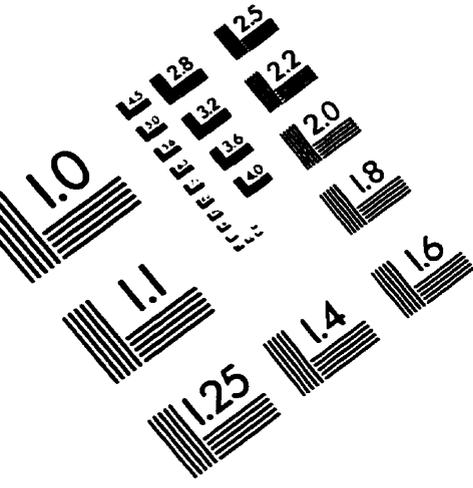
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