Introduction

An engagement with the themes of the hermeneutical self and the ethical difference is undertaken in a comparative religious framework. In the aftermath of colonialism it implies an attempt to overcome the Western tradition of individual consciousness from Descartes to Husserl. In this tradition the thinking subject (knowledge of the self) takes on an ever-increasing importance in the theory of knowledge. In this philosophical development, the thinking subject has been prioritized, while sidestepping human life embedded within socio-historical locations and ethical practices. To improve on this shortcoming, I undertake a comparative religious-ethical study concerning interpretation and ethical self in dialogue with Confucian philosophy.

Hermeneutics (theory of interpretation) sees how the human subject defines itself as a speaking, living and acting moral individual in intersubjective relationship and in the socio-historical context. In the Greek and Roman context, understanding (know thyself) is embedded within ethical practice. One's understanding and self-formation can exert influence in guiding social and cultural ethos. According to Foucault, a hermeneutics of technologies of the self could pave the way to grounding morality on the care of the self.[1]

In contrast to Foucault, Gadamer seeks common ground between hermeneutics and moral wisdom (or practical intelligence), in terms of incorporating understanding into practical application. In this regard, Gadamer takes into account Aristotle's notion of moral wisdom (*phronesis*) concerning the hermeneutical problem of application. For Aristotle, there is sympathetic understanding connected with *phronesis*, which implies the virtue of thoughtful reflection.[2]

Gadamer's reading of Aristotle helps me to bring Aristotle's ethics into dialogue with Confucian ethics, especially regarding the philosophy of the mean. Gadamer does not deal with Aristotle's notion of the mean as an important moral virtue connected with the hermeneutical project. A comparative study of Western philosophy and Confucian philosophy in this light marks new terrain in articulating the place of comparative study of religions.

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1   Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in *The Essential Foucault*, 149.
2   Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 322.

Furthermore, such a study includes a task of grounding the hermeneutical self in ethical practice. This entails a construction of cross-cultural hermeneutics and moral integrity, dealing with a postcolonial challenge that requires a hermeneutical reorientation in ethics of difference, cultural hybridity, dissemination, and decolonization.

In the study of interpretation and the ethical self, I present an interdisciplinary study of hermeneutical theory into which I attempt to incorporate a critique of ideology, discourse ethics, and the postmodern ethic of alterity. It can be done in the fashion of a conflict and entanglement of interpretation and ethical difference. Following this research, the major argument of this book is to improve on shortcomings of the Western modernity project and to further a new model of postcolonial hermeneutics and its ethics of difference. As background to the study, I shall delineate the Western tradition of hermeneutics from its genesis through its development, via interdisciplinary debate and transcultural experience in an interreligious context.

Genesis

The root of the word 'Hermeneutics' is the Greek verb *hermeneuein*, and its root meaning is speech: to speak, or to say. The meaning has three main directions: to express, to expound (explain), and to translate (interpret). The Greek word *hermeios* refers to the priest at the Delphic oracle, and the Greek messenger-god Hermes is associated with the function of transmitting, conveying, and interpreting divine oracles for human understanding. Therefore, the etymology of the term 'hermeneutics' relates to Hermes, the messenger god of the Greeks and suggests a multiplicity of meanings. Hermes brings the message of destiny from God, and such a function is a laying-open of something; explaining of something from a divine oracle. Thus, hermeneutics has to do with the process of bringing an understanding through the medium of language. This aspect is implicit in three basic directions: to express (or to say), to explain, and finally, to translate.

To interpret is to translate. Translation is a special form of the basic interpretive process of bringing understanding. For instance, how is it possible to translate a biblical worldview into modern or postmodern worldviews, or into the context of World Christianity? Christianity in a post-Shoah context has struggled with the reinterpretation and retranslation of biblical narrative concerning the relationship between the church and the Jewish community.[3] The issue of translation is also central to World Christianity.

According to Gerhard Ebeling, language can be helped only by language: incorrect statements by correct ones, obscure statements in need of explanation by a clear exposition, a misleading exposition by an accurate

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3   *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, ix-xii.

interpretation, and a statement in a foreign language by translation.[4] All three meanings may be summed up in English by the verb 'to interpret'.

At a theological level, the minister or preacher has the function of bringing the Word of God through proclamation. Preaching as proclamation is understood as one form of the Word of God, alongside the written Word of God (the Scripture), sacraments, and revelation of Jesus Christ. Like Hermes, the minister is a go-between from God to humans. Proclaiming is an important act of interpretation. In an interesting story about the mission of Paul and Barnabas in Lystra, Paul healed a person crippled from birth and the crowds shouted in the Lycaonian language: 'The gods have come down to us in human form!' Barnabas was called Zeus while Paul was called Hermes, because he was the chief speaker (Acts: 14:8-13).

Speech and Writing

In the hermeneutical tradition there is an emphasis on the saying over the said. The powers of spoken language are placed over written language. Although the writing down of language is foundational for history and literature, it tends to weaken more comprehensive dimensions of God's speaking. The divine saying is more than the written word. Nevertheless, we do not ignore the tradition of writing in the care of the self. In Plato's *Alcibiades I,* the care of the soul is at the center of the dialogue. Care of the self is the principal activity of caring for the soul, not the care of the soul as a substance. The soul can know itself only by looking at itself in a mirror. This implies contemplating the divine element in which the soul is able to discover rules to serve as a basis for just behavior and political action. Knowing oneself becomes the object of the quest of concern for self. Plato gave priority to the Delphic maxim 'know yourself' and this privileged position is characteristic of all Platonists. Later, in the Hellenistic and Greco-Roman periods, however, the emphasis was not on knowledge of the self, but on the care of oneself.

Writing was important in the culture of the care of the self, since it was a widespread activity; a network of obligations and services to the soul. The self is a theme of writing. The care of the self includes the task of taking notes on oneself to be reread, writing treatises and letters to friends, and keeping notebooks for reactivating the truth for oneself. Seneca's letters are an example of this self-exercise. Taking care of oneself became linked to the activity of writing. In Christian tradition, Augustine's *Confessions* established writing as an activity for the care of the self, involved in a new experience of God's grace. In Plato's writings, contemplation of the self and care of self are dialectically related through dialogue.[5]

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4   Ebeling, *Introduction to Theological Theory of Language*, 157.
5   Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in *The Essential Foucault*, 150-4, 156.

Following Plato's view on living language, Gadamer argues that writing down leads to alienation of spoken language (dialogue). In the theological tradition, a theology of the Word of God has been influential from Augustine through reformers to Karl Barth. An emphasis is given to the spoken word of God over the written scripture. A fundamentalist Christian notion of biblical inerrancy is not tenable.

Development

In *Peri hermeneias* (*On Interpretation*), the second treatise in the *Organon*, Aristotle defines interpretation as enunciation, which suggests 'to say' or 'to announce'. In Aristotle's *hermeneias*, there is focus on meaningful discourse. Interpretation is, therefore, every *vox significativa*. *Hermeneia* in the complete sense is the signification of the sentence. Aristotle defines *hermeneia* as the operation of the mind, which makes statements true or false.[6]

Insofar as Aristotle teaches that enunciation is concerned with truth and falsity, enunciation implies an interpretation of the divine message through an operation of the human intellect. Aristotle places enunciation over the process of logical analysis. However, the logical process is also interpretative in a derivative form, because the more foundational interpretation existed beforehand. This aspect is called pre-understanding. There is no explanation or interpretation without pre-understanding. Deconstruction cannot avoid pre-understanding.

Dilthey (1833–1911), a contemporary of Nietzsche, presents the hermeneutical task within the horizon of history. Underlying Dilthey's program is a turn towards life experience. If life is not inherently meaningful, understanding is impossible. As Dilthey argues, the social sciences focus on life already lived – through interpretations and meaning. The meaning associated with human activity is always embedded in a historical context; human understanding is circumvented and conditioned in each human's own horizons and the socio-historical context. In this regard, hermeneutics is the systematic interpretation of human experience expressed in language.

The task of understanding texts involves *the hermeneutical circle*. Complex wholes and their parts are always inseparably intertwined: a whole is to be comprehended only by an appeal to its parts, so the parts acquire their meaning only within the whole. The hermeneutical circle undercuts all hopes of finding a transcendental certainty of autonomous self (as in Kant) or arriving at absolute knowledge (as in Hegel).

Erich Auerbach, in his masterpiece, *Mimesis,* argues that an underlying sense of reality is key to understanding. Human history and society are created through a creative and painstaking process of unfolding, development, and representation. Each age has its own method for seeing and articulating reality.

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6   Aristotle, "De Interpretione," in *New Aristotle Reader*, 13-4.

For instance, Plato developed his thought after the period of Homer, whose mind was poetic and whose poetry was barbaric, full of illogical fantasy. The main methodological point in the hermeneutical sense is that the reader's imagination places him/herself as the author of the text, undergoing life experiences intrinsic to the author's life, through the combination of erudition and sympathy. This perspective is the hallmark of philological hermeneutics.

A theory of mimesis deals with a history of the representation of reality in Western literature. The hermeneutical enterprise undertakes to sympathetically engage with other texts from different periods and cultures. The task of interpretation comprehends the reality of human life, aiming to overcome the bellicosity of the clash of civilizations for the sake of cultures in a relationship of mutuality, reciprocity, solidarity, and recognition.[7] The re-presentation of daily life becomes a realism of interpretation, in other words, hermeneutical realism.

As we have stated, hermeneutics translates the message of the text for a better understanding of it in dialogue with human beings in their own specific contexts. However, there is a tension or conflict between translatability and untranslatability. Every tradition is embodied in all the particularities of its specific language and culture. It is difficult to express some of Plato's key thoughts in the Hebrew of Jeremiah.[8] According to the modernist assumption, there is nothing which is not translatable into one of the internationalized languages. This is a fiction. The type of translation this modernist assumption engages in, generates its own misunderstanding of tradition. A distinction is recommended in the act of translation through interpretation: translation by glossing or parsing and translation by linguistic innovation. Through linguistic innovation, a tradition may be transmitted from its original language to other languages. What is needed in this translation project is same-sense and paraphrase, together with 'a possibly extensive use of interpretive glosses and explanations'.[9] Translation in the act of interpretation can avoid its literal, mechanical application.

Interpretations: Language, Conflict, and Irregularity

Heidegger, in his masterpiece *Being and Time* (1927), calls his analysis of being 'a hermeneutic of Dasein'. *Dasein* literally means 'being-there'. Hermeneutics in this context is his phenomenological explication of human existence 'there-in-the-world'. All explanations are thus rooted in the primary understanding of *Dasein*. The investigation and analysis of human existence in relation to Being necessarily involves interpretation. Heidegger rejects Descartes's notion of the Ego — the thinking subject as a foundational category (*Cogito ergo sum*). Instead, Heidegger grounds

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7   Auerbach, *Mimesis*, xiv.
8   MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 375.
9   *Ibid.*, 379.

the thinking subject in *Dasein*-in-the-world. The phenomenology of being-there is hermeneutic in the original sense of the word.

According to Heidegger, 'Understanding of Being is itself a definitive characteristic of *Dasein*'s being'.[10] The Cartesian assertion of the *cogito sum* omits the ontology of *Dasein* grounded within historical connections founded upon the structure of pre-understanding: fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. However, Heidegger's ontology of interpretation is guided only by care of the individual self without the ethical relationship with the other-in-the-world.

Following in the footsteps of Heidegger, Gadamer does not sidestep mediating a hermeneutical issue with ethical dimension in Aristotle's sense of *phronesis* (practical intelligence). Gadamer further elaborates the concept of history as history of effect (history or tradition that affects 'my' being and understanding), and places a priority on language over human consciousness. His position is well articulated: Being that can be understood is language. Gadamer elaborates the linguistic character of human reality by dealing with human being-in-history.

On the other hand, Paul Ricoeur proposes a hermeneutics of conflict; there are different and diverse interpretations in competition with each other. Heidegger and Gadamer hold naïve beliefs about history, tradition, and language; Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud express their doubts about these. They are the masters of suspicion and distrust, denoting a new terrain of hermeneutics in tension, conflict, and competition. Ricoeur calls ontology of understanding in the fashion of Heidegger 'the short route',[11] because it breaks with any discussion of method. Ricoeur finds it a necessary task to retrieve an epistemology of interpretation. It is born out of reflection on exegesis, based on the method of history, on psychoanalysis, and on the phenomenology of religion. He calls his hermeneutical way 'the long route'.

In light of the long route, Ricoeur argues that hermeneutical reflection must be mediated by life expressions. In the hermeneutical deciphering of life expression, the *cogito* can be richly rediscovered in the sense of second naiveté. The maxim, 'Believe in order to understand, understand in order to believe' requires the hermeneutic circle that embraces believing and understanding in the dynamism of interpretation. Here, interpretation is a recollection, or retrieval of meaning related to faith.[12]

However, Ricoeur's integration of faith with understanding tends to sidestep the language-event in creating faith and understanding. In the theological tradition, God's word as promise precedes human faith and understanding. The word is found in the process of life and life issues

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10 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 32.
11 Ricoeur, "Existence and Hermeneutics," in Ricoeur, T*he Conflict of Interpretation*, 6.
12 Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 28.

forth from a living and life-giving word. The subject matter of theology is God's word as language-event, which changes with the course of history. This constantly makes anew the biblical languages in different times, places, and cultures, creating a new meaning in interaction with readers. According to Ebeling, four key elements represent the main dimensions of the problem of a comprehensive theory of language: 'The authority to speak, the responsibility for language, the challenge to understanding, and the achievement of mutual understanding'.[13]

Taking a step further, I maintain that linguistic-creational reflection on the language-event shapes and guides a postcolonial outlook on faith and understanding, as heard in the world of religious others. God continues to speak in the world of creation, which I call the irregularity of God's word-event. Thus, the language of faith is language of dialogue for the experience of the world and in renewal of it by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is where Ricoeur left off, and it becomes an arbiter for underlaying a postcolonial constructive theology. This aspect supports an archeological rewriting concerning the irregular side or underside of history, which has been forgotten and unproblematised. It is important to unearth traditional sources, texts, and wisdom buried by colonial authority. This is a site of counter hegemony, characterizing postcolonial irregularity through the study of the history of the subaltern-minjung and their social discourse in the contemporary context.[14]

Interpretation: Difference and Plurality

Influenced by Gadamer and Ricoeur, Tracy holds that the meaning of historical consciousness and historicity has to do with the widespread recovery of practical philosophies (for instance, the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*, or Hegelian and Marxist concepts of praxis). Taking a step further than Gadamer or Ricoeur, Tracy defends difference and plurality with emphasis on ethical-political direction. 'We need to converse with one another on the ethical-political implications of all analyses of language and reality'.[15] To study language as discourse is to discover plurality; to rediscover the contingency and ambiguity of history and society, and to rediscover that the ethical and the political are on the same level. For the sake of a new ecumenism, Tracy argues for the discovery of the Other. In this new ecumenism, the other religious traditions become central to Christian self-understanding. Christian consciousness has come full circle into a new interreligious consciousness, because the Christian theological journey into the Other is different from the classical models for Western-

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13 Ebeling, *Introduction to Theological Theory of Language*, 177.

14 Chung, *Public Theology in an Age of World Christianity,* 1-7.

15 Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 65.

Christian odysseys, wandering far and long, but eventually returning home. The new search for interreligious exchange includes several moments: a moment of self-respect, staying faithful to one's own tradition; going deeper and deeper into its particularities, and defending and clarifying its identity. On the other hand, exposure of the self to the other traditions is recommended for learning something of the beauty and truth among other great traditions: 'concerntrat[ing] on their otherness and difference as the new route to communality'.[16]

Tracy's hermeneutics of recognition and self-exposure in an interreligious context is characterized by taking three elements into account. The primary element is respect for one's own tradition; secondly, the desire for self-exposure to other religions and the terror of otherness. Finally, an attitude of willingness must be undertaken on the side of the dialogue partner to allow for the process and challenge of mutual questioning and inquiry. Tracy advocates for a willingness to risk even one's own understanding in the presence of the Other, which constitutes interreligious dialogue in a genuine and fruitful sense.[17] This perspective characterizes Tracy's interreligious hermeneutics of recognition of difference and plurality and also in terms of his mystic-prophetic model. This aspect enables interreligious dialogue to play an integral part in all theological thought.[18]

Ethical Issue and Hermeneutical Reorientation

Gadamer attempts to relate Aristotle's analysis of moral knowledge to the hermeneutical problem. For Aristotle, 'sympathetic understanding' stands 'beside *phronesis*, the virtue of thoughtful reflection'.[19] A hermeneutical reorientation emphasizes the necessity of *phronesis,* which realizes and enriches a particular good life, in light of the fusion of the horizon that is sensitive to situational complexities. This ethical-hermeneutical mediation advocates that morality as a whole depends on a certain concept of 'the good'. Moral norms and life-goods are set within an evaluative framework which incorporates the moral domain (justice) within the ethical (the good). Issues of contemporary society stand in conflict with diverse ethical codes and values grounded in various traditions and diverse sources of moral self.[20] This perspective dethrones the Kantian position on the moral priority of justice for a good life. The Kantian notion of universal morality presents a particularly European bourgeois concept of a good life above others, ignoring the moral feature of particular interpersonal relationships in concrete and diverse situations.

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16 Tracy, *On Naming the Present,* 137-8.
17 Tracy, *Dialogue with Other*, 73.
18 *Ibid.*, 94.
19 *Ibid.*, 322.
20 Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 495-521.

The communitarian (associated with neo-Aristotelians and neo-Hegelians) position is critical of the liberal moral-political reworking of Kant's categorical imperative into a decision procedure. In this Neo-Kantian enterprise every rational person should accept a certain concept of justice as the most reasonable basis for social coordination. However, Nussbaum, in *The Fragility of Goodness,*[21] confronts the ethical dilemma, contending that individuals strongly committed to justice are still vulnerable to external factors, which may deeply compromise or even negate human flourishing. The understanding of human life through suffering, fragility, and vulnerability sharpens the interpretative reason of moral life.

In the Kantian notion of the categorical imperative, situational complexity and fragility of goodness are not recognized. However, Aristotle treated the acknowledgment of vulnerability as a key to realizing the human good.

On the other hand, postmodern ethics begins by emphasizing the place of the Other. Foucault's genealogy of morality emphasizes freedom as the condition for ethics of the Other and supports a counter hegemony against moral orientation, whether deontological or teleological. The good and the just remain insufficient for Levinas unless there is a priority on the Other who is under the trace of the Infinite. An ethical-hermeneutical debate in the Western tradition implies a comparative study of the hermeneutical self and ethical difference between the West and the East (Part III).

Pragmatism and Boston Confucianism

If Tracy adopts a hermeneutical, ethical approach to interreligious dialogue, Neville takes interest in semiotic concern in Confucian-Christian dialogue. Neville popularized 'Boston Confucianism', bringing a Confucian philosophy of culture to conversation with the contemporary situation. He made groundbreaking work on ritual propriety (*li*), promoting the Confucian principle of the unity of knowledge and action, making it an integral part of American self-reflexivity. There is an emphasis on bringing the relevance of the Confucian classics, the Confucian praxis of ritual propriety, and the Confucian ideal of selfhood to contemporary American education, especially toward cultivating humanity. Confucian classics are highly recommended for cultivating humanity, ethical virtue, and ritual propriety, towards the renewal of American pedagogy and self-formation as ethical self.[22]

At the heart of Confucianism are humanity (*ren*) and propriety (*li*). Humanity is not sufficient without propriety. The higher institutions of culture consist of the exercise of adequate behaviors of ritual propriety, which embody the higher ideals of civilization.[23] When propriety is properly

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21 Nussbaum, *Fragility of Goodness*, 1-21.

22 Neville, *Boston Confucianism*, xiv.

23 *Ibid.*, 10.

understood, language appears to be learnt, conventional-ritualized behavior, underpinning deep civilization. When ritual propriety is observed, people are brought into cooperative action and mutual respect. Boston Confucian theory relates propriety to American pragmatism. Pragmatism's theory of signs, its semiology, is utilized to interpret Confucian propriety.

Building upon the elaborate semiotic system of high civilization, Boston Confucianists appreciate the elements of ritual propriety undertaken by Kongzi and Xunzi. Signs create culture out of, over, and above nature; the signs of high culture constitute the harmonious interactions in which the virtues of high culture become a reality. The moral significance of propriety or a civilized sign system is articulated in its culture-building function. The Confucian theory of propriety encounters a pragmatic theory of interpretation. A theory of ritual as constitutive of humanity underscores the importance of Zunzi's theory of ritual propriety (*li*) rather than the axiological thinking of Mengzi. Articulating the ritual theory of normative cultures in the Zunzian tradition, this new development of Confucian theory in the circle of Boston Confucianism is made more effective in an age of pluralism, social disintegration, and conflict.

Rectification and Resistance in Christian-Confucian Formation

For the ethical-hermeneutical formation of the comparative study, I maintain that the Confucian theory of ritual cannot be properly understood without the virtue of humanness (*ren*). It retains human self-cultivation, moral development, and a socio-critical function. The moral significance of propriety is inseparable from ethical self-cultivation and learning the classics, rather than occupying a sign system or governing structure independent of history, society, and the actual lives of people. At this juncture, I take an interest in recovering the ethical and political implication of Mengzi's theory of rectification, which argues for the rights of the people and political resistance.

No individual in Chinese history has so profoundly influenced the life and thought of the Chinese people as Kongzi, 'as a transmitter, teacher and creative interpreter of the ancient culture and literature and as a molder of the Chinese mind and character'.[24] Mengzi radicalizes the political ethics of Kongzi in the context of the king-sage rule, promoting the important place of the people through the ethics of rectification and resistance. Neo-Confucian scholars developed the teachings of Kongzi and Mengzi in their historical contexts, through creative acknowledgement of and response to challenges from Mahayana Buddhism and Daoism. However, this New Confucian School cannot be differentiated from historical Confucian teachings. The stages of Confucian evolution demonstrate the creative and the interpretive periods: formation, adaptation, transformation,

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24 Sources of Chinese Tradition, 1, 15.

renovation.[25] Underlying my study of Neo-Confucian hermeneutics and ethical self is Mencius's politics of rectification, which implies articulating between virtue ethics and social engagement for the sake of the dignity of people.

Modern scholars from the West and East have introduced and discuss the Confucian tradition and its teaching, becoming foundational for modernizing Confucian philosophy, its metaphysics, and moral theory. They deal with Confucianism as a religious and philosophical teaching, open both to the late modern world and to the future for bridging Confucianism in the contemporary situation.

In my study of Confucianism, I maintain that the *Doctrine of the Mean*,[26] as one of the cardinal tenets of Confucianism, epitomizes the culmination of learning. The purpose of the *Great Learning* is to manifest the illustrious virtues, to renovate [love] the people and to remain in the highest excellence (the 'three items'). In the *Great Learning*, to be sincere in thought people first extended their knowledge to the utmost, which lies in the investigation of things. Interplay between the investigation of worldly affairs and the extension of knowledge leads one's thought to sincerity, which rectifies the heart. Hearts rectified, people are cultivated, families are regulated, and states rightly governed, and the world is at peace (the 'eight steps') (ch.1.4-5).

The Confucian goal of self-cultivation is comprehended in terms of 'three items' (teaching the application of the Confucian doctrine of *ren*) and the 'eight steps'. These are the blueprints of transforming humanness into how we live, deliberately maintaining the balance and harmony of the individual and society.[27] At this juncture, I observe that dialectical interplay between method (investigation of worldly affairs) and truth (extension of knowledge) stands in hermeneutical connection with ethical sincerity. Underlying the *Doctrine of Mean* is sincerity, in which the word and action will be right and intact (ch.xxv.3). 'To this attainment there are requisite the extensive study of what is good, accurate inquiry about it, careful reflection on it, the clear discrimination of it, and the earnest practice of it' (ch.20. 19).

In classical Chinese, to believe and to be worthy of faith is expressed by the word *xin*, where the ideogram contains the signs for 'person' and 'speech'. To believe implies letting speech act. For Confucius, faith is one of the cardinal virtues. One believes in a person who is worthy of confidence and in whose word one can trust. Accordingly, sincerity is expressed by *xing*, which is a manifestation of Nature conferred by Heaven. This ideogram contains the signs for 'speech' and 'completion'. Sincerity completes the human word, completes other people and things; both completing other people and things are virtues which belong to one's Nature.

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25 Yao, *Introduction to Confucianism*, 7-9.
26 *The Doctrine of the Mean*, 382-434.
27 Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 84.

This articulates that sincerity is comprehended through language in life-connection with society; the Confucian way of integrating accurate inquiry of principles grounded in worldly affairs with careful reflection, extension of knowledge based on the clear discrimination of it, and with earnest practice of sincerity in terms of moral self-cultivation. Ethical sincerity and intelligence stand in unity, and one who possesses sincerity is one who affects others by transforming them (ch. XXIII). Sincerity is the end and beginning of things and its attainment is regarded as the highest achievement (ch. XXV. 1–2).

The main argument of this book, in the intercivilizational context (Part II and Part IV), is to bring the Confucian hermeneutics of sincerity, embedded within a dialectical interplay between investigation of worldly affairs (method) and extension of knowledge (truth), into dialogue with Western hermeneutics and ethics. I explore Neo-Confucian conflict of interpretation between Zhu Xi (1130–1200) and Wang Yangming (1472–1529) in order to break through such a conflict in light of Mengzi's political ethics of people.

As an introduction, I have mapped hermeneutical-ethical genesis and development concerning interpretation, moral self and interreligious experience of difference, plurality, and postcolonial irregularity in diverse contexts, within Western tradition. I included a debate between neo-Kantian ethics and Neo-Aristotelian ethics, integrating postmodern ethics of the Other. Then I appreciated a contribution of Boston Confucianism in its semiotic interpretation of Confucian rituals. The purpose of this book is to reconstruct an ethical-hermeneutical theory in a global-critical perspective, emphasizing Mencius's political ethics of rectification and resistance in terms of people's dignity in intercivilizational dialogue with Western tradition. This perspective becomes foundational for me to reconstruct a postcolonial hermeneutics which underlines archeological rewriting of the irregular side or downside of history. It presents a new model of ethical humanism in a comparative, global-critical framework for the subaltern-minjung. For this task I take the long route through dialogue with the theory of interpretation and moral philosophy in a Western context. Part I is a study of hermeneutical theory and human experience in the Western philosophical tradition. This study plays a role in ushering us into a intercivilizational dialogue with Confucian philosophy in Part II.