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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The invitation to host the first special themed issue of the *Journal of the Pacific Association of the Continental Tradition* came like an invigorating early spring breeze over Washington coast: refreshing—but not chilling to the bones—with promises of something novel and exciting. Given only one guiding thread I was free to experiment with the margins of philosophical expression and with much support and help from the main editors of the board, namely, Jason Wirth and Chris Lauer, and contributions from excellent scholars, have weaved in what I hope to be colorful additions to the fabric of thought faithful to the mission of PACT. The one guiding thread was to look at the reception of Classical Chinese thought in the Continental tradition by bringing together specialists who make a living with the titles of “sinologist” and “philosopher.” To be sure, this is not the first time for such a platform, but what this issue aims to do in addition to creating a genuine dialogue where ideas were exchanged (which took place virtually during one autumn evening in the midst of the pandemic) is to adorn expository text with poetic lines and artful images.

The theme for our special issue comes from the *Mumonkan* 無門關, a collection of Zen koans compiled by the Chinese monk Mumon Ekai 無門慧開 (1183-1260), which begins with the following poem:

Gateless is the Great Tao,  
There are thousands of ways to it.  
If you pass through this barrier  
You may walk freely in the universe.<sup>1</sup>

In this issue, the phrase “gateless barrier” indicates at least two things: a call to forge passage between sinology and philosophy; and a request for each author to freely envision and explore other “barriers” that may pertain to their own research, including the divide between present and past, humankind and nature, knowing subject and knowable object, and language and thought. That these various barriers are deemed gateless is, I hope, suggestive of the beginnings of crossing over into the other unfamiliar realm, a journey that may be filled with surprises.

The first barrier mentioned above is in need of further explanation, as it was the driving force behind this project. It has to do with obvious differences in terms of method and emphases between the professional sinologist and philosopher. While the sinologist’s discussion is weighted on textual, historical, and philological matters, the philosopher is more concerned with ideas and their significance to present times. This is not to say that writings from the other camp hold no contemporary value: on the contrary, sinological investigations can offer valuable information for those unfamiliar with the field. Philological translation is an enormous part of the sinologist’s profession, a rigorous discipline that demands years of training in Classical Chinese distinct from Modern Chinese, years that a majority of us cannot

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<sup>1</sup> Zenkei Shibayama, *The Gateless Barrier: Zen Comments on the Mumonkan*, trans. by Sumiko Kudo (Boston: Shambhala, 2000), 10.

afford to double-specialize.<sup>2</sup> When dealing with Classical Chinese texts having a good translation with extensive notes is just as important as having a good dictionary—for when it matters, *it matters*. Linguistic nuances can dramatically alter a particular philosophical position, as is evident in Nicolas Williams’ essay. This, of course, extends to other traditions dealing with ancient texts written in classical language, such as those of the Greco-Romans.

On the flip side, a complete understanding of a Classical Chinese text is much more than knowing how to solve philological problems and requires interdisciplinary approaches. The *Huainanzi*, for example, contains sections that demand the sinologist have a decent familiarity with cosmological principles, amongst others. Or take the *Zhuangzi*, a favorite in the Western world, which when rendered into precise English can be awkward at best without literary flair, and which can prove cumbersome to the reader even when the text is rich with philosophical ideas. The point here is not that sinologists should become philosophers, nor philosophers sinologists. Rather, it is that we should look to *collaborative*—not just interdisciplinary—opportunities that actually consist of *real dialogue*, both spoken and written. This is part of what “Gateless Barrier” attempts to do. Another motive is to introduce to the “Continental” other Classical Chinese texts that may be of interest to their own specialties. In other words, to invite them to venture beyond the usual suspects, and to show them that there is much more to Chinese thought than just the *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, *Yi jing*, or the *Analecets*. There’s a whole new world waiting

to be discovered, though here we can only scratch a little deeper.

Throughout the essays in this collection the reader will find a series of original illustrations inspired by Mumon’s poem quoted above. To see the “whole” picture of the series, the reader must cut through each article and mentally suture the images into a narrative. The articles that follow include selected poems and photographs of the author’s own choice, and some also include drawings that are intended to enhance the experience of reading scholarly writings and increase visual aesthetics by balancing word with picture.<sup>3</sup>

“Think outside the box!” is the maxim.



Hsiang-Lin Shih starts us off in “Across the Gateless Barriers: Hyperlinked Farming Poetry in the *Shi jing*” with a discussion on a set of verses that function specifically according to the four seasons. Using the modern concept of hyperlinks and hypertextuality, Shih suggests an alternative method of reading this particular collection of farming poems that spread out a canonized anthology of early Chinese songs. She proposes that there is an essentially performative aspect to the poems including dramatical modes of song and dance. With an alternative twist, these poems must moreover

<sup>2</sup> On the matter of philology in Chinese studies, see Paul Kroll, “Translation or Sinology?” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 138.3 (2018), 559-66. There is also a recent newsletter published by the APA dealing specifically with translating Classical Chinese philosophical texts. See “Timeliness of Translating

Chinese Philosophy,” *APA Newsletter on Asian and Asian-American Philosophies and Philosophies* 19.2 (Spring 2020).

<sup>3</sup> All illustrations are original works by Jennifer J. M. Liu.

be “activated” by reading them in sync with the seasons, or what Shih terms “almanac mimesis.” At the same time, there is a crossing of spatio-temporal barriers between readers of present time and ancestors of antiquity.

Our next barrier is one between “enchantment” and “disenchantment.” In Leah Kalmanson’s piece, “A Visit to the Local God: Reclaiming the Diversity of the Divine,” she discusses the intellectual context for the divide between religion and science where a materialist and scientific worldview rejects narratives invoking the supernatural, not only resulting in the loss of so-called wonder but silencing voices in a diversity of religious, spiritual, and intellectual traditions. Drawing on examples from Hawaiian, Chinese, and Jewish sources, Kalmanson discusses possibilities for “re-enchantment” that retain the specificity and locality of supernatural phenomena within the purview of philosophical discourse.

The following essay by Meilin Chinn takes a timely turn: what would the Taoist concept of reversal mean in light of modern climate change, and what would this imply for humankind? Chinn explores how we can reconceptualize the relationship of humans with nature through motifs from the *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, and a medieval alchemical text called *Laozi’s Jade Casket*. Specifically, she looks at how humans as cultivators and apprentices of heaven and earth can take part in the regenerative and healing processes of nature that are driven by a movement of reversal in a return to the primal origin. The mushroom may be “magical,” but the practical cultivation of it may offer insight into how humans can move more meticulously in the ways of *ziran* and care of our environment.

Switching gears from tilling the land with song and dance, enchanted worldviews, and magical mushrooms, the next set of articles

takes the idea of barriers into the direction of epistemology and metaphysics.

In “Knowledge of Things in Early Medieval China and Its Implications for Cultural Continuity,” Zhinan Chen examines the organization of epistemological paradigms in early medieval China by tracing the evolution of the word *wu* 物 (“object, material, thing”). Through a philological account Chen shows that contrary to a seemingly uniform tradition with a unified system of knowledge, there were in fact multiple layers of construction and reconstruction which differed according to how thinkers conceptualized the barrier between thinking subject and their external world. Based on organizational principles found in the *Han shu*, or the *History of the [Former] Han*, Chen notes how human experiences of worldly phenomena are collected as data and then materialized into a tangible form, as if knowledge has become an entity in and of itself. This reflects a particular intellectual worldview specific to the Han dynasty. By the medieval period, Chen argues that knowledge becomes embodied by the human person, that is, that intellectual power is reflected in the ability to correlate *gewu* 格物 and *bowu* 博物.

In “Beyond Arbitrariness: Kūkai’s Theory of Languages and Scripts,” Nicolas Williams looks at the barrier between language and truth by working through Kūkai’s various writings. He rejects the claim by Ryuichi Abe and Thomas Hare that Kūkai’s notions of language and writing can be cast in a (post-) structuralist light, that signs are arbitrary, and that meaning (or the signified) is always deferred. Through his own translations of key passages, Williams argues that for Kūkai there are in fact some languages that can represent the truth, and that there is a hierarchy of languages that effectively express the dharma. This hierarchy

places Sanskrit at the top, with Chinese following in second place. Moreover, this hierarchy does not stop with individual languages, but extends to the modes of linguistic expression, from “ordinary language,” to “literary writing,” to the highest form in the “language of the Dharma.” This article includes the first full English translation of Kūkai’s memorial to Emperor Saga in 814.

The last piece of this collection, “Traversing Deleuze’s Plane of Immanence: Reading the *Taixuan jing* as Philosophy,” takes up Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s reformulations of philosophy to suggest a new way of reading the *Taixuan jing*, composed in the first century by Yang Xiong in imitation of the *Yi jing*. Here I propose to think of the *Taixuan jing* as the phenomenon, from which concepts are created. Each tetragram complex in the *Taixuan jing* can be understood as a multiple concept. The entire system of eighty-one tetragrams is the expansion of the ultimate principle *xuan* and can be understood as the plane of immanence. As such, the *Taixuan jing* is not an imitation of the *Yi jing*, but rather a creative work that attempts to articulate the absolute through image, poetic verse, and expository prose. The barrier between language and truth collapses in the contraction of verbal expression and image.



In a sense then, this issue is faithful to the PACT mission and an incidental response to Brian Treanor’s prompt to do continental philosophy beyond “the” Continent, or in his words, to do some “intellectual sauntering or wandering” into the unknown, “because one’s understanding is enhanced by encountering

other engagements with truth, other expressions of value, and other questions of meaning.”<sup>4</sup> Or we could add (and this is implied in Treanor’s article) that we must continue to saunter between the familiar and the strange, for when we trespass into unfamiliar planes of thought we may encounter not only rivals and claimants, but friends as well. There was no hidden agenda to force any kind of conformity, no mission to accomplish other than exchanging ideas, no requirement other than good will, respect, and an open mind. The papers collected in this issue reflect the outcomes and give a glimpse what is possible when we come together: creativity, originality, and perhaps most importantly, heart.

Mission: Possible.

From the Land of the Orcas  
Seattle, Washington  
Jennifer J. M. Liu  
January 2021

### Acknowledgements

I thank Jason M. Wirth and the board of PACT for giving me the opportunity to edit our first special issue, and gratitude for Christopher Lauer’s support and guidance along the way. I would also like to express appreciation and respect toward all the contributors for dealing with my bossiness, complying with my many requests and entertaining my crazy ideas. I am truly blessed to have had the chance to work with such gifted scholars and to have forged many friendships along the way.

<sup>4</sup> Brian Treanor, “Continental Philosophy Beyond ‘the’ Continent,” *Journal of the Pacific Association for the Continental Tradition* 1 (2018): 56.