

*Dialogue, Eurocentrism, and Comparative
Political Theory: A View from
Cross-Cultural Intellectual History*

Takashi Shogimen

Comparative political theory is an emerging subfield of political theory. Its genesis lies in the dissatisfaction with current fashions of political theorizing practiced in the Euro-American world. A group of political theorists led by Fred Dallmayr and Anthony Parel first claimed in the 1990s that even though we live in an age of globalization our theoretical framework in political theory derives almost exclusively from European (and American) intellectual legacies, which are rooted in Greco-Roman and Christian traditions.¹ Despite the hegemony of political categories of European (and American) origin in contemporary political discourse, politics is a universal human activity and the ways in which politics is conceptualized are culturally and temporally diverse. Comparative political theory is an attempt to

An earlier version of the present paper was delivered in the session on Political Thought and Intellectual History at the “JHI at 75” Conference at the University of Pennsylvania in May 2014.

I am grateful to Stephen Conway and to the anonymous referees for their helpful comments on this article.

¹ See, for instance, Fred Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism: Essays on Cross-Cultural Political Encounter* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996); Dallmayr, *Alternative Visions: Paths in the Global Village* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 1998); Dallmayr, ed., *Border Crossings: Toward a Comparative Political Theory* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 1999); and Anthony J. Parel and R. C. Keith, *Comparative Political Philosophy: Studies under the Upas Tree* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1997).

incorporate other cultures' conceptions of politics to expand the horizons of political theorizing beyond the Euro-American framework. This anti-Eurocentric movement has been gaining momentum quickly since the dawn of the twenty-first century: Roxanne Euben and Andrew March, both experts in Islamic political thought, Stephen Angle and Leigh Jenco, who work on Chinese political thought, and Farah Godrej, a specialist in modern Indian political thought, have emerged as leaders of this new field of inquiry.²

An interesting but often unnoticed fact about this movement of comparative political theory is that virtually all the leading experts in this subfield were trained and are based in the Anglo-American world. Although Parel and Godrej, for instance, are not ethnically of European descent, their intellectual home is Euro-American political theory. What has gone unnoticed is that there are very few who are seriously engaging in research in comparative political theory in non-European worlds. This is particularly true in Japan. The wide recognition in the Euro-American academy of comparative political theory as a subfield of political thought is evidenced by the fact that recent reference works, such as the *Encyclopedia of Political Theory*, include an entry on comparative political theory.³ Meanwhile, a large group of leading experts based in Japan and specializing in political theory, political philosophy, and the history of political thought have recently produced an authoritative six-volume collection of essays on *Political Philosophy*, published by Iwanami Shoten, arguably one of the most prestigious academic presses in Japan. While the aim of the series is to showcase cutting-edge research in the field of modern and contemporary political philosophy and theory in the Euro-American world, they did not include a chapter specifically on comparative political theory.⁴ So, how can we explain the asymmetry between the Euro-American enthusiasm for this subfield and the Japanese dearth of interest?

² Some key literature in comparative political theory that I do not discuss in what follows include: Stephen C. Angle, *Sagehood: The Contemporary Significance of Neo-Confucian Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Roxanne L. Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslims and Western Travelers in Search of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); and Hassan Bashir, *Europe and the Eastern Other: Comparative Perspectives on Politics, Religion, and Culture before the Enlightenment* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2013).

³ Roxanne L. Euben, "Comparative Political Theory," in *Encyclopedia of Political Theory*, ed. Mark Bevir (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2010), 1:260–61.

⁴ *Iwanami koza seiji tetsugaku*, ed. Ono Noriaki and Kawasaki Osamu (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2014), 6 vols. For the Japanese names in this article, I have followed the Japanese convention: the given name follows the family name.

Taking these contrasting attitudes toward comparative political theory as a starting point, what follows highlights problems inherent in comparative political theory from a standpoint of cross-cultural intellectual history with special reference to Western Europe and Japan. More specifically, I propose to highlight the paradoxical nature of Eurocentrism⁵ in the sense of the cognitive hegemony of modern European (and, to some extent, American) categories in public discourse. I argue that comparative political theory, despite its declared combat against Eurocentrism, is nonetheless, in some significant senses, “Eurocentric” (although I do not find this term appropriate to describe a phenomenon associated with European culture, as I will argue below). One may claim that to discuss Eurocentrism *in* comparative political theory is self-contradictory; indeed, comparative political theory is motivated by *anti*-Eurocentrism. Nonetheless, tacit methodological assumptions of comparative political theory exhibit characteristics distinctive to European intellectual culture. For instance, some leading practitioners of comparative political theory are sympathetic to, and even underscore the importance of, the dialogical engagement with non-European (or American) political ideas. What has escaped these practitioners of comparative political theory is that, even though they endeavor to frame their political theorizing in non-European terms, the dialogical method of comparative political theory they deploy is culturally rooted in the European intellectual tradition. I shall show this through cross-cultural examination of the literary genre of “dialogues” in the European and Japanese intellectual traditions.

The aforementioned dearth of interest in comparative political theory in contemporary Japan, however, cannot be attributed simply to the weakness of a dialogical tradition similar to that which the European intellectual tradition has nurtured. It is exceedingly difficult to deploy a dialogical method in contemporary Japanese political theory because the dialogue that practitioners of comparative political theory envisage requires both an acknowledgement of the inquirer’s standpoint, which is supposed to be distinctively Japanese, and of the “other” tradition with which one engages with in cross-cultural dialogue (such as European political ideas). In the contemporary Japanese context, however, such a dialogical engagement is often impossible because contemporary Japanese political thinking is paradigmatically determined by European (and American) political thought.

⁵ On Eurocentrism, see, for instance, Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2009), and Rajani Kannepalli Kanth, *Against Eurocentrism: A Transcendent Critique of Modernist Science, Society, and Morals* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

The state of Japanese scholarship on political thought and more generally in the humanities and social sciences may appear deplorable from the viewpoint of critics of Eurocentrism. Practitioners of comparative political theory thus turn their attention to autonomous intellectual traditions of political discourse, which are independent from the hegemony of European (and American) categories.

But were non-European (or non-American) cultures autonomous before the global hegemony of European categories in learning about humanity? An influential thesis in Japanese intellectual history suggests that the paradigmatic dominance of foreign ideas was indeed axiomatic in the Japanese intellectual tradition. Likewise, European culture is characterized by the incessant adoption of external sources; for the Germanic peoples who created Europe as a cultural unit in the Middle Ages, Greco-Roman and Christian traditions were not their indigenous ideas. These observations lead me to discern another tacit assumption in the practice of comparative political theory: comparative political theory is supposed to derive from culturally internal, indigenous sources. This presumption of the autonomy of a culture, however, is flawed. Some cultures indeed acquire their individuality precisely by relying on external sources. The autonomy of culture in the sense that the culture is independent from foreign (especially modern European or American) influence is, as a concept, at best useless and at worst a red herring, since some cultures require interactions with other cultures to sustain their distinctiveness.

In view of these historical observations, I submit that, despite its universalist, cosmopolitan, and anti-Eurocentric claims and motivations, comparative political theory may ultimately lead to Euro-American political theorists' colonization of "other" political ideas. Indeed, just as European intellectual culture has historically sought out external sources, comparative political theory engages in cross-cultural dialogue to universalize and empower European (and American) political thinking. Comparative political theory will thus be revealed to be unmistakably an offspring of the European intellectual tradition.

I. DIALOGUE

Although the appellation "comparative political theory" comes with the adjective "comparative," many comparative political theorists do not endeavor to compare and contrast European (or American) and other political traditions in order to understand similarities and differences. Instead

they propose to engage in dialogue with political thought in the non-European (or American) tradition. They are acutely aware of their intellectual “home,” which is the Euro-American tradition; indeed, there is no such thing as a global standpoint—one necessarily takes a specific standpoint somewhere. Thus the leading practitioners of comparative political theory are skeptical about the possibility that one can take a neutral viewpoint from which to compare and contrast two intellectual traditions. Rather, they are inclined to acknowledge the fact that they are embedded in the Euro-American tradition, and that they practice comparative political theory as a learning process through dialogue with the “Other”—that is, neither European nor American conceptualizations of politics.⁶

This dialogical nature of comparative political theory suggests that its immediate intellectual inspiration comes from comparative philosophy. Raimundo Panikkar, a comparative philosopher, argued in his well-known article “What is Comparative Philosophy Comparing?” that any effort at comparing philosophies starts consciously or unconsciously from a concrete philosophical position. Thus a comparative philosophical stance, according to Panikkar, “opens itself up to other philosophies and tries to understand them from the initial perspective,”⁷ and this takes the form of a dialogical learning process. Fred Dallmayr, one of the pioneers of comparative political theory, also took a cue from Hans-Georg Gadamer to underscore the dialogical nature of comparative political theory in the hope that such engagement would lead to the fusion of horizons.⁸

Andrew March has labeled comparative political theory that deploys a dialogical mode of inquiry into non-European (or American) political ideas as “engaged” comparative political theory. This contrasts with “scholarly” comparative political theory. The “scholarly” approach to comparative political theory aims at “investigating whether we *understand well enough* a given text, practice or phenomenon.”⁹ March contrasts this with the “engaged” approach that aims at “investigating whether some set of ideas are *the right ideas for us*.”¹⁰ The “engaged” approach is designed to produce a new normative theory drawing on sources of non-European origins,

⁶ For a succinct and eloquent statement of this position, see Fred Dallmayr, “Beyond Monologue: For a Comparative Political Theory,” in *Comparative Political Theory*, ed. Dallmayr (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 7–20.

⁷ Raimundo Panikkar, “What is Comparative Philosophy Comparing?” in *Interpreting Across Boundaries: New Essays in Comparative Philosophy*, ed. Gerald James Larson and Eliot Deutsch (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988): 116–136, at 127.

⁸ See especially Dallmayr, “Beyond Monologue.” Also see his works listed in n1.

⁹ Andrew F. March, “What is Comparative Political Theory?” *The Review of Politics* 71 (2009): 531–65, at 534.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 535.

while the ambition of the “scholarly” approach is much more modest, in that it seeks to understand similarities and differences between Euro-American and other political thought. Antony Black is a key scholar who deploys the latter approach.¹¹ He is indeed skeptical of the “engaged” dialogical approach when he raises the question: through cross-cultural dialogue, “what exactly is it that we *learn, or could learn, from other cultures?*”¹² The situation around us is not amenable to the practice of cross-cultural dialogical political theorizing. Indeed, there are very few instances, Black notes, in which cross-cultural dialogues actually occur in order to resolve international conflicts. Meanwhile, classroom instruction in the history of political thought is not yet equipped with a good anthology of primary texts of non-European (or American) political thought in modern English translation.¹³

But the dearth of opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue is not the only problem; Black has also questioned Dallmayr’s approach and remains skeptical about its relevance for solving global problems. This point had already been addressed systematically by Cary Nederman. Nederman has argued, in light of various dialogical models of intercultural communication in medieval inter-religious writings, that dialogue does not necessarily lead to “the fusion of horizons.” Indeed, such intercultural communication was envisaged in diverse ways. Nederman catalogued the typology of such communication: (1) dialogues of rational demonstration or conversion; (2) dialogues of mutual edification; (3) dialogues of mutual incomprehension; (4) dialogues of critical self-reflection; and (5) dialogues of mutual accommodation and respect.¹⁴ The dialogue of mutual incomprehension, for instance, obviously does not solve any problems; at best it can only maintain the status quo, possibly even create new conflicts. Dialogue does not guarantee a solution.

Criticisms of the dialogical approach do not arise only from those who deploy the “scholarly” approach. Leigh Jenco, for instance, acknowledges her “debt” to the Dallmayr-style comparative method; however, she rejects

¹¹ See Antony Black, *The West and Islam: Religion and Politics in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Also Black, *A World History of Ancient Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹² Antony Black, “The Way Forward in Comparative Political Thought,” *Journal of International Political Theory* 7 (2011): 221–28, at 226.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 226–27.

¹⁴ Cary J. Nederman, “Varieties of Dialogue: Dialogical Models of Intercultural Communication in Medieval Inter-religious Writings,” in *Western Political Thought in Dialogue with Asia*, ed. Takashi Shogimen and Cary J. Nederman (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2009), 45–64.

the label of dialogical comparative study to describe her research in modern Chinese political thought. She writes:

My resistance stems mainly from the tendency of comparison to preclude the development (if not the examination) of arguments and viewpoints from outside those texts and debates that have marked Euro-American discourse in political theory for the past century. Comparison tends to draw attention only to those aspects of other thought traditions that exhibit obvious resonance with Western categories, rendering non-Western ideas, thinkers, and traditions interesting as case studies but not themselves the domain of theorizing.¹⁵

Jenco thus refuses to be anchored in the Euro-American political tradition; she instead presses forward “on the assumption that, given proper training, the political thinking of early Republican China is as accessible to [her] as is that of any other time and place, whether ancient Athens or Florentine Italy.”¹⁶

These examples do not necessarily suggest that the dialogical—“engaged”—comparative project is already in decline. Recently, Melissa Williams and Mark Warren have rebutted the mounting criticism of the dialogical method by maintaining that “political theory—including comparative political theory—is inherently dialogical not only in its method but in its purpose as well.”¹⁷ They write:

All political theory aims at representing and reconstructing the constellations of ideas that are embedded in a given sociopolitical context, making explicit and available for critical engagement what is otherwise implicit, hidden, or lost from view. *Comparative political theory*, then, is nothing other than the representation and reconstruction of systems of ideas that have arisen in cultures or civilizations different from our own.¹⁸

But such an attempt to generate a new normative theory drawing on intellectual traditions “different from our own” was, according to Megan

¹⁵ Leigh K. Jenco, *Making the Political: Founding and Action in the Political Theory of Zhang Shizhao* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁷ Melissa S. Williams and Mark E. Warren, “A Democratic Case for Comparative Political Theory,” *Political Theory* 20 (2013): 26–57, at 35.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

C. Thomas, not unprecedented before the project of “dialogical” comparative political theory.¹⁹ The Eurocentric tendency of the current practice of Euro-American political theory is often acknowledged as rooted in Orientalism, but Thomas argues otherwise: that Eurocentrism does not stem from Orientalism but rather constitutes a break from it. In order to demonstrate this, she excavates the cross-cultural engagement with ancient Indian ideas by such Orientalists as William Jones and Friedrich Schlegel. Thomas is thus skeptical about the possibility that comparative political theorists distance themselves from Orientalism “by simply denouncing Eurocentrism, and recognizing the value of non-Western traditions for political theory more generally.”²⁰

The European tradition of cross-cultural engagement goes back far beyond the Orientalism of the nineteenth century, however. Comparative political theory’s emphasis on dialogue in the process of political theorizing is not a unique or isolated case in the European intellectual tradition. Indeed, since the time of Plato, European philosophical and theological texts have been full of dialogues. The medieval European intellectual tradition also produced a variety of texts that represent some sort of dialogue, conversation, or discussion. Alex Novikoff recently shed new light on the medieval culture of disputation, the cultural source of which can be traced back to the literary tradition of dialogues.²¹ Inter-religious dialogues among Christians, Jews, and Muslims are commonplace in the medieval literary tradition—St. Anselm, Peter Abelard, and Nicholas of Cusa are among the authors who contributed to this genre. Those works typically present imaginary conversations; nonetheless, the existence and proliferation of this literary genre illustrates that engagement with radically different worldviews was clearly an integral part of intellectual activities in the Middle Ages and beyond. Such dialogical treatises often pay due respect to all different positions and sometimes leave the question of which position should have a final say open-ended. Perhaps the best example is Peter Abelard’s *Collationes* (also known as the *Dialogus inter philosophum, Judaeum et Christianum*).²² Abelard presents the three different convictions of a philosopher,

¹⁹ Megan C. Thomas, “Orientalism and Comparative Political Theory,” *The Review of Politics* 72 (2010): 653–77.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 674.

²¹ Alex J. Novikoff, *The Medieval Culture of Disputation: Pedagogy, Practice and Performance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

²² Peter Abelard, *Collationes*, ed. John Marenbon and Giovanni Orlandi (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

a Jew, and a Christian, yet he defers final judgment because he deems the conversation to be mutually instructional for participants.²³

Did non-European intellectual worlds know such dialogical literature? In the Japanese intellectual tradition, there were also dialogical works of inter-religious discussion. Perhaps one of the oldest examples is *Sangō shiiki*, the text written by the ninth-century Buddhist thinker Kūkai (774–835).²⁴ *Sangō shiiki* juxtaposes three different worldviews in the form of lectures by teachers of three different schools of thought, namely Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. The first volume consists of the lecture on Confucianism, which is criticized by a teacher of Taoism in the second volume. The final volume consists of an attack on Taoism by a teacher of Buddhism, thus concluding that Buddhism is the superior teaching of the three. The three different worldviews are treated on an equal footing, even if the three lectures are obviously fictional and the Buddhist view is ultimately favored. In acknowledging openly the clash of these three different worldviews, *Sangō shiiki* strikingly resembles the dialogical tradition in Europe. However, the reason why I single out *Sangō shiiki* here is not to highlight a similarity between the European and the Japanese traditions; on the contrary, *Sangō shiiki* is one of the rare works in the Japanese intellectual tradition to examine different systems of thought through critical engagement.²⁵

This is not to suggest, of course, that the Japanese intellectual tradition did not know any debate between different intellectual or religious groups. For instance, in the tenth century two Japanese Buddhist schools of thought—the *Tendai shū* and the *Hossō shū*—held one of the best-known doctrinal debates (*shūron* or *hōron*) in the history of Japanese Buddhism.²⁶ Various chronicles record the debate, each school of thought reporting its own victory. *Ketsugon jitsuron* is among the best-known works that capture important aspects of the debate. *Ketsugon jitsuron* takes the fictionalized form of a dialogue between Tokuchi (fl. early ninth century), a key

²³ Cary J. Nederman, *Worlds of Difference: European Discourse of Toleration, c. 1100–c. 1550* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 32–33.

²⁴ Kūkai, “Sangō shiiki,” in *Saichō, Kūkai*, ed. Kōji Fukunaga (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1983), 253–300.

²⁵ On dialogical literature in the Japanese tradition, see Maruyama Masao, “Nihon shi-sōshi niokeru mondōtai no keifu,” in *Maruyama Masao shū* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1996), 10:269–309.

²⁶ Nakagawa Osamu, “Heian jidai no shūron,” in *Mondō to ronsō no bukkyō: Shakyōteki komyunikēshon no shatei*, ed. Martin Repp and Inoue Yoshiyuki (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2012), 130–48.

thinker of the *Hossō shū*, and Saichō (767–822), the founder of the *Tendai shū*. Since the work is written from the perspective of Saichō, the debate is represented as ending in his victory.²⁷ Doctrinal debates did not occur only within Buddhist circles. In the late sixteenth century, Japanese Buddhist intellectuals engaged in lively doctrinal debates with Jesuit missionaries, despite linguistic and religious barriers.²⁸ As Martin Repp notes, debates between Buddhists and Christians in sixteenth-century Japan were possible because the two groups shared the skills and ethos necessary for doctrinal debates. However, Japanese religious intellectuals gradually lost debating skills after the ban on debates by the Tokugawa Shogunal regime (1603–1868), a policy that aimed to prevent the violent conflicts that often resulted from doctrinal controversies.²⁹

The Tokugawa Japanese academic community introduced debate in reading groups (*kaidoku*) as a pedagogical method within Confucian schools in the Tokugawa period. The debate, however, revolved around different interpretations of the text that the reading group was studying, and did not extend to interpretative arguments between different schools of thought because the reading group was organized *within* a school of thought. The function of debates within a reading group was to promote the equality of participants and the toleration of diverse understandings of canonical texts within that school.³⁰ While some discussion obviously took place, debates in reading groups were unlike the debates among the Buddhist schools of thought in the pre-Tokugawa period in that they did not constitute a forum where two radically conflicting worldviews collided with each other.

Meanwhile, the most common “dialogical” genre in the Tokugawa Japanese literary tradition took the form of the question-and-answer (*mondō*). In the question-and-answer genre, an intellectually inferior inquirer typically seeks the teaching of a superior respondent; for instance, a disciple raises questions and seeks answers from a master. Hence, the questions are normally brief and the answers are substantial, as is clear from well-known Confucian texts such as Nakae Tōju’s *Okina mondō*³¹

²⁷ Maruyama, “Nihon shisōshi niokeru mondōtai no keifu,” 270–72.

²⁸ Martin Repp, “Sengoku jidai niokeru iezusukai senkyōshi to bukkyō sōryo tonō sōron,” in Repp and Inoue, *Mondō to ronsō no bukkyō*, 149–61.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

³⁰ Maeda Tsutomu, *Edo kōki no shiso kakan* (Tokyo: Perikansha, 2009), chap. 2. The tradition of *kaidoku* is not monolithic. On the Buddhist practice of *kaidoku*, see Naito Tomoyasu, “Jōdoshinshū niokeru mondō to kyōiku no hōhō,” in Repp and Inoue, *Mondō to ronsō no bukkyō*, 93–107.

³¹ Nakae Tōju, “Okina mondō,” in Nakae Tōju, *Kumazawa Banzan*, ed. Itō Tasaburō (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1983), 49–171.

and Kumazawa Banzan's *Shūgi washo*.³² Obviously, the inquirer and the respondent in this type of literature do not possess equal standing. Thus such dialogues only manifest one worldview and do not represent tensions between two or more different views. And importantly, this type of work vastly outnumbers those works that do scrutinize the tension between two or more conflicting views.

The question-and-answer genre was very common in Tokugawa Confucian writings. Maruyama Masao, arguably the most influential historian of Japanese political thought in the twentieth century, pointed out that this sort of literary style persisted despite the rapid influx of Euro-American ideas in the nineteenth century; typically, the inquirer represents those who adhere to the belief system prevalent in the Tokugawa *ancien régime*, while the respondent represents those who have adapted themselves to the new Euro-American ideas.³³

Maruyama, however, points to *A Discourse by Three Drunkards on Government* by Nakae Chōmin (1847–1901)³⁴ as a work that departs from the Tokugawa tradition. This work consists of (again, fictional) political discussions by three drunkards named Gentleman, Champion, and Master Nankai. The issues addressed by the three drunkards are complex and extensive, but suffice to say that Gentleman's advocacy of disarmament and pacifism was opposed by Champion's militarism. The *Discourse* concludes with Master Nankai's critique of both views. Maruyama highlights two significant points: first, unlike in the question-and-answer genre of the Tokugawa era, the three drunkards in Chōmin's *Discourse* are socially equal; none of them unilaterally preaches "the right answer" to the others.³⁵ Second, unlike the case of the aforementioned *Sangō shiiki*, the three drunkards do not necessarily represent mutually exclusive political ideologies. Rather, this work offers several viewpoints, thereby highlighting that ostensibly opposing views actually share common ground.³⁶ Thus Chōmin's celebrated "dialogical" work also did not adopt a framework that accommodates sharply contradicting worldviews, some of which constitute the "Other" to the author himself.

It follows from the preceding historical survey that the dialogical

³² Kumazawa Banzan, "Shūgi washo" (excerpts), in Ito, *Nakae Tōju, Kumazawa Banzan*, 173–309.

³³ Maruyama, "Nihon shisōshi niokeru mondōtai no keifu," 289.

³⁴ Nakae Chōmin, *Sansuijin keirin mondō*, ed. Kuwabara Takeo and Shimada Kenji (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1965). The English translation is *A Discourse by Three Drunkards on Government*, trans. Nobuko Tukui (Boston and London: Weathermill, 1984).

³⁵ Maruyama, "Nihon shisōshi niokeru mondōtai no keifu," 296. See also the translator's introduction in Chōmin, *A Discourse*, 26.

³⁶ Maruyama, "Nihon shisōshi niokeru mondōtai no keifu," 297, 305. Also the transla-

encounter with the “Other” is integral to the European intellectual tradition, while it is hardly existent in the post-seventeenth-century Japanese tradition. The pervasiveness of the dialogical mode of inquiry in the European intellectual tradition and the lack thereof in the post-1600 Japanese tradition suggests that the conceptual framework of European intellectuals is often decentralized, while that of Japanese intellectuals is not. The juxtaposition of radically different views in the (however fictional) dialogical setting is rare in this tradition of Japanese intellectual works, and the question-and-answer genre, in which one intellectual position prevails, constituted a mainstream of Tokugawa intellectual works. From these observations it follows that Japanese intellectuals preferred, as a conceptual framework, one dominant knowledge system rather than a juxtaposition of two or more fundamentally different systems of knowledge. This is not to suggest, of course, that at any one time in Japanese intellectual history there was only one knowledge system predominant in the intellectual landscape; on the contrary, there were competing knowledge systems at various points in time. The Confucian traditions in Tokugawa Japan, which I briefly discussed above, were of course not the exclusive paradigm; there were other intellectual trends such as the Nativist school (*kokugaku*). Rather, my point here is that the literary output of any *individual* Japanese thinker shows hardly any inclination to allow for the coexistence of more than one knowledge system, let alone any interest in dialectical tension between two conflicting systems of thought within that individual thinker’s conceptual framework. What the Japanese intellectuals did not accommodate—the juxtaposition of radically different worldviews within a single framework—exemplifies precisely what the French intellectual historian R mi Bague has identified as an important characteristic of European culture. In his *Europe, la voie romaine*,³⁷ Bague claims that European culture is characterized metaphorically by inclusion, not digestion, of foreign ideas. Bague presents two metaphorical models of cultural appropriation. “Digestion” is “the process of appropriation in which the object is so profoundly internalized that it loses its independence.”³⁸ “Inclusion,” by contrast, is “an appropriation in which what is appropriated is maintained in

tor’s introduction to Ch min, *A Discourse*, 26; Miyamura Haruo, *Kaikoku seishin no shis shi: Ch min to jidai seishin* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1996), 140–41; Yonehara Ken, *Ch min to sono jidai* (Kyoto: Sh wad , 1989), 143–58.

³⁷ R mi Bague, *Europe, la voie romaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992). The English translation: *Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization*, trans. Samuel Lester (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine’s Press, 2002).

³⁸ R mi Bague, *The Legend of the Middle Ages: Philosophical Explorations of Medieval Christianity, Judaism and Islam*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 146. Also Bague, *Europe, la voie romaine*, 138–41.

its alterity and surrounded by the process of appropriation itself”—in other words, “a process whose very presence reinforces the alterity of what has been appropriated.”³⁹ To illustrate this point, Brague mentions the tradition of commentaries on “foreign” ideas such as that of Aristotle. Medieval Islamic thinkers attempted to paraphrase Aristotle’s texts, thereby digesting his ideas, while medieval European intellectuals avidly produced commentaries that preserved Aristotle’s alterity.⁴⁰ Likewise, dialogical literature also records and preserves the voice of others, thereby including, rather than digesting, foreign cultures. Even if some dialogical literature presents one voice as victorious over the “others,” it still affords room for the voice of the “others” to be heard or read.

One important implication of this distinctively European cultural appropriation is, according to Brague, that the European intellectual framework is characterized by the lack of a defining center. In the Middle Ages, for instance, there were multiple intellectual centers: Christian theology, Roman law, Ciceronian civil and moral philosophy, and Aristotelian philosophy all competed with one another. Indeed, medieval scholastic writings were characterized formally and methodologically by dialectics that reconciled two conflicting views, the sources of which typically encompassed Christian theology, Roman and canon law, and Greco-Roman philosophy. Hence, Brague characterizes European intellectual culture as “eccentric,” the antonym of “concentric.”⁴¹ Brague’s thesis is that the Roman tradition provided a framework within which Christian theological and Greek (especially Aristotelian) philosophical traditions were accommodated and “included,” without being “digested”; none of those traditions singly constituted the center of the framework. Thus harmony between, rather than unison of, intellectual traditions became a hallmark of European intellectual culture. In other words, European culture is not unicentric but multicentric. It is indeed ironic that such a decentralized culture is often criticized under the label “Eurocentric.”⁴²

II. JAPANESE EUROCENTRISM

From the standpoint of the methodological approach of “engaged” comparative political theory, it could be problematic that contemporary Japanese studies of political thought do not operate on an explicitly dialogical

³⁹ Brague, *The Legend of the Middle Ages*, 146.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 149–51.

⁴¹ Brague, *Europe, la voie romaine*, 170.

⁴² Brague, *Eccentric Culture*, 133–34.

mode. If Japanese political philosophers and theorists are to employ comparative political theory's methodological perspective, they would first have to recognize and acknowledge their intellectual home—that is, the Japanese tradition—and then engage in dialogue with the Euro-American tradition, in order to learn from the Euro-American “Other” and thus to redefine and re-conceptualize their *Japanese* conceptions of politics. However, no Japanese political philosophers or theorists make reference to a distinctively Japanese tradition of political ideas as their intellectual home. In the new Japanese series of publications on political philosophy that I mentioned above, it is remarkable that all the chapters discuss European and North American political thought, ranging from Machiavelli, Luther, and Calvin, to Rawls, Habermas, and Taylor.⁴³ Experts on Japanese political thought are excluded altogether from the publication project.

On this contemporary Japanese partiality to Euro-American political ideas, Karube Tadashi, a leading historian of Japanese political thought, recently wrote:

some might think, quite understandably, that we should stop relying on Euro-American ideas and create our own conception of the political; others might think that we should return to the “purely” Japanese vision of the political (*matsurigoto?*) before the reception of Euro-American ideas. However, these are in fact difficult paths to take. The ways in which we Japanese think are predicated on the concept of the political, which is of Euro-American origin and operates within, and cannot go beyond, the linguistic framework for discussion, which is also of Euro-American origin. In one respect, Euro-American canons constitute a “tradition” that matters to the Japanese today.⁴⁴

This echoes what Dipesh Chakrabarty wrote in 2000: “The phenomenon of ‘political modernity’—namely, the rule by modern institutions of the state, bureaucracy, and capitalist regime—is impossible to think of anywhere in the world without invoking certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even theological traditions of Europe.”⁴⁵

⁴³ See Ono and Kawasaki, *Iwanami kōza seiji tetsugaku*.

⁴⁴ Karube Tadashi, *Utsuriyuku kyōyō* (Tokyo: NTT Shuppan, 2007), 111–12.

⁴⁵ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 4.

A difference between Chakrabarty and Karube is that the former finds the situation problematic, while the latter is acquiescent. Still, Karube's remark is, as far as I know, one of the few instances in Japan today in which it has been explicitly acknowledged that the Euro-American intellectual framework (in translation) is now an alter (yet clearly dominant) ego for Japanese political thinking. To use Farah Godrej's terminology in her work on comparative political theory,⁴⁶ Japanese political philosophers and theorists do not try to "de-center" their intellectual home in order to engage in dialogue with the Euro-American tradition as the "Other" because they do not have to. They are paradigmatically dislocated and no longer cognizant of their Japanese intellectual home as a source of agency in a dialogue with the Euro-American "Other." European and American political ideas now constitute the dominant identity of Japanese political ideas. Therefore, the Eurocentric practice of political theorizing in the European and American worlds that comparative political theorists criticize is assimilated and reproduced on Japanese soil. Bhikhu Parekh has lamented that no contemporary non-European or American society has produced original political theory; after two decades, the situation remains unchanged in Japan.⁴⁷

The reverse side of Japanese Eurocentrism is that Japanese ideas dating from before the encounter with European and American thought now constitute the "Other" that is alienated by the Japanese themselves. Of course, the history of Japanese thought is well and alive in terms of academic scholarship. However, as Karube notes, Japanese ideas before Westernization hardly serve "as *sources* of conceptual and theoretical innovation."⁴⁸ Indeed, there are scarcely any signs that Japanese political philosophers or theorists are attempting to rehabilitate Japanese traditional ideas as sources of conceptual and theoretical innovation in the contemporary political context.

The Iwanami Shoten publishers, for instance, are currently producing a new series that showcases cutting-edge research in Japanese thought.⁴⁹ The first volume addresses issues concerning the cultural distinctiveness of Japanese thought and discusses various relevant approaches. The aim of the series is strictly historical: it is to re-conceptualize Japanese intellectual

⁴⁶ Farah Godrej, *Cosmopolitan Political Thought: Method, Practice, Discipline* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁴⁷ Bhikhu Parekh, "The Poverty of Indian Political Theory," *History of Political Thought* 13 (1992): 535–60.

⁴⁸ Godrej, *Cosmopolitan Political Thought*, 108.

⁴⁹ *Iwanami kōza nippon shisō*, ed. Kurozumi Makoto et al. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2013–14), 8 vols.

history, not to rehabilitate Japanese ideas in modern discourse. One exception is Takeuchi Seiichi's chapter on the possibility of Japanese "philosophy."⁵⁰ What he means by "Japanese 'philosophy'" is "philosophy" which is practiced in the everyday Japanese language; Takeuchi points out that the philosophical vocabulary and expressions currently available in the Japanese language are modern translations of Euro-American philosophical categories. Thus "philosophical" language in Japanese is neither classical Japanese nor foreign language: it is a sort of highly technical language that students of philosophy need to acquire as if it were a foreign language. Takeuchi proposes, therefore, to explore the possibility of illuminating the life-worlds that could be captured by the traditional Japanese language. Perhaps this project may be seen as a response to what linguists under the influence of the Sapir-Whorf thesis would call linguistic relativity; that is, "the idea that culture, *through* language, affects the way we think, especially perhaps our classification of the experienced world."⁵¹ On the linguistic level, Takeuchi's proposal may be seen as a critical response to Eurocentrism since it attempts to replace Euro-American (translated) categories with Japanese ones; on the doctrinal level, however, it furthers Eurocentrism in that it proposes to express Euro-American categories in more idiomatic Japanese rather than turning attention to distinctively Japanese doctrinal sources.

In the humanities and social sciences one may sense how deep-seated Eurocentrism is in contemporary Japanese scholarship. This is by no means a new phenomenon: for instance, Martin Heidegger highlighted it in 1953–54 when he wrote a short work entitled *A Dialogue on Language*.⁵² Two decades earlier, Heidegger had regularly conversed with a Japanese philosopher, Kuki Shūzō (1888–1941), who then studied with leading philosophers in Germany and France, and subsequently wrote a classic treatise on Japanese aesthetics, *The Structure of Iki* (1930). In the form of a fictionalized dialogue between an inquirer and a Japanese visitor, Heidegger appears to recapitulate the essence of the conversation he had with Kuki on the Japanese idea of *iki*. Heidegger questions the methodological and theoretical legitimacy of discussing *iki* aesthetically.

⁵⁰ Takeuchi Seiichi, "Nippon no tetsugaku no kanōsei," in Kurozumi et al., *Iwanami kōza nippon shisō*, 1:33–57.

⁵¹ John J. Gumpertz and Stephen C. Levinson, "Introduction: Linguistic Relativity Re-examined," in *Rethinking Linguistic Relativity*, ed. Gumpertz and Levinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1.

⁵² Martin Heidegger, "A Dialogue on Language," in Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 1–54.

Japanese: Later, after his return from Europe, Count Kuki gave lectures in Kyoto on the aesthetics of Japanese art and poetry. These lectures have come out as a book. In the book, he attempts to consider the nature of Japanese art with the help of European aesthetics.

Inquirer: But in such an attempt, may we turn to aesthetics?

Japanese: Why not?

Inquirer: The name “aesthetics” and what it names grow out of European thinking, out of philosophy. Consequently, aesthetic consideration must ultimately remain alien to Eastasian thinking.

.....

Inquirer: Here you are touching on a controversial question which I often discussed with Count Kuki—the question whether it is necessary and rightful for Eastasians to chase after the European conceptual systems.⁵³

Next, Heidegger identified this “question” as a “danger,” thereby highlighting the heart of the matter.

Inquirer: The danger of our dialogue was hidden in language itself, not in *what* we discussed, nor in the *way in which* we tried to do so.

Japanese: But Count Kuki had uncommonly good command of German, and of French and English, did he not?

Inquirer: Of course, *He* could say in European languages whatever was under discussion. But we were discussing *iki*; and here it was *I* to whom the spirit of the Japanese language remained closed—as it is to this day.

Japanese: The language of the dialogue shifted everything into European.⁵⁴

In this fictional dialogue, it is clear that Heidegger perceptively questions the legitimacy of deploying the European conceptual system in an analysis of a Japanese concept. Heidegger is here problematizing Eurocentrism in the sense of the hegemony of European categories, which is indeed the doing of the Japanese philosopher Kuki Shūzō, who analyzed the concept of *iki* by means of aesthetics of European origin.

⁵³ Ibid., 2–3.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 4. Also see Ōhashi Ryōsuke, *Nippontekina nono, yōroppatekina mono* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2009), 136–39.

Despite the increasing number of voices contesting Eurocentrism in academic and public discourse, the deep-rootedness of the tradition of Eurocentrism remains underappreciated by many Japanese intellectuals. For instance, contemporary nationalist commentators assert their political conservatism by claiming to return to Japanese patriotism (*aikokushin*). They often lament that the Japanese abandoned patriotism after 1945.⁵⁵ Ironically, it has escaped their attention, however, that the concept of *aikokushin*, which the nationalists embrace, does not originate from the Japanese cultural tradition before the encounter with the modern European world; indeed, it was introduced into modern Japanese discourse through translation of the European concept of patriotism.⁵⁶

Such hegemony of non-Japanese categories is not new in Japanese intellectual history. The pervasiveness of Eurocentric academic discourse in modern Japan was preceded by the proliferation of Sinocentrism before the mid-nineteenth century. Confucianism was axiomatic in the Tokugawa Japanese intellectual landscape, and Confucian categories permeated academic discourses. But not every Tokugawa Japanese intellectual welcomed the idea of Confucian universalism. Diverse and often conflicting attitudes toward the Confucian paradigm may be discerned in the debates on whether it was legitimate to call China “Zhongguo,” which is typically translated “the Middle Kingdom.”⁵⁷ The Tokugawa Confucian thinker Satō Naokata (1650–1719), for instance, maintained that China indeed deserved to be referred to as “the Middle Kingdom” because that was the appellation given by the sages who emerged in ancient China, while another Tokugawa Confucian, Asami Keisai (1652–1712), argued that it was absurd for the Japanese to call a foreign neighbor “the Middle Kingdom,” because that appellation is self-referential and could be appropriately used only in the country in which the speaker lives. This disagreement shows clearly that both Sato and Asami tacitly acknowledged the dominance of foreign—Chinese—thought in their academic discourse. Matsuda Koichirō, a leading historian of Japanese political thought, perceptively discerns the acknowledgement of China as the “Other” among Tokugawa Japanese Confucians.⁵⁸ However, it suffices for the present purpose to note that

⁵⁵ On the contemporary debate on Japanese patriotism, see Takashi Shogimen, “Patriotism and Republicanism in Japan: A Century Ago and Today,” in *Republicanism in Northeast Asia*, ed. Jun-Hyeok Kwak and Leigh Jenco (London: Routledge, 2015), 158–174.

⁵⁶ Yamauchi Ikuo, “Aikoku toiu go,” *Sankō shoshi kenkyū* 31 (1986): 1–11.

⁵⁷ On the ancient origins of Sinocentrism in China, see Watanabe Hideyuki, *Kodai “chūka” kan’nen no keisei* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2010).

⁵⁸ Matsuda Koichirō, *Edo no chishiki kara Meiji no seiji e* (Tokyo: Perikansha, 2008), 179–214.

Tokugawa political discourse was often Sinocentric in terms of the proliferation of Confucian categories in academic discourse.

From the late eighteenth century on, however, Japanese intellectuals adopted European geographical concepts such as “China” and “Asia.” In the context of the debate on “Zhongguo” or “the Middle Kingdom,” the ideological function of the use of such terms as “China” and “Asia” is to treat China and Japan as equals—they are now recognized as two countries among many around the world. Japanese intellectuals found it helpful to adopt appellations such as “China” and “Asia” because they were names given by a third party. Japanese scholars of the Dutch Learning (*rangaku*) disseminated a new understanding of the world that knew no such thing as “Middle Kingdom” but consisted of regions such as Europe, Asia, Africa, and America.⁵⁹ The deployment of European geographical concepts effectively undermined Sinocentrism; however, it constituted the beginning of Eurocentrism.

Some late Tokugawa thinkers including Aizawa Seishisai (1782–1863) expressed uneasiness about the use of those concepts precisely because they were not self-referential. This uneasiness became acute when the association of the idea of Asia with despotism, typically seen in the work of Montesquieu, was assimilated and disseminated by Japanese translators. The end of the nineteenth century, however, witnessed the rise of “Asianism,” which deemed the Japanese the leader of the Asian nations in opposition to the Western threat. Obviously, the irony is that Japanese “Asianism,” while intended to be self-referential, was couched in the European concept of “Asia.”⁶⁰ This exemplifies the early penetration of European categories and concepts into Japanese discourse.

Today Syed Farid Alatas notes (and perhaps laments) the overwhelming influence of Eurocentrism in the humanities and social sciences in Japan.⁶¹ Meanwhile, Alatas and Leigh Jenco report on the richness of unique, autonomous, and self-sufficient scholarly communities in Asia,⁶² in which Farah Godrej sees a model for “sites of resistance” to Eurocentrism.⁶³ Alatas goes as far as to argue for the practice of Asiatic scholarship in the humanities and social sciences. In light of the current trend in

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, especially 193–96.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 196–205.

⁶¹ Syed Farid Alatas, *Alternative Discourses in Asian Social Sciences: Responses to Eurocentrism* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006), 69–70.

⁶² *Ibid.*, and Leigh K. Jenco, “Recentering Political Theory: The Promise of Mobile Locality,” *Cultural Critique* 79 (2011): 27–59.

⁶³ Godrej, *Cosmopolitan Political Thought*, 102.

the scholarship on cross-cultural political ideas, Japan has hardly anything to offer.

However, attempts to locate the community of “autonomous” scholarly practice in a local intellectual tradition are predicated on the idea that the intellectual tradition of a culture ought to be autonomous, in the sense that its doctrinal content should originate from internal sources only, independent from external influences. The tacit assumption of the autonomy of a tradition is consistent with the dialogical model that defines the practice of leading comparative political theorists: both interlocutors should be autonomous. Only the cultural agent who is cognizant of his or her intellectual standpoint and is not dependent on any other intellectual traditions can constitute an interlocutor in the cross-cultural dialogue with the “Other.”

But what if an intellectual tradition acquires its distinctive individuality precisely by appropriation of foreign ideas? For this question, Maruyama Masao’s classic thesis of the distinctively Japanese dynamic of cultural appropriation offers a useful insight.⁶⁴ At the heart of Maruyama’s thesis is the claim that foreign ideas have always been paradigmatically central in the Japanese intellectual tradition. Buddhism, Confucianism, and modern Euro-American thought determined various historical stages of the intellectual paradigm of Japanese tradition. Unlike Brague’s model of European cultural appropriation, which includes and *preserves* foreign cultures, Maruyama’s model shows that foreign cultures never failed to be transformed in a distinctive way through the process of their appropriation into Japanese culture.⁶⁵ The fact that various foreign ideas exerted overwhelming influence on the Japanese intellectual landscape at various historical stages does not mean that there were no distinctively Japanese intellectual activities—rather, what is markedly Japanese may be discerned in the way in which appropriated ideas were reshaped and redefined. Maruyama argues that the appropriation of foreign ideas ranging from Buddhism and Confucianism to liberalism and Marxism never occurred without what one might call “Japanization”—a historically constant process of transforming foreign ideas.

Seen in this light, Eurocentrism does not represent a pathological state

⁶⁴ This thesis of Maruyama’s is known widely as the *basso ostinato* of the Japanese intellectual tradition. See especially his “Matsurigoto no kōzō,” in *Maruyama Masao shū* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1996), 12:205–39, and “Genkei, kosō, shitsuyō teion,” in *ibid.*, 107–156.

⁶⁵ Maruyama, “Matsurigoto no kōzō,” 207–9.

of Japanese scholarly activities. On the contrary, the proliferation of Eurocentrism is indeed normalcy because the hegemony of Euro-American political categories is necessary for modern Japanese intellectual activities to be Japanese in the modern world. And we have seen that before the advent of Euro-American categories the Japanese intellectual landscape was determined to a considerable degree by Sinocentrism. Perhaps, in a Japanese intellectual context, a departure from Eurocentrism would not necessarily mean a return to an autonomous indigenous intellectual tradition but rather the appropriation and transformation of yet another intellectual culture.

Further, Maruyama's insight helps us to see that the culturally identifiable autonomy of local or indigenous political discourses could be a red herring. The cultural individuality of the Japanese intellectual tradition is not dependent on the autonomy of intellectual sources. The Japanese intellectual tradition is Japanese not because of a particular set of unique doctrines that emerged from indigenous sources but because of the way in which it reshapes ideas appropriated from other intellectual traditions. The absence of indigenous sources (or the disregard of such sources, if any) that define distinctively Japanese ideas does not mean the absence of a cultural identity within the Japanese intellectual tradition.

The above examination of Japanese Eurocentrism as a normal, not a pathological, cultural condition allows us to see the dialogical model that "engaged" comparative political theory operates on from a fresh perspective. To require a political culture that is autonomous and independent from external influences as an interlocutor in cross-cultural dialogue defines the scope and possibility of dialogue exceedingly narrowly. Indeed, such an anti-Eurocentric mindset blinds us to the fact that the Japanese way of appropriating external cultures is a highly self-transformative mode of cross-cultural engagement.

III. CONCLUSION

The present article opened with an examination of the dialogical approach of comparative political theory in light of the European intellectual tradition of dialogue. I have shown that from the perspective of cross-cultural intellectual history the dialogical mode of inquiry that underpins comparative political theory is distinctively (if not uniquely) European. I have also argued that studies of Euro-American political thought in contemporary

Japan do not take the form of cross-cultural dialogue because Euro-American political thinking is now the dominant paradigm, and Japanese political theorists do not turn to indigenous sources to conceptualize the political. Political ideas in the Japanese past are largely the object of historical interest.

From the perspective of “dialogical” comparative political theory, the proliferation of Eurocentrism in Japanese discourse today clearly suggests that the Japanese intellectual endeavor has little inspiration to offer precisely because of its allegedly pathological dependence on Eurocentrism. Thus the task of comparative political theory is to seek non-Eurocentric discourses elsewhere, outside the world in which Eurocentric discourse prevails, because the source of doctrinal inspiration must be sought in the autonomous tradition of indigenous political ideas. But this argument is predicated on the understanding that an intellectual tradition in the sphere of politics ought to be autonomous, meaning that it raises questions, creates concepts, and deploys methodologies independently from other intellectual traditions. In a nutshell, this argument assumes that an intellectual tradition of political inquiry ought to have its own internal sources.

However, this assumption becomes problematic in light of a historical understanding of some identifiable intellectual traditions. I have argued, drawing on Maruyama’s thesis, that the cultural individuality of the Japanese intellectual tradition depends not on a particular set of original doctrinal sources but on the way in which the ideas appropriated from external sources have been transformed. Dependence on external sources *can* be a feature of the individuality of an intellectual tradition. We can add that European culture is, in this respect, no different: that Europe embraced external sources while preserving their alterity resulted in the displacement of its cultural identity that Rémi Brague has called an “eccentric identity.” Needless to say, the ways in which cultural sources are sought externally differ in both method and content between Europe and Japan; nonetheless, the two cultural traditions share common ground in that they both rely on external sources. Comparative political theorists’ search for autonomous, non-Euro/American political discourses is predicated on an exceedingly narrow conception of intellectual culture that excludes such cultures as Europe and Japan from its scope.

What are the implications of these critical observations of the methodological and theoretical premises of comparative political theory? I would argue that comparative political theory as dialogical cross-cultural engagement unwittingly leads to the colonization of non-European political ideas in order to universalize European political categories. European culture

sought and still seeks its sources in the external world, and comparative political theory is one ramification of this ongoing cultural process. Cross-cultural dialogues in the sphere of political thought will conceptually empower and universalize European political categories. In arguing so, however, I am not lamenting the situation. If Brague's observation that the history of European culture is the process of constant displacement through engagement with external sources is correct, we have no reason to believe that European culture will stop its cross-cultural engagement anytime soon. Immanuel Wallerstein envisages a transition from what he called European universalism to universal universalism, and suggests "a multiplicity of universalisms that would resemble a network of universal universalisms" as an alternative avenue.⁶⁶ This idea is predicated on the assumption that European universalism is one of many competing universalist claims. But European universalism is not merely a set of doctrinal claims: rather it is anchored in a constant drive to universalize through cross-cultural engagement and accommodation ("inclusion"), and, in this, Europe is distinctively "eccentric," as Brague put it. The growth of an intellectual project such as comparative political theory is precisely symptomatic of the ever-universalizing force of European culture. In this light, anti-Eurocentrism is *not* a project *against* European culture. It emerged from the self-universalizing impulse of European culture. Thus "dialogical" comparative political theory, which combats Eurocentrism, is paradoxically a distinctively European project.

University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.

⁶⁶ Immanuel Wallerstein, *European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power* (New York: New Press, 2006), 84.

Copyright of Journal of the History of Ideas is the property of University of Pennsylvania Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.