The acceptance and spread of phenomenology in China

Although in the 1920s some of Husserl's basic ideas were already mentioned in the writings of important Chinese thinkers, such as Zhang Dongsun (1886–1973), only a few Chinese scholars studied German phenomenology in the first half of the last century. The first was Xiong Wei (1911–1994), who belonged to the first generation of phenomenological researchers in China who studied in Germany. In the 1930s he went to Freiburg, where he attended seminars and lectures by Martin Heidegger and was greatly influenced by his way of thinking.

At the same time as Xiong, two other Chinese students were in Freiburg. One was Hsiao Paul Shih-yi, with whom Heidegger attempted a translation of *Dao De Jing* by Laozi in 1946. He taught at Fujen University in Taipei after he came back to China. The second was Shen Youding, whose dissertation was directed by Eugen Fink on Husserl's behalf. Shen taught later at Tsinghua University in Beijing and eventually worked at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

The Chinese nation had gone through a series of unprecedented disasters and catastrophes from the late 1930s to the mid-1970s. During this period, phenomenological investigations almost came to a halt in mainland China. However, Hong Kong and Taiwan had become exceptions to this situation, due to their historically special political status. The first Chinese translation of Husserl's phenomenology—a selection from the first and second part of *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*—was published in 1980 by a scholar named Hu Quyuan (1910–2004), who had moved to Taiwan.

Through the 1980s, especially with China's adoption of policies of reform and opening up to the world, many students interested in Western philosophy went to Europe and America to study phenomenology, including students of Xiong Wei. By the 1990s, a second generation of phenomenological researchers had been well trained domestically and abroad and exerted a preliminary influence on the academic circle of philosophy in China. In 1994, they organized China's first phenomenological conference and founded the Chinese Society
for Phenomenology, a research group that meets annually and publishes its proceedings in the yearbook *Phenomenological and Philosophical Research in China*. The Hong Kong Society for Phenomenology was founded in 1996, with the aim of using Hong Kong’s special geographical position and local academic openness as a basis for intercultural and interdisciplinary research. In 2004, the first issue of the *Journal of Phenomenology and the Human Sciences* was published in Taipei; it became the main journal for phenomenologists in Hong Kong. In Taiwan, several institutions and university centers for phenomenology were established. A close relationship of exchange and cooperation is maintained between the phenomenological research circles in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

**The research status of phenomenology in China since 2000**

Recent phenomenological research in the Chinese cultural sphere is conducted and driven forward mainly by the third and fourth generation of Chinese phenomenologists, who work at various major universities and research institutes. Their academic interests and contributions to phenomenology are sketched in what follows.\(^1\)

In mainland China, at Beijing University, Jin Xiping studies Husserl, Heidegger, and ancient Greek philosophy. Zhang Xianglong not only studies phenomenological literature, but also brings the spirit of phenomenology to the study of Chinese traditional philosophy. Chen Jiaying and Wang Qingjie translated Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* into Chinese, which is a major achievement. Du Xiaozhen focuses on the translation and interpretation of French phenomenology. Wu Zengding studies both phenomenology and political philosophy. At Renmin University of China, Zhang Zhiwei focuses on the German philosophical tradition from Kant to Heidegger. At Fudan University (Shanghai), Zhang Qingxiong brings together themes in fields such as Marxism, analytical philosophy, and religious experience from the phenomenological perspective. Ding Yun studies political philosophy while focusing on phenomenology. At Sun Yat-sen University (Guangzhou), Ni Liangkang (who moved to Zhejiang University recently) works on introductory and advanced phenomenological investigations, and he also explores in depth the relationship between phenomenology and traditional Chinese and Indian culture. Zhu Gang and Fan Xianghong study both German and French phenomenology. At Tongji University, Sun Zhourxing has made great achievements in the study and translation of Heidegger and Nietzsche. Ke Xiaogang attempts to integrate phenomenology with traditional thought and culture.

At Huazhong University of Science and Technology (Wuhan), Deng Xiaomang works in phenomenology and German idealism. Zhang Tingguo concentrates on the study and translation of Husserlian phenomenology. At Zhejiang University, Pang Xuequan is introducing Hermann Schmitz’s new phenomenology, while Yang Dachun focuses on French phenomenology. At Xi’an Jiaotong University, Zhang Zailin pursues the grafting of phenomenology with cultural philosophy. At Lanzhou University, Chen Chunwen translates and reinterprets Heidegger’s phenomenology. At Hainan University, Zhang Zhiyang employs phenomenology to reflect on contemporary thought and to deconstruct traditional philosophy. At the Commercial Press, while promoting phenomenological publishing, Chen Xiaowen is engaged in the translation and study of Heidegger’s works.

In Taiwan, at National Chengchi University, Wang Wen-sheng concentrates on the exploration of Husserl’s and Heidegger’s phenomenology. Tsai Cheng-yun correlates phenomenology with post-modern thoughts. Luo Li-jun focuses on Husserlian phenomenology. Chang Ting-kuo, who suffered an untimely death, has left a concise and very rich corpus on phenomenology and hermeneutics. At National Sun Yat-sen University (Kaohsiung), Yu Chung-chi

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simultaneously works in the areas of phenomenology, social theory, and the theory of culture. At National Tsing Hua University (Hsinchu), Huang Wen-hong focuses on the relationship between Husserl's and Eugen Fink's phenomenology and Kitarō Nishida's philosophy. Wu Jun-ye's interests range from Husserl through Heidegger to Merleau-Ponty.

In Hong Kong, at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Cheung Chan-fai and Kwan Tze-wan conduct research on German phenomenology. Lau Kwok-ying focuses on French phenomenology. Wang Qingjie studies both phenomenology and Chinese traditional culture. Yao Zhihua works on phenomenology and Buddhism.

Most of the important phenomenological works have been translated into Chinese due to the personal practice, active participation, and elaborate organization of researchers working in phenomenology, including those scholars mentioned above. Translations of the complete works of some classic phenomenologists such as Husserl, Heidegger, Scheler, Merleau-Ponty, etc. are either in progress or being planned; such publications continue to be welcomed by students and researchers.

With the efforts of these scholars, phenomenology finds its spiritual community in China, which makes it possible to take root and blossom in Chinese culture. The phenomenology of Xinxing (nature of mind) is one such blooming flower. It has had a very long incubation period. Iso Kern and Ni Liangkang, who are equally at home working in phenomenology, Yogācāra (Vijñānavāda), and Confucianism, have had deep inquiries and probing debates on the connections and distinctions of key concepts in these three areas. Their theses, monographs, and articles have yielded the landmark achievement of the “phenomenology of Xin (mind)”, which is the predecessor to the phenomenology of Xinxing (nature of mind). In 2011 Ni Liangkang published the programmatic treatise *The Research of Area and Methodology for Phenomenology of Xinxing (nature of mind)* (Ni 2011), and from that point on the bud of the phenomenology of Xinxing (nature of mind) began to bloom. The 1st International Symposium of Phenomenology of Xinxing (nature of mind) was held in 2012. Iso Kern’s phenomenological collection of essays *The Phenomenon of Mind* was published in the same year. In 2014 Iso Kern’s monumental work, *The Most Important Thing in Life: Wang Yangming (1472-1529) and His Followers on the “Realization of Original Knowledge”* came out. Meanwhile articles on the phenomenology of Xinxing (nature of mind) started to appear in journals and periodicals, together with articles that focused on microscopic modes of the constitution of concepts and the detailed process of formulation of thoughts, all of which aimed analytically and critically at a dialogue and fusion between phenomenology, Yogācāra, and Confucianism. Research achievements and innovative theories based on these three philosophies but that do not belong singly to any one of them started to emerge. It will be possible to make great theoretical innovations in the phenomenology of Xinxing (nature of mind) in the near future. We have reason to believe that the flower of this kind of Chinese-style phenomenology will bear rich fruit.

The approach to inquiry and thought characteristic of the phenomenology of Xinxing (nature of mind) has provided a successful paradigm to establish a connection between phenomenology and all aspects of Chinese traditional culture. Following this path, we can construct or reconstruct a series of inter-disciplines which associate with traditional thought, such as traditional-Chinese-medicine phenomenology, Yi-ology phenomenology, Heaven-Dao phenomenology, calligraphy phenomenology, Poetry (Shi Jing) phenomenology, Chuci phenomenology, and so on. What needs to be stressed is that there is no strict logical correlation between these designations. However, they come about because there are already related theses in some of these inter-disciplines and overlapping concerns in other areas. We call attention to them here to emphasize the many possibilities of combining phenomenology with Chinese culture.
Husserl was first introduced to Japan by Nishida Kitaro (1870–1945) in a 1911 article criticizing psychologism, titled “On the Thesis of Pure Logic in the Theory of Knowledge” (Fujita 2018). Later, in an essay titled “Current Philosophy” (1916), Nishida presented phenomenology according to Ideas I. However, the Japanese reception of phenomenology was mediated, above all, by the direct participation of Japanese students in phenomenology courses in Germany, in particular those of Husserl, Heidegger, and Oskar Becker. It was these students (who were, incidentally, Nishida’s disciples) who contributed the most to the reception of phenomenology in the 1920s. For example, Yamauchi Tokuryû (1890–1982), who attended Husserl’s lectures in Freiburg in 1920, contributed to the first special issue of a Japanese journal devoted to “phenomenological research” and published an Introduction to Phenomenology (1929).

According to Kuki Shûzô (1888–1941), who was present at Husserl’s lectures in Freiburg and Heidegger’s in Marburg (1927–1928), and mentioned by the latter in “A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer”, Japanese philosophers “were brought from neo-Kantianism to phenomenology by Bergsonian philosophy” because Bergson and the phenomenologists share what he calls the “method of intuition”, which abolishes “the too clear distinction between the matter of knowledge and its form”. Kuki particularly brings closer to Bergsonian intuition “the idea of ‘intentionality’ in Husserl” and “the notion of ‘being in the world’ in Heidegger” in order to place them in opposition to the above neo-Kantian abstract distinction (Kuki 1981a, 259). In the 1920s and 1930s, in Europe as well as in Japan, philosophers sought to emphasize the idea of the “concrete” over and against the so-called “abstract”. This is the case in Tanabe Hajime’s (1885–1962) article “The New Turn in Phenomenology: Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Life” (1924), which is based on Heidegger’s lecture on “Ontology (The Hermeneutics of Facticity)” (1923). Published before Being and Time (1927), it is the first presentation of Heidegger in Japan, and probably one of the first in the world (let us also notice that this fast Japanese reception allowed Kuki to contribute to the French reception of phenomenology, by presenting the Heideggerian conception of temporality at the Pontigny Decade in 1928 and advising Sartre to read Being and Time) (Light 1987). Clarifying the hermeneutic turn of phenomenology, in this article Tanabe proposes a “phenomenology of the concrete life of spirit which does not have to be a phenomenology of a scholarly consciousness dealing with an abstracted field, but a phenomenology of the living and concrete consciousness, in other words of Dasein itself” (Tanabe 1963, 29).

This Heideggerian influence (Ôhashi 1989; Parkes 1996) is visible in Miki Kiyoshi’s (1897–1945) Studies of the Human Being in Pascal (1926) and Kuki’s “hermeneutics of ethnic being” (Kuki 1981b, 2004) in his Structure of Iki (1930), which explores an ethical and aesthetic ideal (Iki) born in Tokugawa Japan. The reception of phenomenology, and Heidegger’s in particular, was not simply passive, but also critical and innovative. The main criticism against Heidegger was that he tended to underestimate the question of spatiality (reduced to the ecstatic temporality). For Watsuji Tetsuro (1889–1960), Heidegger underestimates spatiality because he dismisses “the individual-social double structure” (Watsuji 2007, 4) of the human being, who is always already in a spatial milieu, in relationship both with land and society. For Kuki, since Heidegger does not sufficiently take into account the “spatiality and common-being” of the coexisting Dasein who encounters by chance another Dasein, “the ontological meaning of contingency has been dismissed from his horizon” and the contingent character of thrownness has been missed (Kuki 1981c, 270). These criticisms allowed both Kuki and Watsuji to develop their own thoughts in the 1930s: a philosophy of contingency, in particular a phenomenology of encounter, for Kuki.
In conclusion, the pre-war Japanese reception of phenomenology was fertile and quite rapid. Phenomenological research in philosophy departments continued to develop in the post-war period until the present day, with phenomenology also inspiring a number of philosophers to develop their own reflections. Tanabe, for example, continued to confront Heidegger in “Ontology of Life or Dialectic of Death?” (1958) (translated as Tanabe 2013).

South Korea 
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Beginning of phenomenological studies in Korea (1920s–1945)
The history of phenomenological studies in Korea began in the Japanese colonial era in the 1920s, especially in the philosophy department of Keijō Imperial University in Seoul. In this waking phase of studies on Western philosophies in Korea, German philosophies including phenomenology and German idealism attracted philosophical interest, which mirrored the situation of Japan’s close relationship with Germany. Kuk-sok Kwon’s “The Phenomenological Theory of Truth – A Consideration of Husserl’s Logical Investigations”, published in 1929, was the first academic paper on phenomenology written by a Korean.

In the 1930s, Heideggerian philosophy was studied more actively than Husserlian, which was a consequence of the philosophical situation in Germany and Japan. This is testified to by the following papers: Chong-hong Pak’s “On Care in Heidegger” [in Japanese] (1932) and “On Horizon in Heidegger” [in Japanese] (1935); Ki-rak Ha’s “On Spatiality and Temporality in Heidegger” (1940).

Incubation period of phenomenology in South Korea (1945–1960s)
Suffering national division and the Korean War (1950–1953) after liberation from Japanese occupation in 1945, the philosophical interests of Korean intellectuals, severely affected by such tragic and desperate situations, focused on existential philosophy or German idealism. In this period of the 1940s and 1950s, however, some philosophers such as Chong-hong Pak and Hyong-gon Ko at Seoul National University paid attention not only to Heideggerian but also to Husserlian phenomenology. These original thinkers, always taking into account the Korean and Asian philosophical traditions, have been counted as good examples for coming generations of Korean phenomenologists to do phenomenology in their own historical situation, instead of just doing philological studies on the phenomenological literature.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Kah-kyung Cho, after receiving his PhD in 1957 in Germany, began to lecture at Seoul National University on existential philosophy and phenomenology. Through his lectures and above all through his celebrated book Existential Philosophy [in Korean], he has played a decisive role in the history of the reception of existential philosophy and phenomenology in Korea since the 1960s. Having directly experienced the so-called Husserl renaissance in the mid-1950s in Germany, there were various lectures and seminars based on Husserl’s texts which laid the foundation for the following breakthrough of phenomenology in Korea by new generations of scholars.
Breakthrough of phenomenology in South Korea by academic societies (1970s)

It was in the late 1970s that the phenomenology, introduced in Korea during the Japanese occupation in the early 20th century and continually studied after liberation in 1945, brought about a new era of phenomenological research in South Korea. In 1976, the second generation of phenomenologists in South Korea launched the subcommittee for phenomenological research under the Korean Philosophical Association, which was the first official organization of Korean phenomenologists. While reading *Idea of Phenomenology* of Edmund Husserl, many scholars gathered to discuss phenomenological philosophy, which resulted in renaming the organization in 1978 as the Korean Society for Phenomenology (KSP) (Cho and Lee 1997). Since then, this society has played a decisive role in the development of phenomenology in South Korea for over 40 years. Also, due to the quantitative and qualitative growth of the KSP, the Korean Heidegger Society and the Korea Society for Hermeneutics became independent in 1992 and 1994 respectively (Lee 2018).

The KSP first published the Journal *Phenomenological Studies* in 1983, whose title was changed to *Research in Philosophy and Phenomenology* in 1990. The KSP has published 81 issues of its journal so far. The Korean Heidegger Society (KHS) first published the Journal *Heidegger Studies* in 1995, whose title was changed to *Ontology Studies* in 2010. The KHS has published 37 issues to 2015. The Korean Society for Hermeneutics (KHS) first published the journal *Studies for Hermeneutics* in 1994, which published 36 issues until 2015. In 2015, *Ontology Studies* and *Studies for Hermeneutics* were integrated into the journal *Researches in Contemporary European Philosophy*, which is published four times a year (Park 2013).

Since its inception in 1978, the KSP, with over 200 members, has regularly held over 300 academic symposiums including monthly seminars and international conferences. The KHS, with about 100 members, has held 64 conferences so far. The KHS, with over 70 members, has held 128 conferences so far.

Development and perspective of phenomenological studies in South Korea (1980s to date)

Reflecting the zeitgeist of the 1980s in South Korean society, often characterized as the age of democratization, social and political philosophy attracted the interest of the philosophical world in Korea. This situation amounted to a temporary decrease in the young generation of phenomenologists. In spite of this, phenomenological research in Korea was preparing for a new leap forward in the 1990s.

Since the 1990s, phenomenology in South Korea has experienced unprecedented progress, both quantitatively and qualitatively. While less than ten PhD dissertations related to phenomenology at universities in Korea or overseas were written by Korean scholars in the 1980s, approximately more than 70 young scholars have written or are writing dissertations regarding phenomenology at Korean or foreign universities since 1990s.

Korean phenomenologists have also made efforts to translate classic literature of phenomenology into Korean. To take Husserl and Heidegger for example, Husserliana I, II, III, IV, VI, IX, X, XI, XVI, XVII, XVIII, and XIX and Heidegger’s *Gesamtausgabe* 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 1, 6.2, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 21, 24, 26, 27, 29/30, 39, 40, 42, 45, 48, 51, 52, 53, 60, 61, 63, 64, and 65 have been translated into Korean.

Husserl’s phenomenology is actively studied in Korea not only by philosophers but also by scholars in other humanities and social sciences such as political science, sociology, cognitive sciences, anthropology, and qualitative studies, etc. In this respect, interdisciplinary researches of
phenomenology and other disciplines are actively pursued. For example, the ICAP (International Center for Applied Phenomenology), established in 2017 by Nam-in Lee, is making efforts to establish applied phenomenology as a form of interdisciplinary research based on the dialogue between phenomenological philosophy and various disciplines.

Heidegger’s philosophy appeals to Korean phenomenologists at least for two reasons. First, his critique of modernity becomes more and more meaningful in South Korea, insofar as its society and citizens are rapidly modernizing, with many problems that Europe has already encountered. Second, Heidegger’s interest in East Asian thinking and his approach to it have inspired many Korean phenomenologists to make comparative studies of his philosophy and East Asian thinking, including Korean traditional philosophy.

Furthermore, not only Husserl or Heidegger but also the philosophies of Brentano, Scheler, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur, Schutz, Gurvitch, Levinas, Henry, Derrida, and so on are actively studied by young phenomenologists who are attempting to search for a philosophical reflection on the reality of South Korea. These younger scholars, moreover, do not limit their inquiries to phenomenology alone, but also engage in research on a wide variety of contemporary movements such as hermeneutics, the philosophy of life, critical theory, and postmodernism, as well as traditional Western thought and East Asian philosophy.

To enhance international cooperation, the KSP agreed with the American Phenomenological Society to hold academic conferences every two years. The first academic conference was held in Seoul in 2002 and the second in Seattle in 2004. This conference was succeeded by the conference of PEACE (Phenomenology in East Asia CirclE), which has been held biannually eight times since 2004 in Beijing, Hong Kong, Tokyo, and Seoul. Recently, the young phenomenologists of Korea have been actively participating in the conferences of the EANP (East Asian Network for Phenomenology) which has been held annually since 2016 in China, Japan, Taiwan, and Korea.

Notes

1 There is a large number of third and fourth generation of researchers who have also made great achievements and contributions. Due to limited space, however, we can only briefly indicate the research areas of the executive members of the Chinese Society for Phenomenology.

2 This can be seen in the title of a book by Ni Liangkang, The Order of the Mind: the Possibility of the Research of Phenomenology of Mind (Ni 2010).

3 Shisô [Thought]. January 1927.

References


