

Ethics of Tension:  
A Buddhist-Postmodern Ethical Paradigm  
張力的倫理學：  
一個佛教與後現代的倫理典範

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**Keywords:** Buddhist ethics, postmodern ethics, Huayan Buddhism, Jacques Derrida, deconstruction, compassion, wisdom

**關鍵詞：**佛教倫理、後現代倫理、華嚴佛教、雅克·德希達、解構、慈悲、智慧

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## Abstract

This essay considers an ethical paradigm that can be drawn from Buddhist and postmodern philosophy. Ethics is a practical branch of philosophy and an ethical paradigm is closely connected to the fundamental structure and tenets of a philosophical system. That ethics is a practical branch of philosophy also indicates that meaning and value of a certain ethical paradigm is directly related to the environments in which the paradigm is understood and practiced. In considering an ethical paradigm based on Buddhist and postmodern philosophy, and doing so in the context of the 21st century in which we live, we will examine a paradigm I call an "ethics of tension." I will first outline the concept, and discuss how this paradigm can be a form of ethics that can be envisioned in Buddhist and postmodern philosophy. Finally, I will consider the meaning of ethics and the ethical that the ethics of tension would like to underline as an ethical discourse and for an ethical life.

## 摘要

本文思考一個可擷取自佛教和後現代哲學的倫理典範。倫理學是哲學中一個具實用性的分支，而倫理典範與哲學系統的根本結構和理念密切相關。倫理學是哲學中一個具實用性分支的事實也顯示某一特定倫理典範的意義和價值是與該典範被理解和實現的環境直接相關的。為思考一個以佛教和後現代哲學為基礎的倫理典範，並在吾人所生活的二十一世紀的脈絡中進行如此思考，本文將檢視一個稱為「張力倫理學」的典範。作者首先概述此概念，接著討論何以該典範可做為一種，可在佛教和後現代哲學中被設想的，倫理學的一種型式。最後，作者將思考倫理學的意義，以及張力倫理學想要強調的，合乎道德論述的倫理，以及張力倫理學為了合乎道德的生活所要強調的倫理。

## 1. Ethics and Tension

In his book *Step Back: Ethics and Politics after Deconstruction*, David Wood characterizes postmodern forms of ethics as a "step back." Wood writes, "The step back marks a certain shape of philosophical practice, one that does not just resign itself to, but affirms the necessity of, ambiguity, incompleteness, repetition, negotiation, and contingency."<sup>1</sup> What Wood identifies as the characteristics of ethics after deconstruction stands opposed to the general description of normative ethics. Normative ethics becomes possible through a clear-cut judgment between binary opposites, whereas Wood's statement is characterized by a refusal to provide such a definitive mode in our ethical imagination.

Instead of offering a ready-made recipe to answer ethical questions, Wood suggests ethics as a state of suspension. He explains this suspension by using John Keats' (1795-1821) famous expression "negative capability," which Keats defines as a state in which "man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."<sup>2</sup>

What kind of ethics do we envision in this context? And why do we need to envision ethics in a form radically challenging the existing ethics? I would like to answer these questions by proposing an "ethics of tension" as an ethical paradigm that we can draw for the postmodern world and from Buddhist and postmodern philosophies.

Ethics and tension is an odd couple. In whatever way one defines ethics, tension has been understood as an element that needs to be removed in order for

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<sup>1</sup> David Wood, *The Step Back: Ethics and Politics after Deconstruction* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

ethics to function properly. A successful practice of ethics, in fact, would be evaluated through a successful resolution of tension. Against such a trend, we propose here that tension is not a factor that needs to be eliminated in the discourse and practice of ethics, but instead ethics is inevitably involved with the awareness of tension, and further, that ethical life demands one's capacity for living with tension. What are the conditions for tension to exist? A monologue cannot have tension. In order for tension to exist, at least two parties need to be involved. Further, in order for tension to have an impact, the differences in the position and views of the parties involved need to be accepted, either explicitly or implicitly.

In the history of philosophy, this tension appears in a more structured format as a tension between two poles of binary opposites. A generic form of acknowledging the two poles out of which the tension arises has various names: the transcendental and the empirical, the noumenal and the phenomenal, universality and particularities, the subject and the object, the one and the many, the ontological and the ontic, and the truth and its dissemination. In Buddhist tradition as well, one finds examples in the pair concepts such as: the Buddha and sentient beings, the mind and the world, the one and the many, sudden enlightenment and gradual practice, to name a few. Considering the nature of each pole, we can identify them with the centripetal and centrifugal forces, respectively. The centripetal force, the force heading toward the center, denotes the attempt to identify a unified and coherent logic of the world and an entity. The centrifugal force, on the other hand, is the force fleeing away from the center, and thus refers to the inevitable disseminating, dispersing, and diffusing nature of existence. The two tendencies we identified here have been a regular theme of philosophical discourse. However, that these two forms exist in a state of tension, mutually reinforcing, has not always been recognized, and when it was recognized, the tension was there only to be removed, which becomes the *raison d'être* of the tension. What would it mean to understand the centripetal and centrifugal forces as in a relationship of tension with no final resolution on the

horizon? What would be the nature of ethics, if we conceptualize ethics based on the tension between these two forces?

As have ethics and tension, Buddhism and ethics have been considered another odd couple. Since Buddhism's introduction to American academia, Buddhism's capacity to offer a viable form of ethics has been put into question.<sup>3</sup> Some even express doubts that Buddhism can offer any ethics and have proposed that in order for Buddhism to survive in the West, it needs to provide a better blueprint for an ethical paradigm. In contrast, in the recent Buddhist scholarship on Buddhism and cognitive psychology, scholars claimed that one of the contributions Buddhism can make to this comparative study is the ethical dimension. That is, whereas science cannot offer any ethics, Buddhism can offer an ethical meaning of human beings' cognitive activities.<sup>4</sup> What this suggests is

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3 For example, in the first issue of *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, James Whitehill wrote: "Buddhism must begin to demonstrate a far clearer *moral form* and a more sophisticated, appropriate *ethical strategy* than can be found among its contemporary Western interpreters and representatives, if it is to flourish in the West" (emphasis original). See James Whitehill, "Buddhist Ethics in Western Context: The 'Virtues' Approach," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 1 (1994), p. 2. Reprinted as "Buddhism and the Virtues," in Damien Keown (ed.), *Contemporary Buddhist Ethics* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), p. 17.

Several years later, Daniel Palmer expressed a similar position on the meaning of Buddhist ethics, especially in the context of Zen Buddhism: "If Buddhists cannot develop dialogical responses to these concerns [for social issues], then Buddhism in all likelihood will remain on the periphery of Western cultural practices, representing only an *exotic curiosity* and not a vital resource" (emphasis mine). See Daniel Palmer, "Masao Abe, Zen Buddhism, and Social Ethics," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 4 (1997), pp. 133-134.

4 Buddhism and science is one of the most recent developments in Buddhist studies. Earlier publications like *Zen and the Brain: Toward an Understanding of Meditation and Consciousness* by James H. Austin (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1999) demonstrates scientific evidence of Zen meditation. *Buddhism and Science: Breaking New Ground* edited by B. Alan Wallace (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) is one of the first to explore the meeting place of Buddhism and science. Contributors to this volume more often than not try to see the compatibility of the two, while the clear objective of this interdisciplinary study is yet to be declared. In *Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), a more recent publication by Alan Wallace, the author states, "A state of calm presence, emotional equilibrium, and clear intelligence are all characteristics of such genuine happiness, which naturally expresses itself in a harmonious, altruistic way of life." (p. 3) At the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in 2010, there was a panel on "Cognitive-Scientific Studies of Buddhist Thought and Practice: Philosophical Interrogations of the Issues," (Nov. 6, 2012) and panelists proposed that whereas cognitive psychology cannot say much about ethics, Buddhism can offer ethical implications of psychological issues, suggesting that ethics will be one of major contributions of Buddhism to the interdisciplinary study of Buddhism and science.

that the field of Buddhist ethics is yet to be defined. If we ask why that has been the case, we would find that the distance between the Buddhist worldview and that which is the basis of modernist ethical paradigm is sure to be responsible for the doubts about Buddhism's possibility to offer ethics. What kind of ethics, then, does Buddhism propose? We will explore these questions by examining two different philosophical traditions, that is, Huayan 華嚴 Buddhism in East Asian Buddhist tradition and Jacques Derrida's deconstruction in the 20th century continental philosophy.

## 2. Noumenon, Phenomena, Wisdom and Compassion

In Huayan Buddhism, the space for this tension appears in the relationship between the noumenon (*li* 理, the principle) and phenomena (*shi* 事, particulars), the two poles that constitute the Huayan fourfold worldview. Huayan Buddhism began in China during the 7<sup>th</sup> century and had been known as one of the culminations of Chinese Buddhist thoughts. One of the noticeable aspects of Huayan philosophy is its efforts to explain how each and every phenomenon in the world is connected to the fundamental Buddhist doctrines of dependent co-arising. From the Buddhist perspective, no being exists by its own independent essence, but exists through multi-layered causation. According to this understanding, the individuality of a being is an illusion in an ultimate sense. However, Buddhism also does not negate the individual existence on the phenomenal level. The nonduality of existence and the non-existence of individuality are at the core of Mahāyāna Buddhism (大乘佛教). Huayan Buddhism interprets this structure of nonduality through the nonduality of principle or total reality (*li* 理) and a particular event or individual reality (*shi* 事) in the paradigm known as the fourfold worldview (*sifajie* 四法界). The fourfold worldview does not propose the existence of four different worlds; it is a

hermeneutical device to explain the reality by demonstrating the different layers of existence.

The fourfold worldview which was first conceptualized by Du Shun (杜順, 557-640), and later systematized by Chengguan (澄觀, 738-840), neatly theorizes the Huayan version of the theory of dependent co-arising.<sup>5</sup> Put it in a simple form, the fourfold worldview consists of: the reality realm of phenomena (*shifajie* 事法界); the reality realm of noumenon (*lifajie* 理法界); the reality realm of the non-interference between noumenon and phenomena (*lishi wuai fajie* 理事無礙法界), and the reality realm of the non-interference among phenomena (*shishi wuai fajie* 事事無礙法界). The fourfold worldview does not claim that there exist four different realms of reality; it is a hermeneutical device to explain the nature and structure of existence by illuminating the relationship between noumenon and phenomena.

The "realm of phenomena" designates the world of concrete reality in which diverse particularities co-exist. The "realm of noumenon," the second layer of the vision, conceptualizes an overarching principle which encompasses the diversity in the phenomenal world; at the third level, since each and every phenomenon in the world commonly shares the noumenon, the relationship between the noumenon and phenomena is understood as non-interfering. As an extension of the third level, all the particular phenomena in the world, by virtue of their ontological reality, which is emptiness, are understood as existing without obstructing one another. This fourth level of "the realm of non-interference among phenomena" (or "mutually non-interfering phenomena") has been promoted as the culmination of Huayan Buddhist philosophy, the hallmark with which Huayan Buddhism claims the superiority of Huayan thought over other

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5 In the discussion of Huayan Buddhism, I translate *li* as noumenon and *shi* as phenomenon/phenomena following the translation of Thomas Cleary and Francis Cook. Noumenon and phenomena in this case have no relevance to Kantian philosophy. I will also occasionally use principle for *li* and particularities for *shi*.

Buddhist schools, identifying itself as the "complete teaching" or "perfect teaching" (*yuanjiao* 圓教).

Francis H. Cook claims that one of the major achievements of Huayan Buddhism lies in the fact that phenomenal diversity regained respectability in Huayan teaching, after it had been marginalized in the Mahāyāna Buddhist schools preceding Huayan Buddhism. Cook states: "First of all, it is a universe in which phenomena have been not only restored to a measure of respectability, but indeed, have become important, valuable, and lovely. Second, to accept such a worldview would entail a radical overhauling of the understanding of traditional Buddhist concepts such as emptiness and dependent origination."<sup>6</sup> If Huayan Buddhism shares with Mādhyamika Buddhism its understanding of noumenon as the Buddhist concept of emptiness, Huayan Buddhism diverges from Mādhyamika Buddhism in that it pays close attention to phenomenal realities as much as noumenal reality. In order to explain the relationship between phenomena and noumenon, Huayan Buddhism introduces a series of hermeneutic tools such as "mutual identity" (*xiangji* 相即) and "mutual containment" (*xiangru* 相入; also translated as "mutual pervasion," "mutual penetration," or "mutual interpenetration"). The ideas of mutual identity and mutual containment are also explained through the concepts of "simultaneous arising" (*tongshi dunqi* 同時頓起) and "simultaneous containment" (*tongshi hushe* 同時互攝), respectively.

Fazang (法藏, 643-712), a major thinker who introduced the Huayan hermeneutical devices, expounds on the issue in detail in his *Treatise on the Five Teachings* (*Wujiao zhang* 五教章). In chapter ten, Fazang explains the identity of an entity in the phenomenal world:

In the perfect causation of the one vehicle of Samanthabhadra [Huayan Buddhism], the inexhaustible dependent co-arising with the complete

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<sup>6</sup> Francis H. Cook, "Fa-tsang's Treatise on the Five Doctrines: An Annotated Translation," Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Wisconsin, 1970), p. 2.

activities of intersubjectivity is the stage of ultimate wisdom. The concepts of emptiness and existence make mutual identity possible; the concepts of function and non-function make mutual interfusion possible. The concepts of reliance and non-reliance on origination [dependent co-arising] make the same and different bodies possible. Based on these ideas, it is possible to put the entire world into a follicle of a hair.<sup>7</sup>

The idea that a follicle of a hair contains the entire world aptly expresses the Huayan vision of the identity of an entity. To explain this seeming nonsensical concept, let us examine Fazang's explanation through the example of the numeric system one through ten. In understanding the numbers one through ten (with an assumption of one through ten as an entire numeric system), one tends to think that one is a part and ten is its whole. One is a single existence, whereas ten encompasses all the numbers from one to ten. Huayan Buddhism refreshes this epistemological error, stating that for the number one to have its meaning, all other numbers up to the number ten are needed. Without the numbers two through ten, the number one cannot function as the number one. Hence, the number one is the same body (*tongti* 同體) as all other numbers in one through ten, and at the same time, the number one is a different body (*yiti* 異體) from other numbers (two, three, ..., ten) for it to signify the number one and not the numbers two, three, or ten. This is the way that an identity in the phenomenal world is constructed through "mutual penetration" and "mutual identity." In the number one, all the numbers are contained.

This relationship is also explained by Fazang with the co-existence of emptiness and existence. Number one exists separately from the other nine numbers, so it has existence; but number one, as explained so far, becomes number one only when there are the other nine numbers; hence, its identity is

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<sup>7</sup> Fazang, *Wujiao zhang*, T., Vol. 45, No. 1866, p. 703a; my translation here is somewhat different from that of Cook. For Cook's translation, see Cook, "Fa-tsang's Treatise on the Five Doctrines," p. 457.

empty. Because an entity contains the nature of both existence and emptiness, or identity and non-identity, conflicts cannot occur either between noumenon and phenomena, or among phenomena.

One would not have much of a problem conceptualizing that among the ten numbers that make up the numeric system one to ten, there would be no conflict. However, once one expands the scope of "phenomena" beyond insentient beings to the world of sentient beings, the situation becomes rather complex. The four layers of the fourfold worldview of Huayan Buddhism have too often been cited without critical evaluations of what is involved in this vision. Seemingly simple on its surface, a close look at the paradigm evokes questions that do not seem clearly articulated by the major thinkers of Huayan Buddhism during its inceptive period. One of the most problematic is the idea that in the ultimate sense, no conflict exists in the phenomenal world, as indicated in the fourth layer of the fourfold worldview. In reality, one knows too well that the world is full of conflicts. How do we understand the Huayan claim of harmony among phenomena? In response to this question, one can argue that the fourfold worldview of Huayan Buddhism projects the world as perceived by those who have attained enlightenment, not by the sentient beings. In fact, Huayan Buddhism states that the fourth level is the world that the Buddha perceives when he is deep in oceanic samādhi. If this argument justifies the Huayan vision of the world without conflicts, Huayan Buddhism cannot claim to be different from other Buddhist schools that Huayan Buddhism criticized as exclusively focusing on the realm of noumenon. If Huayan Buddhism is to propose the worldview that is based on the phenomenal world, without separating it from the noumenon, it needs to deal with the problems that dominate the phenomenal world which is also the world of the sentient beings. What were Huayanists aiming at with the idea of the non-obstructed phenomenal world?

In fact, in his essay "Mirror of the Mysteries of the Realm of Reality in Huayan Buddhism" (*Huayan fajie xuanjing* 華嚴法界玄鏡), Chengguan, the

alleged Fourth Patriarch of the school, explicitly acknowledges the existence of conflicts in the phenomenal world. Chengguan states, "Phenomena basically obstruct each other, being different in size and so forth; noumenon basically includes everything, like space, without obstruction; merging phenomena by noumenon, the totality of phenomena is like noumenon—even a mote of dust or a hair has the capacity of including the totality."<sup>8</sup> If the conflicts in the phenomenal world are to be admitted, as Chengguan does in this passage, how should we interpret the hallmark statement of Huayan Buddhism, which postulates a world in which particularities in the phenomenal realm coexist without conflict? Different interpretations on the relationship between noumenon and phenomenon in Huayan Buddhism have been proposed to solve this seeming problem in Huayan philosophy. In the context of our discussion, I would like to propose the concept of the "tension" we outlined earlier as a way to understand the relationship between the noumenon and phenomenon in the Huayan fourfold worldview.<sup>9</sup> In doing so, we can also introduce the two most important concepts

8 Chengguan, *Huayan fajie xuanjing*, T., Vol. 45, No. 1883, p. 672c; English translation by Thomas Cleary, "Mirror of the Mysteries of the Universe of the Hua-yen," in *Entry into the Inconceivable: An Introduction to Hua-yen Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983), p. 74.

9 One way of interpreting the problem of "non-existence of conflict" claim in light of the existence of conflicts in the real world to consider this seeming gap as a logical flaw in Huayan Buddhism. Some scholars of Huayan Buddhism claim that, despite the Huayan promotion of the fourth level of "mutually non-interfering phenomena" as its ultimate teaching, Huayan patriarchs were actually more interested in the third level of mutual inter-penetration between the noumenon and phenomena, and thus contradicted the basic promise of the school's doctrine. This contradiction has been understood as "hermeneutic problem" within Huayan Buddhist philosophy. See Peter N. Gregory, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), Chapter 3, pp. 93-114..

The claim that Huayan vision is an endorsement of the noumenal world of harmony at the expense of phenomenal diversity represents the dominant interpretation of the *Huayan jing*, especially of the chapter, "Entering into the Realm of Reality." Allegedly one of the most important chapters in this Sūtra, in this chapter, the truth-search Sudhana makes a journey through the fifty-three dharma teachers. At the end of his journey, Maitreya puts him in samādhi at the tower of Vairocana, the Buddha of Light, in which Sudhana experiences that all the diversities in the phenomenal world exist in harmony in the ultimate realm of reality. This interpretation concurs with the idea that Huayan Buddhism promotes the ultimate harmony represented by the noumenal world. The diversity of the phenomena is acknowledged only to be negated for the benefit of all-encompassing noumenon.

I propose a different reading of the Huayan fourfold paradigm and the "Entering into the Realm of Reality" chapter of the *Huayan jing*, based on the four aspects: first, a consideration of the evolution of theory of the fourfold worldview from Du Shun to Chengguan; second, Fazang's

in Buddhist philosophy in general and Buddhist ethics in particular: wisdom (*zhìhuì* 智慧) and compassion (*cíbēi* 慈悲).

In the essay mentioned above, Chengguan writes, "Contemplating phenomena involves compassion [in addition to wisdom] whereas contemplation of noumenon is [related to] wisdom."<sup>10</sup> Chengguan does not elaborate on the meaning of this insightful passage; after this passage he resumes his discussion, emphasizing the importance of noumenon in understanding phenomena. However, this short passage offers a clue for us to reconsider the Huayan position as to the relationship between noumenon and phenomena. Even though Huayan patriarchs take pains to expound the nature of noumenon and its importance in understanding the phenomenal diversity, in the ultimate sense, phenomena cannot fully understood if approached with the quality required to understand noumenon. Phenomena require an additional quality, which Chengguan finds in the Buddhist concept of compassion.

From Gautama Śiddhartha the Buddha 釋迦牟尼 to the Dalai Lama 達賴喇嘛 in our time, compassion has been emphasized as a major concept in the Buddha's teaching. Simple as it might sound, the logic of how compassion functions in Buddhism has yet to be fully investigated. Compassion is the mind that cannot bear the suffering of others. But what is the ground of this refusal to ignore the suffering of others? What does the Buddhist concept of compassion actually entail? Is it sympathy, emotion, or moral capacity? Is compassion obligation or is compassion a natural overflow of an enlightened individual?

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vindication of the signification of phenomena in the Huayan paradigm; third, the implication of the journey of Sudhana in the "Entering into the Realm of Reality" chapter of the *Huayan jing*; and forth, the function of wisdom and compassion in respect to noumenal and phenomenal realities. For a detailed discussion of these four issues, see Jin Y. Park, *Buddhism and Postmodernity: Zen, Huayan, and the Possibility of Buddhist Postmodern Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), Chapter 8.

10 Chengguan, *Huayan fajie xuanjing*, T., Vol. 45, No. 1883, p. 676b. Thomas Cleary, "Mirror of the Mysteries of the Universe of the Hua-yen," in *Entry into the Inconceivable: An Introduction to Hua-yen Buddhism*, p. 91.

Compassion, in the way Buddhism employs the term, cannot be a mere emotional response to a situation. In a strict sense, compassion is neither just virtue, or an emotional quality, or an intuitive response to a given situation, even though it requires all of these qualities for one to exercise compassion. Nor can compassion be practiced exclusively with a sense of obligation. Instead, compassion is another expression of ultimate irony or even aporia—as Derrida calls to our attention—of human existence and experience.

Compassion comes to pass when an individual realizes the ultimate absurdity of existence itself. Absurdity, in this case, does not need to be understood in a negative way. To use the Huayan Buddhist terminology, compassion arises when one realizes the inexhaustibility of the context of each incident as one considers the dependently arising nature of being. The existence of each entity is always in the net of excess that defies the existing referential system of the subject. This excess is called, in Huayan Buddhism, the inexhaustibility of the realm of reality. This inexhaustibility of context is the reality of each entity in the phenomenal world, like each jewel in Indra's net. To understand noumenon requires only wisdom, for it involves the hermeneutical realm of the inexhaustibility as a condition of being; but to understand phenomena requires both wisdom and compassion, for it involves the existential reality of the subject.

An ethics of tensions is a call for seeing the existence and the world from a broader perspective, from its totality, despite the fact that being an unenlightened sentient being, one's scope of vision is always limited. The noumenal level is the vision with which one sees one's existence through its totality, whereas at the phenomenal level one is constantly returning to individual existence. Buddhism teaches that without being aware of the totality, which tells us that being exists through causes and conditions and not through an independent essence of an individual, the fragmentary existence of an individual cannot be overcome. The importance of this vision lies not so much in understanding metaphysical

implications of human existence as in dealing with suffering in one's daily life. When one insists in remaining in the self-created fragmentary self-sufficiency, one inevitably creates suffering to oneself, to a community, or to others.

### 3. Hospitality, Aporia, and the Ethical

Jacques Derrida's discussion of ethics provides another instance in which we are invited to utilize the idea of tension as an ethical mode. In fact, the tension between the universal (or the unconditional) and the particular (or the conditiona) has become a theme of Derrida's discussion of ethics and justice in his later works. In discussing ethics, Derrida pays special attention to the concept of "hospitality." Derrida even declares, "*ethics is hospitality*"<sup>11</sup> (emphasis original). He reiterates, "Ethics is so thoroughly coextensive with the experience of hospitality."<sup>12</sup> The limits and perversion of our practice of hospitality are, from Derrida's perspective, the very limits of ethics that we practice.

Why is ethics hospitality? Because ethics, like hospitality, begins with one's relationship with others; ethics, like hospitality, begins with one's desire to have a favorable, good, and right relationship with others; and like hospitality, ethics, in one's attempt to be fair, right, and good, always gets caught in the double-bind of the impossibility of making decisions without appropriation. To mark the instability of the existing ethics and our decision making is itself deconstructive ethics. It is thus the interruption and intervention in our ethical mode of thinking. Appropriation is an inevitable aspect of the phenomenal world; the appropriation makes conflicts inevitable at the phenomenal level, as Chengguan noted.

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11 Jacques Derrida, *Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort!* (Paris: Éditions Galelée, 1997), p. 42; English translation by Mark Dooley and Michael Hughs, "On Cosmopolitanism," in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. by Mark Dooley and Michael Hughs (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 17.

12 Jacques Derrida, *Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort!*, p. 42; "On Cosmopolitanism," in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, p. 17.

Unconditional hospitality, like the absolute equality in the noumenal world of Huayan Buddhism, does not have conditions, but they exist only through the presentation at the phenomenal level, which has conditions. Unconditional hospitality is the ground of conditional hospitality, even though it cannot be represented as it is at the phenomenal level. So is wisdom in Buddhism. The absolute equality of beings represented by Buddhist wisdom cannot be fully realized at the phenomenal level, but it is the ground for compassionate actions in the phenomenal world.

Hospitality is a theme that represents one of the pressing issues in our society, as the world becomes more connected and individuals' mobility rapidly increases. With the world community getting closer every day, and technology in cyberspace and transportation bringing us even closer every moment, we begin to ask: To whom should we open "our" territory and how should we open it? What limitations should we impose on the foreigners who will be on "our" territory? Is "unconditional" opening an option at all? What is at stake in Derrida's discussion of hospitality is the aporia that the concept of hospitality carries with it. Hospitality means one's opening of one's space to guests, foreigners, and visitors wholeheartedly and without condition; hence, conceptually, hospitality is pure and unconditional. Hospitality when it takes a concrete form, however, cannot but be limited by reality. No one can just open his home unconditionally even when he is welcoming his guests with his whole heart. This is not because one receives guests with an unwelcoming mind, but because, regardless of how much one opens one's door to be truthful to hospitality, appropriation is inevitable in the actualization of hospitality.

As Derrida notes, "This concept of pure hospitality can have no legal or political status. No state can write it into its laws."<sup>13</sup> The point, however, is not that unconditional hospitality cannot be performed in reality, but that one cannot

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13 Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 129.

simply dismiss it because of its impracticality and its ineffability and choose conditional hospitality. Derrida writes, "No state can write it into its law. But without at least the thought of this pure and unconditional hospitality, of hospitality itself, we would have no concept of hospitality in general and would not even be able to determine any rules for conditional hospitality."<sup>14</sup>

A similar question can be asked about the Huayan view on the noumenal and the phenomenal. The noumenal in the Huayan fourfold worldview is the unconditional, and cannot be inscribed in reality as it is, because of the very fact that it is unconditional; at the same time, it cannot be dissociated from the phenomenal reality, since noumenon does not exist by itself. If we understand the noumenal in this manner, we begin to understand Chengguan's insightful statement that the noumenal is to be approached with wisdom and the phenomenal requires both wisdom and compassion.

The noumenon, or the unconditional, in Buddhism and deconstruction represents that which always exceeds the frame of reference created by the human mind. The excess itself is the nature of the existence of beings, and Fazang calls it the inexhaustibility (*chongchong wujin* 重重無盡) of the realm of reality. By the same token, Derrida explains this excessiveness in the structure of the world through the concept of the inexhaustibility of the context:

There is a context but one cannot analyze it exhaustively; the context is open because "it comes," because there is something to come. We have to accept the concept of a non-saturable context, and take into account both the context itself and its open structure, its non-closure, if we are to make decisions and engage in a wager—or give as a pledge—without

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14 Ibid., p. 129.

knowing, without being sure that it will pay off, that it will be a winner, etc.<sup>15</sup>

When one is aware that existence is in fact possible through the involvements of innumerable factors, ethics becomes a humble endeavor to remind us of the limitations of human beings. If the metaphysical concept of ethics grounds itself in the belief of human beings' capacity as rational beings who are capable of distinguishing between right and wrong or good and bad, the ethical paradigm proposed by Derrida's deconstruction and Huayan Buddhism begins with the acceptance that such distinctions are possible only after appropriation and thus the suppression of the unfavored side in the process of decision-making.

Thinking about ethics in the context of Buddhism and Derridean deconstruction enables us to consider the ethical without resorting to the metaphysical grounding, which traditionally functioned as a foundation for ethical value judgments. It also demonstrates that ethics is not just about making distinctions, and that ethics is also possible by realizing the impossibility of making the final decision. The idea of indecidability, which Derrida sees at the core of a being and a being's relationship with the world, rejects any decision-making as a final closure.

One might consider that the way ethics is outlined in Derridean deconstruction and Huayan Buddhism is not ethics. If we look into the grounds of such a claim, we may, in fact, find that deconstruction's and Buddhism's refusal to offer any final solution makes many feel insecure. But if we step back and think about it, we realize that life itself is a continuation. Wood puts it in such a simple way: "The interminable need to 'step back' is not the Sisyphean 'bad infinity' but rather the ongoing persistence of life, and our contemplation of

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15 Jacques Derrida, "I Have A Taste for the Secret," in *A Taste for the Secret*, trans. by Giacomo Donis (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc, 2001), p. 13.

it. It is no more a sign of failure that this movement must be repeatedly undertaken than that we cannot eat the breakfast to end all breakfasts, or say 'I love you' in a way that would never need repeating."<sup>16</sup> Just as our body needs nutrition through the continuous activities of intake and excretion and the constant movement of our muscles and respiratory organs, so too does our mind require incessant thinking. By the same token, an ethical decision needs constant recontextualization with our awareness of tension between parties involved in an event. Ethics of tension is an effort to envision a life in which one lives life together with others.<sup>17</sup> It is also a proposal to relocate the source of ethical grounds from the human agent as a rational being, to one's awareness of the shared space in life. This shared space could be the one between one and one's self, one and one's community, and humans and one's environments. An awareness of the shared nature of life locates human existence not as an unmistakably rational being at the center of the universe, but as the one whose position is constantly remapped according to the changing environments in which one exists.♦

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16 David Wood, *The Step Back: Ethics and Politics after Deconstruction*, p. 2.

17 A recent volume on Jacques Derrida explores this aspect of Derrida's philosophy. See Elisabeth Weber (ed.), *Living Together: Jacques Derrida's Communities of Violence and Peace* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

♦ Responsible editor: Yeh-ming Chin (金葉明)

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