

Contemplative Studies: A New Vision

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Beyond the dominant trends in Contemplative Studies, namely, Buddhocentrism, neuroscientific hegemony, privileging of so-called “contemplative science,” overemphasis on STEM, the conflation of meditation with mindfulness, especially corporatized, secularized and therapeutic mindfulness, and single-issue applications such as “race” and social justice, something else is possible.

I have an alternative vision and imagine potential “new” directions.

- **Being and living rooted in deep and committed contemplative practice-realization** in which “the contemplative” is primary. This involves a way of life characterized by connection, interiority, presence, reverence, seclusion, and silence. It includes “contemplative inquiry” (CI) as all-pervading existential approach wherein life is viewed as practice-realization and practice-realization as life. Such is “contemplative being-in-the-world.”
- **Investigation of the entire breadth and depth of contemplative practices**, with particular consideration of religiously-committed, tradition-based and theologically-infused expressions. This includes attentiveness to the multi-dimensional characteristics of holistic and integrated contemplative systems, beyond the reduction of contemplative practice to mere technique. One key need in this area involves literary and scholarly translations of “contemplative literature,” including technical meditation manuals, guides to prayer, and the like.
- **Facilitation of a truly interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary approach** in which each specific field and discipline is recognized, honored and supported. I am particularly interested in the liberal arts and what might be referred to as the “interdisciplinary contemplative humanities” (ICH). Along these lines, comparative Religious Studies approaches offer important perspectives, especially with respect to lived and living contemplative traditions as well as critical meta-discussions about the field of Contemplative Studies itself.
- **Exploration and development of critical first-person methodologies**, including auto-ethnography, participant-observation, “scholar-practitioner approaches” (SPA), and “critical adherent discourse” (CAD). Here religious adherents, “professional contemplatives,” and their/our associated communities have essential contributions to make.
- **Cultivation and actualization of embodied contemplation and somatic awareness** (ECSA), specifically through attentiveness to physicality and movement awareness practices. My own interests include hiking, mountaineering, Tàijí quán 太極拳 (T'ai-chi ch'üan; Great Ultimate/Yin-Yang Boxing), walking, and Yǎngshēng 養生 (Nourishing Life), with the latter having some overlap with Qìgōng 氣功 (Ch'i-kung; Energy Work/Qi Exercises). This includes the ways in which specific contemplative systems become manifest as distinctive forms of embodiment and movement.

- **Inter-contemplative dialogue** (ICD), especially with individuals who have dedicated their lives to consistent and prolonged contemplative practice. On the most basic level, this is a contemplative form of inter-religious dialogue, but “trans-tradition” contemplative exchanges are also possible. Some key topics include psychosomatic transformation and embodied being-in-the-world. Through ICD, a more authentic sense of contemplative community may develop.
- **Inter-species relationality** (ISR), including trans-human animal observation, interactions, and even guidance as primary. In my vision, this would involve engagement with and empowerment of “non-human” animals, especially in the form of animal welfare, liberation, and wildness.

