

# Organizational Power and Ethical Subjectivity

In Light of Comparative Historical Semiotics

Youzheng Li

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*In Light of Comparative  
Historical Semiotics*

By

Youzheng Li

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**By Youzheng Li**

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## PREFACE

The saying that the basic origin of current global conflicts can be traced back to the divergence of a few major civilizations may be over-simplistic or even misleading, because all existent civilizations today have been in fact unified by a solely materialist, economic-developing priority. Our age is totally economic-production-directed in this fixed life-view, the goal and methods of which are embodied by ceaselessly advancing the level of physical comforts of human beings and the ever-increasing scientific/technical renovations. Accordingly, in terms of the same life-principle of these universally shared goals and methods, different social communities on the globe exist in sharp competition to gain interests in the world. Under the present-day politically/economically competitive ecology of permanent mutual struggles for advantages is hidden the deeper origin of the conflicts caused by the divergent traditional faiths and beliefs that have evolved in different long historical traditions. That means, the crucial and critical challenges facing the world, despite their various practical and technical features, have their deeper origins in the same historical-psychological plane of human nature, which should become one of the central objects of modern human sciences. Unfortunately, the latter has remained immature for meaningfully dealing with this historical-rooted challenge to the harmonious and peaceful way of life of mankind.

With the enlightenment and the stimulation of modern natural and social sciences, the modern humanities have accordingly already been more rationally reorganized over the last two hundred years, and they have even presented a perspective of turning into truly humanist sciences from the middle of the last century. However, unlike the clearly positive successes of the natural and social sciences, which are products of modernity, the rational modernization of the current human sciences has been faced with two serious obstacles for their scientific maturation. The one is related to the complicatedly paradoxical connections of their traditional/classical and modern/scientific parts, and the historically mixed coexistence of these two types of intellectual practices makes the identity and function of the current humanities or formative human sciences remain unclear and even indefinable. The other is related to the increasingly strengthened institutionalization of the disciplinary-compartmentalization of the age. The latter, following the models of natural and social sciences, is certainly

favorable for the progress of the disciplinary-specification of the humanities, whereas it has also created an obstruction for smooth horizontally-directed communication among different branches of the humanities, which is necessarily required today for the genuine progress of the human sciences. Despite using the same term “science”, the configurations of natural/social sciences and the human sciences are essentially divergent, although they exist and function in the same institutionalized educational/academic/professional context. Therefore, compared with the other two categories of sciences, the development of the human sciences demands an elaborate strategy for strengthening interdisciplinary/cross-culturally-directed scholarship at present. More deeply speaking, we may state that, far from being a mere study of the concept of “sign”, the modern semiotic movement, originating around the turn of the last century, has indeed been proceeding fruitfully along the interdisciplinary orientation resulting in various scientific achievements. But, as one of the central locomotives for triggering the rational modernization of human sciences, the global semiotic movement has been confronted with the same bottleneck: the epistemologically confusing and opportunistically-motivated professional situations caused firstly by its mingled, historically-shaped constitution as well as by its professional immersion in the rigidified systems of disciplinary-compartmentalization that turns out to be an ever stronger hindrance for sufficiently interdisciplinary-directed scientific communications. When the current non-western humanities participate in the international activities of human-scientific studies, this multi-interdisciplinary strategic reorientation becomes even more necessary. In consideration of the rapidly changed conditions of the new century, we may further declare that one of the central theoretical goals of the desired new theoretical semiotic science should be redesigned by its critical analyses of the structure and function of the present-day disciplinary-compartmentalized framework as such.

In terms of the operative-causal mechanism, all challenging troubles occurring in social, legal, political, and economic domains still belong to the practical/technical levels, while their primary origins have still been deeply rooted in the above-mentioned historical-psychological level that cannot be essentially handled well either by natural or by social sciences. The correct understanding and feasible coordination of these nationalist-rooted faiths and beliefs of various races as well as their different argumentative rhetoric, which are all historically accumulated, are above all structurally and uniquely linked to the advancement of rational intelligibility and the efficient applicability of modernized human-scientific knowledge. This theoretical and practical linkage further increases the

current necessity for the scientific modernization of global human sciences. No doubt, the fruitful achievements of a number of modern great human-theoretical works produced in modern history must be the unavoidable sources for helping to develop our future undertaking, and those great original masterpieces certainly maintain their own highly enlightening values in intellectual history; nevertheless, in light of our semiotic-epistemological horizon, these works remain temporary and tentative results to be continuously elaborated rather than established logical foundations to be used for guiding the reconstruction of the new edifice of human sciences.

Furthermore, regarding this process of modernizing human sciences, an epistemological/axiological precondition should be formed through simultaneously formulating an empirical-rational-directed humanist ethics based on the entire historical experiences of this world. The more rationally reorganized humanist ethical attitude could perhaps truly activate the scientific motivation directed towards advancing more meaningful spiritual/intellectual life: namely, to passionately search for human-scientific creations in this world. Far from being mere happy physical survival, the meaning of human existence should be realized in constantly advancing the level of spiritual-intellectual explorations around the globe.

The discussions in this book are focused on critically exploring the above-mentioned problems at the interdisciplinary-epistemological/cross-cultural-comparative levels. As an independent theoretical scholar, this author, with his long Chinese-historical and western-theoretical experiences that have been specially formulated in his particular historical/personal conditions, presents his critical comments and constructive suggestions throughout the book. Most parts of this volume are composed on the basis of articles that were originally published in several academic journals and anthologies over the last 20 years. Many thanks are given to the journals and publishers which have offered their permissions to republish those articles. The related publishing details are given in each of the chapters printed herein. The articles republished in the book have been re-edited and readjusted to maintain stylistic coherence throughout the book. The author wants to express his sincere thanks to Mr. Alex Monaghan for his help in re-editing the manuscript of this book.

In view of the present-day difficulty of publishing books about the theoretical humanities, and especially those written along multi-interdisciplinary/cross-cultural lines like this one, the author also expresses his thanks to Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Its independent scientific policy for promoting the publishing of humanities books has provided this author with such a rare chance to make this book appear at last. Special gratitude is given to Mr. Adam Rummens, the Commissioning Editor, for

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Youzheng Li  
San Francisco Bay Area, on the eve of the New Year, 2019

## FOREWORD

This collection of articles published over the past 20 years reflects the unique intellectual background of the author who has been independently concentrating on the intelligible interaction between the western humanist theories and the Chinese historical experiences.

The humanist-theoretical discussions of this book present a special intellectual assembly that also partly reflects the social, cultural and ideological fluctuations of post-Maoist China with respect to her changeable open-door policy towards the two previously prohibited academic realms: the contemporary western philosophy/humanist theories and the modernizing studies of traditional Chinese scholarship. The author has worked for the past 40 years in these two realms in particular. The author has carried out his independent investigations using different approaches from current western standards because of his particular social and intellectual circumstances. Nevertheless he has been always engaged in the actual western academic contexts concerning the humanities and some of his investigative instruments come from the contemporary western humanist theoretical achievements. For example, the basic epistemological/methodological human-scientific strategy adopted by him consists of three western theoretical lines that have actually formed the basic guiding set of principles influencing his theorizing orientation regarding his devotional efforts towards the formation of the global human sciences. These principles might be summarized by the following:

- **Husserlian phenomenology:** the focus on refreshing subjectivity against all ontological phenomenology;
- **Historical hermeneutics:** the focus on reforming global intellectual-historical communication against any philosophical hermeneutics;
- **Structural semiotics:** the focus on an interdisciplinary semantic commensurability against all semiotic-philosophical deviations.

As a spontaneous lover of contemporary western philosophy, without having experienced regular professional disciplinary training at any academic institution and carrying out his own earlier studies in a secluded way at the Beijing National Library in Maoist times, the author started his independent philosophical/human-scientific studies following the principles

of realism, empiricism, positivism and rationality in which he naturally believes. Those principles are all directed towards the idea of reaching a reality of various sorts with respect to social/human scientific areas. During his youth, without the possibility of other choices, the author decided to freely explore the more appropriate theoretical approaches for understanding the social/human scientific truth more deeply to satisfy his intellectual curiosity. Retrospectively, because of his living conditions, characterized by multiple confrontations between the Chinese and the western, the modern and the historical, and the scientific and the metaphysical, his life-long scholarly explorations could be described as especially focusing on the multiple inter-relational/synthetic issues across the boundaries of national, academic, cultural and disciplinary dimensions. The author hopes the judgments made from this special angle of observation and thinking can provide international readers with a notably different perspective concerning common intellectual/scholarly concerns.

The author only adopted these theoretical-analytical lines after the arrival of the New Period of China, starting in 1978, when international social/human scientific materials were opened to the public and the author luckily immediately entered the Institute of Philosophy. Being confronted with the inexhaustible western theoretical literature at the Beijing National Library since 1977, he worked hard to learn from the new theoretical knowledge by dint of his separate scholarly preparation over the past 20 years. Introducing contemporary western human-scientific theoretical classics to Chinese academia had also become his main task between 1977 and 1988. During the next decade of the 1990s, he stayed in German universities for nine years, finishing several works about western semiotic theories and comparative ethical studies. Despite being a self-taught scholar without getting any regular training in the social/human sciences, he has always worked or collaborated with domestic/international academic professionals for the past four decades. This contrast/comparison has made him experience much more sensitively a basic contradiction existing in international/domestic humanist academia that has existed in epistemological/methodological conflicts regarding the theoretical humanities or human sciences. That means an oppositional co-ordination appears between the two different academic inclinations: professional profits and scientific truth. The possibility of this mutually conflicting coordination is based on the confusing identity of the humanities or human sciences that could be taken by professionals either as a new type of scientific scholarship or as the flexible quasi-liberal arts. In light of this professional system of the humanities we may therefore clearly find out that there exist two sets of scholarly criteria, determined respectively by

scientific evaluation and by professional evaluation. Normally the latter is said not only to be the social-material base of the former but is also taken as its representative double; namely, the two evaluation systems could have particularly but actually overlapped. With his 60 years of experience in studying western theoretical humanities the author has finally concluded that this professional priority has become the very source or origin of the recent deterioration of the scientific character and social/cultural applicability of human sciences. As a matter of fact, the majority of scholars of the theoretical humanities have only carried out their projects according to the professionally regulated standards/procedures, negligent of the separate existence of scientific norms. Either the theoretical humanities or human sciences have been giving up the latter, or the natural/social sciences must clearly differentiate between the two sets of evaluative criteria, and their scientific ways of thinking should have been distinguished.

Thus, either the natural sciences or applied social sciences definitely belong to the category of scientific knowledge, while the so-called human sciences are at most quasi-scientific scholarship and can therefore not really be taken as a type of scientific knowledge. The latter cannot be empirically/positively applicable with respect to political faith, human scholarship, historical intelligibility, literary-artistic signification and religious function. Certainly, there have been a great number of liberal-phrased opinions that self-claim their special definitions of different conceptions of truth. But they are lacking in generally acceptable, actually applicable efficiency. Their actual social/cultural/academic impacts have been aroused not by their rational reasoning but by their various sorts of rhetoric devices. At any rate, not being a scientific type of knowledge, their social/cultural/academic statements have been usually regarded as “useless”, or rather taken as “useful” in the sense of mere literary/spiritual cultivation. One of the results of the mentioned situations has turned out to be a general professional deterioration of the humanities in higher education institutions worldwide in comparison with the situations of natural/social sciences. We have frequently heard the complaints given by scholars of the humanities about their neglected or demeaned situations, and they are often critical of the absolute predominance in the present day of the powers of the sciences, technology, industry, finance and commerce. On the other hand, however, this author curiously finds that few humanities scholars tend to reflect upon the problems of the quality and function of the traditional and modern humanities in self-critical terms.

According to this author’s point of view regarding the development of human knowledge in civilized history, there should be three major sections of rational/scientific knowledge: the natural, the social and the human. From

a comprehensive perspective, the human sciences should indicate that they are (at least) equally significant to the natural and applied social sciences, if not more significant. For the intelligibility produced by the human sciences is closest to the innate/instinctive desideratum of human spiritual existence. After the extensive successful developments of natural and social sciences, now should be the time of expecting a scientific leap forward by the theoretical humanities, which can be briefly called the human sciences. In light of this explanation, the current point of view is concerned with how to make scholarship of the humanities further develop along a humanities-related scientific orientation.

The intelligent superiority of human sciences in comparison with other types of scientific knowledge has been expressed in their specific topics about the traditionally disorderly but crucially important notions of spiritual life, meaning, values, faiths and humanism that have been extremely significant in human historical existence. Those spiritual and life-related notions have been, however, quite arbitrarily created under different historical/social conditions and have become determinative factors that can substantially change and influence the direction and style of human lives. Those axiological-related ideas, which are separate from nature-related ones, have in fact been formed in historical networks of multi-interactions that have been linked with various historically contingent processes but have obstinately penetrated into various national mental inclinations. All those axiological notions, shaped in different national histories, are partly divergent as well as partly overlapped, forming different sets of concepts, which have turned out to be at the origins of mutual conflicts/confusions concerning central faiths. In a certain sense, we can observe that a lot of national conflicts have been aroused by those divergent axiological-type ideas or values/faiths that have been accumulated into different nationalist spirits without any clearly rational justification.

Based on an expanded intellectual horizon we may conclude that all these basic axiological notions play an essential role in forming the humanism that is universally accepted in the globalization age. Regarding the meaning of human life, the relevant humanist intelligibility should be a much more significant task than any of the other scientific, technical or commercial goals regarding human existence. Following the substantial growth of rational academic practices in history, we human beings are faced with the new intellectual task of more rationally readjusting/re-assigning those basic axiological conceptions shaped in different historical circumstances into coexistence with each other and accordingly making the related different humanist knowledge as effectively commensurable as possible in the present globalization times. ● Only by dint of the scientifically



directed, unified development of the different theoretical humanities can the historically transmitted humanist theories become the rightly applicable knowledge and devices. This new ideal of the “united sciences” is different from any natural-scientific/natural-philosophical system that is the result of simplification or a naïve physical-central model, because such simplified quasi-scientific modality artificially excludes many humanities-related topics/realms. The emerging human sciences must imply the double dimensions of adopting both humanities and scientific-directed development and comprising all social, cultural and historical domains. Such a notion of an especially humanities-related scientism can hardly be properly tackled by the behavioral/pragmatic-directed way of thinking that has avoided a lot of the especially humanities-related aspects from its account.

It was the 20<sup>th</sup> century in which started a new stage about the possible revolutionary progresses of human sciences that indeed dealt with the more scientifically-directed problems of the fundamental, pre-conditional, structural and functional dimensions in the humanities. The new human sciences parameters are more intelligibly accessible to various aspects of reality in human history and to more effective inductive/inferential methodologies. These newly emerged intellectual tendencies are contrary to the traditional ones that are based on any philosophical fundamentalism penetrating into all classical theoretical discourses. What especially aroused the author’s attention were these new epistemological features of human sciences that are directed towards the different aspects, levels and dimensions of reality concerning our objects. By describing them we have to reformulate conceptual expressions, namely by employing old words and their special combinations to exactly refer to some hidden realistic planes/aspects. That is why we could have the following: the introspective-subjective reality (related to phenomenology); the intellectual-historical reality (related to hermeneutics); and the linguistic/social/cultural/academically synthetic reality (related to semiotics).

The essence of scientism is the empirical/positive accessibility to reality or objective reality. The ideal of modern human sciences is therefore expressed in their final relationship to the referred reality rather than merely to the signifieds presented by textuality. Regarding the ecology of the current humanities, most of the objects of their studying and teaching are historically transmitted textual bodies or books or thoughts embodied in texts rather than having been further traced back to reality as such. This scholarly feature is fundamentally different from that of the natural and social sciences. On the other hand, the central kernel of the humanities should be the ethical, however our modern ethical thoughts are mainly also

built on the texts themselves rather than on the objective reality presented by the texts; in this sense, the essence of the ethical is especially indicated by its exact reference to various objective realities. In ancient times, when the textual accumulation was not so large as today, ethical thinkers could have been even more closely directed to the actual world and obtain their own ideas about the various realities directly faced by them. However, the so-called reality is a concept relative to the capability of the knower; namely, the reality presented in historically transmitted texts is not necessarily the reality referred to by us. That is why we should constantly search the currently testable reality experienced by us and why we should not simply rely on the thoughts of the realities presented in historical texts. In general, the relationship between thought expressed in texts and reality must be a changeable and relative term. In terms of the conception of a scientifically grasped reality, the intelligible reading of historical texts/thoughts should always be a reorganizing process based on the notion of the currently-faced reality. In this regard, the goal of modern human sciences should be its effective reference to the current objective reality, and therefore all existent related texts are only one of the means used to reach the scientific goal. Accordingly, textuality should be taken only as the means rather than as the end in scientific practices. Therefore even the popular principle of the priority of texts to referents that prevails in structuralist epistemology can only be taken as workable at the analytical-instrumental level; its quasi-ontological implication – of the textual absolutism excluding the separate identity of reality – cannot be accepted from a scientific point of view as well. ● On the other hand, we should also be critical of the naturalist notion of reality adopted by behavioral pragmatists who are incapable of discerning between different types, aspects and planes of reality appearing below the natural-perceptive level, such as those of micro-semantic, introspective-psychological, structural/functional and even motive-ethical realities. There are different types of objective reality; accordingly, there are different types of rationality that function as the tool used to reach the former. That is why this author, as the coordinator of the scientific program of the Nanjing 11<sup>th</sup> IASS Congress (2012), especially declared a new conception of pluralist rationality related to the global human sciences in his speech.

Furthermore, if the humanities mainly work or live in the textual dimension, they would be much more liable to be manipulated by the present-day commercialized mechanism and professional-competitive utilitarianism so as to further weaken or lose their scientific directedness. Accordingly, the notion of textual priority would be much more easily misused for various competitive ends; a natural consequence would be the

atmosphere created for the intensified individual worships that must lead to the authoritative rigidifying of intellectual masters and their textual heritages shaped in history. Those authorized textual bodies would be easily used as commodity-brands in the fixed academic competitive market, with the result that the chosen text-based meaning/value would naturally become the permanently fixed correct standard of goodness/truth in humanist thinking. Accordingly the operational direction of the humanities would be further away from objective reality. As a final result, the humanities would never become scientific/objective-directed knowledge and would therefore be weakening or losing their potential for creative and critical ways of thinking about the intellectual/spiritual life of mankind.

Let us now go back to the initial topic of the current academic axiological/operative tension between the scientific-truth goal and the professional-profits goal, which have been experienced nowadays by all professionals in the humanities. If the above-described development were not to damage the latter and bring about the professional-profits goal to the professionals even more effectively, would the latter have had any motive to seriously reflect upon the former again? Maybe we should trace this back further to the original state of this fixation upon the professional-interested consciousness, namely the related educational processes. First, both teachers and students have been converged on and judged by textual entities and their masters' thoughts that have been shaped in history, regarding them as the only or main solid foundation of their humanist thinking without keeping serious or ultimate attention towards a separate reality (meanwhile our avant-garde theorists have tended to destroy the concepts of truth, referent and reality) during educational processes. Second, during professional periods, the same line of epistemology would further be strengthened or solidified by the additional utilitarian elements. The involved final consequence would clearly explain why the ideal of the human sciences is hardly anticipated. In short, both teachers and students would permanently live and think exclusively in the textual world (library). The risk of this scholarly tendency could also be expressed on a more serious level as we mentioned earlier: we should, in terms of a semiotic-ideological analysis, always be aware that the content and the use of the content are quite different matters; if the former is one-dimensional the latter is then multi-dimensional in connection with different parameters such as motive, aim, method and context. The meaning of the content/thought could be under the determinative sway of the art/skill of the using of the content.

Commercial globalization can be briefly described as a one-dimensional or a singly technologically-directed life-view for it implies a single-value

fixation: the uniquely proper secular happiness has been reduced to pan-materialist pleasure of various kinds. The realization of this value/goal in life will obviously be one-dimensionally or purely technically defined, determined or performed. If so, the traditionally plurally dimensioned civilization of mankind will have been transformed to a one-dimensional type. The development of human civilization will be exclusively defined in pan-technical terms. Considering the approaching age of AI and robots, a world of mechanizing human beings will really become true in the near future. On the other hand, however, the desirability of a totally mechanized age cannot be pertinently measured only by advanced pan-technical capability because the related problems must involve many other parameters of the delicate evaluative machine that are certainly beyond the merely technical-materialist knowledge of the latter. In fact, a new type of unprecedented rational wisdom, which must involve the advanced fruits of the new humanity-theory/ethics, is urgently needed to confront the terribly critical life challenges of today.

The different experiences and critical reflections of this author will present a notably different point of view because his independent academic career and special social/cultural experiences in both the west and east have made him shun the present-day standard academic-institutional determinism formed in the above-described regularly established educational/professional framework. Having a totally different social, educational and academic background in connection with both capitalist and socialist worlds, the author, however, has always closely worked within the regularly defined contemporary western theoretical humanities over the past 60 years. As the intellectual globalization has continued to prevail today, on the one hand, different angles of reading the same western intellectual traditions become more and more necessary for effective global communication on both sides, and on the other, since non-western intellectuals have become more and more aware of western knowledge at a higher level, western intellectuals should devote more time to understanding non-western knowledge via the introductions thereto by non-western scholars who specialize in western humanities theories. Unlike the many non-western scholars who are able to reach the western humanities through western languages, most western scholars are mostly unable to do the same because of both the language barrier and ignorance about alien historical backgrounds. In view of this intellectual imbalance, western humanities theorists, if they were to get rid of the western-centralist prejudice, would be better aware of this common epistemological flaw and would therefore become more likely to pay attention to the ideal of the necessity of constructing the global human sciences. The author hopes the presentation of his articles in this book will

provide some related explanations about the problems concerned. Nevertheless, the obstruction to cross-cultural theoretical dialogues is not merely limited by this historical divergence of different civilizations; a more basic barrier is also rooted in the present disciplinary compartmentalization. There could be dozens or hundreds of disciplines and sub-disciplines sharing similar subject matters, and if each of them holds its own special position during scholarly contacts in arguments, they will naturally tend to oppose each other, especially when they belong to different theoretical schools and cultural traditions. The interdisciplinary policy rests in simply disorganizing this professionally-formed epistemological fence. The so-called professional-institutional mechanism comprises two aspects. The one is the above-mentioned disciplinary-fixed restriction on the requested knowledge for interdisciplinary exchange, and the other is related to another aspect of the mechanism guided by commercial utilitarianism. The latter will influence the attitude of scholars in charge of scholarly-associative decisions, especially their mindedness to secure academic privilege.

Regarding the Chinese-western comparative theoretical studies, the author declared in his paper presented to the German-Chinese Philosophical Conference at the Hong Kong Chinese University in 1985 that the crucial theoretical challenge to comparative studies on Chinese-western philosophy and the theoretical humanities will be indicated in an intellectual challenge of the heterogeneous-theoretical dialogue between traditional Chinese history and modern western theory. Such a theoretical prediction based on the above twin tendency will be naturally in contradiction with the current academic/educational tendency of the disciplinarian-organized compartmentalization; namely, that the human-scientific system has been based on the institutionalized disciplinary-central training procedures, the results of which must be the autonomous coordination of hundreds or thousands of separate disciplines guided by a great number of different specialized experts who work independently or separately without knowing each other's specialized knowledge clearly. In this case, any genuine interdisciplinary dialogues can hardly be workable, simply because of the institutionally regulated restrictions of the disciplinary-central training system. However, we have to recognize that the present effective workability of the disciplinary-compartmentalizing system of the humanities, which has been modeled on that of modern natural and social sciences, has indeed advanced the vertical-directed specialization of various humanities disciplines for the past two hundred years. Unlike the scholarly natures of natural and social sciences, the new human sciences have begun requesting a totally horizontal-directed theoretical interaction of different disciplines from a separate scientific point of view. However this human-scientific

request has been inconsistent with the situation of academic-professional institutionalization that has become more and more independent from the former owing to the strong determinative influence of commercial globalization. That is why we humanities scholars and other higher cultural theorists should reconsider some more suitable interactive mechanism for the human sciences and the related academic-institutional aspects so as to make further development of the extremely desirable interdisciplinary/cross-cultural theoretical communication in the global humanities possible.

According to the author's opinion, the major present-day task for mankind to develop the global theoretical human sciences should be carried out in, among other ways, the comprehensive comparative-synthetic interdisciplinary studies of the three main different social-humanist scholarly lines: the Anglo-American applied social sciences/analytical philosophy; the continental theoretical human sciences; and the traditional Chinese historical humanities. For these three scholarly bodies present the most systematic and most plentiful intellectual systems, indicating different emphatic focuses of thinking that are especially related to the applied social sciences, the stimulation of theoretical human sciences and the complicated historical/ethical intellectual aspects, respectively. This multi-comparative operative framework involves different epistemological confrontations between the western and the eastern, the modern and the historical, and the micro-theoretical and macro-pragmatic levels. In light of this viewpoint, the existent scholarly products in the disciplinary-compartmentalized system should not be taken as completed works; instead, more meaningful efforts should be made towards how to tackle the disciplinary-based knowledge in a more productive/creative way at the interdisciplinary/cross-cultural level in future.

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The 21 articles included in this volume were written and published over the past 20 years. The sequence of the included articles is not arranged according to the chronological order of their delivery or previous publication. The topics of all articles are in full consistence with each other in terms of their special unified scientific-operative practices that have been performed along synthetic-horizontal theoretical lines, guided by the interdisciplinary and cross-cultural epistemological principles. The articles, written at different periods over the last 20 years, have different formative modes and methodologies of spelling of Chinese characters. In order to keep the original appearances of the writings, the different spellings, which are

formed according to different standards used in continental China, Taiwan and western Sinology respectively, remain unchanged in this book. During the re-editing of the various texts only some linguistic expressions have been improved or rephrased without changing their contents so as to preserve the author's original styles of thinking, formed at different stages over the last 20 years. The division of the book into three sections is only made broadly because the contents of all the articles intersect and interrelate with each other. Most of the publications of the author are written in Chinese, so this collection of papers in English cannot fully reflect the scope of his scholarly/theoretical practices and their related historical backgrounds. The supplements attached here present a list of published books of the author and a piece of his intellectual biography concerning his special long-standing efforts towards developing semiotics in China for the benefit of international readers.

Youzheng Li  
August 2018

**PART ONE**

**HISTORICAL SEMIOTICS  
AND THE THEORETICAL ORIENTATION  
OF THE HUMANITIES**



## CHAPTER ONE

# THE GLOBAL-INSTITUTIONALIZED MIND: CRISIS AND PROSPECTS OF HUMAN SCIENCES/SEMIOTICS

### **1. The Deterioration of the Current Theoretical Humanities in the Globalization age; the epistemological necessity of functional division between the social and human sciences**

The humanities or human sciences, whose traditional theoretical basis had been philosophy of various kinds, should have become the most important and required academic realm in all human knowledge because they are closest to the spiritual life of humanity or human life; nevertheless, they have turned to be the least productive/less desirable practices today in our time of globalization. The fundamental issues of meaning, value, life and belief, which are extremely crucially related to the historical existence of mankind, have historically evolved or transformed from the traditional mode of the humanities, which mainly consists of classical philosophy/history/literature, into their modern forms that should be more advanced towards the modern human sciences. However these traditional issues have not been regarded as scientifically feasible types of subjects and have even been taken as useless in our materialist-commercial community. In the totally technicalized/commercialized world of today, the humanities have been already encircled within the specially organized academic-autonomous campus and treated merely as educational training sites for gaining various preconditioned jobs. The humanities today have still kept one of their classical tasks, embodied in traditional disciplines like philosophy, literature and history, that functions as the practice of a spiritual/intellectual delectation, while another central task aims at the use of scientific sources for increasing advanced social or political knowledge and wisdom, but this has been mostly weakened or even lost because of their systematical disconnection with actual life. A positive aspect is the fact that the roles of the classical humanities in these practical fields have

been shifted to the newly established academic realm of the social sciences. Another negative aspect, however, lies in that the so-called post-modern and de-scientific form of current theoretical humanities tends to be less and less concerned about social/cultural realities and excludes rational-humanist ethics so as to present an irrational tendency for reasoning in general.

For the sake of better understanding our critical position concerning the humanities or the human sciences we should firstly explain a current usage of the discipline's classification. This author especially emphasizes the significance of the functional division between the social and human sciences in the academic system despite the fact that the contents or subject material of the two categories certainly extensively overlap. From a pragmatist/behaviorist point of view, such a division between the social and the human sciences seems unnecessary and is even not true, but from a structural/semiotic viewpoint such a division is absolutely necessary, justified and necessary if we attempt to pay closer attention to advancing descriptive/analytical precision at the micro-functional levels/aspects concerned. Despite the linguistic-expressive restrictions regarding disorderly human/historical phenomena, we can only more reasonably apply natural languages to describe and explain the rational/scientific-directed problems about semantically complicated human affairs. In fact, it is the progress of the modern natural sciences that stimulates us to search for a more rationalized and more advanced re-compartmentalization of scholarly disciplines concerning society, culture, history and the essence of human being. As a matter of fact, the exact meaning of the title "social sciences" is relative to its chosen usages. Broadly, it can certainly cover the entire realm of social and human scientific thought, just as it is still used this way in many areas. Our so-called functional division of it is to more clearly demarcate a scientific-operative line between its more empirical/applicable part and its more delicate-theoretical/ethical-intelligible part. So in our usage we only use it to refer to the former and prefer to include the latter in the human sciences. Similarly, we can also explain the referred area of the human sciences as well. Thus, more widely or practically speaking, these two realms concerning human-social affairs are of course closely overlapped and intersected.<sup>1</sup> This artificial division of

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<sup>1</sup> Most scholars/teachers in the social and human sciences belong to the applied social sciences, including media sciences, so the meaning of the division of the social and human sciences remains unclear to them, particularly in Anglo-American and Chinese-academic areas, while most theorists in the human sciences or the theoretical humanities today prefer to adopt the philosophical/artistic

academic zones, initiated by recent French academics, is indeed able to elaborate the precision of objective description and theoretical analysis. By the way, our chosen position does not mean we give complete affirmation to this French theoretical contribution with respect to the general scientific development of the human-social sciences. The advantages and disadvantages can be unevenly ascribed to different schools/streams. In general we certainly recognize that the social sciences (namely, applied social sciences and their theories at a technical level) in the Anglo-American area have attained the most advanced level and the significance of theoretical creations of the French human sciences is mainly expressed in its originality to stimulate our continuing rethinking about how to more effectively and delicately modernize the global human sciences at the epistemological level. The latter, however, implies also its weakness in social-political applications. We focus on it merely as a theoretical model for enlightening us to more productively reorganize our epistemological/methodological orientation but, at the same time, also to perceive its serious shortcomings in its social/political applicability. So, the so-called functional division of the disciplinary classification also implies a division of praxis by distinguishing elaboration at a purely theoretical level and feasibility at a practical level. Nevertheless, a popular conceptual confusion occurring in the pragmatic/behavioral-directed social sciences is perhaps due to the general neglect of the scientific necessity of this theoretical elaboration about the more ambiguously formulated ethical/psychological/axiological studies. (The same reason can be used to explain the lasting debates about epistemology/methodology in the international semiotics and Sinology.)

Therefore all of our critical discussions should be based on this functional division of disciplinary classification in spite of the fact that even in actual departments the contents of social and human sciences are largely mixed together regarding their substantive material compositions. This functional division of disciplinary systems is also able to more clearly help distinguish between different scientific orientations of the Anglo-American-directed and the continental-directed social-human sciences in general and make us more distinctly understand our actual scholarly situations. Accordingly, we may more intelligibly make clear that, in recent decades, the latter remains more theoretical-creative in their research about theoretical human sciences while the former is certainly stronger in their contributions to the social sciences. Therefore this basic division makes us pay more emphatic attention to the latter in order to

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rhetoric style. That is why they are both reluctant to recognize the necessity of the notion of human sciences.

more relevantly grasp the pure theoretical problems in human science. In addition, the correct scientifically-developing orientation of social sciences has already been well fixed in international academia, which is why we can safely exclude the problems of the applied social sciences from our present discussions.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, one of the main reasons why people tend to neglect this functional division about scholarly practices is caused by a professional utilitarianism prevailing in our commercial age, characterized by its encouragement of benefit competitions. As I have pointed out frequently before, following the steady developments of the natural and social sciences over the past few centuries, the scientific character of the modern humanities during the last century has been remarkably developed as well. Roughly speaking, among a lot of types of scientific progress in the humanities within the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the two biggest philosophical/theoretical movements with a stronger scientifically modernizing tendency were characteristically shaped. The first one was aroused by the German/Austrian trend of *Geisteswissenschaften* that was guided by some new types of philosophical schools (neo-Kantianism, historical hermeneutics, phenomenology, neo-positivism, Freudianism and others) since the later 19<sup>th</sup> century and continuously developed until the disaster of Nazism in the middle of the 1930s; the second was launched by the French/Italian pan-structuralism that was stimulated by the European interdisciplinary, theoretically directed (namely de-philosophy-central-directed) linguistic, historiographic, sociological and literary-critical streams that energetically continued until the end of the Cold War. (It is interesting to note that the former was suddenly stopped by the start of the global Hot War and the latter was gradually weakened by the end of the global Cold War.) The two great intellectual/human science movements had been characterized by their respectively different “special-scientific/rational orientations/characters” and they both have indeed created substantially rich theoretical heritages with a strong enlightening instruction; the humanities could, as well as should, become a scientifically-directed practice too, although their scientific practices are different from those of natural and social sciences in their typology. Nevertheless, when we praise the contributions of some movements or schools of philosophy and humanity-theories, what we really affirm are only the chosen positive aspects of them rather than their entire academic consequences that naturally comprise some other not

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<sup>2</sup> More precisely, we may say that applied theoretical problems belong to the “social sciences” and purely theoretical problems are still ascribed to the “human sciences”, such as the branches indicated by their old terms like political philosophy, legal philosophy, economic ethics, etc.

positive or even negative elements. In fact, any scholarly/scientific progress in history is only realized in some aspects of the related phenomena in favor of promoting general human sciences development in future and in reference to their own temporal/partially effective results. In other words, our positive evaluation of some theoretical streams is mainly focused on its potential for stimulating the continuing theoretical construction of the human sciences in their historical entirety.

We exclude the great analytic-philosophical movement from our discussion with a similar reason to that about the social sciences. Analytical philosophy is of course a very important scientific-directed theoretical achievement despite the fact that its typical logical/natural scientific character also narrows and limits its intellectual insights, excluding or weakening a lot of traditional humanities issues through its more exact scientific-styled filtering. As a result, together with natural and social sciences, as well as other modern human science results, it must become quite the positive source of knowledge that can indeed help in promoting the reformulation of human sciences. The special status of the latter is by contrast characterized by its particular synthetic-theoretical requirement that must relevantly combine the traditional humanities-related issues and modern scientific criteria so as to make the former more rationally/scientifically dealt with. This is the very goal of the transformation from the traditional humanities to the modern human sciences; namely, that all important humanities-related intellectual and spiritual issues can be tackled in a really scientific way – the earlier two great movements of theoretical humanities mentioned above should be taken as only temporary/relative progress, attained at certain stages along the same pan-scientific/rationalist orientation. Accordingly, the humanities-related issues could recover their traditional top privilege in the new civilization and the understanding/reconstruction of the related projects could be really effectively treated and solved. It seems to be understandable that only when the humanities become more scientific in a relevant sense could they become more able to increase meaningfully their social/cultural/political influences in these post-industrial times. That the slogan “knowledge is power/force” is also true with respect to the humanities is only valid under the conditions that they should be a knowledge with a really relevant-scientific/rationalist character; by contrast, we may cite too many examples from modern history that have disclosed the inefficiency or mistakes committed by the so-called theoretical statements/inferences of the theoretical humanities, especially their theoretical kernel – contemporary philosophies – that have been more and more reduced to the useless or even misleading metaphysical/ontological rhetoric concerning

the wise guidance of human life. In this sense, neither the irrational type of the theoretical humanities nor the natural science-type humanities can be taken as the effective intellectual/scientific force/power for reconstructing the genuine human sciences and advancing the intelligibility of human life, although any works of the humanities can be easily used as means/instruments to serve any kind of utilitarian or superstitious or ideological purpose.

By the way, however, we should avoid wrongly mixing the notions of rational-effective strength and rational-scientific efficiency. Only the latter is what we should search for; the former may refer to any kind of social or non-scientific effect. We should not search for any more effective rhetorical-persuasive means in order to merely increase any influence and recognition in society. The telos of the two kinds of rationality must be distinguished too and this misleading idea has been just what we have criticized before as well. This reminder also has the very important and real implication that such a mixture could be commonly made just because the majority of scholars in the social and human sciences have already got used to the rigidified mental habit: to do an excellent job in the field just means winning credit from academic authorities and to obtain huge influence in academia or the market; in short, to search only for professional success! As a result, the scholars tend to be overly self-confident in professional and competitive contexts and become reluctant to reflect or recognize their own scholarly shortcomings/errors as long as they can effectively carry out their professional procedures.

As we said above, the scopes and contents of social and human sciences largely overlap and even mostly combine in projects of scholarship because the two classes of praxis are both involved with man and society. However, distinguishing between the two academic categories mainly refers to a functional/operational separation, as we pointed out. Some new types of epistemological/methodological approaches, such as phenomenology, semiotics and hermeneutics, are focused on distinguishing efforts that are not only directed towards the more clearly outlined disciplinary compartmentalization but also towards the more delicate outlooks of different “realities” within the practices of the humanities.

## **2. The Objective Determination of the Soft Powers and the Epistemological Stagnation of Current Human Sciences judged in terms of the model of division of history 1 and history 2**

In other places (see Chapter Two in this book) I have raised a conception of the double historical tracks stating that the civilized history of mankind mainly consists of dichotomous driving lines, one of which is related to social-materialist organizing activities (history 1) and the other to intellectual-spiritual creating activities (history 2). The so-called bifurcation of historical processes is expressed in sets of operative zones/developing lines/driving motivations/social-cultural teleology so as to remarkably highlight the two original driving mechanisms leading to separate orientations, operative ways and practical contents respectively produced along dualist lines of human history. But this model concerning “the general historical theory” especially stresses two central parts: the original driving impulses/motivations in human nature and the special mechanisms/functions of practices. The first internal (psychological) part is about instinctive origins and the second external (natural-social) part is about productive designs and behavioral styles as the resultant machineries of the interaction between the subjective and objective parts. This author asserts that the fundamental causation of human history is rooted in the dualist instincts of the constant human nature, although the historical unfolding is shaped by the interaction between the twin-original motivations (one is the lust for power of all kinds and the other is the desire for rational-spiritual creation) and the external circumstances. The total historical processes/phenomena consist of miscellaneous elements throughout which penetrate the two series of continuous organized actions determined by their original motives, divergent teleologies and operative mechanisms. We name them as historical-function 1 and historical-function 2, or just function 1 and function 2, in our discussions to focus on the different functions of the two prefixed mechanisms. Therefore the concepts of the modes of abstract historical functions should be distinguished from the concrete historical events/agents. In other words, although the two general historical functions are originally triggered/carried out/embodied by concrete individuals/actions, the two historical mechanisms are mainly expressed at the functional levels because the substantial contents of historical processes are mixed together. The functional presentations and the personal actions/results are mutually intersected and substantially intermixed. An individual person/action can

be a carrier of different functional elements, and many persons/actions can share the same set of functional elements as well.

Genealogically speaking, however, the above can be more understandably described in the following. There have indeed existed the two major historical zones where are produced concrete events, processes and phenomena, and the two major functions are originated from the two corresponding mechanisms. The above distinguishing parameters are intended to separate more clearly the two historical dimensions: that of the substantial material and that of the functional mechanisms that operate the former. So in our discussions we will tackle the historical problems from an angle of functional mechanisms. More essentially speaking, our notion of the historical bifurcation is preferably to focus on the very kernel of the historical driving mechanics: the motivational kernels. After all, the basic triggering impulses/developing directions in the historical evolution of mankind are rooted in unchanged human nature. The latter is the originality of historical productions of any kind. Thus, we can say, the substantial contents, such as the individual's personality, his actions, the produced results and the social-cultural zones where individual actors operate are the carriers of various functional/non-functional operations performed at their different substantial aspects. By the way, the distinction of the functional mechanisms, which have been constantly enriched/elaborated in historical developments, is only related to the characteristics in their operations whose technical efficiency is constantly advanced in history. Regarding the problem of the ethical/axiological evaluation of the historical-functional mechanisms, we only need to indicate here that function-2 implies consistent/essentially timeless **ethical criteria** (the positive valuation in humanist-spiritual creations is always affirmative) and function-1 implies consistent/essentially timeless **utilitarian criteria** (the positive valuation in social/political productions can be either good or bad in ethical terms). Accordingly, substantially speaking, the contents of the two kinds of activities are largely overlapped and externally interact with each other while both are essentially segregated and relatively independent from each other at the functional and teleological levels. In essence, they are driven respectively by divergent psychological impulses in human instincts: one by an impetus for power-seizing, order-establishing and materialist-directed constructing and the other by an impetus for intellectual/spiritual creation/elaboration.

Generically speaking, a synthetically characterized way to indicate this bi-contrasting model can be summarized as the power/materialist-organizing mechanism vs. the conscience/spiritual-creating mechanism; or, more simply, the collective power vs. individual ethics.



The contents and modes of the two historical tracks have been continuously enriched and changed following social/cultural developments. In general they are characterized by distinctly heterogeneous drives, aims and styles and those factors can determine their respective developing orientations with the consequent results, although all related/used elements are intermixed and overlapped in the same historical-phenomenal compound: the same intuitively-presented historical stream. In a simplified description we may say that the two historical tracks are characterized by the materialist-social-directed “power-passion” and by the intellectual-cultural “spirit-passion”. Despite the necessary coexistence of their respective productions operating at the same historical stage and being defined by the commonly shared time/space, they are driven by essentially different goals, interests, ambitions and motivations during the same historical periods. In this article we mainly talk about subject matters related to function 2 (or simply, history 2), to which the humanities exclusively belong. Nevertheless, the external interactions between history 1 and history 2 will be also involved. More exactly, our topic is about the interrelationship and interaction between the soft-power systems of history 1 and the humanities of history 2. The crucial point rests in distinguishing their respective autonomous driving mechanisms and their external interactions. Accordingly we should distinguish between the heterogeneous intentions of history 1 and history 2 (or exactly, historical function 1 and historical function 2) as well as their separate mechanisms; their autonomous identities are totally defined in terms of the corresponding independent mechanisms. Even an intention (to say) of an agent in history 2 is directed to an item of history 1; this intention, however, cannot play its conceived role in the other zone effectively – instead it functions only as the material to be tackled by the mechanism of history 1 rather than that of history 2. (For example: philosophy cannot influence politics directly by its own idea; any philosophical idea can only be operated by the agents using political strategy/tactics.)

Regarding the typology of power, we can generally divide this into two categories: the hard type and the soft type, depending on their different operative realms/objects/modes. The hard type, or the traditional type, originating in primitive history and persisting until today, is mostly realized/reactivated in social, political, military, judicial and economic realms, with which we are all familiar and have personal experience. The soft types of power are derived/developed gradually during historical evolution; we may simply name them as the “soft powers” that, unlike the physical/coercively dominative mode of the hard-powers, exercise only indirect influences or determination on various historical objects,

including those included in history 2. Since the outset of the post-industrial period, the soft-powers have been greatly enriched and played increasingly significant and independent roles in the ever-expanded realms, including the cultural/academic/scholarly realms. In our present discussions we will especially focus on the relationship between the soft-powers and the humanities

Regarding the traditional type of regimes, for example, if history 1 is triggered and operated through all the hard/soft-power systems that are basically driven by the rooted desires in human nature for interpersonal domination and securing social orders, then by contrast history 2 is triggered and operated through the instinctive desires for the intellectual/high cultural creation/spiritual sublimation that is permanently stimulated by ethical conscience in human nature. Quite simply, we may safely judge that these two eventual driving forces in history are innately rooted in human nature; the one is indicated by the desire for power and the other by the ethical conscience. Essentially, these two oppositional/contrasting human-natural instincts are the genuine sources of the historical tensions existing between the spiritual-productive strength/energy and the will of material-productive/interpersonal domination, although the resulting changeable phenomena produced by their separate mechanisms can be expressed in countless other internal/external factors. The operative mechanisms of powers are performed in history 1 while their influential effects will reach entire historical processes. History 2, or spiritual-cultural history, maintains and performs its own separate driving mechanism but it cannot avoid being involved in interactions with history 1. This interaction/intermixture in historical processes will also influence the resulting modes of the developing track of history 2. In human history there are always sharp tensions existing between the operations of two historical driving forces. In our theory the so-called basic history-driving force/type is defined at the collective/functional level, although it is certainly embodied intuitively by individual entities. The two basic driving-forces can be exclusively/totally realized in different individual persons or unevenly co-realized/shared by different persons. The actual/eventual modes of realizing those driving forces in historical processes are made by a variety of subjective-objective factors appearing in historical events. But at collective functional levels of history, we may see that the two general driving orientations realized in these divergent resultant consequences, which can be respectively traced back to the pan-materialist-political and the pan-cultural-spiritual mechanisms, are ultimately still triggered by divergent driving impulses/instincts in human nature.

This psychological-central model of historical orientations has no intention of presenting a comprehensive causal-explanative scheme of the complicated historical phenomena that must be the consequences of multi-determinative interactions of a variety of factors. Its theme is only focused on the two guiding causal lines in history in reference to the operative-functional mechanisms performed by the dualist-heterogeneous pragmatic logics in the two major historical zones: the materialist-productive and the spiritual-productive ones.

The hard-powers exercise physically forceful/compulsory roles to control people and maintain social orders; their power-pressure/order-efficiency is operated in a physically direct/coercive way. The efficiency of these powerful operations is essentially based on and linked to the fear of punishment of the people under control and their consequent obedience to the legalized orders. By contrast, however, so-called soft-powers that are factually based on or relatively connected with the hard-power have a more delicately complicated structure consisting of different indirectly determining factors, including the ideological and other kinds. The operative ways of soft-powers are not only indirectly carried out but are also based on the instinctive desires of individuals to hold power or domination over others, a materialist and profitable lust for enjoyment, and social-cultural publicity/privilege; all such instinctive desires are contrary to the other positive instinctive impulses of ethical conscience in history 2. In short, the exercising ways of soft-powers appeal to the quasi-sensuous, self-serving and selfish types of instinctive desires. Therefore, if the hard-powers can directly force people to succumb to their will/orders, then the soft-powers only need to indirectly determine intellectuals to obey/succumb to them through reforming/distorting the mental/behavioral habits of people by dint of allurements and indirect threatening measures.

The hard-powers, or social-political mechanisms, can only force people to obey the regulated social order because of the natural fear of being physically punished, but this way of exercising power way does not necessarily touch other parts of human nature. That means the character or personality of an intellectual can still keep his relative inner freedom for possible independent development at other levels/realms.<sup>3</sup> That means,

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<sup>3</sup> That is why, in the long history of the oriental despotic regimes, when some advanced soft-power mechanisms had not yet been invented, a great number of excellent classical works about the traditional humanities could be continuously produced. In contrast, when modern extreme totalitarian regimes emerged, the hard-powers could touch on each corner of the society/culture, thoroughly suppressing any significant spiritual creations. Although the totalitarian systems were capable of forcing everything under control and therefore made the function

when the soft-powers have been developed/elaborated, they would be capable of changing the personality from the inside, even weakening the ethical spontaneity of conscience if the desires for sensuous/self-serving enjoyment are thoroughly stimulated/organized. Then the institutional contexts, with their moral-legal objective controlled by soft-powers, will replace the ethical conscience/subjectivity of an intellectual/scholar. (We may say that the above wisdom-teaching was originally raised by Confucian ethics.)

In our discussion here we present two general models of soft-powers that have been shaped since the end of WWII, and especially since the coming of the globalization era, each of which are sketchily represented by three main parameters selected only for a general indication. They are:

a) The power 1 trio:  
 Axiology-**materialism**  
 Communication-**commercialization**  
 Process-**technicalization**

We may say that this power 1 trio mechanism operates mainly at a general social level, becoming a total organizing framework guiding the orientation of social/cultural activities through closely coordinating with the hard-powers in history 1.

b) The power 2 trio:  
 Research-**utilitarianism**  
 Life-**professionalization**  
 Method-**institutionalization**

The power 2 trio refers to the indirect controlling system regarding the cultural/academic spheres, particularly with respect to those non- or less scientific activities, including the humanities or human sciences. In principle all theoretical knowledge belongs to history 2, while the goals of natural/social sciences could be in full coherence/consistence with the

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of the soft-power systems not so necessary, a totalitarian-plus-capitalist mixed system can creatively make a highly effective operative combination of both the hard- and soft-power systems. Since history 1 entered its contemporary period, the hard-power mechanisms have indeed played a highly satisfactory role in maintaining just social conditions but at the same time, following cultural/academic developments, it has also formed more elaborate soft-power mechanisms that can also more actively influence the situations/directions of the development of the humanities.

requests/goals of all constructive activities of history 1, driven by its hard- and soft-powers, and those true sciences, together with their highly useful technological productions, just become the constituent parts of the reconstructive processes of history 1. Therefore the actual targets of the power 2 trio are mainly the humanities and higher cultural creations, because the latter two are originally driven by subjective freedom and their goals and productions are not certainly consistent with the teleology of the soft-powers. Concretely, the power 2 trio is related to guidance/control over the orientation and styles of academic/cultural productions, which are the closest preconditions and determining mechanisms of the practices of the humanities and high cultural creations.

By the way, the natural/social sciences are put aside in this discussion because these two kinds of “true scientific” scholarship can not only be directly useful for the teleology of history 1 generally but their genuine scientific characters keep an innate power to maintain the independence of their scientific operations, which becomes the firm objectivist foundation that additionally guarantees their independent scientific operations. In contrast, the vulnerability of the humanities with respect to the influences/pressures from power-trios consists in fact of two aspects: a) the extensive weaker scientific/rational potential at the both the operative-procedural and the signifying-referring (lacking in objective reference) levels, and accordingly the lack of a strong enough scientific-operative space to organize possible resistance or self-defense (by contrast the social sciences have such an objective space for possibly maintaining their scientific-operative autonomy); and b) the largely weakened/disorganized ethical subjectivity of scholarly agents is particularly vulnerable to the pressures/manipulation exerted by a strong external power.

The term “power” has different kinds of referents that keep different connective distances with the sources of power. In this sense the word “power” keeps different direct/indirect semes as well as relatively indicative/metaphoric semes. In general the two soft power-trios’ determinative roles exerted on the humanities have different degrees of indirectness expressed in the processes of their influence/pressure/control so as not to be easily or clearly felt by humanities scholars. After grasping this determinative link between two power-trios and the current status/situation of the humanities, we would also recognize that the present-day comments/criticism about the decaying situations of the humanities comprise two different aspects; these are mostly only about one aspect, stating that the humanities are unjustly looked down upon by current societies everywhere in the world, and these have now gained a general recognition. However a few comments/complaints in the West are

directed to another aspect: the weaker scientific quality of the humanities as such. Nevertheless, this author especially emphasize that it is the latter that is the most relevant reason. It is partly because of the innate shortcomings historically contained in the traditional humanities and partly because of the contemporary radical change of the social-cultural structures that necessarily forces the humanities, especially their theoretical parts, to survive under the social pressures/interference imposed by the two trio-powers. As a consequence, the humanities have been seriously but almost unconsciously weakened with respect to their scientific/rationally-directed impulse/devotion. Simply, it is the hard-powers in history 1 that are restricting/dominating the essential enterprise in history 2 (a mode of the external interaction between history 1 and history 2). Moreover, this collective epistemological/strategic negligence in academia is essentially also caused by the trio-powers, especially owing to the prevailing professional utilitarianism whose internal effect is realized in the universal weakening of the ethical subjectivity/active spontaneity of academic agents.<sup>4</sup>

In some sense we may say that the general academic-organizing ways in connection to natural, social and human sciences are similar to each other, or that the educations and activities of the humanities naturally follow those of the much more successful examples of natural and social sciences. However the latter two, because of their true scientific characters, have effectively gone forward by using rigorous scientific procedures. To unevenly exact degrees, the natural and social sciences can be judged to be scientifically positive and empirically applicable in all human communities. Besides, these two types of scientific systems provide practical utility in human social-materialist life as well. Entitled by the designation “science” (even since ancient times), the humanities have never really coherently or continuously presented these scientific or practicable characters in history and therefore in this sense they are not “productive”, or at least not very, in social-materialist terms. The divergence between the former and latter is above all due to the lacking of the humanities in designative-referential objectivity; besides, the humanities, especially their theoretical parts, are not directly usable in economic-industrial affairs, although they could be indirectly or

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<sup>4</sup> The more profound reason is linked to the structural evolution that the objective legal-moral system has naturally weakened the existential utility of the subjective ethical consciousness, and the former could be intermixed with any other objective social systems of regularity, including the academic ones. In a word, the mind for obeying the objectively regulated systems has replaced the conscience for subjective truth-exploring freedom.

distortionally handled by social-political powers. Therefore, despite all efforts towards knowledge of all sorts being the typical performances in history 2, each sort of human knowledge maintains different degrees of interaction with the power-systems in history 1.<sup>5</sup> We will emphasize here again that because of the mixed appearance of all sorts of intellectual discourses in history in physical terms, we should distinguish the two kinds of discourses at the historical-functional level: the genuine discourses produced in history 2 in terms of its own mechanism, and that which is intentionally or distortionally used in history 1 with its own different mechanism. The latter's social-cultural impact is certainly much larger than that of the former. That is why the products of the genuine theoretical humanities are widely constrained by the pseudo-humanities discourses made in history 1, especially through the channel of the media. The latter indeed belongs to history 1, although media-agents always pretend to be the proper branch in the humanities. In addition, we should understand that the majority of public readers work in history 1 too and their passive preference for the distorted humanities discourses manipulated in history 1 often causes misleading effects on the production of the theoretical scholarship performed in history 2 so as to add the difficulty of the development of the human sciences. That is why we need to distinguish between the minority of scientific-devoted scholars and the majority of professionally-motivated scholars/intellectuals who also exist either in the profession of the humanities or in the profession of the media.

In addition, regarding the confusing relationship of interactions between history 1 and history 2, we have to pay special attention to the transmitting period from the humanities to the human sciences. There exists a deep epistemological divergence between the two conceptions about humanity studies. In fact, from ancient times to the modern historical period, the humanities have always been naturally linked to their possible applications in history 1; actually, the humanities have been taken by most intellectuals just as the intellectual instruments to be used for improving or reforming social, political and cultural realities. Regarding the radically changeable Chinese history over the past century, this pragmatic attitude in modernizing the humanities has been widely accepted: the right humanities-related thinking should be useful methodology that is applied for changing traditional society and politics. Facing such a

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<sup>5</sup> Simply, the concepts of history 1/history 2 respectively consist of the basic driving motivations, the operative-functional mechanisms, the operative results and the changed meaning of the results in changing historical contexts. General history comprises these two functional parts and the other parts that do not belong to history 1 or history 2.

historical background we can grasp that the thoughts about the historical model, new human sciences and the universal semiotics raised by this author could hardly have been understood. According to the bifurcational historical model and the new idealism of human sciences, we have been attempting to revolutionize the mentality of scholars concerning the theoretical humanities. The suggested segregation of the two heterogeneous practices must be beneficiary to the healthy developments of both sides and the mixture of the two divergent practices belonging to the different zones/mechanisms in history must lead to the damage of both. Simply speaking, shallow or wrong social-human knowledge, used to handle social/political realities, would unavoidably bring about new disorder and social evils, just as we have experienced so frequently at home and abroad. In return, interference with the task of constructing human sciences by social-political powers will just lead to the further deterioration of the humanities.

Nevertheless, we still emphasize that this vulnerability of the humanities is first of all caused by internal scholarly weakness. Both the rigorous natural sciences and quasi-rigorous social sciences, together with their respective technical applicability in history 1, are characterized by their different rigorous systems of signification/reference that can exclude conceptual/textual ambiguity. On the other hand, the humanities, as the longest form of scholarship in history, are obviously characterized by their polysemous or ambiguous vocabularies and unclear discursive denotations. In other words, true scientific discourses should be capable of signifying/referring to definite realities/facts while the signifieds of discourses of general liberal arts are linked to a variety of multi/mixed "referents" consisting of both empirical and fictional elements, which are complicatedly related to a semantic complex of complicated realities, including natural, social, cultural, scholarly, artistic, psychological and axiological parts. The point lies in that the signifieds of textual expressions of the humanities are often semantically mixed items. That is why the ideal of the currently forming human sciences is designed to reorganize, reformulate and systematically clarify this traditionally ambiguous semantic compound, applied habitually in various branches of the humanities, including that of traditional philosophy, which has traditionally been recognized as the most rational/logical in its way of reasoning.

Therefore let us turn to a more delicate problem in connection to our topic. As a matter of fact, because of the above explanation, we should also attempt to distinguish between the majority of historically accumulated discourses produced in the field of the liberal arts and their genuinely



rationalist, scientifically directed elements/tendencies. The concept of “function 2/mechanism 2” in our historical model refers to only the latter, although the former as well as all other historical phenomena (including all kinds of irrational, fictional and superstitious discourses, activities and their organizational entities) must totally be the object of investigations of historical function 2. In civilized history, genuinely rational and scientifically directed thoughts/efforts can only coexist with all other heterogeneously formed thoughts/efforts in an extensively mixed way. The both are made by divergent mechanisms, and sociologically speaking, it is always the latter that are more powerful and more influential in the same society where the scholars in the former also exist. Accordingly, a genuine, scientifically-devoted humanities scholar has to be in an existential tension caused between his scientific devotion and his need for social survival. In general, a serious ancient thinker with a certain rational-thinking tendency has always existed together with various kinds of attitude-oppositional pseudo-colleagues over the long course of intellectual history; in modern times, a serious scholar in human sciences will be faced with his frequently seen rivals from science/technique/management who are used to combining his naturally scientific notion pragmatically/opportunistically with some superstitious pseudo-theories (such as the *Tui-Bei-Tu* [推背图] and *Yi-Jing* [易经]) to “pseudo-logically” support his social-political idea. In short, many scientific experts specialized in one discipline would exercise his irrational/non-scientific way of thought in social-cultural realms. In terms of this intellectual custom, some single-disciplinary scientists/engineers could become the stronger opponents of genuine human sciences theorists! A natural scientist can play a double role in history 1 and history 2 together, just like a human sciences scholar can also play a double role in the two historical zones. The example presents another reason why we should separate the professional practices of a scholar and his scholarly practices guided by function 2. ●nce again, our historical division is made at the functional level.

Moreover, regarding the relationship between the human sciences practices of a scholar and his other social-cultural activities, let us look at another related aspect of the problem in order to further understand the significance of the reasonable academic-disciplinary separation made at the functional/operational level. Here we only add the more practical reason that functional separation regarding academic disciplinary systems is also helpful for the more relevant operative division between one’s human science devotion and one’s social commitment, while the relationship between both has been confused for a long time by various philosophical/theoretical ways of thinking. The multiple kinds of

intellectual/theoretical labor divisions lead also to more effective functional/operative labor divisions between social activities and academic practices, both of which can share the same used material that is the object of the action of the one and the object of the investigation of the other. The mixture of the two kinds of objects embodied in the same material usually leads to the serious confusion of recognition. The more rationally-tended scholarly labor division between social/political activities and intellectual/spiritual practices can therefore more clearly explain our recently raised notion of the dual historical developing tracks in terms of which of the two growing historical lines is propelled by different original motivations and is carried out by divergent operative mechanisms, and which separately “serves” the different historical telos of mankind. Although there have existed close external interactions between the two developing historical lines, they cannot be directly engaged in each other’s internal operations. A mechanism of history 1 cannot properly carry out the innate jobs of the mechanism of history 2. It is the same case for the reverse description. Accordingly, this intellectual result cannot be designed or applied by the agents of history 2 to the business of history 1 agents, as so many thinkers in the humanities have wishfully expected (that is to say, a philosopher or a literary man is unable to reform/change history 1 (the political/economic/military world) with his own special knowledge created in history 2; in other words, the operative origins/rules in history 1 and history 2 cannot be alternatively used in an exchangeable way). The same case is more clearly explained in the interaction between social activities and the practices in radical/modernist literature/arts that always naively cherish a strong society-reforming ambition with their irrelevantly chosen artistic weapons. The wrong interpretations shared by the two fields are made by blending external/internal interactions of the two separate categories of historical practices. The fact that the functional separation accords with the paralleled existence of the two operative autonomies is established by the two different mechanisms of the historical practices of mankind. On the other hand, this fact indeed allows the two historical mechanisms to influence each other externally through alternatively making use of elements produced by one mechanism for the job to be carried out by the other mechanism. For example, any social practice can make use of the material produced in some intellectual practice in terms of its own mechanism; conversely, any intellectual practice can irrelevantly or unsuitably conceive an aim to influence or carry out, even if vainly, some social/political plans. That is to say, some avant-garde art or philosophy attempts to carry out their social-practical projects in order to improve or reform some social/political reality,

eventually leading to irrelevant ends with the result that the irrelevant idea/action could just be used to serve that conservative part. That means the worst result could be that such kinds of artistically-styled efforts, which must be under the surveillance/manipulation of the soft-powers, actually present a potentially collaborative and misleading role/effect just because of its irrelevant, invalid recognition that could help expel more suitable measures for attaining the correct aim. (The same role can be applied to some radical religious practices too: the fictionally-made vision, combined with persuasive strength, can actually exclude effective efforts towards the realist end.) This basic functional/epistemological operative misunderstanding would produce a truly negative effect: to block the genuine autonomous/independent progress of intellectual/spiritual efforts in history 2.

Therefore we see that the neglect of the functional separation between social and human sciences indicates a long stagnation of many great theoretical trends, including the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, western-Marxist philosophy, existentialism, psychoanalysis and all behaviorist and pragmatist philosophies. This basic way of dealing with social/political and intellectual/spiritual phenomena by blending them together (as well as the epistemological-erring mixture between theoretical and social practices) becomes one of the main reasons why their theoretical analyses are frequently proved invalid or even misleading at both theoretical and practical levels. The lasting coexistence of these mutually competitive schools rooted in the same ambiguously constituted world is partly also due to a basic intellectual individualism innately driving scholars/thinkers, each of whom takes competitive success on the professional chessboard as individual achievement. So intellectual individualism embodied in scholarly originality and fitting in with the establishment based on the soft-powers becomes the true reason why their disorderly cross-arguments naturally produce the artistic style of liberal arts that could even be encouraged and indirectly guided by the two trio-powers just because of their impotence in a scientific/rationalist way of thinking and action. The extensive weakening of the ethical subjectivity of human science theorists in our times is mainly expressed in two aspects: on the one hand, they are lacking in the independent-creative spontaneity with respect to their scholarship, and on the other they are lacking in the strong independent will to resist to any allurements/pressures from academic/professional powers.

The two aforementioned huge human science movements, together with a lot of other smaller philosophical schools, were seriously weakened or disorganized either by the disaster of World War II (German-linguistic

zones have terribly lost their pre-war spiritual-creative energy since then) or by the materialism-centric/technical/commercialized globalization in our new era (we see the ceasing/ebbing of the French structural movement and its deformation to the irrational trends of the so-called post-structuralism or post-modernism). On the other hand, however, these two great movements could only be suitably recognized as two great temporary/tentative achievements attained along the scientific/rational lines of the humanities; they should not be regarded as satisfactorily complete or absolutely correct scientific consequences when the modern theoretical humanities have in fact remained in their developing stages until now. In our affirmation about the great humanity-theoretical movements based first in Germany and later in France, we combine the two divergent categories concerning the functional level and the social-cultural areas. The latter only refers to the social-physical substratum of the former and in return the former is the carrier of the functional elements at its certain aspects other than its entire phenomena. So what we affirm is only related to certain substantial aspects and some functional levels that are partly and temporarily presented by the movements; we never attempt to affirm the sufficiently satisfactory or pertinent values caused by their intellectual entirety. The example can also be used to clarify our conception in general: function 2, for example, is carried out only by some aspects/events at a definite time of the related intellectual phenomenon that consists of the actor, his thought and action, and his result in terms of the definite evaluative standards. Basically, the affirmed parts are relatively defined in terms of the general functional mechanism 2 and therefore are essentially expressed in the epistemological correction of the practical orientation of the related practices. So the affirmed functional part cannot be simply reduced to (although is certainly carried out by) the concrete person or his works. In other words, we do not need to affirm the entirety of the author or his works in an absolute term but mainly accept their relevant parts that relatively represent the elements correctly produced by function 2.<sup>6</sup> The latter will be included in the intellectual/theoretical treasure as the continuing operative basis for being applied in future. In everyday parlance, people are used to simply following another pragmatic evaluation in order to beautify or adorn excellent authors or works permanently; in modern times this habit of

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<sup>6</sup> The academic star system has become an actual obstacle for promoting human sciences today. When some scholar obtains academic success, every topic of his work could become a valuable theme for permanent discussions only because of his socially recognized authoritative profile. The latter functions just as a commodity brand and the related humanities activities are consequently commercialized.

evaluation is transformed to include an added commercial function: to create a famous brand of classic books through using their historically-transmitted values. This distinction about the evaluation principle is also indicated between the traditional humanities and the modern human sciences. For the latter, the case is exactly the same as what we see in natural sciences: no historical achievement of an invention can be absolutely established merely owing to the fact that it got affirmation from the authorities of its times; it must undergo a constant check within the entire scientific network/framework.

For the sake of more clearly explaining our above conception, let us just add some comments on those two great theoretical humanities movements further. Their positive-progressive achievements cannot simultaneously expel their serious mistakes/ignorance committed by the both with regard to their judgments/practices about political-ethical justification concerning their contemporary political circumstances. As is well known, the scholars of the German-centric philosophical stream indicate their general right-wing patriotism, and the intellectuals of the French-centric interdisciplinary-directed theoretical stream indicate their general left-wing tendency. Even the more serious negative consequences co-occurred with their serious positive contributions to the theoretical progresses of the humanities! Nevertheless, this apparently paradoxical phenomenon just proves our conception about historical bifurcation: any humanity-theoretical progresses refer to only certain parts of the related practices; those temporarily affirmed progresses are only semi-products/raw material to be further processed in future; the scientifically affirmed parts produced in history 2 can be used/applied by any actors, including those in history 1. As a result, the relational problems of thought and politics can be handled by means of any strategic/tactical designs/mechanisms. There exists no linear logical/causal connection between the two heterogeneous domains: pragmatic-operated politics and ethical-guided humanities theory. In other words, the appearances of the same moral discourse in history 2 and history 1 are one thing, the two operative mechanisms handling the same discourse in history 1 and history 2 are another thing; and both are heterogeneous in their driving motivations and pragmatic aims. Scholars always merely pay attention to the concrete appearance of “words” but often ignore the operative mechanisms operating with the words. That is why humanities theorists in history have been always confused in this intermediary zone. This is another reason why we raise the model of history 1/history 2. It is interesting here to mention an old famous saying of Marx that “the most important thing is to change the world rather than to know the world”. The

“logic” linkage, declared by him to exist between the knowing and the acting, is contrary to our historical model that asserts the separation of the two heterogeneous mechanisms. Marx’s mixture of the two kinds of knowledge is owed to his neglect of the functional distinction mentioned above. Social-political actors of course request the correct related knowledge as their effective instruments consisting of social recognition, which belongs to history 2, but the application of the instruments requests still another kind of instrument consisting of acting tactical skill, which only belongs to history 1. Another important example could be the hotly debated topic about the linkage between the Enlightenment and the French Revolution (and all subsequent revolutions). According to our historical model, the epistemological separation/pragmatic linkage of the two historical phenomena could be more reasonably treated. In terms of the behavioral-pragmatic point of view the focus would be put on their phenomenal connection, but if from our point of view we must distinguish between them then the intellectual part of the Enlightenment would belong to history 2 and its application/operation to history 1. For the latter some thoughts of the former are only the material/instrument to be manipulated in terms of a separate tactical mechanism. It is the same case with the relationship between utopian thought and all social-political activities making use of the utopian thought. Regarding the case of Nietzsche and a great number of other similar examples, we can apply the same analytical method in order to reach the more exact functional details concerned.

Furthermore, viewed from the angle of the epistemological history of mankind, the scientific developments of the contemporary humanities in general have been still performed within the system of modern disciplinary compartmentalization that maintains the epistemological and methodological restrictions caused by the related institutionalization of the trio-powers. That means all traditional disciplines have been ever more subdivided and accordingly able to be deepened/advanced at the technical levels that are shaped/regulated by various related disciplines. Thus, especially since World War II, there have occurred more and more ever-specialized/institutionalized disciplines in the humanities, each of which has developed to be more and more operatively structured and maintained professional systems that have provided certain well-organized technically operable procedural regularities. Despite this general remarkable progress at the operative-technical level, the scientific-theoretical level has remained less advanced and its social/cultural influences have even become more and more diminished just because of the consequences brought about in the processes; namely, their identity and functions have become more and more determined by the social establishment of the

academia determined by the two triopowers. As stated above, the current humanities or human sciences, despite the general scholarly developments accumulated in the processes, have obviously fallen into a period of epistemological stagnation and intellectual-creative impotency in a relative/relevant sense, and any genuinely scientific-theoretical perspective of human sciences has been structurally obstructed or restricted by the inlaid operative-organizing mechanisms directly caused by the triopower 2 (namely, scientific technologicalization, professional institutionalization and cultural commercialization). More precisely, they have functioned as the sample professional operations within the above-mentioned disciplinary-central networks at the quasi-technical levels determined/regulated by the fixed mechanisms of respective disciplines.

Despite all that has been said above, viewed historically, we may also find another natural reason why we should logically stress the necessity of the all-round interdisciplinary-directed revolutionary reform of the humanities today. The past two hundred years' vertically-directed development, realized through disciplinary-central deepening and specialization, has now naturally brought about requests for comprehensive horizontally-directed scientific practices performed with multi/inter-disciplinary interaction. The similar readjustments of epistemological/methodological orientations in natural/social sciences have still been successfully carried out respectively in history while the same scientifically desirable development of the humanities has been structurally blocked by the social/cultural/academic conditions of our times.

### **3. The Theoretical Humanities under the domination of the Professional Establishment and the Necessity of their scientifically-directed modernization**

Most excellent works in the contemporary theoretical humanities (which should be separated from those works popularized or widely accepted merely in classrooms that have been used by a majority of intellectuals for the sake of carrying out purely ordinary occupational procedures) are taken seriously and even loved extensively by professional specialists who are regularly trained on modern campuses. The fact, however, should not be regarded as being equivalent to the genuinely scientific-theoretical progress with their effective applicability in systematic explanations and solutions of human and social affairs. As this author has frequently pointed out, we have to pay serious critical attention to the genuine roles of some major contemporary western philosophies, such as the German philosophy

of existence and French existentialism. The epistemological misguidance shared by both the irrationally- and ontologically-formulated philosophies spectacularly indicated in presenting similarly misleading ideas, which were lost either in the rightist extreme ideology or in the leftist extreme one, have not only produced de-constructive effects on the scientific developments of theoretical human sciences or *Geisteswissenschaften* in general but also caused seriously negative political/social/cultural impacts in particular. As a matter of fact, these two leading postwar speculative philosophies provide intellectuals and humanities scholars with different styles of irrational metaphysics/ontology.<sup>7</sup> The reason lies in the fact that their texts have been authoritatively approved/confirmed and been regarded as permanent values within the constantly fixed philosophy-disciplinary institutions. This theoretical privilege has been established within the disciplinary system, maintaining a professionally-constant autonomy with eligibility that does not need to be reexamined in reference to the objective justification of their discourses: they can since then live on their own textual bodies as such forever. Thus, the influential philosophical works have been taken as unchanged spiritual values for constant enjoyment rather than as temporary creations to be further improved/corrected with the unified rational/scientific criteria, as we see in natural/social sciences. That is just the main reason why the theoretical humanities cannot be regarded as a scientific-orientated way of thinking, for their mechanism for establishing academic authority is radically different from that of the natural sciences.

The involved reasons why the humanities have been much less scientifically developed certainly comprise other aspects. A great number of similar successful phenomena have emerged with respect to modern humanities scholarship because of the eligibility they had once won at the professional level, and this academic-authoritative recognition is not determined by their true scientifically-directed contributions but by the actual results that are accepted by the legalized authoritative community of professionals during the related historical processes. Since the outset of the era of commercialization/globalization, the very reason for this pragmatically-

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<sup>7</sup> One of the reasons why a Nazi philosopher can be constantly appreciated and praised by the post-war philosophers of those countries defeating Nazism lies in the fact that many current philosophers' mind-sets are still enwrapped in theoretical-technical disciplinary-centrism and therefore exclude two major theoretical aspects in their reflective speculations: the one is the objective reference to the social reality and the other is ethical subjectivity. As a result, they just function as the disciplinary-centric technicians emphasizing the exclusive rhetorical manipulation of philosophy discourse.



given eligibility obtained by the human sciences scholarship becomes more and more clearly determined by their “use-value” of the market when the ecology of the humanities looks more and more like some commercial-like circumstances. In other words, the social/cultural/scholarly utility of the humanities has been further and further disconnected from their scientific potential or reference towards genuine scientific advancement measured in terms of the principles of the genuine human sciences. Since the term “science” in a broad sense is quasi-equivalent to “scholarship” of any kind in modern times, the humanities have been also included in the united system of education and scholarship together with natural and social sciences. Therefore, the three categories of scientific/scholarly systems are not unified or made consistent by their contents, methods and functions but only by a unified organizing framework/mechanism. The scientific/scholarly activities are no longer the behaviors of individuals or individual groups like we see in ancient times; instead, they are more and more strictly organized by the ever-changeable state/society’s power systems, including its hard and soft types alike. By sharing the same organizing ways the humanities have begun to change their traditional operative ecology as well: from the earlier so-called individual/liberal practices to the collective/organized practices. And with the ever-increasing development of commercial globalization, the professionally maintained or socially organized humanities present their organizing/organized tendency more and more and their individual/liberal character less and less. This historically-changed tendency leads the branches of the humanities to be remarkably disconnected with multi-reality, accordingly further losing their applicability to real life or being transformed into a special autonomy for social survival organized in and supported by the unified academic framework based on triopowers. As a consequence, the more “scientifically” organized humanities increasingly lose their genuinely scientific-creative energy and potential. In short, the humanities today are essentially defined first of all by the status of their being organized by an externally operated multi-academic power/organizer, rather than driven by their own innately intelligent motivation/ethical conviction.

We should explain another epistemological-pragmatic distinction concerned with the concrete individual/collective and their functional expressions. What we emphasize in our bifurcating historical model in particular is the two autonomously operative mechanisms driving and organizing the two main historical-evolutional lines. Any physically existing persons engaged in the main historical evolutions are the agents whose related involvements are only the parts of their historical existence.

That means any one-functional agent can be also the person who can carry out another function or non-functional affairs. The possible multi-involvements of one person in certain historical processes should be therefore distinguishable from his specific participation in certain historical-functional events. So his various concrete internal/external ideas/actions must be different at the epistemological level from his special involvement with certain functional production. If he happens to be a philosopher and a social activist at the same time he has a chance to carry out his works in the two historical-operative areas, but the results of his efforts should be respectively described/judged in different terms from those defined by the two functional evaluations/mechanisms.

The cultural/intellectual developments in the processes of modern industrial history lead to highly strung tension appearing in the humanities; on the one hand, the general scientific development in modern history has indeed restructured and reformulated the humanities to a certain degree, transforming them from the mode of their traditional intellectual/artistic creations to the modern scholarly/theoretical mode of the quasi-scientific studies (one example: from traditional novel-creating to the modern study of the former), but on the other hand the unified educational/scholarly organizing powers nevertheless lead them to be less and less genuinely scientific in character because of the guiding domination of the same commercialized organizing powers. In other words, the same organizing systems make natural/social sciences become more and more scientifically productive while, by contrast, they make human sciences less and less scientifically feasible/effective. In other words, the scientific ideal of the functional transformation of the traditional humanities to the modern human sciences has suffered from some structural obstacles. Accordingly there have always emerged divergent and competing opinions about the correct identity and proper function of the humanities: should they remain as a sort of "liberal arts" or change to some special type of "sciences"? (By the way, such delicate theoretical sophistication can never be effectively/relevantly dealt with by analytical/pragmatist/behaviorist philosophers because of their innate epistemological self-restriction: they cannot clearly demarcate the operative-zones concerning the social and the human sciences as well as the existing domains between social-behavioral actions and introspective-psychological motivations.)

The two kinds of definitions seem to share the same character that all branches of the humanities still need to be referable to actual human life or to social/cultural reality. The reference to natural/social/cultural reality should be the first requirement of the scientific practices despite the fact that the traditional humanities are conventionally involved in

imaginative/fictional thoughts as well. Regarding the current idea of human sciences, we should distinguish between two kinds of references to reality: the modern genuinely rational/scientific one and the traditional half-rational/half-fictional one. ●f course we should accept the two big separate realities: the physical reality and psychological reality. The relationship between the two kinds of realities cannot be simplistically reduced to a pragmatic/physicalist/operativist monism. The latter can explain why the physicalist-directed philosophy of the United Sciences of the Vienna Circle cannot be fully justified with respect to *Geisteswissenschaften*. We have to recognize the justification of the notion of multi-rationality in human knowledge, and there especially exists also multi-reality in historical/humanist life; the notion of pluralist-rationality is therefore necessary for us to more properly grasp the genuine meaning of the human sciences. No doubt all types of rationality and reality can become the reasonable objects of certain scientific investigations so long as we can tackle them in terms of correct typology of rationality.

In addition, there exists also a conceptual distinction concerning the epistemological references to reality: the rational/scientific one and the artistic/intellectual one. ●nly the former can be taken as being genuinely scientific in nature. Thus, should we think about the problems of the scientific transformation of the traditional humanities in the same way? Herewith let us talk about the above-mentioned two scientific movements of theoretical humanities again. The two historical events indicate similar driving forces in the direction of the scientific-tended transformation of the traditional theoretical humanities and especially of the traditional type of philosophy. The first of the pre-war German-Austrian trends indicates a philosophical/psychological/historical *pan-quasi-positivism*, including the historical-hermeneutic, the logical/mathematic-psychological, the psychoanalytic, and the physical/mathematic-analytic, but on the whole it was still based on a philosophical disciplinary-centrism; the second of the post-war French-Italian trends also indicates a *pan-quasi-positivism* performed in the linguistic, sociological and historical domains, including all branches of structural-semiotic practices according to the continental term. A sharp distinction should be made between the two by the fact that the former is characterized by its modernized philosophical-centrism and the latter just by their de-philosophical-centrism or inter-disciplinary-oriented theoretical approaches. By different epistemological and methodological strategies, both trends in essence share the similar tendency of the somewhat pan-scientific rationalism, including their tentatively rational ways of thinking about irrational phenomena. The shared rational/scientific tendency indicates the similar rationalist impulse

with different degrees of epistemological/methodological complicity and different aspects regarding human life/history/rationality and discloses the same wishes for a more rational and effective handling of the problems of spiritual intelligibility and axiological applicability of humanities-related knowledge and updated wisdom concerning the crucial issues of meaning, value and belief, which are innately rooted in human existence itself and cannot be dealt with either by natural or social scientific ways. The traditional fields of philosophy, history and literature remain the relevant realms for understanding and solving the related issues today but their traditional ways of thinking historically prove to be less and less relevantly effective in scientifically applicable terms; or, in other words, those traditional ways of handling the humanities have finished their historical-temporary tasks and therefore must be reformed or revolutionized into their modernized stage, in which natural and social sciences have already made such great progress and been so powerful over the past centuries. That means those exact scientific progresses have forced the humanities to reflect on the problems of their identity, function and methods in consideration of the fact that politics, society, culture and knowledge have undergone so many successful and scientifically-productive transformations in history. Meanwhile, on the other hand, the substantial progresses of natural and social sciences have also constantly disclosed an innate deficiency with respect to their capability of dealing with the issues of human spiritual life: they are just unable to reach the intelligible understanding of meaning, value and beliefs as well as human nature itself, which have historically proved the most significant topics for the fortune of humanity. Concretely almost all tragedies of mankind have been caused by deeply complicated and inaccessible historical/existential situations full of power struggles. Furthermore, the desirable advancement of the quality of human spiritual/intellectual existence in history 2 has also severely suffered from the complicated conditions caused by the hard- and soft-power mechanisms in history 1.

In essence, we attempt to state that all such crucial factors or topics can be included in a general problematization related to the so-called ethical dimension. Both the natural and social sciences can help solve problems about morality/legality in the external social/political term but they are unable to effectively reach the intellectual domains related to the ethical dimension explained above. Thus we may conclude that the very essence of the humanities, regardless of their traditional or modernized modes, just lies in an inside corner of the ethical-spiritual life which we have been far from grasping until now. In other words, the traditional efforts towards ethical reflections should also be relevant and scientifically modernized in

order to increase our capability of really understanding and actually solving the top significant problems in the present-day era of commercial/technological globalization, either passively or actively. As a matter of fact, the contemporary task of modernizing the traditional humanities in fact implies two aspects: the passive and the active; namely, in facing the materialist-aggressive expansion of globalization, the humanities should learn how to persist in its innate identity, and at the same time human beings should more meaningfully elaborate their intelligibility concerning its true valuable existence and spiritual sublimation. These two movements of the theoretical humanities should be more seriously concerned with the difficult yet significant issues and therefore require a more epistemological/methodological re-adjustment in their practical strategies. A rational/ethical-directed consciousness has indeed underpinned these two huge movements and has also been expressed relevantly in all other scientifically-directed practices of the humanities for the past two centuries. But on the other hand, the present-day humanities, which have been sufficiently professionalized, are becoming more and more rigidly bound with the mechanically organized/strictly institutionalized academic systems; accordingly, they have weakened or even exclude their subjective motive/ability to courageously deal with the crucially pressing problems. That means all scientific achievements of the humanities in history still need to be improved/advanced, but their continuous progress has been structurally obstructed under the currently totally institutionalized academic world that has powerfully inculcated them with the value of priority of professional profits.

#### **4. The actual conditions concerning the interaction between the Theoretical humanities and the academic Establishment**

Regarding the task of modernizing the humanities we should above all understand the nature of the general contexts of the hard/soft-powers operating in the materialist globalization era. We should recognize that both social and human sciences have acquired their scientifically-directed progress under the independent progress of natural sciences, and that all three categories of sciences belong to history 2. ●wing to the external interaction between history 1 and history 2, natural sciences and their practical products and technical branches have become the most useful instruments for history 1 and made the latter more and more rationally/effectively strengthened. Thus we see a paradoxical phenomenon in

historical development: the natural/social sciences as the products in history 2 become the important tools to highly strengthen history 1 with their rationally developed capability, and they also strengthen the scientific development of the human sciences by making the latter more capable of thinking in a rational/scientific way as well. Nevertheless, another kind of external interaction between the organizational power system in history 1 and the intellectual/spiritual productions in history 2, namely the traditional dominative pressure of the former upon the latter, has led to this dominating strength greatly multiplying. That means the rationally strengthened mechanism 1 has objectively produced an obstructive power to curb the rational/scientific development of mechanism 2. That is why this scientific/rational turn of the humanities has brought about certain scientific progresses that are mostly expressed at the technical level. Nevertheless, an all-round scientific/rationalist advancement of the human sciences would have made them into another kind of intellectual force that could present a more effective mode of questioning/challenging directed to the self-claimed absolute justification of the purely materialist/technical/commercial-directed orientation of human civilization today. As we mentioned above, true intellectual strength can only be of a scientific/rational type, including its related ethical aspects.<sup>8</sup> In general, any irrational/non-rational intellectual/spiritual practices could be more consistent with the fixed orientation of the trio-power systems. Besides the less scientific/less rationally-tended humanities, we may mention their following “friendly dissidents” who are the popular critics of social/cultural phenomena produced in the trio-power systems: all supernatural spiritual movements, artistic creations, especially the modernist/post-modernist ones, as well as all kinds of sensual entertainments. That is because these kinds of critical expressions are made in irrational/super-realist ways and therefore remain inefficient or even deformedly collaborative in nature. In this sense the post-modernist philosophies, with their various irrational/anti-scientific discourses, can be taken as a typical philosophy of our times, essentially serving the general goal of the pure materialism of the globalization era. This is just because their irrational/nihilist persuasive discourses can only produce certain emotional/aesthetic effects that can never produce some scientifically intelligible theories that really meaningfully confront the present-day social/cultural/scholarly reality.

In terms of the above interpretive model we have to point out that, owing to different reasons, those efforts towards scientifically modernizing

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<sup>8</sup> We note that the rational/scientific tendency of human sciences should especially be realized in de-philosophical ethics.

the humanities have been reduced to failure. Let us raise the example of the two major theoretical humanities movements again. These two huge scientifically-rationalizing movements of the humanities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century indeed attained their respective temporary achievements, indicating the justified rational/scientific orientation through more rationally modernizing the theoretical humanities. Unfortunately, as we have pointed out, the one was broken by the global war, the other ironically by the unprecedented blossoming of commercial/technological globalization. Nevertheless, both have left their respective great heritages: the one was shown by their common empirical/logical positivist-directed way of reasoning against traditional philosophical-centrism (among them, Husserlian phenomenology remains the most reconstructive contribution), which is made by excluding the various traditional metaphysical/ontological speculations; the other by its multi-interdisciplinary theoretical/semantic-unifying pan-operative-positivism through firstly overcoming any philosophical fundamentalism or natural scientificism. As a result of their successive ebbing, all traditional and modern efforts in the humanities nowadays have been professionally institutionalized under the dominative influences of trio-powers and encircled into a systematically organized/regulated autonomy limited only to the campus. All scholarly practices in these fields have been trained, administered and processed within the strictly organized disciplinary-interweaved systems shaped by the institutionalized campus ecology, and all such practices as the formerly liberal arts are now under the supervision, regulation and control of the institutional powers and have to obey the strictly regulated operative procedures which are structurally defined by almost prefixed aims, criteria and methodological procedures. Living under these mechanically organized and controlled circumstances, all of the elements of the liberal-artistic practices have even lost their earlier creative/energetic spontaneity, for they have to pay closer attention to various external restrictive forces and therefore become merely the material/data to be processed or reproduced along the regulated procedures which are eventually determined by the related determinative power system and the evaluative instruction of academic marketing. In our present-day contexts of materialist/commercialized/technicalized globalization, the humanities, as the existence of cultural cultivation, have changed their earlier freedom in mentality and present a kind of quasi-parasitism depending on the materialist-substantial supports and the collaborative permission of the commercial/technological powers.

Regarding the question of the relationship between the liberal art humanities and the double trio-powers, there exist several levels of marketing mediation, ranging from the existing academic-intellectual

ideological status as the general determinist machine, the organization of academic marketing, the ideological criteria available in the market, the market-related promotion/propaganda apparatus (publishing advertisements), the production mechanism of scholarly works as goods produced on the organized campus, the training processes of the “producers” (students, teachers, writers) according to rigidified standards and procedures, and the ways to produce goods with “famous brands” (distinguished professors and theoretical writers) according to the necessarily followed ideological systems that are characterized by their lacking in capability/potential to question/recheck the general establishment based on the double trio-powers. By the way, unlike the straightforward way of operations of the hard-powers, the constitution of the soft-powers presents a typical intermediary mechanism consisting of different middle-functioning layers.

Apparently the intellectual/scholarly orientations guiding the liberal art humanities are decided by the “academic masters” in the production of the academic “commodity”, the professors as the makers/producers of the special commodity, while as a matter of fact the intellectual/scholarly choices adopted by professors are indirectly or more basically decided by other concealed forces; they must follow the fashions/rules created in marketing-operation and work according to the generally accepted existing academic ideology that must be ultimately consistent with the scholarly-ideological policies made by the double trio-powers. The latter effectively obey their will through the budget control as the last step of the determinative procedures. As the main agent for realizing the productive processes of the “goods” of the humanities, liberal art professors get used to processes and elaborate the quality of their jobs firstly by means of implementing the standardized, predominant academic ideology that is already built in their scholarly-practicing consciousness/habitude; alternatively, they eventually become merely “classroom existent”, equipped with the scholarly-ideological principles indirectly made by the trio-powers. In other words, the shoddy freedom of thinking in the field can only be realized through professionally and ideologically regulated/restricted channels.

As a consequence, participants of the professional humanities can seemingly do anything as they did before, but the essential difference between the past and the present is clearly outlined by the related academic ecology, such as that which is mainly determined by the regulated procedures and restricted operative contexts rather than by the performed academic materials such as scholarly texts; essentially, the life of the humanities is determined first of all by the strictly regulated operative systems rather than by the operated material, such as the



substantial contents/data contained in works finished in various disciplines. The activities in all fields are no longer motivated and initiated by liberal artists acting as free thinkers who mainly paid attention to the ideas expressed in texts, but unconsciously by the externally dominating rules embodied by professional systems indirectly guided by trio-powers. ●r more exactly, the scholars' choices are made by the multi-interactions of different parameters such as subjective interests, textual values and external governing contexts. The last, which can bring about feasibility, becomes the most determinative factor.

There exist a lot of externally determinative factors and instructive rules guiding the choosing patterns of individual behaviors; scholars behave like game-players who must follow the preordained game-rules with operative procedures. That means the desired spontaneous freedom of individuals realized in really free intellectual creations/expression no longer exists; scholars must first of all be concerned about and follow professional regulations in order to secure competitive profitability, or they just turn out to be professionalized operators guided by their utilitarian view of life that will be profitably carried out by a variety of professional parameters such as the eligibility of documents, hierarchical titles, and institutionalized ranks as well as marks of honor. Those professional parameters become the very genuine concerns and purposes of the human sciences scholars today and all such related factors can be easily disconnected from rationalist/scientific criteria.

Living under such a totally professionalized system, scholarly content or expressed thoughts, as we pointed out above, have naturally become the raw material to be processed within the regulated scholarly machine for the sake of searching for determined professional profits. ●nly the preordained objectives are the genuine concerns of scholars while the contents of created and used thoughts become only the means employed for the purely professional operative goals. During the processes, the contents of thoughts can usually be appreciated or enjoyed, just like a game-player who has indulged in performing their game-steps, and are merely embodied in the processes at the functional level. Thus this kind of quasi-utilitarian concern about or quasi-passion for professional practices function as a camouflage for replacing the really humanity-scientific devotions required. As a result, current humanities scholars would present a twin-feature in their academic careers: on the one hand as a double personality expressed in their apparent traditional love for liberal artistic values and in their essential concerns about professional benefits; on the other as a double-orientated player embodied by a twin-attentive operation towards immediate scholarly favors and mediated professional profits.

They talk about content or thought as such but they in fact act according to occupational criteria/rules. The choice of the used content or thought of a scholar depends on its utility or eligibility with respect to the academic market evaluation, although he presents the scholarly discourses as the means directed towards the utilitarian aim. The two divergent processes are therefore particularly overlapped in our totally institutionalized globalization era and the tendency has become the key reason why the modernization of the humanities has been structurally obstructed, owing to the radical development of globalization. As a matter of fact, once again, the scholarly contents used have to be consistent with the commercial fashions or fashionable brands/marks that present the operative eligibility in the professional world. Or, in essence, the scholarly contents are only apparently related to humanities' values whereas they are actually related to the market values; for only the latter can provide him with operative efficiency in his scholarly pursuance. Just as the favorite brands of goods are in the sway of the unexpected vicissitudes of the favorite fashions, or just like the changeable fashions in general in the consumerist market, the changeability of theoretical interests in the humanities are caused by the occasional alteration of tastes in theoretical reasoning without any rationally justified foundation. The fact can be used to describe the present-day vicissitudes of intellectual or theoretical evolutions too. For example, a variety of philosophical schools or theoretical trends have been formed by the occasional alteration of intellectual/theoretical tastes as well without any objectively or scientifically explainable causes, although people may regard some successively combined sequences that occurred around the related tasteful changes as pseudo-logical developments based on certain intelligible mechanisms. The same can be found with the changing tastes of fashions, supported by any arbitrary interpretation. All such attempts tend to negate the justification of the notion of human sciences. We may then further grasp that some post-modernist nihilism or extreme relativism could be more comfortable in proclaiming that the theoretical humanities can only be taken as the sort of liberal artistic pragmatism that is similar to all kinds of arts.

As a result, scholarly works play the role of modes of fashion and the choice of the chosen "means" used in academically institutionalized procedure turns out to be much easily handled. Just as fashions have no distinction between "expression" and "content" in their constitution, scholarly works as "instruments" need only to care about their impressive appearance: the sophisticated formalist modes of discourse. As a kind of scholarly commodity, the consumed scholarly content therefore needs only to care about the pragmatic utility of works in the exchange market. This

requirement accords with the present-day (especially in the non-western areas) multiple pragmatic styles of performing semiotic projects; then we see that the styles in imitative, repetitive, copyist ways of opportunist scholarly productions could be displayed at both subjective and objective levels. The effective discursive devices must be acceptable in reference to the variation of the market value; the authoritative discursive styles are formed in accordance with successful discursive models, orientations and even styles decided by the recognized “masters” in intellectual/scholarly history. The so-called “accordance” emphasized here is in fact to indicate an essential repetition of the ways of thinking on both aspects of contents and styles. That means only those authoritatively recognized contents and styles can be regarded as the objectively effective, academically qualified “scholarly works” that can be totally acceptable at all levels of power mechanisms. Thus, the discourse, regardless of how skillfully its substantial content and rhetoric style is created, presents a double function at the content plane and expressive plane together. Nevertheless, the actually productive part is always the latter, which mainly refers to its purely pragmatic-operative feature/parameters that are sufficiently suitable to be used in scholarly production/transactions/communication. Thus we can see the more radical development in recent academic contexts that, according to post-modernist epistemology, the formalist manipulation as such functions independently in our new intellectual platforms and would perhaps assert a “new truth”, characterized by its totally denying the traditionally central terms like reality/truth in order to promote an extreme relativist/nihilist epistemology. These prevailing radical theoretical trends that have just been created in our new century, however, that all dominant social power mechanisms are maintaining reinterpreted concepts of reality/truth, have been widely displayed by humanities scholars and are implicitly inconsistent with materialist/technological/commercial teleology. ●ne example can be raised in the following. The dramatically collaborative co-presence of the empirical-realism/positivism of natural/social sciences in history 2 and all power mechanisms in history 1 on one side and the fashionable irrational nihilism in the theoretical humanities mainly traced back to the Heideggerian-like style on the other can stimulate us to pay serious attention to a positive “hermeneutics” about the trio-powers that these two sides could implicitly support each other under a beautification of post-modernist rhetoric, with a rational common sense made by the joint force that the rational/scientific-orientated development of the theoretical humanities must be systematically weakened. Certainly nothing could be caused by real mutual agreement; the actual reason of such a nihilist way of theorizing is essentially due to a pragmatic opportunist/utilitarian spirit

covered by pseudo-romantically attractive rhetoric. However, on the other side, all factors leading to the popular acceptance are eventually also the consequence of operations made by the materialist-guided power mechanisms.

## **5. The contemporary semiotic movement as one of the main attempts for modernizing the theoretical humanities**

Now let us turn to the problems concerning the relationship between modern semiotics and the theoretical humanities. Unfortunately the problems can hardly be explained clearly if the reader is not familiar with the many disorderly details involved in the contemporary semiotic movement. This is not only due to the fact that the movement consists of too many divergent and even mutually contradictory conceptions of semiotics but also due to the more complicated issues concerning the unclearly expressed idea about why/how to reform or modernize the traditional humanities today. Accordingly, at least according to the interpretation of this author, the historically meaningful emergence of the contemporary semiotic theories was primarily caused by several great thinkers thoroughly modernizing the theoretical foundations of the traditional humanities. Nevertheless, these original theoretical contributions have been gradually blended and mingled by more and more other kinds of scholarly practices using similar terminology. Without clearly distinguishing between the “genuine” and “less genuine” semiotic practices first, we will not be able to grasp the entire related problematique. This author hopes other parts of this book will be a little bit helpful for the related explanations, although this author discuss this kind of topic mainly in his Chinese writings.

Above all, the most remarkably misleading confusion about the current semiotic movement has been made by many scientific schools sharing the same linguistic mark – “sign” – that contains a variety of different historical and modern meanings. As a result, the movement has been full of many divergent studies using this central term—sign and this habit of indistinctly using the general term has led to the weakening or even disappearance of the epistemological/methodological consistence of the semiotic scholarship. The most impressive example regarding this case is certainly the lasting coexistence of the European-continental school and the North American school, although these two so-called semiotic orientations are obviously contradictory at the epistemological/methodological level (the same term is universally used to refer to different conceptions). This notorious case of the operative-oppositional scholarly trends preferring to coexist in the

same international organization clearly indicates a common utilitarian attitude towards scholarship merely in order to share the same institutional profits in the academic competition. This example discloses how powerful the commercialized academic contexts are that have led current scholars holding different theoretical positions to tolerate the disorderly scientific coexistence in the common forum/platform; after all, the fact means that participants have felt a collective utility to maintain an international organization or to obtain extra institutional supports. This organizational strategy for the movement is clearly based on a collective opportunism that adopts this epistemological disorder/conceptual miscellany and interprets it as a scientific-interdisciplinary feature: the typical semiotic character. As a matter of fact, the requested relevant interdisciplinary principle at the epistemological level is replaced by the disorderly combination of different disciplinary scholarships. By virtue of this pragmatic/tactic replacement, the scientific truth-searching designs have been changed to a professional profit-searching strategy. The operative feasibility of this organizational movement has been dramatically due to the utility of the central fantastic word “sign” that has functioned as the theoretical-operative base to reasonably create a great academic solidarity in the scientific-competitive world. (Simply, a pluralist/mixed usage of the single term plays an additional role for expanding the academic power, with a result of weakening its own scientific elaboration of the movement.)

The current semiotic movement, basically originating from the stream of French structuralism, may be characterized by its typical interdisciplinary, theoretically-oriented operative pan-positivism. It is a widely popular misunderstanding that the current semiotic movement has been formed by and organized around the general studies about “sign”. The etymologic link of the term semiotics/semiology with the term sign has been simplistically used as the justifying reason of this popular definition that has become one of the main causes leading to the semiotic studies everywhere becoming an ever more popularized and less scientifically-defined profession. As a result, even the studies of the general history of the usage of the term “sign” have been professionally mixed with the theories of the central concept of “sign” that led to the establishment of the revolutionarily novel discipline of “structural linguistics”. The same verbal item “sign” plays completely different roles in different scientific contexts while the semantic mixture of it has been widely employed to support the development of the semiotic organization.

It is true that in many practical studies about cultural, journalistic and artistic phenomena centered in so-called media-semiotics, the combined application of differently defined concepts of “sign” can be very popular

and that is because most of them operate at a practical level to carry out different pragmatic projects in the recently expanded realm of the media market that indicates the establishment of the commercialized media-culture.

Generally speaking, the lasting co-existing mixture of Anglo-American studies of signs defined in histories of natural sciences and anthropology and the continental studies of signs applied in structural-linguistic theories (created along the Swiss-Danish-French line) has been understandably due to the occasional practices realized in the bi-continental experiences of Jacobson and Levi-Strauss during the WWII period. But the more substantial reason for the building up of the international association until it reached all areas in the world was the uniquely singular organizing talent of the Hungarian-American scholar Sebeok, who had created a scholarly pragmatic strategy/tactics through applying the polysemous term “sign” to unify and solidify this international family across the national and ideological demarcations since the late 1960s, although Sebeok himself had grasped little about the main semiotic base represented and supported by French structuralism and even opposed it strongly. Moreover, what this event really implies is the implicitly determinative factors produced by the rapidly strengthened trio-power systems.

Since the outset of the current semiotic movement, many scholars have been enwrapped in this mixed conceptual-snare: to vainly attempt to unify the authoritatively accepted two divergent schools, tracing back to Saussureian structural linguistics and Peircian pragmatic sign-philosophy at the theoretical level; or, to attempt to put the two types of “sign” (in Saussure’s line and in Peirce’s line) into a unified theoretical system in order to form a “general semiotics” to help strengthen the proper establishment of a new scientific system. As a result, the superficial priority of the single word “sign”, which is read as the logically firm concept, covers up the deep essence/potential of “semiotic/semiology” formed through the true interdisciplinary theorization. Accordingly, a pan-pragmatic philosophy as the epistemological foundation of Anglo-American sign-studies and a continental interdisciplinary-directed epistemology characterized by its de-philosophy-centrism have been illogically blended by pragmatic-operative academic-organizing tactics that have been essentially motivated by a universal academic-unitarianism. Furthermore, based on this habitual blending of the two divergent semiotic concepts, the semiotic movement, especially since its academic globalization, has become unlimitedly open or liberal or tolerant to almost all kinds of self-claimed “sign-players” that can include almost every topic where people can easily find this kind of (or similar) words and concepts

in all social/cultural/scholarly phenomena: actually it can appear in verbal units like word, sign, symbol, index and others. Nevertheless, the empty or unlimitedly open word “sign” and its synonyms can indeed allow semioticians to enlarge the number of their “members” and therefore to shape a ever-expanding organization that can help promote the academic competition without restrictions. Thus, in other words, the shaping of the international organization has been due to two reasons: a) the feasibility is formed by the conceptual ambiguity of the central terms flexibly synonymous with the sign applied quasi-unanimously among members; and b) the motivation is unanimously shared by members to join the powerful organization that can help strengthen professional competitive capability. Eventually, the semiotic organizations function as mere conference organizers to maintain an atmosphere of scientific propaganda by means of a decreasing/relaxing of its academic standards when institutional organizing efficiency plays an increasingly larger role than the scientific quality itself in the professional world of the humanities. For example, regarding each international congress of the IASS, the only concerns of the organizers are embodied in the numbers of possible participants. The academic achievements of each congress could be simply indicated by the increased number of participants alone. The achievements of the semiotic conferences are realized or embodied in any substantial printed material. All participants are also concerned about the scale or profile of the organized events (similar to a regular “academic fest or party”) that can be recognized habitually as the scientific achievements themselves. No doubt the popular style of pursuing semiotic studies this way is also welcomed by all participants who cherish similar psychology because everybody has got used to the institutionalized academic ecology. So what they search for in the organized scholarly contexts is just expressed in solidifying/satisfying their own academic utilitarian goals. In fact, the popularized recognition that semiotics is the study of signs has brought about so many semiotics-irrelevant studies into the field of professional semiotics. Why are serious semiotics scholars also tolerant to the miscellaneous formation of semiotic organizations? It is because of the objective pressure exerted from academic competition and the usually accepted atmosphere caused by prevalent utilitarianism, which make every humanities scholar naturally evaluate the competitive potential that can be obviously strengthened if one appeals to some organizational backing. This attitude of strategic choices will certainly be conducive to seeing that the semiotic-player pays constant attention to the effect/utility of his own organizational affiliation and therefore neglects his serious concerns about the collective scientific quality of the organization.

As a result, the above tendency towards organizational activities has eventually evolved into a conceptual formation of the “semiotic discipline”, the identity of which is not really defined in the scientific-scholarly term but rather in terms of the practical utility realized at the organizational level within the academic context. As a matter of fact, most semioticians indeed accept, recognize and like to join this particular new discipline titled with the name of “semiotics”, regardless of its contrariness to the very principle of the interdisciplinarity of the semiotic spirit. That means the international semiotic players are not only engaged in a lot of non-genuine semiotic-theoretical studies but are also involved in the utilitarian-pragmatic combined organization regardless of its direct contradiction with the interdisciplinary-directed principle of the true semiotic-spiritual orientation. Nevertheless, on the other hand, from an academic-sociological point of view, we might relax our scientific criterion of concern here and pay attention to another important academic phenomenon: the pragmatic change of the concept of “discipline” created by international semiotics in our new era. The term discipline could be added with a meaning defined in the academic-operative term; namely, it just means an effectively maintained organizational unit. In this sense “semiotics” has its justification in the academic world as long as it can use this universal index “sign” as an effective tool to actually unify the members. Such a purely professional aspect of semiotic activities has nothing to do with our topic so long as we can separate our theme totally from their business. At any rate, however, the ambiguous use of the term “discipline” would naturally lead to the weakened consciousness of insisting on semiotic studies along the relevantly interdisciplinary line. This self-contradictive tendency implied in the current semiotic movement proves that the commercialized utilitarian mentality of the semiotician has been basically created by a prevailing extreme academic utilitarianism purely directed to the single academic goal of professional-competitive success that is defined by the above-mentioned practical parameters rather than by the genuine semiotic-scientific ones. Exactly, the so-called “semiotic discipline” is of course not a true “discipline” in a scientific-academic term; alternatively, the “discipline” used here has the special meaning mentioned above – that it is a merely definite way to organize/maintain a special organizational power beneficiary to members’ possible professional profits. In this sense, a so-called “discipline” just functions as a specially organized “guild”. Accordingly, semiotic gatherings would not become occasions for serious scholarly dialogues/debates but would only be equivalent to a common platform used for promoting benefit-searching/exchanges. As a matter of fact, this



development of academic-organizational activities obviously reflects a general tendency of the contemporary commercialized ecology of the humanities as a whole: the scholarly contents have basically been taken as mere instruments to be used to obtain professional-utilitarian benefits. In its extreme case, we can see that the “academic criteria” today could be generally transformed into purely “business criteria” that will be eventually measured by money, power, influence, ranks and eminence. All such commercial and profitable parameters can surely represent the elements used to increase the capability of the professional organizations for strengthening and developing their projects designed for and applied towards professional profits. In essence, the priority of the current scholarly practices of the theoretical humanities/theoretical semiotics could be reduced to better usable instruments, despite the fact that the constitutive contents of the instruments are still represented by scholarly/intellectual materials. What has essentially changed will be expressed at the level of scientific orientation and the social-cultural function of the human sciences, including theoretical semiotics.

The aim of humanities’ scholarly practices is no longer to express the self-consistent thoughts freely created but rather to create the tools used for carrying out the professionally institutionalized procedure that leads to guaranteeing the practical-materialist goals of professionals. In this case, the success of the humanities scholarship is basically disconnected with the innate values (which are, as is usually said: truth, beauty and good) of the genuinely scientific-scholarly concerns but is connected with the market-determined utility and operative workability in consistence with the willingness of trio-powers. Both the market-utility and workability allowed/decided by trio-powers have become the final determinative sources with respect to the collectively adopted strategy/tactics in tackling the humanities. According to the utilitarian-pragmatic logic of such a prevailing academic background, the currently deviated semiotic activities have more easily found efficient ways being directed towards professional successes just because agents tend to adopt ever more flexible/opportunist scholarly-pragmatic tactics. For the pragmatically chosen definition of **semiotics** can be made arbitrarily according to the purely professional-operational feasibility in consistence with the same pragmatic logic of the academic market. Among the different factors influencing the deviated development of current semiotic activities, the most determinative one must be the changed external situations described above, although the way of this kind of influence is firstly created through the intermediary alternation of the mentality of individual scholars who can practically perform their choice, although the freedom of this choice can only be

realized at the technical level concerning how to more effectively accord to the preordained professional rules.

In terms of my long experience in promoting Chinese **semiotics** and coordinating the academic contact of Chinese semiotics with international semiotics, I understand that there is a basic difference of opinion between me and some of the organizers of the international association regarding the aims and methods about how to promote semiotic activities. Eventually I have concluded that what they attempt is different from my related concern that should be definitely linked to the substantial progress of Chinese semiotic science; for them, the true concern is merely about the eligibility or capability of their Chinese partners in effectively joining the existing international semiotic games as described above: basic western language capability, the available budget and the possibility of introducing IASS colleagues' works to China is all that is requested by them. ●f least concern is advancing the real scientific level and the potential of Chinese semiotics for substantial progress in the future. In sum, as long as their Chinese partners are able to join the international semiotic gatherings either at home or abroad, the aims of some international cooperative projects are achieved. For this purpose, fluency in foreign languages and the semiotic ABC talks are especially pertinent for their communication. An added satisfaction can be got if their Chinese partners can present some Chinese culture ABC to stage an ornamental presentation of non-western cultural exotic elements because they could herewith feel that their multi-cultural-directed internationalist programs are actually expanded. As is well-known, the field of foreign languages in China is characterized by relatively lower educational training regarding the knowledge of both western social/human sciences and the Chinese traditional humanities, for the main educational goal has been determined as practical language training over recent decades (this principle was first set up following the USSR model). Nevertheless, the elementary levels of these two kinds of knowledge in the field could become just right with respect to both sides carrying out their shared tasks by merely physically realizing the international communications. Because, after all, most western semioticians and other humanities scholars know little or nothing about the Chinese language and the rich Chinese traditional culture, let alone the advanced studies of Chinese humanities. During my long-term contacts with my western partners I have learnt to be cautious about a sensitive topic: how should genuine international semiotics be promoted if my western partners know little about and are even less interested in learning about Chinese/other non-western knowledge? Gradually I find almost all of them intentionally shun this sensitive questioning in order to avoid

reflecting the actual intelligent conditions requested by serious cross-cultural semiotics.<sup>9</sup> As regards this basic reality I have always emphasized the necessity to organize more advanced scholarly cooperation between western and Chinese partners through some special institutional connection. In any case, advanced western theories and the same advanced knowledge of the traditional Chinese humanities should both be effectively reorganized. For this scholarly request, the current conditions of the Chinese partners, most of which come from the field of foreign languages, are far from being eligible. That is why another aspect of my efforts on China's side has been in promoting Chinese scholars from philosophy, history and other social sciences to join semiotic activities; this eventually failed, however, owing to various factors (I will go back to this story in a later part of this article). Meanwhile I have constantly explained this request to my western partners during our collaborative efforts to promote Chinese-western **semiotic** contacts. Unfortunately this explanative effort in my contacts with western partners failed too. They just did not care about this intellectual request and eventually I grasped what could be their true aim: just to expand the academic scale and social influence of their semiotic organization. For this purpose, the status quo of their Chinese partners, characterized by their fluent practical western languages and less specialized knowledge about the western/Chinese humanities, is just sufficient enough. After all, they are so deeply and widely pragmatically-minded nowadays.

The original theoretical-creative spirits and resultant contributions of contemporary semiotic thought directly originated from the general scientific-directed progress of the humanities of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The latter was certainly based on the general scientific progresses of natural and social sciences that had accumulated at least since the European Enlightenment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The simultaneously further derived technological and sociological developments have led human civilizations towards an unprecedented new period of the domination of the technological/commercialist culture. Generally speaking, the latter has provided a paradoxical impact on the development of the humanities: to promote their scientific advancement at the scholarly-technical level and

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<sup>9</sup> The lacking in genuine interdisciplinary, theoretically collaborative practices will further lead to negative effects when the task of semiotics has been expanded to the non-western world. As this author has explained frequently, cross-cultural semiotics should be regarded as another kind of interdisciplinary-oriented semiotics. All points discussed above are also suitable for understanding the situations of semiotics/humanities in facing the task of modernizing non-western scholarship.

to guide their academic orientation in order to force them to serve the new teleology of technical/commercialized civilizations. The current changeable trend of the post-war international semiotic movement has been representative of the contemporary complicated historical situations.

This paper is not intended to especially deal with the theoretical problems as such. Nevertheless the author will repeat several central points regarding his semiotic-theoretical reflections in the following. Generally speaking, the title “semiotics” covers two main parts: applied/departmental semiotics, which consists of most parts of the semiotic profession and performs the disciplinary-based interdisciplinary projects, and so-called “general semiotics” or theoretical semiotics, which is redefined by myself as the general strategy for reorganizing human sciences (symbolized by the “GS-model”; refer to Chapter Four of this book) by dint of interdisciplinary/cross-cultural approaches. If departmental semiotics is just one field of human sciences, only the GS-model implies a revolutionary meaning and is directed towards the highly significant theoretical-renovating mission for reunifying the entire human sciences.

- a) According to the basic division of the semiotic practices, we have applied semiotics (semiotics 1) and general theoretical semiotics (semiotics 2). For the former, the more flexible usage of the concept of “sign” and related methods is more feasible/reasonable while its interdisciplinarity could be less strictly requested. Professionally, semiotics 1 is more successful and it forms the main body of international semiotics. In terms of this the above related criticism is also less relevant to semiotics 1, for its identity/function is defined mainly by its professional/practical efficiency and less to the development of the theoretical humanities. Therefore semiotics 1 is not our topic. Our scholarly theme is exclusively related to semiotics 2 or the so-called “general semiotics” as named in the profession.
- b) Semiotics 2, or general theoretical semiotics, should cover the following: general semantics, pan-cultural ideological analyses, pan-academic institutional analyses, the strategy/tactics of pan-global modernization/unification of the humanities, the establishment of the new branch of global semiotic ethics based on interdisciplinary theories, and the new branch of global humanist epistemology/axiology based on the new “united science” that exclusively refers to the human sciences. The central part of semiotics 2 consists of the all-round institutional/organizational analyses. So the so-called semiotics is far from being the studies of

signs; despite that, it must cover all relevant sign-studies.

- c) In any case, we can only regard the central term “sign” as a general index or brief mark of the signification, causational, symbolic, representative relationships; we should not substantiate it as an independent well-defined concept to be further made into a pan-metaphysical base. In this sense we prefer to popularly call semiotics a universal-semantics or a pan-institutional-analytical theory; both are of course related to human-historical phenomena.

Conclusively speaking, the deteriorating tendency of the international semiotic movement has been caused by several factors; among the above mentioned several major factors we can repeat the following: the original masters’ theories make scientific contributions only for certain aspects and all need to be further creatively developed; and the combination of several collaborative schools is divergently made by their different orientations/methods and the compositional disorder has naturally led to the consequence of unlimitedly/flexibly expanding membership from different scholarly backgrounds, making the association further lacking in its true coherence of scientific collaboration.

From the recent related development of the so-called Chinese semiotic groups, we can see an interesting phenomenon indicating the interactive relationship between the two weak points of the international and the domestic sides. Because of the compositionally mingling character of the present-day semiotic activities and the strengthened pressure of the professional-utilitarian competition, the two newly-joined scholarly branches – the so-called semiotics of media and cognition sciences – have occupied a more and more important position in international semiotic organizations, although these two newly-come so-called “disciplines” keep their obvious epistemological distance from the original semiotic theorists at the both theoretical and practical levels. As a matter of fact, the remarkable promising growths of these two stronger scholarly/cultural fields have their own independent reasons connected with their relationship to the much changed social/cultural/scholarly contexts. That means these two major newcomers keep their own separate professional fields outside the semiotic movement. Their being “included into” the semiotic profession is of course due to the more and more scholarly open-mindedness of the present-day semiotic movement. As a matter of fact, this apparent development of the current semiotics means there can be only certain academic “combinations” (just like the combination of two companies for the sake of mutual strengthening) of the two existing social/cultural/academic professions. Besides, the identity of recognition

science looks like that of analytical philosophy while so-called media semiotics is part of the general media culture, whose miscellaneous identity comprising the intellectual and technical aspects should be defined in terms of more complicated social, cultural and technical dimensions and has nothing to do with the original scientific-theoretical spirit. Actually a new science about media culture could be a multiply synthetic study based on a variety of disciplines and social/cultural programs. How could we include such an emerging experimental mode of synthetic analysis into a simply self-defined “discipline” – media semiotics? The so-called rapidly expanded development of media semiotics has only been a result of the above-mentioned practical combination of the two professional complexes. (By the way, the media is a title about social, cultural and ideological technique rather than learning.) The combinations of those separately existing fields and the semiotic profession can indeed enlarge each other’s synthetic influence/power at social, cultural and academic levels. But how can we name such social phenomena of combinations of several separate cultural/academic organizations as some scientific development? Being included into the semiotic realm, they also keep their separate energetic existence. In this case, when the original semiotic organization had been going down, the so-called participation is actually the collaborative contract between two sides. The phenomenon looks like the mutual enlargement of two organizations in order to increase each other’s power in competitive contexts. On the other hand, this utilitarian union of several groups can be declared as a mutual confirmation of each other’s scientific credits through propaganda. Such an apparently scientific development made by dint of tactics of mutual organizational expansion has recently happened during the deteriorating period of the humanities.

## **6. The essential contrast of life-attitudes between professional profits and the scientific truth; the basic confrontation between objective institutionalization and subjective freedom**

Despite the criticism discussed above there seemingly still exists a subjective freedom in carrying out the practice of humanities where the individualist creations should be made. There are two kinds of operative individualism realized either prior to or after the global era of institutionalization. In the former the creative individualism is focused on the original creation of the content of various kinds; in the latter it is focused on the original creation of a more effective/utilizable and profitable modality for leading scholars to be feasible in the market

competition. The former is concerned about the spiritual value of their thought itself while the latter about the suitable formality embodied in both the content and style of scholarship. Historically speaking, so-called creative individualism in the humanities, which indeed gets rid of the earlier various compulsory controls in ancient times, could have at the same time lost the objective/public criteria/reference for organizing valuable thoughts and theories in a true scientific way. The same individualism in natural/social sciences under the same social/academic conditions must operate with respect to the confirmable and examinable empirical world. Therefore with rational goals and scientific procedures, their works can be productive in a meaningful sense. Entering the era of institutional globalization, the theorists in the humanities that had already been disconnected from concerns with objective reality have to be directed towards the unique pragmatic scholarly goal: how to attain their own individualist success according to the objectively regulated professional framework. Therefore their individualist freedom for scholarly selection must be relevant to the criteria and rules set up within the objective powerful institutional contexts. In fact, he lives in a “historic” tension between the objective circumstantial determinist machinery and the profit-guided individualist selection that is eventually also determined by the former. In essence, today he has been changed to become a technicalized human being acting subconsciously according to the objectively regulated rules; as a calculating engineering operator he can only invent or create his jobs in his specially designed projects that must accord with multi-restrictive conditions; a liberal art thinker or theorist can only organize his individually finished thoughts under the more and more clearly regulated preconditions established by the trio-powers.

Certainly, in modern democratic countries, no physically coercive measures would be imposed on the humanities scholars forcing them to do something, unlike what we can see under totalitarian regimes. The way of realizing the will of trio-powers is first of all by changing the subjective spontaneity of the scholars, making the latter carry out their selection according to a structurally reorganized mentality that is concerned much more with their own social/materialist-directed benefits than with the spiritual contentment of free creations as such. Simply, this is the fact we point out: “professional/materialist success” comes prior to, or simply replaces, “scientific/spiritual truth”. Then the essential objective determinism is covered by the subjective freedom. The first difference between ancient and modern philosophers lies in their mental structure or ethical spontaneity. Both ancient and modern intellectuals have to realize their works in reference to the objective conditions. But their differences could

be indicated by different selection strategies of their practices under the same knowledge of their objective conditions/limitations. The former are satisfied with realizing, as much as possible, their subjective freedom in their individual creations; in essence their mind is directed towards their own inside aims that are decided by themselves. For the latter, however, their mind is mostly directed to the exterior goals that are guided/dominated by the objective restrictive conditions. Therefore in the past the subjective search for expressing the uniquely original self could be taken as a really self-contained success, despite it not necessarily being in accordance with the scientific direction. As a result, the originality itself expressed by creative talents can be accepted as the absolute spiritual value in intellectual communities in the traditional humanities. In contrast, the current scholarly individualism, under the contemporary systematic pressure of the trio-powers, has been gradually concerned only about the feasible way for profitably participating in the totally institutionalized academic games. Under the new circumstances, both notions of individualism as life-view and as operative originality have changed their traditional meanings. Consequently, so-called scholarly individualism today is reduced to an active individual effort for merely finding a productive stylistic originality that can bring about any competitive privilege within a pre-established operative framework with prefixed game-rules. In other words, these two terms (individualism and originality) are clearly implicative of the instrumental utility. The so-called individualism can be suitably grasped as a self-serving utilitarian spirit and the so-called originality as the purely competitive-technical uniqueness favorable for gaining exchange-value in the market. The latter is therefore one of the main reasons why the rhetoric/formalist novelties can turn out to be the independent value in intellectual/theoretical competition contexts. This pragmatic logic of scholarly praxis looks just like what we see in the current commodity market of fashion/industrial arts.

In consequence, this formalized individual originality can function well in the institutionalized systems guided by the trio-powers that are tended to weaken or dispel the independent/critical-styled scientific rationality in the humanities. Such formalized originality comes to be recognized as theoretical individualism. In fact, theoretical discourse has only been taken as the operative instrument in the institutionalized systems through merely protruding its formalist aspects. Negative individualism can also easily turn out to be self-interested and self-serving within the totally commercialized academic communities that should follow the principle of competitive utilitarianism. The relationship among different colleagues, who are mentally commercialized by now, in the humanities



tends to be similar to that among businessmen. For they all have to exist in mutually competitive relationships within their own respective “quasi-fronts for struggle”. If the humanities scholars, just like businessmen, take their own professional successes as the life-goal in their careers, they would be naturally enwrapped in competitive confrontations. In this case, sincere scholarly collaborations can hardly be organized within the academic framework. On the other hand, as we often stress, substantial scientific progress of the human sciences must depend on the establishment of a collective/collaborative consciousness. The latter is the very precondition for the interdisciplinary/cross-cultural-directed theoretical modernization of the humanities. If so, the cooperative ways of the businessmen, however, should not be the model of the collaborations between/among humanities colleagues; the former is based on the principle of searching for mutual profits and the latter on the principle of the collective interest in searching for common scientific aims. This commercialized style used in carrying out research in the present-day humanities becomes a more and more negative factor, damaging the interdisciplinary projects for the latter, and especially requires the overcoming of the self-serving individualism so as to be able to organize sincere scholarly collaborations in their scientific projects.

It is also true that scientific progresses have been remarkably and widely attained in different dimensions of the humanities in recent centuries, despite the fact that these progresses have been mostly realized at technical levels. The fact means that there indeed exists the objective availability of the potential for promoting the scientific progresses of the theoretical humanities; the obstacle mainly remains on the subjective side. This hopeful fact is just the reasonable reason why we think we are in time for more effectively redesigning/reorganizing the historically great programs for transforming the traditional humanities to the modern human sciences. It is just these impressive achievements expressed in various levels/aspects in the area of the human sciences that also powerfully encourage us to self-confidently cherish such an ideal. The scientific achievements of the human sciences, including their theoretical parts, are just the foundations for organizing our next developing programs. Nevertheless, in terms of such an explanation, we should see the scientifically-directed achievements in different disciplines of the modern humanities only as the half-prepared products or half-finished raw materials, which should hence proceed through much more synthetic interdisciplinary operations in order to produce more complete products to be effectively used in dealing with investigations of social, human and historical knowledge. So scientific progress in single projects, temporarily

finished largely on the basis of single disciplines, should not be taken as the complete or self-contained product that can be safely applied for other projects, just as we see in the natural sciences. Lacking in the absolutely confirmed scientific conditions, all our scientific projects in these areas can only be tentatively and experimentally attempted, but the truly applicable scientifically-directed principles should be applied at the relevant epistemological/methodological levels as well as in the rationalist mentality. Or, we should reform our scientific programs in the field from both the objective and subjective sides.

From a practical operative angle, as we mentioned before, the concrete strategy/tactics of our task should be converged on the interdisciplinary orientation that can be more conveniently interpreted as an orientational transformation from the past vertical focus to the horizontal focus; or, from the specific-analytical deepening to the wide-synthetic combining in our academic world of compartmentalization. That is why we suggest launching these added horizontal/synthetic interdisciplinary efforts on the basis of the remarkable developments in different individual disciplines, full of a great number of successfully finished individual projects. Even if scholarly individualism is really productive in strengthening scholarship in single disciplines, it will not be productively eligible for being suitably applied in many actually requested scientific subjects that must request further interdisciplinary-operative processing. This principle is demanded by the true semiotic spirit functioning as the general scientific-operative strategy/tactics. That such a clear pragmatic logic has been for a long time neglected by scholarly communities has been, of course, mainly due to the objectively restrictive conditions. As a result, utility/profit-motivated scholars prefer to survive only on chosen single disciplinary-centric systems, with the main reason being that they have to calculate the cost of their intellectual investments during their professional careers that are full of competitive pressures, the only goals of which are directed towards professional profits rather than the scientific truth. The humanities theorists today have been systematically modulated into intellectual beings living for selfish interests, which is in contrast with their traditional counterparts' view of life of searching for truth, despite the fact that the latter could only mostly be realized in a utopian way in the ancient pre-scientific times. However, what we signify here is not the result/effect but rather the consciousness/attitude; or, the ethical subjectivity.

Now we may more deeply understand the reason why we need to functionally divide human history into history 1 and history 2. The two historical tracks/mechanisms must be in close multi-interaction with each other externally, but internally they keep each other's separate operative

autonomies with respective divergent origins/logics. The current situations of the theoretical humanities (belonging to history 2) have suffered from the strong influential and indirect dominative factors produced by triopowers (coming from history 1), which have formed the basic objective obstacles for the modernizing progresses of theoretical humanities and theoretical semiotics. This consequence brings about multiple negative results, as we described above; it also leads us to further understand the high significance of the productive formations of the human sciences as well as the related modernization of semiotics 2 that is supposed as the central strategy/tactics for realizing the former.

## **7. The changeable interaction between history 1 and history 2 and the possible deformation of human nature in the approaching AI/Robotization era**

As we said above, history 1 is essentially driven forward by the interpersonal-dominating power impulses and the so-called materialist-directed constructive processes in history 1 are embodied in different kinds of organizational operations such as the political, military, economic, legal, technical, commercial as well as the cultural and spiritual ones. Clearly, every kind of organizational process where the interpersonal-power/influence relationships are effectively established is the right context. Human beings as the agents playing roles in those organizational processes are naturally trained to form certain specific characters and intelligent wisdoms regarding power struggle/influence-exerting games. Among these, the ancient pan-Chinese Legalism (*fajia*) strategies/scheming techniques and the pan-western Machiavellian strategy/tactics remain the typical heritages of organizational-technical learning created in history 1 and these intellectual experiences have built up the specific type of personality specialized in the power-operative arts.<sup>10</sup> Here we should distinguish between the pure cognitional knowledge belonging to history 2 and the technical knowledge belonging to history 1; the former is for the sake of rational understanding and the latter is for the sake of changing the world, although the materials of the two knowledge can also be applied by

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<sup>10</sup> These kinds of books about political strategy/tactics could be especially interpreted from the perspective of containing two functions: the one is related to the analysis of the social-political reality and therefore belongs to history 2, the other to applicable designs for stimulating real actions, and which therefore belongs to history 1. But in general, any works finished in history 2 can be intentionally employed to serve practices in history 1.

agents in the two zones for different aims. By contrast, the driving force of history 2 belongs to an oppositional type: the spiritual/intellectual creative impulses that are embodied in the spiritual/intellectual modes of knowledge that have developed through to the modern type of human sciences. But here we should stress that our dividing principle about historical lines is defined merely at the functional level; that means historical phenomena “appear” in a mingling way in both historical-operative zones, although the two lines with their driving forces operate automatically according to their respective functional-operative mechanisms. Therefore the typical products of history 2 could be applied/handled by the way guided in mechanism 1; and similarly, the typical products of history 1 could also be treated/used by the way guided in mechanism 2. For example, the natural, social and human sciences produced in history 2 can be used in history 1, making it serve its special goals; if the natural/social sciences can be directly used to directly serve its materialist-directed constructions, even the “useless” human sciences can be indirectly or distortively applied in history 1 to produce a favorable effect on its special projects as well. The events/experiences shaped in history 1 can become the subject matter of scholarly investigations in history 2. The above explanation can also be used to make clear the interactions between bio-powers and the humanities, as well as those between the professional humanities and the ideal human sciences in semiotics 2, because the former has already been penetrated and controlled by the social-commercial powers; that is to say, the original philosophical texts can be used today as the pure medium that is manipulated to carry out non-scholarly/mixed scholarly purposes; alternatively, the humanities can be taken as the pure instruments used to perform the professional processes that are partly determined by factors in history 1 that attempt to control the orientation and function of the humanities in history 2. In this case we may say that the remaining rational/scientific part of the humanities still belong to history 2 but their distorted part is either inscribed to (and positively or negatively used by) history 1 or reduced to the non-functional stuff.

In terms of our above heuristic model, a simplified historical composition of mankind can be simplistically divided into four stages:

- a) The biological/pre-historical stage, which contains the primitive level of organizational capability that makes mankind a little bit superior to the much lower organizational level of other animals. This survival privilege makes mankind maintain their effective existence and constant development at their life-level. During this

period human history has not yet really begun, although we can describe it as a primitive type of society missing the historical dimension. The struggle for survival is made mainly by the competitive mechanism characterized with the physical and violent modes; these are the primitive modes of interpersonal struggles for power.<sup>11</sup> This stage presents a pan-biological mode of human existence (Mode 1 of human existence: the non-historical period of the purely survival struggle).

- b) The pre-ethical social-historical stage, which makes mankind attain a more and more advanced organizational level and more and more advanced skill/wisdom about interpersonal power struggles. All primitive theocratic regimes had already presented the historical track implicative of the purely physical/violent struggles and dominations through inventing the myth of some supernatural supports and creating a historical culture of describing the lineage/line of power-holders authorized by the invented supernatural forces. However, in this period, the primitive intellectual culture is still lacking in the ethical-spiritual elements. We can see the mode in the ancient histories of the Middle East and in Chinese pre-Zhou history (Mode 2 of human existence: the pre-ethical cultural period of power-domination).
- c) The mixed cultural period containing the history of power-domination and the history of the ethical-spiritual creations. This period consists of two general parts. The first part consists completely of the historical content belonging to history 1, and the second part consists of the intellectual content belonging to history 2. If the first part implies all heritages from stages a) and b) together, the second part presents a new perspective that turns to exclude the involvement of all elements of the power struggles applied in both the pre-historical and historical stages. This is the unprecedented arrival of the high/ethical culture in human history. In Chinese history it is marked by the birth of the Confucian ethical-directed culture in history 2 (the emergence of the spiritual-cultural world) that co-existed with various elements involved in social/political struggles and power-dominations; in western history, we see the emergence of the Greek philosophical movements. Here we see other modes/grades of human existence: the mode of the materialist-constructive interpersonal domination and the mode of

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<sup>11</sup> This could even be traced back to the anthropoid stage of the world. The interpersonal power-struggle had its archetype in the “law of the jungle”, while in historical stories the power-winners are frequently described as historical heroes.

the spiritual/intellectual creation (Mode 3 of human existence: the double-track history).

- d) The pan-organizational/institutionalized period of history. ●wing to the unlimitedly predominating expansion of AI and robotization, together with the overgrowth of a lot of the new sciences and high technology, the relatively distributive proportion of momentums between history 1 and history 2 has been radically and essentially changed. The risk of the absolute domination of history 1 over history 2 has been continually increasing (Mode 4 of human existence: robotized society vs. spiritual humanism).

As the carriers of historical-cultural phenomena, the biological bodies of mankind have existed through all four historical periods described above. Faced with the up-coming powerful new complex of sciences/technology, the human nature that gradually formed during the past three historical periods will be altered or even extremely disorganized someday. This radically materialist-directed tendency would speed up along the track of history 1 if the creative energy/wisdom in history 2 remains as passive and powerless as what we see today. That is why we should pay closer attention to the modernizing problems of the humanities now and expect that the more effective advancement of the new human sciences could provide more effective balancing to the totally technically institutionalized civilization of history 1.

The relationship/connection functioning at the physical level is separated from the function/teleology regarding the co-existing way of history 1 and history 2. Therefore the spiritual life of human being is functionally separate from its biological and physiological bases, although the former is based on the latter at the physical level. The physical co-existence of the materialist and the spiritual phenomena should be distinguished from the functional separation of the two phenomena. The interactive confrontation between organizational power and ethical conscience, which are two of the eventually reduced driving kernels in history, will become the central issue of human existence that needs to be more profoundly meditated upon.

Facing the above-described historically significant problems determining the orientation of human civilization, one of the most dramatic inventions in our globalization era is AI/robotization. This revolutionary development implies a paradoxical double effect. In terms of our ethical humanist angle, this most radical technological revolution could essentially change humanity/humanism/human nature as such, making human beings into quasi-robot-like animals. It is clear that such a deeply mechanizing impact

on humanity will completely control the life-space of mankind, tending to eradicate that part of the historically constant human nature that has been ethically and culturally formulated. (For mechanization/robotization will naturally replace the traditionally transmitted historical-cultural sediments that are the basis, origin and spiritual-creative source of the humanities.)

Viewed from this angle, we would like to pay our attention to an unexpectedly fresh problem about the relationship of AI-scientific culture and traditional political/military strategies that can be reduced to instinctive impulses for interpersonal dominating power. Despite the successful arrival of democratic politics and the economic revolutions emerging since the dawn of modern history, the essence of international conflicts has remained unchanged: the struggle for domination over others through conflicts of powers of all kinds, including political, military, economic, technical and even religious types. That means even modernized good political systems cannot avoid being involved in primitive power struggles either at home or abroad; the processes of interpersonal power struggles are more and more transformed into more justified ways for domination and government. The latter has gradually presented a basic changed philosophy about interpersonal organization, government and cooperation, which had been habitually handled by traditional politics – the political/military/economic conflicts, full of the traditional aggressive/conquering intentions/methods, seem to be more and more reformed/refined through the technical level/modality that is especially promoted/guided by joint AI/robotization. From a idealist point of view, either notionally or practically, human history could even predict a promising horizon in that the age of political robotization would come with a double consequence: on the one hand, the permanent tragedy caused by the political culture characterized by cruel struggles in human history could be replaced by the non-personal operative processes of interpersonal management/organization, and on the other hand a perhaps permanent eradication of the involvement of the negative instinct of humanity for power-lust. In case the human instinctive impulse for dominating others is replaced, done away with, or just much-weakened through the positive reconstruction of AI/robotization, the agents and their projects in history 2 would be able to be more constructively developed as well.

It is true that we should not neglect the approaching challenge. AI-science, genetic sciences, general robot technology, the dreamed space immigration and many other fields will be strongly capable of changing the essential identity and the rooted mental inclinations of human beings, together with radically changed life-manners, as long as the automatically

radical growth of high technology, primarily guided by AI science, continues to be so widely applied and developed along the current materialist/technological/commercial track of history 1. Accordingly human beings will be more and more technically/commercially organized with respect to their mentality and behavior patterns, and human nature itself would be perhaps basically/essentially changed as well: the human would be losing its culturally/historically accumulated identity, and the instinctive nature of human beings would be thoroughly deviated and deformed at all aspects of their existence. During this kind of radically transforming evolution/revolution, the typical sciences of logic and nature, and even the empirical/applied social sciences, will not be able to deal with the advanced spiritual/theoretical problems of human sciences and therefore will be incapable of relevantly judging the issues concerning the advantages/disadvantages of the total consequences of this subversive revolution regarding the intellectual/spiritual dimensions of mankind.<sup>12</sup> A more horrible change could happen in the identity/function of human nature as such (which is the physical/existing base of the historical essence of humanity). And the essential constitution and composition of the traditional humanities, including both their practical and theoretical parts, are rooted in the constant existence of the basic human nature that has been formed in the long course of cultural history. If this human nature, co-shaped historically, biologically and culturally, is destroyed or radically reformed by the robotizational culture, human beings will no longer be human beings; instead they will become a kind quasi-robot-type machine-animal. As a result the ethical part of history 2 will logically disappear and the spiritual/theoretical goal of human sciences will be totally suppressed or removed by the ever more radically materialized history 1.

● On the other hand, however, when AI, robot science and technology gradually start to largely replace the governing/organizing/leading roles that have historically been played exclusively by humans and by virtue of so many severely unhappy stories about power struggles in history, the decrease or recession of the humanist part involved could also largely weaken or even dispel the roles of the latter originating from historical periods over thousands/millions of years. We may hopefully anticipate that the positively-directed development of AI/robotization's technical revolution could change the general ecology of history 1, using "machinery" to gradually replace most/all intellectual/physical labor operations and leading to the personal labor jobs extensively leaving this

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<sup>12</sup> ● One of the main differences between social and human sciences lies in that the former is epistemologically/methodologically incapable of handling the fundamental humanist issues about meaning, value, belief, and ethical subjectivity.



historical zone, including both the interpersonal organizations for power struggles and the forms of labor in physical production. The liberated personnel, including those wise “leaders” (power-holders) at various levels, can move into history 2 so as to transform their own life-interests to the intellectual/spiritual creations. When the order-maintaining/power-searching jobs and technical tasks have been significantly replaced or systematically undertaken by the AI-machinery network, the majority of people could also decrease their technological-labor involvement and increase their intellectual contributions. The technicalized being would become an intelligent being of various kinds.

The contemporary materialist/high-scientific/technological/commercialized civilization has indeed brought about unprecedented advanced knowledge about nature and society as well as highly comfortable social-materialist conditions. Accordingly society, culture and even human nature must have been radically and basically changed as well. In this basically changed historical era the humanities or human sciences, despite their apparently useless nature, are confronted with two major types of historical challenges/pressures. A traditional one is related to the requested strengthening/revival of the scientific potential of human sciences in comparison with natural/social sciences; a rightly emerging novel one is about the desire to advance the meaningful/axiological analytical capability of the genuine sciences concerning human existence and history in confrontation with the high-technical revolutions of the so-called e-civilization guided by AI technology.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, nevertheless, in confronting the emergent crisis, the traditional type of the current humanities is also unable to effectively deal with and overcome this historical-cultural crisis of the approaching super-technologicalized era. This historically unparalleled existence/challenge to mankind is forcing us to further emphasize the absolute necessity of the advancement and elaboration of the scientific level of the human sciences; the genuine scientific/rationally-directed knowledge about the causal, intelligible and axiological connections concerning the essence of humanity and rational humanism is therefore extremely needed today.

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<sup>13</sup> However, should the unlimited increase of materialist enjoyments and productive efficiency be the unique axiological standards for mankind?

## **8. The challenge of the new technical-predominant era to humanism/human sciences and the historical tension between the power-organizing motivation in history 1 and humanist ethical subjectivity in history 2**

In confrontation with the serious present-day challenge concerning the future of human civilization and the fact that the majority of people, including most scholars in the professional humanities, are automatically enwrapped into the same tendency, the only available remedy for the human sciences to cope with this historical challenge seemingly lies in the remaining traditional-spiritual origin: to refresh the ethical spontaneity within the human science practices. Considering this critical challenge of the era, the modernizing projects of human sciences should readjust their strategy/tactics as a precaution against the absolute restrictions and controls of the materialist/technological/commercial powers imposed at the epistemological/methodological level of the humanities. The present-day scholarly style in the field is easily observed in the phenomena: a distorted self-confidence, and a manipulated superficial individualist arrogance that is specially trained and intentionally encouraged in the pedagogic/academic institutional systems. It is the second kind of individualism mentioned above that leads humanities scholars to be fixed on the same belief and habitude when their life-view/goal has been thoroughly pragmatically materialized, yet instead of maintaining an attitude towards any objective/scientific truth in their practices, their mind is directed to utility/success that is universally authorized and encouraged by the objective multi-historical powers. In their mentality, humanities scholars already no longer believe in objective/scientific truth in their own scholarly practices, in which they are rather comfortable just to follow the logic/orders issued from another objective/scientific truth guided by the materialist powers. This ironical phenomenon of self-contradictory attitudes/life-views can be interpreted as a dramatically sad consequence of the materialist-directed historical development. The liberal artistic intellectuals belonging to history 2, who have given up their own rational/scientific beliefs, have preferably adopted other rational/scientific principles of history 1 on which they are parasitic for a mere comfortable survival.

The necessity of the scientific modernization of the humanities is invisibly disclosed by an ironical double challenge of the rationalist age that is firstly reflected by the indirect pressure imposed by the scientific rationalism of natural/technical/social sciences, guided by the instrumental-rationalist machinery of hard- and soft-powers, and secondly directly by

the weakening or pseudo-scientific deformation of the theoretical humanities today. Regarding the rationally-directed confrontation between history 1 and history 2, the former must, as a result, succeed in forcing the latter to submit to the same materialist and rationally-directed logic. In a deeper sense we may reasonably suppose that either the self-weakening tendency of the rationality or the self-strengthening of the irrationality of the theoretical humanities might disclose, either automatically or sub-consciously, a functionally collaborative tendency to trio-powers.

Usually we have seen frequently expressed complaints by the humanities scholars about their ever deteriorating social/cultural/economic conditions but few of them (almost none) pay serious attention to or self-critically recognize the status quo of the de-rationalist tendency of the humanities as such. (This is just due to their enfeebling or losing their ethical subjectivity.) The ever-lowering social/academic conditions of the humanities are first of all caused by their own constantly decreased scientific/theoretical level and gradually lowered eligibility in dealing with significant scholarships about humanist-ethical knowledge, cultural history and social reality. As a result, the humanities, under the cover of the term “liberal arts”, remain disorderly composed and less effectively applicable. Besides the traditional innate difficulties of the humanities as such, the more basic reason why the humanities can hardly become scientifically productive in our high scientific times just rests in the subjective state of the humanities scholars, and the latter has been ironically determined by scientific/technical objectivity. Can we imagine: essentially, it could be the natural-scientific power of natural sciences that becomes the obstructive force against the human sciences’ development, even if indirectly, because all modern materialist, technological and commercializing developments have been the consequences of natural sciences. Whereas there are different types of “sciences”, just like there should be different types of rationality, this is just the extreme necessity for making the traditional humanities turn into the modern human sciences. On the other hand, however, such an unfavorable tendency to the scientific/rationalist development of the humanities has been made true by virtue of the ethical subjectivity of the scholarly agents. According to the judgment of this author, the utmost origin of this phenomenon should be reduced to the subjective state of scholars that is almost totally under the sway of materialist/technical-directed objectivity.

Since the outset of this century the above-mentioned issue has been getting more serious, and even irreversible, because of the much higher technological times that are coming: namely, the AI-robotization era. Following the ever-increasing pressure of the new tech age, the

subjectivity of humanities scholars has been further weakened and the related extreme development is expressed in a thorough neglect of the fact. That is why humanities scholars tend to refuse any self-critical attitude towards their real situations. The same utilitarian individualism, however, can strengthen such kinds of excessive self-confidence in themselves, cherishing a materialized/commercialized consciousness that is naturally more and more tuned to textual autonomy and less and less to any objective/realist relevance; the tendency looks like what we see in fictional/entertainment-directed arts/literature. As this de-scientific/irrational aptitude is further strengthened, the phenomenon will ironically indicate an inclination to be coherent with the logic of the materialist power mechanisms. If the traditional type of trio-powers can carry out its materialist will by means of indirectly deforming/deviating the mental inclination/subjective attitude of humanities scholars, the gradually emerging new stage pushed forward by the much more advanced AI science/technology could directly change the identity/constitution of human nature itself, whose constitutive kernel is ethical spontaneity. Facing such a critical situation under the sway of the trio-powers and the approaching vision of the extreme materialist civilization brought about by AI science in future and other new higher science/technology, the present-day humanities have no intellectual/theoretical strength for protecting their own meaningful existence. More serious consequences could happen; for instance, humanity or human nature as such could even systematically and structurally lose their innate identity. A purist materialist-oriented civilization guided by the trio-powers and concomitant AI-products, including a naive human dream for immigrating to outer space, could be equivalent to having disorganized and even destroyed traditional human nature/humanism as such, which has been continuously established and developed in the long course of human history, as we pointed out in the last section. Meanwhile, the extreme materialist tendency created and maintained by the trio-powers and higher science/technology has weakened and even deformed the cultural-historical dimensions through comprehensively technologicalizing the mindsets of mankind. In terms of this unprecedented development, we humanities theorists now have a stronger reason to strengthen the efforts for the scientific modernization of the humanities.

At this critical moment, we should pay more serious attention to and reconsider the critical problems concerning the concept of “human nature” and its historical/cultural/intellectual productions that have been totally realized during the long history of mankind. Current civilization is totally based on the evolutionary cultural history of over ten thousand years. Its

driving force is definitely based on the naturally formed human nature, and the orientation/composition of the resultant civilization has been shaped by the humanist spirit rooted in the same human nature. In this sense, so-called humanism also implies an essential aspect that human beings are defined by the cultural consequences of thousands of years' of human history. Essential elements implicative in human nature such as instinctive/intelligent desires for meaning, value, belief and epistemic curiosity have been accumulatively cultivated/matured during the long historical process. It is human history that made the human animal eventually turn out to be advanced human beings, whose existential identity is historically defined by unchanged human nature, which refers to the above instinctive elements rather than to the resultant behavioral tendency/habitude.<sup>14</sup> So humanity and its life processes are basically created by the free driving-will of human beings implicative in human nature. When the theoretical humanities have mostly succumbed to the will of the extreme materialist-technical powers, the intellectuals in the humanities and high culture (popular culture belongs to history 1) will be naturally weakened or lose a central part of their innate human nature, including especially the ethical spontaneity that has been the very central driving force for normally performing all kinds of intellectual/high-cultural creations. At such an extremely challenging moment of the post-industrial/high-technological age any efforts towards the preservation or elaboration of the free-spiritual will of humanity should insist on two preconditions: the humanist-rationalist attitude towards knowing all kinds of human affairs (humanist reality) and the same humanist-rationalist ethical subjectivity. It is just these two preconditions that have been systematically threatened and undermined today. Furthermore, the complex of the triopowers and the ever more actively energetic productions of AI culture tend to lessen or destroy these two humanist/rationally-directed preconditions.

Notwithstanding the apparently critical challenge to human civilization, a dialectic way of human-rationalist reconsideration would perhaps lead to the arrival of a happy new Enlightenment if we are able to persist in a thoroughly rationalist way of thinking about this historical predicament. As we pointed out above, if the mechanism of history 2 could be strong enough to provide an effective axiological/cultural balancing of orientation with the extremely materialist/technicalized powers of history 1, human history could be more preferably developed along a more desirable line.

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<sup>14</sup> This referential difference is always neglected by behaviorists. Above all, they always deny the difference between constant human nature and its external projections that must be changeable because of the interaction with changeable external conditions.

And this effective self-defensive effort could perhaps further lead the latter to finish a positive creative transformation of its authority holding powers to a better readjusted culture of quasi-robotization in all organizational/administrative realms, which would someday hopefully lead to the weakening or disappearance of interpersonal power relationships from history 1! That means, humanity can eventually make the complex of machineries undertake the technical aspects of the jobs about maintaining social orders and interpersonal justices. By the way, this part of the discussion looks indeed like a fantasia, but the point of our article is focused on presenting a productive heuristic model concerning the reasonable foresight that is used here only as an alternative possibility to support the reasonability of our rational justification of and anticipation for the modernized human sciences.

The meaningful active reaction of humanity towards the “AI threat” should not be interpreted as any kind of emotional or vain resistance either. At this especially critical moment we should more profoundly and more rationally reconsider all related factors/problems concerning this unavoidable and preferably favorable fortune of mankind. This romantic-style imagination is justified by a realistic motive in human history: to exclude the possible evil power-holders from historical processes; namely moving, at least partly, the power-holding authority to the “hand” of the non-human machinery in order to decrease or radicalize a rooted-up passion for power in human nature. The idea of strengthening the rational/scientific-directed development of the theoretical humanities attempts to readjust the constitution/orientation of history 1 so as to create a more reasonable and happier mode of the entire human life. Our consideration about the dramatic emergence of AI science/technology operating in history 1 is intended above all to look to redefine our objects/problems/tasks as such: to find out the way to attain a new desirable balance of the multi-tensions involved in the currently radically changing human history.

The above wishful anticipation could nevertheless function as a hermeneutic model that can help us attain a radical change of the notions of political history and historical philosophy as well: how should we judge/evaluate this most crucial human nature – the lust for power or the lust to dominate others in history? In this regard, we have to exclude the implicit admiration for any power-philosophy in history. Human nature consists of two extreme sides: the lust for seizing interpersonal power and the passion of ethical conscience for spiritual creations. And regarding this human nature spectrum, no doubt, the former has originated in the animal dimension of the human being (Mode 1) and the latter has originated in the

humanist dimension of the advanced human being (Mode 3). The lust for power, which has been indicated by a variety of modes of conquering/enslaving others in history which have been stupidly affirmed/praised by a multitude of thinkers in cultural history, is in fact a tragic mixture of the humanist and biological existences. The traditional type of “heroism” characterized by its conquering/dominating power will hopefully be suppressed (rather than further encouraged) by the robotization age. The essence of human existence is reflected in the increasingly rational/spiritual/intellectual creations rather than in mere physical survival or so-called permanent survival.

### **9. The theoretical-semiotic orientation and the profession-institutionalized circumstances – from a practical point of view**

In essence, it is the innate weakness/deficiency of the rationalist attitude of humanities scholars/thinkers that has partly caused the continuously increased degree of domination of the trio-powers over high culture and humanist academia. If the agents of the humanities or human sciences are lacking in persistent scientifically-directed interest and rationally/empirically-directed applicability, their knowledge cannot become a kind of effective intellectual force to independently develop itself. As a matter of fact, in our post-industrial age, the requested rational/empirical/scientific orientation of human sciences is extremely necessary for studies about history, literature, philosophy, the arts and religions, just as the same rationalist orientation has been universally requested by those more empirically-positive disciplines in social sciences, such as politics, law and economics. We should note that, regarding these practical sciences about human life/society, no irrational/supernatural words are allowed to play a role and therefore applied social sciences have developed successfully along a high quasi-scientific line and become more and more applicable/usable. Moreover, the natural sciences have completely excluded/expelled any irrational/supernatural elements from their own domains, although they ironically allow or even encourage the humanities to be irrational in character/orientation. No doubt, the identity of the present-day human sciences should not continue being mixed or reduced to that of the ancient humanities, full of irrational, supernatural, emotional, and mythical elements. That is why the new human sciences should not allow any philosophical antiquarianism/romanticism in their theoretical foundations, although they must be their objects. Even the ancient humanities consisted of both scientifically-directed and literary-directed elements, and the

philosophical and scientific parts were closely overlapped then. In ancient times the humanities mainly referred to those tentatively imaginative/literary-styled ways of thinking when rational/scientific knowledge of the humanities remained quite primitive in their intelligible level; since the outset of modern scientific times, however, the categorical typology of the humanities, following the general model of modern natural sciences, has accordingly evolved towards the rational/scientific orientation as well, including their philosophical branch. The remarkable scientifically-directed development of the modern theoretical humanities has been especially performed through the formation of modern disciplinary compartmentalization and the disciplinary-specific deepening of their knowledge. In other words, as we pointed out above, the modern theoretical humanities developed over the past two hundred years have presented an all-round vertically-directed deepening effort within various multi-compartmentalized disciplines. Precisely in terms of the innate law of scientific development, it is now time that their subsequent continuous development should be organized/spread out at the level of totally horizontally-directed communication. The rise of contemporary interdisciplinary-semiotic movement was mainly stimulated by the related strategic redesign to overcome these epistemological, methodological and sociological restrictions formed during the last two hundred years of disciplinary-centric/specific progress. More exactly, the developing strategy/tactics of the theoretical humanities today should be evenly carried out along the two coordinative operative orientations: the one is realized in disciplinary-centric (vertically-directed) specification/analysis and the other is realized in interdisciplinary-directed theoretical dialogue/synthesis. The latter is just the task of semiotics 2 (in terms of our GS-model). Clearly, this statement accords with the above-mentioned notional division between the semi-products and the more completed products of the excellent works in history.

Now let us here outline the central semiotic debates again. The current international semiotic activities consist of the two remarkably different parts that are tentatively named by this author as semiotics 1 and semiotics 2. Semiotics 1 (departmental semiotic studies) applies its scientific rationality productively in its various empirical/positive-directed projects. From a stronger perspective it contains a great number of successfully attained scientific researches centered on different disciplines plus the added interdisciplinary operations; from a less strong perspective, as a professionally defined discipline it reasonably includes many miscellaneous backgrounds of its participants who apply a lot of conceptions and methods that are very flexibly connected with the



polysemous term “sign”. The epistemologically miscellaneous use of the semiotic methods/approaches have proved to be professionally workable because the term “sign” can play a role of the symbolic mark to combine, collect, and unify a variety of scholarly projects within a professional collective. Its actively positive significance is expressed in its professionally operative productivity when faced with the present objectively competitive situations. Nevertheless, we should here distinguish between the normal scientific-developmental widening and the professionally-manipulative expansion. By affirming the scholarly achievements of semiotics 1 we deny an assertion that the latter is a proof of the existence/development of a semiotic-scientific system that is logically supported by a general semiotic-theoretical foundation or some “general semiotics”. ●n the contrary, any so-called general semiotics would improperly interfere in the naturally formed manners of departmental semiotics. The necessity of the above-mentioned distinction can be exemplified again by the recent semiotic phenomena mentioned above: the expansion of the big semiotic family realized through including some other academic/cultural collectives such as media studies and cognitive science. The recent enlargement of the semiotic profession because of the participation of these two new branches can only be regarded as an artificially-made organizational enlargement through combining several separately existing social/cultural/academic complexes. Regarding the profitable success of combining the two academic-intellectual complexes, is it a scientifically-developing success or a mere professionally-operative success? Moreover, is there any distinction between the two that can be recognized by pragmatically-minded scholars?

In contrast with those productive semiotic studies done at the applied level, since 1994 this author has insisted in saying that the so-called “general semiotics” has been a misleading concept, primarily because the related theorists presuppose those applied semiotic studies should/could be provided with a general, fundamental theoretical system or a semiotic philosophy that would arrange all semiotic studies into a unified scientific system. Such an unfounded theorizing is based on several misunderstanding factors, as follows: a) a wrong idea about the unifying potential of the term “sign”; b) an essentially anti-semiotic idea of accepting the theoretical privilege of the traditional discipline of philosophy; c) a superficially-minded inclination to be allured by the current academic-competitive utilitarianism that leads to a changed scholarly attitude towards professional profits; and d) a consequent tactical consciousness in building-up an international organization for shaping a novel theoretical brand applied in globally competitive academia. In terms

of this utilitarian purpose, the members have indeed anticipated the formation of such a general unifying theoretical model. Therefore, going back to the professional reality, the title “semiotics” has been more and more popularized as one of the most accessible international platforms that provides international partners with an honorable publicity favorable to their professional careers that has seemingly acquired a firm general theoretical foundation. As a result, the originally requested scientifically modernized function of semiotics as an interdisciplinary-theoretical exploration has been gradually forgotten about or almost disappeared. For the sake of building up such a general semiotic theory, we have seen many opportunistically-styled theoretical attempts that have been made through easily making the semiotic profession affiliated with some famous philosophical/quasi-scientific schools. Being satisfied with the operative feasibility in the professional-expansive strategy, which keeps few logical ties with original semiotics, the general semiotic theorists prove to be unable to tackle the genuine theoretical-semiotic problematics. In addition, such pragmatically-directed professional expansionism has further made theoretical semiotics disconnected with the more fundamental tasks linked to the modernization of the humanities.

That is why we are firstly faced with this easily confusing problem about how to properly use generic terms in our scientific practices. With no better choice in our vocabulary available, we attempt to temporarily apply “semiotics 2” to replace the popular term “general semiotics” in order to keep the relevant association with the original theoretical implication represented by the term “semiotics/semiology”. Now let us pay attention to the theoretical-revolutionary aspect of the function of semiotics 2 (or GS strategy). The occurrence of the contemporary semiotic movement implicitly also originated from a spirit/will for resistance/revolt/defense in confrontation of the epistemological bias, sociological pressures, and the organizational manipulation exerted/imposed by all conservative academic establishments. Since the unprecedented high development of the tri- power systems after WWII, semiotic players, just like many other scholars in the theoretical humanities, have gradually changed their traditional inclination so as to give in to these external pressures through a collective self-blinding attitude disguised in a fake consciousness of independence/freedom performed in the campus autonomy that is also eventually governed/guided by those external dominating powers. One of the consequences of this self-succumbing attitude is exhibited by the fact that they recognize and accept the values, criteria, rules and institutionalized channels regulated by their academic system and professional framework. No longer being the theoretical critics

honestly facing the prevalent commercially distorted trends of the fixedly compartmentalized humanities, the semiotic activities have also started to follow the same line especially through systematically giving up the strict rational/scientific principles and goals set up by the original semiotic thinkers. As a consequence, on the one hand this collective inclination has weakened semiotics agents' scientific/rationalist impulse/energy, and on the other it enfeebles the theoretical sensibility and encouragement of semiotic scholars for the sake of undertaking epistemological adventures when faced with the intellectual/existing determinist machinery of the triopower systems. Guided by the currently deformed epistemology/methodology in the theoretical semiotic profession, the accumulated scientific achievements of the original semiotic practices can still be used as useful material/means for pursuing the current fixed utilitarian-tended programs other than just as epistemologically-directed inspiration/guidance. ●r, the famous works could just be used as the mere useful instruments for searching for any utilitarian aims with the semiotic mark/brand rather than being the true theoretical bases for seriously advancing further efforts along the genuine semiotic/interdisciplinary-theoretical line.

The utilitarian-driven scholarly practices still have a supporting background from our pedagogic systems. This essentially asemiotic-spirit orientation in the professional theoretical-semiotic practices has been collectively accepted and has exerted its influence on all related domains and levels. Even the so-called interdisciplinary-theoretical humanities/semiotics could not help but be deformed under the present-day pedagogic institutions that work in the divided disciplinary-centric educational networks. Living in an academia consisting of hundreds/thousands of disciplines/specialties, the concentrative way of disciplinary specific training (or the PhD programs) based on one or a few disciplinary domains can hardly allow interdisciplinary-theoretical knowledge to be acquired merely from the PhD program, which is based on single-disciplinary-centric, narrow and specific methodological procedures; scholars educated in this pedagogic way of specific scientific training are mostly incapable of carrying out sufficient scientific communications or dialogues with colleagues from a great number of other neighboring disciplines/specific programs at a higher, synthetic scientific-theoretical level. While the single-vertical-lined disciplinary-centric promotion systems could produce misleading or confusing impressions, any full professor in one discipline has naturally gained a scholarly eligibility for participating in interdisciplinary studies/dialogues of any kind as long as his position in the academic hierarchy is advanced to the required high level, or his teaching career has lasted for the required length of teaching. The

systematic inconsistency of the one-dimensional academic-bureaucratic hierarchy and the pluralist-intellectual requirements of interdisciplinary communication have been universally neglected because of the universally followed Unitarian life-view in the humanities. That means, the overconfidence of a full professor in his dealing with different disciplinary-based knowledge is not related to his true mastering of the required knowledge of other related disciplines/specialties; instead, his self-confidence in his own scientific capability is in fact firmly linked to his bureaucratic position/title gained through his successfully going through the fixed procedure in the academic hierarchy. In result, as a rule, a full professor trained only in one or a limited few disciplines/specialties can be taken as officially/universally eligible in tackling interdisciplinary-directed projects only on the basis of the knowledge obtained by him in his early, sufficiently deep single-disciplinary-specific training. Thus let us imagine such a scene: when so many full professors who have trained and specialized in respective divergent disciplines get together and talk/argue about the common issues relating to their knowledge of several different disciplines, how could we expect a scientifically meaningful consequence to be effectively produced from the fact that they indeed perform the dialogic behaviors in certain locations? (The point lies in that the character of the liberal arts is able to guarantee the constant feasibility of the practices because of the general lack of true scientifically unified standards for effective checking.) Once again, scientific eligibility is replaced by professional-hierarchical eligibility! This is one of the most serious reasons why the theoretical humanities can hardly be genuinely advanced in a true scientific term.

As a matter of fact, the really proper ways to solve the difficulty concerning such collaborative interdisciplinary dialogue/studies should be created either by additional emphasis on many more complementary studies by the participants about knowledge of other related disciplines in advance or by organizing serious collaborative relationships through a genuinely semiotic collaborative strategy. Nevertheless, it is difficult for either way to be accepted because of the existing academic institutional restrictions in our professionally regulated system. The involved topic is especially related to the series of questionings about the critical reexamination of the values and limitations of the current disciplinary-centric training in PhD programs and how to promote genuinely effective interdisciplinary collaboration in the theoretical humanities. But the involved problems are too complicated to be discussed here.

That means, reasonable doubt would not only be due to the mechanically-fixed academic institutions that are dominated by the

authoritative academic bureaucracy! Such ambiguously formed interdisciplinary-scholarly gatherings cannot be regarded as the true scientific development of the interdisciplinary scholarship that is especially requested by theoretical semiotics or by the horizontally-directed synthesis of the humanities. The latter first of all requests the multidisciplinary-directed educational preparations for each “semiotician” who is hardly able to do so-called interdisciplinary studies if he is only basing them on his narrowly acquired disciplinary-centric knowledge. In addition, a more basic problem is how to overcome utilitarian-individualism in order to solve the former two problems. If a scholar devotes his research to meet his own professional aims, he will never be able or will never have an intention to solve the above problems. By the way, let me mention a popular example as a secondary support to my reasoning raised above. Why do so many theoretical semioticians, namely those engaged in inventing the general semiotics, choose to follow certain philosophical/scientific trends as their main theoretical foundations when the choices are so obviously contrary to the interdisciplinary-principle of semiotics? Calculating their costs spent in their self-educational investment, the scholars dare not spend too much time for enriching their own theoretical knowledge outside their own fields with respect to such sharply competitive academic circumstances. So they prefer to collectively choose a much cheaper or easily accessible way to deal with the problems about the preparation of theoretical knowledge. The result is also due to the fact that philosophy in the academic hierarchy still keeps its old profile of theoretical privilege that can bring about added credit to scholars’ own works. In short, being weakened or lacking in ethical spontaneity, most of them are not courageous enough to independently organize really original/adventurous theoretical explorations out of a risk of confronting the powerful institutionalized academic bureaucracy. Therefore, once again, the ethical spontaneity of the scholar remains to be the very driving force for inquiring into truly scientifically-directed intellectual/theoretical creations. The practical combination between scholarly specialization and pedagogic institutionalization has certainly led to the result of standardizing scholarly criteria and rigidifying the educational procedures influencing the shaping of the mindset of professional scholars. Institutionally-trained knowledge and profitably-oriented mental inclinations are therefore combined to bring about the current tendency of the theoretical humanities, including the part of theoretical semiotics. In other words, the institutionalized ways of pedagogic training in the theoretical humanities tend naturally to lead the students/scholars to weaken/narrow their own range of their intellectual horizon and to

enfeeble their independent ethical conscience concerning their scientific-explorative adventures.

## 10. Conclusion

Considering the powerful objective determinative circumstances, humanities scholars can hardly be expected to still follow traditional ethical idealism in their life-faith to tackle the reformative tasks of human sciences today. What we can reasonably raise at present is only their correct cognition of their true situations rather than vainly suggesting some constructive proposal. The true reason for this passive decision is of course rooted in the established utilitarian mindset of most humanities scholars who have resolved to follow the academic orientation decided by trio-powers to attain their professional profits. Still, theoretically speaking, we have to present our objective diagnosis concerned. As the author frequently expresses in his Chinese writings, if we are still unable to present a real design for the treatment, we are still able at least to present a diagnosis immediately. Confronted with the total predominance of the exclusive economic-centric policy principle in the times of globalization (it is curious to note that everybody is critical and worried about problems of environmental protections but nobody likes to trace them back to their origin: the exclusive priority of the economic growth of the world), and further with the global revolutionary change to the age of de-humanist robotization in near future, we humanist scholars/thinkers should adopt, at least, a double view of life: in addition to unavoidably following the established professional channels, scholarly individuals should pay serious attention to the problems of mankind concerning the desirable development of the new human sciences. Being unable to do something radically changing we can still realize a spiritual way of life in our mind independently; namely, despite the fact that the actual doing/finishing of a project of history 2 depends on the interactive/tensional situations of history 1 and history 2, the actual thinking/understanding of a project of history 2 depends only on the subjective-ethical will rooted in subjectivity. This is sophisticatedly dialectic life-strategic wisdom that has been successfully performed over thousands of years resulting in the spiritual modes of millions of intellectual creations being transmitted continuously, waiting for their favorable interaction with unexpected emerging elements in history. If there is no way to the correct treatment at the moment, the correct diagnosis is always possible so long as the ethical subjectivity subsists. The decision of diagnosis prior to treatment also implies an implicit epistemological stimulant that presses the subject to be

immediately faced with the critical tension where he can actively exist without possibly self-deceptively shunning his true existential duty. That means, this critical diagnosis can press the honestly conscious subject to experience the tensional pressure by dint of leading him to clearly know the mechanics of social powers and the epistemological mistakes that dominate the distorted direction of the theoretical humanities; such an apparently passive reaction can indeed play a really productive theoretical role that is freely/independently done within history 2. That is why our first important task at the moment is to fight against the post-modernist/nihilist philosophy whose first aim lies in destroying ethical subjectivity.

This is also the explanation why we could be so deeply involved in learning Husserl's egoist subjectivity, which has been undermined/misled even by some irrationally-directed phenomenological experts today. No doubt, the current intellectually deteriorating tendency of international semiotics is only part of the tendency of the current theoretical humanities in general. This article has attempted to point out that the unprecedented significance of the genuine semiotic sciences can only be directed towards a great mission for modernizing the theoretical humanities, while the latter can only be realized through adopting a horizontal/interdisciplinary theoretical-synthetic collaboration/communication in order to get rid of the traditional philosophy-centric dogmatism, even including Husserl's philosophical fundamentalism, which is also a misleading factor that obstructs the epistemological modernization of the theoretical humanities. So the profound significance of Husserlian philosophy, in our new theoretical context, does not lie in strengthening the traditional type of philosophy as a dominant discipline but in outlining the blueprint for a new discipline about ethical subjectivity. This interpretation of mine about the significance of Husserlian theory is connected with my judgment that a pure ethics should be epistemologically separated from disciplines/fields of philosophy, law, politics and religion (the related analyses are mostly given in my Chinese writings). The more advanced studies along this line will belong to the new theoretical human sciences in the future. However, its currently affirmable justification could be quite properly asserted in terms of the correct theoretical semiotic perspective. Therefore we have to grasp the epistemological/methodologically revolutionary enlightenment of the semiotic 2 way of thinking, which has been unfortunately misunderstood by many self-claimed philosophical-centralist semioticians. ●n the other hand, philosophy still remains the most important theoretical source in the theoretical human sciences but it must join the current interdisciplinary-theoretical interaction to reorganize/redistribute its own

theoretical structures that have accumulated for the past three thousand years. In this sense, strengthened interdisciplinary-directed interaction and collaboration between philosophy and theoretical semiotics would be beneficiary to both sides (this was the original idea of mine for designing the scientific-programmatic direction of the Nanjing 11<sup>th</sup> IASS Congress in 2012).



## CHAPTER TWO

# POWER-ORGANIZING AND ETHIC-THINKING AS TWO PARALLELED PRACTICES IN THE HISTORICAL EXISTENCE OF MANKIND: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF THEIR FUNCTIONAL SEGREGATION<sup>15</sup>

### Abstract

This article is dealt with at a historical-strategic level. Historical processes can be functionally divided into two sections: the social-material-directed power-organizing part and the cultural-spiritual ethic-thinking part. Thus there exist two corresponding dynamic-operative functions in history, which are guided and impelled by different motivations, methods, and destinations involved at two functional levels. The ethic-practicing praxis has been always performed through the empirical-humanist-rational ways, which today can be more effectively embodied in human sciences to be reorganized by the general semiotic (GS) strategy. So there are two kinds of human historical courses: the one is the materialist-directed power-organizing part and the other is the spiritual-theoretical-directed ethic-reflecting part. From a historical-philosophical point of view, the former is to prepare the material conditions/means for supporting the latter as the ethic-spiritual mission that is directed towards exploring the meaning/value foundation for human existence. Lacking in an internal link between the two historical-pragmatic functions, the ethic-spiritual praxes should manage to find a separate strategy for actively continuing their independent ethic tasks by dint of wisely/bravely shunning the materialist determinism issued from the technical/commercialized globalization era.

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## **Part 1 The two basic practicing mechanisms in human history**

### **1. Introductory explanations about alphabet signs used in the article**

This article deals with relational problems of the heterogeneous interaction between the social/interpersonal-organizing practices and the ethic/spiritual-organizing practices in human history. To concisely discuss this complicated but important topic the author has to use two sets of alphabet letters – “A, A1, A2” and “B, B1, B2” – in the paper to represent two types of general practicing tendencies in history, for which we use A to represent the social/interpersonal realm and B for the ethic/intellectual realm; A1 and B1 to represent two corresponding practicing “logics” or “mechanisms” respectively applied in A and B; and A2 and B2 as two corresponding resultants separately produced by A1 and B2. The central topics in our discussion are about the mutual relationship between A1 and B1 as two heterogeneously constitutive/organizing impulses/procedures that produce two main dynamic modalities/itineraries in historical processes. The detailed usages of each sign will be given in the text. This article is intended to point out that the dialectic/dynamic interaction between A1 and B1 should be a highly significant theme to be dealt with by general semiotics (GS).

The mental wisdom of mankind has been always separately applied in these two sections in history, naturally shaping two different kinds of practicing functions. Despite that the two sections have been often intermingled together in actual life, an implicitly operated functional dichotomy can definitely be found in history. Two central types of wisdom applied in A and B are characterized essentially by two different wisdom-applying logics. As regards A, it is embodied in a pan-power-organizing logic (A1), and as regards B, it is embodied in a pan-ethic-organizing logic (B1). In fact A1 and B1, as two central modes of intelligent-practical activities in A and B, represent two divergent constantly repeated organizing mechanisms in historical life. Accordingly, we name the main parts of the productions of A1 and B1 respectively as A2 and B2. A2 refers to the main institutional skeletons of power hierarchies of all sorts; B2 refers to the explicit/implicit intellectual deposits of humanist ethical/scientific ways of thinking in history. If A2 implies its axiological double aspects – the good and the bad (but in our discussion we do not treat this distinction problem) – then B2 is innately axiologically

positioned – the good or the positive (in a humanistically-justified sense) – just like the way we carry out any scientific approaches.

In general, we could say that the main substantial content of human history consists of phenomena in these two sections, which are in this article marked shortly as “A-set”, consisting of A, A1, and A2, and “B-set”, consisting of B, B1, and B2. In brief, A1 indicates so-called power-organizing logic and B2 indicates so-called ethic-spiritual-creating logic. A1 and B1 amount to the dualistic conceptions of “historical-organizing functions” that are taken as implying real pushing-forward forces, axiological directions and organizing manners concerning historical actions/events. This functional bifurcation hints therefore also at an essential division of praxes of human beings in history: the one directed towards the power-constructing way (as a technique about interpersonal domination) and the other directed towards the ethic-creating way (as the thinking about the meaning/value of existence and ideals of human life). The point is emphasized that these two necessary dynamic logics always work separately, or in a paralleled way, in historical processes, keeping each other’s *internally* divergent practicing courses, although their working grounds/materials (A and B) and their productions (A2 and B2) are actually merged together and therefore indeed *externally* interact with each other. In brief, internally A1 and B1 work separately while externally they are still in interaction. The so-called internal aspects of A1 and B1 refer to their different determinative dynamic sources/driving origins, directed aims and employed methods. This paper attempts to focus on the internal segregation and the external interaction between A1 and B1 as expressed in various social/cultural/scholarly contexts.

If A and B represent the general realms in the historical world and A2 and B2 represent the essential parts of A and B, these four signs still totally refer to changeable historical-social-cultural phenomena. By contrast, A1 and B1 especially refer to the constant driving sources and organizing/practicing mechanisms (or metaphorically, “practicing logics”), and especially to the organizing/practicing motivation and destination, namely focusing on the dynamic-operative ways of applied intelligence. A1 and B1 present themselves as driving mechanisms consisting of various “parameters” such as impulsive inclinations or mental motives, instinctive desires or passions, and faiths in certain values (especially conducting wisdoms), as well as fixed terminals or goals. So both A/B and A2/B2 refer to the produced consequences of actual historical agents and A1/B1 especially to the related producing mechanisms as such, which are indeed more fundamental than their productions in a historical hermeneutic term. A1’s central character is expressed by power-building

manipulations and B1's central feature is ethic-reflecting creations; the former is a social-pragmatic dynamic entity formed by psychological-physical forces and the latter is an ethic-spiritual structuring entity formed by subjective thought only. Exactly, the contrast between A1 and B1 is essentially presented as that between two different kinds of inner-impulse/outer-terminals, the one for the materialist-power-operating and the other for the ethic-spiritual-elaborating. A1 and B1, these two sets of instinctive impulses, operative methods and practicing ends, have existed in permanent tension in history. And, in my interpretation, they are exactly also the general dual-driving forces (the power-organizing and the ethic-creating) and paralleled axiological guidance (respectively for building social-hierarchic order and for advancing ethic-understanding) that shape the characteristic modality of human history. In a certain sense we may assert that A1 and B1, the two basic practicing organizing impulses/terminals innately rooted in human nature, are the central mechanisms for determining historical developments, and all other external factors such as natural/economic phenomena and conditions are only the contexts, materials and tools to be employed by A1 and B1. Facing each other's changeable historical/geographic conditions and materials, A1 and B1 always keep their own constant dynamic-organizing identities characterized by stable impulsive inclinations and fixed pragmatic orientations.

## **2. Two orientations of historical practices and two applicable functions: Power-Materialist-directed vs. Ethic-Spiritual-directed constructions**

In this paper we use A1 to indicate the entire driving sources and organizing mechanisms concerning all kinds of power/hierarchy-building activities, including various practical (applied) kinds of knowledge used for their power-constructing tasks. The latter has evolved from its primitive wisdom practicable in actions to modern applied social scientific/technical knowledge. And we use B1 to indicate the entire driving sources and organizing mechanisms concerning the attempts for advancing ethic-elaborating thoughts, which especially refers to the special efforts made towards the aim for the ethic-spiritual thought interweaving activities that has been enwrapped in all social-cultural/intellectual phenomena. In short, both A1 and B1 especially refer to the two practice-organizing lines, marked metaphorically by logics or mechanisms, which operate and make their respective productions in historical processes. In other words, human history is basically driven and guided by a power-organizing mind and an ethic-organizing mind

simultaneously as well as separately. These two functions as such remain unchanged in history, while by contrast their contexts and productions must be changeable from time to time; therefore behind variegated historical phenomena there are always two hidden kinds of constant driving forces. The former especially refers to the central part of all social-political activities/events, namely to the interpersonal power structure shaping; the latter especially refers to the elaboration/sublimation of the secular-humanist ethical spirit realized in all ethic-intellectual activities. ("Secular" here is synonymous with empirical and scientific.)

The main modes of A2 and B2 as fruitions produced in history have undergone constant changes following the developments in historical processes. For example, regarding A, we may say that A2 evolved from the religious (in the primitive period), the political (in the feudal-despotic period) and the economic (in the capitalist period); regarding B, we may say that B2 started from its inceptive ethic-consciousness state (in the primitive period) and developed into the traditional literary-philosophical modes (in the pre-capitalist period), and finally, following the progress of natural and social sciences, to the mode of human sciences today. Then human sciences finally became a more effective working grounding on which B1 can more effectively proceed with its relevant practices. In contrast with the scientific/technological-directed history of globalization under the control of the present power hierarchy (A2), which presents a characteristic of the organization of the economic-power monopoly (A1), B1/B2 begin to present more clearly their tasks in reconstructing the humanist-ethical/empirical-rational-directed knowledge about humanity itself in confrontation with the present economic-central dominating contexts (A1/A2). It is exactly the times of formation of present-day human sciences in which B1 becomes more conscious of its own genuine destination that should be focused on exploring the new humanist ethical underpinnings deeply penetrating human sciences. Besides, in our terminological usage, the individual/concrete roles and the general/abstract functions (A1, B1) in historical processes should be distinguished too. No doubt, A1 and B1 especially refer to the implicitly existing two functioning mechanisms at the general level, although they are actually and unevenly realized and embodied in countless actual practices carried out by actual persons and groups in history.

Now we should add that our definition and description about A1 are given value-neutrally without touching on the problems about social-political goodness or badness, but rather merely with a special focus on the operative features of its power-organizing ambition and technique, which consists, among its various parameters, essentially of the following: a

desire/impulse for organizing and controlling the collectives or groups of people, a capability in propaganda and interpersonal-struggling tactics, an inclination for establishing hierarchical order and a general pragmatic-wisdom. In comparison, our definition and description of B1 are given only from one-dimensional axiological position, which consists of thinking about the secular-ethical elaboration and human-scientific rationality (contrasting with supernatural morality/intellectual irrationality). As a matter of fact, we may say that there are two heterogeneous aspects in human historical development that are impelled separately by the material-social-tended and the spiritual-ethical-tended psychological sources, which are marked respectively by A1 and B1. Our interpretation can also be described this way: the internal separation of A1 and B1 and their external interaction co-shape the bi-dimensional historical-pragmatic modality of mankind.

The two major historical-practicing tracks are realized only at the abstract or general level, while they are concretely/dispersedly carried by different people as actual agents. We could name A1 and B1 alternatively as logics, mechanisms or functions. That means, in historical realities, the actual people are only somewhat participants in performing functions A1 or B1, by different degrees and at different self-conscious levels. So A1 and B1 are only the indicators of the two general functions concerning historical developments that are certainly embodied in different events and phenomena. In a word, a “function” means precisely the definite features of the organizing-mechanism/logic for producing the related resultant or accumulative productions (A2 or B2) in general practical inclinations.

The bi-aspectual contrast of the two materialist/spiritual-organizing “historical tracks” (defined in reference to their origins, functioning ways and resultant modes) indicate the two divergent instinctive impulses in human beings: the one desire/action is to organize interpersonal-dominating power of different kinds through establishing various types of institutional hierarchies by their special wisdom and applied knowledge, and the other desire/action is to search for the way to more effectively increase and advance the spiritual-ethical learning about the desirable modality of human life. The function of power-organizing corresponds to any actions of interpersonal domination, including financial-material, faith-spiritual, body-physical and ideological hierarchy formations, if all of them, including both physical-material and cultural-ideological phenomena, have the coercive/compulsory strength to control or determine the establishment of social orders and economic activities. By contrast, the ethical-spiritual activities, as pure thought, are concerned only about continuously advancing self-understanding about meaning/values

concerning human existence. Working together with external elements of different kinds, these two basic self-existing historical-practicing functions indicate two mutually separate locomotive-impulsive strengths. Therefore, following the changes of the interconnections between A and B in historical developments, the related consequences of the external relationship between A1 and B1 will be changed as well. That means, when the division between A and B becomes more clearly distinctive (as it has since modern times), the type of the external causal relationship between A1 and B1 will be readjusted accordingly. This is just what we see in our globalization times: the modern materialist-centric lifestyle and the traditional rational-spiritual praxis for ethic-elaboration have turned to be more mutually separated and constitutively heterogeneous than ever, and therewith their external causal relationship has become further closely-tied; essentially, the influence of A1 upon B1 or the domination of A1 over B1 becomes more unprecedentedly pressing. The fact is that when the A-set (A, A1, A2) in our present-day globalization period becomes *legally* more justifiable, the B-set (B, B1, B2) could become *ethically* even less applicable. Once again we further experience a heterogeneous-distinctive tension between the external social-legal logic and the internal spiritual-ethical logic in our current historical situation.<sup>16</sup>

### 3. “Influence on” and “making use of” in external interactions between A1 and B1

As we explained above, A1 and B1 as the two separate organizing mechanisms work separately in their different operative pathways, keeping mutually disconnected logics, but at the external level there certainly exists a causal interaction between them. Exactly, this indirect external influence of A1 upon B1 can be realized only passively, namely by weakening the operative external conditions and efficiency of B1-practicing, although A1 is unable to touch the inside of B1 dynamic autonomy. Still, this indirect influence could after all produce negative effects on the praxis of B1. Despite its organizing self-defensive reactions against pressures from A1, B1 is definitely unable to counter-influence directly the inside of A1 either. In comparison with the everyday saying

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<sup>16</sup> Problems with the ideological impact of technical society upon human life had been widely discussed, even prior to the advent of globalization. However, few of them paid special attention to its obstruction against the rational developments of scholarship about humanity. Let me introduce here a still interesting old book (written in the early 1960s) by Jacques Ellul, which is full of foreseeing insights (Ellul 1964, see especially pp. 23-57 and pp. 334-349).

that B1/B2 is able to actively bring about “influence” on A1/A2 (simply, the thought influences the power), we prefer to rename the active words “influence on” A1 with the passive words “being used by” A1. Anyhow, even at the external level, the so-called indirect interaction between A1 and B1 is performed in an asymmetric mode or according to only a one-directional way. As a matter of fact, we say that A1 can externally/indirectly change the status of B1-practicing through actually influencing B1’s conditions for practicing, even though the reversal is not true. Consequently, if an “influence” of B1 upon A1/A2 seemingly occurs, the fact could just be that the direction of mutual action is reversed: it is A1 that makes use of the productions of B1/B2. In essence, we attempt here to divide this external interaction into different phrases – “the intentional influence” and “the making use of” – in order to more clearly specify the acting-direction involved in external/indirect interactions between A1 and B1. Simply speaking, it is A1 that can externally “make use of” B1’s productions (B2). Therefore, in the everyday sense, we may briefly describe that only the “power-holder” has the capability to influence the pure “thinker”, and the thinker, regardless of his intention, has no capability of directly influencing the power-holder. If the so-called influence of the thinker upon the power-holder seems to happen, the fact might be that the power-holder actively chooses to accept the idea issued from the thinker as useful for A1. Or, the thinker functions only as an “idea-provider” for possible uses by the power-holder who is of course able to freely “use” anything available. What we stress here lies in that this process of one-sided causation reflects only a realization of will of the power-holder by influencing the practicing status of B1, causing favorable or unfavorable conditions in connection with B1’s praxes. The inference that the two cases are essentially different implies a highly significant reinterpretation about the actual relationship between A1/A2 and B1/B2, or, more popularly, between the “power-organizing” and the “ethic-organizing”. Regardless of how useful or applicable an intention of B1/B2 (for example, some ethical thought) could be with respect to A1/A2 (for example, social action), any possible intentional effect can only be one-sidedly decided and adopted by the A1-organizing power itself within its special contexts and in accordance with all its other related factors. It is A1 that is the final determiner in the external interaction between A1/A2 and B1/B2. In other words, in case an A1-carrier does accept an intention/opinion originating from a B1-carrier, he is still restricted by all of the other organizing parameters that are regulated by A1-logic as such. So this statement raised here has nothing to do with the personal moral attitudes of the A1-carrier, for this man, as an A1 logic agent, as the entity



functioning at the general/abstractive level, has to obey the operative mechanism of A1 logic.

The above-introduced interpreting model can lead us to be clearer about the mutual relationship or interaction between the A-set (A, A1, A2) and the B-set (B, B1, B2), especially about the relationship between A1 and B1, as the two paralleled organizing mechanisms concerning social power and ethic-thought respectively. Now let us see a historical example about the causal relationship between the Enlightenment (B2) and the French Revolution (A2). Despite the obvious historical phenomena of the close interaction of the two phenomena being embodied even in the same groups of people, we should penetrate the socially superficial phenomena to reach the two different processes of interaction formed at so-called functional levels. Then should we distinguish between the causal-relational type of B1/B2 externally *influencing* A1/A2 (a thought *produces an effect on* the power-holder) and that of A1/A2 *making use of* B1/B2 (a power-holder *chooses* a thought). With the independent conceptions of historical-practicing functions this distinction concerning the nature of the causal-relation is necessary and useful because both A1 and B1, despite their sharing the same or similar related external objects and contexts, always keep their respective independent “inside-practicing logics” that, as the fixedly-directed impelling-sources/inclinations, should be taken as the really determinative factors to establish A2 and B2 respectively. Therefore all other elements involved in the related resultant events are only the external materials, available tools and other factors to be employed for attaining the definite aims in the related historical situations. (For example, if concrete persons are engaged in the two realms A and B but the included relevant elements are respectively interweaved into different functional resultants at the collective/abstractive levels formed by A1 and B1.) ●nce again, objectively speaking, contexts, conditions, means, and materials related to the two kinds of practicing-logics must be variegated, while subjectively speaking the two organizing mechanisms as such always keep each other’s unchanged independent dynamic autonomy. Regarding this example, the abstractly defined A1 was concretely carried out by different actual power-holders (such as the king’s family, the aristocracy, the church, revolting plebeians, and revolutionary leaders, as well as the related ideologies regarding the French Revolution) and the abstractly defined B1 was concretely carried out by all Enlightenment-related humanist thoughts before and during the French Revolution period. This conclusion implies an emphatic point that social power-organizing and ethical thought-organizing always keep, implicitly but determinatively, each other’s independent dynamic-practicing logics in human history,

although the actual carriers of A1 and B1 (such as actual personnel, related circumstances, historical processes and produced consequences) could be complicatedly intermingled together. The related causational network and consequences in that historical period must be interconnected in different ways; still, however, there must be two self-existing driving mechanisms that operate separately at the functional level. According to common sense, if an idea of the “thinker” is accepted at all by the “actor”, namely the same idea appears on both sides, it seems to be reasonable to say that the thinker “influences” the actor. But the saying neglects that in this case the idea plays its role in different mental contexts consisting of different elements regarding the two sides that keep each other’s divergent operative logics together. Moreover, after all, our statement about these two independent functional-logics does not assert that they should be regarded as so-called “determinative factors” of history. In fact, no such straightforward-lined causational determinative mechanism exists in history, either psychological or social-material by nature, as many traditional historical philosophers simplistically say; what exists in history is only a multi-causal network implying at random countless uncertain factors emerging in historical processes, among which A1 and B1 keep their own functional independency and dynamic autonomy belonging to their different pragmatic poles that provide favorable opportunities for their spontaneous praxes. There exists no objective determinism but only a so-called “subjective determinism” defined in our above descriptions.<sup>17</sup>

Another example is given from the history of ancient China. A2 represents the formative period of the Qin-Han imperial despotic system while B2 especially refers to the *ren*-ethical school created by Confucius (as a quasi-secular humanist rational ethics) and the so-called Legalist school (as the ideologically despotic-inclined and intellectually rational-utilitarian, strategically/tactically-directed, political/military dogma/technique), which both belong to the so-called pre-Qin thought existing prior to the imperialist period initiated by the Qin Empire. It is the Qin/Han-Confucianist-imperialist power-tradition (A1 in this example) that intentionally and synthetically made use of both Legalist thought and the humanist *ren*-ethics as its two kinds of pragmatic-tactic/ideological-educational tools for consummating the lasting empirical system in

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<sup>17</sup> The interaction between the thought and the historical event involves countless complicated discussions that cannot be dealt with here. So we only handle it at the most general level. Jules Michelet’s masterpiece provides some quite rich material about the matter. For reasons of space, let us just make reference to one example he cites in his note on page 9 in the abridged copy of the English edition of that book (Michelet 1967: 9).

Chinese history. Regarding the despotic system, the Legalist strategy/thought forms its “hard core” and the deviated Confucian thought forms its “soft core”; or, the Legalist conquest-loving technique created by the Legalist masters made a deviate use of the peace-loving *ren*-humanist learning of Confucius to create a newly united political-social-academic dogmatism of Confucianism that has become the very ideological/technical foundation of the empirical tradition. In this case we should not say that it was the *ren*-ethics-directed pragmatic wisdom (B1) that was part of the causes helping to form the establishment of the Empire (A1/A2); instead, it was the independent will and strategy/tactics of the historically-existing empirical power-mechanism called Legalist thought (A1) and its wise applicants (A1-carriers) that carried out a successful political-military unification of the land by force. But above all it was the Legalist-inclined power-holders who successfully made use of both pre-**Q**in original Legalist tactics and the deformed (tactically used) Confucian thought to support their despotic power-constructive programs. The reason of our argumentation lies in distinguishing the spontaneous organizing will-practices from the used objects, tools and contexts. It is especially the case that the despotic power-holders alternatively/dialectically made use of two mutual contrary wisdoms (the Confucian-humanist *ren*-ethics, which is a purely intellectual autonomy, and the imperialist power’s Legalist tactical/moral position) to successfully construct their imperialist foundations, although the part of Confucian ethical learning was intentionally and purposely “misused” by the despotic power-organizer as a despotic moral-training tool (see Li 2015). By contrast, the Legalists’ position is completely in accordance with the imperialist power-will, and as a matter of fact the Empire’s political/military ambition and the Legalists’ political philosophy/strategy (an extreme oriental type of Machiavellianism) had truly been intermixed into a historical totality. Confucian thought, as the original humanist *ren*-ethics (仁学) created by the person called Confucius, was terminologically mixed by the Han-despotic power-holder who used part of Confucian thought to form a despotic-academic ideology called “*ru*-learning” (儒学), added to its fake master “Confucius”. To distinguish between the two in terms of this original terminological mixture, this author use the term “Confucianism” (*ru*-儒) to represent the despotic ideology and the term “Confucian thought” (*ren*-仁) to represent the original ethical thought created by Confucius (see Li 1997). This terminological mixing trick could be roughly compared with modern ones regardless of any axiological inclinations: Marx’s original thought, for instance, has been extremely disorderly mixed with a variety of mutually-conflicting schools of Marxism that were later created independently in

different countries and by different groups, causing extensive confusions until today. This kind of terminological confusion has often been intentionally designed and carried out in different social-historical contexts by different power-organizing agents.<sup>18</sup>

Similar cases can be further enumerated in the following. For the 20<sup>th</sup> century world, let us use A1/A2 to refer to all kinds of revolutionary activities (as a type of the new power-constructing attempts) and their related social consequences, and let us use B1/B2 to refer to the humanist ethical-idealism implied in all socialist thoughts initiated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Apparently there exists some link of the same transmitted term “socialist thought” shared by the two trends (the one refers to the *intellectual part* of a socialist-idealist movement and the other refers to the actual *social activities* in the great organizing systems), but in fact the early ethical thought is only selectively *used* by the later social action-applicants, while the two heterogeneously constituted parts actually apply different practicing logics for their different projects (the one is directed towards the ethical-creative thinking and the other is directed towards the actual power-organizing). Similarly, regarding the case of Nazi Germany, A1 represents the Nazi power’s actual ideology/strategy that included some elements from Nietzsche’s thought about power-will, which can be better regarded as only a pure ethical nihilism without any actual organizing elements involved.

In consequence, there is at least a question about the functional distinction between two different processes: the “active influence upon” and the “passively being used by”. Roughly speaking, for those examples we state that there has indeed externally existed causal connections between each B1/B2 and each related A1/A2. But the term “causation” does not present a sense of the “determining direction” or the interactive status of the causal processes. As a result, we may state by mistake that it is the ethical thought (as B1/B2) that causes or produces the power-establishments (as A1/A2) in a causal-connective process. Regarding a causal process in history, our special argumentation is intended to further ascertain which causal side is actively operative and which side is passively receptive with respect to the relationship of functions A1 and B1. So we prefer to say instead that B1/B2 is only “used” by A1 (the “thinker/thought” is *used* by the “power-holder” rather than the former

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<sup>18</sup> The English term originally invented by earlier western missionaries has been used to refer to both the original Confucian ethical thought and its politically-ideologically misused mode, causing serious misunderstanding about Chinese historical messages. This author therefore especially uses the term “Confucianism” to refer to the latter, which is the official political/academic despotic dogmatism.

*influencing/causing* the latter). Therefore B1/B2 would not be interactively responsible for the occurrence of A1/A2. If B1/B2's ideas happen to be accepted by A1/A2 in the latter's projects, the corresponding intentions of A1 and B1 could be by chance overlapped. Even if this were so, we could not say that B1 and its product B2 are parts of the intentional content causing the practices of A1. More exactly, we could not therefore affirm that the related practice of A1 indicate the realization of B1's intention in A2 (even if A1/A2 prefers to declare it this way for a propaganda aim). The question once again is: is it meaningful to strictly distinguish between the "influence on" (B1 to A1) and the "making use of" (A1 to B1), or the "realization of an intention of B1 in A1/A2" with respect to historical causal events? The answer is affirmative because both A2 and B2 are organized and impelled by different practicing logics (A1 and B1 respectively), and these two organizing logics consist of different sets of functional parameters, including their separate motives and aims, so the segregation between intentional-influencing and non-intentional-causing functions should be well-made in order to help us to more exactly grasp the mechanisms of the two different practicing logics and their products. The meaning of this distinction is expressed in an emphasis on getting rid of faith in the apparent existence of the (intentional) causal relationship existing between A1, B1, A2 and B2 in order to further outline the factuality about the empirically provable separation of A1 and B1. Alternatively, a pragmatic notion of temporally/spatially apparent causal links of events that have frequently emerged in history should not be intuitively/misleadingly recognized as the intentionally-guided causal relationship. Therefore, if an idea in a B1-agent is accepted by an A1-agent in the latter's project, that can only be taken that the idea from B1 is useful for and therefore could be favorably "used" by A1; nevertheless, the related intention of B1's idea would not be taken as the same intention of A1 in this case. An intention is only defined by its related context and the practicing motivation of the agent. Accordingly, B1's motivation of producing the idea is not the same motivation of A1 that accepts the same idea; even if the two "ideas" are the same, B1's motivation for raising the idea and A1's motivation for accepting the idea could be different, for both A1 and B1 do not internally share the same sets of parameters belonging to each other's organizing mechanisms. We may further clarify it this way: the idea itself used by A1 and B1 remains the same but this same thing is used by different operative mechanisms; or, the idea is the same but "*how* to use it" may be different and therefore this "*how*" plays a more determinative role than the "*is*" in actually

realizing the use of the idea; in concrete practicing processes the idea becomes an element to be employed by the related “‘how’-mechanisms”.

#### **4. The trio-functional parameters innately contained in two historical-practicing logics originating in human nature**

For the sake of further outlining the constitutive-pragmatic difference between A1 and B1, we should pay attention especially to three crucial parameters of organizing mechanisms: motive, method, and aim. Accordingly we have the following:

- A1: control impulse (motivation); empirical rationality (organizing wisdom); and directedness towards building interpersonal power (aim).
- B1: ethic impulse (motivation); empirical rationality (organizing wisdom); and directedness towards deepening justice-intelligibility (aim).

Thus we can see that the two heterogeneous historical-practicing logics share the same intelligent-directed “wisdom” – an empirical-rational way of thinking, although they are axiologically divergent by motivations and orientations. This shared feature, indicated in their using empirical-rational wisdom, leads us to learn that both the two operate in the same worldly realms despite functioning at different levels.

We will emphasize that the above-given basic descriptions about the two constant organizing-logics (A1 and B1) always operate spontaneously and separately at the functional levels within constantly changeable historical contexts. But the resultant historical phenomena can only present themselves as A2/B2 (as historical productions of A1/B1). Between A1 and B1 there exist no internal/direct causal links but there do indeed exist external/indirect causal links. This double-directed relationship is related to another conception of the positive-tended and negative-tended practices regarding A1 and B1 in terms of their driving directions. Positive-tended practice means that it proceeds directly towards the construction of its innately planned projects on the basis of its own organizing logic; in this case, another organizing logic will not be involved. It is in this sense that we say A1 and B1 work separately without mutual interaction. Negative-tended practice means that the given organizing logic should firstly work to exclude or overcome various obstructive elements caused in its practicing contexts, including force, and its influences come from its opposite organizing logic. It is in this sense

that we say A1 and B1 can work externally in interaction. Or, more exactly, A1, as the power-holder, would like to curb or control B1, and B1, as the mere “thinker”, in case of unfavorable conditions, must defend and protect himself against as well as cope with the unfavorable conditions caused by A1. The negative-tended practices of A1 or B1 can be taken only as the preparative stages for these two organizing logics; namely, the stages on which A1 and B1 work to gain more favorable external conditions for continuing their positive practices. In other words, once again, popularly speaking, in their external interactions, A1 can influence B1, but nevertheless the reversal is not true. The “thinker”, as a B1-carrier, could always cherish a utopian self-comforting fantasy that the ideal strength of his thought would someday influence the negative social reality controlled by the power-holders. Such kinds of misunderstanding about the function and tasks of B1/B2 lead to invalid perspectives concerning the orientation of human sciences.

In terms of this explanation we can further state that even if A1-carriers and B1-carriers adopt the same ethically-affirmative attitude in their projects, there cannot exist a mutual interaction between A1 and B1 at the functional levels. That means the multi-external interaction between the A1-carrier and the B1-carrier would not change the essential structures of separate independent operative procedures performed by their different organizing logics. In terms of the above analysis, we should further pay attention to these separate modes of causation regarding the internal and external interactions between the A-set and the B-set, especially that between A1 and B1. The inferred conclusion is therefore that we no longer say functionally that A1 serves B1 or B1 serves A1 (in a simple popular saying, that “a power” and “a thought” directly help each other). Even when concrete A1-carriers and B1-carriers happen to share the same axiological direction in their respective projects (namely, if a power-holder and a thinker adopt the same ethical intention) they still keep each other’s separate organizing mechanisms; or, their practicing-ends at the organizing-functional level are different: they keep different organizing tasks (with a different “how”). Let us keep in mind the separation of A1 and B1 and their social-natural agents (carriers) as the intuitive historical entities, such as persons, works, actions, events, and processes. As the concrete functional-carriers they live in the same world and same communities with countless causal and intentional interconnections; they also provide each other with the elements requested by each other at intentional-behavioral levels, while there are abstract functional-filters (“monitors”) that automatically filter all historical phenomena into

separate processing channels, leading to their different resultant divisions (A2 and B2).

Our seemingly obscure differentiation given above is intended to point out the independent and spontaneous existence of these two instinctively dynamic organizing mechanisms in spite of the much more complicatedly merged historical phenomena externally caused by A1 and B1 and other factors. In more popular and plain words, we can also repeat that these constant historical-practicing momentums are in fact deeply rooted in human nature – which, as a basic epistemological conception, have been widely denied or rejected by so many contemporary western theoretical thinkers – and should be firstly confirmed by the empirically provable existence of these two psychological-motivational sources. Any denial of the factuality of this positive-empirical concept of “human nature” would help us further understand why some contemporary philosophers could become such seriously wrong judges of historical-realist dramas in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; this denial of factuality even provides people with various misleading interpretations owing to their anti-positive/empirically sophisticated theorization. By contrast, our statement about two instinctive and innate organizing logics is based on this psychological factuality concerning the historical existence of the human being. This is also the reason why the time is really coming when humanist ethics is especially needed, for it is an empirical-rational foundation of human sciences.<sup>19</sup>

### **5. Motivational intentions/causational effects in the sharpened tensional relationship existing between Power-praxes and Ethic-praxes in the globalization era**

The distinction between the mixed existence of A1-carriers and B1-carriers and the separate existence of A1 and B1 should be clearly emphasized. This statement, founded on a semiotic separation between intuitive-empirical and abstract-functional actions, will lead to a very important conclusion that in history the power-organizing practices and the ethical-spiritual practices should be much more clearly separated as well. The statement will become more and more clearly proven as the course of modern history continues. That means, as both A2 (the total hierarchical social power-building achievements) and B2 (the total

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<sup>19</sup> Regretfully, academics always neglect the connection between their wrong judgments and their sophisticatedly-phrased theoretical texts; as a result, any once popularly successful texts are taken by academic marketing as being constantly valid textbooks.



humanist-ethical/scientific achievements) become much more developed today, the mutual separation between two pragmatic-logics also becomes more discernibly distinctive. The sharpening of this separation indicates that we will have more reasons to avoid a misunderstanding about the supposed existence of an intentional-causal relationship between A1 and B1 at their internal-functional levels.

Regarding the content of power, there is a typology of power that covers political, military, economic, legal, spiritual, academic, ideological, cultural and even religious-spiritual realms. Power is formed or realized in different domains by means of a variety of media and elements as long as the action or results present the relationship or networks of interpersonal/inter-collective control/dominance. As the traditionally-leading type of power-organizing activities, the political type is also the main force for maintaining the stability or order of society, in connection with a network of power-hierarchies existing in the different domains above-listed. No doubt, all B1-carriers exist also in social contexts governed by those power-organizations, although B1-logic organizes its own projects separately and spontaneously with a result that the productions made by B1 organizing logic are automatically accumulated in B2. Regarding A1-processes, despite the changeably increased multiplicity and enrichment of power-typology in historical evolutionary trajectories, the innate inclination and the fixed procedures of A1 remain unchanged, in that they are always directed towards the effective building-up of the interpersonal/inter-collective organizations of control/domination. With respect to power-organizational areas of various kinds, we may use the general humanist-evaluative standards to mark them morally. All productions of A1 are realized in different types of power-productions and in different hierarchic orders. Regardless of their axiological natures that are defined ethically, all of them should undergo the same organizing procedures guided by A1-logic. For example, all economic situations must be organized by and under the control of the objective economic power-mechanisms and turn to strengthen the power-hierarchy quasi-objectively, making any social-political-moral inclinations only part of the structural elements used.

In addition, let us see another literary-sociological phenomenon in connection with the building-up of power through employing literary media. A literary phenomenon is a functional compound and only part of it could be filtrated or deposited into B2 as the ethic-implying fruits. In other words, a cultural-natural unit undergoes different organizing processes in connection to A1 and B1 separately/simultaneously. For example, the Russian literary classics in the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be used as revolutionary-

ideological weapons by political radicals in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, although it implies a purely ethical-spiritual content. In general, if there exist two different aspects involved in one social/cultural/academic event, the original ideas created by a B-carrier and the misused effect manipulated by a power-holder can exist in history at the same time. But the fact is that it could be the A1-carrier who delicately makes use of the B1-carrier's idea for a different purpose through employing it as the mere material or tool to build up some ideological power system. From an intuitively common sensical angle, there exists a causal link between these two sides because they share the same intentional element. But as a matter of fact, there are two different kinds of organizing logics involved in these two different process: the first one is supposed as being performed by B1-logic and the second one is supposed as being performed by A1-logic; namely, B1's product is used (or misused) as a mere constitutive element by A1 for organizing its own different plan. Such a phenomenon is even more easily created in all phenomena related to the humanities in general, exactly because they lack objective criteria and standards, and therefore their intellectual productions are more easily made available as material to be misused or disorderly used by different kinds of opportunist applications. Partly because of this reason, any theoretical creations realized in one scholarly discipline (for example, philosophy) can be more easily used as the material for shaping any ideological effects or just used as an intellectual-dominating weapon against the aim of the originally used idea. In short, the same intentional element can be taken as a mere "building brick" to be used in different building designs through contextually or semantically manipulating or suppressing its original idea or, even further, through making use of it as a symbolic index simply for creating propaganda. (For example, making use of a literary/philosophical master's publicity as a mere ideological weapon through delicately deforming his original thought.)

More precisely, as is well known, the intention to motivate a work-production is one thing and its results or effects formed in different contexts and by various organizing procedures would be some other thing. Therefore there hardly exists a straightforward causal connection between the motive and the effect concerning one project. Why? Because the intentional activity in question with its own organizing logic and the interaction between the work and different factors from different social-cultural-intellectual levels are different processes, each of which keeps its own different organizing ways. The process of causal interaction itself could become the object of a social-cultural power-holder with its own purpose and practicing procedure, so an element in the original practice of

a B1-carrier can be used only as the tool or medium by the power-holder for the sake of organizing its own project. Nevertheless, usually people would misread the element shared by the B1-carrier and the A1-carrier as the evidence of the existence of an intentional causation between the two practices. However, the fact could be that it is only that the B1-carrier provides the A1-carrier with the material available, to be used by the latter in a different project. Why do such kinds of things happen frequently in the intellectual history of the humanities, and especially in our globalization era? It is precisely due to the general lack of scientifically-directed knowledge about the generally accepted foundations, prepositions and standards in theoretical/axiological discourses in the humanities. The commercial/technical-directed cultural circumstances, including the richly advanced AI/bio-chemical products, have been transforming the interests of both intellectual elites and the majority of the masses (the majority of the masses are instinctively tended to follow the dominant social tendency/fashion that is absolutely determined by A1/A2) to the topics of technical nature that are widely and deeply disconnected from relevant humanist-ethical/humanist-scientific knowledge. The new generations, who are trained and unified mostly in the standardized technical world, will get more and more used to enjoying themselves by materialist-sensuous ways, which will lead people to become naturally disconnected from any serious problems concerning social/human sciences' theoretical themes. That is part of the reason why sympathetic literary passion, obscure philosophical reasoning and manipulated/fabricated historical stories can be easily transformed by certain power-holders into convenient ideological/propaganda weapons. On the other hand, the shortcomings of some professional humanities scholars could be due to their systematically weakened attention to the introspective-psychological experience. As a result, by mechanically following the models of natural/social sciences, humanities scholars could naturally tend to adopt the naturalist/pragmatic/behaviorist way of reasoning. While all problems concerning meaning, values, faith and motivation must be related to the introspective-psychological reality, which is basically neglected or denied by physical positivism and behavioral pragmatism, they are just one of the essential parts of human sciences.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The technicalized personality is almost equivalent to any single-disciplinary-trained scholar who will logically lack the capability of carrying out the correct judgment of problems concerning widened fields and general backgrounds in connection to other disciplines and fields.

## Part 2 Two historical praxes applied in a multi-tensional network in the humanities

### 6. The necessary scientifically-directed approaches towards the humanities in the scientific/technical/commercialized age

Of all the social-cultural and intellectual activities in history, we will especially focus on the parts with the so-called humanist inclination that implies a propositional-axiological fixation on pan-humanism. The latter is not only based on a principle of our humanity-centric morality but, scholastically speaking, is also owed to a deeper emphasis on the thinking about how to organize or develop a properly rational/scientific form of human-nature-centric ethics and empirical-positive knowledge about human affairs. This mental/intellectual inclination towards humanity-centric thinking, instead of any supernatural/transcendental interests, has continuously and consistently grown up, evolved and gradually ripened in our civilization's long history. There exists a natural and necessary link between human-centric ethical and human-centric scientific learning, for all human-centric ways of thinking must be humanistically/ethically-positioned in nature. Unlike supernatural-, physical-naturalist- and even materialist-social-centric ways of thinking, human-centric learning implies its innate human nature-centric and ethical-axiological stance. The latter has made it more and more separated from other non-humanist modes of thinking. This innate inclination in human nature is even also the historical origin of the contemporary formation of human sciences. In this article we use B-set to refer to the ordinary cultural-intellectual-scholarly phenomena in history, whose earlier historical modes can be classified into two main types: one is the literary mode, including literature and historiography, characterized by its descriptive and expressive features concerning human life, and the other is the philosophical mode, including all kinds of learning such as natural, social and psychological studies, characterized by its acquisitive and theorizing features. Since the inception of modern times, natural-scientific learning has been completely disconnected from the philosophically/theologically-directed modes, and therefore a genuine social/human-scientific way of thinking has converged on the humanities in general. In early ancient times, the philosophical mode could cover all kinds of thought in connection with the natural, social, ethical and metaphysical fields. In its broad sense we may use the phrase "pan-ethical way of thinking" to particularly refer to all thoughts about mind, spirit, value, faith, goals, emotion, instinct, motivation and causation concerning human beings. Ethical learning in this quite broad sense

(namely, not limited in the sense used by the ancient and modern ethical disciplines of various types) is the main concern in the modern humanities or human sciences. Regarding the traditional humanities (B), an axiologically/epistemologically-directed spontaneous will (B1), which is implicitly and collectively embodied in intellectual history, has constantly been engaged in carrying out the ethically/spiritually-directed scientific studies about man and history (B2). B1, as a function for organizing the humanist-ethical/scientific learning, has also groped for its own right mode of intellectual production or reconstruction along an empirical-rationalizing line driven by that deep-rooted instinctive impetus for advancing the humanistically/scientifically-directed ethic intelligibility. The most recent mode of B2 has been reduced to the theoretical part of human sciences today. The theoretical direction of human sciences therefore becomes laying an increased human-nature-directed ethical emphasis; or, in other words, a four-item set of ethical, humanist, scientific, and theoretical aspects becomes further systematically unified in the recently emerging field of human sciences.

Human civilizations have entered their modern stages since the remarkable developments of natural and social sciences; accordingly, the developing emergence of human sciences also firstly appeared at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and has been progressing ever more productively since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This tendency for the more substantial modernization of human sciences attained its recent upsurge when the structural semiotic trend started in the 1960s prior to the arrival of the globalization period. And since then both the commercialization and professionalization of the humanities worldwide, together with irrational post-modernist-theoretical trends, have gradually and continuously made the semiotic movement in general deviate from its orientation of human-scientific modernization. Structural semiotics and its applied interdisciplinary-theoretical approaches have been weakened by the collaborative results of the materialist/economic-dominating power and the ontological-nihilist/transcendental deviation. As this author has pointed out, the latter is in fact essentially and indirectly the consequence of the former.

Modern developments in the natural, technological and social sciences have first of all provided the humanities with a more rational/effective methodology to improve and advance their knowledge and thought about meaning, value and faith concerning human existence through *epistemological-methodological-theoretical* advancement, which is characterized by their getting rid of the thousand year old rigidified domination of traditional philosophical-centrism. The professionally institutionalized restrictions caused by globalization on the one hand and

theoretically misleading philosophical dogmatism on the other have become the two main factors obstructing the further development of theoretical human sciences. These epistemological accidents happening in the humanities and the semiotic movement, far from being merely academic events, reflect a profound challenge towards the spiritually desirable orientation of human civilizations. This statement about the semiotic mission and its connection with human sciences in general of course have nothing to do with the popular present-day semiotic phenomena as a mere new occupation; it is linked to what this author names as general semiotics (GS), a more critical and synthetic epistemological/methodological strategic way of rethinking (as a practicing way of B1), which is inceptively stimulated and directly enlightened by semiotic structuralism but rather implies a much more significantly intellectual inspiration for reflecting and reevaluating the general perspective of human future. The main features of this epistemological turning point are embodied in its interdisciplinary/theoretically-directed theorization against any philosophical dogmatism. Moreover, this "semiotic/hermeneutic stance" is not caused by any ideological/axiological preference but just comes out of a relevant scientifically-directed epistemological-methodological necessity, as we pointed out above.

Current philosophy as a disciplinary scholarship in philosophical history belongs to the big family of the humanities or human sciences; on the one hand it certainly still keeps its own unique disciplinary significance, but on the other hand it has already lost its earlier fundamental-guiding potential. Philosophy today should participate in the same interdisciplinary-theoretical reforming programs together with all other human sciences. In terms of this, if the humanities or general semiotics, in disregard of the interdisciplinary-epistemological requirements, still go back to accepting certain philosophy as their "basic theoretical foundation", that not only means going back to some conservative scholarly position but also indicates a scientific-epistemological backsliding or stagnancy. As a matter of fact, we could even seriously doubt that this insistence in philosophical-centrism either in the humanities-theories in general or in general semiotics in particular just amounts to a theoretical self-castration. First, this philosophical-centrism has already become invalid today as being a solid theoretical foundation for supporting any disciplinary theorizations, and second it even just becomes an epistemological obstruction against the continuous advancement of current human sciences. No doubt, as this author has pointed out before, this still prevailing philosophical-centrism penetrating the humanities is basically also owed to the commercial-professionalism in

academia formed in our globalization period. (For any easy manipulations of rigidified theoretical dogmatism would be welcome to the cultural policy of the materialist-commercial domination.) Nevertheless, what is said above does not mean to degrade this traditionally accumulated scientific value itself, but rather stresses a necessity for more rationally redefining, reorganizing and further advancing its relevant scientific-theoretical function through encouraging it to participate in an active interdisciplinary-directed dialogic practice. With respect to either philosophical-fundamentalism or general semiotic studies, the crucial point of the interdisciplinary strategy can be indicated in its central epistemological breakthrough expressed in a systematic anatomy of all related prepositional and fundamental elements underpinning various disciplines and their theoretical connections.

**7. The logical nexus between human sciences and humanist ethics: the social-material aspect should be the means and the ethical-spiritual aspect should be the end in human historical existence**

The intellectual phenomena represented by B in history cover several typical stages ranging from the primitive ethical consciousness and historical-literary creations to the present humanities in general. But only the essential part produced by B1-logic, or the so-called cream of the historical humanities, can be automatically deposited into the B2-reservoir as permanent theoretical accumulation, which consists of different requested/desirable aspects appearing at the ethically effective, methodologically valid, thematically significant, orientationally-reasonable and intellectual-strategic productive levels. The B2-collection in the long course of human history has unconsciously yet consistently evolved along a constant B1-organizing line, or been pushed forward through the organizing practices of B1-logic. Only in modern times when natural and social sciences have become much more developed, namely when the humanities with their traditionally disorderly composition have turned to be more reasonable and more effective in their new modality of “human sciences”, are we able to more clearly grasp the essential of B2, which is what humanist ethics and human sciences have consistently searched for; we accordingly could more clearly perceive the desirable segregation of A1-logic and B1-logic, namely the innately-rooted divergence originating from the desire/action for power-constructing and the desire/thinking for exploring deeper ethical/scientific truth. (Let us use the ambiguous term

“ethical” here for it can present a clearer contrast with power-desire in our comparative discussions.)

As pointed out above, despite the social-physically mixed existence of A1-carriers and B1-carriers in history, these two general functions of A1 and B1, beyond their individual carriers, keep their separately developing courses (these two logics retain external-causal connections but internal-motivational disconnections at the same time). Out of an innate social-pragmatic inclination, A1 performs its power/order building-up practices in different historical contexts; by contrast, out of an innate ethic-mental-spiritual inclination, B1 is engaged in promoting the advancement of scientific/theoretical learning about meanings, values, aims and empirical causation concerning actual human life. A1’s social-pragmatic programs are related to the minority of elites carrying organizing-leadership as well as to the majority of the masses who are always ready to be organized by A1, while B1’s intellectual practices are related to the minority of deep thinkers or spiritual elites who are innately passionate for seeking ethical/scientific truth, independently from the power of A1/A2. Or, more exactly, B1 is doomed to be permanently engaged in exploring the ethical-spiritual intelligibility. So the innate interests of A1 and B1 are essentially divergent by nature. But generally speaking, it is B2 that provides human beings with advanced knowledge about the spiritual meaning of human historical existence, while A2 as social-institutional power constructions also partly function as the social-materialist conditions for supporting the performance of the practices of B1. (The material is to support the spiritual.) As a result, there exist two paralleled kinds of practicing logics: the efforts for materially-directed satisfaction and the efforts for spiritually-directed satisfaction; the former provides the latter with material support and the latter provides the former with (earthly) spiritual enlightenment about ethical meaning/value in human existence. Regarding the internal/external interaction between A1 and B1 mentioned above, once again, it is A1 as the power-holder that can externally influence B1 while B1 as the thinker is unable to influence A1.<sup>21</sup>

Since modern times, B2’s modality has moved more and more towards the programs of human-scientific reorganizing efforts through the increased rational sophistication of B1-organizing logic that is realized in

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<sup>21</sup> In general the intentional “from-means-to-an-end-directed” tri-link originating in human nature should be in essence realized in the sequence of “social/material-bio/sensual-ethical/spiritual”, but in fact the actual historical-practical sequence becomes just the reverse in human life. As a matter of fact, the spiritually-directed life-end ironically becomes the pragmatic-ideological means used to support the preceding two in our times.



the contemporary interdisciplinary/cross-cultural strategy rather than in simply collecting and gathering people from different disciplines, like what we see in current comparative literature and other fields. A great number of further creative efforts wait to be continued and elaborated upon because of the ever increasing number of interdisciplinary/cross-cultural sources, including the richest historical material deposited in the history of Chinese civilization. In this regard we can see more clearly that without seriously following genuine B1-logic and cherishing its strong creative passion, which have however already been gradually weakened by A1-logic and its results (A2), nothing seriously important can be expected, even if all achievements of academic masters/stars could be employed along professionally-regulated channels formed under the control of an A1-power hierarchy, including its academic part.<sup>22</sup> The academia of the humanities in the present day has been deeply penetrated by the institutionalized power basically arranged by A1/A2.<sup>23</sup>

### **8. Interdisciplinarity-theoretical strategy and the intelligible accessibility to the existence of multi-reality in history**

A revolutionary consequence of French structuralism is expressed in its general tendency for firstly disorganizing and then reorganizing the intellectual/scholarly structures shaped in the existing academic/scientific disciplinary compartmentalization. Its much stronger interdisciplinary inclination is intended to get rid of the academic institutional bondages or the rigidified status quo with a clear aim to create a variety of more original theoretical learning about history, society and the social sciences as such. As pointed out above, unlike the physical-empirical-rational-guided natural and social history that has formed and developed in modern history, the humanities or human sciences imply a more subjective-pragmatic character in contrast with the objectively organized natural-scientific ones. In this sense the existing humanist-disciplinary regularities prevailing in academia show a historically/artificially-formed tendency whose justifications are far from being positively or rationally founded. Such a kind of disciplinary network of rules for scholarly operations could become an unjustified restriction on free exploration for scientific

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<sup>22</sup> The academic star-system is itself a result that has been basically manipulated by A1's tactic that makes use of academic stars as a quasi-commercial brand in accordance with the academic establishment.

<sup>23</sup> The most persistent negative consequence of A1/A2 upon B1/B2 has been actualized in the general weakening of ethical subjectivity of professional scholars in our time, the deeper reason for which will be further elaborated later.

understanding about different social and intellectual experiences. With respect to the general developing routes of scientific studies, we can see a general tendency that is expressed in continuous horizontal/vertical alternations between the individual disciplinary-directed deepening and the multiple interdisciplinary widening. Contemporary human sciences indicate a similarly constructive development, represented in their de-philosophy-centric/interdisciplinary attempts; despite that, not everything done by them can be taken as scientifically completed or satisfactory; furthermore, we cannot of course take them as something fundamental or as certain authoritative models for promoting global human sciences in the future. The meaning of their achievements is mainly indicated by their epistemologically-directed revelation and fruitful exemplary illustrations.<sup>24</sup>

Human sciences have become more scientifically developed following the rapid advancement of natural and social sciences, which help lead to the increased consciousness about scientific rationality, empirical positivism and humanist-ethical justification with a clear purpose to make sciences about humanity become a kind of independent rationalizing endeavor and a sort of productive strength in our more and more scientificalized/technologicalized world. That means, if the humanist-ethical practices (B1) with respect to the modernization of the humanities cannot be relevantly organized, they would much more easily fall under the sway of some of the power hierarchies of A1/A2, especially those determined by the economic-domineering powers. Since economic globalization is spread extensively worldwide, the models of A1/B1 interaction mentioned above have changed rapidly as well. A1-logic could therefore interfere in the formation/operation of B1/B2 and make the latter systematically deviated from its own normal course. When A1/A2 with its universal marketing power is strong enough, namely when it can determine the professional-institutional contexts and operations of B1, or

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<sup>24</sup> The problems concerning the relationship between disciplinary-centric and interdisciplinary-directed theorization cannot be dealt with here in detail; the same problem concerned with history or historical theory is more complicit. Among the copious literature, please refer to Youzheng Li's related analyses based on both Chinese and western intellectual histories. Here this author just mentions a book by Noiriél and especially its paragraph about the relationship between interdisciplinarity and philosophy (Noiriél, 2005: 398). In general, although contemporary French historical theorists are among the most original because of their interdisciplinary-directed way of thinking, most of them are still engaged in inventing some sophisticated scrutinies based on an expanded history discipline while neglecting the much enlarged and changed conception of "history" as such (refer to Youzheng Li's lecture given at the IASS Congress in Helsinki in 2007).

when B1 carriers cannot help exclusively operating within the institutionalized framework that is indirectly under the control of A1/A2, the scholarly practices of B1/B2 will be directly or indirectly under the control of the imperative of the related academic marketing. The epistemological orientation and evaluative criteria of the entire humanities or human sciences would unavoidably follow the compulsory norms and rules regularized by the related marketing mechanism. The scholarly direction defined by professional marketing would definitely be divergent from the genuine humanist-scientific target, and then the emerging scientifically-directed endeavors of human sciences would weaken or even lose their scientific-operative independence. Therefore a lot of related practices in the humanities must be changed or readjusted accordingly, such as those concerning selected topics, useful material and the attitudes of scholars towards doing scholarship, the aims of education and research, scholarly communications, publication, and many other areas. As a result, the content of the humanities could become even more conveniently and more easily manipulated according to the will of A1/A2. A more successful advanced development would happen when the humanities reach their interdisciplinary-developing stage under the guidance of B1-logic. First of all, the scholarship directed by the related A1-logic, out of economic calculation, would be reluctant to follow these semiotic/hermeneutic-directed approaches that request much longer efforts and more painstaking preparations. According to A1-logic, it is more desirable that a single-discipline strategy is preferred than an inter/multi-disciplinary one in consideration of the economic principle required for organizing professional competition in academic marketing. In this sense the interdisciplinary strategy in the humanities will be naturally retarded; or, interdisciplinarity could be tactically undermined by the way of just arranging a gathering of scholars from different disciplines to show an apparent presentation of pseudo-interdisciplinary activities without substantially performing horizontal-theoretical interactions between different disciplines. The related secret could be more complicatedly found when this pseudo-interdisciplinary tactic is indirectly encouraged by A1 as a way to expand academic power/influences by dint of purely increasing the number of participants who choose to work along the scholarly direction according to the A1-line. True interdisciplinary scholarship must be realized in the theoretical dialogues between different disciplines at the epistemological/methodological levels. In addition to the purpose of expanding influence by increasing the number of participants, this fake interdisciplinary scholarly strategy with its real aim of gaining benefits in academic competition can also effectively obstruct the progress of true

interdisciplinary-theoretical scholarship (to use a pseudo-interdisciplinary alternative tactic in a competition context to actually replace true interdisciplinary engagement) so as to cause a more substantial theoretical retardation of human sciences.

We can easily raise a lot of academic examples to disclose how widely the academic arrangements have been contextually and pragmatically used to play a kind of non-scientific role in our world of the humanities in connection with planned usages of scholarly terminology, common names of schools, collective promotions of human-scientific stars, international centers or societies, evaluative award systems and countless other academic-tactical means. As a result, the scholarship processes could function as the tools to increase professional-utilitarian profits or as a way to build up academic-institutional power. The same thing can be even more frequently seen in the general cultural and communicational realm. All such kinds of phenomena can basically reflect the one-directionally causal influences of A1 upon B1/B2. As is well known, according to Roland Barthes' analysis about cultural semiology, there is a famous double conception of "denotation/connotation" (Barthes 2002: 695-698). We may add that this semantic link between the two kinds of signified at the semantic level also implies a more important link between the cultural/academic and the power-organizing aspects at the social-pragmatic level; namely, the heterogeneous/causal link between the "thought" (as denotation) and the "power" (as connotation) can be delicately created. Thus in general, based on the relationship between A1 and B1, the scholarly/intellectual stuff can be used to actualize or to organize the utilitarian projects about building up various interpersonal power hierarchies. Such kinds of heterogeneous-causal connections have in fact frequently emerged and become the determinative means for creating social/political/cultural power institutions of various types in our academic world.

In addition, according to a pragmatic semiotic analysis, a right judgment about a negative social reality in history can even be used as an effective means to silently/secretly shape another kind of even worse reality in society; for example, a justified attack on a really negative social power-holder's activities can become the effective means to conceive and reconstruct an even worse social power hierarchy in future, just through delicately applying the propaganda technique to make the blindly obedient masses and specialized narrow-minded intellectuals trust in the fabricated discourses without having a mind about the hidden evil ambitions. Therefore in history we can see many examples that an earlier correct attack on the corruption and brutality of a power-system has been

intentionally used to organize another perhaps more wicked power-system. For example, in Chinese feudal-imperialist history, many revolts and uprisings against corrupt regimes eventually led to probably equally bad or even worse ones after their seizing of power later. Consequently, all power-holders made use of the same convenient dynastic-Confucianist power mechanism to realize the same kind of power-seizing/manipulating games in history (Li 2015: 157-160). More exactly, as a historical-dialectic observation indicates, the current political, social, cultural and academic situations could just provide a latent ambitious mind (A1-carrier) with a desirable opportunity for cleverly designing and organizing his hidden ambitious projects for organizing new power hierarchies. One of the efficient means used by an evil A1-carrier at the beginning must well employ the tactic for expressing correctly-phrased criticism or blames against the confronted vicious power-holders. A historical-pragmatic dialect would be indicated in this way: the original justified words can become (or be used as) an effective cause/means to realize the later unjustified resultant effect/end. Although humanity's long history has been full of such kinds of power-seizing dramas, the lasting externally-directed habits in our observations and judgments have made scholars and thinkers tend so easily to be neglectful of the psychological-motivational reality. By contrast, differently from most Sinologists' judgments, the original Confucian ethics is especially characterized by its exclusively epistemological focus on the motivational aspects, which chooses on the other side to be functionally operative outside the political/legal/military historical reality.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> This character implies a double effect: although Confucian thought can hardly be used to independently deal with actual social-political problems, it is due to just this epistemological-exclusionism that it can keep a remarkable epistemological/pragmatic consistence in connection with its unique ethical-subjectivity (hermeneutically tested during the long course of Chinese historical experiences), which can only be made intelligible through relevant semiotic-hermeneutic reanalysis of the original text. This author has recently finished a new Chinese book, *A Hermeneutic Analysis of the Analects and New ren-Humanist Ethics* (forthcoming), which will give a much more detailed analysis of the original text and its modern ethical implication.

## **9. The negative impact of single-disciplinary-centric theorization in the interdisciplinary-directed contexts of the humanities**

Now let us focus on the related phenomena regarding the problems of our semiotic-interdisciplinary strategy once again. One of the professional-institutional obstructing methods against the modernization of the humanities today is directly related to the existing system of academic compartmentalization. The so-called “single discipline” with its historical-deposited implication undertakes two kinds of functions: one as the ground for intellectual/scholarly operations and the other as the ground for promoting professional utilities. As mentioned above, the single disciplinary-centric or pseudo-interdisciplinary practices (prevailing everywhere in academic professions today, especially in the fields of multi-cultural studies and comparative literature) become more convenient for A1 to handle/manipulate according to its own logic. One of the remarkable achievements of French structuralism is displayed by its promoting the formation of “human sciences”, which is mainly expressed by its adopting creatively original interdisciplinary approaches. The true interdisciplinary practices must be indicated by one scholar being able to be deeply engaged in two or more regular disciplines; the requirement will demand a person to spend more time and energy concentrating on one’s scholarly way of thinking and projects without spending much time calculating his own professional benefits. In the 1960s, many scholars could still freely choose their spontaneous approaches in this way, while in the later, more seriously institutionalized academic world, few scholars dare to stagger in a lasting preparative stage for their interdisciplinary-directed scientific adventures. When a discipline is used as a ground for seeking A1-guided practices (when the scholarship is obviously guided and controlled by professional systems depending on academic marketing), it can be performed in multiple ways in how the discipline is connected to the chosen standards, processing rules, academically-accepted values, authority texts adopted, marketing management and other aspects. All such connected parameters amount to forming a valuable “brand” for some “quasi-theoretical commodity” that could lead to the final profits judged and awarded by the marketing standards. The related scholars then would behave as businessmen who are always engaged in promoting their own products. In this sense the academic professionalization functions as applying the individually-handled humanist discipline to a converting process that goes in part from its B1-terminal to the A1-terminal; namely, scholarship is at least partly used to obtain some academic-professional

profits consisting of material and social elements basically determined by the related power institutions. Accordingly the orientation of the human sciences has been substantially deviated by commercial-organizing processing, and accordingly scholars unavoidably change their traditional identity of justice/truth-thinker to that of the profit/power-seeker. The substantial part of scholarly material remains the same while the organizing guidance and approaches turn out to be different, yet nevertheless it is the latter, rather than the former, that defines the scholarly-practicing identity. In essence, the academic powers would eventually be built up on the basis of AI-power-organizers; this implicitly determinative power hierarchy would then become the true guiding organizer of projects carried out in the humanities. The ready availability of this converting process is especially related to the resultant fact that the scientific contents of the humanities seem to have become less and less connected with empirically-positive scientific orientations and their humanist-ethical dimension.

But the situation mentioned above could be more complicated in connection with the current prevailing tendency of single-disciplinary-centric scholarship. The single-disciplinary-centric policy, besides its lacking in gaining useful theoretical messages from other related disciplines, could even cause a deeper theoretical flaw just because of its own over-specialized theoretical sophistication based on the single-disciplinary-technically deepening aspect. The unique result of the single-disciplinary-centric technical specialization as such might be overused as the natural justification for attaining its own profitable achievement within competitive academic marketing: namely, any kind of technical depth of theoretical discourse organized within one discipline could be used as an easier way to rhetorically make use of this specializing uniqueness in competitive marketing. By the way, the deeper the degree of theoretical specialization, the narrower its applicable zone would be. This is another reason why single-disciplinary-directed theoretical depth could hardly become applicable in enlarged spheres. However, on the other hand, any sort of theoretical depth would be habitually mistaken as implying some apparent value by its supposed capability to theoretically interpret any kind of topic.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> This is also one of the reasons why theoretical philosophers are liable to make wrong judgments about the interpretive possibility of their own specialized theoretical scrutiny about general social/cultural/moral problems. The point lies in that the deeper their philosophical theorization is, the narrower the related applicable thematic zones must be. The increasing of the one-directional theorizing depth would just lead to the further narrowing of its thematic applicability. Even if a one-dimensional philosophizing is referred to one aspect of reality, the successful

Another example with the same origin can be given by the popular admiration for the genius' individual originality expressed in his inventing new theoretical-discursive rhetoric used in the humanities. The so-called "individual originality" used for performing theoretical texts in the humanities seems to be an awardable principle for promoting the progress of the humanities, but as a matter of fact this principle, used in scholarly competition, must be also inserted in the game schemes designed by the institutionalized academic establishments. The scholarly-practicing originality formalistically created (without reference to reality) in established academic marketing must be the one that accords to the general norms/regulations arranged in the academic hierarchy and is therefore possibly acceptable to the current intellectual fashion-streams shaped in the marketing (the workability of a fashion can only be formed in the established academic contexts). Then the individual originality expressed in theorizing styles could function merely as a propitious way to better rhetorically meet with the competitive games that are also fixed by academic determinative mechanisms. As a result, however, the scientific criterion of truth has been eventually replaced by an artificial/arbitrarily-formed originality indicated by some theoretical-rhetorical wording.

In terms of what is described above, any kind of technical uniqueness of verbal formulation or its incomparability created through the single-disciplinary-centric sophistical theorization without horizontal interdisciplinary cross-referencing or mutual examination could be finally transformed to be a mere mark used for academic competition. For in this case, excepting its disconnection with reality, the self-claimed justification of so-called theoretical originality is mainly formed within its own exclusive single disciplinary domain. As a matter of fact, the tendency of single-disciplinary-centric theoretically/technically deepened results would imply two major secondary effects: the one is related to its partial/prejudicial access to reality that is often multi-dimensionally constituted; the other is related to a more serious fault of weakening or losing a requested ethical aspect contained in practices. As a result, all such flaws could probably be covered by the results produced by single-dimensionally-directed theoretical/logical sophistication as such; for the latter is frequently lacking in strictly pre-examining its applicable range of interpretation. Furthermore, we will point out an even more serious consequence of such kinds of misreading effects in social reality in this way: the specializing rhetoric tactics based on a mere one-sided or one-

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result cannot be applicable to other aspects of reality. But the difference is often neglected by philosophers in their interpretive practices.



dimensional theoretical depth could just be used to unsuitably support a pseudo-justification for some unjust programs that are designed and controlled by a negatively-tended evil A1 and applied in political, social, cultural or academic realms.

### **Part 3 The tensional relationship of the two practicing logics and the future of human civilization**

#### **10. The necessity for interdisciplinary strategy and the motivational impotency for the independent praxes applied in modernizing human sciences**

In terms of the above analysis we can see that the professional-disciplinary compartmentalization in human sciences not only objectively restricts the advancement of our scientific-theoretical knowledge but also subjectively narrows the epistemological horizon of the thinker. In addition, a related serious consequence is more basically expressed in the general weakening of the subjective-ethical volition of scholars/thinkers, who are modeled to become the standard specialized technical-minded operators following prefixed directions and regulated rules in their scholarly practices. Theoretical scholars would no more be independent thinkers and their scientific objects/interests are no longer directed to reality as such but only to historically accumulated texts authorized in the academic dominative mechanism. On the other hand, since modern history has developed along the ever-democratic line, the compositional structure of A2 is much more different from what it had been in earlier histories. Nevertheless, the basic parameters of A1 remain unchanged, keeping its innate interest in projects about power-organizing/expansion, whether morally positive or negative. Externally it is displayed in various fields ranging from the traditional types, such as the political and the religious, to modern ones such as the economic/commercial, scientific/technical, social/cultural and others. All of these external phenomena become the new modes of productions or achievements of A1 organizing logic. In comparison, the essence of B1 also remains unchanged in human history despite the changeable compositions of its productions. It is in our present-day globalization era that both A1 practices and B1 practices have become technically advanced and enriched, with the result that on the one side A1/A2 presents itself as the strongest type of multi-institutionalizing power imposed on its strictly institutionalized domains, and on the other B1/B2 has transformed from its historical pan-literary modality to that of the contemporary human sciences. The strengthened and widened institutional power hierarchy of

A1 and the advanced and deepened rationalization of the theoretical humanities organized by B1 have naturally fallen into increased social-pragmatic conflicts. A1 tends to be more and more pan-commercial-materialized and B1 tends to have more operatively available tools for more productive theoretical creations. In consequence, the interactive relationship between A1 and B1 at the social/external level and their mutual segregation at the internal level could co-lead to a sharper tensional status concerning these two historical-practicing logics today. Practically, B1-carriers must exist within the regulated social organizations basically determined by A1 with its multiple social networks (A2). On the other hand, present-day B1-carriers could not help becoming professionally dependent upon the economic support of A1 power institutions; because of this, the physical-material dependence of B1's innate practicing mechanism has been systematically undermined by the pan-marketing mechanism of A1/A2. Consequently, the genuine B1-carriers have been reduced to the minority of the voluntary humanities scholars who are willing to insist on doing purely scientific scholarship according to B1-logic in defiance against any possible social allurements/pressures externally caused by A1 power systems. The point therefore lies in that, due to living in such a fixed socially-established system, B1-carriers should find a more workable way to keep a paralleled or balanced way to maintain their intellectual independence and autonomy. Nevertheless, the difficulty in forming a reasonable and workable external segregation firstly lies in attaining more pertinent and clearer epistemological/ethical knowledge about the real conditions of our present-day intellectual/academic ecology. As we pointed out above, A1 functions as the productive organizer of multiple power systems, together with its various social productions, dealing with ever-increasing ways to satisfy both the power-desire of the organizing elites and the happiness-desire of the majority of the masses; while B1 functions as the ethic-spiritual pursuer about meaning, values, the mind and causal-motivational interactions concerning human existence in terms of original B-logic and by means of the ever-increasing epistemological/methodological knowledge historically accumulated in B2. Concretely, the practical tension between A1 and B1 is embodied in the relationship of their practices in academic-institutional contexts; in this tensional relationship, the one is the producer and promoter of A2 and the other is the free thinker outside of A2 (as the institutional contexts). From an angle of civilizational evolution, therefore, we should recognize that there exist two basic modes of teleology in human history: the one for pan-materialist social-power constructions (A1/A2) and the other for pan-ethical/spiritual

theoretical constructions (B1/B2). In this tensional context, A1-carriers exist in a completely independent way without taking care of B1/B2's essential needs, while in contrast B1-carriers externally live in a way of depending on A1/A2. In old times, B1-carriers presented themselves in a more mixed mode and therefore they as literary men could play multi-roles by themselves, while in modern periods, owing to the rapidly changed social and intellectual contexts, B1-carriers could be more and more conscious of their innate identity as the more advanced independent B1-organizer. And then, even if A1, with all its productions, becomes the object of studies of B1 practices, A1 and B1 both cannot participate in each other's innate practices. ●n the other hand, however, the professionalized humanities have already become the productions themselves, partly and indirectly determined by A1. In this case, a desirable manner of B1-carriers could firstly lie in distinguishing between two kinds of operative procedures making use of the same humanist-scholarly documents: the one as the practices pursued according to B1 and the other as the practices to accord with the academic requirements determined by A1. That means the same scholarly phenomenon can be related to different operations and used for the sake of different goals; or, the same historical humanities can become objects of different practicing procedures. After all, however, the essence or identity of a scholarly practice is not determined by its content/material but rather by the ways of organizing the same content/material. In our present-day professional contexts, the two different kinds of function and teleology are once again made blurry by these two different usages of the same material. In a word, the stuff of the humanities can be handled either as the ground for pursuing scientific truth or as the ground for seeking professional benefits. In general, these two functions implied in scholarly practices are often widely misrecognized as the same things. But the task of B1-carriers today firstly lies in making a clear distinction between the two. These current mixed phenomena concerning scholarly practicing directions reflect another kind of new interaction between A1 and B1, namely that externally A1 has already widely/deeply increased its influence upon (or made use of) B1/B2 in our globalization era.

Historically-sociologically speaking, A1 logic, as the major promoter of historical-substantial processes responsible for social power/order constructions, becomes today the locomotive for pushing forward global civilization with its either positive or negative consequences, which, however, from the point of view of B1, is not relevant to its own projects and destination (B2). ●n the other hand, it becomes more and more difficult for B1 to carry out its independent practices for advancing its own

historical mission of elevating humanist-ethic-spiritual investigations through systematically elaborating theoretical human sciences. How to overcome this sharp contradiction in current human civilization and its intellectual life in future becomes a significant challenge to the wisdom and ethics of human sciences today.

On the other hand, however, the present central part of B2, the pertinently collected theoretical achievements in human sciences, has also provided ever more effective methodological means used for their rapid development along B1 logic. That means, the traditional pursuit of B1 logic, on the basis of the progress of natural and social sciences, has reached a completely new stage in which there is a more rationally foreseeable perspective for more relevantly and precisely advancing theoretical understanding about meaning, valuation and historical causation in historical phenomena. Unlike in ancient times, however, this domination of A1 over B1 is not realized coercively under our democratic period but rather merely by means of materialist/profitable allurements through making use of the innate weakness of scholarship and personality in the humanities. In spite of the more accessible practicability of the more desirable interdisciplinary/cross-cultural strategy led and promoted by current semiotic/hermeneutic theories, current humanist-scholars still prefer to simply follow professional routines for obtaining professional profits without being very concerned about the right way of freely searching for scientific truth. Why does such a collective tendency to choose the self-succumbing attitude in face of the allurements and pressures from A1/A2 power-holders become so easily shaped today in addition to the known ordinary utilitarian motives? The fact is evidently due to a general weakening of the internal ethical consciousness of literati in general who exist in the general legalized systems set up according to academic professionalism determined by A1 logic. Therefore a deeper reason for the unified tendency of humanities scholars could be based on an acceptable excuse provided by the collective consciousness of the general social legalism penetrating academic and intellectual life today.

### **11. Ethical subjectivity and the legality-reductionist tradition of western moral philosophy: The independent historical mission of B1 in the Globalization Era**

B1/B2 should not be a mere tool or object used by A1; it has its own independent task of proceeding with the ever-increasing general ethical-intellectual elaboration. That its effect and role are indirectly involved in the A1 power context is one thing, and that its effect and role are involved

directly in B1 logic is another thing. While the projects performed in A1/A2 pass away forever with their elapsing history, the projects performed in B1/B2, by contrast, will be accumulated forever in B2 and therewith keep its spiritual-constructive existence constantly. A1 as the power-organizer has only its individually transient survival in a certain historical span of time (as the social-material existence, A2 can hardly be stabilized physically for a long time), while genuine B1, as the ethic-thinking-organizer, must make its products automatically precipitated in B2, which has permanently been made into the collective ethical-spiritual deposit of mankind (as the intellectual existence, B2 can continue forward at a spiritual level without being destroyed physically). The existential difference of identities and typology of A1/A2 and B1/B2, or in the popular terms, “power” and “thought”, rests in that all practices in B1 can continuously last in history while those produced by A1 depend on unexpected and accidental changes of various kinds in history. By contrast, all resultants of different B1 practices must be interwoven with a consistent intellectual network of ethical-spiritual interconnections (B2). In other words, historically speaking, the materialist A1 practices refer to the temporally-spatially discontinuous agents in history; namely, each power-working dynamic network only exists individually in limited spans of time and definite localities (perhaps the modern democratic typology can be exceptional, as we hope), while ethical-intellectual B1 practices have certainly produced a continuous holistically-directed spiritual stream collectively performed across different historical-periodical demarcations. After all, we should pay special attention to the contrasting relationship of historical existences between the temporality/intermittence of power-constructive praxes (A1) and the permanence/continuity of ethical-creative praxes (B1).

The profound implications of this historical challenge originating in the A1/B1 tensional relationship to human civilization and its pragmatic-logical nexus to the lost ethical subjectivity are far from being merely what the present paper has discussed until now.<sup>27</sup> A more serious challenge is

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<sup>27</sup> In terms of current critical thought about ethical subjectivity/power, Michel Foucault is definitely one of the most important thinkers. His profound and detailed discussions about the related western historical material cannot be handled here. Still, lacking in a direct understanding about Chinese intellectual history, his thinking needs to be re-examined more deeply. Here let me just mention a paragraph about his conception about “inside” as a reminder for our further related studies (Foucault 2005: 10-11). This author has a fond memory about his first participation in the western structural-semiotic Summer School in Toronto in 1982, where he, as the author of the first Chinese article about Foucault published in

related to the possible deformation of human nature itself in future if we take a glance at the various AI technologies' fast development, which has definitely been caused by AI logic too. In short, essentially the basic reason could be interpreted by this reversal relationship ironically being embodied in history: in the world of mankind, *the material or means* turns out to be the aim while *the spiritual aim* turns out to be the means. Humanity has been bound and dominated by pan-commercialized technology invented by humanity herself. The unique remaining resisting potential of B1 is hidden in the empirical ethical subjectivity that has been degraded or undermined by A1 in collaboration with the supernatural-deviation and ontological nihilism latently implied in B.

As a matter of fact, B1-carriers' tendency of so commonly succumbing to the established professional frameworks of the humanities, ultimately determined by A1/A2's institutional power, in addition to some practical reasons, could be hermeneutically reduced to a universal weakening of the ethical consciousness of scholarly subjectivity in our globalization era. This ethical-epistemological linkage between the legalized systems and human sciences has been widely neglected by humanities thinkers. From a deeper intellectual-historical perspective we may infer that there exists a deep-rooted epistemological origin in western intellectual history concerning the characterization of western traditional ethical scholarship as such that indicates a traditional mixture of the subjective-ethical way of thinking and the objective-moral way of thinking. The latter can be further represented mainly by ancient Greek ethics and medieval theological ethics alike, which both tend to make their utmost-rational grounding of ethical reasoning reduced to two types of objectivity: the one based on abstract ratio and the other based on the anthropomorphous Super-Being. These two basic types of western ethical/moral-mixed thoughts have been commonly embodied in the same legality-reductive ethical pragmatics. Because of this traditional legalist reductionism of ethical thinking, the autonomy of subjective ethical-directed thinking has constantly been significantly weakened or even deleted. In general, the subjective-ethical aspect in thinking has been replaced by the pan-legalist aspect in moral thinking; the latter amounts to a pan-behaviorist way of thought that could ironically turn out to be an epistemological obstruction for more profound spiritual sublimation. This could be one of the reasons why modern humanist scholars, who are provided with so much high rational intelligence in our modern scientific times, are liable to obey the

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China, had a half-hour talk with Foucault in his office. Two years later, Foucault suddenly passed away.

professional regularities established by A1/A2. The willingness to obey subjective/spiritual-ethical rationality is therefore mixed or replaced by the willingness to obey a kind of objective/social-moral rationality. Considered in ethical/logical/genealogical terms, we may summarize the above double perplexity concerning ethical praxes respectively performed by A1 and B1 as the following:

	Inside: At the ethical-axiological level	●Outside: At the social-practicing level
A1	Individualism (lacking in common subjective-ethical standards)	Collectivism (commonly accepted pan-legalism)
B1	Collectivism	Individualism

From an angle of global civilization, a double-directed way to constructively solve the above mentioned epistemological/pragmatic perplexity lies in a dialectic application of the pan-interdisciplinary strategy for dealing with the relational problems between A1 and B1 at this fundamental level. As a result, we should firstly grasp this double-directed relationship between A1 and B1 by the co-existence of their internal functional separation and external functional interaction.

Therefore it is natural that the popular justification about the theorizing mixture of A1 organizing logic and B1 organizing logic could be easily tolerated or even happily accepted by humanities scholars. ●On the other hand, this moral-legalized way of ethical thinking in our globalization era also makes scholars further disconnected with the independent humanist-ethical autonomy and therefore the fact that the mission for advancing human sciences should be based on an independent universal-humanist ethics is neglected. This ethical universalism based on secular humanism is completely in logical consistence with the rational-universalism of the human sciences. The idea of the scientific way should just refer to that of the universally valid/applicable way. Then a required ethical collectivism is heterogeneously replaced by sociological-legalist collectivism; accordingly, the so-called individual originality applied in doing scholarship becomes only a chosen concrete means used at the technical level in order to be better workable in that social-legalist system. As a preferred technique to meet with the established academic systems, this tactic of individual originality turns out to be just a more effectively misleading alternative excuse to make humanist scholarship further deviated from its genuine scientifically-directed goal. Moreover, the apparent individualism implied in the criterion of so-called scholarly originality happens to accord

with the fashion of social-cultural individualism supported by academia in our democratic era. Nevertheless, the essence of democracy essentially lies in the principle of a universal social-political individualism, which is realized in the justified systems that fairly guarantee everybody's self-interest. That the two kinds of individualism consistently overlap in one mind is another practical reason why the present-day epistemological criticism given in the humanities could be so widely neglected by scholarly applicants. In terms of this interpretation we may further understand that A1 logic cannot be used to promote B1 practices, just like B1 logic cannot be used to promote A1 practices either. First of all, we should be clearer about the paralleled co-existing relationship between A1 and B1, including between politics and the humanities. The fact that there is a segregation and disconnection between A1/A2 and B1/B2 implies a profound meaning for our understanding of the historical-philosophical implication involved: the two historical-practicing logics cannot influence each other at the internal level despite the fact that they could be externally merged and mutually interacted; therefore, despite A1/A2 being so powerful, domineering and practically necessary for the survival of mankind, B1/B2 still has an independent reason and possibility to keep pursuing its historically-transmitted and innately-rooted noble spiritual-ethical mission.

Accordingly, for B1-carriers, there are two kinds of meanings of "the value of life": the external one related to social-physical achievements and the internal one related to the ethical-spiritual creations. These two kinds of life valuations are often mixed together in a single mind. But a humanist theoretician should be able to distinguish between the two roles he adopts in the same professional context and at the same time: that of the pure professional (partly caused by A1 logic) and that of the true B1-pursuer; he should not mix the two sets of values, logics, and tasks together or naively take his unavoidable regular social/political/professional participation as the useful steps for pursuing his own really scientific task guided by B1. On the other hand, he should also be clear that the achievements of his B1 practices do not become a "cause" to positively/negatively influence A1/A2 either. He should in fact calculate wisely about how to handle the actual external interaction between A1 and B1 regarding his two kinds of scholarly engagements. Accordingly, a true B1-carrier should not mistake the importance of A1-carriers as his own importance based on B1. After all, B1's collective historical mission merely lies in creating its own B2 rather than using B1/B2 to "serve" A1/A2. If an A1-carrier chooses to learn from or makes use of B2, the matter is only the business of that A1-carrier in his own projects.



● otherwise, a B1-carrier would relax his own persisting concentration on his own current task – an engagement in constructing global human sciences.

In conclusion, we emphasize that the ethical-humanist thinker as a B1-carrier should be more conscious of the two separate “historical-practicing logics” (the power/order-organizing line and the ethical/thought-interweaving line) enwrapped in the single-merged historical stream in human civilizations; accordingly there exist two divergent kinds of meaning/significance in human historical life. The most crucial/essential dichotomy described in a quasi-historical-philosophical term should not be made between the natural and supernatural worlds but rather between these two divergent modalities of secular existence represented by A1/A2 and B1/B2. The bi-division of the organizing sources/terminals corresponds to the relationship of the material conditions of the former to the spiritual destination of the latter regarding human historical destiny. But it is only the latter that helps to illustrate or elaborate the deeper meaning/value of humanist life. The fact is that these two organizing lines—the power-organizing mechanism, intended to construct the interpersonal-dominating hierarchy, and the ethical-organizing mechanism, intended to create the ethical-theoretical structure—cannot internally participate/interfere with each other; they must keep each other’s practices segregated and paralleled according to their respective different axiological/epistemological logics, even though externally they exist in sharp tensional interaction. The most recent mode of ethical-spiritual development is embodied in the human sciences whose further theorization is to be explored and realized through the interdisciplinary-directed, rational epistemology/methodology. The latter has been typically represented today by an empirically positive, ethically directed general semiotics (GS), which functions merely as a general all-round reorganizer of humanist theoretical knowledge. In terms of this interpretation, the general theoretical-semiotic strategy could obtain historical-philosophical momentum, which could even lead to a possible ethical renovation in human consciousness in confrontation with the ponderous conditions of materialistic globalization. In terms of this interpretation, the semiotic, the human-scientific and the ethical should be consistently unified.

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# CHAPTER THREE

## SEMIOTICS AND ANCIENT HISTORY: RETHINKING THE COMPOSITION OF HISTORICAL DISCOURSE <sup>28</sup>

Two major sections of semiotic studies are generally about two kinds of semantic structures of textuality and institutional mechanisms of textual formations. These two sections, because of their establishment in history, should also be related to current historical theory. Historical discourses are noted for their semantic-constitutive complexity. Institutional formations of historical discourses are even more complicated to explain. Besides, being similar to semiotic theory, modern historical theory is also noted with its multi/interdisciplinary orientation. In addition, both semiotic theory and historical theory must be related to entire fields of social and human sciences.

Regarding so-called general semiotics, there have mainly appeared two kinds of theoretical sources in our semiotic family: the scientific/philosophical type and the linguistic/literary-theoretical type. The present paper attempts to recommend that colleagues pay refreshed attention to a third type: namely, that linked to current historical theory as an interdisciplinary/cross-

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<sup>28</sup> This paper was prepared for the 9<sup>th</sup> IASS Congress in Helsinki as a plenary lecture, read at Helsinki University on June 13, 2007. It was included in Volume 2 of the *Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> Congress of the IASS/AIS* (Helsinki/Imatra, 2009: 923-935). The lecture was foreworded by Prof. Roland Posner, the Honorary President of the IASS. Before delivering this lecture I expressed my thanks as follows: "I am honored to become the first Chinese plenary speaker in IASS history. First, let me express my thanks for the invitation arranged by our president Prof. Tarasti and secretary general Prof. Paz Gago. I would also like to thank Prof. Posner for his kind introduction to my lecture that reminds me of a 25-year semiotic friendship between us that started when we first met each other at the International Summer School for Structural and Semiotic Studies in Toronto in June 1982. There I also met and had conversations with many other famous western semioticians such as Foucault, Eco, Searle, Sebeok, Buissac, and many others; from that Summer School, I gradually approached the IASS."

cultural discipline. Unlike these two main theoretical modes, historical theory is simply connected with two referred dimensions: the intellectual/scholarly and the social/cultural. Global semiotics should include a cross-cultural aspect, which certainly covers the non-western “Others” at the social and historical dimensions. Logically speaking, the non-western social and historical reality would broaden, deepen and increase human knowledge of history. So the globalizational development of semiotic science today urges us first of all to reconstruct our basic theoretical-operative system about descriptions and analyses of the heterogeneously constituted phenomena of different civilizational histories in an empirical/positively scientific term. Besides, the contents of human history consist of different dichotomous aspects such as process/structure, scientific/literary, past/future, disciplinary/interdisciplinary, western/eastern, practice/theory, recognition/action, meaning/referent, and faith/reason. Historical theory as a discipline provides a typical forum for tackling profound epistemological and ethical reflections on human knowledge in general and its future development in terms of hermeneutic and semiotic approaches. In a sense, this author even tends to assert that general semiotic theory and current historical theory share similar scientific-operative functions and orientations with respect to their scientific goals. In short, both of them deal with various kinds of human affairs with the same interdisciplinary-theoretical epistemology/methodology.

## **1. Operative Restrictions in Single Disciplines and the Holistic Ideal in Interdisciplinary Epistemology**

Interdisciplinary and cross-cultural studies in semiotic scholarship should insist on a scientifically holistic horizon that should be theoretically linked to all social and human sciences. General semiotics should accordingly be related to the total range of academic scholarship. However, individual scientific projects are mostly centered on the definite procedures of various single disciplines. Regular semiotic projects in the more successful departmental semiotics are still based on various single disciplines despite their adopting multiple methods from different sources. So the so-called interdisciplinary semiotic studies are actually single-disciplinary-centric in their methodology and this current tendency indicates an operative suitability relevant to the related present-day scientific level. We should recognize an epistemological distance existing between practical departmental semiotics and the idealist conceptual design of the general semiotic theory. Therefore the so-called holistic tendency of general semiotics can only be conceived and expressed at a conceptual level at the

moment, indicating a strategic perspective in advance to the semiotic family. Conceptually speaking, such a holistically-tended general semiotics even shares the same range of integrative development of the entirety of modern social and human sciences, helping promote the semantic clarification and effective communication of the latter. The integrating tendency of these two academic practices reflects a scientific necessity for promoting all-round communication among various elements derived from academic, cultural and historical dimensions.

Among all forms of traditional learning, historiography is a typical mixture/combination of classical and modern modes. As a traditional discipline, history has widely absorbed theoretical fruits from many modern social sciences, especially sociology, anthropology, archaeology and psychology, expressing even the most all-encompassing, interdisciplinary-directed scholarly fields. Regarding all historiographic or historical-theoretical studies, the post-war French structural-historical scholarship indicates a more encouraging epistemological ambition, particularly those highly enlightening roles played by the theoretical evolution of the *Annales* schools over the course of almost one century. As we know, it once tried to make the range of historiographic science equivalent to that of the entire social sciences; accordingly, history had once been designed/anticipated to be a human-scientific entity in the future. The *Annales* schools had a reason for expressing such a highly idealist wish because they indeed felt an epistemological necessity in their historical practices. But we also know the story later changed, because the holistic-historical ambition of the school could hardly be continued in a straightforward and smooth way. In fact, that the *Annales* schools selected their subject matter exclusively from the medieval European period indicates a self-contradiction in their ideal of historiographic totality. As we know, even since ancient times a “universal history” has always been a common ideal shared by many traditional historians. That means the idea of so-called “total history” should cover events happening in global historical-geographic territories in as wide a form as possible. Besides, their epistemologically-chosen tendency to exclude political history becomes another serious self-limitation to their historical/historiographic horizon. On the other hand, we should note that the ideal of total history of the *Annales* is especially characterized by their emphasis on a strategy of methodological integration or interdisciplinary methodology directed towards a perspective of the unified social/human sciences. And in general we should always evaluate the theoretical adventures of the humanities in a reasonably relative term. Therefore, at least conceptually speaking, we recognize that the *Annales* schools’ permanent contributions are especially

characterized by their epistemologically/methodologically holistic ideal, which has already had a substantially instructive influence on the integrative development of current human sciences. As this tendency is scientifically further combined with French structuralism, guided by a similar epistemological spirit, we see a most promising progress in the current movement of modernizing human sciences since the end of WWII. As a result, we see a double integrative operation regarding the ideal of post-war historical theory or historical thought with respect to both human-scientific methodology and the scientifically redefined subject matters. Since then “historical theory”, or theoretical practices in historiography and historical thought, have seemed to be almost overlapped with the entirety of the social and human sciences. Practically speaking, however, this scientific-operative direction can hardly attain its scientific maturation at present. The reason is similar to what we often said above about the ideal of general semiotics under the present scientific conditions.

Here we are faced with two different aspects in our epistemological reflections: the desirability at the general theoretical level and the possibility at the concrete practical level. As regards the range of the subject matters of historical studies, historiography has a reason to spread its conventional range to a truly universal extent, namely including all spatial/temporal phenomena of mankind into their knowledge. As a matter of fact, we are absolutely unable to perform this kind of integrative operation. Regarding the methodological instruments applied, history has a right to be related with all relevant knowledge of social and human sciences in its projects. Both the materials and tools applied for processing materials should be operated within certain historiographical procedures formed in the existing disciplines. However, not only in history but also in other interdisciplinary-directed academic practices, the double integrative tactics can and must to some extent be applied to the projects designed in this way. Consequently, to overcome this contradiction involved in interdisciplinary practices, we should firstly distinguish between the strategic and tactical categories in present-day historical theory. At the ideal level, this new expanded historiography should share its operative range with the entirety of the social and human sciences, while at the practical level it can only be carried out to a highly limited extent. There could exist a reasonable intellectual gap between the epistemological perspective and methodological procedures in historical theory. With regard to the former, historical theory will share a similar holistic intellectual strategy with the theoretical humanities as well as with general semiotics in order to explore the possible theoretical consummation; while

at the practical level all actual scholarly projects must be arranged to be workable through their tactical combination of all kinds of knowledge and techniques concerned. Nevertheless, there is a distinction between the theoretical ideal and practical workability due to a purely technical reason, which is just because we are still lacking the sufficient scientific conditions to attain this epistemological idealism at present.

The integrative ideal of contemporary historiography has been gradually shaped since the outset of modern history. It is only since the era of modernity that it has been more reasonable for us to conceive a conception of total history owing to the ever-advancing intellectual and methodological developments. On the other hand, however, there appears another kind of obstacle or inconvenience for us to tackle problems of total history in the twenty-first century. In fact, so-called total history today, far from being a task to be carried out in a single discipline such as “history” or “historiography”, should cover all different occurrences that have happened in modern society and culture. This new historical reality in the expanded sense is related to all professional historians. A modern historian, however, with a much richer source of documents and more advanced techniques that are available today, can only be satisfied in writing a special history about his contemporary times. He no longer dreams about becoming a great erudite historian who is capable of writing a true universal history about his times. This contradiction in historiographical practices is also caused by the above-mentioned tension in historiographical theory. For example, a genuine total history of the last century could amount to being a quasi-encyclopedia about history, society and culture. How can we follow a traditional way of writing total history like this today? On the other hand, many present-day debates concerning historical theory are still restricted within the textual scope of traditional historiographical works, regardless of the various intellectual tensions prevailing in the total historical horizon of our times. In other words, facing the new intellectual context, many contemporary theoretical historians are still following the traditional mode of historical studies within the historically-shaped discipline or the profession of historiography. In short, there indeed exist multiple inconsistencies between tradition, reality and ideal in historical science.

## **2. Epistemological Rationality and Methodological possibility**

In light of the above discussion, we can see there exists an operative inconsistency in present-day historical theoretical debates. On the one

hand, historians feel the epistemological necessity of paying attention to holistically-directed scholarly tasks and conceiving a lot of new theoretical concepts accordingly, but on the other hand, they are still engaged in their traditional single-disciplinary practices. In fact, with respect to many concepts in history and historiography, there appears an obvious divergence between their traditional and modern modes of scholarly operations. Regarding historiographical practice, our experience in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is completely different from that of pre-modern times with respect to both the different ranges of materials available and the divergent levels of research technique in general. The scholarly research conditions of traditional and contemporary historiographies are radically different and therefore scholarly-operative possibilities of both are also greatly divergent from each other. So we cannot apply the same set of concepts to deal with them in the way that conventional professionals are used to thinking about. For earlier history, especially for ancient history, we have only quite a limited number of written texts as proper objects, while for modern or contemporary history we have almost an unlimited number of objects to be used. In light of this historical divergence concerning research conditions, how can we coherently deal with the same concepts like truth, objectivity, representation, fiction, falsification and others with respect to different historiographical modes in different temporal/spatial sections? Regarding either causal analysis or axiological evaluations concerning historical events and situations, historians of modern and ancient times have significantly different capabilities for performing their tasks at both the subjective and objective levels. As a matter of fact, their jobs should belong to different categories of academic practices.

Here, once again, we should note the abovementioned distinction between the epistemological and methodological levels, or that between the strategic and tactical levels. A historiographical epistemology based on the present-day academic conditions makes contemporary historians more capable of dealing with historical problems regarding both ancient and modern times than their ancient counterparts. Unlike some post-modernist nihilist rejection of historical truth, the objectivity of a historical event can be practically settled on principle by dint of modern scientific and technical tools. Let us compare an elementary type of historical event with a criminal or detective case. The concept of truth related to the type of criminal case can generally be recognized in social life. If so, the truth of historical events and social situations, despite a higher complicity, can be fixed on principle as well. Similarly, for example, the same news item on a TV program can provide really limited flexibility for different reports made by different journalists from different angles, because there exists a



certain shared external objectivity that can be positively checked. If the same cannot be said regarding checking historical events in the past, the reason can only be technical by nature. First, the past cannot be reexamined positively; and second, earlier people had less technical means for performing such positive examinations. ●f the many important historical events of the last century, few of them remain mythical or completely unknown for contemporary investigators on principle. But the actual accessibility to the related truth must depend on the related technical and political conditions that are available. After all, nowadays there does not exist a so-called epistemological obstacle that obstructs us from getting access to historical truth, as some extreme relativists lead us to believe. The same thing can be said about checking historical truth in the past as well. However, the reason remains practical rather than epistemological by nature. Most difficulties facing historians about ancient history are in fact related to a double technical obstacle: the disappearance of past evidence and the weaker intellectual and technical means in the past for reaching sufficient historical truth and preserving it.

This basic distinction between historical knowledge in the modern and ancient times, on the other hand, presents a positive verification for historical theory: namely, there could exist a 'historical objectivity' in an epistemological sense in reference to modern human knowledge and social conditions. Nevertheless, of course, this positive statement can hardly be applied to the present-day studies about traditional histories. Briefly, regarding historical epistemological problems, we should deal with them in light of the present-day conditions of human knowledge, rather than in terms of the past historiographical works and documents, as the present-day empirical positivist methods cannot be directly applied to those past documents that are available today because the latter were originally created by much more modest scientific procedures.

### **3. Epistemological Grades of Conceptual Precision and Predictive Efficiency in Human Knowledge**

With respect to the definition of the precision and efficiency of theoretical concepts in scientific knowledge, there should be different ways and standards for their classification and measuring. In natural, social and human sciences, the rigorousness of related concepts and measures must be differently defined, although natural sciences provide the standard models for fixing conceptual precision and consistency in various scientific systems. Regarding historical theory, the same thing can be said about basic concepts such as observation, verification, truth, objectivity,

prediction, etc. According to a medium layer of rigor adopted by historical theory, what we said above about historiographic-theoretical concepts is still taken as empirically and positively scientific; namely, it adopts a relatively less rigorous definition of the used scientific concepts. Despite different grades of conceptual rigorousness adopted by different types of scientific practice, social and human sciences should still be regarded as relatively scientific by identity, because they maintain rational and empirical features in their operation. A relevant definition of rationality is important for us to be able to accept a more rational rather than a less rational policy to apply our knowledge of the humanities and to organizing our practice in a more effective way either in the present or in the future. Strengthening our rational attitude towards applying our historical science is also related to how to improve our studies of traditional historiography. As we pointed out above, the weak points of the latter are not only due to its lesser capability of collecting and preserving documents but also, even especially, due to its much weaker capability of organizing its scientific knowledge in the past. Historical knowledge, far from being merely collecting observations and preserving memories, refers to causal analysis at the multi-dimensional level that can only be realized after the development of modern social sciences. So-called historical truth or the true picture of historical situations highly depends on the capability of historians' intellectual operation itself. It is a pity that many modern historians mainly take traditional historical works as literary sorts of texts or as artistic remnants for intellectual appreciation and aesthetic enjoyment. But on the other hand, they also tend to confuse those historical classics with the works finished in the modern period on the basis of the seemingly same discipline of historiography with the result of relaxing scientific requirements for the both. By dealing with both traditional and modern historiography, the present-day historians should pay attention to their rather different operative procedures.

Therefore we are faced with a new task in doing historiography now: how should we confront old documents with modern operative procedures, if the latter can hardly be used for the former in a directly positive way? Furthermore, a comparative study must also be arranged between modern historiography and traditional historical discourse. In general, there are two categories of historiography, rather than a single one: namely, the modern and the traditional. They have different operative systems with respect to their conceptual precision and predictive efficiency. And both, as actual historical disciplines, are different from the historiographical ideal conceived today as the interdisciplinary totality at the epistemological level, which can ultimately settle the theoretical criteria

for them. Regarding the capability of prediction of historical science, we should adopt the same relative standard of rationality. After all, the present-day social and political projects concerning present affairs and tasks in the future should be reasonably organized by means of empirical rationality. Without empirical rationality human beings can no longer even exist normally. If traditional historiography has been used for the purpose of reasonable prediction, contemporary historical science, in both narrow and wide senses, plays the same role. Human practices require intellectuals to apply a more rationally-qualified knowledge of their history to better their fortune, even if only indirectly. Rejecting this basic empirical fact and its related concept of truth amounts to a negation of our efforts to productively and positively organize human life itself. Semiotic knowledge today should of course be employed to strengthen this rational intellectual potential of mankind as well. In this regard, without naively trusting in any fabricated logic of progressive theory, we human beings should still cherish the same wishes for a better life in the future, as people did in the Enlightenment era.

As regards historiographical scientificity, we should also pay sufficient attention to the special traditional status of historical science as an intellectual combination of two rational practices concerning cognition and praxis. The latter requires a special practical reason based on our historiographical experience. The so-called historiographical reason needs a special scientific system of conceptual tools maintaining the above medium-level scientificity that must be empirical and pragmatic enough to help human beings realize their social practices in a rational way. In this sense historical science indicates the above double character. ● On the one hand it is part of the theoretical social sciences, developing its scientific exploration as far as possible; on the other hand, as part of the empirical science, it should maintain a balance between theoretical and practical efficiency, making sufficient use of various empirical-scientific methodologies. For the latter it can temporarily neglect the possible involvement of all advanced theoretical speculations until they become more operable, both scientifically and practically. For example, many speculations concerning the unconscious mechanism of social and psychological levels probably determining historical processes should be wisely neglected by performing our historiographical projects. A reasonable distinction between the so-called deeper-historical process and the super-historical process is necessary from theoretical and practical points of view alike. The confusion of these two perspectives would lead to an intellectual disorder at both scientific and social-political levels. For example, some utopian-like mistakes committed by some leading western theoreticians during the

late 1960s indicate this kind of epistemological confusion regarding their theory and practice. There should be an epistemological separation between conscious and unconscious historical rationality. Particularly regarding political practice, human beings should mainly exercise their conscious rationality in organizing their cognition and projects. The majority of historiographical works falls in this domain, hence the related ethical dimension in particular in historical processes. The explicit historical operation and its implicit deep mechanism should be separated. The same can be said about the interaction between objectivity and subjectivity in historiographical operations. In a relative term the subjective part can also be taken as quasi-objective in nature, because of the pragmatic reason that should be adopted. Empirically speaking, individuals always living in a community would share similar views and positions in a society, shaping a quasi-communal intellectual and practical constancy in a period. Interaction between history and ethics are also conducive to laying special emphasis on the historical causality between inner motives and external results. In this regard, psychological and sociological domains can be conceived in the same homogeneously empirical world. In brief, the medium-level scientificity of historiographical thinking guided by practical reason presuppose the existence of a quasi-objective historical-developing society that is able to be observed and treated in a rational way.

#### **4. The Classification of Historiography and the Status of Ancient History**

Traditional historiography, ranging from prehistory, ancient history to modern history, can be classified into their respective chronological periods. The classification of historiography is regularly defined by its presumed corresponding historical realities. Conventionally it is supposed that different modes of historiography represent their corresponding historical processes with respect to certain chosen aspects. Although modern historical theory rejects the naïve view of representation, traditional historiography is still classified according to the various represented periods, even if the extent of the related representation is far from being complete or satisfactorily sufficient. However, from a historical-semiotic point of view, we maintain that historiography should be classified more in terms of the related “productive modes” or the mechanism of doing historiography than by chronological references. In fact, works done in historiography are better defined by the way of making them, namely the certain ways of collecting, processing and analyzing

documents. More precisely, both documents and their ways of being processed are made by intellectual and technical methods mastered by “historians” living in their periods. The point is that different historical periods or conditions provide different mechanisms to produce their historical discourses. Accordingly, the meaning of historical discourse is firstly defined by the meaning-producing mechanism itself that can set up a model for historiographic production, and the related interpretation can then later emerge accordingly. Of course it is not easy for us modern scholars to get access to the production mechanisms of the past. Firstly, the latter can hardly be traced back to their original situations, and secondly, modern people are not in a position to grasp the lines of transmission of historical texts and their related changes. This technically formed gap between the present readers and the original writers creates a big obstacle for us to reach the true situation of past historical texts’ production. Accordingly, there is no easy way for modern historians to form their judgments of the genuineness of historical texts and the related historical truth. Therefore, the so-called reconstruction of historical reality is historiographically almost impossible. This impossibility includes the following items:

- a) The original historical reality disappears forever;
- b) The original situation of producing texts disappears forever;
- c) The track of the transmission of the texts can hardly be traced back;
- d) Most importantly, the historical conditions for producing referred historiographic texts were obviously unsatisfactory or insufficient with respect to all the related steps and aspects concerning textual production.

Hence we reach two conclusions here:

- a) We can hardly grasp the so-called historical reality or historical truth because of the above explanations;
- b) The reason is not epistemological but technical by nature.

In other words, we can appeal to two main reasons to relax our efforts for reaching historical truth, especially that concerning ancient history: first, the original conditions for producing and transmitting historical texts must have been too weak to make past historians attain this scientific level; and second, the modern scientific conditions provide a much higher possibility for us to get access to historical truth about modern history, the fact of which could indicate why we should inversely relax our expectations for

searching for the positively affirmed aspects of past and ancient history. However, the conclusion further proves that, to a certain extent, the concept of historical truth itself is scientifically justified; however, we are unable to search for it using the historical works formed prior to modern times.

Now we have another reason to recognize that historiography is a mixture of the scientific and the literary; namely, most, if not all, ancient historical works are pseudo-literary works. Because of the presumed ancient text-producing conditions, the epistemological problem of reference becomes less important and even less relevant with respect to the conditions of ancient historical production. There could have been a distinction between ancient legend and ancient history expressed in their creators' minds. Ancient historians indeed intend to describe the truer, rather than the more flawed or fictive stories; that is why story-telling practices of mankind developed from the type of myth to the type of history that we see in ancient times. Therefore, ancient historians could indeed collect historical documents (oral, visual and written) from their direct and indirect experiences as positive materials. We can suppose that, in the historical pictures given by them, there must be many true details included in their narratives. But on the whole, as descriptions of historical events or stories, true pictures of historical situations require the representation of many reliable causal connections that can hardly be sufficiently provided under ancient conditions. As a result, there must be a great number of imaginative and fictive creations added to the materials in order to form the pseudo/quasi-causal links necessary for the establishment of any intelligible narrative chains. The essence of historical reality or truth lies in the qualified formation of its causal networks, rather than in merely piling up factual details. Factual details without reliable causal structures have nothing to do with historical truth, for the essence of a story rests on the causal-logic lines rather than on the mere material used by the cause/effect-forming logic. Regarding the function of the narrative, the true origin of the used material becomes less relevant; namely, the true processes of the author's collection of narrative details are not relevant to the historical understanding. The way of collecting and describing observations can be either chosen directly from personal experience or from memory as long as the used details are able to function effectively in the narrative's formation. The so-called effective function here can mean that the used material is as realistic or natural in character as what we experience in real life. Realism in literary description is not logically related to the true processes of its production but rather to its verisimilitude. The story should be "real-like" or just empirically

intelligible. Regarding this technical requirement in historiography, as we pointed out above, both true observations and acceptable imagination can play equal roles in the persuasive reading of narrative logic. Compared with the mode of mythical texts, the historical is more realistic because its discourse reads as more empirically intelligible, rather than because of its possibility to be verified. The more genuine part in historical narratives will lead to a more qualified organizing capability of constructing correct or acceptable causality-links among described events and details, without which piled-up details would lose their empirically acceptable effects in textual reading. The causal network amounts to the “steel structure” of the story building that is the very essence of historical reality. In truth, ancient historical works would be taken as literary creations with certain quasi-realist elements as materials or documents. Recognizing the historical pictures from ancient historical works means finding acceptable causal relationships of event elements; alternatively, historical descriptions refer to that which is embodied in causal representation. But how can we modern scholars trust in the causal representations made by ancient people?

When talking about ancient Greek and Roman historiography, we find those books are characterized by more direct observations or personal evidences of individual historians than about their contemporary events, such as battle scenes in war stories and others. Another more scientific feature of those works is their attention to the causal analysis of the concrete events described. But the historian’s subjective intention is one thing while the quality of the results he obtained is another. Without sufficient subjective and objective conditions for historical investigations and writings, ancient historical discourses can hardly provide sufficiently true historical pictures, as they are lacking or weaker in their descriptions of the multiple causal relationships determining the eventual processes. What is given in the texts about causal analyses indicates merely a subjective intention or gesture about a scientific idea. The same situation could be more serious in the non-western ancient historiography. Let us look at a Chinese example such as *The Record of History*, by Sima Qian. This, the so-called first Chinese historical work by a historian, firstly created a Chinese historical principle of presenting true pictures in contrast with the legendary and mythical works created in earlier times. In comparison with ancient western works, characteristic of emphasizing single stories and personal experiences, Sima gives a total history about ancient China, including a long-term chronology and a social hierarchic system embodied by a number of individual historical figures with different official and moral credits, in addition to documents about certain natural and social conditions of his times. But the principle of “recording

truth” can only be relatively or sketchily carried out. The true principle in his mind (to follow the so-called historical truth) is at most only quasi-realist or applicable when looking closer at real life. What was excluded by him as being unbelievable or “untrue” was mainly that which did not accord with his experience in real life. As a matter of fact, a great number of so-called historical facts only come from oral legends that sounded believable or intelligibly acceptable at that time. Besides, some metaphysical or superstitious ideas prevailing in the book are created or accepted to fill out the all-encompassing pictures conceived. A more serious subjective tendency in this kind of historiography is its guiding principle of political morality mixed with a quasi-religious framework that predetermines an outline of the presumed historical development. Nevertheless, a great number of personal biographies in or directly prior to his times are full of more believable details, compared with other more myth-like stories, which can at least present a “statistical truth” or “probability truth” about the general gestures of life in a specific period or historical society. This great historian or literary historian indicates a strong intention to record and describe historical truth according to his own standards. His most famous principle of giving “historical truth” rests in his sentence “to harmonize legends of hundreds of earlier historians”; in short, the harmonizing process was the only controllable way to attain the so-called historical truth at that time. Because of technical restrictions in ancient history, he could hardly create a really true historical picture merely by dint of his modest intellectual and technical capability that had been provided by his times. That means we modern people can hardly obtain scientifically reliable knowledge about the true causality of that historical process, let alone that of the earlier legendary texts about and from remote history. Instead, we may get a probably truer picture of a historical spirit and a behavioral tendency in the related historical era through those vivid stories created by the great historian who indeed holds a truer attitude towards giving historical truth in his writing. In general, at any rate, an excellent ancient historian means a great historical thinker about the “intellectual truth” of his times.

Ancient historiography can hardly provide scientifically reliable texts because of the related weaker conditions for producing historical texts. Furthermore, with the much more advanced capability of doing history now, we modern people could hardly make as effective use of those past historical texts as we can with modern historiography; we can hardly carry out a positively affirmable analysis of the causal relationship of historical events and situations either. The textual documents in ancient times were not scientifically organized, which is the entire reason why we cannot



expect to finish a satisfactory historical reconstruction of the past. In this case, how can we obtain a reliable picture of the historical reality merely through those individual Greek historians' narratives about causal relations of the military events observed and described in the texts, let alone the possibly more complicated problem about the true source of those ancient historical works transmitted to us? But once again, this failure has nothing to do with any historical nihilism maintained by post-modernist theoreticians; the true reason is owed to the related technical shortcomings that must have restricted the creative possibility of any excellent ancient scholars.

We discussed above the similarity and dissimilarity between history and literature regarding their narrative modes and scientific operations. The status of historiography should be further defined by its multiply pragmatic function as well. Besides its expressive and cognitive functions, traditional historiography certainly plays a role of stimulating and inspiring social and political actions in a more pragmatic way. On the one hand, historiography is a comprehensive, synthetic knowledge about society, politics and history; on the other, unlike literary texts, it becomes the intellectual source and stimulating energy for social agents. If literature plays a mainly inner role for readers, history plays both psychological and social-political roles in reading historical discourse. Therefore, historiography is both directly related to the past and indirectly related to the future. Traditional historical discourse functions essentially as the intellectual source for inspiring the soul and triggering actions. This important pragmatic function, however, has been largely decreased since the outset of the scientific era. This is also the main reason why we should distinguish between traditional and modern historiographies regarding their different intellectual functions.

## **5. Ancient History vs. Modern History: A Reconsideration of a New Intellectual History**

The historiographical confrontation between ancient and modern history provides us with a new epistemological insight into ancient historiography. The two kinds of historiography belong to different academic categories. It is our experience obtained in modern historical knowledge that enables us today to know how better to judge problems about historical truth and objectivity. The present-day direct experience of knowing historical or social processes makes us believe that there exists a true picture or true knowledge about history. The human capability of knowing historical truth depends on both subjective and objective conditions for doing

historiography. Therefore we infer that, from an epistemological point of view, ancient history is knowable in principle although practically it is almost unknowable. This double conclusion leads us to inquire what the true meaning of ancient historiography is for us today. No doubt, we can positively call all historiography prior to modern times “intellectual history”, with their different focuses on various mental and spiritual aspects. Indeed, modern sociology and anthropology provide us with a lot of useful scientific models to deal with historical subject matters. But on the other hand, the incompleteness of the available historical documents must narrow the range of effective observations of ancient historians on historical reality. Besides, these kinds of sociologically directed studies can no longer reach past historical processes that are limitedly reflected in historical discourse. Maybe this is one of the main reasons why the *Annales* schools cannot effectively continue to pursue their sociologically- and historically-directed research aim: they just lack the actual sociological object for their studies. Nevertheless, we may say that sociology and anthropology help us to strengthen our investigations of historical backgrounds and conditions as the stages on which historical activities can be performed more fruitfully. Because they cannot deal with historical processes of the past directly, the idea to reconstruct the historical past is faced with the same difficulty as well. On the other hand, both original historical discourse and the modern investigations of the historical past are the same valuable works of intellectual history in a broad sense, presenting quasi-genuine records of beliefs, faith, wishes, instincts, desires, knowledge and morality, namely those subjective aspects of mankind in their historical life, in certain sociological-anthropological contexts. No longer with a wishful anticipation of attaining objective social and political truth about ancient and remote-ancient history, we can now focus in turn on the so-called “subjective truth” that remains the most significant subject matter worth being explored more precisely today.

Unlike many views of intellectual, mental and spiritual histories of mentality, the present approach is concerned with the appearance of faith and attitudes as such without paying close attention to their causal relations with various external factors. All sociological and anthropological models are used as the ways to shape the modes of the effective appearance of only those mental tendencies. Of all traditional historiography, the mode of ancient history is even more important than either the more primitive texts of myths and legends or the more developed medieval historical discourse with respect to our study of historical subjectivity because of its special discursive construction. It presents a medium grade of social representations that could become more suitable for presenting the original

expression of subjective truth in its purity. Ancient historiography, rather than the previous mythical texts, expresses the truer state of the original mentality of historical masses and individuals. This racial or primitively national mentality or historical faith has been transmitted to later generations as the main psychological and spiritual sources that would play constructive roles in later historical developments. The identity of the original historical mentality can help outline the spiritual aspect of its historical existence and development. The historical discourse of ancient history, which is less restricted either by the earlier mythical fictive type or by the later institutional-ideological restrictions, presents a more original expression of national beliefs and mental inclinations. In light of this, the status of historical social reality is in essence different from that of the reality about a historical mentality. The history of the national mental attitude has a relatively autonomous existence and continuity, being engaged in constant interaction with other historical factors. We can hardly grasp the exact reality of that social interaction because of the lack of sufficient knowledge of the latter, but we can grasp at least the reality of the mentality itself appearing in its interaction with increasingly more accessible social contexts in later historiography. In other words, a hermeneutic investigation of ancient history can help us identify the archetypal mode of the national faith and attitudes after we separate our positive study of historical reality from our positive study of the related historical mentality. All the historical truth implied in ancient historical discourse can be implicitly conducive to the representation of the national mentality or original racial ideology. Here we adopt a double-directed operation for ancient historical discourse: to decrease the anticipation for positive inquiry into the socio-historical reality and to increase the confidence in performing a hermeneutically positive inquiry into the mental reality embodied in historical discourse. The social causal reality depends on the true description of the external actions concerned, which was very difficult to realize in ancient historical discourse, while the basic mental reality can present itself directly by its verbal expressions, to whatever extent the latter could attain. The gap between inner reality and its verbal expression is much narrower than that between external reality and its verbal representation; namely, the causal link between motive and its verbal expression can be more directly grasped than that between motive and its external projections, which is involved in too complex social and technical contexts, the observations and studies of which require much more advanced research tools. Accordingly, we can obtain important and reliable knowledge about ancient mentality per se on the one hand, and on the other we can get rid of misleading explanations based

on the fault or unreliability of documents about causal relations that could present a misleading historical mechanism determining ancient faiths. From my point of view, we should still maintain rationalism when dealing with historical theory, as it remains the most important branch within social and human sciences today. Thus, traditional faiths should be taken as coming from empirical sources that can be traced back historically from a positive scientific method, as we have attempted to do here. In other words, we can more positively trace back the primitive expressions of human nature and instincts through studying those earlier historiographical narratives. For the sake of getting access to the truth of historical human nature, we may do better first to relax our less effective studies of the related external causal realities of ancient history, which can hardly be pursued positively today.

Maybe we can propose that, in our dichotomic conception of historiography that divides the modern and pre-modern types, the former could be more oriented to the positive-scientific dimension and the latter to the more intellectual dimension. In the former we search for a more social-political objectivity to meet with our requirement for more reliable knowledge of both the social and mental world, and in the latter we lay more emphasis on the psychological and ethical truth embodied in historical processes. In both kinds of practice, the semiotic approach will play an active role for helping anatomize the complex semantic composition of historical discourses.

Furthermore, historical semiotics can help make the semantic composition of ancient historical discourse clearer, separating the inner attitudinal part from the external eventual part. The narrative of stories is not taken as a genuine representation of historical reality but as the channel for us to reflect upon the expression of primitive beliefs and intentions rooted in human nature. Accordingly, traditional ideologies, such as the Chinese 'Tao of Heaven', its guided genealogy of emperors, or its pseudo-logical or cosmological law presumably supporting and determining the regular historical unfoldings of Chinese dynasties, could be hermeneutically excluded from our investigation of ancient historical discourse. Although we cannot attain the conclusion through reading ancient discourse by means of modern methods, we can infer this according to a comparative semiotic study between modern historiography and ancient historiography. Modern studies about comparative ancient historiography and historical semiotics can cooperate with each other to realize this hermeneutic analysis of ancient historical discourses. That means a hermeneutic interpretation of historical discourses cannot be simplistically reduced to a causal explanation of the latter.

The new results about human nature and primitive faith in historical processes can be rechecked in modern social and scientific contexts for two purposes: first, to further check their historical meaning in our more accessible contexts, shaped in modern scientific times; and second, to compare them with our modern corresponding experience in order to more productively define historical faiths in new historical situations. This is the very purpose of our empirical-positive historical knowledge. After all, one important function of history or historiography, with its attention to the past, is in essence oriented towards the future. Historiography is essentially purposed for and oriented to the future. But, living in a modern context, we have to reorganize our historical experience. So first of all, we should keep a reasonable distance from traditional historical experiences, which are largely based on unreliable historical observations and broken causal analysis, and which can be hardly used for instruction about our future projects. We should more horizontally organize our historical knowledge in terms of modern social and human sciences, rather than based on the traditional wisdom left to us by old historiography, which would indeed just provide less reliable knowledge about historical objectivity. In this sense, our true knowledge of historical faiths and human natures derived from our longstanding historical experience can be more effectively combined with our new endeavors for new inquiries into social and human knowledge. In contrast to post-modernist historicism, our new positive Enlightenment will be embodied by three main intellectual systems that are horizontally organized, holistically-tended and mutually connected; namely, these are general semiotics, historical theory and social/human sciences. In brief, let us distinguish two kinds of history as reality: history in a narrow or regular sense and history in a broad sense. For the latter, "history" designates 'human existence' as such, namely, everything that appears in human life. In this sense its corresponding learning is the entire range of social and human sciences. Historiography in this broad sense amounts to the total domain of social and human knowledge. This expanded definition will enlarge the possibility of more clearly identifying the related historiographical concepts.

In conclusion, of the above triply-integrated scientific endeavors, semiotics plays a central organizing role in guiding and coordinating new historical knowledge of any kind. Historiographical epistemology is no longer a mere professional concern cherished only by professional historians. In contrast, it is new territory on which more multi-synthetic-directed operations could be organized by all interdisciplinary practitioners of human sciences.

## Supplement<sup>29</sup>

HT (historical theory) in a broad sense can designate the theoretical reasoning in doing history. HT implies the following important aspects:

- Total knowledge 1 (in its classical sense, namely that prior to modern sciences): stressing the wide range of the object.
- Total knowledge 2 (that since modern sciences): indicating both the range of the object and all available methods or theories.
- Combination of theory (knowledge) and practice (action): no other learning has such a synthetic nature. It involves human fortune and wisdom of behavioral choices, hence political history (past) and political selection (future).
- HT shares the same range as social and human sciences (HTS); total knowledge or total theory.
- HT's emphasis will be laid more on the present and future than on the past. Or, HT1 (mental history: the literary-natured) turns to the past while HT2 (historical science: the scientific-natured, including political history) turns to the present and future. The status of history and historiography will be changed or mixed with SHS (historical research based on expanded knowledge of social and human sciences; see below).
- HT as the triple intellectual combination of cognition (past), inspiration (present) and designs (future).

SHS (based on social and human sciences): the HT problem leads to the SHS problem, involving the following aspects:

- HT depends on or is equivalent to SHS, with the result that HT + SHS = new HT (NHT; new historical theory).
- NHT leads to the remodeling of the present historical knowledge of the past, making the latter more empirically-scientifically organized.
- NHT or SHS leads to the remodeling of the present historical knowledge of the contemporary era and the future, thereby forming a new historical perspective: genuine total history about the present, making historical knowledge more empirical-positivist.

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<sup>29</sup> The following is a tentative theoretical summary originally prepared for this paper in order to be clearer about the complicated usage of terms concerning historiography, historical history and the humanities in general.

- NHT or SHS is conducive to the formation of new political history studies (about the past, present and future), and new political history is related to the formation of political pragmatics for the future.

GS (new general semiotics): GS will be more organically connected with NHT and SHS, with a total result of new scientific human knowledge.

HP (human practice): NHT will pay more attention to HP. **HP** needs more scientific methods for organizing practices. Despite the elaborate manifestation of contemporary western theoretical modernization, the obvious flaw of it firstly rests on the structural gap between theory and practice in general. Many theories regarding human practices have proved to be irrelevant to the changeable social, political and historical reality. Social and human sciences must be orientated to the more relevant ways of the cognition and explanation of social reality. Theoretical semiotics should organize its scholarship along the same lines.

**PART TWO**

**A RETHINKING OF GENERAL THEORETICAL  
SEMIOTICS AND ETHICS**



## CHAPTER FOUR

# CROSS-POLITICAL PAN-COMMERCIALISM IN THE POST-MODERN AGE AND THE STRATEGIC GOAL OF THE GS-MODEL FOR REORGANIZING CROSS-CULTURAL HUMANITIES<sup>30</sup>

- \* What is necessary is to rectify names.
- \* If names be not correct, language is not in accordance with the truth of things.
- \* What the superior man requires, is just that in his words there may be nothing incorrect.

Confucius<sup>31</sup>

### Abstract

The present-day academic orientation of the semiotic movement has basically been determined by professional institutions based on a global pan-commercialism across different political systems. This universal institutionalized scholarly tendency produces a utilitarian-motivated, pragmatist-determined attitude towards studies as well as to a set of profit-searching procedures. With the purpose of reviving the classical ethos for scientific truth, this paper redefines general semiotics as a general interdisciplinary-directed functional organizer rather than as something based on some fundamental philosophical doctrines. Being segregated from the main stream of applied semiotic practices performed in different disciplines and cultural aspects, the redefined general semiotics (GS) model will be directed towards the higher academic-strategic problems about organizing the functionally unified development of human sciences

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<sup>30</sup> Originally published in *Semiotica*, Vol. 213: 397-418 (2016).

<sup>31</sup> These proverbs are quoted from *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. I, translated by James Legge, a missionary from England. Confucius was the first “ethical semiotician” in Chinese historical civilization, but his name has unfortunately been fabricated later as the hierarch of the feudalist academic-ideological-fundamentalist doctrines by Chinese imperial powers.

in confrontation with the current intellectual-materialist domination originating from the commercial-technological globalization over spiritual freedom. In order to reach the aim, a pragmatic-logical precondition lies in reestablishing genuine ethical subjectivity as a properly triggering origin.

### **Introduction: Cultural-academic commercialization and the future of human sciences**

The present-day criticism against technological domination, social commercialism and cultural consumerism has indeed been prevailing everywhere, but problems about their determinative relationship to the humanities have rarely been discussed. The present post-modern times can be first of all characterized by their global pan-commercialism and universal technicalization in all social and cultural realms, which are all roundly legalized in a professional context. Moreover, the post-Cold War globalization has already one-dimensionally unified all societal-cultural structures of mankind on the basis of materialist institutionalization. Or, in other words, the institutional globalization embodied in the current economic-ecological trinity, which consists of sciences, technology and commercialism, has already become the determinative force in human life. As the consequences of this triple-directed globalization, educational-academic fields of the world are naturally determined by scientific-technical-centric mechanisms; accordingly, global social-academic professional ecology is already under the sway of the technological-consumerist tri-mechanism. This kind of triply determined academic-ideological orientation, on the other hand, means contemporary communities have obtained unprecedented social-psychological stability across the world as well. As a result, most post-modern intellectuals, unlike their classical literary-type counterparts in the modern historical past, have been technically-procedurally trained in education and knowledge. The term “intellectual” today refers to completely different mental-behavioral make-ups of educated personalities. Because scientific-technical training is highly institutionalized, the pan-technicalized type of intellectuals living in modern and generally legalized communities has become doubly suitable for the professional-institutionalized conditions. In short, the intellectual as the man of knowledge in general nowadays is already almost totally quasi-technicalized at educational, professional and intellectual levels. The contemporary technicalized man lives and works in the technological plus commercialized world, which trains the post-modern man to become a new type of personality, who behaves faithfully following various fixed pan-legal-institutionalized channels. In former

times the political and economic aspects in different countries had been solidified into unified societies with their respective clearly defined political-moral features, while in the era of globalization today the institutional separation of political and economic aspects brings about a more flexible combination between political and economic parts with a consequence that the **worst** types of the two aspects could be reorganized into the **worst** type of political-economic compound. As a result, the morally worse political and economic aspects are probably co-reorganized to shape also the worst type of globally interconnected cultural and humanity-scholarly ecology.

As a matter of fact, commercialism has already been separated from its original social-political-historical backgrounds, becoming a relatively autonomous social-cultural controlling mechanism. Because of this genealogical separation, commercialism has spread over almost all global areas together with its different connected social-cultural-psychological aspects, including the general way of life of mankind. From the cultural-academic perspective, commercialism based on scientific-technological centrism has logically led to a kind of anti-intellectualism with respect to matters of the humanities and cultural activities about literature, the arts and entertainment.

Accordingly there is an unprecedented amount of humanities academia and humanities academics in highly institutionalized professional communities where humanities academics not only live in the objectively rigidified network of legalized social systems, on which their livelihood relies, but also compulsorily behave in obedience to the fixed rules of academic systems, which have become increasingly more regulated by cultural-marketing rules. Almost all humanities intellectuals, who self-identify as liberal thinkers, have actually become professional-legalized “rational animals”, meaning that their instrumental rationality is trained to make them more comfortably follow the social-academically regulated tracks in their whole life. Under such a thoroughly legalized social-cultural condition, the axiological frame of binary values, such as good-bad, right-wrong, moral-immoral in professional practices, are already prefixed and regulated by a number of law systems and social-customary rules; people’s motivational inclinations and behavioral manners are thus basically decided by, and directed towards, the cultural-academically commercialized normal frames. As legalized and socialized human beings, humanities scholars’ independent will for decisions about the basic norms, criteria and even procedures is naturally further weakened or almost lost. That means, academic behaviors are logically directed towards objectively regulated rules and manners determined in the professionally regulated systems. In

other words, for the professionalized humanities scholars, what and how to do are already basically conditioned by objectively fixed rules and socially coerced habitual customs.

The so-called pan-commercializational era of today refers not only to the special period when the exchange of products and interests becomes the predominant principle for guiding manners in all communities of the world, but also to the times when the breadth and depth of social legalization have become more extensively and deeply strengthened. Its concrete operational form is defined by the universalized regularity of marketing, which determines the exchange rules of all kinds of products, including cultural and academic ones. When educational and academic systems operate according to and are determined by respective professional marketing processes, the basic principles, norms and rules which regulate individual and collective academic behaviors are also objectively or exteriorly determined. The so-called intellectual freedom in scholarship, after all, can only be limited in the range restricted by the professional mechanisms related to the marketing. As a result, the subjective autonomy concerning free choices and independent decisions must be more and more narrowed. As a result, this biggest and most radical social-historical revolution in our commercial-technicalizational times has also led to remarkable changes in the entire intellectual life of mankind.

● On the other hand, we see clearly that, regarding natural and social sciences, the consequences and influences of this pan-commercializational and pan-legalizational social-cultural revolution happening in post-modern times are, totally speaking, not only positive but also unavoidable in human civilization. Such a modern plus post-modern social-historical radical evolution will prove to be an irreversible turning point in human history: human life has been doomed to develop along the scientific-technical orientation ever since. However, as regards the humanities and cultural activities, the related consequences and significance of this commercial-technological revolution are complicatedly ambiguous. We may even judge that in this post-modern era, the commercial-institutionalizational world determines and controls the orientation of the humanities and cultural activities through the professional-institutional mechanisms. Scientific-technological developments in general can also certainly provide the scientific development of the humanities with some technically useful tools if we recognize that the scientificity relevant to human sciences should be differently defined in comparison with that of natural and even social sciences. The more significantly derived question rests on a different dimension of technical commercialization, which is

definitely negative to the mission of the rational modernization of global human sciences. In this regard, there are at least three obvious consequences involved. First, the objectively social power of commercial-technological ideology is determinatively quite strong; second, the derived first principles of academic life in the humanities are exclusively directed to materialist profits; third, the ethical spontaneity of humanities academic agents is unavoidably weakened. All three consequences should be reexamined and improved carefully and seriously in order to promote the genuine rational development of human sciences.

Why is subjective freedom in intellectual and the humanities' scholarly creations hardly able to function effectively in post-modern commercialized times? Because in the humanities, the objective "first principle" directed to professional profits has already replaced that of scientific truth that was ideally taken as the only validity in old times. Scientific truth should be determined in reference to intellectual and scholarly contents or scientific value, while professional profits must first of all be determined by the currently valid utilitarian standards embodied in academic and educational productions, or "use value", in academic and educational marketing related to the humanities. With the lack of objective criteria and standards, scientific value (truth) and commercialized use value (utility) can hardly coincide with each other with respect to the humanities. This radical split appearing between innate scientific value and social exchange value in the humanities becomes the most noteworthy characteristic of the present post-modern social-cultural contexts. As part of the humanities or human sciences, semiotic practices today are related to all the above-mentioned intellectual problems concerning epistemology, methodology and ethical pragmatics.

This paper attempts to initiate a tentative GS-model as a first solvable step regarding these three theoretical-pragmatic problematics, which are traditionally attached to the authoritatively-guiding discipline of philosophy. In this paper the author once again mentions the key relational problem between general semiotics and philosophy, suggesting that the latter should be thoroughly reconsidered and reorganized in the contemporary semiotic movement. According to the strategic idea of the GS-model, semiotics is to be divided into two categories – the compartmental/applied one (semiotics-1) and the general theoretical one (semiotics-2); the latter will take over a lot of the traditional tasks ascribed to philosophy. Unlike single philosophical disciplinary determinism, the general semiotic epistemological strategy embodied in its operative GS-model will absorb its basic theoretical sources from all disciplines, including philosophy.

# **1. Global pan-commercialism and its serious restrictions on the scientific developments of the humanities and general theoretical semiotics**

## **1.1 Pan-commercialism, the historically-inherited compositional mixture of the humanities and the empirical-rational-directed formation of human science: the basic binary choice between truth and profits in the outlook of academic life**

During the Cold War period, the sciences and technology that originated in western civilization increasingly developed in all countries that have different cultural traditions and political histories; during the post-Cold War period, pan-commercialism, which originated in western capitalism, has also started steadily spreading into all other countries despite divergences in their respective political-institutional traditions. As a result, we may be able to generalize that the general cultural orientation of the so-called post-modern world today has turned out to be almost totally determined by a cross-political pan-commercialism. Accordingly, the triple instinctive desires for money/celebrity/power and the prerequisite technical conditions for obtaining them are all embodied in the efforts of most intellectuals of building up related organizing mechanisms of all kinds. No doubt, the formations of power organizations are the basic technical conditions for carrying out these interests/pursuits. In effect, the personal desires for material and spiritual benefits and the collective concerns with economic/influential growth have now become a universal dream of human beings in our pan-commercialized world. The so-called “dream of mankind” today is already universally reduced to the mere satisfaction of materialist-focused desires symbolized by the universal index – money. In other words, for the first time in history, notions of happiness and interest in human life have been generally and thoroughly materialized. It is natural that the derived social-cultural commercialism at present has now become the leading feature of the post-modern social-cultural conditions that dominate in each corner of the world. It is curious to note that this general materialized situation in modern human civilizations is unrelated to the existent divergence of various political-control systems around the globe. The economic system and the political system are no longer necessarily bound together from now on, and the related academic-cultural systems of different countries tend to be unified just because of this pan-commercialism on earth. Moreover, the basic typology of powerful organizations, as expressed in society, culture and scholarship, has obviously become economically determined since the end

of the last century. Therefore we see more and more clearly that so-called economic globalization has produced a cross-political, closely interconnected and mutually cooperative network of global economic powers of different countries, which is organized in multiple international economic hierarchies; economic globalization is therefore becoming the universally accepted orientation in the current post-modern era, determining and unifying the ways of almost all human activities, including cultural-creative and humanity-academic ones. The fact implies that the orientations and procedures of educational and humanities-scholarly professions are also eventually determined by the ever-increasingly strengthened economic conditions and the related commercialization. Under the controlling guidance of this global commercial determinism, ever-increasingly prevailing since the turn of the new century, education and humanities scholarship have first of all turned out to be various more strictly institutionalized professional units or organizations. Accordingly the identity of academic-educational professional systems is generally defined by various economically determinative factors regarding their related motivation, training methods, goals, procedures, products, circulation of academic goods and even lifestyle for sensual enjoyments. These post-modernist cultural-academic features are respectively manifested in all professional fields and aspects. If the scientific tendency of natural and social sciences are logically in accordance with the totally commercialized conditions in the world, or in other words, they are just the very technical foundations of the latter, the situations concerning cultural activities and human sciences have simply been passively and misleadingly guided and determined by the global commercialized conditions. In light of this, for the sake of maintaining their professional survival in this post-modern commercialized “New World”, cultural creations and human sciences could not help but follow the directions essentially set by the commercialized mechanisms and also have to constantly readjust their intellectual tastes and scholarly orientations in order to follow or meet the domineering trends caused by an international imperative of this pan-commercialized establishment. As a result, the academies humanities’ commercialized tendency has already developed internationally beyond political demarcations.

Following the regulations of all kinds of material and cultural productions determined, directly or indirectly, by pan-commercialism, various academic-educational units and collectives tend to look to expand their organizational powers through building up cross-regionally and even cross-nationally quasi-monopolizing associations in order to more profitably gain from their joined professional interests through the

networks of domestic and international global marketing. With respect to cultural activities and the humanities, which in essence lack definite objective references, this tendency is even expressed to further neglect the spiritual and scientific criteria as such with a focus on more productively searching for all profitable means and expedient channels in the scholarly-professional world. As a result, to submissively follow the current predominant scholarly trends and cultural fashions actually prevailing in academic communities would be a logical choice for intellectual agents. Professional interests as the final aim can only be obtained through closely following existent effectively fixed routes that are eventually established and guided by academic powers. All national economic entities usually tend to join cross-national corporations beyond the boundaries of their respective political systems in order to win and increase each other's profits. A great number of national academic units, which are under the sway of the same global pan-commercialism, would naturally adopt the same strategy: in order to search for their own academic profits they are engaged in efforts to increase intellectual power's expansion through building up cross-national or international cultural-academic dominating associations. Global pan-commercialism will lead to the unified goal of common professional profits with their chosen scholarly priority, which would then not necessarily be directed towards scientific progress. In such commercially-directed cross-national associations or organizations, the exchange of common interests, which are to be realized at the international commercialized level, would become the most attractive principle for guiding their scholarly practices. In this regard, either the humanities in general or interdisciplinary semiotics in particular are even more liable to follow the same professional line because their constitutional complications and involved disorderly standards are more easily manipulated or controlled in the chosen commercialized power games based on the utilitarian logic of global academic marketing. In this term the way for searching for professional profits must be disconnected with purely intellectual values, making humanities scholarship into the mere tool for gaining individual and factional benefits. In light of the above discussion, we can now definitely judge that the academic epistemological/axiological separation between the principle of professional profits and that of scientific truth in humanities-scholarly practices has already become the most crucial challenge that has been experienced in the humanities in general and the semiotic movement in particular. In human history, therefore, we are faced with the most critical and embarrassing binary choice between the research principle for scientific truth and that for professional interests.



In connection with the above problem of the orientationally-directed binary choice with respect to the humanities, we can further see a related separation occurring between the employed materials for studies and the related sets of procedures in their professional-tactical operations, in which the really relevant and significant part is no longer related to the “content” or “material” (as subject matter) employed but rather to the aims and methods in connection with the procedures for processing the content-material within the pan-commercialized academic-operative procedures. In other words, in this respect the determinative part is no longer the content of thought but rather the effective institutionalized procedures for operating with the content of thought. This tendency is especially indicated in connection with the humanities, in which scholars, despite their dealing with the same kinds of intellectual content as material just like before, are nevertheless determined by differently chosen related factors such as motives, purposes, methods and criteria. Those motivational and operative factors could be further influenced by certain commercialized social-cultural-academic determinative powers. The character of the scholarship of the humanities may be, for the first time in history, primarily guided by the main purpose of scholars to secure their professional-utilitarian survival. The traditional criterion of (scientific) “truth” in humanities-scholarly practices has been replaced by a post-modern commercial sense of (professional) “success”. Similarly, this general tendency has surely also reflected the intellectual orientation of the contemporary semiotic movement.

By the way, we should understand the basic distinction existing between natural/social sciences and human sciences, which is that cultural commercialization does not interfere so seriously in the scientific orientations and methodologies of the former but indeed undermines those of the latter. As a result, in the same economic-commercialized world, natural and social sciences have developed along the rational-scientific line properly and steadily, while human sciences have been radically deviated from the ideal rational-scientific orientation, which is defined by their accordance with related realities and truths about anthropological or historical affairs. However, the obvious divergence concerning the two types of scientific practices have been widely neglected for the implicit reason that natural sciences and technology should go more and more along the rational-scientific line while the humanities should continue going on along their traditional “liberal-artistic” line, which is naturally somewhat disconnected from scientific operations; accordingly, the former should enjoy their ever-stronger power of real knowledge while the latter should be satisfied with their lacking in the real power of true knowledge.

The notion of “knowledge” is here certainly related to the rational-scientific type rather than to its literary-artistic metaphoric mode. For the latter can never produce positive intellectual guidance and rationally triggering power with respect to a deep and precise understanding of human political-historical and social-cultural situations or to effectively obtain the availability of the correct methods for bettering human fortunes. After all, the required rational knowledge concerning the historical, social and political affairs of mankind should not be mixed with any irrational wisdom expressed by poetic fantasies or aesthetic enjoyments!

### **1.2 The confluence of pan-commercialism with the post-modernist epistemological deviation of the theoretical humanities from scientific orientation**

The judgment made above is first of all due to the innate weak points of the humanities as such, the intellectual objects of which are related, simply speaking, to the non-physical modes of realities and especially to the phenomena concerning non-physically defined objects such as the mind, value, faith and historical actions. All such phenomena about human situations are lacking in objective or externally fixed criteria as definite norms and standards for measuring validity and efficiency in connection with related scholarly practices. That also means that the currently used criteria in the humanities become more easily manipulated or controlled by non-scholarly powers for all kinds of non-scientific purposes. The modern natural sciences and modern social sciences share an epistemological advantage in that they can naturally maintain their own scientific orientations because those sciences simply have to be ultimately in accordance with certain objective realities or referents, which can logically guarantee and stabilize their scientific-objective orientations and effectively arrange their scientific practices in order to undergo empirically positive tests or exams. Conversely, the humanities, as the liberal arts lacking in such objective references, are understandably liable to be under the sway of not only various ideological powers but also some arbitrarily “creative liberty” or irrational fantasies. In other words, expanded conceptual devices or a variety of “discursive rhetoric” without reference to any external objectivity can be preferably used for any purely profitable aims. The scholarly discourses of the humanities could be easily taken as any kind of invented verbal media and techniques whose acceptability and utility mainly depend on whether they can produce any kind of intellectual, mental or psychological attractions to or effects on an audience or reading public, and especially whether they could win the

approval of institutionalized academic authorities. The latter must exist in and are authorized by the social-cultural-academic power mechanisms, which are operatively further related to academic marketing. Such a discursive rhetoric in the verbal-textual modes, even since modern times, has gradually intruded into humanities-theoretical domains. Therefore rhetoric devices of various kinds can become the mere tools to be artistically and ideologically manipulated to produce certain persuasive effects, which can even cause a feigned impression on the more suitable and more desirable way of expressing and reasoning for the humanities. The verbal modes of theoretical rhetoric as tools for organizing discursive texts in the humanities present a commonly used vehicle for stimulating collectively acceptable, quasi-scientific/quasi-poetically blended ways of thinking. The basic reason for the operative efficiency of this epistemological ambiguity is in part due to the existence of historically shaped, habitually used, and semantically uncertain “generic concepts” employed in the humanities, such as conceptions of reality, fact, confirmation, positivity and even scientism. Besides, conceptual ambiguity is especially caused by the arbitrary usage of the term “rationality” itself shared by all natural, social and human sciences alike. Even today, particularly from the Anglo-American analytical perspective, some people are used to thinking that there is only one reasonable type of scientific standard and logical validity as provided by mathematics and natural sciences. Therefore scholars tend to think of scientific problems concerning human affairs simplistically and according to the ways of natural sciences. Or, conversely, people holding the oppositional position tend to deal with theoretical problems concerning human affairs according to the anti-scientific ways. That is one of the main reasons why and how the pan-rhetoric-styled epistemology of the humanities today can be so influential in irrationally organizing discourses of the humanities. The same reason can explain why human sciences, out of their constitutional nature, in their academic practices, tend more easily to give in to the attraction and pressure exercised by the commercial establishment. The compositional mixture of the contents of the humanities is only one aspect of the reasons leading to their theoretical deviation from scientific orientation; the other aspects are connected to both the social and the subjective dimensions. As we pointed out above, universal professionalization in academia has now become the expedient vehicle by which pan-commercializing power can exercise its indirect control and direct pressures over the scholarly culture of the humanities. Another related aspect, an even more fundamental one, is linked to the contemporary decay of subjective-spiritual strength under the pan-technological historical conditions; or, more simply, a general

disappearance of the ethical volition of subjectivity living in the totally legalized or objectively regulated societies. In fact, the foremost co-effect of a technicalized mentality and social-institutionalized professionalization has consistently led to the general deterioration of ethical subjectivity, which is characterized by the weakening of the spontaneous will of the individual who can only behave according to the externally regulated norms and rules, and the derived consequence then leads to the formation of a typical utilitarian way of life in the post-modern era. With respect to the weakened or lost ethical subjectivity in post-modern times, scholarly agents more easily succumb to the instinctive desires for materialized profits and social publicity in academia, society and culture. Consequently, these three main reasons can function together to cause the degeneration of scientific-creative potential in present-day human sciences. In essence, humanities scholars, especially their theoretical practitioners, with an ethical-impotent mentality, are inclined to yield to or give up the required intrinsic resisting-strength to both the social pressures from academic professionalization and to the instinctive materialist lust for pure profits and academic power.

Therefore, taken as the platform for creating and expressing works of liberal arts, the humanities become the convenient grounds on which the persuasive tools of theoretical rhetoric could be more effectively produced. Such a kind of theoretical rhetoric does not need to be connected to any objective-scientific references so long as it effectively functions as any practically desirable and professionally profitable means to be used to attract an audience or readers who are of the same inclination, determined by the same intellectual-professional conditions eventually rooted in academic-cultural marketing. Accordingly the academic-professional orientation and quality of the humanities could be mainly determined by the rhetorical-persuasive efficiency of arbitrarily and profitably chosen theoretical-styled devices in the humanities rather than by the traditionally cherished wishes either for approaching scientific truth or for obtaining objective realities. It is widely known that certain post-modernist epistemology has even intentionally strengthened this scholarly-intellectual nihilist extremism since the appearance of the so-called post-structuralist trend, which was generally characterized by its opposition to the scientific-positivist interest of structuralism. No doubt, when the humanities are weakening their scientific tendency or scholars are intensifying their motivation for exclusively seeking professional profits, humanities scholarship would easily tend to take the feasible rhetorical devices as the favorable way for uniquely pursuing their professional successes.

### **1.3 The multiply unanimous tendencies of different kinds of academic ideological powers leading to the obstruction of the scientific development of the humanities**

It is quite understandable that the domineering intellectual power of instrumentalist rationality in science and technology, united with cultural commercialism in the current post-modern world, does not care about problems concerning scientific quality and rational potential in the humanities. On the other hand, however, only with a stronger and more applicable rationality are human sciences able to carry out scientifically directed scholarly practices and effectively deal with problems about a great number of serious mundane questions facing mankind. Because, in spite of their historically weaker capability of organizing rational ways of thinking, the humanities remain the only available platforms on which a mountain of complicated causal/axiological-related problems could be reasonably expected for solutions, especially those about meaning, value and faith. In effect, only the scientific-rational ways of thinking are capable of being applied for effectively examining, meaningfully doubting, seriously challenging or, at least, more intelligibly reflecting those challenging issues concerning higher ethical justification and more desirable ways of human life in confrontation with the absolute domination of the technical-commercialized culture of the world. Regarding the saying “knowledge is force”, this knowledge must be rationally/empirically affirmable in nature and this “force” can only refer to the correct causal and proper evaluative ways of reasoning; by contrast, less scientific/rationally-directed knowledge is hardly able to effectively judge or solve the more significant issues occurring in the historical, social, cultural or intellectual dimensions in our highly complicated post-modern times. That is one of the reasons why we assert that the post-modernist philosophy, which explicitly maintains either irrational or extreme relativist positions, and dogmatic scientific philosophy, which deals with human affairs according to simplistically quasi-natural-scientific approaches, actually share an essentially anti-intellectualism in the post-modern societies so as to joinedly curb the genuine scientific-rational development of human sciences. (Both of the post-modernist and dogmatic-scientific trends even commonly reject the justified identity of the multi-disciplinary title “human sciences”.) Accordingly, on the one hand, cultural creations in mass communities turn out to be more and more sensually entertaining by nature in accordance with the present-day shallow-styled mindset and superficial tastes of the one-dimensionally educated majority of all kinds of pan-technicians. On the other hand, the

global cultural conditions of the trinity establishment, which consists of commercialism, natural sciences and technology, is not confronted with any strong critical-reflective challenges at serious ethical and epistemological levels. That is because any significant rational-critical thought about axiological-epistemological problems can only be produced from the scientifically advanced human sciences. Accordingly, commercial-technological powers would like, perhaps unconsciously, to see the enfeebled rational potential of the humanities to hopefully be made impotent so as to lose any effective critical feasibility when faced with intellectual pressures from social-cultural realities; or, for the humanities to be transformed into something like spiritual cultivation or mere intellectual-aesthetic games. That is why we may regard the post-modernist philosophical strategy which holds these positions by dint of various rhetorically feigned theoretical devices as the typical philosophy of the present age of post-modern technological commercialism.

In addition to the above analysis, we should also pay attention to another subtle ambiguity about the concept of the “spiritual life” of mankind. The above multiply joined inclination against the rational-scientific development of the humanities should also include another one of its traditional cooperators – all transcendent powers that would like to accept sciences and technology but only oppose a rationally/theoretically-directed humanities. In turn, the technical-commercialized establishment indicates the same cooperative attitude. As rationally/scientifically-directed practices, they can also be willing to accept the implicitly collaborative role of those transcendentally/metaphysically-directed intellectual powers. So they tend to be satisfied with a new bifurcation between the material and the spiritual: the former belongs to this world and the latter can be put aside for another world; that is, the technological and the transcendent powers can realize an effective ideological-like collaboration. The latter could seemingly be made to be a ready alternative of the spiritual dimension for this world and the fact is tantamount to that no special spiritual dimension concerning this world is seriously needed as before. The mutual compatibility between the worldly empirical-scientific-technological rationality and the transcendent a-scientific spiritual rationality of all kinds brings about the silently joined effects in weakening or neglecting human efforts for the empirical-rational advancement of the mundane human sciences. Furthermore, as we will discuss later, this heterogeneously intellectual collaboration will more imperiously involve the quasi-scientific transcendental component of the humanities – the metaphysical tradition, which will share this general tendency for obstructing the scientific development of the humanities **from the inside**.

As a result, the present-day commercial-technological civilization, together with various kinds of post-modern ideological rhetoric, can make the materialist-directed intellectual way of thinking the singly authoritative cultural-ideological orientation in this world.

#### **1.4 The literary-artistic-styled humanities and the scientifically-directed human sciences: the necessity for segregating the divergent intellectual inclinations in the same historical-shaped professional field of the humanities**

But on the other hand, there has been always intellectual passion and strength expressed in pursuing rational-scientific practices within social/human science scholarship. The impulse and thrust of the humanities for advancing scientific rationality are not only due to common scientific curiosity about a deeper understanding of human affairs but also due to the revived mental state, which is faced with the objectively existent challenge and is aware that the spiritual orientation of human civilizations should not be completely guided by commercial-instrumental rationality and that humanity cannot take the search for materialist satisfactions or universal consumerism as the unique life-goal in this world. Critical consciousness is especially focused on the following basic ethical problem: commercial-technical systems should also be taken as the material instruments used for attaining a spiritually more valuable or more noble way of our mundane life.

The above highly significant epistemological-ethical issues are related to the general definitions of criteria and standards concerning different axiological notions such as right/wrong, good/bad, moral/immoral, mundane happiness/supernatural bliss, etc. The traditional divergence of the axiological conceptions involved has led to the general division between the scientific-rational and non-scientific-irrational ways of thinking. Under the present-day conditions of globalization, the general consensus regarding those notions becomes more obviously impossible, and accordingly the derived ethical-epistemological divergence will certainly lead to disorderly states of understandings, faiths and behaviors among different peoples and nations. This kind of rational-critical scientific attitude is just what we have perceived in the original semiotic movement. On the other hand, as we know, post-modernist theoretical trends adopt the contrary positions that can also be traced back to social and intellectual history. Therefore the traditional split or tension between the two divergent intellectual directions in the humanities could have been more sharply grasped nowadays. In some sense the original spiritual

impulse expressed in the early contemporary semiotic movement indeed indicates such a positive scientific inclination. Mixed in part by the traditional compositional-ambiguous humanities, modern semiotic practices have, however, unavoidably continued suffering from this historically transmitted, semantically confusing notion of “original sin”. It is natural that the valuable rational-spiritual passion has either been disturbed by the traditionally inherited epistemological ambiguity of philosophical fundamentalism, including both its dogmatic metaphysics and ontological nihilism, or by artistic-imaginative aestheticism. Thus in fact we have always been faced with a basic mixture of the academic conceptions contained in the humanities.

As a matter of fact, there exist two kinds of intellectual practices with respect to the humanities in history: one is a liberal way of doing artistic-like creations, which amounts to the traditionally transmitted pan-literary works whose intellectual nature really looks like that of the “liberal arts” originating in remote ancient times when the intellectual life of mankind was still at a primitive level; the other, the human sciences, has since modern times been shaped to strengthen the scientific function of the traditional humanities. When the humanities was regarded only as the means used for general cultivation and spiritual enjoyment, as we have raised here, is irrelevant; but, when the traditional humanities was taken as the grounds for constructing modern human sciences, the inherited intellectual split certainly became an effective obstruction that should be overcome.

As a matter of fact, however, the humanities in all times have suffered from similar shortcomings with respect to problems of scientific truth, and it is indeed in our times that we have had better conditions to substantially advance the level and quality of scientific studies in the humanities, which have now hopefully been advanced to the human sciences. Besides the scientific weaknesses and shortcomings characteristic of the humanities, we should further point out that these weaknesses and shortcomings in their rationalist potential have just become the very origins and reasons of the consequences that the humanistic discourses have easily been arbitrarily and intentionally misused to serve a variety of non-academic, profit-gaining as well as ideological aims. Originally the primitive natural sciences, such as ancient astrology and witch doctor practices, were also used in similar ways. But after their maturation, the discourses of natural sciences can no longer be technically misused in that way again. The close historical connections between the humanities, political ideologies and social disasters could be an added reason to remind us of a necessity for paying serious attention to the modernization of human sciences, because



it is only in our new era that we are intellectually and technically more capable of solving the problems and effectively meeting the historical challenge.

For this purpose, we should first reconsider the identity and function of philosophy as a traditional discipline within the current humanities, namely the above intellectual division should be connected with all related disciplines, especially including its leading constituent part – philosophy. On the whole, the non-scientific-directed philosophical practices in the theoretical humanities comprise roughly two types: the metaphysical-ontological and the irrational-aesthetic. Regarding literature and history, the intellectual divergence is more complicatedly related to the division between the argumentative and creative modes. Considering the historically-shaped situation of the traditional ambiguity of the humanities and the present-day scientific requests concerning the development of the human sciences, we have reasons to assert that the traditional wide field of the humanities should be divided into two parts in future: scientific-scholarly and quasi-artistic practices. Accordingly, regarding this central discipline of philosophy, there could be also the artistic-directed philosophical way of thinking and the scientific-directed way of thinking in the same historically-shaped field of “philosophy”. In terms of this division we are able on principle to avoid the constitutive confusion concerning scholarly practices in the humanities in general and semiotics in particular. In any case, the artistic-styled practices shaped in the traditional humanities should not be epistemologically mixed with the scientific-directed practices forming in human sciences.

As we know very well, many ancient philosophers just called their philosophizing works as scientific efforts in character, indicating a potential rationalist tendency that was none the less restricted by the level of ancient knowledge in general. The increased scientifically-directed tendency displayed in the modern humanities is on the one hand a current actualization of the classical-scientific way of thinking expressed in ancient philosophy and on the other a consequence of the conceptual impact of the modern developed natural and social sciences across the entire field of the humanities. This consequence indicates the arrival of a new intellectual era: human beings today require a multiple-typed advancement of rationality with respect to those non-objective/referential concepts such as value, faith, action and will in our post-modern era. It is understood simply that, in the present-day commercializing period, anthropological or human-historical knowledge in general must also advance and enrich its own special type of rationality in confrontation with the powerful domination of the instrumental rationality shared by science,

technology and commercialization. That means the narrowly-defined conception of scientificity cannot be used to replace the currently required version of scientificity that is especially pertinent to modern human sciences. On the other hand, any post-modernist-directed nihilist ontology tends naturally or intentionally to weaken the required scientific-directed rationality of human sciences. These two different kinds of humanities have their own right to exist in professional and intellectual fields today; nevertheless they must also be separated clearly from each other without being continuously mixed together. In other words, artistic-like creations and scientific-like studies belong to different intellectual categories in connection with the same general title of “the humanities”. That is why we may simply affirm that the scientific-directed part of the humanities can and should eventually turn out to be a scientifically reformed and elaborated field that should be especially named by human sciences.

Practically speaking, however, following the recent highly developed professionalization of academia and education, the mixed modes in scholarly directions indicating the scientific and liberal inclinations in the humanities are widely protected in order to maintain pragmatic and profitable privileges in academic competition. Then there emerges another kind of epistemological mixture that is involved: each side can take the other as its own “material” or “object” to be used according to their own respective strategies; namely, the artistic one can take scientific discourses as the material used for artistic creations and the scientific one can take artistic discourses as the material or objects used for studying scientifically. Under this same general heading, there exist two different kinds of intellectual operations. Semiotic analysis should keep facts in mind clearly in order to keep a self-consistent way of thinking in dealing with our subjects. Regarding the liberal artistic-directed practices, we should note that the humanities as liberal arts emerge twice or function at two levels: the same material (such as texts or media) can either be the content of artistic creations or the object of scientific studies. From a functional point of view they can of course be distinguished, but on the other hand the two divergent inclinations can also mixedly appear in the same practices carried out by one person, such as in the case of (for example) the works by Roland Barthes. Yes, one person can be a scientist and an artist at the same time, but this fact does not reject another fact: that the two kinds of operations in one project could be still made separate at the functional level. We should clearly segregate the two modes of intellectual practices still further in our epistemological consideration. The co-appearance of mixed and separated performances in professional practices of the humanities should not make our theoretical analysis

confused. No doubt, semiotic analysis is apt at distinguishing different functional dimensions of textual presentations.

In addition, regarding the scientific-directed theoretical practices of the humanities and semiotics, we should pay attention to another more confusing issue: what is the proper form of the scientific way of thinking? It is the current development of the semiotic way of thinking that raises and attempts to solve the problem at a more elaborate epistemological-methodological level that we will discuss again later. The interdisciplinary direction of the semiotic way of thinking launches a historically unprecedented reflection on the basic conception of the theoretical foundations in human sciences. Historically, the answer has always been given to philosophy or its central parts: metaphysics and ontology. Since the start of the modern scientific movement and the origin of modern social sciences, this privilege of “first theory” has also been given in turn to different scientific disciplines such as physics, biology, sociology, linguistics, historical theory and even cognition sciences, characteristic of the current American theoretical preference. In terms of current semiotic theorizing, characterized by its interdisciplinary orientation, any established single-disciplinary-centralism cannot be taken as the justified theoretical foundation for multiple theoretical practices in connection with all other human sciences or for interdisciplinary-theoretical semiotics. Any departmental-centric theory is certainly a useful source used in organizing all kinds of theoretical developments, but it cannot be taken as a logical foundation for those multiply-synthetic theoretical scholarships in human sciences and general semiotics.

What we have discussed above indicates that on the one hand there has existed a historically long-standing split between the scientific and the artistic inclinations in the humanities, and on the other there emerges a relational problem between the mixed mode of the humanities and academic factors produced in the commercialized multi-establishment. It is this epistemological relationship between the two aspects that further stimulates a necessity for advancing the rational ability of scientific practices in the humanities. Accordingly we can discover how deeply and widely problems of the scientific modernization of the humanities or human sciences are connected with the thought about more deeply and widely understanding human conditions at both the social and intellectual levels as well as about the desirable perspective for the future of the humanities. And the crucial methodological steps for approaching this goal can only be performed and pushed forward by applied semiotics of different disciplines as well as by general semiotics concerning the entire field of the humanities. That is why we should first of all consider more

effective ways to reorganize our theoretical analyses of applied and general semiotics.

## **2. A necessary reclassification of semiotic practices performed at different epistemological levels in the age of global cultural-academic commercialism**

### **2.1 A suggested redefinition of semiotics for expanding and deepening its scientific goal for modernizing human sciences**

The formation of modern semiotics and the related contemporary semiotic movement has risen basically from a traditional rational tendency towards the scientific modernization of the humanities. In fact the official title of “human sciences” initially emerged in France almost simultaneously with the prevailing post-war contemporary semiotic movement, indicating that the two phenomena originated in their joint wishes and requests for advancing scientific ways of thinking in the traditional humanities. As part of the modern humanities or human sciences, semiotics has naturally been engaged in similar historical-objectively mixed situations and conditions in its practices. But originally, as scientific-scholarly practices rather than liberal-creative ones, the main semiotic-scholarly mode characterized by its constitutive mixture implicitly presented another type of intellectual labor-division that is expressed in a bifurcation between the scientific-theoretical and the practical-applicative forms of scholarship. In essence, however, the two types of compositional mixture discussed here and in the last section are interconnected with each other because of the original blending of historical scholarship and intellectual practices concerning historical and cultural experiences. This original dualism of scholarly practices has gradually developed into two divergent categories of semiotic studies: general theoretical semiotic studies and compartmental applied semiotic studies.

The simplest definition of semiotics is usually expressed by the studies of signs. The central term “sign”, with its quite divergent meanings, has become an effectively expedient organizer for unifying different types of scholarly practices in the collective academic-spiritual drives, but this all-embracing, specialized term has also become the main cause leading to the various epistemological ambiguities in contemporary semiotic scholarship. Different international scholars, for various convenient reasons, commonly adopt this same historically-transmitted terminal tool with a collective aim to expediently realize and promote an intellectual-academic movement; nevertheless, the original conceptual ambiguity caused by the various daily

flexible usages of the word has naturally led to the inconsistent, even mutually conflicting theoretical positions expressed within the same semiotic movement. For example, a sign-centric semiotic dogmatism has especially been indicated by the many efforts at attempting vainly to “unify” the different theoretical systems respectively given by Pierce and Saussure.

Considering the richly developed situation of semiotic practices, as I have recommended before, the traditional definition of semiotics as studies of signs should be expanded to include those about semantic/communicative instrumental mechanisms, which certainly include all kinds of sign studies in addition to other related semantic/communicative-analytical issues. In consideration of the actual situations and ideal desirability concerning semiotic activities, semiotics should not be restricted or narrowly normalized by the semantically simplified, single-word-based conceptual entities such as signs, symbols and similar daily-used terms at the levels on which they often appear in visually perceived phenomena.

Certainly, natural sciences started from this naturally perceptible level a long time ago, but they have been elaborated since then to different advanced abstract levels; certain social-human sciences organized at the behaviorist level today still attempt to insist on this primitive, naturally perceivable grade for organizing their scientific conceptions related to observation and inference.

In an expanded sense, semiotics should desirably refer to a variety of semantic-constitutional and pragmatic-communicative chains of relationships as well as to the other institutional aspects concerned. In fact there has been hardly one single scientific discipline called semiotics into which a great number of different types of semiotic studies can be reasonably unified in a logically-organized conceptual system. In effect, strictly speaking, semiotic practices are neither implemented in a single theoretical discipline called “general semiotics” nor in various disciplines named “applied semiotics”. Instead, they are implemented in multiple cross-boundary zones of different established disciplines through a variety of interdisciplinary procedures. The intellectual reasons and pragmatic convenience of this customary usage, in addition to the direct factor that the original semiotic thinkers in the modern movement happened to use the same words with various semic compositions in their different epistemological-operative frames, lies in the practical overlapping areas of the scientific-systematic and the academic-operative aspects of its developing processes. Or, simply, it is a blending between the discipline understood as the **scientific-conceiving system** and the discipline understood as the **academic-organizing system**. If the blending of usages

of the same terms is indeed beneficial for promoting simultaneously the expansionist ambition of academic-professional activities and the scientific development of the initial period of the movement, it could turn out to be an obstructive cause against the further positive or productive advancement of the related scientific goals. That could be the case for the present embarrassing situations facing us. In other words, the term “discipline” can be associated either with its scientific-epistemological aspects or with its academic-organizing aspects. Moreover, the two points of view, in terms of the intellectual contexts of the semiotic movement, are still respected in the current popular situations concerning semiotic studies. Nevertheless, there is still another more important perspective in the discussion, which is that the semiotic ways of thinking are also implicitly linked to the highly desirable task of the comprehensive reorganization of the traditional humanities; this much more expanded and deepened task can hardly be dealt with by means of either one of the above mentioned two approaches prevailing in the movement at present.

For example, the commonly used term “applied semiotics” mostly means the studies or analyses of materials contained in regular disciplines by means of “semiotic approaches”. In light of this vantage point, any disciplinary elements associated with the common term “sign” or its like could be conveniently called a certain semiotic practice. Here, the sign-data only refers to the object/material, rather than to the method/theory, of that semiotic project mentioned. And any application of the chosen methods in the projects can only be completed in combination with various other interdisciplinary elements. Clearly, we should not simplistically, or even misleadingly, apply the single term representing the scientific **object** of research as the title to represent more expanded projects with multi-semantic-scholarly dimensions and operations. The possibly more suitable criteria for choosing an effective title for scholarly practices should be that concerning scientific **procedures**. Unlike the situations of other regular disciplines, whose titles are set by extensional parameters, the substantial scope of the object of semiotics is not something referring to the “sign” or similar, but rather to much more variegated parts consisting of various kinds of relational connections, in which signs are only one individual constituent part. In this sense, for example, it is even dangerous to attempt to use the term sign as a generic concept merely because of the original conceptual mixture caused by the same term being commonly used by both Saussure and Pierce. For Saussure, “sign” refers to items existing at the pre-substantial linguistic structures, while for Pierce it refers to the units collected from logical and natural-scientific phenomena. The usually vain scholarly efforts at

theoretically unifying the two kinds of signs are firstly caused by arbitrarily fixing the corresponding link between word and meaning in the contemporary semiotic movement. Or, interpreted alternatively, the same word, “sign”, has been agreeably used by different schools as a conceptual tool for expediently unifying various scholarly practices for the sake of artificially pushing forward academic expansionism. Nevertheless, the semiotic way of thinking implies too great a spiritual significance to be applied in such a simplistic way.

On the other hand, however, without paying strict attention to the precise definition of “sign”, semiotic players can be free to organize any kind of combinative devices involving the term “sign” in their different practices. Thus, no less frequently we see (especially in areas where semiotics has just been introduced for a short period or strongly driven by a superficial mania for profitable fashions) everything in the world could easily be called a “sign” for the sake of exaggeratingly hinting at the widest applicability of the concept! As a result, the popularized and vulgarized term “sign” today finds yet more popularity in the commercialized, culturally-academically competitive context. Such a scholarly tactic and style realized through manipulating the single term could be further strongly controlled by some powerful non-academic apparatus in the current academic and cultural contexts. Therefore the scientific exactitude of semiotic-interdisciplinary applications definitely depends on the ways of using the term “sign” and the related semiotic approaches. This pragmatic secret in the current semiotic movement can be further perceived and disclosed after cross-cultural semiotics arises, just for the reason that the latter is still scientifically low-trained. Nonetheless, the persistence of this conceptual confusion in semiotic praxis has been habitually or intentionally neglected by the collective professional utilitarianism in the present ever-increasingly intensified and expanded commercial-consumerist contexts: the single term “sign” is regarded as the most convenient brand for unlimitedly expanding professional territory in academic competition. Nevertheless, a direct result of the trend is the lowering of the scientific quality of the current semiotic movement itself.

## **2.2 A renewed reflection on the nature and function of semiotics in contexts of professional-profitable utilitarianism and inherited intellectual-historical dogmatism**

As a matter of fact, the most widely recognized and really influential semiotic achievements for the past 60 years are those appearing in various major established disciplines. In other words, semiotic achievements are

not the results produced within a new single discipline called “semiotics”. This categorical distinction emphasized here is intended to avoid a categorical confusion frequently shown in the currently increasingly strengthening tendency of professional collective-protectionism and commercialized competitive-individualism in the humanities and semiotics. Such a professional utilitarian-motivated academic tendency is intended to form an easily manipulated operative-ground for joining professional competition. Therefore semiotics scholars are inclined to practically build up a single discipline called “semiotics” which can be professionally separated from other disciplines in order to become a comfortably handled academic autonomy to profitably secure their professional-competitive capability. For this purpose the tendency will naturally exaggerate its own well-founded disciplinary identity in distinction with all other academic disciplines in the competitive academic marketplace. As a result such a tendency must lead the current semiotic movement to decrease its genuine scientific attention to its cooperative will with the other related theoretical sources of all major disciplines. The tendency of this intentionally wishful self-segregation from the theoretical sources of other major disciplines will naturally shape a special semiotic-operative framework in accordance with academic-competitive marketing that would seriously weaken the scientific and theoretical potential of semiotic-theoretical practices. The true productive energy of the latter can only be kept and developed in interdisciplinary-directed theorizations.

Let us review the examples of those contemporary successful semiotics scholars. In my speech given at the Nanjing IASS Congress in 2012, I maintained that in general there were three major types of thinking about the idea of the “sign” around the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Saussure’s linguistic sign, Pierce’s natural sign and Husserl’s psychological-logical sign. All of them became, in different periods and to different extents, the sources of contemporary semiotic ways of thinking. For the sake of maintaining a categorical precision, we would do better to avoid directly naming those “semiotic sources” as the genuine founders of the modern semiotics movement. In terms of the established disciplinary compartmentalization, we would do better still to say that Saussure’s scholarship belongs to theoretical linguistics, Pierce’s learning to a naturally-directed pragmatic-logical philosophy, and Husserl’s theory to an introspective-directed psychological-logical philosophy. More precisely, as I suggested before, the academic-operative term “semiotics” should refer to the applications of those semiotic-theoretical-related approaches to different humanities disciplines. Accordingly, the identity of semiotics should be exactly defined by certain special descriptive and



analytical procedures in connection with both the analytical approaches and the analyzed materials; that is, semiotics refers to the procedural relationship linked to those original theoretical sources and the different established disciplinary fields. The proper operative grounds of departmental semiotics just refer to those established regular disciplines, rather than to a newly created independent discipline called “semiotics”. In light of this, the formation of the contemporary semiotic movement was mainly realized in different semiotic-related regular disciplines such as: cultural anthropology, represented by Levi-Strauss; theoretical sociology, represented by different leading European and Anglo-American sociologists; linguistic semantics, represented by Greimas and many others; literary theory, represented by Barthes and many others; philosophy, represented by Foucault, Althusser, Derrida, Ricoeur and many others; film theory, represented by Metz and many others; and psychoanalysis, represented by Freud, Lacan and many others. Certainly, a more obvious indication lies in the fact that most works finished in the contemporary semiotic movement have been performed in so-called “applied semiotics”, which means the special-semiotic operations are implemented in different existent disciplines with different theoretical and practical characters. Once again, on principle, the essential **object** of “semiotics” should refer to the interactional relationship of the bi or multi parts. In essence, we may conclude that the valuable interdisciplinary-theoretical contributions of those semiotic masters are expressed in their creative combinative practices between significant subject matters and the related semiotic-theoretical tools. From an interdisciplinary perspective, those semiotic masters primarily chose epistemologically and methodologically more significant theoretical instruments to treat their chosen significant subject matters on the basis of their respective disciplinary grounds. Their semiotic contributions are firstly characterized by their higher theoretical insights displayed at both the theoretical and substantial levels, which make their achievements far from being mere formalist games. Furthermore, such kinds of epistemological-original creations indicate that those different types of semiotic practices can hardly be unified by a professionally defined “general semiotics” that pretends to play a leading/founding role similar to some philosophical-like foundations or logical origins. In short, traditional philosophical-fundamentalism, or, more primitively, ancient single-causal logicism, both of which emerged in western civilization, must be critically given up today because of the updated semiotic-theoretical developments also currently emerging in the west.

### **2.3 The interdisciplinary essence of semiotic practices and semiotics at its general and applied levels**

Thus far we should recognize a self-contradiction could be involved in our understandings of and our operations with semiotic professions and studies of general semiotics. With respect to the usages of general semiotics, the philosophical-fundamentalist type of general semiotics and the interdisciplinary-directed ones are oppositional to each other from an epistemological point of view. Philosophy as the source for theoretical-semiotic elaboration is one thing and philosophy as the fundamentalist basis for supporting semiotic theorizing is another thing. This epistemological ambiguity expressed in semiotic scholarship is basically due to the misunderstood relationship between the traditional humanities and modern semiotics. Consequently, scholars of general semiotics, based on a traditional philosophy-centric prejudice, neglect the fact that the interdisciplinary tendency of semiotics is theoretically just characterized by its anti-philosophical-centrism. As a theoretical-revolutionary device, modern semiotics has originated in breaking through the traditional bondage of philosophy-centrism as well as the old rigidified frames of the humanities.

The above discussion can be further divided into two parts as follows. This interdisciplinary tendency can either be displayed in boundary-overlapping zones of multiple disciplines or only in a single field of one discipline. There are two different types of interdisciplinary operations: the one on interweaved or overlapped ground, composed of different disciplines, and the other in a single field of discipline. They are divergent by their different scales of interdisciplinary operations, different operational grounds and different types of operative combinations between their practical-theoretical or concrete-abstract aspects.

With respect to different types of interdisciplinary semiotic practices, we are influenced by different criteria of judgments. On the one hand, practically speaking, we could follow any professional requirements with related academic and institutionally justified reasons; on the other hand, theoretically speaking, we may need to be connected with higher, more expansive scientific-theoretical tasks and therefore go beyond single-disciplinary, theoretically-institutionalized norms for organizing a larger range of interdisciplinary practices in the entire humanities. If so, we should distinguish between two kinds of justified standards in reference to two different scholarly-epistemological levels. In terms of the two academic categories, their respective theoretical requirements are naturally different in reference to their respective goals, motivations, practical scales

and performing levels, as well as their scientific-operative precision and depth.

The above conclusion concerning general semiotics can be further explained in the following. The problematic of semiotic development or semiotic orientation, which has been discussed so widely in recent decades, is therefore reasonably related to that combinational relationship between all semiotic methodologies and various regular disciplines. Therefore the concept of general semiotics should refer to the synthetic-scholarly practices to be implemented within various regular disciplines. In result, general semiotics in this special sense must be closely related to and cooperative with various regular disciplines. From a theoretical point of view, really meaningful general semiotics cannot live in disconnection with various disciplinary-theoretical practices in the humanities. The achievements represented by those masters of theoretical semiotics mentioned above become in fact the basic theoretical references for us, with which we can better organize our semiotic-theoretical projects. In other words, we may assert without exaggeration that without these kinds of concrete scientific achievements, the contemporary semiotic movement could hardly have been launched. The great successes in the contemporary semiotic movement are mainly due to the concrete interdisciplinary creations realized in different disciplines, rather than due to the guiding of different forms of general semiotics, despite their respective important theoretical endeavors. This is because, on the one hand, this kind of general semiotics is in part only the possible theoretical source for various forms of applied semiotics and, on the other, they are also the temporary preparative stages for promoting an enlarged and advanced type of theoretical elaboration in the semiotic movement; all theoretical achievements under the title of “general semiotics” should remain flexible and open to the content and level with regard to the entire semiotic-strategic horizon and accumulated experiences. By the way, we may once again emphasize that the formation of the contemporary semiotic movement is essentially due to those epistemologically-methodologically created fruits on a variety of interdisciplinary levels and combinations. In spite of the significant contributions of several related philosophical schools, such as the intelligent or inspirational sources for the formation of modern theoretical semiotics, the establishment of the contemporary semiotic movement nevertheless has nothing to do with those types of general semiotics that are based on certain philosophical fundamentalism.

Therefore the interdisciplinary-directed semiotics can be interpreted as the multiple theoretical-relational studies. The category “applied semiotics” refers indeed to a scholarly combination between semiotic methods and

regular disciplines, but we should here further define the actual referent of this categorical term. By stressing that semiotic theories are the result of semiotic analyses applied to various regular disciplinary theories, the involved semiotic practice must be realized at the theoretical dimension of a regular discipline. The application is equivalent to an interaction between two sets of theoretical elements selected from different disciplinary-theoretical sources: the one is a regular discipline and the other is a certain epistemological-methodological association of semiotic approaches. Therefore the classical examples of semiotic theories mentioned above indicate some intersectional interactions of theoretical elements in several related disciplines. In this sense all kinds of successful semiotic practices fall into the field of applied semiotics; the statement simply means an application of one disciplinary theory to another, or, just some theoretical interaction between theoretical aspects of two disciplines. Moreover, there are also notions about “different degrees” with respect to the involved applying levels, ranges and depths. From an operational point of view, the term “applied semiotics” may especially refer to those less theoretical or more practical projects, and those semiotic projects with a higher or more general theoretical character are habitually included in “general semiotics” or “general theoretical semiotics”. In light of the above discussion, we can see there exists flexibility in the nomination and usage of categorical titles in semiotic practices.

#### **2.4 A required division of labor between semiotics-1 and semiotics-2 in the current semiotic movement**

In terms of the above-mentioned double-constitutive ambiguity in the semiotic movement, there are four results involved: 1) philosophy-centric general semiotics; 2) interdisciplinary-directed general semiotics; 3) applied semiotics at a theoretical level; and 4) applied semiotics at a practical level. Among them, 2) and 3) refer to the same objects which tend to be less involved in the collective activities of the semiotic movement because of their closer connections with regular disciplines. As a result, in the organized semiotic movement, 1) and 4), despite their obviously divergent aims and styles, become the main parts involved. The fact naturally presents a constitutional incoherence: apparently, 1) provides 4) with theoretical support while in fact the scholarly connections between the two are quite weak. If this is so, why has such a special phenomenon steadily persisted? In terms of its constitutive identity, 1) should work in the regular discipline of philosophy as a special type, whereas in fact the semiotic philosophers prefer to stay in the field of

semiotics. When semiotics is intended to become a single new discipline, the incoherence of the two parts looks more remarkable. But on the other hand, this incoherent coexistence still implies a practical reason: both can support each other with what they are lacking in. For 1), the successful achievements of the applied semiotic practices of 4) can provide it with solid ground for professional survival; and for 4), the philosophical-theoretical mode can provide it with an impression that the applied semiotic practices seem to indeed have some more serious theoretical basis (that is, with more metaphysical or ontological rhetoric) that indicates their work stays at the scientific-theoretical level. The necessity of the latter is mainly due to its gradual disconnection with 3), or with the theoretical practices of those main regular disciplines. By emphasizing that semiotic theory should be the organic part of human sciences, we are just directed to the ironically crucial phenomenon about the scientific direction of the semiotic movement. Nevertheless, from a professional-practical point of view, our criterion of judgment is changed as well. This strange organizational coexistence of 1) and 4) can indeed make the two weakly linked parts get more chances to gain professional interests in the academic market regarding their scholarly “goods”. As a result, the latter could be extensively encouraged in the rapidly developing commercialized cultural-academic world of today.

Based on the above explanation we can see the following related developments. ●n the one hand, this utilitarian-directed semiotic strategy tends to find some newly emerged cultural fields shaped under cultural consumerism, making them into their favored practicing grounds. ●n the other hand, for the sake of increasing or enriching its own theoretical profile, this semiotic policy tends to rely on some chosen philosophical doctrines as their ready theoretical foundations regardless of the problems about whether their own semiotic practices and the chosen philosophical supports accord with each other or not. Accordingly, some irrelevantly created philosophical-type discourses would play a mere ornamental role in the semiotic-theoretical formulations especially designed by them within the especially institutionalized context. ●bviously, either philosophical or semiotic-theoretical terms can be arbitrarily employed to produce an impression that scholarly discourses are those that have already been theoretically treated and are therefore taken as some form of semiotic-theoretical achievement. Unfortunately this kind of arbitrary combination of different theoretical elements in argumentation according to standardized manners can be legally accepted in the rigidified present-day academic institutional framework. No doubt, the latter is basically

determined by artificially-achieved professional-technical feasibility rather than by objective scientific criteria.

The most serious impact of cultural commercialism in the post-modern age is expressed in the radically changed mentality of humanities scholars. More like a businessman's mentality, many humanities scholars' views of life and practical attitudes today tend to be guided by a pan-utilitarianism, which eventually turns out to be motivated by a clear desire for winning professional profits, which are concretely embodied in higher ranks and lasting honors, in their careers. And also following the businessman's way, they are engaged in organizing educational and academic factions in collectively profitable programs and in elaborating tactics for increasing academic privileges. All of these changes in mental inclinations are conducive to the resultant trends and customs indicating that humanities scholars take professional profits rather than scientific truth as their eventual aim in their vocational life. Accordingly, colleagues living in academically-competitive systems regard each other as rivals or only tactically-cooperative partners rather than as intellectually-inspiring friends. Therefore, the radical mutation in the commercialized academic world has influenced the types of personality and character of humanities scholars with the result that the orientation of the humanities has basically been changed from the inside.

In this respect, semiotic-scholarly organizations could prefer to become academically autonomous as a precaution against any possible theoretical intrusions of other strong well-established disciplines. On the other hand, we certainly have to understand that any kind of scholarly practice has its own practical reason to choose its own favored mode of existing in the academic world. Scholarship is not only a scientific vocation but also a practical way of living. Nevertheless, it is also reasonable that we should not confuse these two different criteria of scholarly practices in professional life: the one out of more practicable wisdom and the other out of more scientific idealism. If the term "semiotics" is justified in being used in this professionally profitable way, we will also have a reason to reconstruct another kind of semiotics, which tends to insist on classical idealism for exploring scientific truth. In terms of the latter, scientific-theoretical semiotics must still be connected to the entirety of the human sciences. In this sense, perhaps a secondary semiotic movement should be designed and established, including an associated redefinition of the modern traditional concept of "general semiotics". So-called "general semiotics", or the GS-model in my proposed suggestion, refers to an operative agent for synthetically organizing such theoretical interactions of semiotic methodologies and regular disciplinary theories.

However, we should be conscious enough to anticipate that professional utilitarianism, principles for establishing academic organizations with a purpose to collectively attain academic-competitive profits, and the related opportunistic/flexibly-shaped artistic-expedient usages of applying special verbal media consisting of theoretical texts in culturally-commercialized fields will all lead to dangerously weakening the scientific strength of the multiply-productive applied semiotics as well. So, regarding applied semiotics, there are two different types of practices: one refers to those less theoretical/more practically-directed scientific projects, which are still creatively performed, and the other could refer to any vulgarized and popularized cultural activity in humanities academia whose scientific quality can hardly be well estimated because of its own chosen less-scientific scholarly methods. But also from a practical point of view, maybe we need to relax our evaluating standard as well: not every kind of cultural-scholarly practice must be performed at a higher theoretical level. The current popular anti-grand theoretical trends in the humanities, shaped in the post-Cold War period, can represent a pragmatist spiritual turn against the seriously sophisticated theoretical praxis in the field. This anti-high-theoretical attitude could just be determined by intensified concern about professional profitability in order to be more suitable for survival under the intensively commercialized academic conditions.

In light of the above explanation, we now attempt to repeat that the contemporary semiotic movement has increasingly contained two different sets of scholarly activities, which can be named as semiotics-1 (applied semiotics, which broadly refers to all applied semiotics, including the related theoretical studies, media-productive, and applied artistic kinds of creative jobs) and semiotics-2 (general and theoretical semiotics, with differently graded higher theoretical objectives). In recent decades, the two parts (applied or practical ones and general-theoretical ones) have always been regarded as mutually complementary, and general semiotics has been wishfully taken as the possible theoretical foundations of applied semiotics. But according to our argumentation, this theoretical presupposition is either theoretically unfounded or practically useless. In fact, general semiotics should be something relational between semiotic-theoretical approaches and basic disciplinary theories. The theoretical apparatus of applied semiotics can be described as any kind of interactive practice between semiotic methods and disciplinary elements that do not necessarily belong to the basic theoretical elements of the related disciplines. This tendency to diverge developments becomes more and more realistic and we can see that the remarkable developments of applied semiotics and popularized semiotics about media-artistic designs are just the fruits of the more and

more intensely culturally-commercialized contexts. As the mass-cultural movement has gradually intruded into academic fields over recent decades, applied semiotic and technological-artistic semiotic designs almost occupy most of the semiotic practices everywhere today; applied semiotics has been more and more regarded as a professional chameleon, which has been more and more determined by professionally-regulated mechanisms. On the other hand, the recently less-developed scholarship of general semiotics has more obviously turned to change its focus; from vainly providing the theoretical foundations of applied semiotics, the latter in fact no longer needs some unified theoretical basis as its operative guiding principles, but rather pays further attention to the theoretical developments of the entirety of the humanities. That means general semiotics should pay serious attention to strengthening investigations of multiple interaction and collaboration between semiotic-theoretical approaches and various basic disciplinary theories, especially those of philosophical theories. In other words, the task of general semiotics should be directed to serve the general goal of the scientific advancement of human sciences. When the latter is expanded to include all non-European-American scholarly traditions, this division of labor of the international semiotic movement becomes not only more suitable but also more urgent, or even absolutely necessary.

No doubt, the general semiotic model or GS-model will be performed at a much higher theoretical-strategic level than semiotics-1; the latter is turning out to be more popularized and more practicable in the part of the cultural-academic world rooted in our global commercialized cultural framework. It is clear that most professional semiotic players, who have emerged since the unprecedented leap forward in the late 1960s, belong to semiotics-1 and only a small number of semiotic theoreticians, who are simultaneously involved in theoretical studies of various regular disciplines, belong to semiotics-2. As we pointed out before, so-called "semiotics-2" should be neither based on some philosophical fundamentalism nor on any "first theory" of other disciplinary-centric types; the general semiotic theory based on interdisciplinary-directed epistemology should be empirically-reductive rather than logically-deductive in character. In this case, we should include them in a new academic category whose true concerns lie in the theoretical problems of the entire humanities; or, they are active practitioners engaged in strategic ways of thinking about promoting the theoretical progress of human sciences. They are far from being a mere semiotic player in a popular sense but rather are engaged in dealing with multiple theoretical sources, including the semiotic one. If the term "semiotics-1", under the new cultural, technical and academic



conditions, really turns out to be a new single discipline with professional autonomy and its own relatively fixed intellectual scope, intelligent direction, operative procedures and formative identity of collective existence, the term “semiotics-2” would turn out to be further separated from this popular tendency of semiotic practices. Instead, it will live more in the humanities as a whole than in the professional semiotic movement, although it is temporarily still tended to rely on “general semiotics” in order to conveniently participate in searching for a much larger, higher, and deeper academic strategic goal: to devote itself to the great task of searching for a new unified theoretical development of human sciences, which includes all historical, cultural and academic traditions in a new age of intellectual globalization.

In terms of this perspective, we prefer to use the GS-model, which emphasizes its function as the all-round interdisciplinary-organizer, to refer to an expanded sense of semiotics-2. In other words, after 100 years of theoretical experiment, “semiotic theory” will have a more acceptable reason to be divided into two parts: the one is mainly connected with the theoretical requirement of applied semiotics and the other with semiotics-2 or the GS-model, which, besides its strongly interdisciplinary functioning, especially hints that its operative range could be relatively linked to the entirety of the human sciences. If the former should more extensively live within the established professional framework, then the latter needs to epistemologically get rid of the scholarly restrictions of the established professional systems. The changeable tendency has been mainly determined and shaped by the rapidly changing cultural, intellectual and scientific contexts over the past few decades. This academic-pragmatic aspect is another reason why we need to make this bi-division about semiotic practices or the scholarly practices share the same title of “semiotics”.

Why do we still need to alternatively use the term “semiotics 2” to express this ambitious scientific mission with a much higher and broader theoretical horizon? It is just because the title “semiotics”, originally linked to those earlier heroic-minded thinkers, still temporarily provides a certain convenient terminal usage implying an inter-boundary-directed referential flexibility for us to carry out this great experimental task. Or, in other words, at the moment we still lack another pertinent title to represent this kind of scholarly program. That means a change of the academic title used for semiotics-2 will be possible in future. The GS-model raised by this author is just one type of theoretical attempt.

●wing to the existence of two actual types of scientific praxis, a conception of the labor division in the contemporary semiotic movement

has now been naturally formed. For semiotics-1, the scientific-collaborative requirement for a certain amount of applied semiotics tends to be unified in their fields, goals, methods, styles and subject matters, which have already become the main stream of the movement. For semiotics-2, despite it partly having grown out of the same contemporary semiotic movement, its scientific goals and interests are different from semiotics-1 in that their formation is also determined by the general epistemological and methodological desideratum indicated in the all-round theoretical development of current human sciences. Therefore the two kinds of scientific practices are connected to different epistemological and operative levels and ranges, although the both are caused by actual scientific-professional requirements that are basically divergent in their respectively different goals, perspectives, characters and styles. In other words, this labor division is due to multiple internal and external reasons rather than merely the natural development of the present semiotic movement. In addition, if semiotics-1 still needs to accept the sign-centrism in its professional scholarship, semiotics-2 will turn to accept a more expanded pan-semantic-analytical strategy, which is in a sense named by this author as pan-semantic-institutional semiotics, which can be even further reduced to the GS-model. The GS-model amounts to a redefinition of the meaning of a semiotic-theoretical practice, whose task, goal and approaches should be extensively readjusted to meet the currently existent crucial challenges facing the entire humanities.

### **3. Commercial institutionalization of the humanities/academia and the GS-model associated with ethical subjectivity**

#### **3.1 Semiotic achievements in history as the steps for seeking further scientific truths or as the advertising brands used for winning professional success**

Understood from the above explanation, the words “theoretical application” can refer to different things: it can mean any arbitrarily chosen combination of various scholarly elements linked to the most general concept of “sign”, but it can also mean the advanced theoretical elaborations realized in the interactions between relevant theoretical-semiotic approaches and the higher theoretical elaborations of regular disciplines. That is why we semiotic theoreticians would like to take Levi-Strauss, Foucault, Pierce, Husserl, Ricoeur, Freud, Barthes, Lacan, Greimas, Metz and a lot of other distinguished western scholars, who

practice according to somewhat interdisciplinary-theoretical strategies, as the more suitable references from certain aspects for our future semiotic-theoretical explorations. Their excellent achievements in their respective fields have already led to scientific-positively confirmed fruits enlightening the developing orientations of modernized human sciences. This is not only because they have already finished their scholarly contributions to their chosen themes at what are generally accepted to be advanced theoretical levels, but also because the theoretical contributions of their works indicate their significance at a higher epistemological-theoretical level with respect to the expected scientific progresses of entire human sciences. Nevertheless, we have to add that by highly evaluating those important theoretical-semiotic works realized in different regular disciplines, we do not take their works as some finished workable foundations on which we can continue to mechanically design our own studies. No, what we confirm here is only the important instructive experiences and promising orientations implied in their relevant intellectual and scientific developments that comprise both positive and negative instructions as well. What we should do at present and in the future rests upon organizing our semiotic-theoretical creations in a much more enlarged and deepened intellectual context in connection to all-round interdisciplinary and cross-cultural theoretical domains. They are taken just as important temporary scientific experiments to be examined and tested further by other scholars rather than as some authoritative dogmas that are required to be obeyed absolutely or passively imitated. In other words, those “semiotic masters” should not be “used” as some authoritatively supported instruments for profitable competitions. Their semiotic-scientific significance and value should not be either finally judged by artificially authorized merits of scientific practices or by temporarily obtained influences and effects produced according to social-cultural fashions. The evaluation of positive progresses in human sciences, different from those of the natural and social ones, should be made from a specially conceived epistemological perspective. In short, the key point concerning evaluative criteria of human sciences rests in the implied theoretically promising orientation of additional creative scientific projects in reference to the related realities of various types rather than their temporarily achieved successes in cultural markets. Therefore any so-called achievements realized in the humanities and semiotics can only be regarded as temporarily useful or even just experimentally valuable results. What we should be mostly concerned about is something related to the genuine potential for stimulating further developments along scientific-rational paths.

The above explanation is first of all due to the question about what the correct understanding of the notion of scholarly achievements in the humanities and semiotics is; and secondly for the sake of precaution against possible wrong manipulations exercised through profitably using any temporary scholarly achievements and their habitually sacralized academic stars created in history in order to gain extra professional profits by dint of improper academic advertisements and implicit manipulations. The latter is even more serious in obstructing the scientific progress of human sciences and semiotics. In essence, the tendency to academically authorize any temporarily achieved humanities-scholarly success is equivalent to the steps of spreading non-scientific profits that are given in the present-day commercialized humanities contexts. As a matter of fact, a temporarily attained scholarly achievement can either be the basis for continuing related scientific efforts or some pure “material” to be rigged in order to win professional profits. Dialectically, scientific consequences, despite their own special merits, can be multiply misused in cultural marketing to produce certain anti-scientific effects, as long as they may be made to function as brands. This is why we are carefully concerned about more precisely redefining the meaning of “scholarly achievements” and “scholarly stars” because they have already been added with some latent non-scientific roles, which could be used for manipulating purely professional competition to favor engaged participants. Accordingly, in the commercialized academic contexts, the concept of “master/star” could indeed merely be used to be a tool for propagandizing the innate preeminence of certain scholarly works and directions represented by the chosen scholars as well as for excluding or fighting divergent scholarly rivals, particularly under the current absolutely utilitarian atmosphere of the prevailing Media Culture. In fact, once again, any historical masters of scholarship can only provide some temporarily valid scientific values for the academic community as the part of the preparations for stimulating the next potential investigations. If some historically established masters are made the absolute authorities in the institutionalized academic fields, they could later turn out to be the very obstacles to creative scientific progress because all the humanities, due to various historical and objective reasons, still remain in their experimental stages in human intellectual history. If this judgment can be widely confirmed in the scientific history of natural and social sciences, it must be more suitably relevant to the case of the humanities. As is widely known, the academic tricks about manipulating “star effects” only concern how to use the “brand” (names) of masters to win benefits by means of various effective advertising tools, which can be easily invented and schemed following the strong mechanisms of the

present media-cultural marketing. The negative possibilities are just because of the lack of objective scientific criteria in the humanities. Thus humanities-scholarly activities, in the commercial-professionalized context, would turn out to be the instrumental means for any kind of self-serving interests. This is just what we have experienced in the present-day post-modern era when commercialization has spread to every corner of the globe. Living in the present-day competitive-professional circumstances, an opportunistically-minded scholar in the humanities even logically tends to choose some generally recognized and therefore easily accepted masters as his ready channels to expediently seek his own professional benefits. Simply speaking, following the steps of a past scholarly master is the cheapest and most secure way to become their newest successor in professional marketing. (The culture of “academic quasi-mafia” would be therefore easily shaped.) This tendency also becomes one of the main reasons why the humanities can hardly achieve relevant scientifically-true progress. (Ironically enough, some clever post-modernist theoreticians can just deconstruct or destroy the term “scientific truth” as such in order to more radically persuade their nihilist arguments.) Essentially speaking, the commercialized Star-Effect, as a popular tactic today, tends to lead scholars above all to pay attention to the mere discourses of their chosen successful authors rather than ultimately to the social-cultural realities and scientific truth.

Some of the chosen, attractive scholarly terms popularized in e-cultural-academic marketing and their utility to professional protectionism will make this prevail for longer. In addition, the above-mentioned professional protectionism and competitive individualism will be logically conducive to the formation of a hierarchical organization with its own ideological roles, including the created images made out of historical-intellectual heroes or masters, who have been officially authorized within the professional-factional systems. Accordingly, some mysteriously inspiring words as the all-embracing and unifying Big-Concepts are frequently employed to stress the existence of the historically deep-rooted “theoretical value” deposited in these mystified basic concepts. And what the chosen theoretical fundamentalism really intends is either to solidify academic privilege or to secure the monopolized professional authorities. The recently prevailing e-technique for promoting advertisements or propaganda in cultural-academic marketing provides a more favorable context for spreading the popularizing effects of such big scholarly words used as brands for the related theoretical commodity. Such a basic epistemological misunderstanding of the essence of semiotic practices is generally due to the fact that scholars are more enthusiastic about

searching for professional success than about gaining scientific truth by dint of whatever convenient ways. And various post-modernist epistemological positions additionally provide them with a happy slogan, which states that “scientific truth” in the humanities never exists.

As a consequence, professional success in the competitive academic systems seems to have become the only workable human sciences standard in our times. It is therefore understandable that although the theoretical advancements of professional semiotics have come to be gradually weakened in the current semiotic movement, professional semiotics scholars can always be satisfied with sharing the collectively fabricated myth of the long-lasting sign-history for a collectively-needed supporting bastion in academic competition. For example, when the word sign is assigned with a quasi-magical role like a panacea, the true theoretical potential of theoretical-semiotic thinking must be terribly enfeebled. Nevertheless, no doubt, the so-called “semiotic profession” itself will never be damaged because the criterion of semiotic success is now defined by the efficiency of the semiotic approaches chosen according to pragmatically feasible criteria and fixed procedures cumulatively set up by various scholarly authorities. Accordingly, the identity of semiotics has been radically changed and obviously distinguished from its classical spirit, directed towards scientific idealism. The professional institutionalization can be artificially designed and built up to constantly secure the effective workability of the related professional arrangements as long as no objectively existing scientific standards are used to prove or disprove its justification.

### **3.2 The GS-model, its four operating realms, and ethical subjectivity as the dynamic origin**

The GS-model as a general strategic-operative conception is connected with all related intellectual fields, and their multi-theoretical interconnection also comprises many different dimensions. In general, the feature of interdisciplinarity is in fact very expansively related to all-round causal descriptions about phenomena in different involved domains. Therefore the concept of the interdisciplinary practices can be quite widely interpreted as that of the general cross-boundary operative features in connection with all referred elements in those related domains. Furthermore, this strategy of general cross-boundary practices can also be reduced to a scholarly-operative relationship between the model-operator as ethical subjectivity and the operated objects that come from the so-called four-layer-domains, which will be described in the present section.

The GS-model can be therefore described as a relational praxis between the agent and its operatively directed objects, for after all the GS-model is connected to both the operated objects and the operating subject that is the innermost decider in handling the GS-model. Regarding the organizing application of the GS-model, it must be a problem about how to effectively operate with the model. This objective strategic problem is correspondent to the problem of related subjective capability. For the operation of the GS-model will be directly confronted with obstructions from the multi-powerful establishment from the very beginning. The interdisciplinary-directed operation is therefore finally related to the firm will of the ethical subjectivity. The relationship of the interdisciplinary operation to the disciplinary operation always implies certain tensional or even mutually-conflicting aspects. Let us here broadly mention the four general operating domains as objects of the subjective agent of the GS-model, which is called ethical in nature because it needs to deal with problems concerning axiological-pragmatic choices and free decisions.

- a) The social-cultural domain: the general social hard-conditions, including the political, economic, scientific, technological, and commercial aspects;
- b) The academic-educational domain: the general social soft-conditions, including the scholarly, institutional, educational, artistic and ideological aspects;
- c) The historical-traditional domain, including the inherited intellectual, customary-preferable, and simply habitual-conservative aspects;
- d) The psychological-characterological domain, or “psychological surrounding and conditions”, or all mental/behavioral inclinational aspects. This subjective part (D1) is indeed the object of operation of another subjective part (D2); the operated subject (D1) is separated from the operating subject (D2). We may here temporarily call them subject 1, the dependent ego, and subject 2, the independent ego.

The above four domains involved with different kinds of cross-boundary zones and aspects should become the objects of the interdisciplinary-practical operations of subject 2 or the final deciding agent with respect to its praxis on the basis of the GS-model. That is why we always state that general-semiotic practices as the boundary-breaking-through praxis should be linked to the ethical subjectivity that is taken as an independent or genuinely free judge/decider/actor. The GS operator/organizer should deal with the four kinds of determinism, including the internal-psychological

one as well as the intersectional interaction among the four. With respect to each domain and their intersecting ranges, subject 2 needs to flexibly reclassify the usual categories and attributes in order to reorganize its cognitive/axiological frames and features across the various natural boundaries. In result, the subject could more precisely and more pertinently reach the interconnections of causation and evaluation before he starts his specially designed procedures for interdisciplinary-scholarly reorganizing practices. That means, the epistemological-scholarly practices on the basis of the GS-model still need to expand and deepen their scientific praxis to different non-academic connective domains. The latter are related to the energetic quality of ethical subjectivity, which is further related to the creative-acting potential of the committed scholar.

From the operative angle, as we mentioned already, the so-called cross-boundary tendency can be essentially reduced to all-inclusive causal analyses. That means general cross-boundary studies are related to the expanded causal studies across various institutional-boundary lines. The evolutionary progress of the traditional humanities to the modern human sciences refers to the goal of attaining the advanced causal-analytical precisions realized in entirely widened realms. Therefore semiotic practices, as the interdisciplinary type of scientific thinking, are tantamount to, in essence, expanded and advanced causal-analytical practices. Only when our subjective will for making choices and decisions is strengthened can this entirely extensive interdisciplinary-directed GS-model be applied by the independent-willed scholar to carry out an interdisciplinary breakthrough against the predominant social and academic compartmentalization. That is why we maintain that the above-mentioned four main cross-boundary practices (A, B, C, D) eventually depend on the re-establishing ethical volition of subjectivity. The latter, in effect, has been already undermined or extremely weakened by the contemporary post-modernist philosophical position, which is totally characterized by its firmly rooted attitude against subjective ethics. Clearly, the scholar, whose subjective will is weakened or destroyed, will become more readily under the sway of the pan-commercialized establishment. Without the required strong subjective will, the GS-model could be hardly operated properly by interdisciplinary-theoretical-directed scholars in the theoretical humanities; without exaggeration, moreover, we may pessimistically conclude that the dream about any really revolutionary progress of human sciences in future would hardly work out just because of this fundamental shortcoming.



### 3.3 The GS-model and the necessary involvement of ethical subjectivity

If the scholar, living within the professional-competitive realm of marketing, exclusively searches his own or his group's professional successes, he must logically first of all care about how to rely on an organizational power built up according to its factional-centric principle in order to secure the needed competitive-operative protections and profitable adventures. Professional successes would need to appeal to the more effective operational means, which can only be obtained through following the game rules set up by the powerful professional authorities. As a result, the professionally-institutionally decided systems of norms and rules will turn out to be the last scholarly judge or the ultimately determinative force; the latter could, on the other hand, be artificially manipulated along a unitarian orientation. On the contrary, with an intention to seek scientific truth in his scholarly practices, the scholar needs first of all to be serious and sincere in persisting with the correct attention to the scientifically guided norms in his mentality. And when the latter is divergent from the academically-institutionally regulated norms and rules, the scholar can firmly follow scientifically-directed guidance in his projects against the obstructions produced by the related non-scientifically-directed academic power; that is, the exact meaning of scholarly priority of the principle of scientific truth over that of professional success. In other words, for the humanities, the related scholarly-selective priority lies not in the external-behavioral correctness regulated by professional institutions but rather reversely in keeping internal-intentional purity concerning scientific faith. That is why we always emphasize that the so-called semiotic-morality problem should firstly refer to the ethical self-strengthening of the scholar's subjectivity as such rather than merely to his external-behavioral manners in accordance with the rules set up by commercialized professional mechanisms. If professional success is taken as the first principle for doing semiotics then any ready non-scientific means could be happily chosen to attain any workable and profitable aim. And then semiotics would no longer be true scientific scholarship but rather a mere game-like system, success in which is defined by the possible effective operative steps according to the fixed game rules. Thus the game-regularity-determining mechanisms functioning logically for professional interests would eventually be indirectly determined by general humanities-academic utilitarianism, which would be further linked to the present-day mass-cultural commercialism.

For the sake of reviving a strong ethical will of scholarly subjects to perform their independent scientific endeavors, they have to be bravely faced with the double challenge of epistemological-cognitive and pragmatic-ethical powers with respect to GS-model simultaneously. That means, GS-model as the all-round interdisciplinary organizer will therefore also be related to the ethical aspect of subjective praxis that has been conventionally thought and decided by philosophy. Thus, broadly speaking, philosophy as a traditional discipline should not be excluded from but rather included into GS program. Philosophy will continue to be the most important theoretical source of theoretical-semiotic studies, but it will be no longer the absolute theoretical foundation of the latter. If the scholarly-ethical requirement based on GS-model is not yet feasible at the present, the discussion of the topic can still present a chance for scholarly understanding about the current serious challenges experienced by human sciences and semiotics. The latter of course refers to semiotics-2 that will be, after being more clearly separated from semiotics-1 in our talk, the main theoretical source of GS-model that implies an aspect of axiological-ethical-directed dimension as well. In other words, GS-model is a strategic-operative organizer for implementing more widely and deeply causal/axiological analyses across various categorical boundaries with an eventual aim for rationally reorganizing the territory of human sciences through a confrontation with the current anti-intellectual social-cultural commercialization.

In an expanded sense, the GS-model, in connection with the entirety of the human sciences, can be used more precisely to explain a triple relationship existing between semiotics, philosophy and ethics. ● On the one hand, general semiotics will invite philosophy and ethics to help it realize its all-round theoretical goal, and on the other hand the GS-model can also help reorganize the structures and functions of traditional-type philosophy and ethics too. The relationship between semiotics-2 and philosophy or that between semiotics-2 and ethics is dialectically reciprocal in interaction. The positive development of the general theoretical structure of human sciences and semiotics-2 depends on how effectively we could operate with this dialectic-reciprocal relationship. In addition, do not forget that scientific practices concerning the theoretical relationship should be also connected with both western and non-western historical-cultural traditions.

As regards the three different but interconnected aspects enumerated above – semiotics, philosophy and ethics – the first item is focused on multi-institutionalizations of semantic and communicative mechanisms; the second item on the relationship between philosophical fundamentalism

and the GS-model; and the third ethical item about an even further enlarged conception of the GS-model that is on the one hand related to the pressure from commercial institutionalizations and on the other to the dual practical tasks: the epistemological-cognitive and the ethical-pragmatic. Our systematic discussions attempt to indicate two related proposals about modernizing the scientific quality of the entire human sciences in reliance on the GS-model originating from the contemporary semiotic movement.

The present author has always combined epistemological aspects with ethical aspects in his critical theoretical-semiotic reflections. The fact is not due to an ethical-centric preference of certain individual persons but rather mainly to a scientific concern with epistemological-operative necessity. Individualism is a basic attitudinal orientation separately fixed at different individual motivational planes. But this individualist position can lead to a practical collectivism at the instrumental level, namely that individuals still need to get together to collectively realize their shared external social targets. After all, it is the motivational state that determines the basic axiological choices of scholarly agents. This can be used to more relevantly interpret Adam Smith's/John Stuart Mill's individual utilitarianism. Either capitalism or democracy, together with the attached legalism, is defined only at the instrumental level without really touching upon the innermost human nature. This is also the reason why religious traditions with a heterogeneous constitution can play a pragmatic-cooperative role today through complementing this gap between the individual and social aspects. Nevertheless, the complementing role is also performed through essentially external channels: the supernatural powers. The latter, however, has nothing to do with preconditions of the establishment of independent subjective will, which is the uniquely single factor that is able to exercise independent scientific-practical freedom.

The post-modern commercial-technological era is characterized by its tendency to effectively weaken the ethical-activizing energy of subjectivity with the result that humanities scholars are doomed to weaken their power to make critically free choices and are therefore liable to succumb to the cultural domination of general anti-intellectual consumerism. The massive mania for materialist lusts of different kinds reflects the fact that subjectivity today has become a passively reactive being trained and guided by powerful commercial mechanisms. This aptitude for following materialist-cultural tides in effect coincides with that for scholarly fashions that are also linked to the deeply rooted habit for exercising profit-calculative wisdom used by scholarly agents. In short, the impotence of subjective-ethical volition, social consumerism and professionally-dominant trends in academia are totally caused by the

current determinative commercial-technological mechanisms in today's post-modern civilizations. These professional mechanisms exercise a determinative impact on cultural-academic affairs through legalized academic institutionalization that sets up a concretely restrictive regularity for scholars to faithfully follow. In this case, consumerism is not only the symbol of post-modern commercial-technological culture but also the symptom of the existing mindset of technicalized intellectuals, who, being enwrapped into the pan-legal-technicalized ways of post-modern life, have more deeply lost a humanitarian-independent spirit in their scholarly practices. ● On the other hand, the consumerist tendency of the social and cultural dimensions will become the right means that are effectively used to maintain the various social-cultural-ideological pressures, including the supernatural ones. Furthermore, those supernaturally-directed spiritual institutions in our commercial-technological era, despite their sublime idealism directed towards other worlds, have nothing to do either with our mundane human-scientific endeavors or with the required ethical-rational quality of the individual thinker. As a matter of fact, they help shape a double-personality in our post-modern era: as the transcendent subject, who self-servingly pays exclusive attention to the supernatural world, and as the practical subject, who still keeps following the mundane social-cultural rules established by the commercialized world. As a result, supernatural streams of thought can only be favorable to the stability of the mundane commercialized establishment, regardless of the memory that their historical tendency was in opposing the human sciences' spirit once represented by the Enlightenment. Do not forget that the latter is also the target of irrationally-directed criticism organized by post-modernist philosophies today. ● Obviously, supernaturally-directed spiritual endeavors and empirically-rationally-directed spiritual endeavors are completely divergent in their constitutions and aims despite their common usage of the same term "spiritual", which is also partly co-defined by its common oppositional feature: the non-materialist one. It is true that one of the purposes of scientifically modernizing the humanities in the semiotic mission lies in increasing the spiritual significance of this worldly life of mankind, and this spiritual dimension therefore must accord with empirically-positively rational intelligibility. The latter cannot be confused by another kind of supernaturally-directed spiritual ideal; in other words, the existence of the latter should not be misunderstood as a similar alternative for what we are searching in modern human sciences.

Facing the above-mentioned trio of powerful confluent pressures on independent ethical subjectivity, semiotics-2's or the GS-model's agent would not only belong to the extreme minority in the post-modern world

but also unavoidably live in extreme solitude. That is another reason why the praxis of the GS-model innately requires a much stronger ethical subjectivity devoted to this independent scientific mission, which should essentially be the spiritual continuity of the scientific rationalism of the Enlightenment with respect to the progress of human sciences. Therefore the situation is clear: the above-mentioned three types of non-humanitarian rationalist intellectual powers work together to suppress this uniquely necessary precondition of the possibility of carrying out our planned empirical-rationalist modernization of the humanities. In the final analysis, semiotics-2 or the GS-model, as the empirical-rational reorganizer, has been uniquely assigned with such a historically significant mission for rebuilding new human sciences in the intellectual history of mankind.

### **3.4. The operative strategy of the GS-model in commercial-institutionalized contexts**

Finally, we need to return to our formerly mentioned explanative pattern of the four domains again. The four domains of objects in GS practices amount to four kinds of references of the subjective organizer. The four causal-interconnected references in GS practices function as the surroundings and also as the objects of the subject. They refer either to the object of cognition or to that of action. In addition, the four causal networks have double dimensions: the structural and the dynamic. In fact the GS-model is confronted with four contexts: a) the social-cultural one (namely commercial-technological) in general; b) the academic-professional (namely educational-scholarly) in particular (these first two contexts are multiply institutionalized as we have already discussed); c) this one is related to the historical-traditional aspects, which will indirectly but also strongly exercise its multiple influence; and d) this one, in a sense, is also a “psychological surrounding” for the academic agent or scholarly-acting subject. An academic agent exists in, and is explicitly and implicitly faced with, these heterogeneous contexts, which are differently institutionalized and therefore establish compulsory criteria and rules for controlling the agent’s behaviors when he is normally, obediently and dependently engaged in his educational and academic activities. Although the GS-agent’s direct object is B, especially for general semiotic theoreticians, at a higher level of theoretical practices – namely, when engaged in multiple cross-boundary scholarly practices – the subject has to be further faced with its own self, or, in other words, D1 is faced with D2. On the other hand, the four references are also objects of independent or free actions of the agent (D2) when he intends to take A, B, C, D1 and

their established rules into account and even attempts to change or readjust them according to his own independently made scholarly designs and performances. In other words, for the academic subjective agent engaged in GS practice, A, B, C and D can function as different systems of norms/rules as well as function as objects or materials which are to be critically reexamined with respect to their causal/axiological connections. The term causality can also be defined at both structural and dynamic levels; or, a causational relationship can be used either to describe the relatively stationary networks of established objective rules or to describe the motivational-selective sequences about temporal activation. In essence, A, B, C and D can refer to four systems of rules and related ways for acting; A, B, C and D can also signify the causal sequences of independent activation containing four heterogeneous zones, ranging from the social, academic and historical to the psychological. Among these causational relationships, only the psychological zone (D) also has two layers. D is the zone or context of an agent's active operation (D2), but is also the zone where objects and materials appear (D1). Precisely, subjectivity also implies double aspects – the structural and dynamic – or it signifies different psychological entities, such as D1 and D2, and D2 is the final decision maker, or eventually activating ego. With respect to the causal relationship, D1, as the operative context or surrounding of D2, is under the sway of A, B and C; D2, reversely, as the originally activating agent, would take A, B, C and D1 as the objects and materials of its operations. From a functional point of view, the same psychological entity plays different roles. In this sense, the same mind consisting of D1 and D2 can also be institutionalized by A, B and C. By saying that the personalities of modern human beings are mostly technicalized, we in fact refer to this mentally institutionalized phenomenon. So the post-modern phenomenon of academic institutionalization has penetrated into all zones, ranging from the social, cultural and academic to the psychological ones.

Regarding causational relationships, the causal sequences of the structural one and the dynamic one are reversed in sequence. For the first type, it is A that is fundamental, which is the basis for shaping commercial-technological society/culture. For the second type, it is D2 that is the fundamental origin for triggering or constructing a reversed causational sequence. In other words, to understand the related situations and conditions, we should pay attention to a causal sequence ranging from A, B, C to D, while in projects for initiating independent or critical actions we should follow a reversed causal sequence, ranging from D, C, B to A. The first sequence brings about the profit-searching-directed humanities and the second sequence will lead to efforts in the truth-searching-directed

human sciences. It means that an independent, free ethical subjectivity can be established or re-activated. The so-called institutionalized mentality is only a metaphorical expression, which hints at the mental state and spiritual inclination of a subject who is under the sway of the institutionalized powers of A, B and C to various extents. Actually it means that subjective attitude towards the will, motivation, aims, habits and intellectual tastes of subjectivity is firmly determined by the multi-dimensionally institutionalized contexts and their effects. Such a psychologically-institutionalized mentality is more comfortable for following the institutionalized contexts of A, B and C. Relatively speaking, D (D2) is directly linked to B and only indirectly to A, C and itself D (D1). In light of this we can say that the typical post-modern man who, being no longer a truly free thinker, is even more professionally-institutionalized in character; or, unlike what he self-claims to be, he is in fact a professionally-institutionalized being, who pragmatically and actually accepts and follows the existing multi-institutionalized realities. That means he tends to obediently follow the established rules working at various levels, directly including cultural and academic rules that strongly determine his axiological and methodological choices. As a result, he gives up any independently triggered spontaneity and chooses to passively give in to multi-institutionalized determinism in post-modern contexts. The term “post-modern age” could be defined exactly as the times when the social-cultural world is commercially institutionalized.

The most serious impact of cultural commercialism on matters of the scientific developments of the humanities and semiotics is embodied in the fact that commercialized behavioral patterns are internalized into academic agents, basically suppressing their independent value-distinguishing free volition. Regarding GS praxis, we can point out its two related dimensions that can be generally divided into two parts: the objective (A, B, C, and D1) and the subjective (D2). The genuine GS-agent, D2, maintains different operative distances from various zones. Its closest or direct object is B, namely the academic-professional domain. We present two sets of causal sequences, both of which consist of a four-part relationship, which is related to zones A, B, C, D. The first stationary one represents the actual situations experienced; the second, the so-called dynamic one, is only idealistically possible and is connected with independent and critical designs and projects, which are intended to keep a distance from the determinative mechanism of all current establishments. The first set is in effect a causal sequence related to the shaping of four institutionalized zones; the second set describes a causally reversed sequence originating from scholarly subjectivity. The latter is actually also a multiply de-

institutionalizational sequence characterized by the establishment of a strong subjective will that is able to critically take the basic and original criteria, standards and procedures concerning interdisciplinary-theoretical practices in the humanities into account.

In consideration of those determinative mechanisms, the successful processes of commercial-technological establishments are made through reformed psychological mechanisms concerning the effective stimulation of common desires for biological and social materialist satisfactions. As a result, the related multi-systems of materialist power have been securely stabilized. These power systems can play contrarily-directed roles: the attractive and the suppressive. The so-called suppressive mechanism nowadays refers no longer to its historically coercive forms, such as politically/militarily physically violent suppression. Its post-modern type is directed to effective control over the outlook on life of the majority, guiding them exclusively to the worries about biological/sociological materialism and profits. It is interesting to note that in traditional periods, the more severe coercive patterns did not mean radically serious threat or harm to the spiritual endeavors of ethically-constituted subjectivity. But such an essential spiritual threat could be more effectively actualized today because of an unprecedented intensification of the relationship between A, B, C and D; namely, A and B have already been able to radically reform the psyche-pattern of individual subjectivity, internalizing materialist desires and habits in the soul, which would tend to naturally obey the objective determinism finally fixed by the objective establishments. With this changed outlook of life and reformed psychological mindset rooted in active materialist desires and passive-reactive behavioral patterns, the mentality of most humanities scholars in post-modern times is necessarily directed to the uniquely fixed goals for searching for professional profits. Accordingly, the academic-professional institutionalization becomes almost the absolute control power for restricting or excluding any critical ideas of scholars with respect to the fixed professional systems, including both their external and the internal aspects.

And this academic-institutional power of B is also under the sway of A, C and D1. If D2 intends to activize any challenging designs or projects against B, it will be confronted with these multi-suppressive obstructions. In short, we can say the realization of this second causal sequence amounts to shaping a radical confrontation between the **collective** social-material power and **individual** ethical-spiritual subjectivity. This situation once again reminds us of the true meaning of post-modernist philosophy (what we criticize post-modernist philosophy for is not especially related to its explicitly expressed conceptions, but rather to its implicitly disclosed



subjective-volitional impotence): to destroy subjectivity and its ethical will. Without firm independent ethical will, the scholarly agent has lost its unique remaining subjective weapon for maintaining and performing its free scholarly-spiritual capability. Humanities scholars, especially their theoretical agents, could not help maintain only the external-legalized tendency directed to faithfully follow the professional establishments in order to securely obtain their own basic profits within these academic institutions. Moreover, professional establishments are also further linked to academic marketing, which is characterized by using the tactical means fixed by the academic hierarchy consisting of socially recognized masters and scholarly trends. The latter two can help create a kind of “use value” of “scholarly goods” in the related marketplace. So, in our commercialized times, there exists indeed a distinction between scientific value and use value with respect to the market for humanities’ products, although some post-modernist philosophies even attempt to reject objective scientific value as such and instead take use value as the only justified one. After all, theoretical humanities scholars are above all faced with the epistemological pressures originating from the academic market mechanism. Under such a situation the independent agent of the GS-model should be volitionally strong enough to trigger the reverse-directed causal action (namely to start from D to B to A and even to C) to approach his goal.

In light of the above explanation, we may say that the subjective-ethical factor is the most fundamental in positively reorganizing epistemological orientation in the scholarship of the human sciences. For it is the final dynamic origin of the will for realizing free decision and triggering action; if it is independently strong enough, the scholarly subject can indeed take an original initiative against challenges and obstructions arising from the four (A, B, C, D1) objective types of institutionalized mechanisms, which are, on the other hand, respectively shaped by the contemporary universalized commercial-technological civilizations. The latter are on the one hand the positive strength to promote natural and social sciences, but on the other become the original or indirect cause to deviate the scientific direction of human sciences from their rational-scientific end. By the way, the present paper has no intention of discussing the problems of the justification of the related political and economic modes; our discussions are merely focused on how to precisely describe the actual causal relationship between the social, cultural, academic and psychological dimensions, which exists in all current academic communities around the world. Regarding the related proposal about how to promote the scientific development of human sciences and general semiotics, the recommended proposal as the necessary condition

for carrying out the GS-model can be reduced to the task about how to reestablish ethical subjectivity, which has been widely neglected and even unconsciously suppressed in our post-modern technicalized times.

In conclusion, we may summarize that there exist two types of “modern semiotic movement” which are respectively in connection with semiotics-1 and semiotics-2. The latter, or its related GS-model, in connection with a grand idealism for developing human sciences, could be compared with a movement with an aim to launch a secondary Enlightenment in human history. Unlike the first one which originated in Europe, this one must be organized on a global level, and should be founded on the comprehensive knowledge of mankind that has been accumulated in natural, social as well as human sciences in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Theoretical semiotics in its broad sense as explained here, as an instrumental system working at the epistemological and methodological levels, has been established just to devote itself to this great scientific mission. If we are still far from being mature enough to start effectuating it substantially at present, we are certainly able to present a clearly formulated blueprint of it for possible reflections in the historical future.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# “GENERAL SEMIOTICS” (GS) AS THE ALL-ROUND INTERDISCIPLINARY ORGANIZER: GS VS. PHILOSOPHICAL FUNDAMENTALISM<sup>32</sup>

### Abstract

This paper presents a crucial problem about the identity and function of general semiotics. The latter is not only defined in terms of interdisciplinary-directed theoretical practice in comparison to the philosophically/fundamentally-directed one, but also further redefined as an operative-functional organizer that does not necessarily imply the fixed first theoretical doctrines. General semiotics (GS) is described as a functional strategy for organizing the all-round interdisciplinary-directed theoretical construction. In addition, the paper emphasizes that the interdisciplinary essence of semiotic theory is contrary to any philosophical fundamentalism and that applied semiotics does not need any philosophical foundation either.

### 1. What is the main challenge for contemporary semiotics?

Immediately before the Sofia Congress, the author received a questionnaire from the Sofia Congress Committee titled “*What is the main challenge for the contemporary semiotics?*” (September 2, 2014). The author responded to it with four sentences that are included here with added short notes. The answers and comments given in the following can help explain the critical background of the thoughts presented in this chapter.

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- a) Commercialized utilitarian academic systems lead to “professional success”, rather than “scientific truth”, becoming the genuine final aim of scholars’ practice. (Accordingly scholars tend to follow the established rules of doing scholarship, which are determined by multiple external factors including the more powerful non-academic forces.)
- b) Nihilist ontological rhetoric is used to weaken the interdisciplinary human science-related tendency of semiotics. (Accordingly scholars tend to search for any arbitrarily invented rhetoric rather than objective validity as long as the former effectively works in the academic market.)
- c) In the global academic context, on the one hand western scholarship is far from being familiar with non-western traditional scholarship and thinking, and on the other, contemporary non-western scholarship, in their own traditional studies, is far from being familiar with contemporary western human-scientific theories either. (Accordingly, the truly global semiotic mission can hardly be attained.)
- d) Commercialized cultural and academic circumstances lead to a general vulgarization of content, direction, and practicing style of semiotic activities with a result that the term “semiotics” could be frequently misused as a “pop-cultural brand” to seek to produce any kind of propaganda, advertising effect or factional influence through manipulating internet media in academic-educational marketing. (Accordingly the term “semiotics” could be more arbitrarily used by a variety of applied semiotics just for competitive profitability with a result that semiotic practices are further disconnected from the general trends of theoretical advances in various main disciplines in the humanities.)

## **2. The basic points in connection with the above judgments**

In light of the above basic judgments, we further concisely derive the following proposals:

- a) The urgent necessity in the intellectual mission of mankind today is to transform the less scientific “humanities” into the more scientific-directed “human sciences” in order to more rationally and systematically solve the crucial problems concerning inter-conflicting faiths and dogmas among different peoples and their

traditions in this world.

- b) For this goal there is an urgent related procedural necessity, which is to exclude the epistemological involvement of any philosophical fundamentalism in the above scientific-directed mission regarding general semiotics and human sciences.
- c) The above two significant demands lead to a new conception of general semiotics as a strategic operator concerning epistemological-functional designs for realizing the interdisciplinary-organizing tasks concerning the humanities and theoretical semiotics.
- d) Philosophical history presents constant, gradually developing processes of academic-disciplinary splitting, from which modern mathematics, natural sciences and social sciences have separated; it is time now for human sciences to follow the same academic-historical line.
- e) Fundamentalist philosophy consisting of certain kinds of classical metaphysics and ontology partly shares similar non-empirical-scientific ways of thinking with those prevailing in religion and poetry. Also, similar to the necessary segregation between religion and politics as well as that between poetry and natural sciences, historically shaped fundamentalist philosophy should be separated from the epistemological foundation of social sciences as well. All kinds of non-empirically-oriented intellectual activities can and should be the important object of semiotics and human sciences, but they will hopefully no longer be the theoretical foundation of the latter.
- f) Accordingly, a specially defined general semiotics called the GS-model can help to promote multi-rational operative coherence with respect to various departmental semiotics as well as to the modernization of human sciences.
- g) In addition, GS will also undertake a related great task: to organize an institutional-semiotic anatomy of constitution and function of fundamentalist philosophy itself in terms of new epistemological-methodological perspectives derived from the synthetically and coordinately advanced theoretical parts of human sciences.

### **3. The necessity of general semiotics as an interdisciplinary-scientific organizer**

The modern semiotic movement has entered its stage of so-called global semiotics in the new century. The global movement of semiotics is mainly characterized by its three emerging consequences: the global expansion of

the horizon of geographic-historic-cultural territory, the comprehensive widening of scholarly-theoretical perspectives from different semiotic traditions, and the deeper reexamination of the all-round relationship between society, culture and knowledge in the real world. And all three tendencies can be relatively reflected with respect to the relationship between modern semiotics and traditional philosophy; or, exactly, in the epistemological confrontation between something named as general semiotics and any type of philosophical fundamentalism. The fact is that a theoretically more productive conception of general semiotics, urgently required by human sciences in general and theoretical semiotics in particular, has not yet been accepted widely today. This is especially due to the prevailing professional protectionism and scholarly conservatism, based on academic compartmentalization and competitive individualism.

On the other hand, the academic-institutionally strengthened mechanism supported by the commercial-technological establishment is embodied in its solid control of the human sciences' institutionalized system and therefore in encouraging educationally rigidified ways of doing scholarship of the humanities fixed in different mutually-segregated disciplines. The desirable approaches to the modernization of human sciences in the new era, by contrast, should lie in organizing horizontally comparative and extensively cross-disciplinary research through breaking through the academic boundaries. Accordingly there emerges a necessity for a certain strategic goal to be guided by “general semiotics” as a functional-operative organizer with respect to the promotion of interdisciplinary interaction not only between different departmental semiotic practices but also between various social and human sciences.

#### 4. Philosophy and human knowledge

As is generally known, philosophy has been the very source of all kinds of human knowledge in intellectual history. On the other hand, the existence of both developed mathematics/natural sciences and social sciences is the consequence of their respective independent developments owing to their gradual segregations from their philosophical origins in history. This dialectic evolution finally brings about a clear differentiation between philosophy and the sciences in general. Eventually the nature of sciences of all kinds is even characterized by excluding all philosophical elements from their constitution. The same tendency has been recently emerging in the humanities today as well, although the latter as an academic field still naturally includes philosophical elements as part of its constitutive contents. Logic, the very core of philosophy, has already become an

independent discipline closely combined with mathematics; aesthetics, as an important branch in classical philosophy, has also been widely and effectively replaced by the newly-shaped independent disciplinary theories in connection with literature and the arts. It is well known that the latter two have already turned out to be the most important parts of contemporary departmental semiotics. Even one of the central parts of philosophy—ethics, or moral philosophy, as I myself particularly stress frequently—is better left disconnected from its philosophical framework and should even be further closely tied with semiotic sciences in our new era. Finally, the philosophy of history, another important part of modern philosophy, must be separated from any metaphysical-ontological doctrines as well from a scientific point of view and should be further included in the contemporary new discipline of “historical theory”, which could be closely linked with the recently emerging new discipline of “historical semiotics”. Unlike the cases of natural and social sciences, however, the last three independent disciplines in the humanities present themselves as a scholarly-disciplinary mixture containing social/human sciences and philosophical elements alike. On the other hand, philosophy, especially continental European philosophy, as a current discipline also contains a lot of interdisciplinary-scientific elements, almost becoming a scholarly combination of traditional philosophical and modern scientific parts.

We may ask, why does human knowledge present this changeable way of developing in history? Simply put, it is due to a natural demand for a gradual deepening of human rational practices in historical evolution. Therefore the constitutively self-splitting change of the composition of philosophy as an entire discipline in history is a natural and necessary historical process. We can regard this scientific-oriented process as progressive and constructive in nature. This process actually brings about multiple advanced qualities of reasoning expressed in man’s capability of doing observation, description, analysis, generalization and even predication in understanding and tackling human affairs. Thus, eventually, we see the new term “human sciences” was reasonably created after the Second World War. This completely new intellectual phenomenon indicates a more obvious scientific-directed and de-philosophical-centrist tendency in our times. It is in just this general context that current semiotics has become a more and more methodological and epistemological guide in reconstructing contemporary human sciences. The fact has become further concretized and multiplied when the interdisciplinary nature of semiotics has grown to impact the field that is about the modernizing enterprise of the traditional non-western humanities. The recent development of the

latter in recent decades further proves that a de-philosophical-centrist position for advancing the theoretical humanities becomes even a necessity today if the modernization of non-western traditional heritages were to be really scientifically conducted and accordingly reformulated for carrying out true international academic dialogue concerning theoretical humanities.

### **5. Philosophy as a modern professional discipline in connection with certain theoretical knowledge and philosophy as a fundamentalism with its historically transmitted dogmatic implications**

In spite of its philosophical and linguistic origins, the modern semiotic movement has been synthetically realized in different scholarly fields and disciplines, including both traditional and modern fields. The remarkable involvement of semiotic practices in human sciences is just due to the steady strengthening of interdisciplinary or horizontal interactions between different scholarly disciplines. And this general academic development has been obviously caused by the general progress of respective scientific-theoretical practices in various academic branches. No doubt, this semiotic turn in the humanities also represents a scientific turn in the modernization of the humanities. In addition, this semiotic-scientific turn amounts precisely to a de-philosophical-centrism turn. Yes, a lot of traditional philosophical content has been already converted into modern scientific content, as we mentioned above. But there is indeed an essential basis of traditional philosophy that we may generally call “metaphysics” that keeps its historically unchanged fundamentalist-theoretical dogmas. Philosophy as a modern discipline has a right to keep any kind of constitutive content in its discipline as long as the traditional topics are still interesting to academia. However, besides being an academic unit that is an accumulating site of historical thoughts, philosophy has also implicitly reserved a historically unique privilege for organizing theoretical activities in both the historically and contemporarily institutionalized humanities. This academic-type institutional-ideological power itself silently possessed by fundamentalist philosophy today is still quite influential at different aspects of the theoretical constitution of the humanities. Owing to the traditional academic-institutional background, which is even basically encouraged by the contemporary technology-oriented social-cultural mechanism, this philosophical-fundamentalist-type ideological power continues exercising its dogmatic epistemological domination over the theoretical direction and practical methods of the entire humanities, even



giving a hint that the theoretical elaboration of the humanities still needs such a fundamentalist leadership as the “first philosophy”. This tendency, no doubt, is also directly impacting the methods of theoretical reconstruction in our semiotic world, including its departmental and general parts alike. Naturally, if semiotics, as an innovative or revolutionary tool in stimulating the theoretical modernization of the humanities, accepts, implicitly or explicitly, this theoretical privilege of philosophical fundamentalism, a cognitional self-contradiction will occur within semiotics as follows: general semiotics, based on any philosophy-centric theoretical framework, becomes immediately contrary to the interdisciplinary essence of semiotic science as such. Therefore any philosophical-centric reductionism of semiotic theories could indicate a regressive movement against the modern semiotic spirit. This philosophy-centric preference for a theoretical construction of general semiotics is mainly caused by the exacerbating tendency of the present-day system of institutionalized professional competition in current social/human science academia, which presses scholars to more profitably calculate the cost of their research investment and the competitive-tactical advantages during the process of searching for their profit-seeking-directed professional aims (see Li 2013). If so, a more convenient and profitable way for them would be to appeal to this traditional privileged potential or an implicit theoretical-domineering power of certain dogmatic-philosophical fundamentalism in order to save or put aside some more painstaking and more complicated efforts for learning from various specialized theoretical experiences of other related disciplines.

● On the other hand, we should here immediately distinguish between two different relations between semiotics and philosophy. The first is the one that also exists between interdisciplinary-directed semiotics and philosophy as a discipline containing its various valuable materials. In this case, semiotic theory always needs to learn from philosophy and to pertinently absorb as much as possible the related philosophical-theoretical elements into semiotic-theoretical constructions, just as all other disciplines of the humanities should do the same in their inter-actional relationships with philosophy. The reverse process presents the same desirability: philosophical thinking should pay more and more attention to the theoretical fruits independently attained in other humanities in order to enrich or reform its own structure with respect to the theoretical perspective of the entire humanities in which philosophy has always been engaged in history. For example, we can see that the book *Main Trends in Philosophy*, edited by Paul Ricoeur (Ricoeur 1977), and the French *Philosophy Encyclopedia*, edited by A. Jacob (Jacob 1989-2000), indeed

present a really interdisciplinary horizon and perspectives. The second is the relationship between semiotics and philosophy that is taken as an exclusively self-enclosed speculative corps guided by philosophical centralism or fundamentalism that is also implicitly supported by the academic-institutional establishment with its historically conservative ideology. This historically unchanged philosophical fundamentalism is mainly displayed in its abstrusely elaborate metaphysics and metaphysical ontology, insisting on its everlasting fixed system of absolute values and logic-centric dogmas embodied in various “first principles”, which can be originally traced back to philosophical sources in remote ancient times.

We certainly recognize that fundamentalist philosophy as such is very important in human intellectual history, just like what we see in various religions, and it should keep its independent academic existence in our intellectual world. On the other hand, nevertheless, we also maintain that there is no scientific reason for theoretical semiotics to accept its habitually taken-for-granted authoritative intervention in theoretical constructions of other empirical-scientific scholarship related to the empirical historical world. We may think in this way: it is just because of this kind of irrelevant engagement in causational thinking and ethical judging about historical-empirical human affairs that so many contemporary fundamentalist-type philosophers, both western and eastern, have brought about numerous seriously misleading interpretations and wrong conclusions in contemporary political history. The main reason for this sad development really lies in the fact that there exist no reasonable links between metaphysical-ontological ways of thinking and all other empirical-scientific ways of thinking in social and human sciences. The ambiguous idea about the two ways of conducting theorization is in fact caused by epistemological inconsistencies in human history. Accordingly, abstruse philosophical fundamentalism has a special negative influence on empirical-scientific scholarship in connection with history, society, morality and politics in our actual anthropological world. Nowadays we attempt to state that fundamentalist philosophy plays, in some sense, a speculative-imaginative role like poetry, if not really like religion. Both these imaginative-spiritual kinds of activity are of course justified in their preferred ways of organizing their thinking/faith, but should not be allowed to improperly apply their speculative or imaginary rhetoric into theoretical practices that require genuinely empirical-scientific reasoning. Even “science” as a modern term should be separated from its less strictly defined acceptance formed in remote antiquity, however the same term is still used in various modern fundamentalist philosophies.

## **6. General semiotics as a strategic design for reorganizing the interdisciplinary-directed theoretical progress of human sciences**

It is evident that the humanities or even human/social sciences, rather than the entirety of human knowledge, should be completely readjusted or reorganized in our new century. But the point is that the theoretical readjusting process within a semiotic framework should not be organized at a substantial level; instead it should be designed and performed at a multiply structural-functional-relational level. Traditional systematic philosophy, some modern philosophies attempting to reconstruct the unified sciences, modern all-embracing theoretical sociology, contemporary universal historiography and the philosophy of history have all tried to provide such a synthetic processing ground for reorganizing and recombining the entirety of human knowledge at a substantial level. As is generally known, all such efforts in modern and contemporary history, despite their respective theoretical achievements, can hardly attain their goals. One of the reasons for this consequence is caused precisely by their commonly shared simplistic strategy designed for reaching respective discipline-centralist unifications. In fact, however, a truly reasonable theorizing mode for integrating and harmonizing human and social sciences cannot be understood by carrying out any disciplinary-centric reductionism or by realizing a new expanded syncretism of human knowledge. The acceptable conception of the unification of contemporary human sciences can only reasonably refer to the advancing and widening of a coordinated and coherent relationship between empirically positive confirmable fruits of different disciplines, each of which must also above all carry out their respective interdisciplinary-directed empirical-scientific practices separately. This principle is just what general semiotics attempts to follow.

In recent decades, besides adopting some quasi-philosophical modes of general theorization, the idea of general semiotics has also been conceived as a new type of encyclopedia about the entire interconnected knowledge of mankind. The editing guidance of different projects in the field indeed reflects a comprehensive point of view of semiotic science taken as something including and integrating human knowledge as extensively as possible. Nevertheless, all these efforts to systematically collect together and reorganize entire scholarly-informational materials merely amount to presenting certain co-exhibitions of different collections of more or less sign-related knowledge from the existing disciplines while theoretical interconnections among them remain less coherently studied, if they are

even studied at all. In other words, these kinds of projects only attempt to finish a job of presenting huge collections of knowledge without really being engaged in organizing interdisciplinary-theoretical studies between them (see Posner, Roberring and Sebeok 1998). It is obvious that the remarkable achievements of current semiotics are mostly realized and displayed in a variety of departmental or applied semiotics with respect to their interdisciplinary practices performed at the epistemological-methodological level. Furthermore, we also have to note that the actual creative vigor of semiotics grows only from various disciplinary and interdisciplinary practices in the entire humanities. Therefore, far from being a mere single discipline, semiotics must keep its progressive steps synchronistic with those of human sciences. At present we are indeed faced with a serious challenge regarding how to relevantly and effectively develop the interdisciplinary strategies in the entire field of human sciences. Concretely, the current theoretical retardation disclosed in both general semiotic practices and entire human sciences could be mainly due to the fact that the modernization of the humanities with its richly accumulated traditional heritages, positive and negative, western and eastern, requires first of all a deeper and wider interdisciplinary-directed epistemological breaking-through. Or, more exactly, what we require, especially at present, is something related to the general interdisciplinary strategy overarching all disciplines of human sciences. In terms of this interpretation we could reach a more suitable conception of general semiotics that, far from being a semiotic type of philosophy, should be involved in creating such a theoretically more suitable functional-operative organizer. What I have presented about the concept of “institutional semiotics” before (Li 2014), for example, is a related attempt that is made by dint of exercising such an all-round analytic-synthetic scientific anatomy of the profession and scholarship of semiotics. Let us call this type of general semiotics “GS” for short, which can be taken as a universal semantic-anatomical reorganizer at the academic theoretical-strategic level with respect to the entire human sciences in general and semiotics in particular.

Furthermore, unlike the idea of a semiotic philosophy, GS does not need to be a fixed system of theoretical propositions representing an alternative new type of theoretical foundation, intending to methodologically unify various concrete practices performed in different disciplines; instead, most semiotic practices should firstly be implemented in the existing individual disciplines by means of their various interdisciplinary tactics. What GS is and does lie in is in analyzing, synthesizing, readjusting and reorganizing the results of theoretical

interactions between all the related disciplines. Rather than being a solidified system of theories, we prefer to say that GS can be regarded first of all as a set of epistemological directions, methodological procedures, scholarly-ethical attitudes and a scientific-intellectual consciousness. And the concrete methodological-operative tools used by GS come from the scientific experiences of various departmental semiotics. The main purpose of GS is to promote or restructure the interdisciplinary interaction in the world of human sciences so as to more closely strengthen scientific-practical ties between semiotics and human sciences. Or, more precisely, GS deals with the relational issues of both departmental and general interdisciplinary practices, regarding the interdisciplinary-theoretical relationship as the operative center for promoting the progress of human sciences in general and semiotics in particular in order to realize an important task about the systematic anatomy of the humanities in the new century. Besides, unlike the deductive-logical-theoretical type of rationality used by philosophical fundamentalism, GS adopts an empirical-inductive-practical type of rationality. The scientific orientation of semiotics should be settled in reference to real historical, social, cultural and academic experiences in this anthropological world.

## **7. GS and the modernization of the traditional non-western humanities**

Let us turn to a more complicated scientific challenge to cross-cultural semiotics and humanities in the current global cultural/academic context. As I have explained many times before, with the sharp constitutional divergence between the western and non-western historical-cultural-intellectual-academic traditions, the much more elaborate western metaphysics cannot be suitably employed for interpreting or helping modernize the latter at a theoretical level (see Li 2008, 2011). As regards this problem, western semiotic theories have been experienced to be the much more relevant and desirable alternatives. In essence, so-called cross-cultural semiotics is only a special type of interdisciplinary semiotics that requires that scholars obtain knowledge of both western theory and non-western history at the same time. The problems of the theoretical modernization of traditional non-western humanities is not only related to the advancement of the scientific level of the latter but also to a more realistic intellectual requirement that the non-scientific-characterized, non-western traditional humanities, including their quasi-counterparts in the west (namely, western studies of non-western cultural traditions such as Sinology), under the contemporary situation of the universal weakening of

the educational conditions of the humanities, could much more easily be manipulated to continue playing its less scientific/more ideological roles within their respective circumstances with a result of seriously leading to the stagnation of the scientific modernization of the non-western humanities in general. On the other hand, all non-western scholarly traditions, especially those with rich historical records, provide highly valuable treasures of the unique historical material and experiences that are terribly useful for promoting cross-cultural theoretical developments of global human sciences. Based on this understanding, the global expansion of the semiotic movement can be understood by us to be extremely significant for our global semiotic mission, which also requires us to courageously double our efforts to attempt the semiotic-interdisciplinary boundary-breaking adventure.

## **8. GS as an interdisciplinary organizer for synthetically anatomizing philosophy as an institutionalized discipline with any logic-centralist dogmatism**

Generally speaking, there still exists a pressing task for us to promote an active, creative interaction between semiotic theory and philosophy. Let us be clear that philosophy remains the number one, most important theoretical source for the scientific-theorization of the humanities, even from a point of view of interdisciplinary semiotics (see Li 2013: 32). Semiotics, at its general and individual levels, always needs to intensify its theoretical strength through learning from philosophy. For the sake of advancing the quality of theoretical studies in human sciences, first of all, we need an especially desirable preparative project of institutional-semiotic anatomy of philosophy as a traditional discipline. A very significant task in present-day semiotic-theoretical practices is to more scientifically penetrate into the mechanism and functions of this historically-shaped and continuously transmitted philosophical scholarship. This project is especially related to ontology, metaphysics, and some other related rhetorically-sophisticated ways of thinking (even including the derived or related nihilism and extreme relativism). In a word, this GS project will make philosophy itself an object of a theoretical semiotic analysis. In handling this project, the GS-model as a form of total synthetic strategic guidance will make use of all related human knowledge, social-cultural conditions and even historical experiences as its methodological weapons and epistemological references. Based on the remarkable progress of human knowledge in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, all the scientific capability available could hopefully converge on anatomizing

this most powerful, taken-for-granted theoretical mechanism in intellectual history. Nevertheless, this challenging mission will play a double role in practice. Therefore, we may conclusively say that this project undertaken by GS will be a doubly-directed theoretical interaction between philosophy as a big single discipline and semiotics as an interdisciplinary-directed scholarly assemblage functioning at the operative level. The latter always needs to enrich its theoretical potential through learning from the former. In return, the former, as a theoretical-institutionalized system, should also become the analyzed object of scholarly practices based on the GS-model, together with different theoretical achievements of various departmental semiotics. And the consequences of this two-way mode of scholarly interaction would wishfully push forward the unifying progress of human sciences at a multi-rationally operative level.

In my last paper published in *Semiotica* (Li 2014), I treated general semiotics as a tool for institutional analysis with a focus on the internal and external institutionalized objects and contexts; in this chapter, I have treated general semiotics as an all-round functional organizer by emphasizing a focus on the epistemological-methodological multi-relationship between semiotic approaches and reorganized humanities knowledge. Both aspects of the identity and function of general semiotics exclude any theoretical involvement of philosophical fundamentalism that is traditionally taken as some absolute or authoritative theoretical foundation. Such a historically and habitually accepted relationship between philosophy and knowledge is no longer taken as valid, and fundamentalist philosophy as a traditional faith of “first theory” should disappear forever in our new century. Conversely, once again, philosophy as a very important professional discipline should be taken as the object and material of theoretical-semiotic studies, somewhat organized along the line indicated by the GS-model. From this point of view, we can understand that either the GS-model or institutional semiotics implies an extremely profound significance for effectively advancing the scientific-theoretical level of human sciences.

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## Supplements

Several points of reference follow about reconstructing theoretical semiotics during the preparation of this chapter.

### 1. Problems of crises in the humanities and theoretical semiotics

We human beings exist in an unprecedentedly crucial double crisis today. Crisis-1 refers to the social-political-religious challenges that are universally understood as belonging to the traditional category; crisis-2 refers to the spiritual/intellectual-axiological disorders that function actively, but the related kernel—real knowledge of meaning and values, or the theoretical part of the humanities—remains structurally deactivated. Crisis-1, being of an empirical-practical and technological nature, has little to do with the humanities and is not our topic here; crisis-2, namely that of human-theoretical thought, is the right subject matter for us, although it is almost unsolvable, which is why we call it a “crisis”. No individual thinkers could or should be the cause of it; instead, crisis-2, the spiritual/theoretical one, must be the logical product of the historical development. In intellectual history we have frequently experienced moving stories concerning the interactions between intellectual/spiritual crises and the related revolutionary turning points for overcoming them. Such kinds of great intellectual events that still prevail in our present-day textbooks can hardly be imagined in this century; despite that, our humanities world has become increasingly institutionalized and profitable and its professional feasibility/utility persists. The professional institutionalization in general and the unification between theoretical researches and stabilized procedures in particular have successfully led to segregation between the proceeding of the theoretical humanities and their



actual impacts on scientific truths. The reason is so evidently indicated that the criteria of theoretical-scholarly efforts in the humanities are almost exclusively defined within their strictly institutionalized realm without any genuine reference to the social/historical reality, if the latter does not merely refer to the so-called reality inserted in texts. The current epistemological separation between verbal texts and the true world becomes part of the external causation of crisis-2. ●wing to the institutionalized separation between the two theoretical humanities, including its central part—philosophy—so-called “thinkers” have lost their historical ideal: becoming the “intellectual heroes” to help cope with the intellectual-spiritual crises of their times. The symptom of this unhappy judgment can be clearly indicated by the fact that almost no great philosophers over the past century ever played such an intellectual-heroic role; some of them exerted many negative influences on the growth of human sciences. As the author has pointed out before, this historical phenomenon is essentially also caused by the structural evolution of the humanities as such: the philosophical as well as all kinds of theoretical practices in the humanities have been faced with a basic revolutionary phase in history, namely the comprehensive interdisciplinary-theoretical reorganization, which is on the other hand in sharp conflict with the strong professional institutionalization movements pushed forward and controlled by the pro-materialist-directed globalization drive. It is exactly in terms of the above-mentioned context that the semiotic spirit is to be grasped. In other words, why has the semiotic spirit, rather than any activities using this academic mark in the community life, been able to implicitly and explicitly appear for the past century? Its essence lies in the critical focus on the interdisciplinary scientific-directed theoretical reflections on all contemporary theoretical achievements in the humanities. For the same reasons, however, the current semiotic practices have obviously been losing their original theoretical-renovation impulses, becoming more and more popularized and commercialized. This tendency has led us to divide the contemporary semiotic movement into two categories: semiotics-1, as the currently predominant professional main streams, and semiotics-2, as a generic ideal index for continuing and further modernizing the original conceptions of the modern theoretical semiotic founders. ●nce again, we should point out that the division of semiotic conceptions is also made by the natural tendency formed within modern intellectual history. Still, the concept of semiotics-2, in spite of it being a mere ideal model, has become an implicative index today that can, more clearly than any philosophy, present the basic situations and horizons concerning crisis-2. The significance or connotation of “the semiotic proper”, rather than the fact of

any related products achieved in academia with this title today, is, far from being a problem of professional achievements, connected with the spiritual future of human beings. Thus, so-called semiotics-2 should not be recognized as part of the semiotic profession whose main body consists of semiotics-1. As a theoretical ideal model it should be the central part of the entire theoretical humanities. In fact, it should also be a general symbol of the intellectual/theoretical/spiritual desideratum implicitly cherished by mankind for elaborating its rational-existential level. Nevertheless, because of the actual historical involvements of the contemporary semiotic movement, we would like to point out that semiotics-1 (departmental semiotic studies) still partly present a ready epistemological window from which we could more easily feel the spirit of semiotics-2, so long as the latter is able to get rid of any out-of-date philosophy-fundamentalist bias.

## 2. The professional theorist looks like the game player operating in fixed procedures

There have been two kinds of conceptual compositions of the term semiotics over recent decades: its actual reality as a social-academic movement (semiotics-1)<sup>33</sup> and its theoretical ideal implied in its relevant theoretical and explosive history (semiotics-2). Actual professional semiotics has been organized according to a rather flexible principle: any kind of self-claimed studies of signs and meanings in the humanities are eligible participants or members without any truly strict scientific-evaluative restrictions.<sup>34</sup> It is true that for the past century there have appeared a lot of great theoreticians, including several great founders of modern semiotic-theoretical trends and later creative successors after

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<sup>33</sup> Since my first personal contact with the IASS in Toronto in 1988 when I was the first Chinese to participate in IASS activities, in my experience of its events over the past 30 years I have found almost all its organizing members have only been concerned about the increase of the number of its international members, obviously paying less attention to the checking of the qualifications of these members. The final index of the so-called success of the IASS has been exclusively indicated by the increased number of total members at the international level.

<sup>34</sup> Since my participation in international semiotic activities began in 1982, the only organizing principle I have directly watched in the IASS has been characterized by its lack of scientific restrictions on the quality of participants: namely, any self-claimed “semiotician” has been welcome. The only workable organizing principle is mainly concerned about the enlargement of the number of participants! This organizing principle itself is determinative for a necessary separation between the actual semiotics-1 and the ideal semiotics-2.

World War II who have attained important achievements along the genuine semiotic orientation and became the true movers of the current semiotic movement. Nevertheless, the exclusive pan-materialist-oriented globalization begins to re-orient the axiological/epistemological directions of all kinds of intellectual practices during the same period. The semiotic movement has increasingly lived in the heterogeneous tension of divergent forces. Obviously, the pan-materialist spirit today becomes the uniquely predominant trend and its stronger impact on the humanities is realized in the ever-increasing strengthening of the academic market and its system of multi-institutionalization. As a result, accordingly, the semiotic profession can only exist and act in the multiply-institutionalized realm following the fixed sets of criteria, rules and channels which are systematically reorganized and controlled by the new academic-sociological logic based on pan-materialist/commercialist principles.

One of the results of the pan-institutional development has been the development of two kinds of scientific operations in semiotic professions: the traditional one, following the typical scientific spirit/norms, and the post-modernist/opportunist one, following the dominant-procedural regularities co-determined by various institutional forces. The latter has become more and more predominant in the academic field today. By doing research, scholars take account of the related factors and exactly follow the institutional procedures that could really lead to successful results. Thus professional scholars must exactly obey the fixed norms and rules, paying close attention to their operative precisions in scholarly practice. Far from being a free and creative thinker, he or she becomes today a game player whose active steps as such must be self-restricted within the objective game system. The theoretical humanities look like a multiple game system that is under the government and control of sets of authorities or powers that maintain the general orientation of the game-playing field and final aims in co-ordination with the orientation and style of the general globalization process. Being an educated procedural operator, a scholar has already chosen to be obedient to the objective game logic and essentially given up his or her own creative spontaneity in practice. It is not difficult to see that even the artistically-styled scholarly theorists are also similar to the game player within the fixed chessboard, just like any modernist/post-modernist artists who still need to follow some implicitly formed workable norms/rules and the valid “fashions” decided by the art market and customers’ tastes for artistic commodities. So the most serious loss of a pan-post-modernist scholar is disclosed by him losing his own independent will/self-decision in his creation. His creative freedom is naturally restricted by the professional-

institutionalizing models accepted/authorized by his collective community. Accordingly, humanities theories no longer attempt to scientifically explain and analyze the realities of various objects but are applied for professional-pragmatic purposes.

### **3. The distinction between the thinking and the operative ways of thinking**

What is the essential part of the theoretical thinking about human affairs in history? Customarily, we take the accumulation of related knowledge or the intellectual message as the substantial embodying of thinking; especially, in terms of intellectual history, the substantial body of scholarly life is embodied in education and the transition of knowledge that is exactly reflected in the passing on of intelligent messages among people. So the very central part of intellectual activities is expressed in the passing on of accumulated knowledge that has been generally accepted by the learning authorities. Regarding the humanities, it is characterized by the obvious fact that the acknowledged knowledge or results of thinking in the related fields indicates two aspects: its timely establishment and its temporary popularity. The thoughts on human affairs or in the humanities present themselves as successive fashions of ideas multiply and disorderly formulated; that means the very intelligent medium or message of the related knowledge, as the solid composition of thought, are only the historical and spiritual material to be handled sociologically within historical frameworks. These compositions or media are to be operated upon to gain social-intellectual recognition. Then what is the essential part of thinking or thought regarding the humanities now: the message as material-media as such or the way to handle it? If the former can be reduced to a certain solid part of intelligent media with fixed contents and forms (knowledge as such), the latter is more complicatedly formulated. While it is the latter that is the determinative part, in comparison with the former, for carrying out the formulation/function of thought in the humanities, its capability, potential and effect can hardly be understood and described clearly. Traditionally, thinkers in the humanities are encouraged to be creatively original in their scholarly practices, but on the other hand the very key term “originality” or “talent genies” in history have been very ambiguously and arbitrarily grasped too. So-called original thoughts in intellectual history concerning humanity, in contrast with those about the natural and social worlds, are similar to some intellectual entertainments that are purely arbitrarily defined or accepted. Nevertheless,

the accumulated knowledge in these fields can become important spiritual wealth or treasure habitually appreciated in human societies.

Their effective existence and productive function today can be further confirmed and strengthened in the highly institutionalized academia and culture; the substantial part of them comprises historically accumulated knowledge, including the “material-content” and “ways to handle the material-content”. The latter, as the previously effective ways of handling or operating the former, are also reduced to the category of material-plan at a functional sense. These two parts, taken from historical sources, can form the currently workable materials and channels carrying out actual learning, teaching and studying. But the essence and its definition of the new ways of handling all kinds of intellectual materials remain unclear; they are the matter to be practically employed but are yet to be scientifically defined and examined.

In a popular term we may simplify the epistemological division between the traditional type of humanities and the new-century type of human sciences by dint of the new understanding of the orderly relationship between the material-content (embodied in all historical masterpieces embodied in their textuality) and the way to handle the material. If you only effectively pass on the accumulated material (textual masterpieces), that can hardly be named as “thinking” meaningfully today. The thought or thinking about human affairs in our new era can no longer be expressed in mastering and conveying accumulated knowledge as such; the term “thinking” will no longer be defined by the memory and keeping of fixed texts but must be redefined by a more meaningful way of thinking in dealing with textualities and their complicated structures. These added connotational semantic elements are just semiotic in nature. Thus the thinking does not only refer to the text-material but also to the way to handle the text-material. We may broadly say that the traditional scholarly way in the humanities is textual-memorizing in style while the modern scholarly way in human sciences is textual-reinterpreting in style. The latter refers to a priority focused on the operative aspect of thinking with a purpose to enrich creative energy and to advance practical efficiency.

The “thinking” or “theoretical thinking” is not completely contained in the related texts or results of finished texts of earlier thinking; in other words, past wisdom is not limited to the finished texts accumulated individually. And all such historically transmitted texts, far from being different “units of complete valuable thought”, are similar to the mere material to be continuously reorganized by later thinkers in their new contexts; the historical material units consist of related experiences, contents, methods, positions and historical contexts. In essence the

historically accumulated and transmitted thoughtful texts play only a role as data-material to be used by successive thinkers through their new subjective/objective conditions. So, facing the rich treasure of historical texts, we cannot think that we have already possessed fixedly attained intellectual values; what we acquire from the historical heritage is merely the material or data for continuously processing it according to the changed valid operative conditions.

If we regard the historical texts as satisfactorily finished or complete “thought units” or the pragmatically-feasible “intellectual entirety”, rather than as the organizable material, we would be restricted in advance by the historically-formed epistemological/methodological frames. Then we would not feel the necessity or possibility to tackle the historically transmitted text-material in an interdisciplinary term. In fact, we should anatomize those historical textual entireties at first and make all of them into the sources of material or data to be reorganized according to completely new strategic/tactical channels that are accepted today.

#### **4. Faith supported by rational reasoning and the pragmatic utility of faith**

Although the humanities are generally taken as useless in their materialist productions, if we keep in mind what we distinguished above about the faith problem, they could obtain a quasi-materialist utility as the instrument for providing pleasure/comfort. Far from being taken as the genuine ways for exploring scientific truths, the materially useless humanities can instead play a significant role about so-called theoretical-psychological satisfaction. Scholars or thinkers are engaged in miscellaneous contents of theorization and imagination resulting in various historical texts that can certainly undertake a function to offer some actually effective “spiritual medications” for solving psychological worries or pains in human life, such as the dread of death and wishes for everlasting life, or functioning as a kind of medicine to release various life pains. We can easily remember a great number of such examples in philosophical history.

Scientific and psychologically-satisfying purposes are of essentially divergent sorts but they can hardly be distinguished in the theoretical humanities. As a matter of fact, at present, both have been widely and deeply mixed together; or, quasi-scientific practices have been self-deceptively taken as true-scientific ones. The “scientific” or “scholarly” becomes a beautifying way to play such an intentionally misleading role in the professional fields. In terms of this explanation, we can further

understand why traditional disorderly conceptions about the humanities, or at least theoretical humanities, could have so constantly existed in human civilizations. If any kind of practicable combinations of historical texts can be so easily accepted as important scholarly achievements, the remaining task may lie in the art of how to create attractive tricks to allure the audience or followers to be really satisfied by the artificial textual devices.

A comparative explanation can be given from the history of manipulative arts for creating faith among masses. As is well known, the more illiterate masses of people are, the firmer their life faith could be. The firmness of faith among a populace could be so easily invented or produced by smart “masters” in different historical generations. So the successful establishments of faith-systems have nothing to do with rational knowledge or thought but with the efficiency of the art and technique of stimulating rhetoric embodied in the affirmable effect/solacing quality of the faiths created. Similar pragmatic logic, in a rough comparison, holds in the ecology of theoretical rhetoric techniques in the theoretical humanities too. If the confirmable criterion is not defined by simple, firm faith in the theoretical truth, the formalist-rhetorical sophistication and supernatural-speculative complicity as such could be misjudged as quasi-logical proofs.

### **5. Professional-institutional conditioning and the required subjective spontaneity**

The historically unprecedented and even uniquely presented challenging question facing the humanities theoretician today is about the essential confusion or mixture of truth-concern and career-concern regarding the life view of humanities scholars. As we pointed out at the outset, in general almost all scholars in the field are exclusively concerned about their own professional careers as well as the related academic achievements whose evaluation or judgment is systematically rooted in social and academic institutions all over the world. There are seemingly no longer independent concerns about pure human science truths, with the exception of if the latter happen to be profitable in academic practice. The basic loss of truth-concern in scholars’ mentality makes people blind to the essential and crucial shortcomings and problematics of the theoretical humanities in contrast with natural, technological and social scientific sciences. The scholarship of the humanities is almost universally reduced to the self-contained campus functioning as the practical means for self-literary cultivation and the related professional processing. Accordingly, because of the concomitant loss of ethical spontaneity, scholars just neglect the scientific necessity for the revolutionary reconstruction of the

theoretical humanities inspired by the general scientific progresses of the new world. On the other hand, this epistemological negligence leads to three related consequences in our era: the existence of the sharp crisis; the potentiality of the scientific-spiritual revival; and sincere pragmatic engagement.

The term “humanism” as a “life philosophy” today contains two basic added aspects: the epistemological and the pragmatic.

- a) The epistemological dimension: the scientific inclination of any kind in this world is implicative of a universal semantic consistence or at least a coherent mutual-communicability regarding meaning, valuation and purpose among all people existing in the single community. All oppositional positions are in fact contrary to the scientific spirit that must be in essence consistent with all kinds of scientific practices, especially in the natural and social sciences. By contrast the humanities, especially their theoretical practices, are characterized by their general semantic disorder and mutual divergence. This lasting historical fact has been always interpreted as the natural indication of artistic-spiritual style, but people constantly neglect its evil historical consequences: struggles, cruelty, violence and wars, as well as possible self-destruction. All such negative phenomena in history have not been due to so-called conflicts between different civilizations but actually due to conflicts concerning meanings, values, beliefs or faiths at the mental level of human nature expressed in different historical traditions. Those mental elements concerning universal human nature are the objects of the scientific investigations of human sciences. Therefore the ideal of human sciences should be carried out at this general dimension common to all human beings, for only genuinely scientific attempts about humanity’s affairs can establish the basic semantic domain in which different human beings can attain reasonably mutually-restricted agreements for a more desirable existence for the entirety of humanity. The human sciences are directed to help establish such a more feasible epistemological frame for reconstructing the humanities. By contrast, all religious, ontological and metaphysical elaborations, despite their respective social/cultural utility, should be disconnected with the rational/scientific business of human sciences with respect to problems about meaning, value and faith. Simply speaking, we would do better to distinguish between the traditional humanities and the modern human sciences in our conceptual designs.



- b) The pragmatic dimension: either for carrying out human sciences or applying them to different human projects, we have to insist on true human sciences direction and methods based on the ever-renewing achievements of all sorts of recent sciences. As we have pointed out frequently, any workable and mutually-consistent humanist projects must be guided by commonly accepted principles and methods that must be based on suitable scientific approaches. But in the current world of theoretical humanities, their scholarly tendencies are indicative of widely divergent orientations and purposes. The so-called intellectual pluralism and creative freedom characteristic of the humanities are only the terms of epistemological and pragmatic disorderly alternatives, lacking in the required workability. As a matter of fact, the so-called workability of the humanities and their theoretical practices can only be performed within professionalized disciplinary systems and pre-regulated educational procedures. Unlike natural and social sciences, which must be workable and objectively examinable, the humanities and their so-called theoretical elaborations are never asked to be workable or applicable outside of the campus area. The serious outcome of this general tendency is expressed in the negligence of the possible reconstructive potentiality of the accumulated intellectual sources in humanities of all kinds. Furthermore, the so-called negligence of the potential power of the intellectual/spiritual sources of the humanities is especially related to the objective necessity and desirability of mankind for acquiring the truly workable scientific-operative tools obtained in historical, psychological, religious, literary, artistic and ethical realms. We human beings cannot be so blindly pushed forward by the uniquely-correct pan-materialist driving force to formulate human life so universally one-dimensional in future. In fact, humanities scholars/thinkers are extremely enwrapped into non-realistic, non-positive, non-experiential and quasi-artistic-directed ways of reasoning and imagination. Artistic or mechanic-scientific alternative theories could be the means for physical profits and psychological comfort, but they have nothing to do with the genuinely qualified human sciences. For the sake of really attaining the intellectual/spiritual praxis, however, besides intelligibility, another necessity is the revival of humanist ethics, which should be triggered by the minority of humanities theorists. Nevertheless, as the consequence of all-round institutionalization, thinkers or scholars in the humanities, in contrast with earlier generations

before WWII, are losing or sharply decreasing their original/natural sensibility/instincts about good/evil and true/false, despite having acquiring much more knowledge.

## CHAPTER SIX

# REN (仁)-HUMANIST ETHICS AND SEMIOTICS IN FUTURE: ON FOUR TYPES OF RATIONALITY<sup>35</sup>

The Nanjing IASS Congress, as the first genuinely global semiotics congress in IASS history, should become a forum where the modern semiotic movement is systematically reexamined and reevaluated with respect to its achievements and negative experiences alike during the past one hundred years; then, within the intellectually expanded context, we should reconsider how to make it progress further and more creatively. It is well known that all contemporary applied semiotics have obviously achieved great successes in different fields. The main problem remaining in our semiotic field today is still related to so-called general semiotics or semiotic theory in general. There are two reasons why general semiotics has been important all the time for us until today: first, all modern semiotic practices are related to either philosophical or general linguistic theories; and second, the current semiotic way of thinking is related to the development of human sciences as a whole. In other words, considering its origins and future development, semiotics is connected with a much more general theoretical background that defines its identity and its prospects. That is why the discussion about general semiotics has always been a key part in the history of IASS activities for the past few decades, and its significance is also due to the fact that there have existed too many divergent approaches of general semiotic theories within the scholarly experiences of IASS; therefore, the phenomenon of this general theoretical divergence itself should be clarified first. In addition, when the IASS is expanded to the non-European/American areas, including the land of Chinese civilization, the problems about the identity of general semiotics

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become even more seriously important and challenging, for they are also very widely and deeply tied with the orientational problem of modernizing Chinese humanities, and the latter is even linked with the self-critical reexamination of modern western human sciences as well.

The present chapter attempts to talk about the several key issues regarding a global semiotic theory in terms of a present-day Chinese intellectual and historical stance. In general, this chapter contains three main sections: A) a redefinition of general semiotics; B) a protection of scientific rationality; and C) the necessity of reestablishing ethical subjectivity against commercialized professionalization.

### **A. The new conception of semiotics: Semiotics and semiotic elements in our academic-globalization era**

The essence of semiotics lies in finding out the more relevant, relatively independent theoretical elements from different modern disciplines and then recombining them in specially designed projects. This is equivalent to interdisciplinary-directed programs. The interdisciplinary tendency of semiotics should be scientifically-orientated in nature; this is similar to what we have seen in the development of natural sciences: the progress of the latter is made through alternating processes of disciplinary specialization and interdisciplinary communication. Similar scientific progress in the humanities is realized first of all through breaking up the disciplinary barrier formed in the traditional academic compartmentalization. When different national traditions of the humanities in the world have been intermixed or mutually influenced, the interdisciplinary scholarly programs have been able to be much more developed and the accumulated scholarly material could be enriched. Accordingly, cross-cultural semiotics as a regular academic field can be established. That is why we can say the emergence of the present-day cross-cultural semiotics has launched a new stage for the modern semiotic movement and therefore it is reasonable for us to further strengthen cross-cultural-directed interdisciplinary exploration in our family. In addition, in the world of western social and human sciences, for the past few decades we have seen an unprecedented increase in the interdisciplinary development of the humanities that is mainly based on the contemporary structural movements. These two noteworthy interdisciplinary developments have changed the panoramas of current global semiotics and even global human sciences as well. Firstly, the basically changed semiotic situation presses us to more suitably redefine semiotic science with a result that on the one hand the new semiotic vision would reasonably prevent the current tendency of general semiotics from

going back to the single disciplinary-centric notion formed under professional-competitive pressures, and on the other the double interdisciplinarity of these new semiotic practices would oppose the current semiotic tendency to search for a certain type of philosophy as its theoretical foundation. It seems that the direct result of these two efforts keeps a theoretical and generative tie with the customary, simplistic definition of semiotics as a study of signs. No, the multiple changes of contemporary semiotic practices can no longer accord with such a simplified definition based on mere linguistics and the intellectual history of signs. Instead, **semiotics should be a study of synthetically institutionalized and institutionalizing mechanisms of the formation, operation and effectuation of semantic and communicative production in general.** It represents a general epistemological and methodological development of global human sciences in our new century. ● in other words, the semiotic practices are definitely part of the entire human sciences of the world. It is due to this significant link that the semiotic way of thinking could become so important today. Therefore the semiotic practice signifies an epoch-defining turning point for the scientific modernization of human sciences. That is why we should get together here in the Chinese historic capital of Nanjing to reconsider the past, present and future of the global semiotic movement.

According to this more flexible understanding of the term ‘semiotics’, we may accept a double way of dealing with this complicated scholarship: the one refers to the more concrete semiotic projects in our customary semiotic practices that mostly work at a tactical, methodological-operative level; and the other refers to the more general, interdisciplinary-theoretical way of thinking that works at an abstractive, epistemological, strategic level and is connected to the overall situations of theoretical human sciences. The two sections of general and departmental semiotics should cover both the western and non-western parts. This new semiotic globalization also means, on principle, the end of the traditional European-American-centric semiotic history, which has been increasingly absorbed or shared by non-European/American academic areas as well.

### **B. Safe-guarding of rationality: Post-modernism is a philosophy typical of the commercialization-dominance era**

The above-mentioned new scientific task of semiotics needs first of all to maintain or strengthen the comprehensive implication of rationality in theoretical practices in the humanities. The first principle for our current

semiotic movement should further emphasize the incomparably important significance of the concept of rationality that needs to be understood or redefined today as a multi-layered rational scheme in terms of our interdisciplinary/cross-culturally changed academic world, rather than as certain traditional types of fixed principles. In other words, the ever-more intensified demand for academic rationality should be realized in dividing the top theoretical level and the ones applied next should be used in the present-day professional systems. Regarding the task of semiotic renovations, we do not need to limit ourselves to those currently available operative patterns employed in our semiotic-theoretical profession, if the latter prove less productive in promoting our true scientific projects. The interdisciplinary/cross-cultural tendency of current semiotics allows us to reorganize our semiotic strategy through firstly reestablishing our top rational principles in terms of the entirety of human intellectual history.

In the history of humanist rationality, there emerged two big different traditional origins over 2,000 years ago: the pre-Christian (pre-supernatural) Greek philosophy and the pre-Confucianist (pre-imperialist) Chinese ethics. The Greek origin is characterized by its logic-centric reasoning and the Chinese one is characterized by its humanist ethical empiricism. The former has been transformed into different stages throughout history, including its modern western scientific-technical type; the latter, despite its historical deformations, has always maintained its essential spirit in Chinese intellectual/cultural history. The central identity of rationality can be redescribed as a pan-scientificity, which must comprise two necessary parts: logical reasoning and empirical reality. The two essential parts are contained in all western natural sciences with the exception of phenomena in connection with the empirical realm of subjective world.

When we call semiotics a science, it should be originally founded and further checked by the two criteria of original rationality, which are basically embodied in their modern versions. In light of this we may practically mention four typical examples of human rationality which are connected with the notion of semiotic rationality mentioned here:

1. The empirical-pragmatic principle, which is typically embodied in the modern history of England;
2. The logical-systematic principle, which is typical in the modern history of German-speaking countries;
3. Social/cultural positivism, which is typically expressed in the modern history of France;

4. Humanistic-empirical ethics, which is essentially linked or spiritually realized in the long course of Chinese intellectual history.

The first three principles, originating in the Graeco-Roman traditions, are exactly those employed in natural and social sciences. The fourth appears dialectically in Chinese despotic civilization. Owing to the unavoidable western-leaning modernization of China, the same modernizing tasks of human sciences in general and semiotics in particular tend to be in entire coherence with the first three principles with respect to the actual human and social worlds. In other words, humanist ethics provides human sciences with an additional empirical and actual ethical rationality that can be engaged in active productive interaction with the other three principles in terms of a commonly accepted empirical-humanist ethical precondition. Unlike all other kinds of scientific practices, the human sciences are uniquely characterized by their necessary ethical underpinnings. This heterogeneous/consistent twin-composition of the objective-scientific (cognitive) dimension and the subjective-ethical (pragmatic) dimension in the human sciences proves to be the very reason why it is most difficult for us to make the traditional humanities transform into the modern human sciences. In this chapter we attempt to handle this problem through more precisely redefining the concepts of “rationality” and “scientificity” first.

It is due to the enlightening impact of modern western scientific knowledge that modern Chinese thinkers became capable of reflecting their own traditional thoughts and culture in rational/scientific terms 100 years ago. (The time at which the original version of this chapter was presented at the international semiotic congress in Nanjing was exactly 100 years after the founding of modern China in Nanjing.) Gradually we are finding that during the long history of pre-scientific China, a highly rationally-directed humanist ethics had been lurking beneath her social-political despotic system. Its uniquely pure empirical-rational character would present another type of rationality concerning the basic subjective ethical wisdom that could be so surprisingly able to be more consistent with the rational-logical reasoning of modern western social/human sciences. While regarding western traditions of the humanities, there are always lots of metaphysical/supernatural elements involved that would become obstructive elements against the scientific-directed construction of human sciences. In this sense, this Asian empirically-directed, traditional humanist ethical wisdom, without any transcendent/supernatural elements, could be said to be almost a unique one in human history. Practically speaking, this author finds that, because of this special character, this

ethical wisdom can be certainly applied for promoting the scientific development of the general human sciences.

By the way, we need to explain that the so-called four principles as such cannot be confused with the entire formative mechanisms of actual historical-shaped philosophical phenomena that contain those principles, whether completely or partly. Today we can and should epistemologically discern between and methodologically select relevantly beneficiary rational elements from related historically-transmitted rational experiences in western intellectual history. For example, there are a great number of rational elements within various departments in philosophy as a professional-operative field that could be selectively accepted today in reference to our different projects, but we do not need to accept any philosophical doctrines in their entirety as the ready rational foundation used in our present projects. Furthermore, even some great classical philosophies, particularly their metaphysical/ontological parts, can no longer be accepted as constantly valid rational systems that can be used to guide our new way of reasoning because our present theoretical contexts have been totally changed. In short, we attempt to distinguish the scientific-rational elements implied in philosophy from the philosophical institutionalization rooted in the traditional academic framework. In light of this, any post-modern ontological rhetoric should definitely be excluded from scientific-directed semiotics. By the way, any post-modernist nihilism or extreme relativism has already become the main theoretical obstacle for the progress of new Chinese human sciences.

If the selective use of the above four rational principles can become our scientific-operative foundations, we could become more able to guarantee the rational orientation of semiotic and human-scientific modernization. Thus, human sciences, including their semiotic part, should be in harmony with natural and social sciences as well because they share common rational principles based on worldly reality and empirical logic. The identity of scientific practice implies reality and logic. If natural and social sciences do not allow any transcendent elements in their composition, the same should be the case with human sciences. When Derrida opposes the conception of human sciences as such, he did in fact oppose the scientific spirit itself. The main obstacles of the rational modernization of semiotics and human sciences rest in two intellectual sources: existential nihilism and narrow-minded quasi-scientism. The former tends to make semiotics look like an artistic game and the latter tends to make semiotics lose its really relevant rational elements. Simply put, the latter conceives semiotics mechanically following the model or technique of natural sciences. The both, in different ways, undermine the



genuine rationality of semiotics and human sciences alike. In consequence, objectively speaking, the both represent intellectual trends to serve the benefits of commercialized technical globalization in this world.

### **C. A Justification of subjectivity: A logical necessity for the reestablishment of ethical subjectivity in humanities academia**

The above sections are about a new interpretation of the identity and nature of semiotic science, while the present section is about semiotic pragmatics; namely, how can the minds of we theoretical semioticians be aroused to more independently reorganize our academic efforts for realizing the rational task mentioned above? The present-day situations of the global technical-commercialized world are certainly in co-ordination with the normal developments of natural and social sciences, which indicates an essential disfavor against the scientific rationalization of human sciences that include semiotics as their scientifically reorganizing/modernizing weapon. In such a totally commercialized world, all academic professions cannot help following the rules of the marketing domination. Accordingly, humanities scholars and semioticians living in such a professionalized world tend to give up their traditional philosophical motivation for independently searching for the objective truth and meaning of existence; instead, they search for mere professional profits. This social-objectively fixed tendency is structurally contrary to the scientific spirit/aim for rationalizing human sciences, because the scientific practices mean the exact motive/aim for pursuing objective truth and the deeper meaning of life (in contrast to the majority who live just for a happy physical survival). This is another aspect of our epistemological reflection on the present-day semiotic movement. The scholar lives in a mutually oppositional tension between the different philosophies of life: either doing scholarship for the sake of attaining truth of various sorts or for the sake of practical benefits only. ●n the other hand we know clearly that one of the common characteristics of contemporary western philosophical streams indicates a general tendency to avoid/destroy the theory of subjectivity and subjective ethics. Even both rational and irrational ways of thinking existing under the pressure of present-day technology-dominating social logic hold a similar anti-subjective epistemological position. By contrast, according to humanist ethics, without autonomy of subjectivity, there is no longer an independent choice for the scholar. In addition, also according to humanist ethics, the subjective-ethical and the objective-moral belong to different

epistemological dimensions. And, as far as I know, in western ethical history, the two directions have always been mutually confused at the epistemological level. Briefly, there exist three different topics of priority in the ethical way of thinking: personal happiness, interpersonal justice and personal attitudes towards the former two. The last one belongs to the ethics of subjectivity. So we are absolutely unable to exclude or delete the subjective aspect as an “attitudinal ethics”. The historical Chinese humanist ethics uniquely keeps a focus on the pragmatic wisdom of a subjective ethics that happens to be reflected in our present-day humanist-directed scientific reconstruction practice.

Heidegger, as the first enemy of rationality in the last century, cherished a life-long ambition to destroy the orientation of Husserl’s rational phenomenology with a deeper hidden ambition to destroy the justification of subjective ethics. It is regretful to find that even so many western phenomenology philosophers could have been misguided by his ontological rhetoric implying this ethical-excluding element. It is a pity that even so many experts in Husserlian theory have also overlooked such an important implication of subjective ethics in Husserlian learning. In fact, without attaining his final ethical stage during his whole life, Husserl still provided a uniquely solid foundation for reestablishing the notion of ethical subjectivity in a modern psychological-logical way.

It is highly interesting to note that there exists an alien type of “theory” of ethical subjectivity, namely the one that operates in an intuitive and practical mode, which is the so-called “learning of the mind” of Wang Yangming (who lived during the Ming Dynasty) along the lines of traditional Chinese *Ren*-humanist ethics. The doctrine is that the true impetus of ethical action exists only in one’s genuine awakening soul and is actually only stimulated by the “*Affektion*” of ethical consciousness; namely, true ethical conscience and practicable ethical action can hardly be aroused only through grasping the pure intellectual thought (namely, reading the text). In other words, the ancient Chinese philosopher Wang Yangming’s learning indeed explores how to build up a truly firm subjectivity that is able to make ethical choices realizable; or, without such creatively-living subjectivity, true ethical practice is hardly possible. This thought, expressed through his philosophical-poetic epistles, implies a deeply realistically-directed pragmatic-epistemological meaning for modern ethics and even for promoting the current theoretical human sciences, when modern humanist theoreticians are simply lacking in genuine instinctive power for courageous actions in their own chosen careers. By contrast, we may penetrate into the key weak point of the logic-centrism of western ethics. As a typical example, we have to decline

Kant's doctrine of the so-called Absolute Imperative once again. It is Confucius who states this: the ethical subjectivity rooted in constant human nature can only be relatively, rather than absolutely, aroused. Both the best and the worst in human beings naturally belong to the few and the majority could be trained or advised to advance their probability of becoming better. That is all. This empirically-founded statement indicates that we should distinguish between subjective-ethical and objective-moral aspects; the latter should be realized in social, political and legal channels. By ethical humanism, we have to reaffirm that the general good quality of human life can only be maintained through establishing the justified social/political/legal systems from outside; all statements that the good moral quality of people is the guarantee of good society are scientifically unfounded. On the other hand, however, the task of modernizing the theoretical humanities indeed requires such free spontaneity of ethical subjectivity whose establishment-probability is becoming lower and lower nowadays than in earlier history. In this case we humanist theoreticians should double rather than weaken our efforts, and we should learn from ancient philosophers regarding their heroic personality rather than their out of date knowledge. It is both logically and practically true that firm ethical spontaneity is still the necessary condition for carrying out independent or free scholarly creations about modernizing human-scientific projects. There certainly exist no objective standards for truth and meaning within human sciences, but there does indeed exist the subjective freedom for adopting a persisting attitude directed towards truth.

In terms of different approaches, Husserl and Wang Yangming, the one logical-epistemological and the other intuitive-practical, similarly search for the really qualified ethical subjectivity. This seemingly subjectivist vision of ethics tends to regain its significance and efficiency in our present living conditions caused by the professional commercialization of our age. The topic raised here has nothing to do with any speculative reasoning but rather is related to the very social-empirical reality with respect to the life-style of humanistic scholars: to choose scientific truth or professional success in their careers?

In the slogan "Rereading Husserl" proposed by this author in China, we attempt to strengthen the exploration of the general theory of Husserlian subjectivity through semiotically excluding some related metaphysical-dogmatic remnants, namely finding the relevant theoretical elements by dint of our reorganized rational typology; and by the slogan "Rereading Wang Yangming", also suggested by the author in China, we attempt to modernize a hermeneutic ethics of subjectivity through semiotically excluding Confucianist-despotic social, political and

academic ideologies. Quite interestingly, it is the current western semiotic epistemology that urges us to reconnect the human sciences with eastern subjective ethics in empirical/positive rationalist terms.

## Supplement

### Li's Speech at the Concluding Session of the 11<sup>th</sup> IASS Congress

Technically speaking, Chinese semiotics remains much weaker than those in many other countries. But, honestly and realistically, China will become one of the strongest and richest semiotics centers in the near future, if it can follow a correct direction of development. In many other countries, semiotics is still taken as a single discipline for professional convenience; idealistically speaking, however, we have to insist that semiotics should spread and penetrated into almost all fields of social and human sciences in China, including both modern and traditional types as well as oriental and western leanings alike. China, besides her great success in material reconstruction over the past 35 years, should also be ambitious enough to become a top intellectual forum at the global level.

The semiotic world consists of two kinds of intellectual forces at two operative levels: a variety of disciplinary tactics and the interdisciplinary strategy. This academic mixture is on the one hand a natural phenomenon required by semiotic practice but on the other hand also becomes one of the roots of scientific controversy within semiotic activities. This semiotic tendency has been further strengthened recently because of the ever-increasing professional competition and institutionalization. The new social-academic situation presses us to reconsider the essence of the semiotic science. Why should there be semiotics? If semiotics, after narrowing its thematic scope, is made just another discipline among many, it will totally lose its spirit. For example, if you call cognition science as semiotics proper today, it would just be like what we have done with respect to the disciplines of logic and linguistics; we are faced with a categorical confusion. Yes, all these scientific disciplines are important and co-constitutive parts of the semiotic world; that means their specialized knowledge is even useful for many semiotic projects in other disciplines at the above-mentioned tactical level. Nevertheless those disciplines themselves are also autonomous academic units that can exist independently in the regular academic world without an obvious necessity to join further interdisciplinary activities. If these internally well-organized disciplines claim to be the central part of semiotics, that would hint at a tendency for some disciplinary-centric domination; namely, they attempt

to use their single disciplinary science to unify so many other ones. (This is just the reason why a truly Chinese semiotics cannot be formed until now: because of the competitive conflicts between different disciplines.) What I point out here has nothing to do with decreasing the significance of any semiotic-related scientific disciplines as such in our semiotic world, but we have to pay serious attention to a more reasonable readjustment of functional roles in our semiotic world. It is obvious that the strategic part of the above operative dichotomy is more related to those characteristic interdisciplinary-directed intellectual objects, particularly the traditional humanities. And by considering both western and non-western traditional humanities, the categorical confusion must become doubly-seriously increased. Because they are less scientific in their constitution, they will become the main objectives in our semiotic world. After all, the aim of semiotic operation is just to clarify semantic and constitutional ambiguity.

Therefore the very center of the current semiotic practice rests on those kinds of academic activities that are more related to interdisciplinary exploration. The latter is especially required by the modernization of the traditional humanities, namely philosophy, history, literature, arts and religions. Unlike the above-mentioned modernized scientific disciplines (which can definitely develop themselves along the respectively fixed scientific channels), the humanities still keep their traditional semantic and constitutional complexities which make them unable to reasonably provide a truly effective intellectual means to solve our very basic problems concerning the fortune of mankind. Accordingly, despite the solidly successful development of science, technology and commercialization over recent centuries, the central problems of value and faith related to the desirable existence of human beings mostly remain to be solved. We need a more reasonably constituted epistemology with a related and more scientific methodology to improve or modernize human knowledge of the traditional humanities.

After several hundred years of scientific development of disciplinary specialization, we humanities scholars find that a new era emerges when humanistic knowledge strongly requires a reorientation of its developmental strategy: namely, to strengthen the horizontal or interdisciplinary interaction. If this statement is true, the significant task should just be assigned to semiotics. "Semiotics" is just a term that can be used for any chosen content with any chosen aim. If we choose it to superfluously name a mere regularly-existing scientific discipline, we could make it more separate from the above-mentioned genuine semiotic spirit and orientation; but if we use it to name that more synthetic scholarly collective, it would be linked to a much greater intellectual goal: to modernize the theoretical

humanities at the global level. Semiotics, as the central force to help to innovate the knowledge of human science, remains in its infancy, it is not too old, instead it is still quite young. Let us international humanistic scholars work together to reorganize our problematic from both disciplinary and interdisciplinary angles in order to more effectively pursue our semiotic idealism.

By the way, this successfully held IASS Congress in Nanjing implies an additional historic sense: it has been held in one of the oldest areas of civilization which has just said good-bye to her lasting feudalist history through just passing the mark of one hundred years of self-modernization. It urgently needs a new epistemology and methodology in her intellectual reconstruction. It should be our semiotics that offers such a reasonably promising hope. Finally, as one of the original designers of this great congress, let me sincerely express our thanks to Nanjing Normal University and its Foreign Language College headed by Prof. Zhang Jie and the IASS Board headed by Prof. Eero Tarasti.

This congress, initiated six years ago, cannot be realized without their continuing creative efforts in our present and ever more complicated world. Let me also express my sincere thanks to many other international scholars who have been engaged in promoting eastern-western semiotic cooperation, especially Prof. Roland Posner and Prof. Gloria Whitalm, our two honorary IASS presidents. Finally, let us thank the excellent team of the NNU Committee headed by Professors Zhang Jie, Xin Bin and Yan Zhijun, and especially Gu Xiaomei, Ji Haihong and Wang Yongxiang for their whole-hearted devotion to organizing this historic international meeting. Many thanks to all participants who have come to Nanjing from every corner of the world.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# SEMIOTICS AS THE RATIONAL ORGANIZER OF GLOBAL HUMAN SCIENCES— SEMIOTIC THEORY: WESTERN PHILOSOPHY-CENTRALISM VS. GLOBAL INTERDISCIPLINARY THEORY<sup>36</sup>

The problems of semiotic theory today should be reconsidered in terms of the entire intellectual situations of the world. Semiotic problems can hardly be solved entirely within the existing international semiotic scholarship as such.

### 1. Theoretical crisis

“Theoretical confusion/conflict”, as a topic expressed in several IASS meetings over the past three decades, tends to be popularly described as a “theoretical crisis”. In fact it is an effect of the constant incongruity between the great intellectual ambition of founders of modern semiotics and the utilitarian-pragmatist developments of many subsequent followers who have been engaged in the commercialized, compartmentalized academic world of our times. The separation between the epistemological goal of semiotic theory and its technical-artistic sophistication has been obviously displayed for the past few decades. However we do not need to be disappointed at the consequence; it only hints that we are on the verge of another important turning point in our one-hundred-year history of semiotic development: a decisive transformation of the theoretical way of thinking from traditional philosophical fundamentalism to contemporary semiotic-rational pluralism. There are dozens of important philosophical

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systems in human history; each one of them claims to be the single solid basis for truth inquiry. Many of them have naturally attracted a number of followers in their pragmatic ways, whereas they are doomed to diverge from and argue against each other all the time. If semiotics is involved in this philosophically-tangled warfare it must necessarily produce a lot of epistemological and methodological confusion. Intellectual freedom would usually produce intellectual divergence. Each important philosophical heritage could contain its own intellectual value and historical influence, but no one is naturally eligible to provide a fundamental basis for constructing or founding all other branches of human knowledge. In a certain sense we may say that the philosophical discourse today can only be taken as one kind of material to be further elaborated and reorganized within a more comprehensive intellectual context, whose potential is already much richer and much more complicated than the traditional philosophical scope.

## 2. Non-Philosophy-centric semiotic theories

Accordingly, the theoretical confusion caused by philosophy-centric semiotic theories could be worse than the related philosophical situation, because it is based on certain fixed dogmas of historically authorized philosophers. Then semiotic theoreticians would be merely reduced to the passive followers of some chosen distinguished philosophers and accordingly lose their own theoretical spontaneity or rational originality. If so, what is semiotic theoretical spontaneity? It should be expressed in its independent inquiry into a more effective procedure for its special scientific operation in reference to the entire scientific world; accordingly it must be somewhat separated from traditional philosophical trends which are historically traced back to pre-modern scientific antiquity. Thus, the philosophically-directed semiotic theories would be easily influenced by the intellectual divergence in philosophy that is shaped by historical processes as such. We may find that every theoretical breakthrough in semiotic history displays a creative distance or diversion from the main track of traditional philosophy. This tendency is evidently exhibited in Saussure; it is the case with Peirce, an eccentric philosopher; and it is also indicated in Husserl, a typical academic philosopher of the twentieth century. With regard to the last one, we should perceive his subtle complicated efforts for distinguishing himself from the classical metaphysical heritages despite his close links to the philosophical tradition used as his material.



With respect to the relevant relations between philosophy and semiotic theory, what we talked about above about philosophy is mainly referred to the problem of internal and external philosophical institutions as well as their scholarly systems rather than its huge useful intelligent sources that can be understood in and applied to other different intellectual contexts, including the semiotic and hermeneutic ones. So a semiotic-theoretical task today lies in reorganizing different intellectual-theoretical elements produced in history in terms of a new semiotic-epistemological framework. This task requires us to make creative efforts alongside a more effective rational way beyond the traditional philosophical channel. For example, among contemporary continental philosophies, Husserl's phenomenology is in certain aspects obviously semiotic in character, while on the other hand it is also rooted in traditional philosophical systems. How to separate "semiotic elements" from "philosophical systems" will become an important task for our present-day phenomenological-semiotic inquiry. So-called phenomenologists, because of their sticking to the fundamental-philosophical framework, would rarely carry out this revolutionary task regarding epistemological reorganization. In general, as an interdisciplinary scholar, a so-called philosophy-semiotician should first learn from the original philosophical systems seriously and later disorganize it according to a semiotically recombined epistemological strategy. In short, we semiotic theoreticians must on the one hand continue learning seriously from philosophical knowledge while on the other avoid blindly following its dogmatic logical systems. That means semiotic theorizing implies a more creative way of thinking about the new typology of rationality derived from all human sciences.

To overcome western metaphysical fundamentalism, a globally-directed semiotician must appeal to a variety of intellectual sources in human history and practice, including all those from the non-western historical experience. In a sense, we need to avoid western deductive-logical dogmatism in terms of both western and non-western historical, cultural and ethical experiences and through an enlarged and multiplied typology of reason and rationality. As the almost singularly rigorous theoretical system in human history, western classical philosophy lives and works in its own historically fixed cultural determinations. A cross-cultural semiotic-hermeneutic approach will be helpful to relax the mechanic rigidity of the traditional western logical dogmatism. But the precaution of the logical dogmatism does not mean that we should turn to any oppositional side of irrationalism; instead, semioticians are always concerned with some more relevant types of reason and rationality during their increasingly deep scientific practices. Semiotics, which had learnt a

great deal from traditional philosophy, now searches a fresh new type of scientific rationality through its creative practice in reorganizing global human sciences.

### 3. Post-modernism is objectively to serve the benefit of the Establishments

Traditional philosophy consists of both its rational and irrational aspects. In some sense the irrational branch is also based on the same deductive reasoning in a reversed way. Why does the post-modern thinker prefer philosophical-centric to human-scientific theorizing? Because any scientific practices must imply the rational plus the empirical elements, whereas the philosophical way also contains the non-rational part that can be used in different irrational ways. Therefore, the post-modernist thinker purposes to divert from the scientific direction of semiotic theory in terms of an extremely relativist or nihilist epistemology. Yes, post-modernist scholars also attack philosophy, but in fact what they target is the rational aspect of it. In fact, they make great use of philosophical discourse, while their real target is a super-philosophical catchword: rationality in general. That means its target is not only philosophical rationality but also all types of rationality. With respect to reconstructing human sciences, the semiotic-scientific theory is oriented to a more effective rational objective while the post-modern semiotic theory attempts to deconstruct any rational effort. The fact is that theoretical semiotics tries to search for a more effective rationality to replace the less effective one represented by traditional philosophy. By contrast, post-modernist criticism of philosophy purposes to destroy rationality itself with the intention to obstruct the rational developments of semiotic theory as well as human sciences. In this sense, we could judge that post-modernism becomes the enemy of reason per se.

As a result, philosophy-centrism with its both rational and irrational trends could make semiotic theory either maintain a traditional, conservative, less effective rationality, or, intensified by post-modern thought, allure semiotics to give up rationality completely. One extreme type of it is that semiotics is regarded as a quasi-artistic game enjoyed, tolerated and materially supported by the multiple establishments of the world. Why? Let me raise a general question to post-modernists here first: why can natural and technical sciences maintain an absolute rationality in their theory and practice whereas human sciences, including semiotics, should divert from the scientific direction? May I describe this tendency as a “post-modern trick” in our times? Why did Derrida hate the identity of human sciences so much? Why did he not hold the same position for the

natural sciences? This is the most central question raised for epistemological discussion in our IASS family today. On the other hand, we can see another negative effect of the philosophy-centric semiotic theory alongside the quasi-natural-scientific dogmatism, namely the following of some simplified scientific patterns that only provide semiotics with less effective rationality for dealing with our highly complicated social and cultural reality. That means both rational and irrational philosophical systems rooted in the long course of history cannot be taken in their entirety as the natural basis for developing the new theoretical model of human sciences in general and semiotics in particular.

#### **4. Semiotics lives in Human Sciences in our globalization times**

As I have repeatedly emphasized before, semiotics is part of the human sciences that have historically suffered from the conceptual ambiguity of the latter. Semiotics is on the one hand the result of the influence of the rational development of natural and social sciences across history, and on the other it is the semantic reformer of all the humanities. Semiotics' task lies in a relevant cooperation with all kinds of sciences in order to firstly re-chart the semantic topography in human sciences. We may just say that human sciences are waiting for semiotics to improve and reform their semantic and inferential constitutions. So semiotics must stand by the side of science. A reasonable identity of human sciences becomes more and more justified when they become more and more globalized today. We may state that the main body of all non-European academic traditions belongs to the general category of the global humanities. Regarding the traditional Chinese humanities that are parallel to the western ones with respect to their cultural-intellectual range and academically/scholastically-expressed richness in history, they have been undergoing steady modernization for the past century. How and why did we Chinese scholars discover semiotics immediately after the end of the "Cultural Revolution", which has been so misinterpreted by many contemporary western thinkers? Because it seemingly provided a possibility for leading a double modernization of the humanities: of that in the west as well as of that in the non-west. Semiotics has firstly been an epistemological locomotive of modernization of the western humanities and secondly a guiding force for reorganizing traditional Chinese humanities. As regards both tasks, semiotics should be scientific and rational in nature. That is why we have a reason to take some western post-modern nihilism as the main obstacle to the intellectual and academic progress of Chinese humanities in our

globalization era. Rejecting intellectual progress amounts to rejecting the task of modernizing the traditional humanities. This is one reason why non-western semiotics should not blindly follow some western irrational semiotic fashions, including the post-modern one.

## 5. Philosophy-institutional determinations and free semiotic inquiry

Besides the philosophy-centric and post-modern semiotic trends, the present-day European-American semiotic theories also display a more stable tendency that are widely and deeply rooted in the academic institutions and social marketing which are determined by the social, technical and commercial framework of our times. This comprehensive academic institutionalization arranges semiotic operations within a fixed academic system that determines the methods and orientation of western semiotics. As global semiotics becomes more developed, the theoretical and practical problems facing non-western semiotics are more widely and more seriously raised. Living in different social and historical institutions, for example, Chinese semiotics has to reconsider the more suitable relations between the different academic institutional determinations. This is a more basic reason why semiotic globalization urges us to reflect on the academic and intellectual confrontation of different directions of semiotic practices. This multiple-institutional difference even makes us reconsider the entire problematic regarding semiotics and its institutional backgrounds. Therefore the present western theoretical orientation based on western social-academic institutions would not naturally be regarded as the available guidance for non-western semiotics. Accordingly, the interrelation among semiotics, the humanities and socio-historical institutions should become one of the main topics of semiotic epistemology in our global era today. In some sense, the apparent contrast between the European-American semiotic practices and the Chinese ones should be replaced by the more synthetic contrast of the two kinds of semiotic practices as the reorganizers of collected scientific material and the existing social-academic institutional conditions. We semioticians, as true originators inspired by an academically revolutionary ideal, should firstly reexamine these predominantly western-fashioned social-academic-institutional conditions in order to more productively realize our global semiotic devotions. The so-called contrast between the western and non-western semiotic ways in fact involves a trans-cultural task: how to rationalize or improve our working conditions in order to push forward our global semiotic mission.

## 6. Semiotics in defense of rationalism

Nobody today dares or is able to oppose the rational orientation of natural and social sciences because the objective worlds of the both are logically empirical and positive in nature. The semantic ambiguity of psychological, spiritual and axiological manifestations in human sciences indeed provide some people with a certain excuse for their irrational imagination and unscientific fantasy. Regarding this case, we have to elaborate on our thinking about the multiple constitutions of scientific practices. In general terms, all kinds of rational efforts could be called scientific, but there is a distinction in connection with the object, goal, method and motivation with respect to different scientific projects. Until now the rational tendency of natural sciences has been permanently established, whereas human sciences have been just on the verge of rational and scientific progress for the first time in history. By contrast, at this very moment, some post-modernists attempt to obstruct the rational progress of human sciences in order to make human thinking more confused. The results can only be conducive to making human sciences more and more ineffective in dealing with problems facing human existence. In view with this risk, the semiotic practice is determined to support the rational-scientific orientation of human sciences. Rather than being a mere branch of the latter's system, or a new discipline within it, semiotics should be regarded as an organizing agent living and acting within global human sciences in totality.

There are three aspects or stages of semiotic interdisciplinary rationality: semantic elaboration within a single discipline, interdisciplinary operation based on a single discipline, and interdisciplinary operation among different disciplines. The three semiotic aspects or stages represent different levels and aspects of rational operation in human sciences. Therefore the rational development of human sciences depends on the advancement of semiotic rationality per se. As the author has emphasized frequently in different situations, the social and intellectual advancements of humankind absolutely rely on the rational progress of human sciences, while the latter in turn logically relies on the more effective rational methodology applied in semiotic theory in its present global context.

## 7. The global task of IASS and the double role of the semiotician

In terms of the above explanations, global semiotics will enlarge the scope of both material and methods, presenting a more comprehensive and

constructive perspective for the unfolding IASS movement. IASS should not be limited by its traditional European/American-centric trends but rather become a truly international/intellectual movement. Accordingly, any single semiotician will play a double role: as the expert in his own special discipline and as a co-organizer of some related interdisciplinary projects. This understanding will help promote the semiotician to function beyond his narrower specialized field and more effectively promote the development of the semiotic movement. On the other hand, the interdisciplinary direction of semiotic practices also means liberating all kinds of disciplinary knowledge from the scholarly monopoly or control of the fixed disciplinary authorities. We should know that any disciplinary achievements have a double meaning: the disciplinary-centric one and the interdisciplinary one. The twofold meaning of disciplinary achievements is determined through different contextual conditions. In terms of the former, an expert is certainly more profound in his specialty, while according to the latter the same expert needs to learn a lot from other disciplines to expand his understanding of others' and his own scholarly results. Therefore every specialist needs to learn from many other disciplines' specialists according to different epistemological assignments in his chosen projects. So, the semiotician is an all-round trans-boundary agent against any improper disciplinary-centric restrictions. On the one hand the related scholars, including theoretical semioticians, should deepen a "first discipline-based meaning" established by specialists, and on the other hand they should pay attention to the "second interdisciplinary-explored meaning" created by theoretical semioticians as a general guide for multiple coordinations. As an interdisciplinary boundary-breaker the semiotician even has a duty to be more actively involved into the proper theoretical competition for the "interpretation right" of "second meaning" with other disciplines' specialists. In other words, we should not allow disciplinary specialists to dogmatically monopolize their interpretation right concerning their first meaning; in other words, we should always keep a hermeneutic balance between the first disciplinary meaning and the second interdisciplinary meaning. This more active theoretical attitude of the semiotician towards the interdisciplinary practices means also that he or she needs to be more actively and more creatively involved in both disciplinary depth and interdisciplinary width. The semiotician should be both a scientific specialist of one kind as well as a hermeneutic interpreter based on multiple cross-boundary practices. In this sense, a desirable ethical bravery of the semiotician is related to his will-for-power to keep getting rid of the predominant academic-institutional compartmentalization.

## **8. The conceptual units used in semiotic descriptions: constitutive elements vs. natural persons**

The interdisciplinary approach is noted basically with a transformation of epistemological perspective from the person-unit to the element-unit; or, from the historical-natural entity to the structural-functional entity. The semiotician will not take individual works produced in history as fixed intellectual units but rather as various compounds of useful scientific elements. In other words, every important historical figure is regarded as only the source of conceptual elements to be used in all related scientific practices. Therefore, the relevant material-units for semiotic operations refer to the trans-historical conceptual elements rather than to the entire works of individual scholars produced in history. The same can be said of the units regarding schools and trends that historically appear as various intellectual units. In essence the operative style of semiotics is quite different from that of philosophical compounds consisting of different scholarships of individual figures as mental totalities. Even the semioticians themselves should be treated in this way. Therefore, a semiotician will no longer appeal to or rely on the customarily accepted merits of entire works of historical figures; instead he should be a reorganizer of different historical materials by dint of some new scientific methods redesigned by him. So the semiotic-interdisciplinary approach always implies a meaning of epistemological revolution or invention; he tends to firstly disorganize various historical-intellectual individualities and secondly reorganize or recombine their constitutive elements in terms of other intellectual contexts and theoretical strategies.

But how does the semiotician reorganize his traditional material that is actually fixed in the customary thinking units based on individual persons, including philosophers' individual systems? Based on scientific direction, the semiotician must adopt a rationalist principle in general and explore a more suitable structure and constitution of his objects in particular. The semiotician is the redesigner and reorganizer of rationally-directed projects beyond any ready traditional academic manners, especially the philosophical ones. The traditional philosophical forms of rationalism are connected with their special contemporary backgrounds that are conditioned by a variety of occasionally appearing historical factors. The semiotician is therefore always faced with the task to reformulate the constitution of his own historical objects and redesign his own rational operative tactics in his semiotic projects. Instead of being caught in the historically concretized forms of rationality embodied in traditional theories, semiotics attempts to set up new operative approaches. In this

sense we can stress that semiotic theory, including its cross-cultural forms, is in contrast with those based on the western philosophical schools that remain the main theoretical modes in humanity and the main sources of the present-day western semiotic theories. This suggestion will be highly pertinent to the modernization of the traditional Chinese humanities, even according to the spirit of the current western structural-epistemological position.

## **9. Semiotics' ethical character as the relevant factor for reorganizing its strategy**

Consequently, we semioticians are the operators of all kinds of cultural material and methodologies, naturally tending to disorganize the dogmatic monopolies formed from all disciplinary theoretical authorities. On the other hand, the semiotic way can help disciplinary scholars to explore the multiple meanings of their subjects beyond their disciplinary frameworks. That means, semiotics helps to pluralize theoretical practices in all disciplines and makes their scientific results more applicable in various academic and cultural circumstances. Thus, the interdisciplinary-semiotic operation and the disciplinary-centric semiotic operation are complementary with each other too. Similar can be said of the cross-cultural semiotic and the western disciplinary-centric operations.

Traditionally, despite it keeping multiple intellectual objectives in history, philosophy's key essence would be said to be ethical in its innate spirit; the essence of semiotics or general semiotics could be also grasped as ethical by nature in the following three senses. First, because the goal of semiotics is the same as that of human sciences, we may say semiotics is eventually directed toward a new ethics, namely a non-philosophy-centric ethics, to be reorganized in global human sciences as a new intelligent totality. Second, traditionally ethical thinking has been closely connected with the goal to directly improve social morality, namely theoretical practice is directly tied to social-practical life; a modern semiotically-defined ethics instead will remain working at the purely academic level, together with the ethical components of human and social sciences as its direct objects. That means a semiotically-designed ethics will not be directly linked to any social-political targets. This strategic shift of ethical operations has nothing to do with its own basic social-cultural concerns of semiotics but will rather be linked to the stratification of its reasonable theoretical operation. Semiotically-directed ethics is multi-constitutional in its character. Accordingly, ethics will never be a simple result of philosophical inference or metaphysical speculation; it depends on the



theoretical progress of entire human sciences. Therefore, semiotic ethics must definitely be performed according to a rational-scientific orientation. Finally, the above-mentioned double role of the semiotician means that he or she should be more ethically intentional with a stronger consciousness of the general objective of semiotics beyond his or her specialized interest. Without this collective consciousness about the common goal for truth, semioticians will rarely attain their semiotic-theoretical aim. Semiotic practices should be collectively organized, oriented and practiced by nature; it is today evidently a collaborative enterprise, just like human sciences has increasingly become a collective way of efforts in our times. Without this collective consciousness in their practices, the IASS will hardly be able to make theoretical progress in future. That is why we should overcome all kinds of self-interested mentalities rooted in the present-day commercialized compartmentalization that makes the scholar sometimes behave as a mere businessman. So, global semiotics today calls for an ethical awakening or a renewed attitude for truth inquiry. The double role of the semiotician means that a semiotic scholar should go beyond his professional and national bounds in order to obtain a more comprehensive intellectual horizon. Ethical consciousness will not only help semioticians get rid of academic institutional restrictions but also help them overcome commercial competition with others. The commercial-style competition is naturally contrary to the scientific cooperation required by semiotic science. Any commercial competition is based on some technical specialty in disciplines, making scholars tend to make much use of technically-formed disciplinary autonomy, while by contrast semiotics requires that its agents cherish a willingness to join interdisciplinary cooperations. If the former is an interest-directed practice, the latter is rather a truth-directed one. Our semiotic progresses would be dependent on the solution of this contradiction concerning the motive for self-interest and the motive for collective-truth at both subjective-motivated and operative-organizing levels. With respect to their intellectual adventures, semioticians are doomed to be involved in constant confrontation with guiding pressure from the predominantly multi-institutional power. In a deeper sense, the semiotician should be more courageous than all other kinds of scholars when faced with institutional pressures. So the semiotician should be an academic fighter with a firm ethical devotion. Consequently, a semiotician should be inclined to think about his subjects and methods more originally rather than blindly follow the fixed authoritative norms and rules determined by various academic institutional powers. For the latter, technically operable rigor must be used to replace genuine intellectual/theoretical productivity.

As of today, semiotic activities still remain to be organized and performed in national-central domains. Global semiotics will lead to a more academically-holistic and social-international perspective. No other international academic association could hold the same grandiose ambition for the world. If the ideal of the IASS has not yet been substantially realized in reality, it must have been indeed cherished by some of its founders in the 1960s, or exactly embodied in the structural-semiotic trends of those times. At the moment of the IASS movement's turning towards its global expansion, its agents can hopefully take the occasion to more seriously reorganize its theoretical and practical strategies with the purpose of refreshing its original academic idealism.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# CHINESE SEMIOTICS AND THE POSSIBLE CHANGE IN TYPOLOGY OF THEORETICAL SEMIOTICS DURING THE GLOBALIZATION PERIOD<sup>37</sup>

### Foreword

The revolutionary impact of Saussure's structural linguistics on modernizing the general theoretical orientation of the humanities is obviously displayed in its getting rid of the two traditional ways of thinking: the philological-linguistic and the metaphysical-philosophical. We may say the one represents a physical-centrism and the other a philosophical-centrism. It is theoretically-directed but no longer metaphysical-logical. In short, the first revolutionary role of modern semiotics is expressed in its keeping a clear distance from classical philosophy, although historically it indeed also originated in the ancient philosophical sources. Let me firstly give a brief summary of this chapter with the following:

- Modern semiotic theory consists of various general aspects of different disciplinary-based theories, including philosophical. So it is interdisciplinary rather than philosophy-centric by nature.
- Its theoretical contents come from the theoretical practices of various disciplines, including both western and non-western academic experiences.

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## Abstract

Traditionally we get used to a dichotomy of the theoretical and the applied domains in semiotic studies. Therefore there exist a general semiotics as the theoretical mode and a disciplinary semiotics as the applied one. Clearly, the existing general semiotics arose from the west and all non-western semiotics seem to be reduced to the category of applied or discipline semiotics. However, this scholarly dichotomy tends to be doubtful in the globalization era. This chapter intends to point out that general or theoretical semiotics, far from being some original meta-semiotics, is itself a synthetic body of a more general theoretical source outside semiotics proper and various disciplinary scholarship. Thus, the content of theoretical semiotics as such is also related to the theoretical developments of various regular disciplines, including non-western ones. That means cross-cultural semiotics will probably in turn also influence the development of general semiotics in future. This chapter states that as one of the major non-western areas of semiotics, Chinese semiotics will also play a constructing role in forming the new academic field of global interdisciplinary semiotic practices and make its “cross-cultural-directed interdisciplinary semiotic experiences” actively included in the global theoretical semiotics of the new century. In this sense, global semiotics, consisting of the western and non-western parts, will be further solidified and united in a new global semiotic movement.

## 1. General Theories

Semiotic theory is based on and preconditioned by some more general theoretical achievements in history, such as the most general ones like the linguistic and the logical, and as the relatively general ones like the psychological, deep-psychological and even the sociological. Such general subjects have been intellectual autonomies as the most basic disciplines in human knowledge (in terms of their ideal types rather than their status quo); they provide some theoretical fundamentals to semiotics in different ways, forming the elementary parts of the so-called theoretical semiotics. Theoretical semiotics is therefore related to the interactional consequences between the general theories and various disciplinary-centric theories. Accordingly we may propose another more pertinent dichotomy that exists between the “application theory” and the “theoretical application”. The former is about those more theoretical studies and the latter about those more concrete studies (for example: the distinction between film theory as such and the analysis of movie pictures on the basis of theory). So we

could have various semiotic disciplines such as respective studies in philosophy, history, literature and the arts. All fields like these can be divided into the more theoretical and the more applied in relative terms. Usually we call the former theoretical semiotics and the latter applied semiotics. The identity of “theoretical semiotics” is already a synthesis of the general theories originally existing outside the semiotic and various conventional disciplines, including both western and non-western parts. In our classification a conventional discipline, including various disciplinary semiotics, consists of the more theoretical and the more applied parts. Thus, in “literary studies” we could say there is literary theory and literary analysis; the former is more about general principles and the latter more about an analysis of fictional works. Similarly we have theoretical studies at the general level and applied studies at concrete levels in literary semiotics, historical semiotics and artistic semiotics. Without a connection to those general disciplinary semiotics there is no separate “general semiotics”. What exists logically above disciplinary theories and as their common theoretical guidance seems to be the “general theory” that is outside of or independent from the various semiotic fields. Therefore, semiotics, including the theoretical ones, remains at a secondary level in the theoretical hierarchy.

## **2. Semiotics as the Main Organizer of the Theoretical Synthesis of Humanist Knowledge**

Semiotics is a synthetic user of established specialized knowledge of the humanities, synthetically and relevantly combining various intellectual and academic elements that are selected from various disciplinary sources. That is why we call semiotics an interdisciplinary practice. As I pointed out at the Berkeley IASS Congress in 1994, if we attempt to establish a new philosophical or linguistic foundation for a general form of semiotics we may immediately fall into a logical self-contradiction, for philosophy itself has also been one of the conventional disciplines ever since the dawn of the modern era. We are far away from the period when philosophy was the foundation for all other knowledge in ancient times. Instead, semioticians search for an interdisciplinary-directed theoretical “foundation” that plays a function as a mere theoretical organizer in operative terms. So-called theoretical semiotics, as we just said, should not be taken as another meta-theoretical dogmatic doctrine; it is a synthesizer in interdisciplinary and cross-cultural academic practices. The important theoretical semiotics available today all comes from historical efforts made in various main disciplines such as philosophy, history,

literature, the arts, media and others. Meanwhile, a theoretical semiotics formed across disciplines plays a role that looks like an external bridge linking various related elements from different disciplines. Of course, linguistics and logic have penetrated into all semiotic practices, but they originate from independent fields outside modern semiotics. So we can define the identity of theoretical semiotics as something partly derived from other established disciplinary sources; or, more exactly, it is a combination or interaction between various “general theories” and the relevant concrete scholarly results of different disciplines. Semiotic theoreticians should promote these synthetic efforts along the same lines. On the one hand we depend on existing conventional knowledge and on the other we attempt to readjust/reorganize their inner structures/functions. In general, semioticians are not creators but the creative users of concrete knowledge created by different specialists. We exist dialectically outside as well as within all disciplinary knowledge, especially with respect to the humanities.

### **3. Non-western semiotics become part of the practices of theoretical semiotics in the Semiotic-Globalizing period**

The several above-mentioned types of general theory originate in the west, and therefore theoretical semiotics tends also to be confused because of its two different theoretical practices: the general theoretical practices that are outside semiotics and theoretical semiotics that contains part of the former. The former originates in the west but has become the common subject matter of all mankind. Semiotics originates from all interdisciplinary activities, including non-western ones. That means theoretical semiotics is not restricted to western academia only. Cross-cultural semiotics as the new type of interdisciplinary practice in relation to both the western and non-western academic sources has formed a new academic platform for promoting scholarly dialogues between all kinds of humanist disciplines. On the one hand it is especially related to applying some western theories into non-western cultural material, while on the other hand it is also part of the scholarship of theoretical semiotics in general. In other words, theoretical semiotics will become the common job of the western and non-western semiotics alike in future, because the traditional non-western disciplines will naturally join the common synthetic efforts for promoting theoretical semiotics. Concretely, various types of theoretical semiotics in different disciplines will be changed or readjusted due to the creative and critical participation of non-western traditional disciplines such as philosophy, history, literature and the arts. For this purpose, of course, we

need to undertake a two-step academic dialectic strategy: firstly we need to apply the western analytical tool for reformulating or modernizing the traditional non-western discourses, and secondly we need to be able to apply the reformulated discourses of the non-western disciplines to the interactional scholarship between the western and the non-western semiotics at various theoretical levels. That means non-western semiotics, which itself is the result of western and non-western interactions, involves the global semiotic aspect at two stages: the stage for modernizing the traditional formulation at a national level and the stage for joining the common theoretical inquiry at a global level. The latter, however, will be useful for both western and non-western semiotic theoreticians. In this sense, semiotic practices prove to be helpful for unifying humanist knowledge of all kinds.

#### **4. Semiotic Globalization towards the newly unified Humanities of Mankind**

● One of the common misconceptions concerning problems of human civilizations is the idea that human history has been approaching its closing stage. Indeed, the fact is just the contrary: human civilizations in this globalization era remain in their nascent moments in the long course of human existence. Besides the remarkable progresses of natural and social sciences, the traditionally most divergent and ambiguous humanities have just reached the eve of their own global renaissance that is especially symbolized by the emergence of modern semiotics. Why? The traditional flaws of the humanities have firstly been caused by a universal semantic disorder that has been the very origin of historical struggles among different faiths. Semiotic practices have led to the advancement of a universal semantic clarification about historical/intellectual discourses of various kinds. Without this common semantically operative ground for effective communication, people from different races and histories can hardly obtain understanding, sympathy and respect at a mutual level. The point in the scholarship of the humanities or human sciences is first of all the problem of semantically reorganizing analyses about different traditionally verbally expressed phenomena, while semiotics is especially specialized in handling this general semantic-clarifying task. Naturally, the semiotic is a science rather than an art or quasi-art. ● Or, more exactly, we should clearly distinguish between a semiotic science and a so-called semiotic-type art or media technique. The former belongs to rational praxis in human scholarly activities, just like natural and social sciences. Therefore the preconditions of cross-cultural semiotics, including Chinese

ones, are a general understanding that semiotics is of a rational and scientific nature in broad terms. As we have often repeated, semiotics is part of social and human sciences; that means we firmly support the identity and validity of the conception of human sciences. But on the other hand, we also need a pluralist type of rationality and science to replace the dogmatic ones frequenting intellectual history. Now it is semiotics that opens a new horizon for intellectual endeavors through an unprecedented bridging between the western and the eastern humanities. To realize this great global intellectual target, we should further strengthen the rational direction of semiotic practices. We may declare: no rational orientation, no semiotic globalization.

With respect to cross-cultural semiotics and Chinese semiotics, our western colleagues should change a traditional bias about the distinction between western and eastern civilizations. Such a historical-philosophical distinction has been cherished by both western-centrism and eastern-nationalism. The conception of semiotic globalization will further expel such traditional preconceptions that could have been valid only in the historical past. That is because today the east has already comprehensively absorbed almost all fruits of western civilization and has therefore essentially changed its social and cultural conditions. As a matter of fact, the east is only a geographical notion, while culturally speaking it still consists of both eastern and western social-cultural elements. It is absolutely true already for the natural and social sciences; it will also be true for the human sciences in the near future. For example, either for human sciences or for semiotic studies, Chinese academia is already open to all human intellectual heritages today. In this sense, the knowledge of the humanities originating from the west will become the spiritual wealth of us as well. By comparison, our western colleagues are still lacking such a global consciousness because of their relative neglect of their knowledge of non-western civilizations. So, in this chapter, I would like to say to my western colleagues that theoretical efforts in non-western and Chinese semiotics will be the organic part of general semiotics or theoretical semiotics someday. In terms of this prediction, our semiotic family should pay more serious attention to semiotic solidarity at the global level. A developed non-western semiotics will strengthen our common semiotic science. It is far from being only a simple application of western theories into eastern materials; it is in fact another creative ground for promoting and modernizing semiotic science as well as the human sciences across the world.

Finally, some remarks about concrete matters in our international semiotic dialogue. Regarding the proper way of cross-cultural semiotics in



future, it is far from the case that the western one is more specialized in the theoretical role and the non-western is more specialized in the historical one. In fact, both western and eastern scholars will handle both the theoretical and the historical subject matters on equal terms. That means the global semiotics requires a restructuring of the way of doing semiotics, namely by reorganizing the way of doing semiotic scholarship through strengthening the collective or cooperative mentality in performing individual jobs. Nobody is able to grasp all knowledge by himself, while a scholar could be a wise and rational user of the existing knowledge produced by all other scholars in his own specially designed projects. We need to enhance the evaluation for creatively using second-hand knowledge more systematically and in interdisciplinary/cross-cultural terms. Everybody is the teacher and the student at the same time in our global semiotic practices. As a consequence, the notion of a genuine global semiotic era has already been clearly formed. All of us belong to the same semiotic family needing each other's cooperation and mutual help. Let me express my wish that this Nanjing Symposium represents a symbolic starting point for our great semiotic mission.

## Supplement

### **Li's Speech at the Concluding Session of the Nanjing Conference (November 17, 2008)**

This Nanjing International Symposium of Cultural Semiotics is the sign of remarkable progress with respect to both Chinese and international semiotic history.

By saying goodbye here I would like first to express once again my advice to the international guests: please do not limit your purpose of visiting China only to introducing your own scholarship to your Chinese colleagues. You should pay additional attention to a more healthy, more satisfactory development of Chinese semiotics in general so that the semiotic cooperations between the IASS and Chinese semiotics will lead to much more fruitful achievements in the near future. ●n the other hand, a developed Chinese semiotics will also contribute to the progress of international semiotics as well. Then I would like to say to my fellow compatriot participants that this Nanjing Symposium implies a much greater significance than it appears. It could be even said to be a breakthrough in Chinese academic history. The event proves that Chinese scholars have resolved to join the academic dialogues of the social/human science mainstreams of the west. We are used to saying the slogan "Go to

the world!" But this "academic world" should not be restricted to Sinology or Chinese self-introduction alone. It should refer to the international forums of current humanist-theoretical discussions. We Chinese scholars should be ambitious and courageous enough to participate in the main theoretical debates in the world today. For this purpose we have to first master the advanced theories in social and human sciences on a global level. Traditional Chinese civilization was one concerned about the humanities. Therefore we Chinese scholars today should be able to continue expressing ourselves clearly about theoretical creations in human sciences. And semiotics is the very channel used for our international theoretical dialogue. In this sense the Nanjing Symposium will be an important first leap forward to the common great intellectual destination.

## CHAPTER NINE

# ON THE INSTITUTIONAL ASPECT OF INSTITUTIONALIZED AND INSTITUTIONALIZING SEMIOTICS<sup>38</sup>

### Abstract

One of the original reasons for the modern semiotic movement is due to a general attempt to systematically increase the semantic clarification of the discourses of the traditional humanities through getting rid of the domination of philosophical-dogmatic stereotypes by dint of intensifying the interdisciplinary-directed theoretical practices. The emerging single-disciplinary tendency of the current semiotic scholarship operative under the circumstances of professional competitions and determinism of marketing has pressed semiotics to develop in a professional-utilitarian and methodological-pragmatic direction. The result of this tendency will lead to its further disconnection from the original spirit/target of the contemporary semiotic movement directed towards the scientific/rational-directed progress of the theoretical humanities. Accordingly, this institutionalization of the single-disciplinary-directed semiotics could substantially weaken the scientific orientation and creative potential of semiotic-theoretical practice. This chapter presents a double conception of institutional semiotics to deal with the subject.

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## 1. Introduction: What is “institutional semiotics”?

The problem of social-cultural-academic institutionalization contains two aspects: first, the institutionalized phenomena in human history, which amount to the expressions, descriptions, reflections and analyses of those phenomena from a traditional institutional point of view; and second, the modern scientific approaches to the former in terms of both institutionalized and institutionalizing scholarly procedural operations. The latter can be further classified into two modes: the investigation of the institutionally determined phenomena and the ideological manipulation of the former. Or, simply, they can be summarized in the following two ways: the institutionalized phenomena to be objectively described and scientifically analyzed and the methods creatively applied to the former. Accordingly, regarding the humanities, this category can be further divided into academic activities in general and humanistic learning in particular. With respect to semiotics, our objects will be more specifically defined within the academic contexts. The title “institutional semiotics” can refer (here always at the theoretical level) to three different senses of the term: a) semiotics is used to study all social-cultural-academic phenomena which are institutionalized; b) semiotics is used to study semiotics itself, which is also institutionalized; and c) semiotics is manipulated by an institutional device for different purposes in order to play an institutionalizing role.

So-called institutional semiotics could be a branch of the so-called “general institutional analysis” with respect to the social and historical phenomena that are culturally or academically institutionalized. It can be divided into two aspects: on the one hand, the analyses of all kinds of social, cultural and academic institutions as such and the related institutionalized phenomena, and on the other, the application of the institutionalizing devices to those phenomena for any kind of institutionalizing purpose. The institutionalized phenomena also include those of academic and semiotic institutions and institutionalization as such, and the institutionalizing devices can be especially applied to the scholarship and discourses of semiotics and other human sciences. Why do we only take an interest in human sciences here within various categories of human knowledge? The simplest answer is that both natural and social sciences, to different degrees of efficiency, are definitely under the control or supervision of the principle of scientific objectivity and in reference to the external reality, while human sciences, as so-called liberal arts, have on one hand lacked such a principle regarding the exact objective examination and inspection and on the other innately connected with the

subjective factors concerning spirit, values and faiths, which are nevertheless the most significant matters for human life.

We attempt to say that the issue of semiotic institutionalization implies two aspects in its scholarship: the static and the dynamic. The former is about anatomizing the multiple institutionalized phenomena of society, culture, academia and even semiotics itself; namely, analyzing semiotic manifestations from a multiple institutional point of view. Institutional semiotics in this sense operates with an inside analysis of semiotic institutions as well as with an external analysis of the institutional contexts of semiotics. The latter refers to the application of various institutionalizing tactics into semiotic practices with the intention to ideologically influence their goals and methods as well as desirable pursuits. The semiotic is then taken as a mere means used to probably meet with any kind of professional-utilitarian or cultural-ideological intention.

In light of the aforementioned explanation, institutional semiotics keeps an innate link to or is overlapped with the habitually established semiotic-ideological analysis in modern times too. Or, more precisely, both semiotic fields are mutually complementary with or merged into each other. In this sense there could be a more specially defined synthetic field temporarily called “ideological-institutional semiotics” that would focus on the ideological aspects related to the institutional analysis of semiotic topics with respect to both its internal and external parts: namely, the ideological-institutional analysis of certain semiotic phenomena and that of semiotics as such in connection with all related contexts, including political, historical, cultural and academic ones. In a sense, we could say that the combination of the semiotic, the institutional and the ideological parts forms a “trio of synthetic analysis”. In our present consideration, attention is especially paid to the academic fields. More concretely, we may raise the two interconnected branches here: the (ideological-) institutional analysis of semiotics as such and the semiotic-ideological-institutional analysis of academia as a whole. For the investigation of these two semiotic branches as thematic topics, all other related contexts can be involved as well. These two semiotic-related scholarly subject matters are obviously also connected with our reflections on the general problem of the modernization of human sciences.

The remarkable part of the latest development of semiotic practices is further displayed in its role in anatomizing the institutional conditions of all humanistic fields as well as in exploring their respective formative processes and functional structures. In a certain sense it is a semiotics of cinematic apparatus (to me at least) that instructively helps shape a new

scholarly aspect of semiotics: the institutional-ideological analysis in general. The latter explores the causal links between institutional functions and their cultural-academic consequences. This new semiotic model, based on this single field, can be taken as a heuristic model and applied to different fields. As a result, the semiotic institutional analysis, including both its static and dynamic modes, can provide not only semiotics but also general humanities with an effective analytical tool. ●n the other hand, a pan-institutional-analyzing semiotics can also be used to analyze and study itself and then to raise several related problematics from the institutional angle, such as: what is semiotic science today? How does it work and in which context now? Which results can it produce? By whom is it worked and for whom does it work? And what are its identity, position and role within the humanities?

## 2. Intellectual backgrounds of the Contemporary Semiotic Movement

The main task of the modern semiotic way of thinking lies in the first attempt to more precisely and effectively redefine the conceptual units of humanist discourses and to more relevantly distinguish between different levels of reasoning within the humanities, which are traditionally characterized by their blurry and vague semantic expressions. The eventual purpose lies in more scientifically reconstructing discourses in the humanities, including semiotics. Far from being simply a result of so-called autonomous semiotic history, contemporary western semiotic achievements have been attained mainly owing to the interdisciplinary-scientific and de-philosophical-centric theoretical developments in the modern humanities. The same reason can be used to explain the origin of the French structural movement in the 1960s as well. The structural-semiotic movement in France became the typical development of contemporary semiotics because it indicates two main semiotic-tended characteristics: humanistic-interdisciplinary operations and the de-metaphysical/de-ontological epistemology applied to the theoretical parts of human sciences. Accordingly we see that the crucially important non-philosophical-type theoretical innovations were created during the period of the structural movement, and these new interdisciplinary theories have accordingly influenced the theoretical orientations and substantial constitutions of scholarship in various branches of the humanities since the late 1960s. At the same time, the very term “human sciences” first prevailed also during that period in France. Unlike the spirit of German *Geisteswissenschaften* of the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century, which still intended to

lay its theoretical foundations on philosophy, French human sciences tended to create and pluralize the new scientific-theoretical modes of thinking about humanistic learning, arts, culture and history. The interdisciplinarity of semiotic-structuralism is embodied in different human sciences, which makes it essentially different from all other kinds of interdisciplinary operations, especially from those that prevailed in American humanist academia. The newly revised term “epistemology” there displays a special meaning that keeps an obvious distance from any traditional philosophical conceptions of epistemology and metaphysics as well as ontology. Thus, we may say that the contemporary semiotic movement, mainly guided by the French structural trend, accords with the essential requirement of semiotics for a more relevant reorganization of the semantic and institutional compositions of the traditional humanities whose theoretical basis had always been rooted in some philosophical systems. If this great intellectual development, which can be historically compared with that of the French Enlightenment, had been completed, it was because of its generally employing the humanistic-interdisciplinary strategy. Comparatively, may I attempt to hint that the cross-cultural type of semiotic practices that has been formed in the last two decades in non-western areas could perhaps lead to another turn of the epistemological revolution of the humanities? This is simply because cross-cultural semiotics is part of interdisciplinary semiotics in general.

The original founders of modern semiotics indicated different interdisciplinary adventures in their creative ways of thinking, such as Saussure, Peirce, Husserl and many others before and after them. When the contemporary semiotic movement attained its higher level it was mainly owed to French structuralism, characterized by its multiply interdisciplinary activities or deconstruction of the traditional institutionalization of the humanities. It was the French type of human sciences that indicated a more relevant feature of interdisciplinarity realized in the current western humanities. According to this new revolutionary direction of the humanities, the first trait is exactly displayed in its tendency against any kind of philosophical-fundamentalism. The philosophical discipline, as a long-standing and even uniquely privileged traditional discipline in western history, is decentralized to become only one among many others in the humanist family; or, it first of all stands on equal terms with other humanities branches with respect to their academic positions and roles. In other words, it was then that many non-philosophy-founded theoretical modes in human sciences, such as the linguistic, literary-theoretical, anthropological, various artistic (especially the cinematic), sociological, psychological, psychoanalytical and others

appeared. These remarkable academic creations in the history of human knowledge were technically due to the original interdisciplinary or de-traditional-institutionalizing breaking-up measures taken by the structural semiotic approaches. Furthermore, the results of the French structuralist movement have exercised a wide substantial influence on the composition and formation of the humanities in the west since then. Its intellectual effects have been obviously wider, deeper and more lasting than that which happened in pre-war Germany in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. By the way, this is why we Chinese scholars, who keep an open-minded attitude, at first paid much more intensive attention to the development of French semiotic structuralism than to any other western semiotic achievements since the late 1970s; unexpectedly, we felt something seriously important emerging in the French intellectual arena during the same period as China's Cultural Revolution was proceeding. Compared with the French trend, all other semiotic achievements are relatively lacking in such a strong humanistic-theoretical interdisciplinarity, or still remain restricted by the philosophy-centric or quasi-natural-scientific-directed theoretical frameworks.

We find that structuralism basically indicates a rational, quasi-positivist or quasi-scientific inclination. Even the earlier thoughts of Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan certainly imply some special types of skeptical rationality and psychological positivity. The lasting contribution of this movement to the humanistic intellectual revolution is expressed in its rationalistic penchant for realizing its interdisciplinary operations and therefore also in creating a more original, inspiring way of new ways of thinking about the humanities in general. Furthermore, this new way of humanistic thinking even indicates an especially suitable epistemological connection with the theoretical requests of the just refreshed modernizing tasks of the Chinese traditional humanities. By the way, we should not be confused between the idealist criterion regarding the intellectual orientation and any actual (including both positive and negative) fruits historically-occasionally realized in the related concrete practices with respect to the humanities. The practical academic productions are one thing, and the scientific quality or value of the same productions is another. The conception of "human sciences" that basically formed during the structuralist era keeps its scientific character or its interest in scientific truth through scholarly operations, whose scientific spirit had also been cherished by the earlier *Geisteswissenschaften* drive despite their different understandings of the conception of the scientificity about humanistic thinking. After all, the both belong to the orientation of the rational-constructive and scientific-directed intellectual line in human history.



As is clearly known by us, structuralism is basically overlapped with humanistic semiotics (semiology). Structural semiotics as a theoretical movement becomes a new-type epistemological-revolutionary effort within the new humanities that are characterized by their interdisciplinary scientific direction through deconstructing the traditional academic-theoretical institutions, including especially the professional institutionalization of the western philosophical genealogy. This scholarly direction is therefore equivalent to its de-philosophy-centric trait in theoretical pursuits. We should always be aware that the semiotic-theoretical problems are always innately linked with the renewed evaluation and reorganization of the identity of traditional philosophy implying its stereotyped historical lineage. Consequently, both belong to the very center of the epistemological reflection on structure and function of the traditional humanities theoretically based on that ideologically fixed philosophical lineage. Since the rise of post-modernist and post-structural trends, some current French theoretical thoughts have been turning to the contrary direction of the above-mentioned two rationally-directed characters displayed in the structuralist movement. (Unfortunately, this vicissitude of mere intellectual fashions has been widely taken as a new “correct line” replacing the old “wrong line”!) The quasi-rational or quasi-positivist tendency of the human sciences along this line has been weakened or even mostly replaced by the irrational post-modern theory that tends to use its irrational type of philosophizing mode to further undermine human rationality. This typical irrational character even makes the post-modernist trend into the very enemy of the spirit of “human sciences” as such. In addition, theoretical reasoning in the humanities is interpreted as a special kind of quasi-artistic one. Consequently, since twenty years ago, a nihilist or extreme relativist type of ontological philosophizing in some sense is taken once again by many scholars as an updated theoretical “foundation” of semiotic practice; in fact, many semiotic scholars even try to rely on this fashionable philosophical foundation without thinking that the essence of contemporary semiotic movement is just expressed in its de-philosophical or interdisciplinary-theoretical penchant. No doubt, this irrational turn in certain current semiotic schools is part of the general tendency of the current post-modernist humanities emerging in our post-Cold War period. As a result, contemporary French theoretical history, either in the human sciences in general or in semiotics in particular, exhibits an epistemologically mixed picture containing rational and irrational creations alike.

Meanwhile we see another different type of anti-humanistic-interdisciplinary theoretical tendency emerging mainly in North America:

the quasi-natural-scientific one, including those based on cognition sciences, language philosophy, natural philosophy and especially pragmatic philosophy which also indicate an inclination towards certain scientific or philosophical reductionism. And these rigidly quasi-natural-scientific-directed trends of doing semiotics further tend to treat the semiotic scholarship as a new discipline with its own independent (namely non-humanistic-interdisciplinary) features. According to this conception semiotics should be taken as one single discipline among many others, so as to even openly exhibit its anti-interdisciplinary character with respect to the humanities. In light of this way of thinking semiotic theory turns to be linked to certain philosophical foundations once again, including both the scientific-typed and language-philosophy-typed directions.

As we pointed out above, the essential interdisciplinarity of semiotics signifies the theoretical interaction among the main branches of the humanities, such as philosophy, history, literature, the arts and religion, and semiotic interdisciplinarity is the most typical one among the others. That means above all that contemporary semiotics is a pluralistically innovated phenomenon realized in various branches of the humanities; it is far from being a mere new discipline especially created or derived from existing philosophical theories. Its revolutionary spirit is expressed in a deeper and more comprehensive reflection on and criticism of the theoretical ways of the traditional humanities as a whole. Therefore the scope of the modern semiotic world can be overlapped with that of the entire humanities with respect to their all related themes. The semiotic ways of thinking represent some epistemological and methodological tools as such within the entire humanities or human sciences in connection with their various aspects such as the semantic, logical, inferential and predictable ones. The post-war contemporary semiotic movement guided by the French line is part of the innovative and modernizing efforts made across the entire new humanities. Anti-interdisciplinary reactions of certain semiotic-theoretical efforts, including those post-modern schools based on certain philosophical and quasi-philosophical foundations on one hand and the narrowly defined quasi-scientific and scientific-philosophical ones on the other, can be pragmatically converged into one common tendency: to pragmatically build up a new single “discipline” in terms of the operative and thematic restrictions of the existing semiotic learning so as to be more helpful for their professional expansion program under the present-day highly academically competitive circumstances.

### 3. Global Commercialization and Semiotic Professionalization

The recent development of western semiotic ways of thinking runs parallel with the post-Cold War development of global commercialization. The latter has led to the overall strengthened institutionalization of all academic activities in accordance with an absolutely dominant, commercially directed life-philosophy with respect to social, cultural, academic and intellectual phenomena. Under these post-Cold War commercialized conditions, the nature and mode of global cultural life have also consistently transformed to be suited to the pressing demands of the technological-commercial power of a purely entertaining or sensually pleasing type of culture, or simply, a businessman-taste culture. This popular-consumerist culture of the global commercialized world today must logically turn out to be spiritually-superficial, non-intellectual, or even anti-intellectually-tended in nature. Then we see the new cultural modes like electronic cartoons, popular songs and dances, amusing sports and various commercialized competitive games prevailing all over the world. The so-called popular culture today just means a totally commercialized pop culture whose nature of amusement and consumerism is also basically determined at the technical-institutional level. This tendency can naturally satisfy the cultural needs of the majority of people who are almost totally pan-technical-directed in their education, knowledge, tastes and life aims. Thus, we live not only in a commercialized but also in a technically organized world. Such an anti-high-intellectual culture must be contrary to the spirit of the humanistic-theoretical practices. In fact, such a pop culture formed under technical-domination also accords, by dint of the marketing systems, with a technically-ideologically-guided method of academic production that is logically non-humanistic-theoretical in spirit. Accordingly, the non-scientifically-directed humanities can be more conveniently led and more easily manipulated by the commercial-technical dominative power. It is clear that the post-modernist idea about making the humanities into some quasi-artistic-style scholarship is in complete accordance with the same will of the technical-commercial dominion that prefers to make the human sciences something like mere spiritual entertainment, thereby losing any of their socially and culturally substantial impact. ●f course, a theoretically weakened type of human sciences will become easier to be put in intellectual obedience to the technical-commercialized guidance controlling society and culture. It is quite clear that only scientific strength in humanistic knowledge could become the intellectual and practical force, at least theoretically, to counterpoise the direction of culture and academia

that are basically controlled by the technical-commercial dominion. It is interesting to note that the thoroughly commercialized globalization has unified the general life style of all humankind today, regardless of their respective political-social systematic diversity. And this is the very circumstance under which human sciences and semiotics struggle for their effective existence and creative development. Thus, there exist two kinds of intelligent practices in human life: the scientific-technical-commercial one and the cultural-intellectual-humanistic one. In our completely materialized civilization today, the former exercises its absolute mastership while the latter remains dependent and even parasitic on the former. Therefore at present, human sciences, especially semiotics, must first of all pay close attention to this genuine social-cultural condition that becomes really determinative to their existence and activities at present and in the future.

Regarding this situation, the humanities, including semiotics, have more and more turned out to have certain parasitic activities in their character. The main reason for this tendency is due to two historically new aspects: they have to firstly choose feasible ways to securely live under the conditions controlled by the technical-commercial powers; and secondly they have to maintain a professionally permissible existence with the financial support of the former. This consideration of professional profits will naturally restrict the intellectual freedom of the humanistic scholars who clearly know about this materialist-type “Absolute Imperative” that cultural and human-scientific productions should also be put into the academic market for checking and recognition. How to plan, organize and direct one’s intellectual practices in the humanistic professions becomes a matter that must be taken account of by scholars existing within this commercially determined context. As a result, the possibility of humanistic practices becomes more and more determined and controlled by two factors: these objective social-professional preconditions and the scholars’ practical worry about the way that they can secure the related material profits. Both converge to weaken the ethical will of spiritual subjectivity.

If the above description is generally correct, the basic criterion of the current humanistic-scholarly practices has been mainly determined by a non-scientific psychological motive: the desirability or feasibility of possible successes in the humanistic-professional market, which consists of strictly-guided education, occupation, publication and social consequences, all of which must be suited to the forcible demands of the deep-rooted social and academic establishments. In short, as for the humanities, the motives and goals in the related academic practices have to

be changed, and the final effective criterion of the human scientific studies will be professional profits rather than scientific truth.

It is noteworthy that the post-modernist's nihilism takes a position against "objective truth" and rationality; this very fact is exactly in accordance with the domineering logic of this professional-utilitarian determinism. Accordingly, humanistic scholars should obey the institutional rules that are basically and eventually fixed by technical-commercial powers. In this sense, we may state that some post-modernist philosophy could be symbolical but actually representative of that spirit of our technical-commercialized age; or, we may just say that post-modernist philosophy is a typical philosophy of our commercialized times. Therefore, while natural sciences still stick to their traditional goal for searching for objective truth and acquiring intelligent power for objective judgments and reasonable prediction, the human sciences would be forced to give up, relatively at least, the same scientific goal.

#### **4. The Intensified Commercialization of Post-modernist Times and the Weakened Interdisciplinarity of Semiotics**

The strengthened professionalization of humanities academia naturally leads to the multiple institutionalizations impacting on their scholarly conditions and activities. More exactly, there exist two kinds of academic institutionalization: the hard one and soft one, or the materially/behaviorally fixed institutional organizations and the intellectual/operative rules for organizing scholarly activities. The latter include intellectual attitudes, scholarly aims, practical directions, operative procedures and methods, selection of subject matters, standards and rules of academic publishing and the related marketing, as well as the employment policy on campus and in institutions, etc. All the above items are regulated by socially fixed professional mechanisms. The objective for professional success becomes the first important motivation and criterion for scientific practices in the current humanities-academic communities of all countries, and professionalization make the chosen academic material documents and all other academic methods merely the means to be used for attaining this commercial-professional purpose. Accordingly, the traditional criterion towards objective truth in scholarly life is at first mostly excluded from humanistic scholarship. Therefore, the term "scientific" in the humanities is only used in a metaphorical sense. As a result, the reasoning of the humanities tends to become a rhetoric-styled practice following the socially acceptable patterns that are directly and indirectly determined by the conditions of the academic establishments. It is the same thing for

some semiotic schools that have followed the same intellectual games set up under the same conditions.

●riginally, the modern semiotic spirit had been intended to search for semantic clarity and a more reasonable reformulation of their scientific discourses. The search for semantic clarity is based on the belief in the existence of objective truth with respect to society, history and culture, so people want to have more precisely defined concepts and terms used for representing these realities outside human subjectivity. The epistemological negligence of objective reality in the humanities field will lead to the eventual exclusion of the term “scientific truth” from the theoretical humanities. Accordingly, semiotics is liable to become another kind of art or intelligent game that can be designed and operated similarly as true artists deliberately do. Under the nihilist pressure of this post-modernist philosophy, some semiotic practices attempt to be epistemologically reunified with that irrational philosophy, intending to be theoretically more closely reliant on powerful philosophical support. The combination of the post-modernist elements and certain semiotic practices will co-work to form certain single disciplines that can more profitably organize their projects in the commercialized academic world. ●n the other hand, the pan-scientific or natural-pragmatic philosophies support another type of the single-disciplinary-directed semiotics too, as we have already pointed out above. Both directions happen to be collaborative in shaping the same turning point that the semiotic becomes single-disciplinary in constitution and functioning once again. Accordingly, semiotic organizations tend to be engaged in professional-utilitarian pursuits under a single-disciplinary solidarity.

The professional academic institutionalization of the western humanities and the socially-culturally commercialized development of the past one hundred years have been favorable for the establishment of the autonomous existence of the humanities in their gradual segregation from reality at various levels, including the historical, social, political, and even scientific ones. This general tendency would also distort the identity of semiotics as scientific learning in connection with the entire humanities. In terms of the interpretation, we may understand why there could be a special problem of semiotic institutionalization. Semiotic scholarship is above all characterized by its inclination to deconstruct the traditional institutionalized scholarship; the interdisciplinary operation itself is indeed a measure taken for breaking down the fixed authoritative institutions of disciplinary-compartmentalization of modern traditional academia. In the sense of the hard-lined academic institutionalization, the interdisciplinarity refers to the cross-disciplinary-directed professional organizations and

intensified regularities, and in terms of the soft one it refers to cross-disciplinary intellectual criteria, scientific designs and all related scholarly arrangements, as we described above. The latter is certainly more typically related to that institutionalizing procedure. The revolutionary spirit of semiotics should just lie in its special capability to break up the traditional institutionalized academia. When semiotics itself is ideologically manipulated and professionally fixed on its institutional procedures along the anti-interdisciplinary line, it will greatly weaken or lose this traditional-positive potential for its original pan-semantic analytical task. Therefore the term “institutional semiotics” can refer to two different conceptions: as the way to de-construct the traditional academic-institutional organizations and as the method for institutionalizing semiotic objects in semiotic scholarship. The latter can either promote or obstruct the interdisciplinary development of semiotics.

Accordingly, for example, the post-modern single-disciplinary-directed institutionalization of semiotics can be realized along two directions. Post-modernist and post-structural trends, which have been shaped during the highly commercialized world regarding society and culture, claim to be anti-rational and even anti-scientific in their intellectual attitude. This new French post-modernist intellectual fashion indicates a quasi-artistic style of using discourses produced by the traditional and modern humanities. Thus, the same intellectual heritage of the humanities can be used by different kinds of user who accept different epistemological positions and methodological devices: namely, the scientific-directed and non-scientific-directed types. The situation is in some sense similar to that in Chinese culture-related academic operations with respect to both western Sinology and modernized Chinese humanist theoreticians; both share the same traditional material but have different academic goals and methods (the topic will be further discussed later in this chapter). The curious matter is that it is the post-modernist thinkers who prefer to adopt a self-contradictory position to fight scientific efforts in the humanities by means of their artificially chosen strategy: on one hand they declare a position to deconstruct traditional philosophy and on the other hand, when the structural-semiotic and other rational human science movements obtain more fruitful achievements, they claim to be the defendants of philosophy as a traditional discipline again so as to display a highly pragmatic-opportunist style in handling theoretical problems concerning the humanities. So they become the active players of philosophical games again; that means they are in fact used to making great use of the semantically ambiguous discourses and the less scientific reasoning historically implied in traditional philosophy. As a result, this self-claimed

disciplinary-deconstructing strategy turns out to be the supporter of the leading traditional disciplinary institution: philosophical ontology and metaphysics. As a matter of fact, discourses of the discipline of “philosophy” can be firstly used or manipulated to play the role of undermining semiotic rationality. According to the post-modernist angle, it seems that the humanities do not need rational or scientific methods to investigate social, historical, cultural and spiritual problems. According to this anti-scientific logic, faced with historical criticism, people can only deal with various socially and politically critical situations “pragmatically”. (The most absurd post-modernist historical theory is expressed in the statement that there is no “historical truth”.) This idea happens to be consistent with the commercial-technical ideological point of view that certainly leads to the persistent inferiority of the human sciences to the natural and technical sciences.

The central idea of the modern semiotic movement is expressed in both modern interdisciplinary devices and the traditional principle of rationality alike. It is the interdisciplinary approaches against the existing scholarly systems that set up the various new epistemological directions for the contemporary semiotic movement. If one of the post-modernist traits is displayed in its opposition to the scientific direction of semiotics, then the quasi-natural-scientific-directed semiotics of various types tends to be contrary to humanistic-interdisciplinary methods. The latter also includes the scientific-philosophic trend, intending to lay a narrowly defined scientific foundation for a new discipline with the same name of “semiotics”. And then we see a more popular tendency occurring recently in which both the post-modernist and the quasi-scientific semiotic practices converge to form a common requirement to search for the philosophical foundations which are used to theoretically support their respective semiotic practices. This common tendency in searching for some semiotic-philosophical bases in different forms and manners (roughly speaking, the dogmatic-rational (scientific) philosophy and the irrationally nihilist philosophy) therefore lead to the same result that intends to weaken the humanistic-interdisciplinarity of semiotic methodology. ●r, more precisely, the semiotics based on humanistic-interdisciplinarity (the interdisciplinarity among different disciplinary theories in human sciences) could be replaced by different kinds of interdisciplinary combinations regarding sciences, technology and arts. Theoretically speaking, the so-called interdisciplinary-oriented way of thinking in semiotics first of all means to take the de-philosophical-centric theoretical orientation of any kind and create the new type of theory through promoting the interaction of theoretical sources of different



human sciences. The revolutionary development of the semiotic theories of structuralism is essentially due to the various independent developments of the theoretical innovations in various branches of human sciences. As a result, both post-modernist-directed semiotics and the quasi-scientific-philosophical one are combined, through international institutional-professional collaboration, to shape a certain new type of semiotic discipline. Thus the identity of semiotics as a new single discipline, artificially reorganized by commercial-professional efforts, will greatly lose its original theoretical character. Why is such strange combination able to happen around the turn of the new century? Thinking more deeply, it is due to the pressure of academic commercialization and professionalization of our times. For the sake of individual scholars to secure professional success, the mode of single-disciplinary existence seems to be more favorable for academic operations in intensively strengthened competitive communities. Put another way, both directions (the irrational and the narrowly-defined scientific) cherish the same target: to struggle for success in cultural-academic marketing. There is no difficulty for us to grasp that competitive success can be obtained by dint of choosing any kind of object and method as long as the latter can be artificially and profitably manipulated to produce desirable operative efficiency. Thus scientific idealism has been replaced with professional-commercialized pragmatism.

The above-mentioned new turns in the current semiotic trends can also be traced back to its historical situation. We find that there exists an interconnection between the philosophical-centric semiotic theory, the single-disciplinary-turned semiotics and the commercially professionalized semiotic tendency. As is well known, the contemporary semiotic movement basically consists of two divergent intellectual traditions: the current French humanistic-interdisciplinary drive and the modern Anglo-American linguistic-philosophical and pragmatistic drives. The fact that post-modernist thoughts attack the new conception of the human sciences can also prove its oppositional attitude to the idea of semiotic science as such. In retrospect to French intellectual history, its essentially positivist character produced the Enlightenment two hundred years ago and structuralism later in the middle of the last century. Either the contemporary structural-semiotic movement or the French intellectual revolution against the traditional domineering establishment can be relevantly reduced to a basically empirical positivism in a broad sense. Therefore, either structuralism or its related semiotic school indicates a special type of spiritual positivism that naturally contains empirical-scientific elements. We should evaluate the positivist-scientific elements

as such that are our very proper methodological materials for reconstructing the new human sciences. ●f course, once again, we should not mix the positive intellectual traits with their possible negative social-political-practical consequences in historical processes. The epistemological and pragmatic gap between the general principles and their practical outcomes always exists in human history (similarly, we should never mix Marx's own thought with any following schools using his name as a brand because their respective social-historical-academic contexts are quite different. The identity of a "thought" consists of three parts: the textual content, the way to handle the content, and the context where the content is tackled). A lack of faith in scientific truth and the motivation for professional profits will certainly lead to a serious weakening of semiotic-theoretical strength.

### **5. The cross-cultural development of semiotics: the related Chinese experience**

The past three decades in Chinese history is generally called the New Period. The difference between the new and the old periods, among many other things, is especially expressed in the gradually increasingly liberal attitude of the government towards western academic thoughts concerning the social and human sciences in the New Period. As is well known, the ●ld Period was characterized by its strictly maintained Lenin-Stalinism that takes western social and human sciences as the officially defined ideological enemy. The development of the new Chinese humanities in the New Period has been formed through a clear contrast with that of the ●ld Period: the contrast between the academic lines of the rational-scientific line in the New one and the irrational/non-scientific line of the ●ld one. ●n the other hand, when the new Chinese humanities begin to make contact with their western counterparts, all the results of scholarly developments in western historical stages have streamed into China all at the same time; accordingly we are faced with both modernist and post-modernist ways of humanistic thinking almost simultaneously. What kind of proper attitude or position should Chinese scholars take then, with respect to the current complicated western intellectual situation?

For the sake of clarifying the historical background concerned, let us firstly describe in brief the modern developments of Chinese social and human sciences for the past century.

- 1) From the beginning of the century to the beginning of the Japanese aggression drive (1900-1937), there was a remarkably successful

modernizing development of Chinese natural-social-human sciences. The fruitful academic results of the period became the main basis for the next development of modern Chinese culture and academia.

- 2) From WWII to the end of the Cultural Revolution (1937-1978), the development of Chinese social sciences remained in slowly progressing or even stagnant states in both the mainland and other Chinese communities. Hong Kong and Taiwan kept their relatively developing tendencies in the humanities but most of the products were made at philological and practical levels. Their theoretical achievements in the education and academia of the overseas areas had been attained basically along the practical, behavioral-pragmatic-directed line, getting little access to the recent theoretical developments in the new continental humanities.
- 3) From the New Period of the mainland to the present (1978-2012), namely for the past three decades, all Chinese communities have shared an ever-increasing theoretical interest in social and human sciences emerging in all parts of western academia. The intellectual achievements of western Europe have been widely introduced into Chinese communities since the late 1970s; and it is noteworthy that the main works have been done firstly by scholars living on the mainland during the New Period, rather than by those scholars living in all overseas Chinese communities despite the fact that it is the latter who have kept much more lasting and closer contacts with the west or worked personally in western academic institutions. This historical background can explain why, during the 1980s, most Chinese translations of modern and current continental European humanistic theories were made firstly by scholars living on the mainland of China rather than by those living in Hong Kong and Taiwan, despite their having kept continuously closer connections with the west.

The above historical review can also exhibit a present-day contrast of the academic-intellectual roles between Chinese scholars remaining on the mainland and those working in the west or in the overseas Chinese communities. It is the former who play the major role of introducing current higher western humanistic theoretical thoughts to various Chinese communities. This fact also explains why it is Chinese academia on the mainland that started the semiotic movement rather than those Chinese who got their educational training in western educational institutions. By the way, generally speaking, the Chinese achievements in introducing

modern western humanistic thoughts into Chinese communities for the past three decades has been basically made by a few Chinese scholars through their independent investigations into current western humanist theories. Furthermore, the fact also indicates the consequence of the western institutionalized graduate programs regarding the humanities that can only provide the conditions for humanistic theoretical training at a modest level. Such a standardized and professionally-directed training level can hardly secure a guarantee for acquiring advanced theoretical learning in the humanities. As a matter of fact, the present western graduate-educational systems in the highly standardized humanities seem to restrict the potential of non-western students to show a creative or original way of thinking or to read over sufficient literature at a higher theoretical level. After going back home, where humanist-academic conditions are clearly much weaker than in the west, the humanities knowledge they acquired in the west rarely enables them to continue advancing their theoretical scholarship because of a number of more negative restrictions. If such kinds of humanities-educational problems still exist in western higher education today, similar ones must become doubly serious in non-western areas. But on the other hand, from a professional point of view, the institutionalized mechanism of educational training of any kind must anyhow always be workable and profitable because any chosen humanist-historical-technical materials can be effectively applied to any kind of professionally-directed systems that have never been concerned about true scientific quality. Therefore the change of epistemological criteria in the further commercialized humanistic training has nothing to do with the efficiency of its application to certain professionally-determined systems, no matter whether the criteria are scientific truth or pragmatic success. By losing the scientific goals of getting access to objective truth and acquiring sufficient knowledge, the potential of scholars for purely intellectual-spiritual inquiry into human sciences must be systematically deteriorated. This spiritual/theoretical-related problem can never become the objective of the concerns of the official authorities. ●n the contrary, the best of intentions have even ironically resulted in the very loss of interest of the latter.

Semiotics in contemporary China started exactly at the very beginning of her New Period 35 years ago. Concretely, the direct stimulation of Chinese semiotics came by chance from the initial contacts with the just imported literature about current western philosophy and social/human sciences, including the structural-semiotic thoughts of cinematic and literary theories. As the initial introducer of those new theories, this author had taken account of a lot of related factors in consideration of his

theoretical-thematic priorities. The more fundamental reason for choosing this intellectual/theoretical line also partly originated from his general reflection on Chinese history over the past century. A self-critically-directed theoretical ambition was directed to the thorough examination of the non-scientific and even irrational mistakes committed in the past ideologically-guided humanities scholarship prevailing in both the traditional periods and the earlier modern periods as well as to inquiring into more reasonable and more scientific alternative ways for constructing the new Chinese social sciences. Unlike all conservative academic-nationalist humanities scholars in various Chinese communities, this author has always emphasized that refreshed national efforts for establishing new social and human sciences, besides comprehensively learning from modern western social/human theories, must honestly face the current controversial western theoretical-ideological turmoil and finish our own independent/objective judgments and selection of divergent and even mutually contradictory theoretical discourses. We began to understand quickly that we have to more deliberately organize our own relevant and desirable programs about investigating western theoretical literature from different schools and trends. Without the ideological bias caused by any kind of established academic institutional system, an independent reflection on desirable theoretical orientations has been naturally formed on the basis of several primary intellectual principles that can be summarized in the following five intellectual/spiritual lines in the world:

- a) Theoretical and practical rationalism of ancient Greece and Rome (idealism and rationality);
- b) Inductive-logical empiricism in England (natural and social reality);
- c) Search for deductive-logical foundation in Germany (systematic reasoning);
- d) Social-cultural positivism in France (operational epistemology);
- e) Historical-ethical humanism indirectly implied in the 3000-year intellectual history of China (mundane ethical faith).

So, from the very beginning of the New Period, our semiotic interests were stimulated by a general concern about a more reasonable and more effective type of new social and human sciences as a whole. This preferred interest was initially due to the purely scientific idealism cherished by us and had nothing to do with the situation of contemporary western professional determinism. And the working principles for reorganizing our epistemological and methodological knowledge were fixed in reference to

the general intellectual sources of all civilizations as well as to our particular experience in Chinese history. That means the arising of the most important part of current Chinese semiotic thoughts had nothing to do with the influence of the contemporary western utilitarian-tended educational systems. Thus, the top guiding principles for us have always been deduced from the aforementioned five basic rational-spiritual lines that should be creatively recombined for us to find various more relevant and more feasible ways to reconstruct our new human science systems. In this sense, current semiotics has entered China naturally, together with several other continental streams of thought such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, structuralism and their applications in different fields, as well as with Anglo-American analytical and current pragmatic trends. We have to deal with them independently by ourselves without just passively following the contemporary western trends that happen to be temporarily influential on campus. Gradually, however, there have emerged sharp confrontations between two different scholarly attitudes of scholars towards western humanistic studies in Chinese academia: between the independent, scientifically-directed and critical attitudes and the utilitarian attitudes that passively imitate and follow the current theoretical fashions formed in the western standardized-institutionalized humanistic training systems on campus.

These five original rational-spiritual lines in world history should be selectively and relevantly combined to help construct certain new types of human science systems, including semiotics, in our new century. In other words, whether for the new human sciences in general or for semiotics in particular, the guiding constructive strategy should be determined by these top pluralist-rational criteria. According to my judgment, our basic guiding line for reconstructing Chinese social and human sciences should only be fixed on the basis of human plural-rationality as such. Therefore we have to bravely and firmly confront the highly complicated and extremely vast quantities of materials of contemporary western humanistic thoughts and make efforts to learn from each of them at first; simultaneously, however, we also have to strengthen our independent and critical consciousness in order to more wisely select the relevantly required knowledge from different intellectual/theoretical sources and recombine them with respect to our projects that are newly designed in reference to particular Chinese backgrounds. The formative Chinese semiotic theory should not be a direct copy of the fashionable western semiotic schools, as has been done in China until now. And so-called comparative semiotics should not just mean the simply juxtaposition of Chinese and western topics either. ● On the other hand, developing Chinese semiotic theory cannot be organized on

the basis of any philosophical schools. On the contrary, we have to independently reorganize our theoretical construction in terms of basic rational typology. No doubt, we take semiotics as the organic constituting part of the entire humanities and also as an anatomizing-synthesizing device for reconstructing our new systems of social and human sciences. Anyhow the recognition of this deeper epistemological principle, from very beginning of our New Period, could help us hold a scientific idealism that has been contrary to the negative aspect of the current western utilitarian professionalism regarding human sciences in general and semiotics in particular. Nevertheless, it is a pity to find that the actual unfolding of the Chinese semiotic development can hardly avoid being influenced by this universal academic-commercializational power despite the critical warnings given by this author constantly over the past few decades.

When Chinese semiotics started to join in international semiotic activities in the early 1980s, we have been clearer and clearer about the scholarly necessity to introduce cross-cultural elements to western semiotics as well, if the latter seriously wanted to become the very basis for a genuine semiotic movement in the world. Accordingly, we became more concerned with the problem about how to construct Chinese semiotics more productively. Basically, so-called Chinese semiotics consists of two parts: the learning from western semiotics and the reorganizing of the new field of semiotics in connection with Chinese historical, social, cultural and scholarly backgrounds. So Chinese semiotics should first of all explore the multiply institutionalizing backgrounds as follows:

- a) A more comprehensive view of the western semiotic-theoretical composition that consists of its continental and Anglo-American directions and their larger institutional contexts. Starting from our experience in the structural semiotic movement, unlike most increasingly professionalized tendencies of various western semiotic schools, we are focusing on paying attention directly towards the rich potential of wider and deeper interdisciplinary practices within western humanities regardless of whether they are currently popular or not in the west. In terms of this independent principle we have to appeal from time to time to the above-mentioned higher rational-spiritual lines of knowledge.
- b) As regards Chinese semiotics, we are faced with a more complicated academic situation that is connected with both its relationship to the Chinese intellectual tradition and to its

relationship to the western intellectual tradition. The both are first of all related to the general problem of the modernization of Chinese humanities. So Chinese semiotics is the essential part of the modernizing projects of Chinese humanities. With this more comprehensive background, Chinese semiotics must be something that is obviously beyond the extant two big international systems of Comparative Literature and Sinology, which remain less interested in systematic theoretical construction.

- c) Connected with the above, the problem of Chinese semiotics is part of the current new Chinese humanities in general, and the latter is today still under the institutionalized influence of the international Sinology network which is theoretically weak in reaching advanced modern theoretical knowledge and is motivated by a higher professionally utilitarian purpose. But on the other hand, because of the special historical-political backgrounds, this already internationalized scholarly network maintains a special privilege at home and abroad to interfere with and influence the tasks of the scientific modernization of Chinese thoughts and academic affairs by means of a superficial pragmatism. As a result, the current modernizing process of the Chinese humanities is experiencing a sharp tension between the non-theoretically-directed pan-Sinological scholarship and the modern theoretically-directed reformative programs of the Chinese humanities. By the way, the theoretically-backward international Sinology network is also implicitly supported by the international trio of “natural science/technical/commercial powers” that remains ignorant of the necessity of the truly theoretical progress of social and human sciences, or even tends to make the latter remain in their present-day parasitic situations characterized by their intellectual conservative and scholarly-philological nature.

Practically, within current Chinese academic life, the situation of the current Chinese humanities and semiotics indicates the same complicated tendency: higher education in China just launches programs for professionalizing and institutionalizing academic practices that basically follow current western educational patterns. This institutionalizing tendency in Chinese academia and education would in a certain way lead to a negative effect on the original and creative potential of advanced theoretical scholarship in the field of the humanities. That is why we attempt to highlight an ethical spirit to encourage more independent studies in accordance with higher rational principles. The essence and



significance of Chinese semiotics, however, should not be estimated superficially through observing the present-day professional semiotic activities that indeed display a more and more active and energetic thrust merely owing to professional utilitarianism and appeal to the trifling curiosity of the less experienced reading public who are in fact liable to follow any kind of international fashion.

The upcoming Nanjing 11<sup>th</sup> IASS Congress will be a great event that contains a multiply historical significance in global academic history, as I have pointed out in many other places. In our conception it will be different from the regular activities of the international semiotic activities organized in the west. First of all, it will become the converging arena of multiple intellectual trends in the global academic world rather than being a mere special gathering for international colleagues belonging to the same professional field and sharing similar professional profits. The most remarkable features could be therefore expressed in the following here in advance:

- a) To more seriously establish a new global dialogic forum for cross-cultural semiotics, presenting the confrontation between the western and eastern academic-historical heritages;
- b) To further promote the active development of the global interdisciplinary dialogues against the current institutional compartmentalization;
- c) To more actively promote the theoretical interaction between semiotics and the human sciences so as to further advance and expand the semiotic role in the entirety of academia;
- d) To more relevantly organize the crucial dialogue between semiotic theory and philosophical theories, and to more openly organize the debates between western rationalism and western irrationalism for the sake of shaping a more desirable semiotic as well as humanistic-epistemological orientation in our new century;
- e) To more systematically manifest the panorama of the central problematics of the global human sciences in courageous confrontation with the fully commercialized social-cultural conditions today.

International semioticians and humanist scholars should go beyond the current western academic stereotypes and expand their epistemological horizons on a global level. And then they should recognize that a new cross-cultural age is arriving, which requires that the epistemological and methodological systems globally reorganized by dint of combining the

different theoretical experiences of the west and the intellectual-historical experiences of the non-west when the non-western theoretical partners become more and more capable of participating in the required interdisciplinary and cross-cultural academic dialogues and collaborations with their western colleagues.

## **6. Semiotic-institutionalizing analysis and a Reconsideration of the Identity and Function of Semiotics**

Under the pressure of the present-day professional competition across the world, the state of semiotic theoretical interdisciplinarity tends to be gradually diluted, and its strengthened disciplinary autonomy consists of its artificially-defined substantial scope and a profitably invented historical genealogy. When the semiotic circle came to be more interested in tracing back to a definite historical origin and the related evolution, we could feel that some current western semiotic professions prefer to organize their disciplinary autonomy through simplistically creating an intellectual genealogy in order to increase its independent academic identity and power in the competitive context. Thus we can perceive a functional link that exists between three aspects: scholarly genealogy, single-disciplinarity and professional competition. As a result, the semiotic practice has further maintained a clearer segregation from the large humanities family; or, more exactly, it prefers to be a more clearly defined single discipline among many others.

Now let us turn to the topic of the institutionalization of semiotic operations again. Becoming a quasi-autonomous discipline, professional semiotics forms a set of fixed operative rules governing its methods of actual practices. And the soft institutionalized aspects are also arranged according to professional requirements. Accordingly all possible agents of this professional discipline, at home and abroad, should follow the same set of rules and criteria. And the final judgment for the quality of the operation of semiotic practices depends on the final test: the normal procedure for the related professional success that is predetermined by the academic-marketing mechanisms. The scientific quality of semiotic scholarship is decided by the double-institutional arrangements, simply losing its reference to scientific objectivity. By the way, the entire rational experience in the long course of Chinese intellectual history must become the solid basis for defending this scientific principle against any so-called post-modernist nihilism attempting to destroy the conception of social objectivity. ●ne result of professional competition in the humanities is expressed by scholars tending to search for some more effective strategy

within the predetermined frame of operations in the professional world. Without looking for any objective truth, humanities scholars can only search for the professionally more feasible and more profitable tactics in their scholarly arrangements and designs. Their attention is more directed to the professionally determined norms and rules than to the objective reality of various kinds. Living in the intellectual autonomy consisting of historical semiotic elements, they seek competitively desirable elements from the quasi-ideologically fixed scholarly reservoir. This tendency completely accords with that of the entire humanities whose existence today also depends on the technical-commercialized society and culture. The humanities or human sciences will no longer be taken as the genuine scientific practice under the implicitly cooperative pressures of both technical domination and humanistic-theoretical nihilism. Then we could someday have only one-dimensional “science”: the natural/technical-directed one. As a result, the humanities would be reduced to being some artistic game or mere spiritual/moral cultivation. In other words, it seems that, as regards the material-technical activities in human life, we need the scientific way of thinking and rational practices, while regarding the social, cultural and historical activities, we would seemingly not require the scientific way of thinking and practices.

This cultural tendency, essentially determined by the materialized and commercialized powers, has been making human beings lose their most essential capability and spontaneity: the rational or scientific way of thinking and action with respect to the problems in social, cultural, humanist-academic and spiritual fields which are in fact much more important than the sciences and technology regarding the essential requirements of mankind. In other words, the problems such as those about values, faiths, history, culture and the arts are more directly connected with the quality and justice of humanist life. As a matter of fact, the objective or commonly acceptable knowledge of human nature, culture, society, religion and history should be also handled scientifically in our technical-commercial civilization if we want to deal with those crucial problems in a rational and effective way. Semiotics, with its institutional-ideological-analytical devices formed by interdisciplinary-theoretical pluralism, can certainly be applied to the relevant reflections on the formations of both the vertical processes and lateral structures of the humanities in general and philosophy in particular, with a view to making clearer their composition, formation and function in different historical, cultural and ideological aspects.

As one of the academic-institutionalizing arrangements, the system of “academic stars” plays a determinative role in guiding practical directions

in the humanities, including semiotics. For example, regarding the traditional humanities, do we still need to restrict our intellectual horizons in the established framework consisting of series of historical “masters” when the latter are evaluated mainly by their temporary successes in various historical stages and contexts? In other words, should the historical influence itself become the authoritative standard for our evaluations of current humanities? If yes, why has the habitual way based on the system and lineage of the academic stars not been accepted by natural sciences? (The humanistic stars system also plays a commercial role in academic marketing; as famous brands in general, the humanist stars can be intentionally used in promoting professionally and commercially competitive manipulations.) Must the latter, as the true scientific practice, rely on objective and empirical criteria? When the network of famous academic figures becomes the very base on which works are authoritatively formed, scholarly norms and criteria and the humanistic or semiotic practices will be further segregated from reality and objectivity of all kinds. The sets of opinions and decisions of powerful individual stars will replace the objective world to become the final scholarly judges and authorities that are in fact ideologically chosen and profitably fixed.

Why does semiotic theory always pay attention to philosophical problems? Because it is traditional philosophy that has played such a determinative role in forming the scholarly ways of various social and human sciences in history, but it also strangely consists of concepts with different semantic compositions and ways of reasoning produced in different historical-cultural periods and contexts. The highly semantic inconsistency of philosophical conceptual compositions itself proves its unreliable efficiency in guiding the big family of contemporary human sciences. That is why semiotic theoreticians want to firstly use pan-semantic methods to analyze the merits and usage of philosophy as a discipline. But on the other hand, semioticians also want to use traditional philosophical-theoretical elements to enrich the theoretical sources of semiotic theory. In fact, the strengthened interaction of semiotics and philosophy leads to mutual improvements of the both. This philosophical influence is especially linked to the ethical knowledge of mankind in all civilizations and accordingly to the fortune of human beings. The existing state of the semantic uncertainty of philosophies becomes the easily manipulative means to be used in utilitarian competitions of various kinds. The non-scientific and highly rhetorically-formed features of philosophical discourses with strong semantic vagueness and uncontrollable inferential-disorder are liable to be employed for any kind of intellectual and ideological practice.

If such problems do not become proper questions in the west, they should be quite justified questions in China. Chinese semiotics must follow genuinely rational principles for reorganizing and readjusting our semiotic and humanist learning. Regarding the task of China's learning of western theoretical discourses, institutional semiotics has an additional role. Any kind of intellectual discourse, whether scientific or ethical in nature, can be used or handled by any other different purposes or motives, for example the commercialized and other individual profitable-utilitarian ones, and therefore those properly composed academic discourses could be used for other kinds of roles contrary to the scientific and ethical ones. So institutional analysis can help guarantee the scientific and ethical quality of the presentation of humanistic scholarly discourses. It is semiotic-institutional analysis that can help distinguish between different layers of compositional and functional structures of the human sciences. This additional function will be especially connected to the ideological analysis of human sciences, and any ideological part is essentially related to the possible role of ethical subjectivity too. Institutional analysis can also help disclose the factual situations that any academic or scholarly practice is associated with its social and cultural contexts, and therefore the humanistic-theoretical investigations should be made with respect to all the related contexts in order to reach the actual objects and purposes of scholarly practices. There has been no purely humanistic scholarly existence. Behind the scholarly discourses and their practical processes, the directly or implicitly connected non-scholarly motives, purposes, objectives and subjectively determining factors and multiple contextual determinations can be disclosed besides the denotative meaning of the discourses.

## **7. Conclusion: the Definition of Semiotics Reconsidered**

We may maintain that the general recognition that semiotics is the study of signs would become more simplistic in reference to the development of the current semiotic-theoretical practices. At first, different thinkers had different conceptions about the same term of "sign" (Saussure and Peirce belong to quite divergent lines of theoretical thinking, for example). For Peirce and some other American semioticians, their semiotics has been on the one hand connected to pragmatic-logic studies and on the other so naturally connected with a history of signs that it is indeed part of the history of natural sciences. For Saussure and his followers, the conception of sign tends to be on the one hand connected to theoretical-linguistic semantics and on the other connected in multiple ways to modern social-

humanist sciences. In light of this brief note, the question is whether we should still stick to the traditional saying that semiotics is the study of signs. The semantic clarification touches every level and aspect of scientific discourses and their various preconditions rather than focusing on the signs as the signifying units only. When the study of signs as the main objects is expanded into that of signification and communication in general, the mechanisms of signifying, recognizing and communication becomes much more complicated and expanded; semiotics may then be regarded as a total body about a certain synthetic hierarchy of signification, communication, constitution and textuality, or simply, a multiple-semantic institutionalization consisting of both lateral and vertical social-cultural dimensions. So we can no longer simply call semiotics something specialized in classifying and analyzing phenomena of signs. ●n the other hand, however, the definition of the sign-centric semiotics remains quite useful for the establishment of the professionalization and institutionalization of the single-disciplinary-directed semiotics. The fact also reminds us of the existing links between the philosophy-centric semiotic theory and the professional-institutional development of the current semiotic movement. The latter tends to be contrary to the spirit and orientation of the structural-semiotic movement based on the humanist-interdisciplinary operations. In other words, should the new direction of cross-cultural semiotics in our new century be organized along the professional-profitably defined line or along the line that can lead to the systematic modernization of human sciences? This particular methodological-technical problem within the semiotic practices is directly connected with the more basic epistemological problems within the human sciences in general. ●nce again, is so-called semiotics only the name of a single discipline that is used to support academics to survive in academic marketing, or instead a general term that represents the efforts to promote a much higher and broader intellectual-revolutionary program of mankind? The cross-cultural tum of the current global semiotic movement has urged us once again to advance the level of our epistemological reflection that further turns our attention to the innate interconnection between semiotics and human sciences.

Therefore, in terms of the above analysis, the present author strongly asserts that international semiotics in its cross-cultural period in the new century should not be restricted by the traditional concept of semiotics taken as the learning merely of signs or symbols in cultural history. Despite the fact that signs or symbols can play an important role in organizing semantic, functional and pragmatic studies, these semiotic concepts still function within the entire academic and cultural contexts of

mankind. So the title of semiotics should be employed for a much larger and more comprehensive thematic domain, namely a pan-semantic analysis about humanistic discourses, and so-called pan-semantic scholarship will lead to a much more significant set of problems which are about the way to more deeply understand the structure and functions of a social-cultural-historical world. Accordingly, the term semiotics can be added to with some new elements and given new functions; or simply, the term can be “re-used” in correspondence with the greatly changed social, cultural and academic contexts in our new century. Regarding the problem of the re-use of the old name or the invention of the new name, the former seems to be more desirable and more workable; that is why we still think, for a purely practical reason, the general academic term “semiotics” should not be replaced at present. Nevertheless, it is better for semiotics to live and act within the entire human sciences. After all, we have no necessity or desirability to define and use the term according to its etymological origins. Instead, the term can and should be used to represent a significant desirability for the grandiose task of synthetically reorganizing all human sciences with a view to promoting a more well-balanced progress of global human civilization.

## CHAPTER TEN

# THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL TURN IN THEORETICAL SEMIOTICS: FROM SIGNS IN THE NATURAL/CULTURAL WORLD TO THE SEMANTIC INSTITUTIONS OF ACADEMIC DISCOURSES<sup>39</sup>

### Foreword

The present chapter attempts to discuss a strategic shift of general semiotics formed in its global and cross-cultural development in the new century. Global semiotics, or the globalization of semiotics, indicates a pan-comparative turn of present semiotic studies. In result, global semiotics could be equivalent to comparative semiotics, which leads to a new reflection on general or theoretical semiotics. The semiotic movement should obtain new momentum in the globalization era. It will be connected to both Euro-American and non-Euro-American academic/cultural traditions; it will be also linked to all social/human sciences. In fact, semiotics will become one of the theoretical bases for reorganizing and reforming the entire humanities of mankind. Signs have been the central conceptual units used for the study of meaning in semiotic history, while for the past few decades the problem of meaning has been more and more

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<sup>39</sup> Originally published in *Semiotica*, Vol. 162-1/4: 175-193 (2006). This chapter is the revised version of a lecture delivered at the Finnish "Global Semiotics" Congress in Imatra on June 14, 2005. In this chapter the author attempts to give a general outline of his semiotic point of view through presenting a selected bibliography. What is given here remains sketchy, indicating the scope of the author's personal scientific concerns. The topics in this paper are related in multiple ways to the current epistemological discussions in the west, so several related works are put in the list of references, although the paper does not go to detail about concepts like truth, referent, reality and objectivity. Please refer to Li (1997) for more related discussions.



expanded to include the structure and formation of the entire discourse of the humanities. In other words, our concern with the progress of semiotics today is closely linked to our endeavor for promoting the progress of human sciences in general. Therefore semiotics can be regarded as the main gateway to the epistemological and methodological modernization of global human sciences. With respect to this objective, the main object-domain of semiotic operations will be more precisely shifted from the actual world to academic discourses.

## **1. Three dimensions in global semiotics and semiotics as multi-comparative studies**

### **1.1 Three dimensions: the geographical, the cultural, and the academic**

An expanded conception of semiotics in the era of the academic globalization can be conceived in terms of three dimensions emerging in human history: geographical expansion, cultural communication and the reorganization of academic institutions. The conception of semiotic globalization involves these three different dimensions. First, it is a geographical expansion of the established scholarship of Euro-American semiotics to non-Euro-American areas. This is the basic part of the present international semiotic activities: the one-sided spread of the Euro-American semiotic science to other areas. At the cultural dimension it indicates a more complicated but perhaps a more productive aspect: the desirability for intellectual interaction and the engagement of different semiotic traditions. The third dimension means the intellectual interaction between the different traditional semiotic heritages and the theoretical structures of modern human sciences. The three dimensions of global semiotics can also be described as different practices at the sociological and cultural as well as academic-theoretical levels respectively. In this sense, semiotic globalization is connected to a comprehensive program for reorganizing the current topography of the human sciences of mankind. In fact, the above three dimensions of the international semiotic movement are already implied in the usual terminological expressions: the interdisciplinary and cross-cultural theoretical practices. The pursuit and realization of these theoretical goals are closely linked to the academic goal of the globalization of semiotics.

## 1.2 Semiotics as multi-comparative studies

In result, semiotic operation is comparative in nature. Comparative methods can be applied to different academic aspects such as areas, disciplines, schools and cultural traditions. Globalization is equivalent to the topographic expansion of any kind with respect to its “spatial” integrity. The above three types of conception of semiotic globalization should be formulated in operative terms: comparative practices in a broad sense. Any comparative scholarly operation means an intellectual procedure performed, beyond the single-disciplinary framework, in combination with other disciplines formed in different cultural and academic contexts.<sup>40</sup> The globalization of semiotics is therefore reduced to a general comparative semiotics that is innately contrary to any disciplinary-centrist semiotics.

Furthermore, comparative studies refer to the dialogue among scholars with different backgrounds, bringing about a necessity for establishing the common ground for carrying out meaningful communication between different types of academic discourses that are determined by different scholarly constitutions and institutions. Semiotic globalization means the expanded dialogue and cooperation among agents with different disciplinary training and cultural backgrounds. The concept of “sign” provides us with a common denominator for communication between different scholarly languages, while different cultural and academic traditions will make the formation of a common denominator in semiotic communication more difficult and accordingly increase intelligent intricacies for inquiry. In this sense, the Euro-American semiotic centrism indicates an operative restriction on comparative studies. We cannot directly or readily apply the conceptual reservoir and reasoning patterns established in the Euro-American academic traditions in non-Euro-American subject matters. Therefore in global semiotics there exist two different processes: the spread of Euro-American knowledge to other areas of the world and the latter’s further creative study in comparative terms. Global semiotics means a double effort for each part: to study the original theory originating from the Euro-American theoretical sources and to

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<sup>40</sup> In my speech at the Chinese semiotic conference in Hangzhou in 2002, I stated that there exist three types of comparative semiotics: one in individual topics applying multiple methods (inside a discipline); one about general semiotic theory regarding one discipline (about an entire discipline); and one about general semiotic theory concerning multiple disciplines (among multiple disciplines). Therefore the interdisciplinary can be reduced to the comparative in general terms (see Li 2003: 250).

creatively work on cross-cultural projects at the above-mentioned different comparative levels.<sup>41</sup>

## 2. The theoretical identity of semiotics and the semiotician as the interdisciplinary mediator

### 2.1 Interdisciplinary pluralism vs. philosophical centrism

A deeper implication involving semiotic globalization is related to two aspects: a) what is the more desirable pattern for present-day semiotic studies and b) how should we “use” the term “semiotics” as a methodological organizer to perform academic projects along the most desirable line. Regarding the first aspect, the most important question is epistemological in nature: should general semiotics or semiotic theory be theoretically based on a philosophy or be interdisciplinarily-directed in its strategic consideration? From an epistemological point of view, the interdisciplinary-directed and the philosophy-centered theoretical constructions in semiotic-theoretical studies are mutually contradictory to a certain extent with each other. In fact, there is a self-contradiction for the theoretical use of the term in the latter. Many theoretical outcomes in semiotic studies come from non-philosophical disciplines such as linguistics, anthropology, historiography, psychology and others.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the philosophical-

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<sup>41</sup> Umberto Eco points out that the time for a new systematization of semiotics has yet not arrived today (Eco 1999: 8). In my opinion, the conceived systematization should also be linked to cross-cultural semiotics. The latter should be regarded as one of the main areas for semiotic frontier research today (see Li 2003: 92).

<sup>42</sup> Many theoretical debates in western semiotics are due to this philosophical centrism, by which semiotic theory is frequently reduced to some philosophical theory, including both analytic philosophy of language and continental existentialism. Eco once said: “Thus a general semiotics is simply a philosophy of language” (1984: 8). Later he also expresses that: “*On ne peut qu’être d’accord avec Heidegger: le problème de l’être ne se pose qu’à celui qui a été jeté dans l’Être-là, dans le Dasein... Dans notre Être-là, nous avons l’expérience fondamentale d’une limite que le langage peut dire par anticipation (et donc prédire seulement) d’une seule manière, une limite au-delà de laquelle il s’efface en silence: c’est l’expérience de la Mort*” (2000: 593). It seems that Eco tends to use the same term (sign) to represent both philosophical and linguistic conceptions just like he uses the same term (language) to refer to the related analytic and existential philosophical conceptions. Eco correctly points out that analytic philosophy is satisfied at the conception of truth but disregards what is related to it prior to the thing (see Eco 1999: 19). However we may use the term hermeneutics

centrism of semiotic theory must involve different philosophical schools that differ from each other in different ways that would involve semiotic discussions in traditional philosophical disputes. The above distinction is further connected to different interpretations of the nature of knowledge in general and that of the humanities in particular. This distinction is also related to the different opinions about the status quo of the current humanities: is their present state naturally-historically justified, or something that should be more thoroughly reformed? The interdisciplinary character of semiotic theory is contrary to any philosophical reductionism. Therefore the semiotic way of thinking should become de-philosophically-centrist in character. This fact will profoundly change the traditional way of theoretical practice in the humanities as well. In addition, the cross-cultural development of semiotics will further strengthen this tendency of new theoretical construction. One of the reasons, among others, lies in the fact that the constitutions and functions of western and non-western philosophies are essentially divergent.<sup>43</sup> This divergence, nevertheless, can be positively used to promote the development of semiotic theory in its interdisciplinary-directed practice.

Our understanding of the last question is related to another common sensical question like “how can we properly or productively grasp and use the term semiotics?” In this sense semiotics can be operatively used merely as a general name for an academic-organizing strategy. By justifying the status quo of the social and human sciences, the present method of semiotic studies is naturally a mere part of the former. In order to reform or to modernize the humanities, general semiotics is interpreted first as a tool for reorganizing the humanities. With such an expanded function, general semiotics should readjust its traditional structure and function from this side. We may try to practically put it this way: is semiotics what it has actually performed in its present manner, or is its identity to be defined in reference to all other existing disciplines currently performed in the academic world? But global semiotics will strengthen a desideratum for forming a new type of meta-theoretical practice to treat a general theoretical problem facing current semiotic studies: multi-

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to cover all related epistemological factors prior to the fact in order to expand our epistemological horizon.

<sup>43</sup> This author says: “A complete understanding of the Chinese philosophy is far from being a mere philosophical discussion; in fact it involves different aspects such as semantic organizations, social/scholarly institutions, scholars’ motivations, intellectual conditions of the audience, cultural structures, politico-historical contexts, and the traditional academic functions in Chinese history” (Li 2001: 170).

interdisciplinary-directed theoretical practices in human sciences. In this sense, semiotic theory should be linked to the entire theoretical structure of the humanities or human sciences, and to participate in the current reorganizing process of the latter. This desideratum will be further required when semiotics is to expand itself to the non-western academic world. In other words, the traditional philosophy-centric semiotic theory should turn to the present interdisciplinary-directed one. On the one hand, the task of semiotics is much more expanded; and on the other its scientific significance could be more enhanced as well, for it now could become the very main impulse for the modernizing process of all human sciences. Accordingly semiotics should live in and merge itself with the entire humanities.

Here the above-mentioned task becomes doubly significant with respect to the strategic reflection in global semiotics. As non-western humanities will enrich and complicate the composition of western as well as global humanities, the practices of non-western semiotics will make the identity of general semiotics richer and more changeable in future. When we accept that semiotics is a useful tool for promoting dialogue between western and non-western humanities, the question about what the more acceptable content and function of general semiotics should be becomes more relevantly necessary for our discussions. Regular scholarly projects are mostly organized in various disciplinary-centric contexts, while semiotic inquiry is always faced with the situation of rapidly changeable interactions between traditional disciplines. The semiotician is not only a regular operator along fixed procedures in a certain disciplinary framework; he is also a creative adventurer working in interdisciplinary-boundary areas.

## **2.2 The mediator for the multi-interdisciplinary theoretical dialogue: professional specialism and intellectual freedom**

Therefore we can see a basic contrast between two kinds of scholars: the disciplinary-specialist and the interdisciplinary-mediator. In other word, there is a problem of relationship between semiotics and other regular disciplines. In general, semioticians tend to have a special interest in theoretical interactions of different scholarly systems. We may say that they are the specialists dealing with the multi-disciplinary-relational problems in the academic network. If so, the IASS should make great use of its academic image and resources to organize international semiotic activities in a more pluralist way. In terms of this new interpretation about theoretical and applied semiotics, the former is closer to the study of the

interrelationship and interaction of all discipline-rooted theories, especially those originating from the humanities implicative of semantic ambiguity. A theoretical semiotician, besides being perhaps specialized in the technical details of definite disciplines, is also specialized in the intellectual relationship of the epistemological and methodological theories implied in various disciplines. No other kind of scholar could be more suitable than the semiotician for playing such a mediating role in the common enterprise of reorganizing the theoretical topography of social and human sciences in the world. In conclusion, disciplinary-centrist scholarship and interdisciplinary scholarship are mutually complementary in our expanded academic contexts. In a certain sense the both belong to different strategic levels: the single-disciplinary-methodological one and the interdisciplinary-epistemological one respectively. The latter is the user or applicant of the former in a broad sense. We could say that semiotics is a new type of learning about the multiple scientific relationships of different theories.

### 3. Western basis: The European-American experience

Semiotics can be conceived as a highly promising scientific procedure with respect to its different perspectives. The evaluation of semiotics has nothing to do with its status quo, but is instead related to one's conception of semiotics-related knowledge. If one accepts a more grand profile of semiotics, this would be due to the stronger devotion one has for a greater academic ambition. Semiotics as the thinking about signs has a very long history, and its fruitful results have already been deposited in various scientific achievements across history. The thought of signs played an especially active role during the pre-scientific stages, promoting the progress of sciences and technologies in history. It is only in modern times that semiotics has become a significant academic stream following the all-round development of natural, social and human sciences since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The fact that semiotics has become an international movement with the establishment of the IASS in the 1960s is owed to the remarkable post-war development of social and human sciences, in which French structuralism played a determinative role. It is noteworthy that all modern semiotic masters such as Saussure, Peirce, Husserl, Morice, Hjelmslev, Sebeok, Benveniste, Barthes, Metz, Chomsky, Greimas and many other contemporary semiotics-practiced scholars have cherished intellectually and academically more ambitious goals beyond their own respective specialties. This common tendency becomes the very source of and inspiration for their respective semiotic adventures. So why did each

of them choose semiotics as a life-long devotion?<sup>44</sup> Because it is logically linked to the huge intellectual ideal that is connected to the future development of all human knowledge. Therefore as followers of the same line of semiotic adventure, we should be inspired by the same kind of intellectual enthusiasm when we are involved in the global semiotic practice in the new century.

Besides, with respect to the contemporary history of semiotics, we have to recognize the huge contribution of the French structural movement, which is the main reason why semiotic thought in post-Cultural Revolutionary China has steadily spread. Not only structural semiotics but also other related post-war French thoughts have exercised a strong influence on Chinese human sciences. Among the many factors involved, its comprehensive intellectual horizon and its interdisciplinary strategy are the most relevant factors for intellectual development in China. At the same time, as the students of the current French thought, we Chinese are clear about both the positive and negative experience gained from French structuralism. What we emphasize in this respect lies more in its operative strategy than in its philosophical implication. Current French thought provides us with very fruitful and instructive documents for further study. With a tendency to overview the entire panorama of the humanities, the structural movement discloses, most instructively, the flaws implied in the internal logic of the humanities that can become a profitable starting point for further investigation. On the other hand, the richly formulated discourse of the French humanities provides an impressive example about the epistemological relationship between the humanities and reality at its various levels. These two intellectually serious flaws in human sciences, the internal-logical weakness and their serious disconnection with reality, are exhibited more clearly and more instructively in the structural movement than in many other modern intellectual trends.<sup>45</sup> So the French

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<sup>44</sup> In my lecture given at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 2000 I mentioned all these great western names as the reason why we Chinese scholars should pay serious attention to semiotic studies. In that lecture I particularly characterized the common tendency, shared by all of them, of maintaining a wide semiotic horizon related to the entire intellectual world (see Li 2003: 240-242).

<sup>45</sup> It is interesting for us to read Eco's following words: "*Debarrassons tout d'abord le terrain d'une equivoque qui domine ma semiotique, equivoque que j'ai creee moi-meme, et en particulier en citant a chaque fois mon dialogue avec Barthes qui se terminait par <et surtout il faut tuer le referent !>*" (see Violi 2000: 21). In my interpretation of the concept, the term "referent" cannot be so easily destroyed; it involves many aspects which should be discussed more seriously one by one. We do not have a single problem with the referent. There exists a typology of problems regarding the referent. Barthes' brilliant criticism of the conception

way of semiotic thought becomes a relevantly stimulating source for Chinese semiotics in general because of its broader intellectual panorama and its pertinent reflections on the multi-relationship between thought and reality.<sup>46</sup> Accordingly, semiotics should be regarded as the most relevant intellectual tool in dealing with the renovation of the present structure of the humanities; the vision could be further widened when the latter includes its non-western counterpart. In my opinion, semiotics has already become the leading epistemology and methodology for the western-non-western academic dialogue in the humanities. Why is semiotics especially related to human sciences?<sup>47</sup> First, we already have much more practically reliable or objectively stable knowledge about natural and social sciences. It is the humanities that innately lack the common denominator concerning meaning and value for communication between different intellectual traditions or streams of thought. For the purpose of attaining mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence of different human beings in the globalization era, we have to find or create a common denominator for meaningful communication between different beliefs and thoughts.

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could lead to a more rational, rather than irrational, questioning about reality, objectivity and truth. The post-modernist analysis of the conception is a simplistic one that I am unable to elaborate upon here for reasons of space. The author will deal with it in detail in his upcoming book. For now, please refer to the author's work "Verbal Medium and Constitution of Meaning" (Li 1997: 53-74).

<sup>46</sup> While writing this paper I heard of the sad news of the death of Paul Ricoeur. As the earliest Chinese introducer of his thought to China, I wrote a short memoir about my personal contact with him over the past 25 years and my high evaluation of his intellectual heritage. He is one of the few western philosophers indicating an intellectual tendency for interdisciplinary and semiotic research. When I translated Levi-Strauss' *La Pensée Sauvage* in the late 1970s, I mentioned Ricoeur's deep sympathy with structural semiotics to Chinese readers. When I finished my translation of his *Main Trends in Philosophy* in the early 1980s I tried to arouse the attention of Chinese readers to his interdisciplinary orientation in philosophizing. Of course, from a semiotic point of view, Ricoeur has not done enough along this line, but he has already done much more than many other philosophers. In my judgment Ricoeur's semiotic tendency is obviously restricted by his ontological fundamentalism. In general, his works disclose a typical ambiguity caused by the interaction between philosophy and semiotics.

<sup>47</sup> My epistemological emphasis regarding semiotics is different from some western colleagues who maintain that semiotics can be related to all fields of human knowledge. At first, I stress a reasonable separation between the semiotic and the scientific. Sebeok says that semiotics has a task to promote dialogue between the humanities and natural sciences (see Sebeok's topics in *Semiotica*, Vol. 136-1/4 (2001) and in many other places). However, there should instead be a basic operative demarcation between the two types of scientific practice, I think.



Semiotics has proved itself to be the most effective means for attaining this significant purpose. Thus, semiotics should be linked to all practices concerning the improvement of the global humanities. Its interdisciplinary strategy can be performed at two levels: the disciplinary-centric level and the interdisciplinary-directed level. This semiotic operation at the above two levels across academia will strengthen the process of reorganizing or modernizing human sciences. Interdisciplinary-directed semiotics will also further shift disciplinary-framed scientific projects to question-centric projects. This will help us to consider our scholarly programs without being restricted by the established disciplinary patterns, thus making them more relevant to the new epistemological desiderata regarding scholarship and reality alike.

#### **4. The Chinese potential: the implicated meaning of Chinese semiotics to global semiotics**

The international or global significance of Chinese semiotics lies in that its development would also influence the constitution of the existing Euro-American semiotic traditions some day in the future. The development of Chinese semiotics will enrich the presentation of the above-mentioned problems implied in human sciences in general because of its intellectual ambition to become an academic movement at the global level.

##### **4.1 The special features of Chinese semiotics**

Among all non-European-American semiotic practices, the Chinese one indicates a very important character, as I have discussed many times before. We should describe current Chinese semiotic studies according to three aspects:

- a) The regular type of the activity, as we see in the west
- b) The theoretical potential in various existing disciplines which is related to semiotic thought
- c) The theoretical and practical potential in traditional Chinese and Chinese-western comparative studies

Part a) is still developing and is not yet influential in present Chinese academia. But we should not estimate the significance of Chinese semiotics merely in terms of this straightforward observation, which cannot be regarded as properly representative of Chinese semiotics. By contrast, part b), in my opinion, is much more important than part a). This

is not only because its potential can easily be actualized but also because theoretical scholars in this part indicate a more creative and more profound intellectual possibility. We could even expect more from this part with respect to its huge potential to promote Chinese semiotics. Probably, however, the most stimulating aspect of Chinese semiotics is exhibited in part c). If part b) can provide more theoretical knowledge, required for semiotic studies, part c) is prepared for a more original intellectual creation not only for Chinese semiotics but also for global semiotic adventures in future, because part c) will be even more capable of joining the theoretical dialogue with the western humanities through the mediation of Chinese semiotics.

#### **4.2 Chinese semiotics as one of the main developments of current interdisciplinary/cross-cultural semiotic practices**

It is interesting to note that Chinese classical scholarship as such could actually be employed to join global semiotics and international humanities at present. A semiotic transformation of the Chinese classical discourse could lead to making this heterogeneous dialogue possible. The process should firstly be a sufficiently interdisciplinary interaction between the Chinese and western traditional academic discourses. The Chinese tradition, basically consisting of philosophical, historical, literary and artistic discourses, provides a different kind of intellectual source of mankind that could complement, enrich, and even impact the knowledge of the western humanities as long as the former has been suitably translated to the universally intelligible language first. Unfortunately the value of the latter can hardly present itself at its original expression plane. That is why the present China studies in the west are less productive at the level of theoretical studies because of their conservative methodological direction. Chinese semiotics set in the framework of cross-cultural semiotics will produce a double impact on the global humanities: to make traditional Chinese scholarship more commensurable and communicable with the western humanities and to stimulate in turn a spiritual stimulant to global semiotics.

#### **4.3 Chinese semiotics and de-philosophical-centrism**

Chinese semiotics in the sense of part c) once again implies high significance and indicates even a necessity with respect to the desired interdisciplinary direction of semiotic operation. A philosophically-directed semiotic theory would perhaps hamper the development of

Chinese semiotics. Despite using the same term of “philosophy”, Chinese and western philosophies are widely divergent in their constitution and function. The involved negative impact would be even doubly increased for Chinese-western comparative semiotics because the latter must be related to both interdisciplinary and cross-cultural operations.

### **5. Semiotics as a general designation for the inquiry into the relational structure of different disciplinary theories in global human sciences**

In its global meta-theoretical sense, far from being a mere singly identified discipline, semiotics could become a general “conductor” for the “symphony” of human sciences, with special attention paid to the multi-relational problems regarding all their theoretical resources. The existing disciplines have been naturally and practically formed in history. As long as they are needed in the academic market they have a rationale to continue existing that way.<sup>48</sup> The existing way of doing scholarship can of course satisfy the intellectual interests of professionally-directed educators. But a new type of intellectual interest directed towards the inter-relational problems among different theoretical resources of various disciplines can only arise after it has relatively got rid of the predominant professional restriction. Theoretical or general semiotics could be regarded as a special “discipline” about the relationship of theories originating from various disciplines. Semiotics would be therefore understood as a study of the relationship of different disciplinary theories.

This position presents itself as a typical rational/empirical character, intellectually directed towards various domains of reality. Any type of science is directed towards some kind of reality rather than to mere fiction.<sup>49</sup> Thus scholarly semiotics is in fact a science rather than an art.

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<sup>48</sup> In my recent publications in Chinese, the topic of the tension between scientific enquiry in human sciences and the related market competition has been frequently treated. The latter seriously damages the former with respect to the quality of scientific production (see the titles given here and in other places). To a lesser extent the problem exists in the west as well. After truth and reality are rejected by post-modern radicals, the motivation of scholars is reduced to a mere personal search for success in academic marketing. Apparently, extreme relativism indicates a less dogmatic attitude, but in fact it leads to a vulgar commercialization.

<sup>49</sup> Eco, once again, confusingly applies his criticism of the term “referent” in two different ways: the scientific and the literary. He says that: “*La tâche principale d'une écriture de création sera alors de nous montrer que les limites de l'être sont infranchissables*” (see Petitot and Fabbri 2000: 599). In my opinion, we have to

The distinction between the scientific and the artistic operations is also based on academic rationalism that is in contrast with so-called post-modernism or epistemological nihilism in general. Why is semiotics more capable of dealing with interdisciplinary and cross-cultural subject matters? Because interdisciplinary and cross-cultural semiotic communication firstly indicates a necessity for establishing a relevant semantic and grammarian means for bridging different traditional discursive channels. For example, we must create common units at the expression plane for communication between some heterogeneously formulated discourses. Regarding either western interdisciplinary-academic or western-non-western comparative dialogues, we cannot use the terminology of one discipline to fully relevantly express the discursive content of other disciplines. That is why we cannot reduce theoretical principles of linguistics or anthropology to philosophical ones either. Similarly, we can hardly describe Chinese philosophical discourse in terms of the western philosophical terminology. The present comparative theoretical studies among all cultures suffer from the lack of such a pertinent semantic commensurability. In addition, a more epistemologically-directed semiotic inquiry involves the necessity for the communicational “grammar” or codes to make the dialogue, comparison or combination between different theoretical discourses of various disciplines possible.

Without much tracing back of the historical development of semiotic thought, we focus instead on how to more productively make use of the term semiotics or general semiotics. The term semiotics is evidently far from being a sufficiently suitable designation for all studies of theoretical relations in different disciplines of human sciences, but it is at least the right name for the most crucial type among them: the multiple semantic commensurability of different academic discourses at interdisciplinary and cross-cultural levels in human sciences. In this regard no other academic title could today be more suitable than that of semiotics for being used in this way.

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make a basic distinction between two kinds of semiotic operation: the scientific and the literary. Otherwise we are just undermining our scientific practice, reducing it to an intellectual entertainment. But on the other hand, literary devices can certainly be used to describe some aspects of historical reality that cannot be directly treated well. In this case, the literary can function as the sociological see Le Goff's comment on Eco's novels (Le Goff 2000).

## **6. The expanded object-domain of semiotics: The pan-semantic institutions of academic discourses**

As we have pointed out before, in western semiotic history the sign is the basic concept to unify the semiotic way of thinking involving nature, culture, logic and language. In fact, logic and linguistics were the main disciplines to promote the semiotic way of thinking until its modern development, primarily represented by Saussure and Peirce. No doubt, modern semiotic scholarship formed in terms of the two types of signs will remain the very foundation of global semiotic development in future. However, the new situation of semiotic globalization requires a strategic expansion that leads to a double-structure of the elementary objects of semiotics: signs in natural, cultural and linguistic domains on one hand and semantic institutions in academic discourse on the other. This strategic turn accords with the scholarly expansion from the traditional sign-discipline to the semantic mechanism of global human sciences.

The global development of semiotics even leads to a new fixation of semiotic/semantic units. Semiotics of discourse and of the semantic analysis of artistic institutions in current western semiotics will play a more and more expanded role for cross-cultural semiotics. In result, following further operation at interdisciplinary and cross-cultural levels, we will have an “expanded semiotics” centered on multi-formed semantic institutions, including the traditional learning of signs and semiosis, as the main object-domains of semiotic studies. The so-called semantic institutions, which are effective in forming the semantic constitution of academic written texts, involve three different levels: the social-cultural conditional, the external academic institutional and the internal academic institutional. What we discuss here belongs to the last one, namely the semantic institution in a narrow sense. After all, semiotic-semantic units must be enlarged to include the increased levels of the semantic mechanism that determine the constitutions and the functions of academic discourses, especially those in human sciences.

### **6.1 The traditional semiotic definition as the study of signs**

Despite the universal manifestation of signs in different cultures, the conception of semiotics as the thought of signs is rooted in western philosophical traditions. When structural linguistics emerged, the concept of the “sign” was generalized and taken as a general term with double aspects: the linguistic and the philosophical (pre-scientific). This double identity of the sign has been further expressed in the present two different

directions: the French one and the American one. In a broad sense the former might be more related to human/historical sciences and the latter more to natural/social sciences. Both semiotic movements share the same traditional term of “sign” although with different meanings and referents. Both are important for our further studies of semiotics. But the semiotic development for the past four decades urges a necessary reconsideration of the dominant role of this central concept used in semiotic studies today. Does the sign remain an effective basic unit to unify the semantic and pragmatic expressions now? Sign is used as the basic unit to deal with semantic analysis while this semantic analysis should involve multiple types of expressive and interpretive mechanisms in the social/cultural world as well as academic discourses. A proper semantic “unit” could be larger and more complicated than what is described by these linguistic and natural units; it will be related to an organizational system with signs as constituent units only. But the multi-structured semantic mechanism makes the basic constituent units less independent and less effective in shaping the semantic organization of academic discourses. A semiotics of academic discourses requires a more pertinent set of units to describe multiple semantic mechanisms, such as the linguistic, logical, intellectually and historically pre-determined expressive and pragmatic as well as political-ideological-procedural. All such added factors could be said to be hermeneutic in operation. In other words, an academic semiotics must be related to a semiotic-hermeneutic procedure. Therefore, interpretative units could be more related to “organizational units” than to natural (both linguistic and physical) units. We call these organizational units “semantic institutions”, whose original modes are what we originally learned from cinematic institutions in film semiotics. The requirement for these expanded semiotic units is especially due to the involvement of cross-cultural semiotic practice that discloses more complicated factors with respect to academic-semiotic communication.

## 6.2 The general concept of semantic institutions in academic discourse

This paper does not attempt to elaborate upon the investigation of academic-semiotic institutions as such.<sup>50</sup> Instead, it intends to indicate an emerging necessity for an epistemological shift of the basic conceptions in

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<sup>50</sup> The author employs the concept in several projects concerning his hermeneutic analysis of Chinese historiography, including his lecture given at the IASS Congress in Dresden in 1999 (see Li 2000-2001, 2003, among others).

the present global semiotic development. In brief, we may accept a binary scholarly strategy in principle: the scientific and the semiotic; namely one that distinguishes the semiotic from the scientific scholarship in general terms. Unlike the nature of general knowledge of nature and society, theoretical semiotics today is first of all a study of meaning of academic discourses as well as a study of relationships among disciplinary theories. In a deeper sense, one of the main objectives of semiotics is the study of how to understand the multiple semantic institutions of knowledge. Because of this, semiotics has different degrees/ranges of involvement in various types of knowledge: for example, at present it has little involvement in natural sciences, more involvement in social sciences, and the most involvement in human sciences. The last category of knowledge is characterized by its traditional blurry formulation and arbitrary way of reasoning. Precisely, semiotics is especially about the study of the theoretical-operational institutions with respect to the semantic and pragmatic constitutions of the humanities. Therefore, the institutional analysis of semantic mechanisms of scholarly discourses will essentially expand and deepen our understanding of problems of the constitution of meaning in the humanities. Such a scholarly position makes semiotics much more related to the conditions of the current human sciences than to their historical traces. Compared with its present great achievements, the historical source of semiotic thought is less relevant than before for characterizing the semiotic operation. Rather than being directed toward its earlier history, the current semiotic strength is firstly linked to its present academic context, and especially to its desirable academic structure in future. In my opinion, regarding the development of semiotic theory, the studies of the present semiotic situations are much more relevant than their historical perspective.<sup>51</sup> The above-mentioned three dimensions of semiotic globalization could be further reduced to a corresponding institutional analysis at three levels: sociological-political, cultural-historical and academic-disciplinary.

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<sup>51</sup> The emphasis on semiotics' links to modern human sciences is divergent from a focus on its historical perspective. The latter is obviously more connected with signs in the physical and cultural worlds. In contrast, the former is much more tied to the constitutions of present-day scientific discourse.

### 6.3 Institutional semantics and the disciplinary-directed/interdisciplinary-directed theoretical interaction

This non-philosophical-fundamentalist and interdisciplinary-theoretical approach could not be in accordance with the codes and rules of the existing academic systems across the world. A deeper epistemological and methodological challenge of semiotics to the development of the present human sciences lies in its tendency of anatomizing and reorganizing the external and internal academic institutions.<sup>52</sup> The concept of “institution” here can be taken in both its “hard” and “soft” aspects, referring respectively to the related social-economic-educational system and the related intellectually operative system. The latter is the very topic discussed here. Of course it does not mean that there is really a “semiotic imperialism” that tends to encroach on the existing academic area but rather means that it tends to organize the separate scientific programs besides or beyond the regular academic systems. It will promote a more reasonable and effective cooperation with the traditional academic world characterized by its disciplinary compartmentalization. Semiotics will first learn from various disciplinary-specialties and then try to reorganize them or creatively re-use them at another level of academic practice. Semiotics is a synthetic practice to make use of specialized knowledge created by specialists in various disciplines. Without tending to replace or degrade various disciplinary specialties, semiotics should learn from all kinds of disciplinary-centric knowledge. But besides this, semiotics proposes to start or to continue interdisciplinary research on the disciplinary-organized knowledge, in which semiotics has to reanalyze and reorganize disciplinary-specialized knowledge in various newly-created contexts. If so, the semiotic is complementary, rather than oppositional, to the regular systems of knowledge. The object and material of semiotic studies come from the disciplinary knowledge embodied in modern scientific progress. In fact, without underestimating the significance of specialized knowledge of various disciplines, semiotics can even help advance and improve that specialized knowledge through promoting horizontal communication between various disciplines. This holistic practical method can strengthen rather than weaken the specialization of disciplinary practices. As we have said, there are two concepts of semiotics: one that is the established

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<sup>52</sup> The author stated in 1995 that there are two basic requirements in both semiotics and human sciences: “semantic reorganization in the entire field of the humanities and institutional reorganization in their research procedures/strategies” (Li 1997: 76; also published in the *European Journal for Semiotic Studies*, Vol. 7-3/4 (1996)).



discipline artificially formed by dint of selected messages from academic history and another that is the scientific organizing strategy based on interdisciplinary inquiry beyond the existing academic framework. The two kinds of semiotics, namely the relatively regular one (including both applied semiotics and theoretical semiotics) and the relatively irregular one, could co-exist interactively, just as is the case with the co-existence of semiotics and other regular disciplines. Once again, the conception of semiotics as theoretical-institutional analysis hints that a general semiotics is logically linked to the structure of the entire theoretical humanities. Accordingly its scientific task will be advanced and expanded upon according to the multiple/synthetic way as well. Moreover, this epistemological turn also accords with a methodological transformation from disciplinary-centrist projects to problem-centrist studies.<sup>53</sup>

## 7. Several practical problems in promoting global semiotics

The inspiring objective of global semiotics has been made possible only in the Internet era. How to reorganize IASS programs in the Internet age is a new topic for our semiotic communities.

### 7.1 Internet Communication

The successful experience of the IASS for the past four decades has made the IASS become a very useful and comprehensive modality for organizing multiple-interdisciplinary scholarly communication in the world. The framework of the IASS today, however, has to be readjusted to more effectively develop its programs in the era of global semiotics. For this purpose, first of all, it should make efforts to establish an effective international dialogic stage for multi-dimensional communications among scholars from all areas and different fields. A dialogic stage or platform of the IASS should provide the possibility for a sufficient expression of all different semiotic interests and approaches. The difficulty, however, rests at two practical levels. First, in contrast with western semiotics, not all non-western semiotics has formed official institutions to regularly organize its semiotic activities. Second, because of financial restrictions,

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<sup>53</sup> It is a lesson from French structuralism that the problematique comes prior to disciplinary norms. The former can create its methodological combination of tools taken from different disciplines. So a semiotic project is usually based on several related disciplines rather than on a single one.

only a small percentage of non-European-American members are able to go to international activities each time. These two aspects become the main barriers for the IASS to really realize its ideal in the era of semiotic globalization. In this case, the strengthening and increase of internationally-directed online publishing centers with links to the IASS could be one of the effective measures to promote various programs in the process of semiotic globalization.

## 7.2 English as a universal language

In our Internet era, online communication should be a more useful and more effective channel to organize IASS communication across the world. For this purpose we have to first of all solve the problem of languages that are commonly used among members from different areas. At present, English is the only universal language capable of being read, or passively accessible, by most scholars in the world. But in non-English-speaking areas, only a small percentage of scholars can express themselves satisfactorily in spoken or written English. This phenomenon becomes a major practical obstacle for IASS communication at the global level.

First, we should distinguish between the prestige or right of a national language and linguistic necessity in verbal communication in international contexts. Members from different countries go to IASS activities not for the purpose of exhibiting their own national pride but to introduce their thoughts effectively to international colleagues. Each language in the civilized world has its merit regarding its own cultural tradition and social life, but not every language can be effectively used internationally. In the globalization era there exists a general split between domestic languages, used for original ways of thinking and domestic communication, and English, used for international communications. So every scholar is required to employ a double-language tool to face both domestic and international situations. The question is why is it English, rather than any other language, that is accepted as a universal language? It is just a problem caused by history. The ideological implication of the historical fact should be reasonably distinguished from the practical utility of the chosen language in the current practical world. According to this functional point of view, the benefit of any non-English-speaking scholars lies in using English as a linguistic tool in order to effectively attain their true purpose: sufficiently effective communication with international colleagues. A feeling of linguistic nationalism here is completely irrelevant or contrary to the purpose of academic communication for everyone. So there are two different requirements or criteria involving our

language problem that should not be mixed as they often are everywhere today. As an international organization, the IASS is faced with this practical barrier of the effective communication tool: how to provide a linguistic service to most IASS members. Particularly regarding the promotion of the online publications and forum of the IASS, an English editing service becomes an urgent requirement, because many members, including some distinguished European scholars, cannot master English to a satisfactory level for academic publication despite the fact that many of them are excellent semiotic thinkers. We should not miss their contributions to IASS communication merely because of this linguistic-technical barrier. In comparison with the large expense of organizing international activities, the cost of a regular English editing service for online publications is relatively limited. With this service, the IASS can really strengthen its function as an international organizer of semiotic communications across the world. The language problem becomes especially important for the IASS because it is the unique academic organization in the world that involves almost all disciplines of the humanities and all cultures into a comprehensive communicative context.

### **7.3 The double role of a single player: the organizer and the researcher**

A scholar's academic prestige could be measured by two separate criteria: achievement either in one's scientific specialty or in one's organizing activity. The latter should not be mixed with the former; namely, an academic organizer should be "neutrally" concerned about how to maintain academic-organizational efficiency and fairness to serve all different semiotic approaches without exercising any intellectual discrimination or partiality. Therefore members with an organizing duty should not have a mind to let their own individual scholarly position influence the intellectual direction of the IASS' organization and activities. For example, the lasting divergence between the American line and the French line in doing semiotics should not become a factor in determining members' attitudes and policies in dealing with IASS programs. The traditional divergence between the western and non-western semiotic scholarships should be treated in the same way as well. The IASS should maintain and follow a true academic democracy in our big family. Without this academic democracy, semiotic globalization can never develop itself effectively. Therefore, semiotic globalization, because of the multiplicity of its tasks, urges a change in the academic-ethical attitude of the scholarly

agents in order to make them capable of meeting this unprecedented theoretical challenge in our time.

Therefore, one's achievements in his organizing efforts should be separated from his scientific projects involved in the same planned program. The point lies in that one player with the double role should cherish equal or balanced enthusiasm for his two different aims. There are two kinds of achievements in IASS praxis for each member: the one for promoting the collective progress of IASS business as a whole and the other for attaining individual success in his scholarly plans. The latter is linked with one's other projects in his professional practices and the former with one's chosen commitment to the IASS mission. In this regard, the semiotic agent should be more ethically motivated in academia, for the semiotic goals have an extreme requirement for a collaborative spirit of semiotic scholars.

A semiotic organizer plays a double role as an academic organizer and as a scholarly specialist alike. The idea will be related to the substantial development of semiotic globalization. If we do not solve this problem at the organizing level we can hardly attain our goal at the scientific level either. Let us describe it either as a "stage builder" or as a "role-player on the stage" in the following metaphor:

The A-role: Practice for *building up* the stage: "A-role" as an organizer

The B-role: Practice for *performing* on the stage: "B-role" as a specialist

A and B could be performed by a single person, but the two roles should be separated in one's mind and separately conducted all the time during all related academic cooperative projects. For the A-process, every semiotic organizer should share the same idea and goal together with all other semiotic organizers. The collective effort of the IASS in its semiotic organizing activities would reject any organizer using his A-role to profit his B-role. Without the clear separation of these two roles in one's mind and behavior during a collective program, the progress of global semiotics will be systematically obstructed or even damaged.

#### **7.4 Ethical attitudes and academic reorientation**

Therefore, semiotic studies of academic semantic institutions not only involve the analysis of epistemological structures and functions of the humanities but also involve that of ethical choices in the related social-historical-political-cultural systems. The ethical (motivational)/internal (scholarly)/external (sociological) *triple-institutional analyses* will open a

rather productive and promising perspective for semiotic developments in the globalization age.

The scientific profit of a specialist is based on his specialized knowledge rooted in the academic system, which becomes the basis for his professional achievements. While semiotic approaches tend to decentralize the social-utilitarian function or professional protectionism of academic specialties, there could be different approaches to similar topics beyond the existing professionally specialized scholarship. Specialists would be unhappy about this “competition” with an academic “stranger” whose approach could be beyond his own knowledge. Disciplines are formed in connection with a number of institutional privileges such as position, title, income, honors, the capability of publication, privilege, the power to guide conferences, and academic/social influence. All such present-day social-academic factors would lead to the formation of utilitarian individualism in academic realms. Nevertheless the latter is contrary to the scientific tendency of the Enlightenment or to the classical-philosophical spirit for the pursuit of truth. We should distinguish between good and bad types of academic individualism as a precaution to the scholarly commercialization of today. The pursuit for common truth and the pursuit for individual profit present the crucial divergent lifestyles related to the future development of global semiotics. Without scientific idealism in mind, a scholar would have less motive to be open to the interdisciplinary games of semiotics that will increase the cost of his academic and intellectual investments and weaken his competition potential in the academic market. In this sense, the direction of the intellectual adventure involved in global semiotics is related to one’s ethical attitude as well.

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

# EPISTEMOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE INTERCULTURAL SEMIOTIC MOVEMENT: TOWARDS A NEW ENLIGHTENMENT IN THE THEORETICAL PRACTICE OF MANKIND<sup>54</sup>

### Summary

General semiotics could be taken as a scholarly reorganizer of knowledge or as a general perspective for readjusting the discourses of the humanities at three cultural domains: the western traditional, the non-western-traditional and the globalization-intercultural (comparative). The viewpoint is not based on what semiotics is at present but on how to make a desirable use of the term semiotics from a global perspective. So the intercultural or international semiotics will be conceived in comparison with the changed situations of all human sciences. Therefore semiotics first of all represents a spiritual ambition to reexamine and reorganize the mechanism of the current compartmentalized academic framework. Any single-disciplinary-based knowledge must produce certain positive scholarly results whose scientific eligibility is still based on the preconditions and operative frameworks of that discipline. That is one of the reasons why single-disciplinary-based scholarly results are frequently misused when their scientific topics reach beyond those institutional restrictions. One of the purposes of semiotics lies in reexamining the disciplinary-established restrictions through comparative/interdisciplinary interactions in critical terms. In other words, semiotics is helpful for analytically and synthetically reorganizing discursive products in terms of the entire academic disciplinary system. This author maintains that we are today faced with the

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<sup>54</sup> This paper was read at the 8<sup>th</sup> IASS Congress in Lyon. The supplementary statement was read during the concluding session as a newly elected vice-president. The chapter was previously published as part of the e-Proceedings of the Congress (2004).



necessity of a new scientific Enlightenment on a global level. And semiotics is required to epistemologically guide this global academic movement. There are two different aspects involving human knowledge: the content and the use of content. If science in general involves the former, then general semiotics would involve the latter. For this purpose semiotics is demanded to strengthen its endeavors in the multi-comparative direction by dint of sufficiently interdisciplinary operations.

## Preface

Semiotics could have presented much more important scientific results than it has actually produced in its professional framework today. Every semiotics player is faced with two different conceptions of semiotics: semiotics as what we are performing in concrete academic fields and semiotics as what we can more creatively conceive or anticipate from a broader intellectual perspective. Therefore we can and should also pay attention to the theoretical potential of the entire semiotic practice with respect to its multiple interdisciplinary and transcultural developments. Metaphorically, we may describe the former, the regularly performed semiotic practices, as the ones operating at the tactical level and the latter as the ones working at the strategic level. To properly grasp semiotics in its second sense, we should trace back the modern history of semiotics on the one hand and scientifically reexamine the conditions/situations of all social and human sciences on the other. Without a conception of the latter we can hardly grasp the profound theoretical potential implied by an idealist semiotics. In brief, the term “semiotic way of thinking” can be used in two different ways: the regular professional practices prevailing in various fields today, whose achievements could be characterized by their methodological-original creations, and as an index that refers to the general epistemological adventures in connection with the entirety of human knowledge.

In other words, our problem is how to use this academic designator in a more productive way. This chapter intends to point out that the following three existing scientific developments require us to estimate anew the understanding of the potential of semiotics: the interdisciplinary direction of semiotic operations; the necessity of restructuring the western human sciences; and the necessity of the global expansion of human sciences. The three suggested reconsiderations are essentially interconnected with each other. It is western semiotics itself that raises the problem of the necessity of restructuring western human sciences. It is also the latter that discloses that semiotics should have played a much more important role than what it

has done in its current professional practices. China has a 25-year history of studying semiotics, and Chinese semiotic practices started with passionate attention being paid to the achievements of those great western thinkers who have been concerned about major epistemological and methodological subject matters about modern social and human sciences.

## 1. Semiotics as an Interdisciplinary-Directed Scientific Operation

Semiotics produced from interdisciplinary studies is essentially related to how to more reasonably/scientifically apply the knowledge obtained in various scientific disciplines. Semiotics in a general term plays a key role in three modern major theoretical streams in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the (Anglo-American) analytic/pragmatic-type **philosophical one**, the (Swiss-French) semantic/structural **linguistic-sociological one**, and the (Austrian-German) phenomenological/psychoanalytical **logic-psychological one**. The modern semiotics founders, proceeding in different directions, lived in and together with the modern history of social and human sciences such as philosophy, linguistics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, literary/artistic theories and many others. Moreover, the earlier main representatives of contemporary western semiotic theoreticians had all cherished great theoretical ambitions of various kinds to deal with major theoretical problems in connection with contemporary sciences and societies alike. In general we may assert that the contemporary semiotic movements in Europe and North America had been triggered simultaneously by French structuralism. If all branches of modern semiotic practices indicate the tendency of interdisciplinary operation, French structuralism showed a stronger or more typical character of this type. That means French structuralism as a semiotic practice was involved in multiple fields of knowledge and their interaction.

How did the interdisciplinary-directed practices in the humanities happen? When those great thinkers attempted to search for some new tracks in their traditional disciplines, they tended to find more effective methods from neighboring disciplines. Thus, interdisciplinary practices have been a natural consequence in intellectual history. The essence of interdisciplinary practices is displayed in the efforts to get rid of the restrictive norms and rules of the current academic compartmentalization. While professional human science practices have usually been based on disciplinary-centric specializations, intellectual originality in semiotic ways of practices must appeal to interdisciplinary interactions; namely they need to recombine their epistemological and methodological tools

originating from all academic traditions. In this sense semiotics indicates a more revolutionary character in comparison with all other academic methodologies.

Another consequence of the interdisciplinary-directed operations of semiotics is reflected in a basic tendency to semiotic theorization. Traditionally, the utmost theoretical basis in various humanist disciplines mostly comes from different philosophical schools. The basic theoretical-semiotic contents are displayed in the philosophical discourses. By contrast, the interdisciplinary-directed semiotic theories are tended naturally to be de-philosophically-centralized in type. In this sense, semiotic theories should be differentiated from any philosophical fundamentalism. In fact, we can no longer base a theoretical elaboration for semiotic projects on the principles of any philosophical schools, even those in terms of a philosophy of language. By getting rid of a philosophical frame, a theoretical semiotics searches for its new theoretical foundation in terms of an interdisciplinary approach. Historically speaking, semiotic theory has, at least partly, grown up from some philosophical sources, but it has had to step forward beyond its philosophical origin later on, stretching over various theoretical practices in different fields. Accordingly, modern semiotic science should absorb its theoretical support from the intellectual reservoir provided by different historical disciplines; it can no longer limit itself to any single-disciplinary frame, including the linguistic-centric ones, despite its keeping a very close link with the latter.

The typical semiotic practices are characterized by their interdisciplinary-operative methods, which are still distinguishable between the interdisciplinary semiotic method within one discipline and that among multiple disciplines; or, we could say, the division between the **disciplinary-centric interdisciplinary** operation and the **trans-disciplinary interdisciplinary** operation. The latter can be naturally extended to the intercultural interdisciplinary domains. One of the key steps in semiotic strategic operations should be focused on the systematic anatomy of the cultural contexts, the theoretical presuppositions, the operative pre-conditions and the preconditioned frameworks with respect to various disciplines. Thus, the involved disciplines will be disorganized into different constituent parts at lower levels during semiotic analyses in order to be handled in a more consistent and commensurable way. Every discipline operates according to certain academic conditions and within various social-cultural contexts, so the meaning and effects of the textual works produced in that discipline are multiply determined. So the comparative interaction between/among different related disciplines would be a highly complicated process.

## **2. Semiotics as a Pan-Semantic Analysis for Understanding and Communication in Social and Human Sciences**

The pan-semantic analysis is logically based on an interdisciplinary approach. Any discipline is shaped on definite conditions and in related frames. The meaning and effects of propositions and judgments formed in its projects will be organically related to those conditions and frameworks. For the sake of making the meanings and effects of texts of projects produced in different disciplines more commensurable and communicable, we have to first of all dismantle their respective disciplinary-related conditionings. In terms of this we understand why traditional philosophical thoughts can hardly play the role of the theoretical basis for the interdisciplinary way of thinking, if the latter involves a multiply formed set of information. In these cases the philosophical theories formed in their definite formative contexts and the semiotic/interdisciplinarily-produced contents supported by the former will undertake the less communicable encounters at several constitutive levels. According to the linguistic compositions of the humanities a number of ordinary words without precise redefinitions are also employed in those projects and therefore those everyday terms commonly used in all branches of the humanities will naturally become the origin of general semantic ambiguity in human science discussions, including the traditional philosophical ones. Within their own special fields the common terms could be more precisely defined and used through special explanations of different authors with respect to their own different contexts, but in the fields of other related disciplines the same terms could be applied in different contexts. Accordingly, the linguistic forms of the words and sentences employed in projects shared by the two related disciplines remain the same while the meanings of them could be widely changed. In result, the same shape of the employed words helps cover the ambiguity caused by those rigorous philosophers because of the improper application of their theoretical languages. For example, that is why the stricter phenomenological-psychological terminology can be arbitrarily used in much less strict ways in some popular talks in the so-called phenomenological movement. The same case can be made to explain some discourses formed in analytic philosophy when the more precisely defined terminology is applied in analyzing discourses historically formed in the traditional humanities, especially those produced in non-western history. The intellectual/theoretical discourses are full of historically-shaped ordinary words used for thousands of years, while their corresponding operative conditions and intelligent contexts

have changed from time to time in different hermeneutic situations. ● On the one hand, analytic philosophy is characterized by its clarity and rigor in its own special theoretical discourses. ● On the other, however, it could indicate a simplistic tendency to deal with complicated studies about topics formed in the traditional humanities. The rigorousness of the definition of scientifically used terms and sentences in one scientific-philosophical field might become the coverage of the ambiguity or simplicity of interpreted discourses in some traditional disciplines supported by the same terminal sets because these two are shaped in quite different conditionings. The example indicates that interdisciplinary-theoretical dialogues should first of all deal with the mutual semantic-communicable problems that are just the task of genuine semiotic science.

● On the one hand semiotics should be ambitious enough to promote a wide communication among different disciplinary discourses; on the other, however, it should be modest enough to deal with the effective conditions for making the interdisciplinary communication possible. Its object is mainly about problems concerning signifier and signification; the latter is the relation between the former and the signified. Regarding its proper objective, semiotic science must maintain its scientific nature and the concepts of signified and referent are certainly taken in empirical-scientific terms. So we may emphasize that there are two concepts of positivism: the **semantic (representation)-directed** one and the **scientific (verification)-directed** one. Both refer to the empirical universe comprising different real domains such as the physical, psychological, axiological and pragmatic. The point lies in that the pan-semantic-directed operation should not be mixed with the scientific-directed one.

As a reorganizer of the existing academic structures, semiotics is involved in various kinds of semantic practices, such as the linguistic, behavioral, psychological, conceptual and communicational. Its semantic practices are tended to make differently constructed discourses communicable by building up the ground for all-round intellectual/theoretical dialogues among a number of disciplines. The traditional academic boundaries in the humanities could hopefully be broken up through various interdisciplinary-directed semiotic processes. Furthermore, semiotics can lead to the re-interconnection of social and human sciences through firstly anatomizing the latter. The interdisciplinary operations of semiotics play a double role in both disconnecting and reconnecting procedures in humanist knowledge. Therefore the great significance of semiotics is perceived by its innate links to the entirety of human knowledge. For the sake of fully estimating the potential of semiotic science, we should keep an eye on the structures and functions of human knowledge as a whole. So a semiotic

epistemology should be the essential part of the epistemology of social-human sciences. Thus, we may recognize that “general semiotics” or a general theory of semiotics functions as a general organizer in restructuring human sciences. It is not something performed within a new discipline called semiotics but something operatively related to the entirety of social/human scientific knowledge that is characterized by its traditionally transmitted semantic ambiguity.

### **3. Intercultural Semiotics should be One of the Central Parts in the Globalization of Semiotics**

Economic-political globalization will naturally bring about an academic and intellectual globalization as well. General semiotics naturally plays a central part in this scientific-developing tendency. Globalization here contains two aspects: the geographic and the social-cultural. Far from being a mere global spread of western knowledge to various non-western fields, academic globalization is a process of totally cultural interactions. Also far from being a so-called multiculturalism, which has been practically arranged as the simple coexistence of different cultural traditions, semiotic globalization means the intellectual/scientific results obtained during the theoretical and practical interactions of the western and non-western humanities. Semiotic globalization is in fact a dialectic process: the scientific influence of the western scholarly tradition exercised on the non-western one and the reversed impact of the latter on the former. It is a double process of theoretical/intellectual interaction: first, the western scientific scholarship influences and changes the non-western one; and second, the changed or modernized non-western scholarship promotes the reflection and readjustment of the western humanities in turn. The point is that the theoretical interaction between the western and the non-western can only effectively happen as long as the non-western is firstly modernized along the modern western scientific orientation. So generally speaking, there are two processes in the globalization of semiotic theoretical operations; the first theorizing process (the influence of the western on the non-western) and the second theorizing process (the reverse influence of the westernized non-western on the western). The relationship can be especially used to describe that desirable interaction between the western and the Chinese humanities. We can surely assert that it is the properly defined semiotics (rather than, for example, the currently prevailing cognition science and media semiotics) that can more effectively or productively modernize the traditional Chinese discursive system; it is also semiotics that can make Chinese

semiotics, based on its extremely rich hermeneutic historiographic experiences, become able to help readjust the organization of the present western academic discursive systems shaped exclusively in the western tradition. In this respect Chinese semiotics is essentially different from Sinology or Chinese Studies in the west, which remains generally restricted by its scholarly insufficient knowledge of both modern western theories and traditional Chinese historiography. So Chinese semiotics, as a theoretical reformulation of traditional Chinese discourses, attempts to modernize the less theoretical academic directions of either the so-called National Learning (*Guo Xue*) in China or Sinology in the west. In terms of their respective professional considerations, both have reason and justification to subsist in that pragmatic way, whereas Chinese semiotics, which is intended to modernize Chinese traditional scholarship, has a quite different academic target that will be directed towards a more scientific or more theoretical direction in dealing with traditional learning and national-historical culture and therefore promotes the latter to a more universally communicable new modality of scientific humanities. The so-called Chinese semiotics in its narrow sense is equivalent to a scientific reformulation of the traditional Chinese discourses with the intention of effectively immersing itself in the global dialogues of theoretical thought and historical-theoretical scholarship alike. Accordingly, Chinese semiotics will reformulate traditional discourses in fields such as the philosophical, literary, historical and artistic, leading to the clearer disclosure of the mechanisms of the historical, social, cultural and academic mechanisms in Chinese history. A possible scientific fruit of these new practices could even provide a fresh new historical/theoretical experience of human existence with which the west is far from being familiar. Regarding this, western social/human scientific thoughts should pay more serious attention to the new perspective concerning the human humanist experience for the sake of enlarging or readjusting their related knowledge accumulated purely from their own historical experience. In this case we have to point out that the traditional far eastern orientalism, also formed within the traditional western academic contexts, cannot be a qualified alternative to a genuine eastern Asian type of the extreme oriental stranger. Therefore the main western trends of humanist scholarship should reconsider their relationship with non-western intellectual/historical experiences in order that they can become the more communicable one by dint of proper semiotic hermeneutics. Professionally speaking, the intellectual/theoretical changes creatively caused by future Chinese semiotics would make both the main western stream of humanist theories and the Sinology-directed Chinese studies uncomfortable in the

face of such an epistemological challenge. But they would certainly gain benefits later when they take a more suitably active attitude towards this new perspective of cross-cultural cooperations and interactions in future. It is the same case for western semiotics which, besides its regular practices shaped in the western context, has a chance to be faced with its significant “Other”. On the other side, Chinese semiotics therewith obtains two tasks as well: to modernize the traditional Chinese academic discourses by virtue of modern western theoretical instruments as well as to join the current international dialogues at the theoretical level. Mankind in the new century, together with the rise of intercultural semiotics, is faced with the task of restructuring the entire humanities around the globe. Limiting themselves to the traditional and professional framework, scholars would not feel the necessity to deal with the humanities in a revolutionary way as we try to propose here. Any workable academic practices can be accepted as suitable or workable for operations either in a scientifically specialized or a professionally regulated sense. With the motive of scientific truth in mind instead, semiotics scholars will look to the situations beyond their habitual professional ranges. Besides, the humanities, which have suffered from their traditional shortcomings, indicate the serious weakness in dealing with some basic intellectual problems, especially those in ethical and historiographic fields.

Therefore the so-called Chinese semiotics, unlike its historical sources, will be a field where the historical material will be transformed or reformulated into scientifically intelligible discursive systems; it will become the most suitable dialogic partner of western humanist theories. More precisely, Chinese semiotics should be taken as a synthetic entity consisting of the traditional Chinese **historical** and the modern western **theoretical** aspects. Why do we here especially deal with Chinese semiotics with respect to the entire non-western semiotic world? Because it contains the richest and the most “strange” intellectual/cultural thesaurus consisting of written traditional discourses and visual remnants in her long cultural history, presenting the most remarkable records in its typology of writings and cultural heritages. If semantic-directed semiotics is especially related to the relational analysis between the written sign systems and the signified objects, the Chinese written systems are naturally the object of comparative or intercultural semiotic studies. French semiotics, because of its pan-semantic direction, is therefore especially helpful for the development of Chinese semiotics. Chinese semiotics becomes accordingly a double-mirror and a double-bladed scalpel for both the Chinese and western humanist academic modernizations.



#### 4. The Significance of Structuralism and Contemporary Pan-Positivist Epistemology

Regarding the above-mentioned three main theoretical trends in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, all of them seem to indicate a pan-positivist tendency. Therefore they, to a certain degree, keep a reference to tangible reality to different degrees in their intellectual/theoretical operations. The positivist position in its broad sense is expressed in its contrast with the lines of fictive, metaphysical and artistic practices, either with respect to the real object or to the rational operation. Reality refers to the different real domains that could be linked to the physical, logical, linguistic, psychological, psychoanalytical, cultural, and axiological worlds. Reality is not limited in referring to the perceptual realms only. All kinds of real worlds can be known through the shared empirical experiences of human beings. Despite various non-empirical factors being involved in the trends of thought, the main part of them is positivist-empirical-directed. When semiotics is metaphorically compared to cultural logic, it refers to a cultural reality that is also constituted in multiple ways, including the real “fictive objects”. We can say that the general line of French structuralism is characterized by its multiple-layered analysis of cultural and academic phenomena in order to expand and deepen the related net of reality. That means the structuralist way of thinking tends to apply rational approaches to reach certain real experiences of both the physical and spiritual. This seemingly more complicated French structuralist style reminds us of the general French positivist thought of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The composition of real objects could be highly heterogeneously complicated but the applied epistemological/methodological ways remain relevantly rational/empirical. The point is that this general positivist spirit tends to be anti-metaphysical/ontological so as to lead the theoretical reasoning to get rid of the Hegelist/existentialist pseudo-rational stream.

Despite the different sources in modern semiotic history, we are inclined to emphasize the special contributions of current French structural scholars with an emphasis on its interdisciplinary-theoretical orientation of thinking rather than its every concrete conclusion. No doubt, the main contributions of the contemporary semiotic movement should be represented by the French and related continental structural-semiotic schools. All other great semiotic trends have their important influences and achievements in many other aspects. But regarding the typical semiotic way of thinking scholarship, many other types of scholarly efforts with the name “semiotics” cannot be compared with the French one just because of their epistemological deviation from the structural-semiotic

spirit. Why do we need to estimate anew this special contribution made by French structuralism? In my opinion, there are four main features of the French cultural-semiotic scholarship that indicate its characteristic significance: the interdisciplinary-theoretical, the intercultural-referential, the positivist-empirical and the pan-semantic-directed. The four features are exactly what we require to promote the new interdisciplinary/intercultural semiotic movement in the new century. This combinative human-scientific strategy is much more pertinent for being applied in dealing with the problems of the highly complicated and ambiguous semantic constitutions of all traditional humanist discourses.

First, it is generally recognized that, compared with other types of semiotic practices, the French structural movement is characterized by its multi-interdisciplinary direction. This scholarly tendency makes scholars/thinkers firstly avoid the scholarly-operational restriction of academic institutionalization in order to more independently design and organize their original projects in various social-human science fields. Another original tendency is displayed by their more synthetic theoretical horizons in connection with the three main theoretical trends in the west: the Anglo-American analytical-positivist, the Austrian-German logic-psychological positivist and the French cultural-sociological-positivist trends. The last can be traced back to the Enlightenment, which itself was a synthesis of the English and French empirical-rationalist traditions. Such an intellectually more synthetic tendency makes them capable of organizing some genuinely interdisciplinary-style research. As a matter of fact, the French structural movement implies a pan-positivist tendency originating from different western positivist sources in contrast with various metaphysical-ontological trends prevailing in the western theoretical humanities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These cultural and historical semantic-directed practices are synthetically performed in different fields; that is why we say French structural semiotics properly embodies the guiding spirit of contemporary semiotic practices. Semiotics must be interdisciplinarily-directed and therefore linked to the general target of reorganizing and renovating human-scientific knowledge. Nevertheless, let me reemphasize here again that what we pay special attention to here is mainly about the general spirit and orientation of French structuralist-semiotic epistemology, which are indeed partially applied in different important works, and that is why we Chinese scholars translate many of their masterpieces into Chinese. But the positive statement does not mean their finished works are good enough or even correct. Maybe we should add that their intellectual/theoretical achievements also disclose some general negative shortcomings in their concrete judgments concerning

their social/political reality, just like what we see from the existentialist movement. After all, the French elites seem to be more brilliant in operating with theoretical matters than with practical ones. We are clearly aware of this evaluative distinction. On the other hand, as any original intellectual creations are manipulated into new dogmas or new standardized disciplines in the professional world, they easily lose their potential for furthering intellectual creations in future. The fact indicates that semiotics players should always pay serious attention to a larger intellectual panorama. We hope the interactions between western and non-western semiotic studies could provide a more instructive chance to reflect on a more desirable semiotic perspective now.

Faced with the global academic commercialization, a semiotic epistemology should maintain a positivist or scientific conception of truth that is widely neglected or dismissed by post-modernist thought. There is a typology of truth rather than a single absolute form of truth like the natural scientific one. The French positivist intellectual tradition has always tended to be directed to different relevant types of reality related to their chosen humanist subject matters. Without the concept of reality, the semiotics player is no more a scientific researcher but a mere artistically pragmatic gamer. To reach different modes of truth and reality or to become a scientific scholar, we should readjust the rational terms in our semiotic practices, just as Barthes or Foucault attempted to reconstruct their conceptions in terms of some new epistemological requirements. Anyhow, semiotic science should be a rational type of practice rather than a quasi-artistic one. We should pay serious attention to the causal links between global commercialization and irrational ways of performing scholarship today. The both are negatively influencing the scientific development of semiotics. Some French elites prefer to think French thought expresses a national genius for humanist theoretical creation. From an intercultural point of view, however, we prefer to assert that French structural semiotics as such has been also the consequence of their excellent combination of different modern theoretical sources from around the world so as to indicate an international tendency at the intellectual level or from having performed a successful interdisciplinary and intercultural synthesis based on the achievements of the entirety of modern western social and human sciences. The new French humanist theoreticians should be regarded as good theoretical synthesizers in any case. This theoretical synthesis can be realized in France; it can also be realized in other areas, including IASS stages as well. Besides, the so-called interdisciplinary epistemology of semiotics implies a strong critical-theoretical tendency in its scientific practices. This critical-theoretical part

is in contrast with any established theoretical foundations shaped in the traditional disciplines, especially the philosophical one. Semiotic theoretical practices are linked to and even based on the theoretical results of all related disciplines, but it presents itself as the reorganizer and synthetic user of all theoretical material, including the philosophical, rather than as the passive follower of the latter. Therefore the epistemology of semiotics is essentially contrary to any philosophical fundamentalism. In fact, its critical character is exhibited in its disconnection with any philosophical dogmatism. Any attempt to settle general semiotic theory within some philosophical school or discipline is equivalent to the tendency against the spirit of the semiotic science. The scientific advantage of semiotics is just caused by its breaking up the academic restrictions of disciplinary compartmentalization in modern history. So the constructive part of French structuralism should not include those works related to philosophical dogmas. For example, the contribution of Althusser's theory is not his so-called Marxist-philosophical speculation and other political ideology but his structural-positive analysis of social-cultural phenomena. Excluding his and others' political-ideological radicalism, we can still take a glance at some original epistemologically-stimulating ideas of the French thinkers. The necessity for this scholarly-operative segregation, practically speaking, is owed to the fact that the same ideological title has for a long time been misused by a great number of political adventurists in the world.

In general, the transformation from structuralism to post-structuralism in France is an intellectual reversal from the positivist-rational to the anti-positivist-irrational. We can only regard this changed intellectual turn as a reactive drive against the French semiotic spirit. An appeal to the structural-semiotic orientation is a reemphasis on the general rationalist tradition of modern French social/human scientific thought. All structural scholars search for a deeper/relevant reality in comparison with the naturalist type of superficial/perceptive reality. Once again, what we evaluate most in this regard is a kind of experimental value with respect to the constructive mission of the formative human sciences. It is clear that there emerge a lot of wrong judgments and conclusions in structuralists' works as well, just like in many other humanist-scholarly records. By contrast, there could be more positive achievements in the related contexts of analytic-pragmatic traditions because the latter operate in a narrowly chosen scope regarding pan-physical/natural-behavioral phenomena, whereas the composition of the traditional humanities is much more complicated and sophisticated than the former. So, just as we should distinguish between social and human sciences, we also need to make a

distinction between two kinds of humanist positivism: the quasi-natural scientific one and the structural-rational one (permit me to use this term at the moment). That means, the structuralist scientific orientation indicates a more relevant enlightenment regarding epistemological relevance with respect to the conceptual reformulation, operative efficiency and correct theoretical objective in the task of reorganizing human sciences.

### **5. Interaction of the Western and the Non-Western Humanities: Towards the Theoretical Globalization of Social and Human Sciences and a New Enlightenment of Human Knowledge**

The value and efficiency of most humanist scholarly products can only be fixed under certain conditions and operative frameworks regarding related disciplines, fields and schools. One of the tasks of general semiotics lies in reexamining those operative conditions and more reasonably redefining and rearranging the related scholarly projects through reorganizing the related operative networks. We apply the title semiotics in such a general way because the basic goal of semiotic studies should be consistent with the direction of restructuring the modern human sciences of our times. So we can easily expand and advance the scientific practices of semiotics along this new scientific line. In other words, we should continue or resume the original ambitions of the semiotics masters around the turn of last century according to the current changed social-cultural contexts and new scientific conditions. This use of the title could make semiotics work at a more operative than a substantial level; it refers to a general strategy or becomes an intelligent organizer facing the general goal of renovating humanist knowledge in this new century.

From a practical point of view semiotics scholars will be doubtful of the possibility and value of intercultural semiotics. The new situation requires a more reasonable way to view and arrange semiotic projects; the semiotic family further stresses a more cooperative way of doing semiotics than ever before. Intercultural semiotics does not mean a mere geographic spreading of semiotic practices; it also means a new attitude and methods formed in terms of the new intellectual context. The specialized and the general knowledge should be further involved in a more reasonable combination to treat the new objects, problems and objectives. Each semiotics scholar, besides their customary scholarly specialty, should learn more from neighboring fields in an indirect way or at a general level in order to form a more constructively expanded theoretical horizon. That is why we need international semiotic dialogues to help scholars approach

these two different semiotic aims. Therefore, on one hand each semiotics scholar needs to perform his or her specialized theoretical projects through learning from neighboring disciplines and on the other he or she needs to pay attention to or to share in promoting the development of the semiotics movement in general. Both **discipline-centered interdisciplinary** research and **cross-disciplinary-directed interdisciplinary** research work along the same semiotic-strategic orientation: to perform theoretical and practical studies in terms of reorganized operative frames and procedures with respect to the current academic structures. The semiotic studies based on definite fields become the efforts to combine their own disciplinary methodology with those of neighboring fields, embodying a more creative epistemological/methodological combination in their own designed projects.

Semiotic operations in the second sense are characterized by their strategic practices directed towards the entire area of human knowledge and meet that general task. With this perspective in mind, all semiotics players should be more open-minded and intellectually more sympathetic by keeping a more cooperative attitude in contacting different kinds of semiotic performances, including those in different disciplines and different cultures. Any semiotics player has a double role in our family: as the professional specialist and as the promoter for the common mission. The latter makes him or her the scientific organizer and movement agent. In fact we need to make semiotics a renewed new movement in terms of its current intercultural or globalization turn. There is no doubt that the center for the theoretical development of semiotics will remain in the west for the near future but it has to pay sufficient attention to what is going on in non-western areas. A new form of intercultural cooperation among semiotics players in our intercultural century is required.

Epistemologically speaking, semiotics is the renovating force and traditional agent at the same time. In the sense of the latter it stands by traditional rationalism in contrast with the current post-modernist irrationalism. The semiotic task of reorganizing the humanities is directed to the traditional rationalism that should be further elaborately improved along a more reasonable line. In the same sense, the current semiotic direction should not be satisfied with collecting all related scientific achievements merely in a semiotic terminology and framework; it should be a reorganizing force directed to the entire academic world of mankind. Semiotic practices at an epistemological level should be a scientific experiment carried out through collective efforts. So, far from being the creation of a few talented scholars, it should be realized at a collective level. Accordingly, every semiotics player plays a double role: the one involved in concrete projects and the other in the collective concern with

the common business of the movement; in short, a semiotics player should also be engaged in promoting the general progress of human sciences. The expanded mission of a global semiotics movement is emerging in this Internet era when mankind expects a new Enlightenment of human knowledge. Accordingly, an emerging intercultural semiotics is intellectually linked to a much greater task facing human civilization as a whole. So we can say the epistemological problem of semiotics is the exact central part of that in the entirety of humanist knowledge. With the achievements of the specialized sciences over the past two centuries, human beings are able to start another holistic reorganization of human knowledge, especially with respect to the relatively less successful fields in social and human sciences. Semiotics belongs to the kernel of this totally revolutionary-directed academic exploration of humankind. That is why we urgently require semiotics. Let us put it this way: semiotics is simply the way to promote all-round interdisciplinary theoretical communications. The existing disciplines in human sciences can effectively subsist under the present academic market rooted in the global commercialized society. There exist two different academic orientations: the intellectual-scientific and the commercialized-professional ones. The two mechanisms of scientific practices follow two different criteria and directions. It is the former that remains to be directed to the truth-pursuing objective; so, we can say that semiotics should continue developing along the traditional rationalist spirit that is certainly represented by the French Enlightenment.

## Supplements

### Semiotics in Future

#### **(A Statement at the Concluding Session of the 8<sup>th</sup> IASS Congress in Lyon, as the newly elected vice-president of the IASS, July 12, 2004)**

In my opinion, intercultural semiotic practices will perhaps someday widely influence the theoretical panorama and framework of semiotic studies in the world. Being related to the basic constitution of human sciences, intercultural or globalization semiotics could lead to the emergence of the **human-scientific Enlightenment** in future. I am honored to express this in a French university with the name “Lumiere” that hopefully symbolizes a new stage of semiotic progress in the cross-culturally expanded academic context. What semiotic science has attained up to now is mostly what has been carried out by our European/American

colleagues. Having spread throughout the entire world, semiotics will stimulate a global human science movement once again. In this process, Chinese semiotics will play a more and more important role if the objective conditions are favorable. We may say that China's history indicates the three "biggest" credits in the world: the longest continuing history, the largest human population in history and the richest written historical literature. Besides her economic, scientific, technological and social goals, China is faced with an urgent task to modernize her scientific scholarship concerning the modernization of her traditional culture and humanities. This requirement for scholarly modernization indicates a desideratum to obtain a more effective methodology for promoting traditional Chinese humanities to communicate with modern western human sciences. For this purpose semiotics has proved to be one of the most useful methodologies. Chinese semiotics should be organized in two dimensions: firstly, to learn from modern western social-human theories and share current efforts to further their developments because, in fact, western theories today belong to the entirety of mankind; and secondly, to modernize her own traditional scholarship. The results of these two kinds of semiotic practices could in turn probably have a complementary impact on the composition of western human sciences in the future too.

The essence of semiotic practices is indicated in the interdisciplinary direction of the theoretical humanities in contrast with the traditional philosophical-centrism of the latter. Today a crucial crisis in semiotic epistemological inquiry is connected to a prevailing confusion concerning the relationship between general semiotic theory and a so-called semiotic philosophy. If semiotic theoretical reasoning tends to rest its logic in some metaphysical-ontological rhetoric, the trend could imply an operative self-contradiction. Semiotics is a scientific engagement based on rational and positive scholarly procedures. In addition, China's semiotic-performing experience will enrich and pluralize the typology of rationality and positivism in human life. Nihilist discourses must be the object of semiotic research, but they should not be taken as the methods applied to handle any objects. Otherwise we mix two different intellectual practices: scientific reasoning and the artistic manipulation. The post-modernist mixture of the two procedures actually becomes the main barrier for epistemological advancement in the current semiotic world.

Intercultural semiotics should be regarded as a developing expansion of global interdisciplinary semiotics. In fact, cross-cultural semiotics consists of its both western and non-western aspects. Both of them will also be involved in the formation of the global human sciences in future, which will eventually help improve the general human conditions.



Semiotics is still in its nascent period. All achievements attained so far remain mere scholarly sources to be employed for further creative development under the new conditions of the world. The next stage of semiotic development will be the new times for a more comprehensive synthesized interaction of human knowledge in the globalization context. After the past two hundred years of scientific specialization in humanist knowledge, there will be a turning point for a new synthesized progress of human sciences on a global scale. During this process semiotics will play a leading role in the new century, I think.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

# ON THE INSTITUTIONAL RESTRICTION OF ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES<sup>55</sup>

### Introduction

Multi-faceted aspects of semiotics reflect both the intellectual and social crises of our era. Modern semiotic-scholarly development stimulates the reorganization of social and human sciences in terms of interdisciplinary and intercultural strategy, first pressing to seek a more pertinent classification for understanding cultural/academic phenomena. Based on these social and intellectual backgrounds, semiotics undertakes an important task without parallel, in rearranging our way of doing research in the humanities. The semiotic challenge is directed toward three major obstacles in present-day academic life: a) scholastically, the classificatory ambiguity; b) institutionally, the disciplinary autonomy; and c) socially, the domination of academic authorities. The interdisciplinary status of semiotics is embodied in the attempt to both separate and combine disciplinary elements at the same time, for some disciplines are too broad and others are too narrow with respect to our interdisciplinary-directed projects. Both academic tendencies may cause semantic and epistemological ambiguity in the humanities.

Since the advent of modern sciences, intellectual progress has been measured first by more precise classification of natural, social and cultural phenomena; practical-disciplinary divisions have been systematically reestablished over the past two centuries. Thus, an academic discipline has two basic parameters: the scientific-operational procedures and the social-operational institutions. Cognitions, questions and solutions are treated within the established disciplines according to commonly accepted procedures of classification. As a result, human questions of various kinds are firstly raised according to the classificatory systems fixed in academic

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<sup>55</sup> Originally published in *Interdigitations: Essays for Irmengard Rauch*, edited by F. Carr, W. Harbert and Lihua Zhang (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 421-430.

history. On the one hand, the scientific specialization of disciplines based on fixed classificatory systems fosters the advancement of knowledge; on the other, the same systems might reversely impose restrictions on the development of knowledge that is organized within the rigidified institutions.

Consequently, a number of questions are addressed firstly to fields or disciplines that are socially established in departments, institutes and scientific centers. Those institutions have educated and established disciplinary specialists who are therefore the authoritatively chosen people who are responsible for judging and guiding the scientific solution of related problems. The final outcome of the treatment of the questions depends first of all on the pertinence of the initial classification with respect to the questioning. Or, more simply, whether the authorized specialists are really the right persons for treating and solving the problems handed to them. Such questionings are mainly connected with the social and human sciences. The multifold composition of phenomena in the latter makes the suitable classification of related disciplinary-based problems more difficult to arrange. As a matter of fact, both the division of disciplines and the classification of scientific questions in the social and human sciences have been influenced by pragmatic academic tendencies that are not necessarily relevant to the reality of related conditions and practices. With respect to non-western phenomena, these problems become even more serious; there is more difficulty in raising, understanding and treating social and cultural questions. The present chapter attempts firstly to indicate the serious problems concerning the disconnection between the existing scientific questions and the related disciplines that are authorized to deal with the former; and secondly why a semiotic approach can be a more effective way to overcome the epistemological difficulty systematically caused by rigidified classification systems shaped in history.

## 2. The related problems in China

It is true that the above-mentioned problems exist noteworthy in the west; however, they have appeared even more seriously in China and in western studies connected with Chinese affairs. The following academic examples given could be somewhat illustrative of this.

### 2.1. Film Studies

Twenty years ago there was in China a unified academic circle called “film studies”, which was an incorporated part of the larger profession

ambiguously called “the field of film”, where the film production business occupied the center. The arrangement was determined by both ideological demands and scholarly requirements during that period. The former was due to the belief that film scholarship should serve film production and the latter to the general cultivating task of film culture, which was incorporated into the more integrative section of the national cultural, academic, educational affairs, which maintained its own ideological orientation, operative tradition and authorized groups of intellectual experts. Because scholarly professionals exist in a personnel hierarchy, the top experts are naturally the final deciders who controlled scholarly-practical directions and performing methods. As a result, the scholarly authority of film studies seriously obstructed the development of film scholarship along genuine scientific lines. These situations described above have radically changed since the purely political-ideological restrictions have been removed since 1978.

When the new era of genuine academic life arrived, we have gradually understood the necessity for compartmentalizing different research practices related to so-called film studies since the late 1970s. Popular film reviews, the more practical/technical studies, practically-guided criticism, theoretically-directed criticism, pure film theory and even the so-called philosophy or aesthetics of film arts belong in fact to different intellectual and academic operative categories. An authorized expert specializing in one or two of the above-mentioned sections is not necessarily competent in other related problems in other categories. In this regard, should we build up one single discipline called “film studies” or different disciplines with new titles within the film culture? ● On the other hand, the authorized experts spontaneously tended to oppose the related academic reforms or considered forming a new “labor division” about film scholarship. Instead, the distinguished academic leaders, including those who were regarded as politically liberal, tended to control everything in their own authorized “fiefs”. The knowledge involved was therefore essentially still restricted by the old academic system that was based on the old ideological/epistemological system of classifying notions. ● Only when the old structure of the academic disciplinary framework was deconstructed and the more reasonable new scientific notion of labor division had been accepted by the related authorities could our initial efforts towards introducing current western theoretical film scholarship be gradually made during the 1980s. (However this author’s work of translating structural-semiotic film theory and criticism had started as early as late 1977 in cooperation with the Beijing Film College.) Personal authority in connection with scholarly direction and scientific efficiency is directly

related to existing academic and epistemological problems of classification. Regarding our examples, the basically reformed labor division required first of all the separation of film production and film study, followed by the sub-division between the more practical and the more theoretical studies. The active results were connected not only with scholarship but also with artistic practices and its allowed social consequences. During this epistemological and academic period of transformation, semiotic approaches have played a considerable role in China. To a lesser degree, the phenomenon also exists in western academics in general and film scholarship in particular. Nevertheless, thus far, film semiotics or semiotic-directed film theory remain dubious undertakings in the opinion of many western film professors. One of the reasons expressed is that there exist different types of film studies, each connected with different academic standards and desiderata. By the way, in fact, the so-called section of film theory has undergone multiple epistemological/pragmatic challenges/crises in the west too. The problem is that it has been involved in a lot of changed academic and cultural situations. This western development would certainly bring about further mutually-conflicting impacts on the situations of Chinese film studies in the new century.

## 2.2. Literary and artistic studies

Literature plays a leading role in Chinese cultural and social history, from ancient times to the present. Similar to the case of film studies, there have existed two much larger professional fields called “the Circle of Literature” and “the Circle of Literature and Arts”, with literary-artistic creations of various types as their main tasks. These two big closely-related cultural circles have been government-run since 1949. The subsections of criticism/theory belonging to the circles (simply, the circle of theory) function to “serve” or theoretically support literary-artistic creations, whose aims have been officially conditioned to “serve” the Chinese revolutionary mission. Regarding the whole academic network before 1978, the related educational/scholarly businesses had been arranged to eventually “serve” the revolutionary works of literary-artistic creations too. Thus, in general, the literary-artistic creations and the related scholarly practices have been closely interconnected. During the New Period, the plan of “labor-division” in this largest cultural/academic realm has been gradually carried out and the earlier revolutionary-centric “literature culture” has been transformed step by step to an almost purely academic/scholarly organizing direction. In a definite sense, the abovementioned two circles, to a lesser extent, have still kept their

traditionally set nature, while in higher educational/research institutions the genuine scholarly knowledge, both domestic and international, has become the object. Nevertheless two main traditionally-shaped characters of practices have remained to subsist in the field. The main body of literary studies has been focused on philological topics and critical/theoretical thoughts have been constantly centered on the modern/contemporary Chinese history of literary-creative practices, which have been totally ideologically penetrated for the past century. Because of this basic ideological framework, all related new international theoretical information can hardly influence that academic/cultural ecology. Concretely, the so-called literary studies, which are distinguished from literary creation, comprise mainly two practically-tended categories: the morally/ideologically-directed theoretical/critical comments on finished works in modern history, and traditional philological-centric studies. Whereas the former played a more important social role in the extreme revolutionary era, the latter has been respected as intellectually more serious and productive in academia. ● On the whole, creative, critical, historical and theoretical activities have been widely woven into contemporary Chinese literary life. ● On the one hand, literary/linguistic philological scholarship remains the main type of literary study in China, but on the other, new literary-theoretical studies have still been restricted by the overwhelming prestige of modern Chinese novel writing. We may even state that the main body of Chinese literary-theoretical scholarship has been epistemologically based on the literary/journalistic writing processes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Literary-theorizing is closely linked to the literary-creating that is open to the majority of the population. In general, Chinese literature has been the ideological instrument and post-popular entertainment alike.

Practically speaking, literary studies of various types have been integrated in a unified system, with its hierarchical authority taking responsibility for its effective management.

When this author translated Broekman's *Structuralism* in late 1977 (published in 1980), we can imagine how much epistemological contrast had been created by then. Besides the strong intellectual curiosity aroused, there was little substantial influence for the next 10 years in post-Cultural Revolutionary Chinese academia. In fact, since contemporary western literary theories have been widely introduced into China, they exist only on the periphery, playing a minor role in actual literary studies. A basic division between the creative and theoretical activities in connection with literary-artistic phenomena has been gradually recognized. Such an ideological-pragmatic recognition had led to a meaningful conversation in

Chinese literary culture, leaving the way open to an initial stage of serious reflective endeavors on this central cultural subject matter. The semiotic-directed literary-theoretical thought has been inserted on the very starting step too. It is literary semiotics that can help to strengthen our understanding of the constitution and function of the most influential national literary phenomena. It was also this author who firstly introduced Barthes' literary theory/criticism into China.

### 2.3. Political studies

The general title "political studies", which is in contrast with political activities, could have covered three different categories in China over the past hundred years of modernization: traditional political tactics/policy-making (Part A), modern political-legal institutional studies (Part B) (belonging to social sciences), and so-called political "science/philosophy/theory" (Part C) (belonging to the humanities). In general, political studies have been mostly practical or pragmatic by nature. Part A, including its traditional Chinese and modern western elements alike, remains the most important and sophisticated, Part B has been completely introduced from abroad and Part C mainly plays a theoretical-symbolic and ideologically inspiring role. The function of the last is therefore also more practical than scholarly. In short, practical wisdom has been always more important than the theoretical understanding involved in modern Chinese political life. With this historical background, even during the early New Period, so-called "political studies" in the special institutions of political studies only meant the studies of political-institutional reform designs and improved political policies. The newly introduced discipline of "political science" was still understood in connection with some concrete targets of political-institutional reforms. This traditional practical/pragmatic-tended character of general political learning has now penetrated into most parts of political scholarship and critical discussions. Of course, modern western theoretical literature on political science and political philosophy have been increasingly introduced in China; similar to the Chinese situation of current western literary theory, which has remained an abstract presentation in academia without substantial influence on Chinese literary life, the same can be said of the situation of Chinese studies of modern western political science and theory. The fact that the political-theoretical praxis has not yet been shaped in China until now can be displayed with two typical examples. Firstly, there have indeed been more and more repetitional ways expressed of presenting various modern western political

theories in academic forums, but they remain isolated from actual political life; on the other hand, the most favored method for and theme of political-critical discussions at home and in the overseas Chinese communities are converged on practical critical comments/attacks on concrete social-political events and situations. No important systematizing tendency/interest underpinning those millions of practical critical talks has been displayed. A more typical example of expressing the lacking in true theoretizing inclination concerning current Chinese political thought can be explained by the following phenomenon: out of so many Chinese critics who are currently living in the west, few of them indicate any basic intention to finish a really scientifically-directed theoretical monograph about the structure and function of modern political history. Instead, they prefer the descriptive mode of historical retrospective writings to a deeper, more systematic analysis. Compared with their western counterparts, it is true that the traditional Chinese political-investigative learnings are totally descriptive by nature. Such a historical-pragmatic habitude concerning Chinese political reflections in ancient times has been transmitted to the modern period. In addition, the Hegelian-Marxian trend of political philosophies has played a basically symbolic-ornamental role whose true function is laid on the faith-arousing line.

As a result, a basic confusion between scientific research and practical analysis has been still prevalent. ● On the one hand, every politician or journalist thinks that he is competent to study politics because of his having real experience or direct observations about political realities; on the other hand, every dissident thinks that his morally critical talks about the political or social wrongdoings of the authorities is tantamount to a kind of political study. We can even assert that there has never existed a qualified political scholarship in China in this century. However, the flaw has at least been recognized by Chinese scholars themselves in comparison with other fields. The deeply-rooted, national-habitual over-self-confidence in their own political thoughts could be explained by the fact that the immediate feeling of their personal experience with political realities has forced them to pay exclusive focus on the reality of life as such. This historically-shaped psychology is also caused by a pragmatic-empirical tendency. As a result, every thinker about politics works as a journalist-like talker does. The phenomenon can be traced back to the beginning of this century. By the way, only a journalistic form of political rhetoric is able to be engaged in actual political practices. As a matter of fact, the roles of politicians, ideologues, moral critics, journalists and theoretical analysts have been wrongly intermixed with each other. A related semiotic-analytical approach may help to separate different



semantic and functional layers of political life and practices. After all, the retardation of Chinese political and social reform programs is partly due to the historical-habituall weakness regarding the theoretical mind of Chinese intellectuals.

## 2.4. Studies of traditional opera

Among all traditional Chinese arts, the situation of opera, especially that of the more elaborate ones, is ever more critical. Almost all suggestions and measures relating to opera in China are connected with practical reforms designed to meet the changing tastes of the modern Chinese audience. More so than with the field of film, the “Circle of Traditional Opera” is weak in its scholarly tradition. Everything concerned with cultural criticism has been discussed and treated by the authorized “experts”, among whom the leaders are the experienced actors and actresses themselves. The first serious confusion in the identity of the specialty occurred between the performative and scholarly practitioners. The so-called crisis is related to the many different levels of the changing society which can hardly be comprehended by the actors, directors and administrative officials in the field. As a result, the crisis can hardly be alleviated and opera, especially the most sophisticated one, *kunqu*, is steadily on the wane. The crisis lies not in the necessity for strengthening irrelevant aesthetic studies, as has been done to date, but in the need to appeal to a more permanent one, e.g. artistic semiotics, which can help separate different planes and their effects on the composition of this cultural phenomenon in its social-cultural and historical aspects. But few scholars understand that the most practical traditional phenomenon and the more theoretical western methodologies can be combined in order to more effectively increase our knowledge of the phenomenon, which remains one of our most valuable cultural heritages.

## 2.5. Historical studies

Ideological historiography, political historiography, theoretical historiography and the philosophy of history have for a long time co-existed in China, although they belong to different scholarly categories. The overlapping relationship between the special political and general historical processes has made Chinese historiographic studies indicate a strong practical/ideological character. Political powers/regimes have always applied historiography to support their political propaganda over the past 3,000 years. In various Chinese communities, historical studies are

respectively constrained by related political circumstances. As a result, a number of important events and periods in modern Chinese historical studies have been treated unscientifically or ideologically. The most remarkable example that can be raised is the “Xi-An Accident” (1935) on the eve of the Sino-Japanese War. This dramatic accident involved different political and social elements in the process, such as the contemporary Chinese authorities, the USSR, the Chinese Communist Party, the Japanese, the local military power and the independent intellectuals. The long-standing discussions on this historical event in different Chinese communities are full of mutually contradictory judgments and misinterpreting conclusions purely out of politically-motivated reasons, although the related historical truth, which radically changed China’s modern history, has not yet been fully disclosed. Frankly, there has not yet existed a comprehensive modern Chinese historical book that can be all-roundedly accepted. Another example is the “February 28 Tragedy” of Taiwan after the war. This historical accident involves the contemporary authorities, the present-day successors of those authorities, the local separatists, the Japanese, the Communist Party and independent intellectuals. Despite the fact that the objective truth of this historical event has been clearly presentable in the past few decades, different political fractions purposely make use of the event to defend their own respective political profits through intentionally distorting the related causal links and confusing the hidden true reasons involved.

In fact, a great number of modern historical events and processes have been misused and distorted even by different historical experts serving different political powers. Regarding modern Chinese historical studies, we may conclude that there is no problem about the truth but there always exists the problem about the distortive interpretation of the truth.

The essence of the reflection on and scholarship about historical events have been basically under the sway of the one-sided utilitarian motivation of historians.

● On the other hand, besides these politically-directed historical studies, purely academic studies have remained philological by nature over the long course of Chinese history. This philologically-directed tradition of historical scholarship tends to neglect or be ignorant of the knowledge of socio-causal and intellectual-objective aspects, rendering this most important academic field in social and human sciences much less effective in presenting reliable explanations and justified interpretations. This is because philological scholars have been much less competent in grasping problematics at the theoretical dimension with respect to the exact causal analyses and proper political-moral judgments. In general, the majority of

these professional philological historians are just lacking in intellectual preparations for understanding modern historical science or theories. They live on and are proud of their linguistic/textual-distinguishing skills and descriptive-directed narrative reconstructions. In general, this epistemological confusion about proper academic classification about historical studies has seriously hampered the progress of modern Chinese scholarship about society, history and the humanities in general. In the meantime, those conservative historiographic authorities, which have got official support everywhere, are content with maintaining their academic powers and tend to obstruct the more scientific/theoretical historical studies, which would hurt their traditional-authoritative privilege. The retardative tendency of modern historiography could imply a hidden deeper motivation: the less scientifically-tackled historical stories are easier to be arbitrarily misused to fabricate pseudo-historical verifications favorable for political powers.

### 3. The problem in Sinology

In order to explain the epistemological constraints on established disciplines, Sinology as a professional field in the west merits serious discussion. The combination of the western education-institutional framework and the Chinese historical material or research objects makes them share the same epistemological confusion in connection with different problematics. In general, the following different disciplinary elements could be integrated into the same over-synthetic field of Sinology or China Studies consisting of Chinese-western knowledge: linguistic, historical-philological, philosophical, archeological, sociological and even political. However, the scholars working in the field, because of several objective restrictions, are mostly weaker in their training about both traditional Chinese classics and modern western scientific theories, whereas their profession requires them to deal with divergent subject matters including both the scholarly and the social-political ones. So in a strict sense, China Studies is basically the synthetic working shop site providing western students lacking in profound academic Chinese language/history with some elementary cultivating knowledge about alien culture; broadly, this educational type is attached to the general context of so-called multi-cultural studies.

But on the other hand, this specially constituted profession has been linked to a very important non-academic function in the world. Some agents, especially those originating from Chinese communities, function as highly respectful “academic diplomats” working between China and western countries. On one side, following the development of Chinese-

western communications and exchanges, the suitable intermediating agents become more and more welcome; on the other, despite the ideological-oppositional relation between the two, a modern national atmosphere of over-respect for western culture has been prevailing in different Chinese communities over past hundred years. This kind of mutual mediating jobs have played very important roles many times since WWII, mainly through the rare capability of language and alien information of the agents in promoting international communications and understandings. On the other side, regardless of all such non-academic contributions made by this profession or discipline, what we are concerned about here lies in its direct and indirect impacts on the desirable development of modernizing the Chinese humanities today; in other words, the academic compositions, tasks, linguistic levels and theoretical requests between Sinology and modern Chinese human sciences have been totally divergent but they have been for a long time confused extensively until today. Unfortunately, such a scientific-practical distinction between the smaller scope/range of Sinology and the much larger ones of the Chinese humanities has been intentionally neglected by a lot of Sinological experts, especially those originating from Chinese communities. It is just the latter who have enjoyed a special academic privilege from different Chinese authorities so as to become even the direct obstacle for promoting the modern theoretizing development of the social/human sciences of different Chinese communities.

Unlike the established disciplines in the western humanities, Sinology is still in its less well-established scientific-disciplinary condition. Specifically, the Sinological “discipline” is only a customary-practicable combination of different scholarly areas at elemental levels. Thus, we can see here the functional confusion resulting from the fact that this academic field is in fact not scholarly specialized enough to deal with its various scientific/political tasks. The most remarkable among these tasks concerns political discussions in China. In the west the analogous political category must be divided into its scientific-scholarly category and its political-actional category. However, in some Sinological political studies, especially those organized by Chinese-Americans, the two categories are mostly mixed together, eventually resulting in neither side being specialized enough. The Sinological-political activists are neither specialized political agents, nor genuine political scientists either. Rather, they are informants on Chinese socio-political affairs working at a journalistic level. Or, they function as both critics and human rights observers for Chinese politics. Because, compared with most western people ignorant of non-western affairs, they know much more about

empirical Chinese affairs. This historical background determines the identity of current Sinological scholarship. On the other hand, where it belongs to western society and the western academic community, it is more welcome to be closely tied with Chinese institutions; there exists close interaction between both sides at the pragmatic level. This academic field provides us with a typical example of the confusion resulting from different scholarly constituent elements.

In addition, we confront problems concerning improper academic classificatory obstacles again. The academic classificatory trouble is basically related to the confusing criteria for judging scholarly authority or qualification in tackling practices. Different criteria would be pragmatically mixed together or perhaps reduced to a single criterion set on the principle of social/academic publicity embodied in the institutional-hierarchical positions. As a result, academic reputation is then either reified in the hierarchical sites or produced by a journalist in a way that would become the singly effective standard for professional successes that must be popularly intermixed with scientific successes.

#### 4. Disciplinarity and hierarchy

The classificatory patterns of modern sciences lead to numerous specialized fields called disciplines, which in turn produce authorized disciplinary-based leaders. The humanist-academic leaders of all types become the responsible authorities for regulating and maintaining scholarly criteria and standards. Some academic-authoritative leaders tend to control their academic powers by dint of persistence in the traditional-scholarly patterns and procedures decided/supervised by them. Their personal academic interests are due to the valid existence and effective operation of the specialized disciplinary network based on various kinds of traditional classificatory systems. The interdisciplinary and interculturally-directed creative tendencies in humanist academic life today are, however, contradictory to the established disciplinary-classificatory systems and consequently oppositional to the benefits of some ambitious academic authorities. The fact could be one of the immediate reasons as to why the interdisciplinary-original practices would usually be resisted by the academically conservative disciplinary-based masters in the humanities. On the other hand, we should deeply understand the delicate logic that the interest of a few academic leaders is also totally consistent with that of the majority of scholars when almost all professionalized scholars today have accepted the same life-view: the aim of scholarly life exactly rests on obtaining professional profits. In this regard, when scholarly practices

become merely the pure means that are used to attain the aim, the more easily operable the scholarly procedures are the more preferable they become. So the clearly regulated and less changeable academic systems/procedures are regarded as the most desirable patterns for humanist-scholarly practices.

The academic-institutional hierarchy itself certainly becomes a structural mechanism for stabilizing the conservative theoretical directions with respect to the related disciplinary-based scholarship. Individual academic authority is further needed and well used by many other professional colleagues choosing to join the lineages of the respective disciplinary powers. Within competitive humanist academia, the best way to seek personal benefits lies in participating in certain scholarly factions attached to the powerful disciplinary-centric authorities. Competitive ecology in the humanities is therefore characterized by its intellectually partisan spirits/manners. That means the authoritative school leaders have also constructed certain collective academic powers as the basis for academic competition. The identity of individual scholarly authorities is indeed tied to the collective interest of their followers. For a “post-modern” society lacking in the notion of “truth”, the genuine motive for doing scholarship is to gain academic successes or official recognition. Without considering which sort of theoretical results is closer to “truth”, school members are mainly concerned about the proper strategy for protecting the prestige of the school and strengthening the authority of the school leaders, and the two aspects are directly linked with their own professional benefits. The privilege of school leaders per se, therefore, turns out to be a means to guarantee the collective interest of a scientific school. That is why humanist partisan groups, which have their own respective mini-hierarchies, can be effective and widely established, and the apparently rich development of the humanities has been partly based on this utilitarian mutually-supporting relationship. Such so-called development also proves the fact that human science practices have been obviously commercialized. The names of the authorized school leaders could function as “brand names” used in the quasi-academic market.

The general humanist-academic tendency, based on the present competitive culture, will be doubly displayed in China academia because of various non-scientific traditional heritages. The history of the western humanities is indicated in the combination of scholarly consequences of diverse distinguished scholars in various academic fields and historical periods. The so-called intellectual/disciplinary schools have been expressed respectively in the textual records of the remarkable historical figures, while the productive accumulations of humanistic practices have

been in fact casually shaped. The so-called disciplinary-divided achievements are the collectives or combinative records of the intellectual works of those chosen historical figures, while the historically chosen manners have operated at random. Because of the habitual ways of accumulating humanist learning and cultural remnants, the more antiquarian it is the more valuable it is in treating historically-transmitted heritages; this evaluative standard, which is also partly set up by a commercializing position, has become a separate or independent norm involved in the current academic-evaluative mechanism that has nothing to do with purely scientific principles. In addition, when intellectual combinations of this kind have been fixed, this intermixedly-formed evaluative standardization will naturally lead to the establishment of the current institutional systems that will guide further intellectual/scholarly productions in academic life. This is an extra factor obstructing the genuine progress of human science scholarship.

The interaction between historically-shaped, scholastically-accumulated textually-autonomous integrity (tradition) and contemporary individual new scholarly experiences (creation) is also shaped by the liberal-artistic status of the humanities by historical chance. In any case, the traditional autonomous existence of one discipline also includes the successive-combinative thoughts of the related historical academic authorities; this historical-intellectual legacy will be a strong determinative, institutional factor forming the new mode of scholarly thought as well. Within the intellectual traditions in history, the intellectual power-holders can play a role as a current academic-authoritative power that will influence humanist-scholarly production in future. The prevalence of the historical authority over the contemporary scholarly freedom in the humanities tends to decrease the spontaneity of scientific efforts, which should have been more horizontally-directed by nature and more positively-empirical in character. The above-described historical factors involved in the current epistemological formation in scholarly practices are the implicit reason for the obstruction of theoretical progress in the human sciences. Therefore, the recent fashion of historicism in the theoretical humanities is linked with the above analysis: academic authorities in these scholarships habitually tend to strengthen the so-called historical roots of current human-scientific thoughts. As a result, intellectual tradition, academic authority and conservative epistemology are organically unified. Therefore the institutional anti-interdisciplinary strategy tends to insist on the theoretical authority of the historically established intellectual autonomies. By contrast, semiotics plays a role just in breaking up the professional,

disciplinary and academic compartmental institutionalization that has been deeply and multiply rooted in the historical/intellectual contingency.

## 5. The role of semiotics

“Semiotics” can be employed in different scholarly/cultural fields and at various operative levels/aspects, playing different roles. At the most general designation, semiotics refers to reorganizations of the traditional academic systems of the world in terms of their interdisciplinary-epistemological strategy. At the general theoretical level, semiotics is naturally connected to theoretical parts of various disciplines, especially including philosophy. The philosophical theorizing way remains the central part of the theoretical humanities, which nevertheless have undergone so much radical change since World War II. In light of the above-mentioned explanations, semiotics implies an implicitly “academic-revolutionary” character because it should firstly be confronted with the existing academic framework that tends to resist any efforts aimed towards basic institutional reforms. In this regard the theoretical-semiotic practices even imply a moral aspect indicated by the semiotic agent; namely, under the fixed pressures of the existing academic institution, a theoretical semiotician has to independently choose his scientific-practical route and originally design his projects. Theoretical semioticians, in terms of genuine semiotic spirit, would not help to resist the rigidified restrictions and bureaucratic domination of the academic authorities in various fields. Besides this necessarily required intellectual courage, the operative subject should above all refresh their traditional faith/belief in scientific truth. Without this inner mental inclination, semioticians would prefer to choose the more feasible and more profitable path through loyally following the professionalized procedures in their academic career. As a result, the notion of objective scientific truth would be replaced by “academic correctness”, regulated and supervised by the scholarly authorities institutionally formed within professional frameworks.

The general semiotic approach in general represents such a “rationalist/positive-scientific” direction because of the following innate traits: a) the interdisciplinarity, b) the intercultural dialogues, c) the institutional analyses, d) the academic-ideological analyses and e) the pan-semantic analyses. All five principles in the general semiotic strategic wisdom are all inclined to more reasonably break up the established humanist-academic compartmentalization and do away with any dogmatic domination of the existing hierarchy of academic power.



- a) The interdisciplinarity. It is obvious that the interdisciplinary direction is in opposition to the disciplinary-centrism, with the necessary result that the authorities of the disciplines must be weakened accordingly.
- b) The intercultural dialogues. The phenomena or material of theoretical-semiotic research should be connected with as comprehensive ranges as possible so as to spread the scope of the objects treated. It is evident that western-centrism in historical documents will be replaced by the entire historical experience of the entire world. The traditional conclusions based on western history must be revised following the expansion of human experiences in scholarship. On the other hand, the autonomy of non-western cultural scholarship must be deconstructed as well. Western-directed methodologies must be widely employed in the field in order to make the studies more intelligible.
- c) The institutional analyses. It is mainly due to the contributions of structuralism/functionalism of various sorts that the determinative conditions behind the phenomena have become more important. Without being content with limiting our observations in the directly apparent experiences, we should inquire into all hidden institutional determinism that makes appearances be what they are. Accordingly, a number of theoretical studies in social and human sciences should be more deeply and more extensively reorganized.
- d) The academic/cultural ideological analyses. For the sake of more profoundly investigating social-cultural phenomena, the ideological dimension involved will be a characteristic subject matter of semiotics. Academic/cultural ideological aspects in a great number of scholarly/cultural phenomena present themselves to be even more complicated than political ideology, which is usually more perceptible. The strengthening of this kind of thinking with respect to the modern studies of all historical humanities will largely renovate the magnitude of intellectual-historical scholarship.
- e) The pan-semantic analyses. Compared with the highly successful natural sciences, social and human sciences are widely obstructed by the traditionally transmitted semantic complicity that has penetrated into all related textual documents. One of the most important tasks of semiotic studies lies precisely in re-describing or reformulating the historically-transmitted textual manifestations. The classical textual world should not pretend to have a natural intellectual privilege that has normally been manipulated by the conservative academic position in favor of artificially and

utilitarianly advancing the pertinent antiquarian value of all historical documents. In this respect, the scientific and aesthetic values should be more clearly distinguished in order to make the classical-academic heritages more meaningfully and productively join the both ancient/modern and eastern/western intellectual dialogues.

## 6. Conclusion

The formative history of disciplines in the humanities can be typically expressed by a description of the lineages of individual authoritative authors in different historical academic categories. The diachronic-connective line of excellent individual scholars in a discipline's history can be representative of the status and function of the related discipline. The constituent units of the discipline are the individual thoughts that are the research objects and the working grounds of practitioners in the discipline. The disciplinary-constitutive units can be said to refer to the various intellectual totalities of individual authors; that means one author's thought has been entirely accepted and authorized in the discipline. The interdisciplinary strategy stresses the relevant interaction between different intellectual elements selectively implied in different thoughts and various operative procedures of individuals. That means any individual entities comprising thoughts, texts or effects of individual works are certain to be first of all anatomized and recombined. The historical entity of "individual thought" is one thing and the selective and relevant usage of that entity is another. In this respect, the semiotician's attitude towards the historical entity and the historian/historiographer's attitude towards the same historical entity are epistemologically divergent. This distinction can be used to explain a lot of epistemological divergences concerning other kinds of comparisons between the semiotic-interdisciplinary line and the many conventional disciplinary-centric lines. In other words, the intellectual elements of individual authors are put into the specially designed operative procedures formed through interdisciplinary rearrangement. The absolute merit of one individual thought should be evaluated in terms of two different standards: the historical-descriptive and the semiotic-analytical ones. This could be one of the most important contributions of semiotic science to the productive development of human sciences today. In some sense, this kind of distinctive separation leads us to reasonably keep a distance from the doctrinally/permanently fixed privilege of the historically-shaped intellectual/theoretical thoughts that should be the objects of our critical reflections in constructing modern human sciences.

Relatively speaking, the contemporary academic authorities affiliated with different historically-shaped disciplines should not be taken as absolute scholarly criteria for guiding the development of our new theoretical thoughts. By the way, if semiotics is viewed as only another new type of discipline in our competitive academic context, its renovating potential described above will be lost, although our present-day professional situations have been unavoidably organized and governed in this way. This fact should arouse the serious attention of all semiotics scholars. Finally, let us repeat that theoretical semiotics can be essentially described as an interdisciplinary-directed mechanism of new epistemology/methodology for the sake of analytically and synthetically reorganizing the procedural elements comprised in different disciplines.

**PART THREE**

**CHINESE HISTORICAL/IDEOLOGICAL  
SEMIOTICS**

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# RU (儒)-POLITICAL-RELIGION AND A SEMIOTIC RE-DESCRIPTION OF CHINESE ACADEMIC IDEOLOGY<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Originally published in the *Journal of Political Criticism*, Vol. 17: 145-216 (2015). The author, as the advisor of the New China Semiotics Forum, had co-organized a series of summer symposiums about comparative historiography, Chinese semiotics and Husserlian phenomenology in cooperation with Department of History at Ning Bo University; the Ning Bo Classic Library (*Tian Yi Ge*); Guiyang Yuzhang Academy of Classic Learning; the Department of Philosophy at Guiyang University; and the College of Liberal Arts at Lanzhou University in 2014. After informing this activity to *History and Theory* (Wesleyan University), the author received an invitation from its editorship concerning a possible contribution of a report about the contents of our series of talks. Having no convenience in writing such a report then, the author promised to contribute a paper to the upcoming special issue of *History and Theory* about Chinese history. An assistant editor sent me an affirmative reply encouraging me to carry out the proposal. This present chapter is the paper that was originally prepared to be contributed to that journal. Later on, after I had just got a note from that assistant editor mentioning the decision about the paper would soon be positively made, I soon received the formal refusal from the editor in chief with some confusing interpretations of the refusal that were given by their invited reviewers who specialized in Chinese history or in European historical theory. One of the advisers of the journal is Prof. Eggers, whose historical thought had been firstly introduced by the author to China as early as 1979/1980. Later he told me in email communication that he was not familiar either with semiotics or hermeneutics after I had explained to him that historical theory as a discipline should replace historical philosophy as the new guiding strategy. (And that continental semiotics and historical hermeneutics should be the main part of this new historical theory.) Then I understood that the scholarly policy of that special issue had been influenced by the “expert group”, the scholarly direction of which may have been similar to that of the organizers of the earlier Buffalo conference (see footnote 76, chapter 19 in this book) about Chinese-western historiography held in Buffalo in 1998. The paper was immediately accepted and soon published in the *Journal of Political Criticism*, Vol. 17 (2015). From the two events the author has become more clearly conscious of where the main obstacle is against any original novel conception of historical scholarship. Some extant disciplinary authoritative teams, which are motivated by searching for academic power, must exclude renovating thoughts, because the

## Abstract

Current hermeneutic-semiotic-directed historical theory further emphasizes that contemporary historical-theoretical advancement should be based on a renewed concept of total history that includes all historical civilizations of mankind. The most essential kernel shared by different historical heritages remains the descriptions and analyses of political-power structures together with their various types of faith-ideological supplements. The *ru* (儒) Chinese Empire, which lasted continuously for over 2,000 years, is characterized by its rich and highly sophisticated academic historiographically-ideological system. The present chapter attempts to outline the bi-compound structure of *ru* (儒) historiography and its universal meaning for understanding the detailed coexistence and interaction between the part of Chinese political power structure and that of *ru* (儒) academic historiography in the long period of Chinese feudalist history. With respect to *ru*'s (儒) political power structure, its direct *fajia* (法家) operative expressions (A), its system of academic-ideological faiths (B), its *ren* (仁) ethical antithesis (C), and their tri-part interactions in Chinese history are re-described and re-formulated from a new angle in this chapter.

### 1. Introduction: total history and the common denominator of power structures

#### 1.1 Total history and scientifically-directed historical theory

Contemporary studies about traditional Chinese historical scholarship are an intellectual interaction between the traditional Chinese literature and modern western theories. But we should be aware that all related scholarly terms in the humanities and comparative studies are semantically ambiguous and should be redefined in reference to their contexts.<sup>57</sup> Even the common term “history” refers either to the historical processes (realities) as such or to their representational textual products (works). Similarly, the application of the western terms “historiography” and “hermeneutics” in comparative studies need to be contextually readjusted

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conservative line of scholarship could be more convenient for use in professional competitive contexts.

<sup>57</sup> As this author pointed out a long time ago, “...many of the major academic and intellectual conflicts in Chinese cultural history should be reformulated in a more rational conceptual framework” (Li 1988: 311).

too. In this chapter, historiography especially refers to historical scholarship, studies and writings, and hermeneutics generally refers to the special perspectives and methods in connection with the intellectual interaction or dialogue between ancient and modern historiographies as well as those between western and non-western historiographies. The reminder of the usage of scholarly terms is especially relevant to comparative studies of the humanities across western and eastern as well as across modern and ancient intellectual spheres, because the terms used in different contexts indicate different semantic focuses and overtones, easily bringing about misleading understandings.

## **1.2 Historical records, sources and intelligent capability for determining the scopes, scales, quality, typology and classification of historiography**

Historical works and documents are the sources from which historical knowledge is organized. The quality and type of a certain historical knowledge firstly depends on the width, depth and scientific quality of the used sources available and involved intelligent feasibility alike. Since the inception of modern scientifically-directed western historiography, a new reasonable request has been raised that the historical-material sources used in modern western historiography should be as universal as possible.

The idealist notion about universal or total history implies a presupposition about the objectivity of the historical processes of mankind, which has nothing to do with the actual capability of realizing the ideal but rather mainly leads to a reasonable formulation of historical-epistemological problems. The traditional ambiguity of the term “history” is associated with the term “general or universal history” as such. For the term “general” or “universal” can refer to history-1 (range of works) or history-2 (scope of realities or processes). The original ambition in the history of modern western historiography even implies similar uncertain references. Usually, it refers to history-1, namely the comprehensive scope of historical writings across territories. However, if so, the idea is immediately linked to another reasonable question about the huge gap between the two different domains of history-1 and history-2. This naturally makes a cognitive expansionism much less meaningful just because history-1 can hardly present a really complete picture of history-2. ● On the other side, the epistemological question can stimulate us to rethink about the implication of this gap itself. A directly derived result lies in distinguishing the cognitive referent (history-2) from the scholarly object (history-1). Despite the existence of the epistemological gap mentioned

above, the historian is still required to have a cognitive distinction between referent and object in his historiography. Simply speaking, historians cannot mix these two intuitively, although habitually they could tend to be blurred in scholarly practices. Regarding the ideal of formatting a total history, as the French *Annales* states, its relevant focus should be on the represented comprehensive extent of history-2, but when different sources of history-1 have been organized rather divergently, the conceived extensive unification of different materials from history-1 would become less meaningful. Therefore the genuine referent of total history should lie in history-2, realities, although that is currently hard to attain.<sup>58</sup>

Regarding historical studies, historical narratives in general and periodic histories everywhere are written and compiled according to naturally occurring temporal-sequences and artificially (usually politically) divided temporal periods. In a word, historical works or historiographic studies are directly referred to the past historical processes appearing in artificially fixed temporal periodization. This intuitively-shaped habitual method of historical periodization has been based on a common-sense understanding that historical works are “correspondent to” (similarly representative of) the referred historical realities. Now we are becoming aware that this intuitively-felt corresponding relationship completely relies on historiography-making technologies, which are obviously divergent with respect to different ages and areas. As a result, periodization based on natural temporal sequences in historiography becomes even less reasonable.

This habit of historical writing already indicates a notional confusion concerning the concept of the “object” of historical writings, for most historians cannot really take the represented historical processes as their object of studies, editing and writing. Simply put, they can by no means get access to those processes as such for they already disappeared forever. (The epistemological difficulty of the sociological-centric historiography is involved here.) The true objects of historians can only be the available verbal and non-verbal materials or preserved documents. Therefore what determines the scope, depth, quality and type of historical writings is above all related to the quantity and quality of available materials or documents and the related technical conditions, rather than to the referred objectively periodized historical processes. Generally, the informational gap between historical processes and their related historical representations

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<sup>58</sup> Regarding the difficulty of formatting a “total history” frequently raised by western historians, this author especially refers the reader to the efforts made by the French *Annales* school (see Li 2008a: 339-360; Coutau-Begarie 1989: 0.vii; Le Goff and Nora 1974: 14).



in connection with old histories are in fact extremely large and wide to different extents. Moreover, in addition to the available documents, another relevant factor is about the related scientific-operated knowledge that has also been changeable with respect to different historical periods and geographic areas. Until the arrival of modern times, scientifically-directed historical scholarship had been obviously weaker. However, the situation has gradually changed for the past hundred years when modern sciences and technology have developed extensively and quickly with a result that the quantity and quality of contemporary historical records and representations have attained unprecedentedly higher levels everywhere. A remarkable characteristic of contemporary historical representations is indicated by multiple disciplines and technology at different dimensions and planes. For example, journalism and military intelligence, together with many other modern disciplines and research means, have been all conducive to the richly increasing quantity and quality of preserved historical records and related historical writings everywhere. Comparatively speaking, because of the huge differences in capabilities of dealing with historical records and historiographies between the ancient and modern periods, we can no longer reasonably deal with their respective historical scholarships by the same discipline title of “history” or “historiography” or “historical studies”. They should be taken now as belonging to different academic-disciplinary categories, including their intellectual and technological aspects. That is why the present author once suggested that the more reasonable criterion for disciplinary-compartmentalization in historiography should be the scientific quality of knowledge and technology of historiography-making in different ages and areas regarding history-1 rather than the supposed history-2, based on naturally-fixed temporal periodization.

In light of this, relatively speaking, the same case can be even more seriously said about the scholarly divergence between the western and the Chinese historiography traditions, if the two large historical scholarly traditions can be taken as two systems of historical disciplines. Nevertheless, this scholarly divergence has almost disappeared with respect to contemporary historiographies about the current histories of different countries today as well, for modern globalization has already unified, on principle, the conditions for historical scholarship in different countries all over the world. In this sense, we may assert that contemporary historical studies about modern or contemporary histories in different countries have already been unified because of the scientific unification of their respective scholarly levels and techniques in the global era. Therefore it is clear that contemporary historical studies about current

historical processes should be taken as belonging to a new category that is much different from either western or eastern traditional historiographies. In this respect, it is contemporary historiography or historical works in the broadest sense that is, for the first time in history, closer to the attainment of the ideal of total history; it has become even more “universal” or “general” than any historical ideals could imagine in the past.<sup>59</sup>

In consequence, we attempt to say that the divergence between ancient and modern histories and that between western and oriental histories are caused and determined by different cultural-academic conditions related to the conditions of preserved documents and the intellectual-technical instruments involved. The analysis indicates that the real determinative factor regarding the scope, quality and type of historical scholarship is not the related historical process or reality but rather the actual historical conditions about the preservation of documents and the used scholarly-technical means. Accordingly, a more reasonable classification of current historical studies should be set by those scholarly-making conditions rather than by the represented historical realities as such, which can never be sufficiently available for scholars.

Therefore, this new type of contemporary historical studies in effect should no longer be named by the traditionally used term “historiography”, which was established and practiced throughout the pre-scientific periods. Firstly, in a broad sense, the term “history” can refer to all social and cultural phenomena in the world and therefore it must be connected to the knowledge of all natural, social and human sciences as well as to all realms, levels and aspects of the mundane world. That means the studies and representations of contemporary history are based on all related social, cultural, intellectual and technical means. Secondly, this new type of historical studies has already remarkably increased its representational quantity and quality so as to make it more closely accessible to the related historical reality or truth. Conversely, this development of contemporary historical studies helps once again to epistemologically justify the notion of historical truth. For example, as part of the historical truth, the social-historical events in journalistic, military, criminal, economic and many

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<sup>59</sup> The term “history” has been traditionally mixedly used for representing either “historical process” or “historical writings”. The reason for distinguishing the both lies in the huge gap between them with respect to the representativeness of the latter. Following the rapid progress of human knowledge and technology since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the apparatus of “historical recording” has been greatly advanced with a result that the new typology of contemporary historiography raises in fact a new epistemological challenge to the status quo of our current total-historical theory (see Li 2007: 45-53).

other fields in modern history can be mostly described as almost “positively true” nowadays. Or, the human capability of the observation, description, recording and preservation of historical processes for the past century has already rapidly changed the scientific conditions of historical studies. Therefore, the so-called historical theories handled in academic professions today are more related to contemporary studies about earlier or old historical processes and historiographies, namely the inherited old historical texts, which are taken as the real object of historical scholarship. We must recognize that these two kinds of historical studies have already been separated, the one’s object is the inherited texts and the other’s is the social-historical reality. But ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary historical studies have still been taken as belonging to the same “discipline”—history or historiography—in spite of their mutual divergence concerning their respective scholarly constitutions. This practical mixture in scholarship becomes one of the main causes of historical-epistemological confusion today. By the way, many contemporary post-modernist historians or history-philosophers still tend to take history-1, namely written works, as the only justifiable object for reasonable ways of thinking and investigation, neglecting the objective existence of history-2, which is logically involved in historiography. This epistemological inclination is in part related to what we are discussing in this chapter, in which the subjective feature of history-1 and the objectivity of history-2 are recognized at the same time.

### **1.3 The objective of historical scholarship: to understand historical reality or to understand historical works? The distinction between object and objective regarding historical scholarship**

It is mainly out of the above-mentioned confusion about what the proper object of carrying out historical studies is that modern historians are used to maintaining that the transmitted historical works themselves are the truly proper object to be handled and the aim of historical studies should be focused on the historical works as such rather than on the described historical processes. Nevertheless, in historical studies we cannot avoid further distinguishing between the two concepts of object and objective; the distinction is logically linked to the involved historical epistemology. By emphasizing the distinction between reality and works, we attempt to point out that in ancient times historians could not have had strong enough conditions and means about historiography-making, so they could only take the works as the object of their scholarly operative jobs; or, in a

simplistic way, they regard the works as being basically in accordance with referred reality. Regarding contemporary historians or historical epistemologists facing the double alternatives, they still prefer to follow the traditional way of accepting this basic presupposition partly because of the existing academic-professional autonomy maintained by the institutionalized discipline, which can pragmatically regulate the intellectual priority of professionally authorized texts over the social-historical reality: a cognitive priority of works to realities. That is in part why a textual-centric historiography prevails in academia and educational systems today. In this chapter, nevertheless, we remind ourselves that our eventual aim in historical studies should still lie in reaching the referred historical processes as closely as possible. In other words, we still attempt to attain precise enough descriptions of the historical processes through historical works, and the scholarly orientation for objective truth has, epistemologically speaking, nothing to do with our capability of attaining the goal. We can of course professionally-habitually fix the works and materials (history-1) as the only justifiable object of our historical studies by a common agreement, being practically satisfied with the obtained results that must be half-scientific and half-literary in nature. Thus, with respect to our scientifically-directed historical studies, we can then make a useful conceptual distinction between the realities as the “objective” and the works representing realities as the “object”. As we have just pointed out, the scientific development of contemporary historical studies can make the distinction more clearly intelligible and acceptable today when the historical processes can be amazingly precisely represented because of modern scientific-technological progresses and contemporary epistemological sophistication. This development of the modern historical sciences can also change traditional historical epistemology as well.

It is due to just this above-mentioned confusion concerning the notions of object and objective that there has emerged the traditional idea that historical works are of a historically-literarily mixed nature, which have been naturally taken as being connected to history and literature alike, or, indeed, even more inclined to the literary in character. For the less scientifically-operated ancient historical works, historical studies or works indeed indicate a more literary feature or become literary works that use historical stories as material only. (The comparison between the impressive records of warring fields of Hiloduode’s work and those about the Second World War is impossible, for they belong to completely different scholarly categories despite their stories being habitually labeled with the same catchword of “war history”; that means, “war history” is not a “scholarly relevant” common term for these comparative studies.)

Following the modern development of the scientific way of thinking, the categorical divisions of writing practices have already become more and more subtly elaborated. As a result, the more scientific conception of history or historiography becomes really possible and even unavoidable. In this case the post-modernist rejection of the notion of historical truth seems to be practically due to the fact that they take works as the main object of their praxis, intentionally giving up any objective references.

**1.4 The contemporary turn of historical studies:  
Methodological-technical levels determine the quality  
of historiography; the traditional term “history” has been  
transformed into the entire realm of modern social-human  
sciences**

In addition to the foregoing discussions, we should state that our present-day academic compartmentalization about the humanities is still a mixture of classical and modern literatures, and it is especially the case with historiography. We should be clear that all materials of the humanities are historical in nature; in this enlarged sense, historical scholarship should cover all fields of social and human sciences. On principle, it is time now for us to more precisely redefine the discipline named with terms such as history, historiography or historical studies. At the least, we should divide historical scholarship into two categories: the modern scientific type and the traditional quasi-literary type. For the two types of disciplines are clearly determined by different sets of criteria for handling historical scholarship that involves three different aspects: historical sources, historiographic methods and styles of historical writings. In reference to the three aspects, the traditional classical type and modern scientific type are remarkably different in their preconditions, scholarly instruments and scholarly manners. As we pointed out above, the conclusion becomes more distinctive if we compare the historical works of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and those made before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. So these two historiographic works belong to different categories although they are related to the same kind of historical materials in a broad sense. The academic division is determined by different scholarly compositions involving scales of sources, scientific techniques and scholarly attitudes adopted. The conclusion about contemporary historiography also helps to solve a long-standing dispute on the nature of “history” as a discipline – whether it is more scientific or more literary – or from a more theoretical perspective, the derived question about “is there a historical truth?” We may state that many vivid discussions about historical epistemology today are caused by a basic

conceptual ambiguity: “what is meant by the term historical truth?” The present author firmly accepts an empirically-positive sense of it on the basis of records about the historical works and documents accomplished during the last century. Our argumentation for a recognition of historical truth can be briefly interpreted by a comparison with criminal judgments in the sense that criminology is based on the precondition of the existence of truth. The justification of the concept of “truth” and the attainment of truth are of course different in nature, which is related to the availability of sufficient intellectual and technical tools involved. The fact of the insufficient representativity of historical works about realities cannot be used to reject the epistemological justification of objective historical processes. In terms of this we should know there are two kinds of historical referents: the original emerging processes in actual space and time in history and the works that are somewhat related to the former. Accordingly historians should understand that the representational quality of historical works depends on our scientific-technical potential that has been gradually advanced in history, and the related representational quality must be logically advanced as well.

The above common-sense distinction between object and objective implies an epistemological significance. If contemporary historical works can support the justification of the notion of historical truth that proves the existence of “objective” realities, the same term “truth” used or implied in ancient historiography will be meaningful despite their less scientific ways of mixing the object and the objective. The derived conclusion is connected with both extreme relativism and traditional dogmatic conservatism. Regarding the former, the concept of truth can be justly protected, and regarding the latter, historical truth should not be confused with the works simplistically taken as realities.

### **1.5 The central object of historiography rooted in human existence: causal analysis of interpersonal dominations in historical processes or studies of causal relationships of power in human history**

The above preparative discussion presents on one hand some related epistemological explanations and on the other goes back to the classical conception of general or universal history. For history-1, concerning pre-modern historical scholarship, the idealized or presupposed notion of referred or described comprehensiveness of historical descriptions is proved to be meaningless, with the result that the general historical principles valid for all human histories can hardly be imagined now. No

universal rules can be generalized on the basis of much less comprehensively described ranges of related historical processes. Among all possible cross-cultural comparative historical studies about respective old histories, however, one of the most important and intelligible topics shared by all civilizations, as suggested in this chapter, is the kernel part of all historiographies: political history; or, more precisely, the comparative typology of political power structures with all associated ideological supplemental mechanisms. For all historical existences have been ones of socially organized collectives, the central foundation of which is the structures of political powers with their closely related spiritual-ideological mechanisms. Among a number of parameters the very central one, in comparison with cultural, social and economic aspects, is the political; namely, the interpersonal relationship of power or dominations. Political history remains the most significant part of modern historical studies, because it is directly related to the subject matter of interpersonal dominations with respect to both the static-structural relationship and the dynamic-causal relationship. The studies of the relationships of interpersonal dominations involve both structural and dynamic descriptions and analyses alike.

Based on the above discussion we attempt to state that the main scholarly aim of present-day studies of ancient or pre-modern histories lies not in comprehensively reaching the related historical truth but rather in merely limitedly attaining the historical truth about the more stabilized structures of power relationships in addition to more sufficiently reaching the related intellectual and academic ideologies in connection with political power relationships. For this limited goal, scholars need first of all to recognize the objective existence of historical truth in general.

In terms of the above explanations the present chapter attempts to focus on the political-academic-ideological mechanisms in Chinese history, which is uniquely characterized by its extremely long-lasting historical and intellectual continuity of over 3,000 years. It is interesting to note that the special political-ideological type of the Chinese despotic-imperial system is characteristic of the officially made and controlled, sophisticatedly organized and effectively operated mechanisms of orthodox historiography. Regarding the social political history of mankind, we find that any social-political powers (the hard part of power) function in combination with related intellectual-ideological systems of faith (the soft part of power). From the inherited historical literature of all civilizations, we may be able to formulate more positively a unified typology of the double-mechanisms of political powers in human history someday. With respect to Chinese history, the latter part is extremely richly constructed,

and a characteristic of its unique type of political religion is named with the single character “*ru*” (儒).

## 2. The formation of Chinese *ru* (儒) political origin and heritage

### 2.1 Historical writings and historical truth in Chinese historical thought

Traditional Chinese culture is characterized by its incomparably rich collections of historical works and documents in human history. According to this Chinese traditional notion of historical writings, the aim of historical works nominally still rests on finding and recording historical truth. No doubt, the conceptual existence of historical truth is by no means the ability to realize it in their historical practices. The fact still implies an important hermeneutic sense of it to the historian. Firstly, the limitation of a capability for historical scholarship was caused by the lack of sufficient collections of valid documents, scientifically-directed historical knowledge, and historiography-organizing instruments. However, the traditionally accepted conception of historical truths, either in Chinese history or in western history, can be in accordance with the empirical-positive ideal in modern historical sciences. More particularly, the essential part of political-historical truth remains the structure and dynamics of interpersonal power relationships.

In addition, at least in Chinese history, strenuous struggles for actualizing and seizing political power have ceaselessly been the strongest ambitions in the historical life of mankind. And political phenomena in China can be depicted by the multi-relationships of interpersonal dominations among people and groups. One of the deepest political motives for the more aggressively-characterized human beings has been their innately strong impulse to gain superiority or domination over other fellows, and the tendency can be easily traced back to the same instinct of beasts, although in civilized societies political life is interweaved with many other political, cultural and moral-religious dimensions. Therefore, problems of interpersonal domination based on power relationships or power mechanisms in political history should remain a permanent subject in historical studies, including traditional Chinese historiography. This human racial inclination is obviously linked to the notion of innate human nature, universally disclosed by the general fact that there is a deeply-rooted lust of ambitious people for seizing power or dominative superiority over others in human existence. Therefore, the most significant



historical truth concerning this human nature is exactly exhibited in the permanent empirical realm: the interpersonal power struggles in all historical processes. In terms of this physical-psychological background, Chinese political culture has evolved and developed, being embodied by a variety of intelligent and instrumental progress. In general, this political-cultural evolution is displayed in two aspects: violence/scheming and superstition/faith-stimulating. These two kinds of means are the political-tactical basics for attracting, gathering and convincing the masses collected and used as the fighting tools for power struggles and for maintaining the firm control of power holders over subjugated people. The horrible coercion by force and the convincing persuasion by superstitious artifacts have always been dialectically employed to form the strategic foundations of control in political histories. In this sense, the essence of history remains political-centralism.

In the traceable historical past, namely since the Shang Dynasty (1600-1100 B.C.), we can see from inherited documents the two ways of governing and dominations of rulers and their consistent applications in all social-political-military practices: the empirical wisdom linked to violence (the military in general) and the supernatural wisdom about faith (the rites for venerating gods). The consistent application of the two joined arts had become the archetype of original political domination in ancient Chinese history. These two basic tactics, empirical violence and supernatural superstition, in political-military struggles were gradually elaborated, leading to the shaping of two original guiding lines of primitive Chinese political wisdom. Let us call them the hard line or violent-tactic (simply, the A-line) and the soft line or superstitious-moral (simply, the B-line). In fact, since the Shang, the first documentably-confirmed dynasty, the twofold political wisdom and its associated various technical mechanisms have established the archetype of power structures in the long course of Chinese despotic history.

The strongest human animal instinct is rooted in fear of different types, for example, those that are interpersonal, natural and life-marginal (death). Following the evolution of mankind, mass obedience is connected either with beastly instinctive fear and physical violence (A-line) or with primitive-spiritual fear, which can be said to be an imaginative violence (B-line). The psychological existence of the two types of fear leads to the shaping of a mentality of expectant fear, resulting in a socialized habit of precautionary succumbing to both the realistic and supernatural power-holders in advance. The result is actually displayed by the establishments of rules of mind and conducts being set down by the latter. Nevertheless, the same system of rules to be followed can be traced back to different

psychological origins roughly marked by the A-line and B-line. The twofold structure of so-called primitive morality originates from two different empirical instincts: the animal and the human. Both are originally due to personal fears of being punished or destroyed, either by actual stronger humans/animals or by imagined superstitious deities; or, inversely speaking, the two types of fear are also embodied in two types of wishes to be safeguarded by the stronger. From the angle of the rulers, the two origins of socially organized fears and obedience also become two basic levers in controlling techniques.

Although these earliest twofold levers for maintaining power hierarchies increasingly developed in ancient Chinese history, they constantly preserved their original structure. The latter also became the inherited archetype of original Chinese despotic-totalitarian regimes realized by the first and second Chinese empires, the Qin and Han (221 B.C.-220 A.D.), which grew up originally from the original Zhou Dynasty established about 800 years earlier. The joined playing of the two political levers proved quite effective in making the governed subjects more easily succumb to the kings, the power-holders. Since the Shang were replaced by the Zhou, who later attained a higher cultural level in Chinese history, the B-line, the soft-lever, was further elaborated in that the earlier moral aspects had been transformed into a more complicated and more effective system consisting of social norms, rules, rites and faiths in connection with different societal sections. The expanded, synthetic system of morality had been shaped in a more closely organized hierarchical community. The new social-cultural system is traditionally called “zhou li” (周礼, the ritual system and culture of the Zhou (周) Dynasty); meanwhile, the earlier rude moral instruments were increasingly added to with empirical-humanistic elements as well. In general, the earlier notion of Heaven, which was closer to an anthropomorphic deity under the Shang, became a more and more abstract symbol of the cosmic power – also named Heaven – under the early Zhou. In this further cultivated system of the Zhou, the humanistic faith in indoctrinating and educating affairs with respect to moral-psychological training had been intensified. The period of the Zhou (周) Dynasty is called a period of so-called Chinese feudalism, during which the two original political wisdoms, A and B, had been enriched accordingly.

Therefore, the Zhou (周) Dynasty, as a higher developed stage in Chinese history, was especially characterized by the sophisticated development of its soft-line, the moral-faith-constructive endeavors (B-line), which was displayed in two aspects: the further richly socialized system of faiths and its corresponding elaboration of the technique

concerning supernatural superstition. The first was called the “*li*-system” (the hierarchical system of rites and related thoughts of feudalist morality), characterized by establishing feudal-stratification and the related moral-educational procedures, which were intended to indoctrinate the thought and conduct patterns concerning specially-stratified interpersonal morality into top rulers, officials and common people in order to make political obedience more effectively and more consciously performed. The second was called the entity of “heaven-*tao*” (天道), imagined as the highest power-holder in the universe, which functioned as a political-type religion based on the notion of power hierarchy reigning over both the cosmos and earth. From a more profound perspective, we may derive that the elaboration of the soft-lever had been promoted by a strengthened rational requisite in the hard-lever; namely, the notion of heaven should avoid an empirically-positive inconsistency with the empirically-directed wisdoms employed by the hard-line (A). A primitive sophistication of the heaven faith has been helpful for weakening the cognitive conflict between empirical evidence and super-empirical superstition.<sup>69</sup>

## 2.2 The expanded meaning of A-line and B-line in Chinese history

Broadly speaking, we may summarize that the double-lever-archetype of political-dominating mechanism in ancient times comprises two basic modes of ancient political-strategic-tactical ways of thinking and behaving. The twofold political-tactical archetype has been rooted in Chinese history, laying down the basis for its lasting stability and feasibility. We should keep in mind from now on that this archetype of Chinese political culture always consists of these two parts or their different varieties, which functioned in collaborative and consistent ways, although the proportional degrees and modes of the two parts and their interactions has been flexibly changeable in different historical contexts.

Regarding the interaction between the historically changeable meanings of some traditional linguistic-characters and our present selective usage of them, there exist several complicated reasons to be further explained although, unfortunately, we have no space for the job

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<sup>69</sup> Regarding the complicated relationship between historical writings and a variety of superstitious faiths, I refer the reader to Gu Jiegang (顾颉刚), the greatest historian in modern China, and his work *zhongguo-shanggushi-yanjiujiangyi* (The Investigation of Remote Ancient Chinese History), republished in 1999 (originally published in 1930).

here. We can only remind readers of the difference existing between the habitual senses of used characters and our specially focused sense-aspects of the same characters. In any case, the meanings of all the traditional characters are widely related to the chosen contexts; habitually they have been misunderstood as constantly unchanged. The reason why this linguistic problem is relevant here is because the mixed involvements of ancient and modern senses of the same characters used in modern contexts are related to semantic disorders in our mutual understanding and discussions.

In our “semiotic usage of traditional characters” we choose to use some terms, which were in use in fact much later in history, to represent phenomena, which appeared much earlier, in order to convey multi-significant historically existing elements. So, we prefer to use “A” to mark the primitive mode of the traditional name “*fa-jia*” (法家) used much later (misleadingly translated as “the legalist school”) and to use “B” to mark the primitive mode of the traditional name “*ru-jia*” (儒家), also used much later (the character “*ru*” (儒) with no definite meaning will be explained later). In essence, with respect to the practical realms, A as the hard line refers to the violent-military part and B as the soft line to the cultural-administrative part; the both function in the same political-dominating system, which could be traced back to the remote past of tribal societies. It should be emphasized that the contrast between A and B lies in the level of methods and policies rather than in that of political-morality, as is wrongly interpreted by most ancient and modern scholars. As a matter of fact, the terms “*fajia*” (法家) and “*rujia*” (儒家) have been officially and widely in use only since the Han. Accordingly, our present usage is different from both the related traditional and modern regular ways. According to the Chinese traditional interpretation, *fajia* (法家) and *rujia* (儒家) represent the two oppositional political-moral ways of thinking, respectively emphasizing anti-moral-directed violence and moral-directed benevolence; however, according to our analysis, the difference between the two is only pragmatic-tactical and practical-expedient in nature. The saying of the oppositional political-morality of the two parts was firstly caused by the ideological fabrication of Chinese despotic powers under the Han. Even the traditional academic terms *fajia* (法家), *rujia* (儒家), and many others are highly ambiguous in meaning, although they can maintain a pragmatically self-consistent usage in their chosen contexts.

More precisely, according to our interpretation, the marks A and B are the primitive modes of *fajia* (法家) and *rujia* (儒家); or, the latter two are the advanced modes of the original modes A and B. The appearance of names of social-political thinking ways occurred in much later times when

the primitive scholarly activities were originally established. The *fajia* (法家), or literally “legalist school” (which, in fact, means to maintain severe and strictly controlled policies regarding both internal dominations and external militaries), was the developed mode of the earlier basic A-line, turning out to be a really full-fledged learning and policy mainly displayed in three hard-social realms in connection to strategy-tactics: administrative, military and legal. Precisely, this line contains two chief features: violence and plot-tricks. The B-line, or the primitive type of *ru-jia* (儒家), as pointed out above, consists of two aspects: the social-cultural and the supernatural-mythological parts. *fajia* (法家) as a political theory adopted a bare “power philosophy”, which was either internationally directed to military-aggressive conquests through well-organized aggressive activities, cunning tactics and secret schemes or domestically directed to severe punishments and praise with respect to subjects. Based on the original violent tradition, *fajia* (法家) more typically and successfully embodied the essence of ancient Chinese politics, although this bare violent part was intentionally hidden by all power-holders with the purpose of exaggerating the beneficent face of the ruling classes. With this political philosophy and aggressive techniques, the Qin defeated all other states, successfully establishing the first Chinese empire.<sup>61</sup>

### 2.3 The historical emergence of a heterogeneous intellectual force: Confucian ethics

Before the establishment of the totalitarianized Chinese imperial system, a basic national-ideological way of thinking had already been shaped in the Chinese mentality, indicating an everlasting threefold interaction between three intellectual forces, among which, besides the remotely traceable original A- and B-lines, there appeared a completely new type of thought called “the ethical”, or, named in its Chinese term, “*ren*” (仁) (literally: man, humanity and benevolence), which we mark with “C” in this paper. Or, quite simply speaking, these basic three factors in intellectual interactions are: A (violence), B (morality) and C (ethics). C is traditionally identified with Confucian thought, although the true authors and compilers

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<sup>61</sup> Regarding the relationship between the process of Chinese empires and the establishment of ancient Chinese historiography, there are a number of reference books and documents. The author strongly recommends an authoritative standard introduction written by Liang Qichao (梁启超), titled *zhongguotishyanjiufu* (A Methodology of Chinese History), republished in 1984 (originally published in 1922).

of the related text titled *The Analects* were the legendary disciples and followers only, regarding which one thing is worth mentioning here: despite a variety of overlapped elements with a lot of other historical and mental customs in ancient China, this ethical thought is characterized by the innately self-consistent holism of its ethical-pragmatic logic. In fact, there has been a permanent contrast between the unchanged spiritual logic of ethical autonomy and the changeable phenomena of the political-social-cultural facts in Chinese history.

As regards the central traditional Chinese political-ethical-pragmatic frame of thought, we depict it with this model of three lines in the paper. Both A and B have a double-identity indicated by social-political and intellectual-moral aspects; the so-called “thought” here is overlapped with its related social realities, which have been profoundly and multiply rooted in the special original Chinese history. A and B, with their associated social realities, formed in and are the results of the naturally shaped social-cultural-historical backgrounds, ranging from the earlier theocracy of the Shang to the later more rationalized humanist feudalism of the Zhou (周). All the historical systems and social patterns are the natural consequences of Chinese historical developments, the detailed processes and origins of which remain little known until now. In this sense, A and B, or their mature types *fajia* (法家) and *rujia* (儒家), are collective expressions of the related intelligence and behaviors. Regarding the primitive modes of political thoughts, despite the difference between the pragmatic styles, both A and B mainly served to safeguard the interests of political power-holders. The developed aspects of morality within the B-line were directly linked to and determined by both heaven and human power-holders. The essence of this historical system of faithful mentality, after all, has been ultimately directed towards the effective guarantee of absolute obedience of inferiors to their superiors, or to different grades of power-holders.

It was under this historical condition that an individual-centric type of ethical thought suddenly occurred, represented by a legendary historical figure, Confucius, and his vagrant academy (ca. 500 B.C.), presenting not only different but also essentially oppositional or challenging lines of thinking in reference to the moral situations of the power of the ruling systems and its suppressive ideology under the Zhou Dynasty. As an ethical system it must have also originated and evolved in the earlier historical and intellectual traditions along the B-line (simply, the individual-ethical originates from the collective morality). Since then, Chinese political-intellectual history has indicated a permanent interaction between A, B and C. Although this Confucian thought and its historical origins must share the same social-political-institutional heritage, as the

only available historical material and conditions, with A and B, it asserts a quite independent axiological system different from the official-ruling ones. Paradoxically enough, however, eventually this ethical challenger to the *fajia* (法家) power-philosophy was delicately used to serve or support its opposite: the ruling class. In brief, we may state that Confucian ethics has been a motivationally-ethically challenging spirit in confrontation with Chinese power-holders. As a matter of fact, the essence of Confucian ethics is embodied in the challenging dialogue between official power and private consciousness with respect to political-ethical criteria and orientations. The main reason lies in that Confucian thought is an ethical system mainly realized or functional in the motivational or attitudinal domain without really entering the politically-applicable realms of its ethical pragmatic autonomy. ●ne direct reason of the historical emergence of this ethical-immanentist inclination can be apparently in part explained by the general lack of a higher scientific-rational mentality in ancient Chinese civilization. Nevertheless, the phenomenon implies a much more profound significance in general. Unlike their western counterparts, no ancient Chinese thinker ever thought clearly about the possibility of seeking some more desirable social-political means or organizations to replace the naturally inherited, customarily accepted ones. ●n the other hand, this shortcoming in national mentality presents two different kinds of historical advantages. For traditional Chinese despotic politics, it provides a super-stable social-political system, maintaining a uniquely lengthy continuity of Chinese civilization. And for Confucian ethics, it helps maintain an ethical-motivational autonomy that has actually been tested in the long course of history, maintaining in our consciousness an independently-persisting mental orientation towards ethical justices among human beings, rather than passively serving power-holders, although the ethics does not know clearly what the ethical truth should be in reality, let alone how to make it realized. What exists here genuinely-relevantly is an intentional attitude or a fixed ethical inclination rooted in the mind, which could indeed play an active independent role on purely cultural levels, relatively separate from social-political realms.

Positively speaking, Confucian ethics indeed helped traditional Chinese despotic regimes, especially when the latter had developed into their more totalitarianized mode, slightly increasing their level of political-morality on one hand with its virtue-training teaching; but on the other, negatively speaking, it has been extensively and deeply used by the ruling classes to justify and strengthen their extremely unfair despotic-totalitarian domination over the thought and actions of literati. At the cultural-intellectual level, the existence of Confucian thought embodied in the text

of *The Analects* has led to a permanent confrontation or tension between the humanist ethics deeply rooted in the benevolent part of good human nature and harsh power-violence performed by the aggressive instincts in evil human nature.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, by the way, axiological confrontation or tension has become a historically permanent spiritual source for cultural-intellectual creations and productions of various kinds in the long course of Chinese history and a characteristic of its highly developed literature and arts. A great number of cultural and intellectual products and expressions have been mainly due to the inspiration and stimulation of the Confucian ethical spirit. At the political-practical levels, Confucian ethics has also even been ideologically misused by Chinese political powers to serve the ruling class itself.

The identity and content of C can be much more simply and purely defined than those of A and B. C is basically a mere system of thought actualized in the mind of individuals, and A and B are synthetically social-cultural existences appearing in collective powers. However, C has indeed had an independent and spiritually powerful impact on Chinese cultural and intellectual history. In any case, these three heterogeneous historical factors or realms have shaped both coexistent and mutually-conflicting mechanisms of intellectual interactions in Chinese history. Among these, A and C have been constant opponents at the intellectual-ethical level, while B, when it had further developed or grown to its more synthetic mode “*rujiao*” (儒教) (religion or system of *ru* (儒)-politics) under the Han, also became the origin of a catch-all ideological title representative of the *ru* (儒)-imperial system.

### 3. The establishment of the *ru* (儒)-imperial system and its academic-historical ideology

#### 3.1 General background

Historically speaking, Confucian thought has presented itself by two modes of existence: as the intellectual-independent autonomy and as a tool to be used by the ruling class. As an implicitly self-coherent ethical system, it has played a cultural, intellectual, educational and virtual-training role with respect to literati in general and at the level of social

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<sup>62</sup> As for the “true” Confucian thought, we can only rely on *The Analects* (regardless of some fictive parts created and distorted by others in the book). Its basic philosophical line is contrary to the *ru*-totalitarian political philosophy based on anti-Confucian thoughts (see Legge 1991).



usages since the Han; on the other hand, it has also been used by power-holders as an educational instrument to serve the ruling class and literati in general about moral indoctrination. The Han defeated the Qin Empire but adopted all the institutional heritages created by the Qin, the first nationwide conquest. It was the Han that, for the first time in history, successfully combined different historical heritages into an unprecedentedly workable totality, including aspects such as military violence, severe discipline, deceitful tactics, a centralized despotic administration, superstitious worship to heaven, and family-type mundane religion for venerating national-historical king-lineages, as well as Confucian virtual training techniques, bringing about the establishment of the Chinese *ru* (儒)-imperial system based on the Qin's militarized dictatorship. Among different *ru* (儒)-systematic components, the two uniquely great historical-cultural contributions are those leading to the official formation of the Chinese academic-institutional system, namely the five-class-scholarship (whose texts amounts to the "Bible" of a *ru* (儒)-political-religion), and the sacralization of the historical figure Confucius, making him a spiritual hierarch of the *ru* (儒)-political-religion.

Confucian political ethics, despite its lack of applicable methods, indicated a definitely clear idea about the subjective-ethical goal for individuals and the moral orientation of political practices for regimes; by reading the text, it presented an obvious objection to the contemporary Zhou political realities, which were hermeneutically referred to all Chinese despotic regimes over 2,000 years. And when the late Zhou entered its Warring-State period and all Zhou feudal states adopted *fajia* (法家)-lined politics fighting each other, the ethical-conceptual conflict between Confucian ethics, represented by Confucius' follower Mencius, and the prevailing politically aggressive-tended states became sharply serious. Since then, even long before the establishment of the Qin Empire, a typical intellectual/political confrontation between Confucian political ethics and any violent aggressions following *fajia* (法家)'s aggressive philosophy of power has been dramatically formed. The strongest *fajia* (法家)-lined state, the Qin, which more successfully adopted a *fajia* (法家) philosophy, or the aggressive policy purely based on the A-line, defeated all other states, annexing all of them to build up the first albeit short-lived Chinese totalitarian empire. The Han, also based on the Qin's *fajia* (法家) line, became the final victor who established the persistent *ru* (儒)-imperial system. The historical fact proves clearly that it is the militarist *fajia* (法家), rather than Confucian ethical politics, that has become the genuine historical momentum in China. This historical consequence confirmed the

victory of the A- and B-lines and the failure of the C-line in this respect; but, ironically enough, eventually the C-line and its author were used by A and B to serve them. The militarist Qin proved to be a great victor in military conquests but not a successful imperial controller. So it was the Qin's successor, the Han, that became a lasting despotic dynasty. Han emperors found time to readjust the Qin's line, mainly based on A, by a clever combinative application of A and B together; the Chinese despotic empire therefore had successfully established its permanent archetype for internal and external politics. That means, the B-line, under the Han, had been more effectively created, superseding its foregoing two great creations.

The synthetically-formed superstitious mechanism developed from the B-line in ancient China had undergone a characteristic elaboration displayed in two aspects. On the one hand, the cosmic-metaphysical heaven worship had grown gradually more sophisticated, becoming mixed with the more abstract Taoism. The ultimately-shaped plain Chinese metaphysical concept named "*tian-dao*" (道) (heaven-*tao*) is composed of the more imaginary part "heaven" and the less imaginary part "*tao*" in order to intensify its theoretical-persuasive strength. On the other hand, the ancient mythological deities had been gradually but systematically transformed into historical figures; namely the worshiped deities in earlier oral legends had been successfully anthropomorphized. This historiographic fabrication had resulted in making legendary supernatural deities become empirically accessible old kings. This double intellectual-ideological policy manipulated by the imperial regime made a clever use of the two sets of different sacred sources of a metaphysical and empirical nature. The latter accorded with the developed rational knowledge of the nation at the time, namely making old superstitious faith into the one that is empirically-rationally more accessible. According to this national-mental character, the images of earthly-historical stories sound more convincing than purely supernatural-imaginative fictions. A political-ideological continuity between the legendary historical forefathers as earthly power-holders and the current emperors as real political power-holders had been strengthened without losing its original profitable link between heaven and earth. A supernatural-superstitious power-ideology and a natural-mundane power-ideology have been satisfactorily finished since then.

It is important to repeat that, since the Han, the B-line (the soft-line, *rujia* (儒家)) has been in fact further enriched and become the synthetic-mechanical compound that we name as the *ru* (儒)-imperial system, where the A-line and the B-line had been so delicately organized into a functional entirety. In other words, in the *ru* (儒)-system, *fajia* (法家) and *rujia* (儒家)

had been made an organic whole; or, in traditional terms, “outside *rujia* (儒家) and inside *fajia* (法家)”. ●r, *rujia* (儒家) could have been further substantialized into *rujiao* (儒教) (literally, the religion and system of *ru* (儒)), which consists of both the external-socially and internal-culturally institutionalized arrangements. The latter includes a new type of political ideological system consisting of the classical type of historiography, namely the classical texts about the words and deeds of the legendary ancient Chinese kings, although those texts are half fragmentary documents and half imaginative fictions. In this system, Confucius, the author of *The Analects*, had been purposely fabricated as a founder of that historiography-ideological system. Because of this original intentional confusion, which concretely fabricated the author of *The Analects* as the editor and teacher of the *ru* (儒)-imperial-religious classics, contemporary studies of Chinese history still suffer from this nominal blending with a result of bringing about a lot of basic misunderstandings at home and abroad. This fabrication produces at least two serious mistakes in connection with modern historical studies. First of all, it hides and covers up the fundamental opposition between Confucian humanist ethics and the ●in-Han’s imperial power philosophy. Secondly, it misleadingly makes the A- and B-lines in the unified system of *ru* (儒)-imperial regimes apparently separate, interpreting this separation emerging at the policy-operational level as that existing at the level of political-moral directions. In essence, the key essence of Han *ru* (儒)-political ideology lies in camouflaging the *fajia* (法家)’s violently organized hard-line foundation of *ru* (儒)-regimes through exaggerating the political-moral character of the *rujia* (儒家)’s academic ideology that was manipulated by the same regimes. In essence, the Han inherited all political-military systems left by the ●in but complemented it with a more effective and culturally elaborated academic ideological system.

In terms of our simplified formulation, it was during the Han period that the three parts of A, B and C (or part of C) composed a more synthetically inter-coordinated system called the “*ru*” (or *rujia* (儒家)) system. From the first ●in empire to the last Ching (or “●ing”) empire, the traditional Chinese political systems remained basically the same, always retaining the hard A-line as their very institutional foundation. Where they differed from each other was with respect to the relationship between *fajia* (法家) and *rujia* (儒家), which had emerged mainly in the policy-practical level. Unlike the traditional saying that *fajia* (法家) and *rujia* (儒家) are two oppositional lines of political philosophy, these two had been complementary to each other in jointly maintaining *ru* (儒)-imperial

regimes. Or, essentially, the *ru* (儒)-imperial system consists of *rujia* (儒家) as a soft-lined moral-ideological profile and *fajia* (法家) as a hard-lined political-coercive substance.

On the other hand, because of the historically shaped special connection between despotic political ideology and Confucian thought, the name Confucius has been even ultimately made the leader of the ideological system headed by his ethical opposite! Since then, for over 2,000 years, the two different intellectual and practical ways of thought have been confused together in scholarly thinking. The consequence has become even more serious since the earlier western missionaries rashly translated and interpreted the imperial ideology with the term “Confucian classics” or interpreted the *ru* (儒)-imperial ideology as really being invented by the so-called historical figure of Confucius. In fact, the proper name of that ideological system and thought were indeed marked by the character “*ru*” (儒).

### 3.2 A derivative discussion about character-pattern semantics and its ideological-pragmatic effects

Regarding the problems about ancient Chinese words and character-semantics, we have to present a derivative discussion first. The original semantic confusions of the titles or theoretical terms have been widely caused by ancient *ru* (儒)-ideology and modern Chinese-western translations. In this regard, let us mention just a few one-character words and two-character words such as *tian* (heaven), *dao* (道) (*tao*), *fa* (law, rule), *fajia* (法家) (school of law), *ru* (儒) (no definite meaning), *rujia* (儒家) (schools of *ru*), *ren* (仁) (human being, benevolence, or good), and also *ruxue* (儒学) (learning about *ru*-academic ideology), *renxue* (仁学) (learning about *ren* (仁)-ethics), and the more general and more synthetic term *rujiao* (儒教) (political religion, or a synthetic-constitutive social-political system named after *ru* (儒)).

The *raison d'être* of the nounal confusions lies in the semantic structure of the Chinese character-centric language itself, in which character-patterns as the basic units of words and phrases keep their constant verbal shapes but each contains a lot of possible different dictionary-semes. So the concrete meaning of a character as a word can only be fixed by its contexts. A character pattern looks like a fixed little box full of semic units, of which the total number and use-frequency are changeable in history. Semantically speaking, there exists an apparent contradiction between the unchanged visual form of a character and the

changeable structure of the signified content. In general, in the history of its one-character word language, Chinese is richly contextually-determined. If one seme implied in a character is separated from the entire semic group of that character and used to represent the relevant meaning of that character, semantic confusion or misinterpretation would very easily happen. That means, in this case, one constituent seme of a character is first used to represent the meaning of the one-character word, excluding the involvement of some other constituent semes, which in fact could selectively appear in other possible contexts. Modern Chinese is firstly characterized by its systematic transformation from the one-character word language to the two-character word language, with a result of increased certainty of signification of abstract and general words. In ancient China this tendency had already emerged to a limited extent. An involved negative effect lies in creating another kind of semantic confusion of Chinese words: the polyphonic reading of a word by means of arbitrarily selecting semic combinations from the entire accumulated semic reservoir; namely, an early effective but late ineffective seme of a word can be re-used to produce some artificially misleading meanings implicative of the ideological overtones caused by the same character pattern.

This signifying tendency still widely functions when the ancient two-character words began to be employed, because this character-phrase would appeal to a de-contextual separation in creating that semantically one-sided way of reading the chosen characters. The most typical example is given by the more abstract ones such as “*dao*” (道) (*tao*) and “*tian*” (天) (heavens), which can be shared by different ways of thought, with their basic semic origin: “way, rule, law, regularity”. The mythically charming usage implied in it is also indicated by secondary or third connotative semes in illogically used contexts. It could be the latter part that signifies the truer or deeper signified; that is to say, those about supernatural, metaphysical, true-nihilist, false-nihilist, political-extremist and ethical-basic ideas, etc.

Let us see another example in our present usage of the key character “*ru*”, which has been the very origin of conceptual confusions, but nevertheless has played a very significant and ideological-functional role. We may simplify its expressions in this way: at present, in our reading, it temporarily refers to four different items. First, a proper noun about a job of scribing and document-keeping, or that even in general refers to the primitive literary-type jobs in the remote past, which are mainly related to the soft-line B; second, an expanded title for the primitive type of literati in general or special groups of people who are able to handle primitive


“cultural-style” jobs such as reading, inscribing, recording, document-preserving, and even hermit-curing and deifying in late Zhou times when cultural activities had been further advanced; third, the title for representing official-learning with related internal and external institutions of the imperial academic-ideological system since the Han; and fourth, as the general title to represent the entire multi-systems of the despotic social-political regimes and society. *Ru* (儒) as a single character with its uniquely separate sense enriched by its unknown etymological trace-line can be combined with other single characters to form semantically more definite words to express the above different meanings with various flexibly changeable overtones. In terms of the above descriptions, we are impressed that this character *ru* (儒) means nothing in disconnection of contexts!

Since traditional Chinese history has been discussed by dint of a modern scientific-theoretical approach, the first problem lies in how to properly handle traditional terms in a theoretical-intelligible way. It is a semiotic problem concerning noun-semantic interaction between ancient and modern scholarly usages; namely, how to use the old characters full of multiple senses and referents to express definite meanings in our present discourses.

Unfortunately, most regular scholars who have specialized in modern studies of Chinese histories prefer to employ the old terms in their traditional-customary senses, namely making the historical objects and modern methods share the same character-semantic structures. A lot of scholarly prejudices and misunderstandings in fields of western Sinology, Chinese “state learning” and comparative studies have firstly suffered from a lack of this necessary semiotic treatment of the relationship between historical names and related ideas. In general, traditional Chinese academic discourses are full of ambiguities and polysemes. Without paying attention to the semantic fact, the way of thinking of a modern scholar will unavoidably remain at the same intelligible level as his ancestors. But, even worse, in ancient times scholars used character-words in a specially organized pragmatic way, indeed conveying meaningful ideas in that traditional context, while in modern times scholars have already used the same character-words in a completely changed context!

In the Han *ru* (儒)-imperial system, with all constituent parts organized on the grounds of a special combination of the A-line and B-line, the A-line was highly developed as the reorganized institutional mechanism modeled on the Qin Empire and the B-line was more richly developed as a synthetic compound including the establishment of the sacred *ru* (儒)-classics (儒经). Then *ru* (儒) was made into a sacralized term representing

the fundamental value and faith of the imperial lineage of power-holders, who had been selected and supported by heaven almighty. The emphasis on a certain side of B, the literary profile, had surely been helpful to strengthen the efficiency of the faith of people in the imperial power-holders through magnifying the soft-morality inclination and covering up its hard-violence kernel.

Since *ru* (儒) has been used to describe the post- in despotic polity, its true meaning has been expressed by a special combination between the A-lever of physical violence, which had been embodied in well-organized institutionalization and was approved and protected by heaven, and the B-lever of spiritual belief embodied in sacralized historical texts recording the words and deeds of former kings, also authorized by heaven. Heaven, as the top powerful source, functions in two sides of A and B respectively. For A, it symbolizes horrible terror and for B, it symbolizes the love and guarding of the ruling class for the ruled people. Compared with all former despotic regimes, the *ru* (儒)-imperial system is especially characterized by its academic-ideological-textual system. The latter will therefore become the spiritually more powerful mechanism to maintain the centripetal magnetic power regarding whole populations and groups. The dialectic interaction between A and B actualized in their further advanced levels has shaped the everlasting social-cultural type in Chinese history. *ru* as the dialectically combined compound of various elements is therefore implicative of a set of binary contrasts to be marked in this way: A/B, hard/soft, coercive threat/moral love, military-disciplined/civil-administrative, and atrocity/academia, as well as empirical-rational/superstitious-religious. Besides, there should have been a totalizing art of systematically operating with the binary elements in the *ru* (儒)-system. This strategically manipulating technique named as “*ru* (儒)-art” can be taken as the essence of the *ru*-political-ideological system, which has successfully worked for over 2,000 years until today. Technically speaking, the semiotic secret of the spiritual strength of the character *ru* (儒) rests in its semantic emptiness as well as its flexible character-combinability. For the etymological trace of *ru* (儒) in remote ancient times has not been clearly traceable, and this linguistic feature is just a condition for its being ideologically used in any flexible way.

Let us now consider another key character, *fa*, and the phrases containing the character, especially the most important one: *fajia* (法家). If the character “*fa*” (法) (law, rule), like “*dao*” (道) (*tao*), can be semantically connected to different realms and ranges, the created two-character “*fa-jia*” (法家) (literally, school of the legalism, or, more

literally, the advocate of the principle of “*fa*” (法)) can explicitly or implicitly express or hint at different senses. Let us try to briefly enumerate them in the following: (in ancient and modern usages) its historically actual referent is the special policy line, which was especially adopted by the Qin Empire in the Warring-State period, characterized by its Chinese types of Spartanism/Machiavellianism; (in ancient and modern usages) the theoretical and practical elaboration of that primitive policy and tactics developed later around the Qin Empire, enriched also by a metaphysical overtone, which was associated later with philosophical Taoism; a school named by *fa* was formed then; (in our usage) the social-political-military operating tendency of *fajia* (法家) can be traced back to the original A-line; (in ancient but also in modern usages) the term *fajia* (法家) has been selectively used to indicate the moral-evil and barbarian-violent policies and actions carried out by the Qin Empire; since then this understanding of the term has been further popularized; (in ancient and modern usages) the political system and military tactics of the Qin Empire were completely inherited by its conquerors, the Han Empire, and all subsequent *ru* (儒)-empires; or it was the Qin Empire and its special strategy-tactics based on *fajia* (法家) that prepared the solid foundation for Chinese *ru* (儒)-imperial institutional history; while on the other hand, all *ru* (儒)-empires, based on the hard-model of the Qin Empire, created an intellectual context, where the current *fajia* (法家)-involvements in *ru* (儒) empires have been excluded from official discourse. Substantially, the *fajia* (法家) system and policy that originated with the Qin had been absorbed, but also enriched or complemented, by the developed B-line; (in ancient and modern times alike) the term *fajia* (法家) had been officially given a specific moral-toned meaning: political evilness or cruelty. This paradoxical semantic-tactic implies the following meanings: to hide the fact that the essence of *fajia* (法家), shared by the Qin and all other subsequent *ru* (儒) empires but apparently as a political-ideological tactic, has covered up the similar political and military evilness implied in many subsequent *ru* (儒)-regimes; to exclude the spread of the knowledge and skills of political-military operations of *fajia* (法家) in the entire land in order to monopolize the knowledge and techniques about political-military fighting as a precaution against their spread among people; to emphasize the moral-goodness of current *ru* (儒)-regimes through collectively assigning the evil-name to a legendary image of a past-defeated national common enemy to highlight the permanent moral-positive profile of *ru* (儒)-imperialism; (in its modern usage) the original term “*fa*” (法) (law) in



its most original sense (“rules”) can be used to describe all types of social organizations and conducts. Because of the same referential ambiguity, the literally translated modern equivalent “law” will apparently play a semantically-confusing role, although the single concept of “rule” or “law” has no serious scholarly link with modern political sciences, having nothing to do with democratic legalism either; (in its modern usage) by employing *fajia* (法家) in its traditionally confusing usage in modern social-cultural contexts, there can be various ideologically-biased ways of manipulating the word, either positively or negatively depending on the implicit motives of the word users. That is to say, it can be used negatively as its traditional proper noun used in contrast with “*rujia*” (儒家), which is used in its traditional sense of “benevolent politics”, so that in this case it is just a pronoun for “political evils”; while positively, namely when *fajia* (法家)’s opposite “*rujia*” (儒家) is used in its modern critical meaning of “reactionary dictatorial feudalism”, *fajia* (法家) means the good policy of maintaining the “legalism” used in a modern sense. In this case, the character *fa* in the word is intentionally linked with the same character used in the modern Chinese phrase “politics by legalism rather than by one-person dictatorship”. When arguing and debating, different senses can be adopted by arbitrarily using different ways of expressing the same character or word, rendering any debates meaningless. And it is curious that the two mutually contrasting senses can be delicately used at the same time, and then one sense is used in a denoting way and the other in a connoting way. For example, for modern *fajia* (法家) advocates, it could be hinted by the pro-*fajia* (法家) argument that the historically-true context of the *ru* (儒)-imperial system as the social context of the actual performance of *fajia* policy also implies the positive elements of *rujia* (儒家). Reversely, for modern *rujia* (儒家) advocates, they can also implicitly hint that *ru* (儒)-politics historically had a *fajia* (法家) background. All of those modern usages of some traditional terms could be manipulated by ideological-players with certain profitable aims in their current completely changed contexts.

Since the Han, the precise senses of *fajia* (法家) and *rujia* (儒家) have been enriched and readjusted respectively but still kept each other’s original semes, which have been morally-ideologically used in the new semantic compound as the “*ru* (儒)-imperial system”. The character “*ru*” (儒) has been preferably selected as the general term to represent the newly-created political-military-ideological compound just because of its ambiguous cultural-literary-moral implication. Although in this compound, *ru* (儒) is made to be specially institutionalized by *fajia* (法家)

and *fajia* (法家) is elaborated to politically include all hard realms such as administrative, legal and military aspects. And on the other hand, in Chinese metaphorical expressions, *ru* (儒) also plays a role like *yang* (male, sun, foreground) and *fa* plays a role like *yin* (female, moon, underground). From now on the term *ru* (儒) implies both a traditionally narrow sense and a new extended sense silently added by the institutional part of *fajia* (法家). In traditional terms, a popular phrase has been rendered to express this double-faced situation: “*yang-ru, yin-fa*”; or, “openly, *ru* (儒), and secretly, *fa*”; or, “apparently, literary-profiled *ru* (儒) and substantially, violently-suppressive *fa*”. Double-faced ideological wisdom has become a traditionally dominant mentality in *ru* (儒)-political wisdom.<sup>63</sup>

### 3.3 *ru* (儒)-imperial academic ideology and *ren* (仁)-Confucian ethical thought

Among numerous important one-character words which contain broad or general meanings, the most typical cases with respect to social-political fields are displayed by the one-character words “*ru*” (儒) and “*ren*”. *ru* (儒) is the most general catchword of the *ru* (儒)-imperial system. In this sense, *ru* (儒), without definite meaning outside its context, amounts to a sense-empty title and is more easily used on any associative occasions. By contrast, *ren* is both a definite concept and a general title with respect to Confucian ethics. Despite the common features of one-character words shared by *ru* and *ren*, the both play differently-directed signifying roles; the former helps produce the ideological blending role based on *ru* (儒)-imperial ideology and the latter helps create a special reading technique to convey different aspects of ethical praxis. Semiotically speaking, *ru* (儒) is uniquely characterized by its most ambiguously semic implication. With many etymologically traced semic roots, its historically appeared meaning has remained quite empty or polysemic. When Confucius was fabricated to become the leading figure of the *ru* (儒)-academic-ideological system, the ethical aspects of his humanistic thought could become strong empirical-psychological supports for *ru* (儒)-academic-ideological-moral doctrine as well. Confucian ethical elements and the *ru* (儒)-academic-ideological elements were pragmatically-intentionally blended, neglecting

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<sup>63</sup> For further elaboration on the topics mentioned here, please refer to “On modern usage of the traditional Chinese characters” (Li 2009: 219-222).

the basic ethical-epistemological opposition between the two; for *ru* (儒)-morality is basically a philosophy of power-holders based on *fajia* (法家) and *ren* is essentially a political-ethical defiance against any unjust dominations. ●nce again, let us repeat this statement: a basic ethical confrontation has always existed between the power philosophy of *fajia* (法家) and the political-ethical principles of *ren* (仁)-learning. From an intellectual perspective, the basic confrontation can be described as being between the existing collective power and the individual ethical-challenger in the history of Chinese civilization.

So the Han ruling class not only used Confucian ethics as a practical method for virtual-training in order to strengthen their subjects' faithful loyalty to the Han rulers but also used the image of the author of *The Analects* as an officially authorized founder of the newly formed scholarly-religious system. The total intellectual ideological system of the Han was now called the *ru* (儒)-imperial academic system (*ru-xue*, 儒学) or *ru* (儒)-political religion (*ru-jiao*, 儒教). In a broad sense, including both the hard part A (political system and policies) and the soft part B (the scholarly part and the moral-educational part), added to a distorted C, this system refers to the entire content of Han-despotic mechanisms, which looks like a synthetic body consisting of different elements such as the political-governing, religious-superstitious, official-academic and moral-faithful. In a narrow sense the term "*ru-xue*" (儒学) refers especially to the newly established academic system consisting of the classics, scholarship of the classics and related procedures for the education-promotion of Han officials. By the way, since the Han, *ru* (儒)-academics in fact, far from being scholars in the modern sense, have functioned as quasi-officials. During the entire course of Chinese history, all scholars and intellectuals have been candidates for officialdom.

In addition to being used by *ru* (儒)-imperial politics, however, Confucian thought has indeed become the central driving force for a relatively independent impetus for spiritual and artistic endeavors in Chinese history. The Confucian ethical spirit can also be generally represented by a single-character "*ren*" (仁) as its all-inclusive catchword, and as its main concept, which literally means benevolence or kindness, *ren* (仁) is represented by its pictographic form, which pictures "two persons standing face to face", or just signifies "interpersonal relationship". *ren* (仁), as a disciplinary catchword, symbolically implies a mundane ethical humanism, hinting that the basic ethical theme can only appear in the relationship between persons and persons rather than that between man and deity. Its ethical character also accords to the general

secular tendency of the Chinese national character. In a structural-semiotic reading, the character *ren* (仁) can have a lot of different senses in different contexts of *The Analects*. Unfortunately this complicated problem cannot be detailed further here.

In summary, according to the redefinition made by this author, a semantic distinction should be made between “*ru* (儒)-learning”, as part of *ru* (儒)-imperial ideology, and “*ren* (仁)-learning” as Confucian thought. In Chinese history the former refers to a multi-compound containing a special type of social-political system, the *ru* (儒)-guided policy-operations, the academic-ideological system and the supernatural-substitutive religion. By contrast, the latter refers to a purely ethical thought mainly represented by a single text: *The Analects*.

Thus, in the retrospectively constructive process about the power-ideological backgrounds of the *ru* (儒)-compound, we may say that three main sections are included: the direct heaven-superstition, the empirical evidence of historical documents of the lineage of imperial power-holders authorized and preordained by heaven, and the official appointment of the legendary Confucius as the hierarch of *ru* (儒)-academic ideology as a mundane theist system. ●f these three parts, the academic-historical ideology embodied in the five-part system of sacred texts is especially characteristic of *ru* (儒)-imperial political philosophy. The number 5 accords with the mythical number 5 contained in the popular cosmological metaphysics, “Five Elements”, indicating the objective laws (heaven-*tao*) of the universe. Besides, the author or thinker of the historically-real ethical text *The Analects* has been imposed with this intellectually-leading role representative of the *ru* (儒)-imperial ideological system.

●ne of the reasons why it was Confucius who was elected to play such a historical role rests in the genuine intellectual truth that his “first Chinese book” in history was strongly psychologically moving and ethically-instructive with respect to the empirical-rational mind of the ancient literati. Therefore the special medley of the historically true humanist-ethical thought concerning empirical virtues and the historically false heavenly-political morality has played an amazingly effective coordinating role in stabilizing and strengthening the *ru* (儒)-imperial system. Nevertheless, on the other hand, this true ethical-affective spiritual power has always been institutionally restricted within the track of *ru* (儒)-political-religious fundamentalism in Chinese history.

## 4. The double-constitutive system of *ru* (儒)-historiography: the Five Classics and Standard History<sup>64</sup>

### 4.1 The general background of Chinese historiography

It is generally recognized that western traditions of historiography are more rationally or more scientifically organized than the Chinese one, but on the other hand, traditional western historical works have not provided more systematic records and detailed descriptions about western historical processes and circumstantial conditions mainly because of the fact that most western historical works in old times were made by different individuals who handled the works as their own personal intellectual creations. Conversely, as regards Chinese official histories organized either by official institutions or by officially/ideologically-guided individuals, almost all authors shared similar or even common orthodox intellectual inclinations in their ways of observing, thinking, recording and expressing historical events because they had lived in similar or common social-cultural-political conditions for over 2,000 years. Originally speaking, either in terms of literary or academic activities, all of them had been organized within official-ideological frameworks. In the Chinese tradition, academic organizers and power-holders were of the same powerful collectives. In light of this we may understand why there has been an almost logical connection between the intellectual developments and the officially-operated academic-ideological-productive customs.

Intellectually speaking, it is stated that the connection between political behaviors and historical jobs in ancient China has been displayed by two relatively interconnected motives: to obtain useful experiences about past political processes and to apply reasonably convincing means for winning future successes in political struggles. The former was the original source of official historiography and the latter of strategic-tactical-ideological manipulations when political practices became increasingly more complicated and expanded. In the Chinese case, when intellectual progress had been further promoted around the establishment of the first Qin Empire, the historical mode of thinking and writing matured further, and

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<sup>64</sup> On the relationship between *ru*xue (儒学) and Chinese historiography, an authoritative modern reference book is the 7-volume series *Gushubian* (古史辨), edited by *Gu Jiegang* (顾颉刚) and others (republished in 1982, originally published from 1923 to 1940). It is a pity that the epistemological level attained in this book series can never be followed by any other Chinese and Sinological historical theories since then.

the original historical studies with a clear mind for both reaching historical truth and fabricating false historical stories was formed at the same time. The two different kinds of historical-scholarly consciousness developed simultaneously: the scientifically-tended and the politically-ideologically-minded. The one lies in finding objective facts and the other in inventing propaganda tools. Since then some more serious historical thinkers and historians became clearer that the only correct way for obtaining historical truth (true causations of historical events and their proper moral evaluation) is to rationally examine the represented historical processes; then they could be separated from the original historical artisans, who had used historical materials mainly for superstitious and primitive-practical purposes. Nevertheless, the weaker and lower historical-cultural conditions restricted the related scholarly level. Still, a classical historiography was gradually formed on the basis of the fragmentarily collected-preserved official historical documents and other historical relics.

The primitive historical scholarship organized by the power-holders and official “historians” together contains two kinds of purposes inherited from traditions in general: how to safeguard and make secure the regimes and how to improve the social-political morality of both rulers and subjects. Apparently the two purposes could be unified in scholarly activities. As regards this kind of historical studies, two different methods are applied: empirical-rational analysis (rational-directed line) and political-ideological inventions (supernatural-superstitious line). This mixed way of historical thinking has dominated the direction of about 2,000 years of Chinese official historical scholarship. Meanwhile it indicates an intelligibly self-contradictory but pragmatically coherent character: empirical-rational thinking and superstitious-deceptive propaganda. As a result, a pragmatic-synthetic entirety of historical practices has been shaped: the unity of moralist-causation and the support of a supernatural power. The latter has been also employed by power-holders and by independent historians respectively through so-called dialectic hermeneutics in terms of a general conception of “the total union of man and heaven”, by which the human-natural power can be justified and guaranteed by the supernatural heaven-power, for the former and power-holders are morally restricted by the same supernatural heaven-power. The ancient Chinese were convinced that the double controlling directions of the dogma of heaven-power with its all varieties could more synthetically help secure the stability of the *ru* (儒)-imperial system.

## 4.2 The establishment of ancient Chinese official historical scholarship

Although there is no space for a detailed review of the history of Chinese historiography or historical works in this chapter, we will point out the fact that there has been a gradual establishing process of Chinese official historiography that has gone through a long period of evolution, starting from the primitive documents-legends that were roughly produced and kept in the remote past, via personal-style historical writings on those documents-legends, to the formation of official academic historical institutions and their productions. Chinese historical practices, which provided Chinese historiography with their basic materials originating in various political offices, even the earlier personal historical writings, indicate a richly official character that is expressed by both their ideological frames and official sources of historical material. The so-called first Chinese historical work by individual author, *The Records of History*, was only produced after the establishment of the Han Empire. The writer was Sima Qian, who worked in an office, but the Empire had not yet got a clear mind about current historical practices and therefore had not yet established a special institution for formally organizing official historiography. The original quasi (primitive)-academic works in China were totally produced in offices or governments, which were the single possessors of historical documents, but the fact did not mean that all works related to officially preserved materials had been recognized or evaluated highly by political authorities. The long delayed establishments of institutions of official historiographies in Chinese dynastic history means that the official understanding and evaluation of the political significance of historiography developed over a long span of time. The original emphasis of official historical consciousness had been placed on its political-moral-ideological function, which had been already undertaken by the basic academic *ru* (儒)-textual system of “Five-Classics”. Broadly speaking, from very beginning of original Chinese scholarship, the primitive-historical and primitive-philosophical works had been closely mixed together; or, in other words, the primitive-theoretical mode of Chinese mentality had been characterized by a historical-centric-type way of philosophizing.

Simply speaking, *ru* (儒)-ideology plays a three-fold function through official historical documents: the moral indoctrination about the duty of absolute obedience of subjects to the emperors as heaven’s sons; the faithful fright of emperors in front of their “heavenly father”; and ordinary people’s fear of forceful punishments from heaven through the empirical-

tangible coercions of empires. In light of these basic functions, an ideological doctrine about the objective of historical laws was gradually shaped. As a result, the third basic function of the *ru* (儒)-system was reduced to that expressed in the indoctrination of the existence of objective historical laws that were convinced to be naturally-logically supportive of any current and future successful new rulers, who had legally survived along the same objectively supported historical lineage of power-holders. This means sequential existence in the temporal dimension presents a quasi-objective-logical order that has been said to be consistent with the will of heaven or with the historical-symbolic signs of the latter. The political ideology of *ru* (儒)-doctrines, which has dominated Chinese history for over 2,000 years, implies the additional basic dogma that the actual lineage of Chinese ruling systems that has been displayed and confirmed in the long course of history has been believed to base itself on an objectively necessary “historical-logic” secured by a mythical-styled supernatural cosmic power. The joined power of heaven-will and the cosmic-logical *tao* have been unified to doubly secure the heavenly-chosen mundane powers. This becomes the very essence of the *ru* (儒)-doctrine system embodied and justified in the related historical texts. This political-ideological fabrication shows how significant the historiographic practices and records have been in the long course of Chinese civilization.

With the total composition of the *ru* (儒)-imperial system as our background understanding, this chapter is focused not only on the B-line but especially on its *ru* (儒)-academic-ideological mechanism as such, which has been mainly embodied and operated in the *ru* (儒)-historiography system.

The A-line, or the hard-part of the *ru* (儒)-system, can be included in the general category of political-institutional history; its structure and function are widely comparable with studies of all other despotic-traditional histories. But the subject is not our main topic in this chapter. Regarding the soft-part, its part of intellectual discourses was connected to the general religious-intellectual relationship. In its general sense, the so-called ideological phenomenon is about the synthetic relationships between the mythical-superstitious and the intellectual-scholarly elements with a purpose to stimulate a reasonable faith in certain supernatural-logical bi-determinism. The ideological aspect will be more typically displayed when the related intellectual part is advanced to the academic-scholarly level. If the western theological tradition is a kind of religious ideology, the Chinese *ru* (儒)-classical tradition is a kind of earthly-empirical-directed academic ideology implying an implicitly religious-



tended underpinning. As we have pointed out, the Chinese heaven-religious mentality is in essence a mundane-type religion, because its ultimate goal remains related to life on earth. This worldly-directed heaven-worship naturally evolved to the humanity-intellectual dimension: the scholarly domains. ●r, the quasi-religious justification of the *ru* (儒)-heaven-worship is evidenced by the correspondent temporal scholarship. In other words, the supernatural part of the *ru* (儒)-faith system does not only serve earthly aims but also needs to be justified by the secular way of reasoning: supernatural faith and natural justification are delicately unified. It is not the natural that serves the supernatural but rather it is the supernatural that serves the natural. ●n a lower level, the Chinese family-piety religion indicates a similar character. So the secular religion of the *ru* (儒)-system can obtain a more convincing empirical-rational foundation. (By contrast, in the genuine religious traditions, people have to appeal to fictive imaginations.)

Unlike all other ancient theocratic-type regimes that are directly based on the combination of supernatural religious and temporal political powers, the *ru* (儒)-imperial system works through secular scholarly-ideological media. The latter is embodied in its special mode of *ru* (儒)-historiography. The *ru* (儒)-political-faith is not realized in a direct-intuitive trust in supernatural gods but rather in a mediated humanist rationality: an empirical-rational-directed historiographic way of presenting justified interpersonal relationships, which nevertheless reflect and symbolize the heaven-religious intentions and an absolute logic. In other words, the *ru* (儒)-political-ideological system is, firstly, academically-scholastically justified in the mundane order of power and, secondly, quasi-religiously evidenced in heaven-symbolism. The earthly-power-order of the former is based on and supported by the superpower-order of the latter. *ru* (儒)-political-religion is expressed in the interconnection and interaction between the earthly power and the heavenly power.

### 4.3 The *ru* (儒)-imperial System of Five-Classics and its historiographic character

The institutional difference between short-lived and long-lived empires lies in that the Han, in addition to adopting the ●in's hard-style despotic control system, also invented a soft-style cultural system of academic-ideological construction called *ru* (儒)-learning systems which have been embodied in a series of five classical texts of a historical-documentary

nature. The system of classical texts is in fact a mixture of broken historical-legendary documents and supernatural-superstitious indoctrination maintaining that the worldly rulers are the sons of the most powerful heaven, which is also the final judge on human affairs via compulsory law-regulations. And the so-called official historical documents are taken as the records of the lineage of successive heavenly sons, or the heavenly-appointed privileged power-holders on earth, which is conducted according to the moral norms given by that objective cosmic almighty. Therefore, a powerful supernatural authority was taken as the solid foundation of the Chinese political lineage consisting of ancient kings and later emperors that were arranged by heaven along that moral-logical-directed historical track. The essence of *ru* (儒)-ideology always lies in the knowledge of an absolute epistemological authority based on cosmic and earthly objectivity. Similarly, in a less sophisticated form, *ru* (儒)-historical science has played the same rhetorical trick through presenting a historical objectivity. And the first function of the historiographic-type system of *ru* (儒)-classical texts lies in textually disclosing the continuous historical traces regulated by heaven. Therefore, *ru* (儒)-learning's ideological functions are expressed in a hinted way that all Chinese political rulers have obtained absolute support from heaven, the most powerful force in the universe. A characteristic feature of this Chinese national "First Cause and Top Authority", however, is indicated by the lack of detailed attributions. The less-logical, less-religious and more pragmatically-inclined tendency of ancient Chinese national spirit feels happy with accepting this worship for the not anthropomorphized quasi-deity, because this superstitious mode of faith can be still consistent with the national empiricist temperament. Consequently, the absolute domination of the despotic rulers has not only been morally justified or supernaturally authorized but has also obtained an absolute security from the highest power in universe.

The contents and themes of the five classics are the so-called officially preserved speeches and conducts of past historical and legendary kings or power-holders, which have been systematically compiled into the official historical works about pre- in Chinese general history guided by the heavenly-appointed/approved lineage of Chinese kings, and also provide the basic ideological framework for organizing and guiding official historiography writings. This original textual system, which was based on the created historical ruler-lineage consisting of partly documentary, partly oral-legendary, and partly mythologically-created stories, should be included in the academic category of primitive historical studies or historiography. An important historical fact is that, despite its long-

standing ancient history, the original real-academic practices in Chinese history officially commenced only with the establishment of the despotic Han Empire, which was the first in Chinese history that was able to provide sufficient materials and synthetic conditions consisting of technical, cultural, intellectual and political aspects for actually organizing academic activities; therefore it was also the first period of book-production in Chinese history, during which these primitive books were only collected handwritten fragmentary texts on bamboo slips and silks. Because of the slow gradual development of writing practices in ancient history, the ways of producing and editing historical writings indicate that the earlier historical facts and stories had been usually collected, compiled and written down in much later periods. The customs in the transmitted historical writings led to extensive confusion that, because of the much inferior conditions for recording and preserving official-historical experiences, and even owing to the earlier weaker intellectual consciousness and capability of writing intellectual thoughts beyond practical or routine needs, the transmitted factual records lacking in definite signs of dates and locations and the related historical legends can hardly be separated clearly. The fact that pre-Qin historical writings must be mixed works consisting of fragmentary documents, systematic legends and later imaginative fabrications indicates that we can hardly take them as genuine “historical works” in a modern sense, although they are very important material about ancient thought. (More precisely, the so-called pre-Qin ancient thought is mostly also that formed around the Han period rather than in the periods depicted in the writings.) So it is natural that another characteristic feature in ancient historiography is naturally displayed by a twofold literary style: legendary deities had been gradually anthropomorphized and the real or legendary human rulers had been gradually deified at the same time. Along this habitual line of fabricating historical imaginations, many remote original Chinese kings recorded in both the *ru* (雩)-system of five classics, which were systematically compiled under the Han, and the first Chinese general history, *The Records of History*, which was written in Han, are proved by many modern Chinese historians to be the imaginative results of ancient mythological deities, especially those original kings in the merely legendary Xia Dynasty (夏) (2100-1600 B.C.) and the historical Shang Dynasty. (Its primitive and modest social, political and cultural conditions have been extremely well covered up by the later finished writings about the Shang (商) and the Xia (夏).) On the one hand, this historiographic process was due to the natural mentality of a people who were always curious about tracing themselves back to the signs of their earlier ancestors through constantly memorizing names of past rulers

and important events and continuously exercising retrospective imagination about reconstructing past stories more and more consistently. On the other hand, the spiritual impulse for using this historical imagination is owed to the ideological request for constructing a convincing written system to show a long historically exhibited existence of the supernatural-authorized heritage of ancient kings. In short, the traditional Chinese historical ideology is characterized by its inventive combination of the supernatural-religious and natural-historical forces, which was carried out through combining empirical rationality and superstitious-speculation in order to doubly strengthen the profile of the stability and security of primitive political regimes, which are believed to be deeply rooted in so-called historical logic. In respect of the historical-ideological productions, the historiography-reconstructing inclination was also displayed in a simplistic national wish for extending the temporal span of Chinese dynastic history. The length itself of the existence of the organized power-holders has always been the value itself, which can be in essence reduced to a kind of worship for historical power-holders.

Following the natural progress of intellectual life in Chinese history, after the firm establishment of the sacred historical mythology about the ancient power-holder lineage during the whole of Chinese history, it is interesting to note that the original inclination for empirical rationality also developed with a result that empirical-rational-directed historical thinking gradually advanced within the fixed academic-ideological practices as well. That means this empirical-rational-directed historical thinking was mostly expressed in historical writings whose referents or scholarly objectives are in actuality the historical processes originating in the Qin-Han period, and especially expressed in the preparative works about writing recent, contemporary and current histories, including the historiographic ideal of recording and describing historical truth by means of more rationally convincing empirical-inductive methods. As a result, the extremely huge and amazingly rich institutions and traditions of Chinese official historiography have been gradually established.

In consequence, the *ru* (儒)-historical-ideological applications have been eventually realized in two channels: the *ru* (儒)-imperial five-part system of classical texts as the fundamental “theoretical” doctrines (historical-type quasi-philosophy in the Chinese sense) and the series of *ru* (儒)-official historiography systems in the successive *ru* (儒)-dynasties since the Han. Despite the fact that the contents of both channels are about historical subject matters, the first one refers to words, conducts, and stories about either legendary or actual rulers occurring in the pre-Qin or pre-centralized despotic periods of Chinese ancient history, which are not

only no longer able to be empirically examined but are also sacredly rigidified as dogmas. The historiography of the Five-Classics functions as the basic ideological foundations of all *ru* (儒)-imperial systems in history and also as a certain kind of “theories” about the absolute authorization of the political power of Chinese historical rulers. Unlike the similar basic doctrines of other civilizations related either to the religious beliefs or to logical-philosophies, the *ru* (儒)-imperial fundamentals were of a quasi-theoretical, quasi-religious-political and historiographical type. Or, the *ru* (儒)-imperial ideology can be regarded as a political-type religion including a historiography-type theory that presents itself through historical texts.

Among its polytheist customs the unique top quasi-deity is the non-anthropomorphized supernatural notion of “heaven” that is different from all other real religions by its simplified supernatural-dominating roles restricted in the authorizing and supervising of worldly governance and domination, and by its being only allowed to be worshiped by state rulers. In other words, according to the *ru* (儒)-hierarchical regulations concerning supernatural and worldly worship systems, heaven-worship is the privilege of the emperor’s family alone. For the most ordinary people, besides a variety of folk-worship, their main objects of worship are dead family ancestors, and this quasi-supernatural worship about ancestors can be taken as the ideological extension of natural interpersonal morality guided by the family-piety tradition. In a sense the worship of heaven is also a kind of extended family-piety regarding the mutual interaction between the ruler as the son of heaven and heaven as the father of the emperors. This plain simile between the relationship of father-son and that of heaven-emperor could be more easily accepted and obeyed by the ignorant mass majority with a result of sacralizing the identity of imperial families; namely the humanist-empirical relationship of the former is misleadingly used to prove the supernatural-speculative one of the latter. This *ru* (儒)-worship doctrine of double-piety is first of all emphatically expressed in the five classics. The famous *ru* (儒)-doctrine of piety looks like a pure family morality, the essence of which is linked to the double subjugation mechanism to both the earthly and heavenly power-holders. The five-classics system as a series of sacred historical texts functions as a religious-political-ideological “*ru* (儒)-Bible” that actualizes the unification between the supernatural power of heaven and the mundane power of emperors.

The ideological political doctrines expressed in the five-classics became symbolically the absolute morality model for philosophical beliefs, political behaviors and daily conducts of rulers, subjects and

ordinary people. Concretely, systems of laws and rules of manners have been mostly established by the existing rulers, whose authority is generally recognized as having been given by heaven functioning as some absolutely-powerful object. And almost all the historical phenomena of scholarly confirmable political, social and cultural activities have happened since the establishments of the Qin-Han dynasties and have been expressed in official or standard historical works made in different dynamic periods over about 2,000 years. We can emphasize that only the historical writings finished in the post-Qin period of Chinese history, or Standard History, can be taken as genuine Chinese historical writings whose texts, authors, forming-processes and intellectual effects can be rationally examined according to modern historical methodologies. This is another reason why we should distinguish the five-classics-type Chinese historiography (as the sacred national classics of beliefs following the moral-ideological rules and orders set down by historical power-holders) and post-Qin historiography (as the academic records of actual Chinese historical experiences).

#### 4.4 The political and intellectual functions of Standard History as standard historical writings

If the historical words and conducts of the original pre-Qin power-holders in the *ru* (儒)-five-classics system (“*jing*” (经), literally, “classics”) play the roles of the guiding principles for public/private faiths, moral laws and behavior-manners, which were not directly and indirectly experienced by Han people, the main parts of the narratives and facts of the standard histories (*shi*) are based on materials that were almost empirically accessible, namely the used documents and sayings were either almost verifiable or empirically believable. The empirical verifiability of “*shi*” (史) (history) and the speculative acceptability of “*jing*” (经) (five-classics) commonly compose the Chinese culture of historiography, in which “*jing*” (经) (or epitomized as *ru* (儒)-history A) functions as the fundamental codes of national beliefs and moral codes based on the power and logic of the imaginative heaven-*tao* and “*shi*” (史) (or epitomized as *ru* (儒)-history B) functions as the applications of those codes in describing the actual historical processes. Following the natural development of Chinese intelligence and cultural knowledge, Chinese rulers and intellectuals have increasingly felt the compelling necessity and profitable utility of empirically-confirmable evidence and empirical-rational reasoning in historiographic practices. Whether for understanding

the past political-historical truth or for improving and correcting political-tactical methods in future, increased empirical rationality should be relevantly necessary. Although this slowly increased rational capability has been gradually employed in social-cultural practices, Chinese thinkers and historians have never become clearly conscious of the related facts and scholarly necessity in their scholarship. Because of the constant stagnation of the scientific-directed rationality in Chinese intellectual history, the ideal of seeking historical truth has remained at a mere abstract level. They kept a collective belief that the wisdom and knowledge of their original ancestors, formed and supported by heaven, are the best, and the intelligent capability of humanity has remained unchanged, although the actual capability of Chinese intellectuals was indeed gradually increased with respect to their actual cultural practices, as the situation of the Song Dynasty indicates. This unconsciously increased capability of exercising empirical rationality in intellectual practices in fact stimulated the interest in and the inclination to find empirical reality, especially in historiography scholarship among all intellectual practices, because by thinking and writing about historical subjects, scholars naturally have to pay closer attention above all to the trusted empirical facts.

#### **4.5 The aims and functions of Standard History and the two meanings of historical logic**

Chinese official historiography or Standard History contains two kinds of historical writings, which have been finished according to the official ideological and habitual standards or rules involved and are included in the State Book Series of standard historical writings. The former were those written by individuals and the latter were those organized by historical offices. The latter, as official historiography, almost only refers to those produced since the establishment of the related official institutions starting as late as during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.), which was the second largest centralized Chinese *ru*-empire after the Han. That means, this big Chinese medieval dynasty started to become more conscious of the practical significance of guided official historiography, which was taken as another important ideological weapon for strengthening the despotic political regime. Despite the strengthening of the political organization of and supervision over historical writings since the building-up of special institutions for organizing official historical works, the development does not mean individual freedom for historical thinking became more seriously restricted, because from very beginning of the formation of Chinese historical writings, *ru* (儒)-imperial historians or scholars living under the

despotic regimes had been able to self-consciously control their own ways of thinking according to commonly shared political-ideological frames and the related scholarly-practicing conditions. In a broad sense, just like many Chinese literary and artistic works formed in regularly fixed or stereotyped patterns, the traditional Chinese historical writings, since the formation of the first Chinese historical work *The Records of Historians*, had been automatically performed according to fixed purposes, patterns, styles and principles, which can be traced back to the so-called original-national archetypes of historical writings indicated in the five-classics. Regarding the stereotyped way of writing historical works, we should add that there is a separate reason, different from the political-ideological one, for the ways of composing prosaic and poetic writings in old China almost all being organized in stereotyped modes. The implication of this fact should be analyzed in a separate literary-semiotic study.

These two systems of *ru* (儒)-historiography had officially existed across all different dynasties, including those dominated by foreign conquerors. (The two non-Chinese-racial aggressors of Mongolia and Manchuria, respectively establishing the Yuan (元) and Ching (清) dynasties, were willing to follow the same *ru* (儒)-imperial political/ideological systems because the two aggressive powers had remained in barbarian states until then.) They believed that the formalist conversion to or incorporation into the traditional Chinese political-cultural systems were beneficial to their own domination over the conquered Chinese people: “we use your way to more effectively control you” (this means, the foreign aggressive race becomes the master and the conquered race turns into slaves, while the latter is still ironically satisfied with the result that their conquering foreign masters adopt the dominating skills of the conquered race). And it was ironic that the traditional Chinese reaction to this way that foreign aggressors converted themselves into rulers over Chinese land was like this: “foreign aggressors are ultimately conquered by a great Chinese civilization”. As a matter of fact, regardless of the different historical and geographic backgrounds, everybody has been satisfied in making use of the same historical lineage of power-holders through being ideologically recognized to be a heavenly-authorized member within the same historical-logical line. (Even some modern Chinese regimes have followed this same feudalist historical-truth ideology.) In essence, in the Chinese mentality, the two systems of historical writings are unified; all rulers and people have always existed and should continue existing under the singly unique ideological framework that we may call the *ru* (儒)-imperial system of truth/power, which has been authorized and supported by the top cosmic power-holder: heaven, or heaven almighty.



#### 4.6 The academic/ideological labor-division between *ru* (儒)-history A and *ru* (儒)-history B

The static historical system of the five-classics series and the dynamic historical system of Standard History (including the so-called 24-dynasty historical-writing series) play different roles in carrying out the unified *ru* (儒)-academic-ideological tasks. The former promulgates the permanently authoritative orders and rules established by the original kings depicted in historical legends through presenting their words and conducts in Chinese historical stories, playing a role that looks like the social-political constitution for the Chinese race and nation. The latter presents a quite different character by its reference to real historical processes (those about the immediately preceding dynasties and even the contemporary dynasties) since the Qin-Han period. It is Standard History that is empirically more positive, and its task lies in observing, recording and compiling historical events and words of various kinds. Although, according to the *ru* (儒)-ideological priority, the Classics is superior to Standard History and plays the role of general intellectual guidance over the latter, it is Standard History that functions as the genuine historical practice. A Chinese hermeneutics about *ru* (儒)-classical scriptures had been performed along a fixed *ru* (儒)-imperial-ideological lineage with a purpose to interpret the meaning and significance of the sacred historical texts, and its only object is the texts as such. Conversely, Chinese historiography in Standard History must refer to both documentary texts and social realities with the primary purpose to construct the historical works, which would be preordained for being included in the unified *ru* (儒)-historical writing system, displaying an authoritative lineage of Chinese historical powers based on heavenly power. For the two systems of historical writings, despite being rooted in the same academic-ideological framework, they are divergent with respect to their objects, objectives and scholarly purposes. With the same aim of displaying the *ru* (儒)-defined historical truth, *ru* (儒)-Classics is not empirically verifiable, while Standard History must live among constant intellectual-tensional pressures between following the historical facts and obeying the despotic-political-ideological-moral principles. After all, *ru* (儒)-historians of Standard History have possessed much greater freedom for realizing their intellectual creations and expressing ethical praxis, in which, we may assert, intellectual freedom is basically inspired by *ren* (仁)-Confucian ethics.

It was in the next long dynasty, that of the Song, which lasted just over three centuries and which has been generally regarded as the greatest

period concerning cultural and academic achievements in Chinese history, that *ru* (儒)-historiography attained at its highest level, with respect to both official and private historical works and writings. Regarding the categories of historical writings we may mention the following types as examples: the standard periodic histories of biographic patterns, the general histories of a genealogical type, the encyclopedia-classificatory reference books of history, a great number of notebooks about political, social, cultural and academic observations and reflections, as well as a huge number of philosophical, literary and artistic essays in connection with historical subject matters. In brief, all ancient literary writings can be included in the category of Chinese intellectual history.

The historical works published during the Song Dynasty, however, indicate paradoxically two different or inconsistent characters: on one hand the empirical-rational tendency was obviously increased and on the other the speculative/metaphysical tendency was also unprecedentedly advanced. The former led to the advancement of the capability of performing empirical-causality, making historical thinking and writings more rationally acceptable, while the latter led to the intensification of Tao-metaphysical-directed, quasi-logical dogmatism about general morality in historical writings. Thus we see there are two different concepts of historical truth being stressed in scholarly practices: the one is basically defined by empirical verification based on rational induction, namely empirical truth, and the other is axiologically defined by the strengthened metaphysical/despotic-political morality in addition to the *ru* (儒)-academic ideology. The former is about the ability to make a distinction between correct and false and the latter is about distinguishing between good and bad. The serious point lies in that the latter is given in terms of a Taoist-directed imaginative-objective metaphysics and a Buddhist-inherited psychological ontology; the two religious sources, nevertheless, provide two different speculative models. The Taoist one is directed to the external heavenly Tao and the Buddhist one to the internal psychological nature. Accordingly, this neo-*ru* (儒)-imperial philosophical trend, characterized by its focus on its respective theoretical reasoning (also called “*li*”, literally, “theorizing”), provided the original historical/political *ru* (儒)-imperial ideology with a quasi-theoretical foundation. In essence this theoretical elaboration was mainly related to the fundamental problems concerning both Confucian ethics and *ru* (儒)-imperial-moral ideology. On the other hand, the Songs’ thought, scholarship and writings about history had also advanced with respect to the scholarly-technical aspects in addition to a highly intensified consciousness of historical ethics and morality. Still, historical writings

were performed within the traditional tension that was reduced to that between two kinds of thinking about historical causality that had been taken as determining the developing lines of historical processes, although the two determinative mechanisms cannot keep any mutual rational links with each other: the one remains heaven-supernatural-directed deductive-determinism and the other empirical-observable, reductive-reasoning.

#### 4.7 The meaning of historical truth in traditional Chinese historiography

Whether in western or Chinese traditions, the mixed usage of the term “history” has always prevailed. More complicatedly, in China the term “*shi*” (history) can even refer to several different items linking to this same character such as: historical processes, historiography, historians, history-related original divination practitioners, simple note-hands, the earliest type of “secretary” who is engaged in any kind of scribing, and even all kinds of “knowing persons” who practice astrology, divination and medicine. The polysemy of “*shi*” also indicates a historically increased process of intelligence involved in historical thinking and practices in China. This polysemous identity of original historical thinking can in part explain the long scholarly preference for text-centric historiography, which takes the transmitted historical documents of any kind as the object of contemporary historical studies, or the scope of historical investigations is restricted to the available texts. This historical-writing-centric historiography naturally leads to the intellectual inclination towards the literary aspects in historical texts when the cultural and literary levels had been gradually advanced. The inclination has of course conversely increased further focus on texts, which accordingly increase the ambiguity of the scholarly category concerning historical studies. By the way, we may find the original senses of the character “*shi*” are largely overlapped with those of the character “*ru*” (儒). Yes, different characters could share closely mutually-exchangeable senses in the highly disorderly linguistic and semantic world of ancient times. In general, etymologically speaking, the character *shi* (史) is traceable to an earlier remote past than *ru* (儒).

But on the other hand, as we pointed out above, the historian is always faced with externally existing or occurring “matters” and “events”. This scholarly condition makes him different from the ancient philosopher who only needs to care about reasoning itself at an intellectual level. So ancient historians naturally cherished the idea of distinguishing between true and false as well as right and wrong in an empirical-positive sense; or, we may say, his mind must be oriented to the objective historical truth outside

texts. Since the arrival of western modern sciences, western historians have possessed more and more scientific and technical conceptions and means for advancing the possibility of carrying out historical-scientific practices. In ancient China the gap between a historian's ideal of reaching objective historical truth and the pre-scientific conditions for realizing that ideal have remained regretfully great. Nevertheless, on the other hand, this constitutively-confused scholarly condition presents a special clue regarding a special conception of historical truth. There has been therefore a basic contradiction in Chinese historical reasoning regarding the relationship between the empirical-causal truth and the speculative-moral truth. The former has slowly but steadily developed, which is mainly expressed in the system of Standard History, and the latter has kept its historically unchanged ideological-dogmatic constancy, which is expressed in the *ru* (儒)-fundamentalist framework that is universally accepted and used in historical writings. Consequently there exist two meanings of the term "truth": the empirically-verifiable one and the superstitious ideologically-confirmable one. The first aim of traditional Chinese historiography is to historically present the verifiable existence and justification of the authorized power-lineage of Chinese rulers supported by heaven. The very convincing appearance of the generations of kings' families in historical texts is generally taken as the repeated confirmation of the *ru* (儒)-doctrines about kings' sacredly noble background that signifies that their dominations are not only legally justified but also unavoidable or irresistible in character. The combination between the Standard History writings and the *ru* (儒)-classical scriptures presents a special joined textual system that attempts to express the two kinds of historical truth. The superstitious heaven-power mechanism implicates double aspects: on one hand it indicates and realizes its selective support for the existing regimes or emperors and on the other hand it also indicates a function of supervising and judging the moral expressions of emperors. So, according to this heaven-hermeneutics, empirical-rational reasoning and supernatural-superstitious interpretation can be arbitrarily combined to attain the most profitable effect. For the standard about morality is after all to be fixed by interpersonal justice; all fighting rivals call their enemies moral-evil and the defeated enemies are interpreted as basically being discarded "logically" by heaven almighty.

This alternatively workable supernaturally-founded political logic pragmatically leaves a space used for interpreting the actual historical developments consistently, and a pragmatic wisdom had been shown that the two contradictory historical-political mechanisms could be *ru* (儒)-hermeneutically compatible. These two interlinked functions of the earth-

directed supernatural philosophy were also meaningful for the governed officials and common people: on one hand the ideological mechanism was very helpful for their willing wishes for obedience to the heaven-supported rulers, and on the other, it could encourage officials and people, in principle if not in reality, to help heaven to supervise and advise the rulers; this possibility would indirectly form, to a quite limited extent, a counter-restriction on the rulers (which basically depended on how wise the ruler himself could be when faced with another's criticism). Therefore, the resultant effects of this superstitious ideological system about power philosophy was eventually conducive to forming an objective mechanism that, from both ideological and empirical-rational angles, helped secure the lasting stability of the *ru* (儒)-imperial historical-political ideological systems.

The traditional Chinese way of reasoning was essentially characterized by its empirical-pragmatic-rational tendency. It is generally said that the Chinese mentality lacks genuine religious interest in that all superstitious, mythical, speculative, quasi-religious and metaphysical beliefs and customs are implicative of a strong mundane-utilitarian character. That means the traditional religious phenomena, ranging from the worship of heaven and natural polytheism to that of ancestors and superior family members, are all expected to serve living people in their worldly blessings and benefits through mythically believed self-family-protecting power-sources in some supernatural world. Until the coming of Indian Buddhism, ancient Chinese people, in spite of a general imaginative notion about the after-world life, had a strong concern about the material benefits of this life. And all those quasi-religious imaginations were contributive to the welfare of living people; accordingly even the meaning of dead forefathers lay in protecting and helping their living offspring. But, essentially, the successful development of Chinese Buddhism has also been due to the fact that the vision of everlasting longevity beyond one's natural death amounts to a more rhetorically convincing theorization.

● On the other hand, despite its worldly character, the quasi-religious philosophy of the *ru* (儒)-classics can indeed arouse the same sacred veneration for and deep belief in the heaven-supported primordial kings. We may call this metaphysical-supernatural worship a kind of mundane religious spirit whose historical workability in part lies in the delicate usage of the ambiguous status of the concept of heaven. ● On the one hand, heaven indeed implies some supernatural and powerful elements with the moral intentionality of taking care of the fortunes of mankind and maintaining justice in this world, and on the other the status of this sublime being is emptied in respect of its appearance and concrete

features. Heaven has been imagined as only a set of mysteriously imagined functions in association with the fortunes of mankind. That means, those functions are only indicated in the human world, or seemingly are only concerned about or interfere in human affairs.

In terms of the above we can understand that the heaven-mechanism in Chinese historical processes and writings only functions as a basic framework whose role is eventually disclosed in realizing moral praises and violent punishments of the rulers of ruled people. The true judging standards still need to accord with the empirical humanitarian ethical principles originating in human nature. The so-called preordained results determined by heaven's instructions are only a supplementary confirmation made after the event! The truth is that, in their daily lives, people perform their thoughts and organize their conduct purely following empirical-rational wisdom and confirmable calculation, while the final results of those thoughts and conducts are rhetorically interpreted as being basically determined by a mysteriously superior, unseen power in heaven. In terms of this, the heaven-mechanism does not participate in the real political-historical processes in human affairs, although political agents make use of the heaven-theory as ideological and quasi-religious propaganda to convince most illicit, less-intelligent and weak-willed common people in various ways. It remains instrumental to convince people that successes and failures concerning political agents, either rulers or rebellions, have been basically under the sway of this universally believed, cosmological judging-power. The faith in objective necessity leads to a willingness to accept the reality! Nevertheless, on the other hand, this superstitious ideological-schemed dogma also strangely allows the empirical reasoning concerning interpersonal struggles to operate independently without immediate interference in those interpersonal struggles ahead of time. Therefore empirical-rational reasoning can in fact prevail in historical and political practices and historical writings, forming a special type of traditional Chinese empirical-rationality.

The universal applicability of mundane-centric Chinese heaven-faith has also been displayed on the side of challengers or rebels against the current ruling-classes. They could make use of this same quasi-religious notion according to the exactly the same logic: to call the current decayed situations of regimes as ones that had been discarded by heaven or just to intentionally fabricate deceptive symbols befallen from heaven. Thus, the initiated rebellion can be said to act following an instruction ordered by heaven against some immoral anti-heaven bad emperor, which literally means: "to actualize the goal of the rebellion according to the Tao of Heaven". The logic works so simply for the pragmatic mentality that

anybody plans and acts completely according to empirical-rational wisdom of the *fajia* (法家)-line during the processes of concrete struggles (that means, the true logic involved remains empirical-rational in nature) but at the same time he declares (according to a *ru* (儒)-heaven-hermeneutics) that his actions are in fact arranged and supported by heaven (in modern terms, “heaven” functions as some objective necessary law and therefore must be obeyed). So a double guarantee is fixed: the natural talent of the human operator plus the supernatural blessing given by heaven. Although the heaven-superstition looks absurd from a modern point of view, its actual effect and practical value has been indicated by the fact that its real psychological productivity is displayed both collectively and individually with respect to the strengthened and multiplied self-faith of actors, no matter if they are rulers or ruled, enwrapped in their strenuously desperate fighting. The basic impulse for the belief in this heaven-hermeneutics is due to the deep-rooted lust in human nature for seizing power, and this human nature is instinctively embedded in its rude beast nature. After all, the human being is a blended combination between the human and the animal.

For most private and official historians engaged in the production of Standard History writings within the fundamental-ideological framework, the meaning and purposes of Chinese historiography practices, including aspects of writing and reading alike, can be quite roughly outlined in the following:

- The empirical verification and practical confirmation of the moral justification of the currently existent dynasty that replaced the preceding dynasty that was discarded by the logic of heaven (according to the intention of heaven).
- The alteration or replacement of dynasties factually recorded and morally affirmed in historical writings can confirm that the moral conditions and the newly assigned heavenly-mandated authority of the present dynasty must be superior to those of the preceding ones that were destroyed or replaced, so as to secure belief in and obedience to the current regimes.
- Most historical writings in Standard History are scholarly works dealt with by the present dynasty about the prior defeated or replaced one; this fact can lead to keeping or increasing a relatively fair attitude in historical-writing guidance and agents in their scholarly jobs as well as relaxing their self-worries about their ideological restrictions in their writings and decreasing possible fabrications in their historical writing in favor of the current rulers’

interests. As a result, serious rulers and historians can be both motivated by their purely empirical-rational-directed intelligent curiosity for exploring true causations in the related historical processes as well as to eagerly learn from both the utilitarian and moral lessons involved as objectively as possible. The derived consequence is certainly positive for the scholarly progress of Chinese historiography in general.

- Under the general fixed ideological frame, a great number of facts, narratives, analyses and experiences have been collected and kept in the written textual reservoir, becoming important objects or sources of traditional Chinese knowledge. Besides, despite the rigidified quasi-religious-ideological knowledge about the fundamental classics, Chinese intellectuals, including both historians and general literati, have maintained a historiography-centric interest in humanitarian learning.
- For both ruling families and general literati, the standard historical writings became one of the most important and effective sources for moral inspiration and intellectual preparation concerning the designed political and intellectual projects.
- In a deeper sense, the standard historical writings function also as the stimulating and inspiring tools used for promoting moral/utilitarian-directed will-training and moral-character education. For Chinese *ru*-literati, the reading of historical writings amounts to a process of a spiritual drill for ethical self-purification as well as to that of learning from empirical-rational knowledge.

## 5. The epistemological-pragmatic tension between *ru* (儒)-learning of power philosophy and *ren* (仁)-learning of ethical subjectivity within *ru* (儒)-imperial academic ideology

### 5.1 The two types of reasoning in *ru* (儒)-historiography

The imaginative-supernatural moral-ideological ideal, which is reified in the half-recorded and half-fabricated, transmitted broken historical documents of the Five-Classics (*ru* (儒)-history-A) and the empirically-rationally operated, worldly-natural, strategic-tactical experiences about power-competitions recorded in the verifiable historical writings (*ru* (儒)-history-B), dialectically combine in a nationally characteristic typology of *ru* (儒)-pragmatically-directed intellectual tradition. In this special sense



we may assert that the traditional Chinese system of pragmatic philosophy is the one shaped and embodied in the historical texts, rather than the one determined in any logical-deductive line resulting in some “first philosophy”. In terms of the afore-mentioned discussions we see the individual scholars or historians can indeed perform empirical-rational-directed historical investigations and writings under two-fold restrictive conditions: metaphysical-speculative political-religious guidance (*ru* (儒)-fundamentalist doctrines) and intelligent-technical limitations concerning historical studies and writings. It was within this doubly restricted framework that the traditional Chinese historians and general scholars developed their special capability of empirical-rational-directed historical thinking and scholarship with a view to searching for historical truth in both its causal and moral senses.

In certain sense we maintain that the traditional Chinese way of thinking is mostly the moral-evaluative-predisposed rather than the scientific-intellectual-directed. Or, all empirical-rational-directed ways of thinking are eventually reduced to their utility for effective moral judgments on historical events, including both positive and negative ones. The primitive scientific ways of thinking were always on one hand under the sway of the *ru* (儒)-moral-ideological preconditions and on the other served the moral judgments on historical processes according to the standards set down by the former. Under the same *ru* (儒)-fundamentalist framework the same empirical-rational ways of historical thinking, systematically recorded in the standard histories, can be used for a two-fold purpose: from the emperor-official (the ruling class) positions to increase the knowledge and practical wisdom about techniques for securing the regimes of the existing dynasties and from the general readers of literati to satisfy their intellectual and ethical curiosity and meet their utopian political dreams according to the empirical-rational-directed conclusions about historical truth. The psychological satisfaction of the latter’s type (based on *ru* (儒)-history-B) can be strengthened even further by appealing to another type of worship in the *ru* (儒)-classics (based on *ru* (儒)-history-A). An example can be shown by a spiritual experience concerning the experience of reading *The Book of Change* to a class, which can be interpreted as a detailed structure of Chinese heaven/tao-superstition and its regulated mechanisms, especially when the reader exists painfully in a seriously depressed or decayed situation. This mixed type alternatively exercises empirical-rational and speculative-imaginative knowledge for organizing one’s epistemological frame regarding a crucially challenging situation suffered by the reader. For the *ru* (儒) class-book can provide a fictively created objective social-cosmological logic or

law (*ru* (儒)-history-A) to intensify the reader's confidence firstly gained through reading the related standard history in an empirical-rational way (*ru* (儒)-history-B). The point involved lies in that the special construction of this so-called first *ru* (儒)-classic, *The Book of Change*, allows readers to almost wishfully interpret the meaning of his actual situations and desirable solutions. Here, once again, however, Chinese intellectual wisdom is expressed in this way: firstly he indeed does his best to gain empirical-rational understanding and make a decision accordingly, and secondly he appeals to the *ru* (儒)-ideology of heaven/*tao* for psychological self-satisfaction as a self-convincing complement. This *ru* (儒)-class-learning therefore plays a double role in the Chinese mentality: firstly as the restrictive precondition for scholarly practices and secondly as the artificially used dogmatic faith to secure one's related empirical-rational understanding.

A more relevant mixed mode of organizing historical analysis is the combinative use of the empirical-inductive inferences about the causal connections of personal external behaviors and the empirical-inductive reasoning about the motivational connections of internal intentions and external results of personal parameters, including motives, words and conducts. The historian does not only need to infer the true connections between the prior and posterior actions and obtain the general rules from reductive conclusions, but also to attempt to find the morally-related links, namely the related actors' morally positive or negative responsibility for the external results. The involved moral considerations will further be associated with the moral judgments and actual interferences of the heaven-power. Although readings of historical texts can relatively increase readers' experiences in historical-causational knowledge, the resultant effects of historical readings lie in renewed experiences in the causal connections between people's ethical motives and related historical results. In other words, the empirical-rational experiences gained from reading historical texts are tantamount to the means or preparative stages for readers to reach certain ethical self-reflections and moral inspirations, which become one of the genuine purposes of historical reading. ● One reason is that, because of the less-changeable types of historical processes and historical writings, the experiences and knowledge obtained through reading historical texts amount to a repetition of the same intellectual and moral-feeling patterns; or, a "historical-reading rite" is enjoyed as a way of carrying out self-spiritual-sublimation, which can and should be refreshed every day. So, scholarly practices were more related to ethical-affectional requests than to epistemological-intelligible research.

## 5.2 A permanently refreshed experience in politically-morally conflicting views between *fajia* (法家) (A) and *ren* (仁)-ethics (C) in *ru* (儒)-historiography

A characteristic Chinese historical dialectics has been displayed in both separate and combinative ways of the two ethical-oppositional mental lines regarding their respective motives, aims and methods (A-line vs. C-line). It requires a more delicate analysis to discern the different ways of thinking between the pure Confucian ethics (C) and the *ru* (儒)-imperial morality based on A and B. The intellectual divergence not only reflects a permanent confrontation between personal ethical consciousness and collective moral power but also different ethical/tactical ways of thinking indicated at both constitutive and functional levels. With respect to Chinese historiography, we can consequently go beyond the historical-natural phenomena to reach the operative planes of three different kinds of intellectual-social elements (*fajia* (法家), *rujia* (儒家) and Confucian; or, A, B and C) and their mutual interactions, among which the key part is displayed in that between A and C.

In light of the above explanation, we are going to discuss the special mixed criteria for thinking in historical writings. In the general ideological framework of heaven-superstitious determinism and the deceptive, preordained logic of authoritatively ordered political power-sequence, following cultural and intellectual progress, Chinese historians developed their empirical-rational wisdom and social-scientific curiosity in their historical scholarship. The latter naturally leads to an intensification of independently exploring historical truth, although, because of the general weakness of scientific impulses and owing to the distortional restriction of moral-central determinism in their historical thinking, their historiographical-theoretical achievements have remained at the experiential level. If the developed historical wisdom had not been performed at really theoretical level it had indeed been realized in a very important domain about experiencing interpersonal interaction, namely the one specialized in observing and describing motivational-causational networks for all political conduct in actual historical transformations. Limited to this empirical level and within this restricted frame of ideological-presupposition, traditional Chinese historiography still displays sophisticated skills and capability in its observations, analyses and writings.

● On the other hand, under the deep influence of Confucian ethical thought, all excellent Chinese historians express a profound ethically-motivated attitude to searching for a double-sensed historical truth, which is related to the empirical tactically-directed causational facts and to the

facts disclosing ethically-motivated intentions behind conducts. In essence they are concerned about finding two objects: the one is about the true causes/reasons of political-historical phenomena and the other is about the internal spiritual-ethical expressions behind those external political-military conducts. The so-called “ethical truth” as one of the objectives of Chinese historiography refers to the true ethical intention or a certain mental state for actualizing moral justice, either by their heroic self-dedication or by bravely meeting with danger or death. The ethical truth can be disclosed through analyzing the external expressions of the people engaged. A Confucian-ethical evaluation for heroic bravery must be a combination of the ethical faith and the related behavioral realization; it is far from being mere physical valor and boldness, and therefore Confucian political ethics even takes any violent conquests and cruel suppressions as such as some of the most serious evils in the human world. Generally speaking, with the purpose of improving social-political conditions in future, Chinese historians’ true interest is expressed in retrospectively examining the past in order to search for spiritual-ethical satisfaction through exploring the double-sensed truth in their historical practices. On the other hand, ethical truth as a real mental state refers also to an existence of the ethical subjectivity of the historian himself, namely a typical historian, whose identity in ancient China is reflected in two roles: the scholarly agent and the social-political actor. That ethical subjectivity is expressed in strengthening or establishing the ethical-mental state internally with respect to itself. A typical historian, whose identity is different from that of a literary man or philosopher, is naturally interested in external practices, because his historical referent is the actual world itself containing every aspect in actual life. Eventually, he applies his history-scholarly commitment to double-directed objects: the external historical reality and the internal subjective reality. The latter is certainly due to a spiritual impact from Confucian ethics, which is realized either in *ru* (儒)-imperial social-cultural contexts or at the pure Confucian-ethical plane. But Confucian political ethics remains at the purely ethical level without going so far to independently and freely think about problems of practically improving or inventing more suitable means to better meet their political-ethical ideals. A Confucian ethical thinker is originally enwrapped in a self-contradictory state, characterized by the contrast between spiritually cherishing the subjective free ethical ideal and actually following the objective transmitted feudal patterns. Because of the former, Confucian thought has become the lasting ethical inspiration that could stir innate ethical-critical passions, which defy the unfair social-cultural reality in Chinese historical reality, and because of the latter, it

could be smartly absorbed by rulers as a virtue-educating/indoctrinating tool to support the lasting despotic-political system through firstly being combined with the *fajia* (法家)-political-military institutions and tactics.

As an originally conceived pragmatic-directed historical scholarship, Standard History is certainly intended to be useful for improving political security and increasing social welfares in the future of humanity. Nevertheless, because of the traditional institutional and intellectual restrictions mentioned above, the historically accumulated historical knowledge is hardly applicable for the purpose. The historical logic of *ru* (儒)-imperial dynasties had been mostly determined by the historically shaped despotic-political mechanism as such whose crucial shortcoming lies in its imperial-totalitarianism led by the emperor as an earthly unique “superman” or the son of heaven, namely a self-claimed representative of the top power in the universe. Although social-political improvement is the first or final objective of *ru* (儒)-imperial historiography, its second objective, which is realized in investigating historical knowledge as the means or methods for attaining the first one, remains the actual one. *ru* (儒)-imperial historiography teleology is essentially transformed into scholarly research on past histories with its purely intellectual interests in experienced facts and events. Reading historical works possesses two different interconnected aspects: the *fajia* (法家)-lined (A) quests for causational truth and the Confucian-lined (C) quest for subjective-ethical truth. The intellectual opposition between A and C can be said to occur at two different levels: the empirical-intelligent and the ethical-motivational. Regarding the capability of doing social-political causational analyses, A is much superior to C; and regarding ethical-axiological evaluation, the ethically-justified criteria of C is directly oppositional to the expedient-utilitarian ones of A. A and C have definitely been inimical to each other in an ethical sense during the course of Chinese history. According to a *ru* (儒)-hermeneutics about political philosophy, the basic opposition is described as that between the “*tao* of hegemony” (based on the *fajia* (法家) line) and the “*tao* of kings” (based on the *nixue* (儒学) line) with respect to entire political situations; while from our perspective, the opposition should be defined in purely political-ethical terms.

More precisely and more comprehensively, according to this unique historical ethics of C, Chinese political historiography can be described by its three different roles: 1) as the way to enrich causational-analytical knowledge based on the A-line; 2) as the way to advance self-devotional forces to serve the *ru* (儒)-imperial regimes, following the B-line; and 3) as the way to strengthen the self-ethical spirit, guided by the C-line. The

judgment about each aspect is connected with the other ones in an interactive or motivational-causational network. The search for historical truth is not only expressed in getting knowledge about causational truth but also, or even especially, in grasping the collectively-directed moral truth and the individually-directed ethical truth involved. The three parts in reading *ru* (儒)-historiography therefore closely interact and even overlap with each other in the actual reading experiences.

Here we should distinguish the mental-ethical from the behavioral-moral planes with respect to personal expressions in our discussions about the Confucian/*ru* (儒)-dogmatic personality of the historian. The term “morality” here especially refers to the impact of external behaviors in conformity with *ru* (儒)-imperial-ideological public norms for actualizing officially regulated proper conducts (B-lined), while the former refers to the individual expressions of the subjective-intentional or motivational-attitudinal states (C-lined), which are of deepest concern in the Confucian-ethical-directed way of thinking. Although in concrete social and historical conducts the two aspects must be interweaved and mutually interpenetrated so as to shape entire events naturally, at the functional level the separation between the two is discernible after our modern detailed analyses. As a matter of fact, an examination of external causational connections becomes the very conditions and means for perceiving internal ethical-intentional qualities. External moral expressions mean faithful obedience to the official rules and orders in behaviors (B), which are not necessarily supported by subjective-spontaneous ethical origins (the agent then functions as a standard *ru* (儒)-official). According to Confucian ethical standards (C), the automatically triggering intentional actions are evaluated as ethically superior ones (the agent then realizes his own *ren* (仁)-ethical ideal). We will derive later in future studies that this ego-based immanent ethics amazingly implies a modern significance for deepening scientific-directed historical epistemology, for this ethical emphasis on the subjective side is linked to a problem of real mental mechanisms about how to create an ethically-directed attitudinal state in scholars’ minds. The separate reality of the mental state, once again, has nothing to do with the capability or possibility of actually realizing the scholarly objective cherished by that mental state. ● On the other hand, when the related external conditions have changed, the separate mental state could perhaps obtain some new ways to realize its aim. In this sense, the internal ethical-mental state or ethical subjectivity as such implies a potential for its external projection, producing actual results in the world. For example, this is just the case with Confucian ethics, the encounter of which with modern western

methodology has resulted in it being able to actually reenergize its dynamics in the new historical contexts.

● Our clarification presented here purposes to raise that this *fajia* (法家)-centralist *ru* (儒)-system has historically had little (if not nothing) to do with genuine Confucian political-ethical thought (C), if we are able to strictly separate it from the *ru* (儒)-imperial political-moral ideology (B). But, in a narrow sense, we can also say that there is indeed an organic unification between the *fajia* (法家) line and the *rujia* (儒) line realized by the Han by the created *ru* (儒)-imperial political philosophy which especially refers to the academic-ideological body: the sets of classical texts based on historiographic productions. The *ru*-imperial system of classics makes the *fajia* (法家) into supernatural-heaven ideological tactics and the *ru* (儒)-school into unified historical learning; namely it makes the supernaturally-threatening mechanism reified into a human-historical power-lineage in order to multiply secure the stability of the *ru* (儒)-imperial systems. By the way, the *fajia* (法家) line has been indeed both a more original and more lasting wisdom-tactic in China's long pre-history, and history or historiography about it represents the basic wisdom about political techniques, which have consisted of alternatively using horrible violence and deceptive tricks to carry out interpersonal subjugations since the early emergence of the primitively socialized Chinese race. ● Originally, primitive historical stories of any kind had been always the tool used by *fajia* (法家) as part of its strategic-tactical means.

### 5.3 Confucian ethics in Chinese historiography and its separation from the *ru*-imperial political-ideological-moral system<sup>65</sup>

An additional major historical reason why the author of *The Analects* was eventually and permanently chosen as the founding-father of the *ru* (儒)-imperial academic-classical system lies first of all in the objective existence of that amazing text itself. Based on this textual fact, a lot of related manipulations based on the mixed and confusing existence of different elements became the true activating factors for shaping this

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<sup>65</sup> Confusion between the original Confucian humanist ethics and the *ru*-feudalist imperial morality has prevailed until today. ● Only a semiotic-semiotic analysis can help clarify the differences involved. For this please refer to Li (1997c), especially the "Introduction: Ethics and Academic Ideology", pp.1-8.

successful *ru* (儒)-ideological creation in Chinese history. The main roles of *The Analects* can be summarized here:

- The text contains strong ethical-inspiring thought based on empirical human nature and therefore can become the natural source for being extensively accepted; accordingly the honor assigned to its author must be effectively convincing;
- The commonly shared historical context and its materials presents a false appearance about the same intellectual positions adopted by Confucius and the despotic rulers, with an intentional neglect of the fact that the same contexts and materials could be used by people with different or oppositional ethical positions;
- Some one-character words used in *The Analects* can be intentionally or misunderstandably misused by *ru* (儒) scholars;
- Used by academic-philologists/ideologists as equivalents to the indications of *ru* (儒);
- Classics was much later used by the same trick in which while one-characters appear in the titles and texts in the *ru* (儒)-classics, the meanings of the same characters (like *shi*, “poetry”; *shu*, “book”) have different referents in different historical, intellectual and even linguistic contexts. It is the polysemous feature of those single characters that presents the means for such academic-ideological distortions and manipulations.

*ru* (儒)-imperial regimes indeed employ the virtue-training part of *The Analects* honestly at the educational-technical level. It is interesting to note that Confucians also employ historical *Zhou-Li* (周礼) material at a practical-technical level, meaning they are guided in a different ethical direction; conversely, *ru* (儒)-imperial traditions employ Confucius’ virtue-training wisdom also at the technical level, making them finally serve imperial benefits.

In consideration of the genuine constitution of the system of Chinese *ru* (儒)-empires, we should be cautious of the historical-legendary sayings about various pre-●in historical stories. Because of the above analysis, we see a historical and international conceptual confusion regarding the role of the legendary person of Confucius has influenced our proper judgments of Confucian ethics on one hand and *ru* (儒)-imperial academia and social-political systems on the other. In spite of the common historical-cultural elements shared by Confucian thought, other schools of thoughts and



social forces in ancient China, Confucian thought is indicative of historically unique features that are expressed in not only its earthly humanist-centric ethics but also in its thematic focus on or essential restriction of the ethical-motivational practices. Various topics concerning political, social, supernatural and cultural items play merely the role of the material or media used to signify subjective ethical topics regarding proper ways to do correct ethical choices when faced with hundreds of typical binary-oppositional-choosing situations. As the apparently unsystematic textual body consisting of a number of ethical proverbs, *The Analects* amazingly shows a pragmatic-logical system including implicitly consistent and coherent connections in the fragmentarily presented network of ethical orders anonymously collected and orally issued by a legendary person named Confucius. A characteristic significance of the ethical system has been indicated by its almost universal and continuous attractions to and extremely willing acceptance by the rulers and literati of all *ru* (儒)-dynasties, including those who originally came from outside China proper, although all such textual acceptance could be finished by the unconsciously arbitrary-selective or fragmentary-combinative ways. That means the intellectual attractions and pragmatic efficiency of Confucian ethics have long been historically tested, even after the end of the long-lasting *ru* (儒)-imperial history. The essential reason for this cross-cultural universal acceptance is due to its empirical-humanist ethical epistemology that is naturally suitable for or relevant to all human beings, regardless of all the supernatural backgrounds caused by different histories.

Reading texts of *The Analects* can be performed in different selective ways, which, with different textual groups of the book, present different textual-reading autonomies. The life of *The Analects* is embodied in various levels of self-consistent intelligibility of different sentential connections. And the spiritually independent existence of Confucian ethics is also based on its various sub-sections with textual self-consistence. It is this feature of comprehensive textual consistence that has guaranteed not only the validity of its ethical logic but also its entire historical existence. Despite this amazing feature, historical Chinese literati and even modern intellectuals can hardly reach the sufficient extent of a self-consistent reading of the entire textual body because of the lack of the required modern epistemological-theoretical conditions, which strangely only become available owing to the emergence of new knowledge of semiotic-hermeneutic methodology that originally came from the west.

● On the other hand, the historically effective value of *The Analects* should be divided into two parts: the one as the constituent part of the *ru* (儒)-imperial system (B) and the other as the independent ethical system

concerning the evergreen justification of its mundane humanist-directed, subjective motivational-centric ethical principles and wisdom (C). The latter part is certainly more determinative with respect to its theoretical and pragmatic efficiency in the entirety of history. The secret of the phenomenon lies merely in that its ethical topics are mostly related to the basic interpersonal-attitudinal relationship and to the states appearing on the psychological-motivational plane without logically reaching practical dimensions. As far as mankind is concerned, these two have always been unchanged despite the constant evolutions of historical processes across even different social-cultural traditions.

As an attitudinal ethics, Confucian ethical idealism has also been mainly displayed, to different yet insufficient extents, at the motivational-attitudinal plane shown in intellectual works, including the philosophical, historiographic, literary, artistic and even martial-artistic ones. This historically-shaped original intelligent restriction can be more deeply traced back to both the then historical-cultural level and the national characteristic's weaker tendency for scientific-logical reasoning that caused the delayed developments of Chinese natural and social scientific activities in the past. On the other hand, this national intelligent-mental limitation could help make Confucian thought historically maintain its actual and functional independent existence with a result that its intellectual flexibility makes it interact with various social and academic rational practices in both positive and negative ways. It is this apparently passive feature that has also been beneficial to preserving its self-persisting and self-operative intellectual potentials. As a result, the content of the original Confucian ethics, completely preserved in the text of *The Analects*, has been safely and entirely transmitted to successive generations until today, playing its same kind of spiritual roles in different historical-cultural contexts.

From the existence of this subjective-ethical autonomy realized in a fixed text derived a special learning about an ethical-volition-formative technique, which can either be imminently linked to the intellectual-spiritual planes for the aim of ethical self-completion, or socially-practically linked to the despotic-political programs for the aim of realizing officially-assigned tasks and imperially-given honors. For whatever reasons, the former always finds the chance for literati to pursue its internally-directed independent goal, whose expressions are in a strong desire and firm will directed to the search for philosophical, political, historical and artistic "truths" in their implicitly independent spiritual life. Yes, while the notion about truth, so indistinctly conceived, can hardly automatically lead to any scientifically feasible pursuits, it can still

effectively function as the meaningful target at the mental-attitudinal plane and can help to keep the volition-formative mechanism to separately persist or to keep the mere literary expressions preserved for subsequent generations. As a result, an independently existing ethical attitude supported by the volitional mechanism towards truths becomes the clearly discernible psychological phenomenon, perhaps through poetical works, in Chinese intellectual history. Let us be clear here once again that what we focus on here is not the truth as such, which was so unclearly conceived in ancient times, but instead the truth-referred attitudinal direction and volition as such. Perhaps, the imprecise or confusing feature of the word “truth”, whose traditional equivalents present different modes, dialectically shows an epistemological merit, namely helping maintain the independent existence of the ethical objective in the historical mentality. This separately existing ethical attitude, expressed and tested in Chinese intellectual history in different modes, has formed an implicitly everlasting spiritual worth and strength with respect to the expanded human perspective. And, most frequently, ethical psychology of this type has been displayed in literary and historiographic creations in history with different modes caused by various external conditions. In this sense we can state that, regarding historiography practices, this ethical attitude is also directed to something similar to a “historical truth” in its scientific and ethical modes. This blurry notion of historical truth or reality can either refer to the part of the ethical subject itself, or the true ego that is able to make correct decisions about subjective-ethical attitudes concerning concrete situations, or to the proper objective-rational judgments about historical realities. In other words, historical truth can refer to both the subjective and objective objects, or to both the internal ethical ego and different external true realities.

In conclusion, let us emphasize once again that the doubly polyphonic existence of Confucian ethics and *ru* (儒)-imperial ideology within the *ru* (儒)-despotic social-political systems in history has led to the implicit split of intellectuals’ personalities: as ethical believers in or sincere readers of *The Analects* and as pious believers in or sincere readers of the *ru*-imperial classics and careerists of the *ru* (儒)-imperial vocations. Therefore, Confucian thought has played a double role in the formation of Chinese historiography. It is due to our semiotic-hermeneutic perspective, which is unfortunately unable to be discussed in further detail here, that people can find that this separation appears in a functional way. Why do we emphasize this implicit separation of the two intellectual systems and accordingly another associated separation between the *ren* (仁)-ethical inspiration at the psychological level (C) and the morally-directed *ru* (儒)-

social-political practices at the behavioral level (B) with respect to our present discussion of historical scholarship? Because the two different types of systems, the Confucian ethical text (C) and the *ru* (儒)-imperial hard and soft mechanisms (A, B and C), keep their respective independent stimulating functions. The Confucian ethics embodied in the self-coherent textual body amounts to an inspiring source to exercise the consistent ethical effects on an individual's mind and soul. Because of the lasting separate existence of the textual body in history, *The Analects* has actually kept a holistic influence on minds at the psychological level, although practically this influence is mixed together with the double-constitutive *ru* (儒)-imperial mechanism, including both its textual and social aspects. In fact the both exist in a polyphonic or overlapping way in mentally-practically synthetic processes. The doubly-mixed lines of thinking and conducts can indicate their separate effects aroused by the classics-reading, such as the intensified sincere feeling about loyalty to *ru* (儒)-imperial social-political-directed dogmatic systems and reversely about the critical attitudes and disappointed emotions aroused by the negative manifestations of that social-political system.

*The Analects*, with its universal humanism, does not necessarily function in combination with certain actual social systems and practices: its ethical-logical system and its historical existence can be separated in our semiotic-hermeneutic perspective. The subjective attitudinal-emotional ethics can separately function at the basic elemental ethical level, playing a pragmatic-logically self-consistent guiding role regarding the ethical subject's mentality and behavioral decisions. The characteristic subjective-pragmatist autonomy of the original Confucian ethics itself, rather than its actual historically-realized method, does not really include the part concerning external practical aspects and therefore is able to be freely combined with other social programs as well.

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<sup>66</sup> This paper was prepared using an interdisciplinary cross-cultural approach, involving copious Chinese and Western literature. Considering the space limitations, the author has used almost no quotations from the related works in this paper. For anyone taking an interest in the detailed reference sources of the author's research, please check the different references given in his monographic works listed here.

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

# NON-WESTERN SEMIOTICS AND ITS POSSIBLE IMPACT ON THE COMPOSITION OF SEMIOTICS THEORY IN FUTURE<sup>67</sup>

### Abstract

Traditionally we are used to a dichotomy of the theoretical and the applied domains in semiotic studies. Therefore there exist a general semiotics as the theoretical foundation of semiotics and a disciplinary-centric semiotics as its applied realm. Clearly, the existing general semiotics arises from the west and all non-western semiotics seem to be reduced to the category of applied or disciplinary-centric semiotics. However, this scholarly dichotomy is not formed from a complete or scholastically satisfactory point of view at the semiotic-globalization stage. This chapter intends to point out that general or theoretical semiotics, far from being some original meta-semiotics or “semiotic philosophy”, is itself a synthetic body of several general theoretical sources outside of semiotics proper and various disciplinary-centric theoretical scholarship. Thus, the composition of the formative theoretical semiotics as such should also be related to the theoretical elements of different disciplines, including non-western ones. In this sense, a higher developed non-western or eastern semiotics would also potentially contribute to the progressive formation of general semiotic theory in future.

Saussure’s revolutionary role in modernizing the humanities is played out in its disconnection from the two traditional ways of thinking: the philological study of language and metaphysical theorization. We may regard the one as originating from material-centrism and the other from philosophy-centrism. Structural linguistics is theory-directed, but belonging neither to philological nor to speculative types. In short, the

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most revolutionary role of the semiotic way of thinking based on structural linguistics is expressed in its keeping a clear distance from modern philosophy, although it can be partly traced back to the general philosophical way of thinking. Let me first point out two basic themes in this chapter in the following:

- Modern semiotic theory consists of various general aspects of different disciplinary theories, including the philosophical one. But its modern establishment has been certainly based on interdisciplinary-theoretical outcomes that are thoroughly disconnected from philosophy-centrism by nature.
- Its genuine theoretical contents should be synthetically derived from the theoretical practices in various traditional disciplines of the west and the east alike, rather than from any philosophical-logical doctrines of both intellectual traditions.

In terms of this position, we may suppose that non-western cross-cultural semiotics will probably in turn influence the development of general semiotics in future as well. This chapter states that, as one of the major non-western semiotic-historical sources, Chinese semiotics as well as many other eastern semiotics will perhaps also play a constructive role in promoting the global semiotic-theoretical maturation and make its “cross-cultural-directed interdisciplinary semiotic experience” actively involved in the global theoretical semiotics of the new century. In this sense, global semiotics, consisting of the western and non-western parts, will be further solidified and mutually interconnected in terms of an expanded global semiotic movement.

## 1. General Theory

Modern semiotic theory is based on and preconditioned by some more general theoretical principles other than the philosophical in history, such as the most general ones, the linguistic and the logical, as well as relatively general ones, like the psychological, deep-psychological and even the sociological. Such general subjects, as the most basic disciplines in human knowledge (in terms of their ideal types rather than their status quo), have been intellectual autonomies; they provide some theoretical fundamentals to semiotics in different ways, forming various constituent parts of so-called theoretical semiotics. Therefore theoretical semiotics is the product of the interaction between different general theories and various disciplinary studies. Accordingly we have another more pertinent dichotomy between



“application theory” and the “theoretical application”. The former is about those more theoretical-styled studies and the latter about those more applicable ones (for example, the distinction between film theory as such and the analysis of movie pictures in terms of some theoretical principles). So we could have various semiotic disciplines such as semiotic studies in philosophy, history, literature and the arts. All fields like these can be divided into the more theoretical and the more applied ones in relative terms. Usually we call the former “theoretical semiotics” and the latter “applied semiotics”. The identity of “theoretical semiotics” is already a synthesis of the general theories originally existing outside semiotics proper and various conventional disciplines, including both western and non-western ones. In our classification, the conventionally generic title “semiotics”, including various disciplinary semiotics, refers to both the more theoretical and the more applied ones. Thus, in “literary studies” we could say there is literary theory and literary analysis; the former is more about general principles and the latter more about the analyses of fictional works. Similarly we have theoretical studies at a general level and applied studies at concrete levels in, for example, literary semiotics, historical semiotics and artistic semiotics. Without a connection to those general-theoretical aspects of disciplinary semiotics, there does not exist a separate “general semiotics” at all. What exists logically above those general aspects as their common higher theoretical principle can be called “general theory”, which is outside or independent from semiotics. Therefore, semiotics, including its theoretical parts, remains at a secondary level in the hierarchy of knowledge.

Unfortunately, the relationship between the terms “semiotic theory”, “general semiotics” and “semiotic philosophy” still remain unclear today. In semiotic discourse we frequently experience ambiguous usage concerning the term “philosophy”. For example, Kalevi Kull says, “According to Deely, semiotics is definitely the philosophy of the postmodern age” (Deely 2005: ix). It seems that semiotics and philosophy are two things that are interchangeable. In fact, another saying that is also quite common is that semiotic theory should be reduced to some philosophy of language. Many contemporary philosophers are of course the sources of semiotic theory. As Petrilli and Ponzio point out, the problem of semiotic theory could be closely related to ontology and philosophical epistemology (Petrilli and Ponzio 2005: 22). All of these philosophy-related topics of semiotic theory indicate a traditional tie existing between the two subjects of semiotic theory and philosophy. The author of this paper, however, maintains that it is time now for us to get rid of philosophical frameworks of any kind in order to reformulate a more

reasonable conception of a really interdisciplinary semiotic theory (Li 2007: 783-791).

## 2. Semiotics as one of the main organizers of the theoretical synthesis of human knowledge

Semiotics is a user of all established knowledge, synthetically and relevantly connecting intellectual and academic elements from various disciplinary sources. That is why we name semiotics as an interdisciplinary practice. While we have to be careful about general philosophical terms in formulating semiotic-theoretical ideas, the traditional generic terms in semiotic discourses also seem not to be satisfactory in our theoretical construction today, including terms such as “sign”, “symbol” and some other general terms. As I pointed out in my paper “Interdisciplinary/depilosophizing orientation in semiotic theory today”, read at Berkeley in 1994, “This common word [sign] is too broad to become a universal operator used in forming semiotic theories” (Rauch and Carr 1997: 899). If we attempt to establish a new philosophical or linguistic foundation for a general semiotics, we may immediately fall in a logical self-contradiction, for philosophy itself has been one of conventional disciplines ever since the start of the modern era. We are already far away from the ancient period when philosophical learning was the foundation for all other knowledge. (We should always make a distinction of the exact referents for the same disciplinary title that are applied in changeable historical academic compartmentalizations.) Not only philosophical terms, but also many other existent general terms in different disciplinary fields should not be safely used as the basic conceptions for semiotics, which is wrongly conceived as a “new single discipline”. This author states that, “In the light of the strong heterogeneity of current semiotic studies, how can we present any meaningful design for a ‘theoretical foundation of a discipline’ (Echbach), a ‘cultural logic’ (Lotman), a ‘general semiotics’ (Eco), or a ‘semiotic philosophy’ (Peirce)?” (Bernard et al 1996: 76). Instead, semioticians search for an interdisciplinary-directed theoretical “foundation” which functions as a mere theoretical reorganizer in an operative sense. So-called theoretical semiotics, as we just said, is not another meta-theoretical dogmatic doctrine; instead, it should be a synthesizer in interdisciplinary and cross-cultural academic interaction. The important theoretical semiotics available today all comes from historical practices made in various major disciplines such as philosophy, history, literature, the arts, media and others. A theoretical semiotics across disciplines only plays a role as an external link among related general elements from

various disciplines. Yes, we have linguistics and logic penetrating into all semiotic practices, but they originate from independent fields outside modern semiotics. So we can define the identity of theoretical semiotics as something partly derived from other established disciplinary sources; or, more exactly, it is a combination or interaction between various “general theories” and the related concrete studies in different disciplines. We semiotic theoreticians should promote this kind of synthetic practice along the same line. On the one hand we depend on existing conventional knowledge and on the other we attempt to further readjust their inner structure. In general, the semiotician is not especially qualified to play a role as “the creator” but rather as “the creative user” of all disciplinary-knowledge attained by different specialists. We semioticians exist dialectically outside as well as within the disciplinary-directed academic world, especially with respect to the new framework of human sciences.

After a closer observation we find that a more profound question is related to the connection between three academic fields: philosophy, human sciences, and semiotics. Ivaylo Znepolski says:

*Il convient que les sémioticiens prêtent l'oreille aux appréhensions croissantes de Habermas, selon qui l'entrée de la philosophie dans ces types de coopération avec les sciences humaines, qui n'excluent pas la division du travail entre elles, met en doute son identité; avec cet acte de coopération, c'est comme si la philosophie renonçait à être quelque chose d'exceptionnel, renonçait à des prétentions théoriques d'universalité, avec lesquelles son essence est liée; ce fait ne nous permet pas de croire que la coopération de la sémiotique avec la pensée philosophique facilitera son identification: elle ne fait qu'ajouter certains traits supplémentaires, qui sont sujets à identification. (Petitot and Fabbri 2000: 231)*

Habermas' worry about the blurred identity of philosophy just discloses an anti-semiotic feeling of his: a philosophical-fundamentalism. It is true that the philosophical conception of “logical universality” is certainly in disaccord with the identity of contemporary human sciences. The observation further proves that semiotics must stand by human sciences rather than together with a philosophy-centric academic system. We may even say that the semiotic essence lies in its disconnection from the traditional identity of a German genre of philosophy.

### 3. Eastern semiotics could become part of theoretical semiotics in the Semiotic Globalization Era

The above-mentioned academic identity of the general theory of semiotics is traditionally shaped in the west, so theoretical semiotics tends to be misleading in its two different kinds of theoretical practices: the one from the general theoretical source that is outside semiotics and the other from theoretical semiotics that contains part of the former. The former originates in the west but has now become the common subject matter in all cultures world-wide. In principle, modern semiotics has developed in all interdisciplinary activities in the totality of humanities academia. That means theoretical semiotics should not be restricted exclusively to the European-American academic tradition only. Cross-cultural semiotics, as the new type of interdisciplinary practice with respect to both the western and non-western academic worlds, also becomes a new academic ground for promoting scholarly dialogues between all kinds of disciplines. On the one hand it is especially related to applying some western theories into non-western cultural material, while on the other hand it is also part of the scholarship of theoretical semiotics in general. In other words, theoretical semiotics will become the common task of both western and non-western semiotics in future, because modern non-western disciplines will be naturally integrated into the common synthetic endeavors of the world for promoting theoretical semiotics as well. Concretely, various types of theoretical semiotics in different disciplines will be changed or readjusted following the creative and critical participation of the non-western or eastern traditional disciplines such as philosophy, history, literature and the arts. For this purpose, of course, we need to undertake a two-step dialectic strategy: firstly we need to apply the western analytical tool to reformulate or modernize the traditional non-western scholarly discourses that had been less logically-organized, and secondly we are able to apply the reformulated discourses of the non-western disciplines to the present-day scientific interaction between western and non-western semiotics at various theoretical levels. That means non-western semiotics, which itself is the result of the western-non-western scholarly interaction, involves global semiotics at two stages: one stage for modernizing the traditional formulation at the national level and the other stage for courageously sharing the common theoretical inquiry tasks at the global level. The latter will be useful for both western and non-western semiotic theoreticians in their separate or cooperative practices. In this sense, semiotic practice, especially its theoretical part, must be helpful for unifying and advancing human knowledge on the whole.

In terms of this definition, the semiotic way of thinking should first of all escape the traditional monist dogmatism or the logical monism that is related to a historical fundamentalism in reasoning and practice in European history. The classical mode of this kind of thinking has been philosophy as such that historically determines the structure of total knowledge. However this classical type of knowledge has been changed greatly since the modern semiotic movement, which requires the reformulation of human knowledge in terms of interdisciplinary/cross-cultural practice. That means the theoretical practice shaped in any discipline is able to form an independent theoretical basis for scientific operations in any semiotically designed project. Accordingly, there should be a clearer distinction between the classical philosophical approach and the modern theoretical one in various branches of the humanities. For example, there appears an obvious distinction between the category “philosophy of history” and the category “theory of history” today. The latter naturally includes the theory of Chinese history containing the emerging discipline of Chinese historical semiotics in which philosophy could no longer play a role (see “On the Distinction between Philosophy of History and Theory of History”; Li 2008a: 142-149). The same could be said with literature and the arts. As Li points out, “...a historical semiotics can help make clearer the semantic composition of ancient historical discourse...” (Li 2008b: 356), which leads to a systematic reformulation of historical discourse as such. The general traits of the reformulated historical discourse will also present a new theoretical aspect to historical semiotics as part of semiotic theory in general.

#### **4. Semiotic Globalization towards the new unified humanities of mankind**

One of the common misconceptions about human civilizations is the idea that the present phase of human history is approaching its closing stage. The fact is the opposite: human civilizations in this globalization era remain in their beginning moments in human history. Besides the remarkable progress of natural and social sciences, the divergent and ambiguous humanities, disorderly shaped in history, have just reached the eve of their global renaissance, which is especially symbolized by the emergence of modern semiotics. Why? The traditional flaws of the humanities have been firstly caused by a prevailing semantic disorder that has been the very origin of historical struggles among different faiths. The semiotic practices lead to the advancement of the semantic clarification of traditional intellectual discourses of various kinds. Without this common

semantically intelligible ground for effective communication, people from different races and histories can hardly attain mutual understanding, sympathy and respect. The crucial aim in scholarship of the humanities or human sciences is first of all concerned about the problem of a semantically coherent analysis of different traditional discourses, while semiotics is especially specialized in handling this general semantic-clarifying task. Naturally, semiotic analysis is a science rather than an art or quasi-art. Or, more exactly, we should clearly distinguish between semiotic science and semiotic art in order to protect the rational spirit of semiotics. The former belongs to the rational praxis in human existence, just like natural and social sciences. Therefore the preconditions of cross-cultural semiotics, including the Chinese one, are the understanding that semiotics is of a rational and scientific nature in broad terms. As we have often repeated, semiotics is part of social and human sciences; that means we firmly support the identity and validity of the conception of human sciences. But on the other hand, we also need a pluralist type of rationality and science to replace the dogmatic ones frequenting human intellectual history. Now it is semiotics that opens a new horizon for intellectual endeavors through an unprecedented bridging between the western and the eastern humanities. To realize this great global project, we should strengthen the rational orientation of semiotic practices. We may declare that: no strong rational direction, no meaningful semiotic globalization.

With respect to cross-cultural semiotics or eastern semiotics, our western colleagues should change a traditional bias against the distinction between western and eastern civilizations. Such a cultural distinction has been cherished by both the western-centrism and eastern-nationalism. The conception of semiotic globalization will further help expel such a traditional prejudice that could have been understandable only in the historical past. Today, the east has already comprehensively absorbed almost all the fruits of western civilization and therefore substantially changed its social and cultural conditions. As a matter of fact, the east is only a geographical notion, while culturally speaking it now consists of both eastern and western elements. This is absolutely true in the case of natural and social sciences; it will be also true in the case of human sciences in future. For example, whether for human sciences or for semiotic studies, Chinese academia is already open to all human intellectual heritages today. In this sense, the knowledge of the humanities originating from the west will become the spiritual wealth of the east as well. In comparison, our western colleagues are still lacking such a global consciousness because of their relative unfamiliarity with non-western history. So, I would like to say to my western colleagues that theoretical

efforts in non-western and Chinese semiotics will be the organic part of general semiotics or theoretical semiotics someday. In terms of this prediction, our semiotic family should pay more serious attention to semiotic solidarity at the global level. A developed non-western semiotics will strengthen our common achievements in semiotic science; it is far from being only a simple application of western theories into eastern materials. Instead, it will be in fact another creative ground for promoting and modernizing semiotic theory as well as human sciences in the world.

In sum, let us make some remarks about some concrete matters in our international semiotic dialogues. Regarding the proper form of cross-cultural semiotics in future, it is far from the case that the western is more specialized in the theoretical job and the non-western is more specialized in the historical one. In fact, both western and eastern scholars will handle the theoretical and the historical subjects on equal terms. That means global semiotics requires a restructuring of the way of doing semiotics in the world; it will be engaged in reorganizing the way of doing semiotic scholarship through strengthening the collective or cooperative mind during various practices. Nobody is able to grasp all knowledge by himself; as we indicated above, a semiotic scholar is a wise and rational “user” of the existing knowledge produced by all other related scholarship. We need to enhance the evaluation for using different second hand knowledge more systematically; this is implied in the sense of the interdisciplinary practices as such. Everybody is the teacher and the student at the same time in our global semiotic practices. (This implies that we should reconsider the relationship between semiotic science and the regular sciences based on the educational systems of disciplinary-specializing training types.) As a consequence, we are now expecting the arrival of a genuine global semiotic era. Or, all of us should belong to a big unified semiotic family based on each other’s intellectual cooperation and complementarity.

By the way, quite simply, why is there semiotics? Following a modern period of vertical disciplinary analysis-specialization, there is naturally a necessity for horizontal interdisciplinary synthesis-combination as well. Why is non-western semiotics involved? There are three main reasons for this: as the means for spreading western theoretical thoughts to non-western academia, as the means for spreading original non-western historical knowledge to western academia, and as the means for promoting scholarly interactions between the two academic worlds. This new type of intellectual experiences will be naturally combined into strengthening the total horizontally-directed synthesis at the global level.

Finally we may conclude that so-called semiotic globalization or global semiotics does not require the construction of a new general

theoretical system as the practice-guiding model for organizing different semiotic projects; on the contrary, what we need is the formation of a new operative-strategic attitude and practical wisdom being directed towards the establishment of an interdisciplinary-theoretical framework based on global human sciences. Thus, so-called semiotic theory should not be taken as any specially/individually created theoretical-textual entity; instead, it means a set of operative patterns based on the relevant interdisciplinary-theoretical level with respect to various projects that are designed and performed in entire human sciences. So, semiotics cannot be disconnected from the extensive system of total human knowledge; it is the organic part of the theorizing tasks of modernizing human sciences that mainly focuses on the topics of semantic and communicational analyses in various concrete projects, in combination/collaboration with many other non-semiotic scientific methodologies. The revolutionary nature of semiotics in modern times is firstly reflected in the understanding that the present-day human sciences need to be further modernized or more rationalized in the face of the totally rationalized natural sciences and technology which control our world by their strong instrumental rationality. In the present critical period in human history, post-modernism attempts to de-rationalize human sciences with two major schemes: the disorganizing rationality and the destructive ethics. Facing this aggressive anti-rational challenge, semiotics should become a rationalist resistance to the spiritual/cultural domination of all kinds of direct and indirect commercializing powers.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE FORMATION OF CHINESE  
HUMANIST ETHICS:  
FROM A HERMENEUTIC-SEMIOTIC-  
HISTORIOGRAPHIC POINT OF VIEW<sup>68</sup>

Preface

My books *The Structure of the Chinese Ethical Archetype* and *The Constitution of Han-Academic Ideology* (under the general title *Chinese Ethics & Academic Ideology: A Hermeneutico-Semiotic Study*), finished at the Bochum Institute of Philosophy (as the result of an independent academic project supported by the VW Foundation between 1991-1996) and first published by Peter Lang, Frankfurt, in 1997, will now be republished by Silkroad Academic Publishing, Hong Kong, in cooperation with the Chinese Renmin University Press, Beijing. As the original recommenders of the proposal for this republishing project, the Renmin University Press also published my two other related books on historical ethics in Chinese: *A Hermeneutics of The Ren-Learning* and *A Hermeneutic Study of Historical Ru-Academia* respectively in 2004 and 2009. These two 2-volume series, one in English and the other in Chinese, are guided by the same scientific line about the same topic, but they are arranged quite differently with respect to their respective thematic focuses and historiographic ranges. For the reader who reads both English and Chinese the two series are recommended to be read together. (The contents of the

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<sup>68</sup> Originally published in *The Formation of Chinese Humanist Ethics: From a Hermeneutic-Semiotic-Historiographic Point of View* (Singapore: Silkroad Press, 2013), vii-xxi. This article was written in 2011 as a preface for the new edition of the old books originally published by Peter Lang (Frankfurt) in 1997. After a new Chinese monograph about Confucian ethics and Confucianist academic ideology was published in 2009, it was recommended by the publishing system as a project to be translated in English. The author then suggested the re-publishing of his old English books with similar topics instead.

two Chinese books are included in the English books as Supplements for reference.) With a view to emphasizing the character of the traditional Chinese way of ethical thinking, the general title of the present English series has been changed to a new one: *The Formation of Chinese Humanist Ethics*; the term “ethics” is used here in its broad sense and the term “humanist” signifies the historically unique character of Chinese ethical thinking.

The Chinese Renmin University Press and Silkroad Academic Publishing have now decided to republish my books for international readers, a fact that indicates an ever-increasing open-minded tendency and substantial progress in the Chinese humanities publishing business in China, because the topic and style of the books are obviously different from the regular ones in both Chinese and western academic communities. Regarding comparative Chinese-western ethical scholarship, we may state that two major trends are still predominant today: western moral metaphysics and Chinese Confucianist-dogmatic philosophy. In my opinion, the two directions of ethical scholarship, despite their respective achievements, are commonly characterized by their relative negligence of related historical reality. The present two books were meant to introduce a more real picture of Chinese historical ethics and classical scholarship.

For the past three decades, China has restarted or resumed her systematic studies of western culture and thought as well as of the modern humanities. As a matter of fact, Chinese academia has placed an ever-increasing emphasis on investigations into the recent theoretical results of the western humanities, especially contemporary western philosophy, which had for a long time been prohibited before the end of the Cultural Revolution. For the past few years, I myself have maintained a very fruitful collaboration with the Chinese Renmin University Press with respect to several important projects, such as the large translation series on *Levi-Strauss Selected Works* (15 volumes) and *Roland Barthes Selected Works* (18 volumes), as well as the new project on the translation of Husserl’s eight masterpieces. Frankly speaking, it is such a rapid development in the theoretical publishing affairs in China that I myself could not have anticipated it even just 10 years ago.

Generally speaking, the scholarly open-minded attitude in promoting social and human sciences could be observed everywhere in Chinese academia for the past 10 years. One important example related to my own semiotic efforts is that the 11<sup>th</sup> Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies (IASS) was held in Nanjing, China in 2012, with the general title “Global Semiotics: Bridging Different Civilizations”. The event symbolizes an intellectual turning point over the 40 year history of

the IASS that hints at its strategic reorientation towards cross-cultural semiotics in our globalization era. Semiotics, in its proper meaning implied in works by Saussure, Peirce, Husserl, Jakobson, Levi-Strauss, Barthes, Greimas and others, is oriented towards a general epistemological revolution of human sciences. Therefore this symbolically significant international academic event also implies another interesting meaning that, while the humanities all over the world seems to be being further neglected, its Chinese counterpart, which remarkably contains studies of the western humanities, seemingly tends to be being more energetically pushed forward.

While preparing the two series of books for the past two decades I have also been actively engaged in international and Chinese semiotic activities. In general, one of the main tasks of semiotics is related to the interdisciplinary reorganization of the human sciences, emphasizing the necessity of multiple communications among different disciplinary theories. In light of this new scientific point of view, the traditional focus on philosophy-fundamentalism of any kind as the main way for theorizing different practices in the humanities should be replaced by a new theoretical pluralism. The intellectual tendency will even be doubly strengthened when the human-scientific scope is expanded to non-western areas. Inspired by the same spirit, my approach to the studies about Confucian and Confucianist scholarship was generally organized along the semiotic/hermeneutic or comparative semiotic/hermeneutic line. The new approach intends to more effectively promote intellectual dialogue between the Chinese and western ethical ways of thinking. For this purpose, we should firstly present more acceptable related historical descriptions; that is exactly the main aim of my books. However, the present books can only be suitably readable when they are not restricted either by the western-eastern metaphysical philosophy model or by the usual way of Sinology that has been formed and functioned within western educational systems. Sometimes, unsuitable philosophizing tends to cover up the reasonable understanding of historical truth while “China Studies” in the west refers to a general study about the basic knowledge of the “Culture of Minority Races” on campus. The latter should not be confused with the social and human sciences as being comprehensively and systematically organized within the entirety of national history. It is easy to see that Sinology and “Chinese Social Sciences” are extremely divergent with respect to their goal, range and depth. Moreover, originally my two books were indeed intended to be interesting to a general academic public in the west. So it is far from being a work similar to the typical ones usually read in Sinology or its branches overseas.

Briefly speaking, in my own scholarship, the so-called hermeneutic, having nothing to do with its philosophical/ontological trends in Europe, is especially related to the study of comparative historiography; and the so-called semiotic, besides its ever-stronger modern western pragmatic-philosophical tendency, is more about cultural semantics and institutional analysis. In this new preface let me try to explain that this cross-cultural hermeneutic-semiotic project about traditional Chinese ethical thought and its historical experiences, explored in the books, may imply three main topics given in the following.

### **1. The necessity and practicability of the humanist position in ethical thought**

First, the original Confucian way of ethical thinking, which is essentially different from and distortedly used by the despotically controlled academic ideology serving the imperial powers, is a typically humanist and empirically mundane one in history. This pragmatic ethical system has actually and energetically played its spiritual guiding role in Chinese history for over 2,000 years until today. The reason for this historical miracle of its lasting efficiency is simply that it has surprisingly kept the identity and function of an innate humanism that is different from many other historical moral systems with any (theoretical or imaginative) transcendently-directed faiths. On principle, this intellectual tendency could allow it in a uniquely possible way to play a role as a mediator or a dialogic platform for different systems of values and faiths with whatever transcendently-directed moral dogmas. Despite their divergent transcendent sources, different systems of dogmas and faith in the world must have shared common empirical issues concerning earthly coexistence. And for the purpose of settling these commonly involved empirical problems, different parts have exactly the same need to join a commonly accepted dialogic stage for exchanging different ideas for attaining mutual conciliation at the practical level, if not at the theoretical level. And the Confucian historical humanist system can provide them with just such an effective platform. Traced back to the original idea of this Chinese humanist ethics we find that a proper meaning of ethical thinking, first of all, implies its innate object: the justified interpersonal relationship and the related proper individual attitude towards the former. Both aspects of this ethical teaching are certainly determined by the empirical social life absolutely shared by all human beings existing in the same world.

It is well known that humanist movements in the western humanities have had their own history for the past two hundred years. Regarding the

philosophical schools in the western ethical or social traditions, all of them often advocate some “basic-theoretical” foundations for logically supporting their moral systems too. However their own humanist theoretical systems may also imply some transcendent or pseudo-transcendent reasoning, for example “scientific metaphysics”, which makes them quite easily fall into theoretical conflict with the above-mentioned traditional systems of faith and beliefs of different areas. By contrast, Confucian humanist ethics, just because of its pre-theoretical, pre-imperial-autocratic and purely empirical-practical character, can avoid this anthropologic trouble originating from different historical national customs because of its spiritual focus on the purely interpersonal-motivational dimension.

## **2. The necessary separation of the two historical figures of “Confucius” in Chinese history: Confucius I and Confucius II. The corresponding separation between pre-*Chin*-imperial Confucian ethical thought and post-*Chin*-imperial Confucianist political-ideological institutions**

Secondly, a deeply-rooted historical mixture and confusion between the original Confucian ethics and the imperial-despotic politics making use of Confucianist academic ideology has seriously hindered the proper grasping of the true identity and function of Confucian ethics as a purely intellectual autonomy. The confusion has been increased internationally when some early European missionaries used the English name “Confucius” to refer to the two historical phenomena. (Their initial knowledge of Chinese language and culture could not make them attain the depth of that mythical kingdom. Besides, the radical divergence of semantic structures between the western and Chinese languages had led them to be unable to find the correct corresponding terms in their translations of Chinese texts.) In fact, the former had been formed before the establishment of the first Chinese despotic empire, and the latter refers to the political-social institutions of the imperial systems with their multiple ideological instruments that include the distorting manipulation of all available cultural heritages. Therefore we could say that there exist two historical figures with the name “Confucius”, the one was the teacher of pre-*Chin*-imperial Confucian humanist ethical learning (the *Jen*-learning), embodied only in the genuine historical text *Lun-Yü*, and the other was the sanctified or mystified “master” of a “quasi-religious ideology” created by the imperial power. So it is necessary and useful for us modern scholars to distinguish between *Confucius I* (the pre-*Chin*

ethical teacher) and *Confucius II* (the hierarch of the state-academic-religion). We can also call the former the genuine teacher of the *Jen* (or in another spelling, *Ren*; literally, its meaning is partially grasped in benevolence or humanity) learning and the latter as the legendary/fictive founder of the *Ju* (in another spelling, *Ru*; this has been legendarily traced back to the remote/primitive scribing job/skill but was fabricatively used by the despotic power as the uniquely correct Chinese quasi-religious intellectual orthodox school that is implicative of an absolute ideological authority entrusted by the imperial powers.) This canon system is equivalent to an academic type of political religion. A hermeneutic-semiotic analysis can help us find the implicit parallel and mutually influencing functions of these two historical entities through explaining the special historical experience of the interaction between universal humanist ethics and the historically determined academic ideology. The reasonable separation of the two (implicit and explicit) trends in Chinese history will bring about two positive consequences: making the *Jen* humanist ethics able to play a probably constructive role even in the modern intellectual context, and promoting a more intelligible understanding of the constitution and function of traditional Chinese academic history from a modern scientific point of view. Thus, with the more precise descriptions of the two spiritual forces, we may wisely get rid of the *Ju* imperial academic nationalism that can only narrow our intellectual horizon and obstruct us from joining the international thought exchange today.

In addition, some modern conservative scholars in Sinology or China Studies have always been unable to make a clear distinction between the two aspects—the textual-material and the analytical methods—in doing humanities research, let alone the many contemporary Chinese and overseas Chinese Confucianist philosophers. Regarding the modern study of traditional scholarship, we have to make an operative distinction between the object and the approach. The former must be original or historical by nature, while the latter should be modern or scientific. As a scientific procedure it should appeal to all useful relevant methods of modern sciences rather than merely sticking to either western or Chinese traditional philosophical reasoning. In other words, the “material” must keep its historical-geographic identity while the “methods” can be picked up from different modern theoretical sources that have nothing to do with their historical or geographic origins. Otherwise, on one hand, the modern Confucianist nationalism would blindly rely on the old Confucianist-Daoist-Buddhist quasi-religious ideology, which has been established and maintained by the imperial powers and hired scribblers for over one

thousand years, and their useless methods which were in fact despotically-politically formed in past historical contexts; and on the other, it purposely avoids a difficult but necessary task: to learn from modern western scientific theories and methodologies. The national-habitual worship for the intellectual forefathers added by the methodological ignorance of modern social sciences has led to the popularity of contemporary Confucianist academic nationalism. The only result it can lead to is to make China restrict her international horizon and accordingly weaken her intellectual influence in our global village.

### **3. The desirable connection between Chinese humanist ethics and the reorganization of global human sciences in future**

Thirdly, a very important role that could be played by *Jen* humanist ethics today is certainly related to its teaching about the subjectivity-directed ethical thinking, while subjectivity-philosophy has been widely criticized and excluded in the west today. A lot of philosophical negations of the status of the subject as the independent ethical agent in modern times are equivalent to the negations of the spontaneous acting power of the individual agent in the fully institutionalized societies today. According to a hermeneutic reinterpretation we might disconnect the *Jen* ethics from its historical political context so as to reduce it to the inmost zone of ethical subjectivity: the ethical motivation and the related pragmatic wisdom for making the right choices. From a modern interdisciplinary point of view we could perceive a serious shortcoming obstructing the progress of human sciences in the current commercialized and institutionalized academic world where the principle of individualist interest-motivated competition plays a determinative role. Lacking in objective norms and criteria, the human sciences tend to really become the “liberal arts” which are gradually losing their possibility of carrying out scientific goals. In the so-called post-modernist era, human sciences, especially their ethics at the center, can hardly play an effective, constructive role for humanity, either intellectually or socially. In other words, without forming a more generally acceptable conception about value and truth, human sciences and ethics in our globalization times would become more and more useless (except as a form of usability for intellectual/spiritual enjoyment). As we know, there is a Chinese proverb that says: “knowledge first, action second”. Compared with the fact that natural and social sciences have successfully attained their ever-increasingly fruitful achievements in accumulating knowledge, human sciences, including their ethics, are confronted with an



unprecedentedly serious crisis about their identity, quality and utility with respect to their social and intellectual practices. In some sense, one of the main tasks of global semiotics lies in seriously dealing with this scientific task of modernizing and reforming the present human sciences. The task of this scientific renovation, which is made in terms of an interdisciplinary approach as well as from a hermeneutic-semiotic point of view, must be pursued along the cross-cultural orientation as well. With a view to reorganizing this academic task, we indeed see a delicate relationship existing between the progress of the humanities in the global context and the unavoidable role of ethical motivation at the level of the scholar as the pragmatic subject. It is here, I find, that the traditional humanist ethics of *Jen* can play a relevantly constructive part. As a result, the interaction between the modern global human sciences and the historical Chinese humanist ethics will lead to a more desirable development regarding the global human sciences. Thus, we could reach a decisive point in human intellectual history: despite the variety of great, brilliant achievements of modern western humanities, from which all peoples should continuously learn seriously and systematically, we have to give up any simplistic attempts to copy the ready results of theoretical productions that have been temporarily finished within the western disciplinary framework. For without a cross-cultural expansion of the theoretical horizon, the human sciences can hardly reach a really comprehensive horizon or attain a more effective intelligibility in the global context.

Now let us summarize shortly the above three points once again. For the first point, we should reasonably stimulate a pragmatic dialogue between the universal humanist ethics and various historically formed transcendent/supernatural systems of faiths by means of a practical focus on the commonly shared empirical problems about the interpersonal relationship that can only be properly judged by the also commonly shared empirical-pragmatic principles. For the second point, we should distinguish between two figures of Confucius, namely the original ethical thinker formed in the pre-centralized imperial society and the later academic ideology of the despotic empire; accordingly, we have to overcome any scholarly nationalism which can only lead Chinese academia to limit its horizon and ambition so as to be reduced to a mere localized nationalist ideology or a historical nostalgia that will certainly lead to its segregation from the international thought exchange. For the third point, we should overcome the two epistemological obstacles caused by both western and Chinese negative tendencies in connection with the direction of the humanities, and make efforts to make the humanities more “scientific” and operatively more applicable in our world of technicalization and

commercialization on the basis of interdisciplinary, cross-cultural epistemology and methodology as well as through keeping a distance from any irrelevant ontological rhetoric. Ontological discourses can exist as some philosophical poetics but should not be allowed to undermine the scientific endeavors in human sciences. The criticism of metaphysical-ontological centrism is also traced back to modern western interdisciplinary trends whose cross-cultural expansion will lead to a more comprehensive reconsideration and rearrangement of the global human sciences in our new century. If the western humanities unfortunately continue to neglect their scientific development under the increasingly strong pressures from the technical-commercialized powers, we should arrange for the non-western theoretical humanities, including their western studies, to make more productive efforts to pursue this great historic task of mankind. For reason should remain the top principle for human beings; and reason must be embodied in human sciences as well. It is disastrous to find that reason always guides natural sciences and technology while, by contrast, its guiding influence on human sciences strangely decreases. (I cannot elaborate here upon an argument against some popular western criticism of the Enlightenment; simply, its mistake lies in ignorance of the multiple and pluralist composition of concepts like reason, reality and truth.)

The formation of discourses in the humanities is predetermined by the norms, principles and methods professionally fixed within the academic establishments. If this is so, what should be our final authority in judging the quality of that discourse: the artificially-formed disciplinary regulations set up within some academic circles, or the objective and subjective reality of different kinds in the actual world? Eventually, should we appeal to the artificial rules embodied in some specialized books or to the objective reality in our research? Unlike natural sciences, and even social sciences, which can be examined and judged by the objective natural and social reality, human sciences have always lacked reliable criteria based on the objective world. Thus, it is ironic to note that on one hand there is a serious notional diversity and conflict regarding meaning, value and faith among different peoples, and on the other hand all human crises, either social or intellectual ones, can be eventually traced back to the axiological divergence on which the scientific reflection has constantly weakened its attention everywhere. We need to note that if natural and social sciences are more related to the issues at the level of the means of knowledge, then human sciences are more related to the issues at the level of its aim. The fact is that human sciences today consist of disorderly accumulations from divergent historical and professional sources, including elements from western and eastern, as well as from ancient and modern, while all kinds

of intellectual sediments have been almost freely combined by our professional practices in the contemporary academic systems without sufficiently scientific discrimination. As a result, the final “authority” of the eligibility of the humanities discourse actually comes from its “use value” in the related professional marketing! One of the reasons is that there is no strict distinction between the aesthetic and the scientific operations in the field; furthermore, we have much more complicated and difficult problems concerning fact and reality in connection with society, culture, thought and the related investigations. It is one of the semiotic aims to more relevantly and precisely define these ambiguous but crucially important concepts used in the humanities in terms of new scientific instruments so as to substantially advance our knowledge about human beings themselves and their actual activities. It is unfortunate that the current western humanities theories seem to be increasingly losing their interest in exploring reality and rationality in their scholarly practices. The destructive impact of anti-scientific-directed post-modernist philosophy is caused in fact by the current commercialized society: It has become a philosophy characteristic of the commercialized era only to search for the successful fashion in the academic community. This serious shortcoming in scholarly operation is covered up, however, by an increasingly strong external academic institutionalization and general cultural consumerism. The above-mentioned tendency of the current humanities’ theories towards losing interest in reality results in scholars turning their attention to the texts as such alone. In my opinion this tendency to neglect reality is completely wrong and will have quite a negative impact on the expected development of new ethical sciences, which are extremely required by humankind today.

The above realistic point of view of mine about the humanities today is partly due to personal experiences formed in my special career. A little bit of digression about my special experience could be useful for readers to judge my own discussions. My independent intellectual efforts regarding semiotic, hermeneutic, structural and phenomenological theories for over the past 30 years, exactly since the end of the Cultural Revolution, are part of my long-time concerns about various realist or empirical objects formed over the past 60 years (during my school time in the 1950s I was naturally intoxicated by classical European literary realism). Unlike almost all western scholars trained in the established educational systems, I am a completely self-taught person, especially since abandoning my civil engineering studies at Tianjin University as early as early 1959. With an adventurous passion for contemporary western philosophy and other modern theoretical themes I always cherished a strong curiosity for the

deeper and hidden truth of actual life itself. Following increased scholarly reading, my attention was further concentrated on reality at all levels and all aspects, and naturally all practices of reading were taken as the mere means for attaining this eventual cognitive aim. Therefore, since my youth, my intellectual interest was never determined by any professional consideration or dominated by any academic authority. Propelled by a pure desire for knowing a more realistic and deeper truth I began naturally to turn to logical positivism in the late 1950s (in China this philosophical school came as early as in the 1920s, firstly through Russell), and later even turned to Husserlian phenomenology (in China it had never been seriously introduced until the late 1970s) from which I perceived another realistic dimension: the psychological-logical one behind its idealist-metaphysical reasoning. But it was the structural semiotic movement, to which I was able to get access as late as in late 1977 when the Beijing National Library (where I spent my independent research life between 1959 and 1966) was reopened, that strongly led me to turn my attention to a much more synthetic and complicated reality on social-cultural-historical-psychological dimensions. (Such a notion of multiple-synthetic reality seems not to be easily grasped properly by the analytical and pragmatic philosophical mind.) It was also the first year after the end of the Cultural Revolution that I started my formal academic life; namely, the next year I became a researcher at the Institute of Philosophy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, through passing a special five-philosophy-language examination. Furthermore, between 1982 and 1984 I got a rare chance to visit the universities of Princeton, Columbia and Munich in turn, by dint of financial aids from the regular programs of the Chinese government and the German DRRD. The chance opened the door for me to personally reach the western humanities activities for the next 30 years.

During the last few years of the 1970s I started to introduce to Chinese readers (most of whom had lost a regular educational life during the Cultural Revolution and had even stopped their intellectual contact with the modern western humanities for the previous three decades) the thoughts of Husserl, Levi-Strauss, Gadamer, Ricoeur, Barthes, Metz, Foucault, Lacan, Le Goff and others, according to my own epistemological interest that was completely disconnected with the then predominant trends in post-Cultural Revolutionary China. (But my gaze has been always guided by my own epistemological interest that has nothing to do with current political fashions.) Consequently, throughout the 1980s, I remained an introducer of current theoretical thoughts from the western humanities. Still, my intellectual interest had been always focused on realities of various types. In this sense I have never been attracted by any continental

ontologically-sophisticated poetic philosophies despite their rhetorical delicacy, although I need to read them for my understanding and judging of the world's intellectual reality (so in 1982 when I met with my sponsor Prof. Richard Rorty at Princeton and my next sponsor Prof. A. Danto at Columbia I felt a little bit surprised by finding their being still interested in discussing Sartre's philosophy then. In my opinion, this ontological tradition traced back to the Hegelian has become the main hindrance for the scientific development of human sciences in general and the proper understanding of Confucian humanist ethics in particular). Later, I went further back to my earlier reflection on Chinese intellectual history that indicates another mode of historical reality. So when the time came, I started a related research project in Germany in the early 1990s. Another reason for this thematic refocus was due to my understanding that no ethical consideration could be theoretically complete as long as no non-western parallel experiences are involved in a comparative study; for this purpose, of course, the latter should be reformulated at first in a hermeneutic-semiotic way, the original modes for which come from the west (this can hardly be done by the philologically-oriented Sinology that is restricted by its fixed educational task determined by the western system). The same can be said about comparative historiography in general. An epistemological combination between hermeneutics and semiotics will lead to the necessary change of current historical theory and consequently make us definitely say good-bye to that metaphysical type of philosophy of history, which is still influential in many western journals of history. I firmly insist that a genuine understanding of any historical reality relies firstly on how thoroughly we could get rid of the classical philosophy of history (because of this position I am always doubtful of justifications of the epistemological background of some leading related western journals when they try to combine historical theory and historical philosophy). This cross-cultural turn in my scholarly practices led to two concrete consequences: the reinterpretation of Chinese traditional ethics and the reconsideration of the identity of comparative humanities.

Retrospectively, I have luckily enjoyed several true independent periods in my whole life: my independent study of philosophy over 20 years in China between early 1959 and 1978; my research career over 10 years in the Institute of Philosophy at CASS, with the complete freedom (because of the specially flexible situation immediately after the end of the Cultural Revolution) to select thematic contents in individual projects during the 1980s; my independent research in Europe (Germany and France) for almost 10 years, as a guest research fellow; and finally my independent way of life as a freelance scholar in the States over the past 13

years. With almost sufficient literature sources available all the time and without any professional commitments, this career has made it possible for me to think about the truly relevant problems concerning human sciences and ethics more freely and independently than any colleagues living on the institutionalized campus. This special personal experience has let me understand clearly that, faced with serious epistemological challenges, humanities scholars must first of all shape an ethical personality, not for the purpose of becoming a “good man” or to make efforts to realize a “good society” (those classical goals belong to other intellectual channels and require many different related conditions) but for the purpose of having a true independent mind for reorganizing and readjusting their research strategy following changing and changed contexts, by means of keeping reality-directed observation and truth-directed analysis under different external determinations (including pressures and attractions alike). If they are guided by the motive of obtaining personal reputation and social success (for professional individualism these two aims are not only legal but also justified nowadays) in our commercialized world, a humanities scholar can hardly cherish an independent aim to search for scientific facts and truth beyond his own disciplinary-regulated framework (just because the single-discipline-centrism is the most useful to support one’s benefit-directed pursuits). Their professional frameworks can help secure their consistency with disciplinary regulations but not certainly with the approaching reality outside their disciplines. Unfortunately, so many humanities scholars live mainly with a book-reading style in order to attain successes along their professional tracks. Few of them are aware that there exists a pragmatic-logical link between the ethical motivation of the scholar as subject and the scientific quality of his works. From my independent observations on the external situations and owing to my special independent status, I firmly believe that, regarding the current conditions of human sciences, the academic individualism that has strengthened in the commercialized society would be better replaced by an ethical collectivism that will help scholars keep a necessary distance from various commercial games. The renovating task of the global human sciences definitely depends on the collective and cooperative consciousness and joint efforts across the world despite the uneven developments of different scientific communities. The new century calls for a true solidarity among international scholars. Let me further explain this desirability from an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural angle in the following.

There is no doubt that all specialized knowledge is formed within established disciplines that must be organized in a strictly regulated institutional framework. But we should see that the results of the different

specialized scientific productions are equivalent to being some “materials” for further processing and remaking in a further expanded social-cultural context and for a higher pragmatic objective. Therefore the identity of disciplinary or specialized knowledge could hopefully be defined as “date-material” or “half-made products” for possible further uses in other successive projects that may demand collaboration with other disciplines and their scholars. Any time we have to rely on various specialized disciplines for obtaining different “half-made goods” at first. And secondly those half-made products should be further processed or remade to become the relatively more “final” or more usable products when our scientific plans are advanced to a higher scientific or teleological level. The same process can be extended to the cross-cultural domain when the latter is in fact a variety of interdisciplinary practice. In light of this, for example, both western theoretical disciplines and oriental philologically-directed historical ones could respectively play important roles in their next more synthetically composed scientific production.

There exist regulations of single discipline, but there also exists another kind of regulations in interdisciplinary practices. The two kinds of regulations, the disciplinary and the interdisciplinary ones, are different in their respective compositions and aims. But more and more we need the both, rather than one or the other, as our synthetic methodological system, particularly when we want to increase our epistemological level in our studies. In other words, the single-discipline-centric position is strong enough to secure one’s professional pursuits, but not enough to direct him towards the expanded goal for approaching some other non-benefit-related truth. Unfortunately, today the professional systems in the humanities are mainly related to the interest-procuring conditions that just do not care about true scientific aims as such. The self-benefit-directed motivation and the commercialized mechanism in this field obviously stimulate the prevailing of academic individualism in our times. Therefore most scholars of the humanities must live in a multiple tension, regarding their psychology and practices alike, between the interest-goal and the truth-goal. If post-modernism can really destroy the term “truth”, humanities scholars can only follow a commercialized life-style in their profession. That is why some post-modernist philosophers hate the conception of “human sciences” so much as well as the idea about universal ethics. Their “intellectual liberalism” can only cause serious impotence or confusion in human ethical reasoning. If it spreads to non-western areas, this nihilist rhetoric will despoil the just developing situation of human sciences there. Confucian humanist ethics will firmly resist this epistemological and axiological nihilism formed in a highly commercialized circumstance.

Regarding cross-cultural dialogue or collaboration in the new human sciences, the related scholars should more systematically readjust their scientific consciousness beyond their own specialized field if they really want to know “more truth” in the expanded field.

Accordingly, it is epistemologically naïve to conceive that academic globalization means only the application of the western theory to the eastern historical material. No, both western theory and eastern history should be reorganized synthetically at once in an epistemologically higher scientific stage, for the both will be related to different kinds of reality and rationality in the cross-cultural world. Practically speaking, because for the past century the east has learnt so much from the west and the west has learnt so little from the east, it is “dialectically” natural that in the new century, the westernized eastern intellectuals (linguistically they know both sides) have an increased obligation to play a more active and a more creative role for promoting western-eastern collaborative projects in the cross-cultural humanities despite their relatively weaker knowledge of western theory. The results must be positive for both sides, if we can keep a humanist-ethical attitude based on scientific collectivism at the global level. With the above metaphor of “half-made products”, we may understand why much single-disciplinary-based knowledge (especially philosophical) in the past can hardly provide relevantly satisfactory theoretical guidance for solving our scientific and practical problems in various fields (we should pay honest attention to the seriously negative impact of some major philosophical schools on society and thought in the 20<sup>th</sup> century). In light of the rather instructive French *Annales*' principles (unfortunately they have not realized their principles about total history thoroughly enough because of their cognitive separation from the eastern historiographic traditions), we should define our “aims and problems” first and then try more flexibly or relevantly to combine various useful “methods and tools” from different related disciplines for the newly designed plans. On the other hand, human knowledge, especially that of the human and social sciences, remains in the beginning stage in consideration of the still limited human historical span. If this is so, how could we be so over-confident in the mere temporary conclusions from our present occasionally accumulated knowledge? (Why could those modern great “philosophers” think that they have already created some permanently valid “wisdom” for mankind?) What we should keep in mind is to set the right orientation for our future intellectual adventure and to insist on the line of reason, which is the single valid foundation of global human sciences. Let us hope that the arena of the new Chinese human sciences could become another important stage in the world for promoting



this global task of developing new human sciences at the global level, side by side with the existing European and American ones.

Finally, let me express my sincere gratitude for such a generous publishing subsidy from Silkroad Academic Publishing and the kind recommendation of the Chinese Renmin University Press.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

# SIGNIFICATION AND PERFORMANCE OF NON-VERBAL SIGNS IN THE CONFUCIANIST RITUAL SYSTEM<sup>69</sup>

The Confucianist learning of rites and related code systems are full of performative details realized in patterned conducts, programmed processes and a multiple-media-emblematic network, most of which exhibit themselves as non-verbal signs and rhetoric. Those non-verbal ritual codes and the related regular performance exercise an extremely effective impact on the directed communication and domination of the imperial society. As a result, in the *Li*-system, non-verbal signs and codes could function more relevantly and effectively than the related verbal part which itself also functions at a quasi-non-verbal level.

Today semiotics has proved to be a more useful tool for analyzing intercultural historical manifestations, especially for the non-verbal expressions in socio-cultural history. The Confucianist *Li* (ritual) system is a synthetic, multiple-media institutional network that has effectively worked for over 2,500 years as a hardcore component of the despotic social system. From a semiotic point of view, the ways of interaction between the verbal and non-verbal elements of the *Li*-system are more interesting for our understanding of the reality of the performative arts dominated by Confucianist power.

In general the conception of *Li* implies two categories at the institutional and the ritual levels that can be called the principle of the socio-political system and the rules of performance of rites of various kinds. Both are connected to the attitudes of people in exactly performing them. Compared with other Confucianist classics, *Li*-learning's characteristic is its focus on descriptions of the ritual performance and the related attitudinal norms. It is important to note that the so-called *Li*-learning as a

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synthetic system is more corporeal-physical than verbal-intellectual in its composition and operational manners. In principle, there should be a richness to the teaching and the related written records about the *Li*-system in Confucianist scholarship and its socio-political roles. Confucianism as a term of the synthetic academic system has been usually reduced to the *Li*-learning, and Confucianist China has been traditionally called a state governed by the *Li*-system. In fact, among the five or six Confucianist classics, the *Li*-classic is the weakest in its historical genuineness and philosophical implication. First, not much is left about the records of the ritual customs and *Li*-teaching in written form. Second, we can reasonably doubt that there ever existed a rich literature of *Li*-learning in history. For, differently from other kinds of Confucianist teaching, the *Li*, or the ritual rules in its narrow sense, is more connected to the material requirements, body movement, physical gesture and exterior conduct than to any intellectual activity. It is concerned more with non-verbal than verbal expressions, while both kinds of expressions function collaboratively in maintaining the socio-politico-cultural order of Confucianism, especially its ideological aspects. In other words, the spiritual-cultural manifestations express and convey a physical-socio-political impact in Confucianist social life. The *Li*-system is full of non-verbal media networks embodying the Confucianist ideological enforcement. Unlike the Legalist tradition which appeals directly to the codes of behavioral restraints and coercive punishments, the *Li*-system establishes a prior- or quasi-Legalist order which exercises a multiple control system making the ideological and emblematic channels into the self-controlling mechanism working inside one's mind. In essence, the so-called Confucianist society is based on a double-control mechanism: the spiritual-ideological and the physical-political. The former could be more basic in maintaining social order, more effective in keeping political stability and more productive in providing the conditions for cultural creations. Conversely, the *Li*-system existing in between is a social-cultural-academic-historical compound consisting of a great number of social-behavioral and emblematic codes regulating social-hierarchical relations and interpersonal attitudes through a variety of verbal and non-verbal media such as: static-hierarchical systems of architecture, clothes, vehicles and colors, as well as behavioral patterns concerning the performance of rites of various types, including body gestures (walking, greeting, etc.), facial expressions, mind-body corresponding codes and the ruled manners of other daily activities. All of the emblematic media concerning *Li*-learning function as channels regulating mental, physical and social conducts according to the historically established hierarchy of power and ideology. The *Li*-system is

a multiple-media mechanism to maintain, both mentally and physically, hierarchical order in society. The main point of this historical topic lies in that the performance of the non-verbal media codes in the *Li*-system effectively leads to the persisting inclination in the consciousness of the rooted interpersonal hierarchical order as well as of strict self-disciplinarity. The hierarchical relations in the society are, through emblematical channels, transformed into patterned internal inclinations and habits in the strictly self-ruled mentality.

As a matter of fact, the task of the *Li*-system has a double aspect: the internal ethical-intellectual and external moral-customary ones. The former becomes a necessary tool for the ethical agent to effectively carry out his self-chosen moral goals. The latter is the physically organized laws to force people to obey the hierarchicalized orders. The internal intellectual reasoning of the former and the external behavioral enforcement of the latter co-exist and interact to collaboratively decide and secure the general direction of the Confucianist society. The former is realized via the individual's ethical subjectivity and the latter through the individual's subjugation to the power-holders. The *Li*-system in connection to physical media indicates the stereotyped and patterned signifying channels that are characterized by its constant and effective semantics, both expressive and performing in nature. The meaning and effects of the non-verbal ritual media are less changeable. Or, in other words, it forms a symbolic language with respect to the expressive and performing aspects, presenting a historically fixed mechanism of behavior to secure the restrictions on conducts of social members. If the legal system belongs to the hard part of Confucianist power, the *Li*-system belongs to its soft one; the latter is characteristic of its effective performing force in maintaining the Confucianist order. This maintenance is firstly realized in mentality and consciousness through the forced performance of non-verbal emblematic gestures of various types.

It is interesting to note that, comparatively speaking, the scholarship of *Li*-learning has been less developed in Chinese history, primarily because there were less related written texts appearing in the Han period. Regarding its constitutional feature, *Li*-learning involved more practice than theory. Later there appeared two "fabricated" pre-*Ch'in* classics: the *Li Records* and the *Li of Zhou* in the later Han period. Apparently the *Li* category in the Confucianist set of classics was enriched and substantialized accordingly, while in fact the fabricated phenomenon brought about more questions than clarifications. The fact is that, regarding its constitution, Confucianist *Li*-teaching should be more related to the practical than the theoretical aspects. On the one hand, these

fabricated classical texts inserted in *Li*-learning were not really necessary for the performance of the Confucianist Canon, and on the other hand it was not in consistence with the constitutional identity of the *Li*-system as social customs and behavioral practices. For the thoughts about *Li*-learning had been expressed in all other Confucianist classics already. It is generally accepted that the only “genuine” classic in this section of *Li*-learning is the *Codes of Rites (Yi Li)*, the broken records of ritual practice in several pre-*Ch'in* states. It contains only some unsystematic descriptions of the local ritual practices of various kinds that were generally taken as true historical documents. Obviously the existing written form of the pre-*Ch'in* ritual practice, regardless of how genuine it could be, was only selectively recorded and edited as well.

It is interesting to note that in the *Li*-system even the verbal media tend to be semantically stereotyped, accordingly losing their original spiritual function. Words and their expressive/communicative roles become quasi-corporeal gestures: the verbal signifiers function as non-verbal symbolic stimulants. In social and cultural communications based on the ritual system we see sets of stereotyped expressions conveying fixed ideas and effects in social life. The fact can also explain why *Li*-learning contains much less intellectual contents than other sections of Confucianist classics; or, alternatively, the classic contains more behavioral codes for practices than intellectual intelligibility for theoretical understanding. As a result, the verbal media in *Li*-learning is more symbolic performing than literally communicative; they function as a coded index for ruled conducts rather than as means for intelligent discourse.

In a less strict sense, the Confucianist ritual system functioned also as a quasi-legal system that we may name today as the historical source of the Confucianist ideological mechanism. First there developed behavioral patterns of rites functioning as supplementary systems to the politico-legal coercive machine, and then it was developed further to the more sophisticated cultural phenomena that functioned both quasi-legally and cultural-ideologically. The latter became the source of rhetoric gestures of Confucianist cultural artifacts. In its archetypical modes the *Li*-system, including both its verbal and non-verbal parts, was in essence the system of behavioral rules and codes that are more related to the requirements of conductive enforcements than to moral intelligibility. The verbal signifiers in the *Li*-system become the instructions for conducts and prohibitions per se. In the final analysis, the value of the soft *Li*-system is not less effective than the hard legal system in maintaining social control. We may describe it in today's terms by saying that the former is a “soft force” and the latter a “hard force”. But both can work in two different dimensions: the

external and internal ones. At its higher level of performance the *Li*-system is interiorized into mental mechanisms and exteriorized into corporal patterns so as to exercise a more profoundly influential effect on patterned inclinations and conducts. The fact also explains why the Confucianist society had been able to exist for such a long time without a structural change despite its constant political vicissitudes.

If we conclude that the *Li*-system is the main secret of the continuous stability of the Confucianist society, the statement implies three different meanings. First, as a pre-legal or quasi-legal system, it works together with the legal system to maintain socio-political order. In this aspect it could be more basic and more effective than the latter in producing people's habit of obeying the legal order; it shapes the inner self-control mechanism. Second, the consciousness shaped through performing the *Li*-learning leads to a deep belief in the justice of the Confucianist world that becomes the very soil of Confucianist cultural life. Third, within the two mental orders, an ethically-directed interpersonal attitude has been shaped. The behavioral inclination towards other people is normally regulated within social stratification and it further forms a psychological state of ethical character in individuals: the respectful mental state with respect to other people in a graded modification and towards the social-political hierarchy itself. This psychological state concerning morality, regardless of its related ethical meaning, becomes the strong origin of Chinese cultural creations.

The above three types of historical results of the *Li*-system have been realized mainly by the non-verbal *Li* media in which even the verbal media function as quasi-non-verbal ones. Both verbal and non-verbal media in the *Li*-system function in a symbolically performing way, bringing about the regulated attitudinal and behavioral norms in mental and behavioral inclinations. Genetically speaking, this *Li* attitudinal mentality had been shaped more through the exercise of the non-verbal and quasi-non-verbal media at the physical and behavioral level than through its impact at the intellectual level. Its basic source was the unconscious historical process as such rather than any theoretical invention. The point lies in that the non-verbal media are more easily and more effectively implemented as instructions for the regulated conductive patterns. In the signifying and communicative channels, the signified non-verbal forms also tend to be stereotyped and fixed, accordingly weakening or losing their original semantic role. A Chinese character has a number of possible senses in the dictionary, and its actual meaning in texts is contextually determined. But now, in the *Li*-system, the verbal elements function more as behavioral

instructions than expressions of ideas and conceptions. In result, the verbal and non-verbal elements function at the same practical level.

The so-called *Li*-state, which had been shaped on the virtue of education and performance of the ritual system, is characterized by its having a complicated network of rich rites and norms in social and political life. The *Li*-system strictly standardizes people's conduct in a graded normative system and interiorizes those norms and habits in inclinations, shaping a persisting state of mutually-respectful psychology. The *Li*-system and its practices are effective in shaping and maintaining the mental state with its intellectual, emotional and inclinational factors that become the rooted basis for people at different levels to respond to Confucianist instructions with willingness and spontaneity. For this purpose the non-verbal media of the *Li*-system could function more effectively just because of these unintelligible underpinnings; they became the mere sign-systems for forming patterned habits and customs that had been performed naturally in history. The point lies in the practical efficiency of securing the graded social order whose intellectual implication is only added later for extra ideological indoctrination. That is why the verbal part of the *Li*-system functions mainly at a behavioral level rather than at an intelligent one: words work as the immediate stimulants for ruled attitudes and actions, or internal and external behaviors as such. Conduct and inclination for conduct are multiply programmed in terms of Confucianist codes during the historical process.

Verbally-involved rites and non-verbally-involved rites work together to shape consciousness, habits and customs with respect to the directed patterns of the moral potential, mental inclination, ethical attitude and practical conduct of the individual and the collective. Ideologically-sociologically speaking, the *Li*-system becomes the cornerstone of the historically subsisting Confucianist society whose comprehensive dictatorship lies more in the shaping of the psychological formants caused by habitually-realized ritual-behavioral patterns, which function as the programmed material stimulants, than in the external coercion carried out by the law system. The so-called "*li zhi*" (to govern mainly through the *Li*-system) in contrast to "*fa zhi*" (to govern mainly by criminal law) in Confucianist doctrine indicates a more utilitarian than moralist origin in its historical performance. In general, there existed a four-layer control system: the attitudinal (psychological), the ritual (emblematic, rhetorical), the performing (behavioral, habitual and repetitive), and the violent-coercive (institutional, legal and subjugating). They work respectively at individual and social levels as different enforcing channels among which the middle two play the key role in performing the *Li*-system.

The *Li*-system can be taken in different chosen scopes that possibly connect with the (internal) conceptual and the (external) legal poles, and selectively function in different contexts. By saying that the sections of the middle two parts of the *Li*-system are the key parts in its functioning, we emphasize the central role of the non-verbal ritual/actional performance consisting of the institutional, emblematic and behavioral dimensions. The emblematic parts consist of different sensual media, each of which performs its special effects to strengthen the rooted inclination of the Confucianist agent to effectively follow the rules of the Confucianist order.

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## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

# DISTINGUISHING REALITY FROM DISCOURSE IN CHINESE HISTORIOGRAPHY: FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF HISTORICAL SEMIOTICS<sup>70</sup>

### Abstract

Interdisciplinary and cross-cultural semiotics will systematically change the present-day academic compartmentalization, which will especially impact the constitution of historiography. Emphasizing the distinction between reality and discourse, this chapter suggests a new historiographic view based on document-centrism rather than periodical division. Then historians can more reasonably reach historical truth in hermeneutic terms. Following a semiotic rereading of a modern Chinese historical school, *Gu-Shi-Bian* (textual criticism of historical literature), a more serious comparative historical theory will be established in the global humanities. This modern critical Chinese historiography will be instructive to the development of historical science in the world.

Semiotic studies are characterized by their interdisciplinary nature while the current academic world has been generally organized in a disciplinary-centric framework. Accordingly, western semiotic studies today still tend to maintain their academic status as one “discipline” among many others. In my opinion, the fact becomes one of the main obstacles to the substantial progress of global semiotics today (Li 2006: 176-177). As cross-cultural semiotics has steadily developed in the new century, this obstacle becomes more and more serious. So-called cross-cultural semiotics is even faced with a more difficult task for overcoming

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the double restrictions of this discipline-centrism. As I have pointed out several times before, cross-cultural semiotics is in essence another kind of interdisciplinary studies. Semiotics is not only the methodological tool to be used in conventional disciplines but also is (or should be) an approach towards a general goal of a theoretical breakthrough in the recent development of the humanities. In light of this, semiotics will especially play a *revolutionary* role in the advancement of European Sinology, American China Studies and Chinese “State Learning” (*Guo Xue*), among others. It is noted that they are all related to traditional Chinese historical discourse whose multiply complicated semantic compositions need to be sufficiently reorganized in our times. The traditional Chinese historical and literary discourses have been created and accumulated in the long course of Chinese history. For the sake of making the traditional discourses more intelligible in terms of the modern academic framework, we should further more reasonably classify the historical discourses. For this purpose a more intelligible scientific criterion for the new classification of the discourses of Chinese historiography is required first.

## 1. The *Gu-Shi-Bian* School of Textual Criticism in Modern Chinese Historical Studies

● One of the remarkable features in semiotic analysis is its maintenance of a distinction between referent and meaning in written discourses in traditional history. In other words, the distinction is made between historical reality and its verbal representation; the latter is in fact historiography writings or “historical discourses”. The term “history”, either in Chinese or in western languages, usually means reality and discourse alike in historiography practice. This traditional mixture of the two meanings of the term is connected to a basic conceptual confusion with respect to the relationship between historical reality and its corresponding verbal representation. As a result, on the one hand there is a conception of the historical process or reality and on the other a conception of historical discourse. The two conceptual categories are conventionally taken as being widely overlapped. A historical discourse is usually taken as the direct representation of the related reality. In ancient times reading the former amounted to knowing the latter. Since modern times, Chinese historians have become more and more critical of the semantic ambiguity implied in the classical historiography. Among them, Gu Jiegang’s work is the most productive in his textual criticism of the

traditional historical texts.<sup>71</sup> His theory of textual criticism is basically displayed in a clear distinction between reality and discourse by reading the ancient historical texts; or, in maintaining the conceptual distinction between historical truth and historical records. According to the school, there exists a traditional tendency to falsify or to retort historical writings. In my interpretation, Gu's scientific approach to the critical examination of the traditional texts reflects a semiotic character: it not only emphasizes the distinction between reality and discourse but also pays attention to the constitution of different systems of historical discourses. The constitution of historiography is related to the quality or probability of the representational function of historical discourse. In other words, the historical critic today should explore the true identity of traditional historical writings, especially of those about the pre-Qin Imperial period. The learning represented by Gu and his school's followers is called "*Gu Shi Bian*" (literally, the discrimination of ancient historical texts), that is to say, the school tends to distinguish between "true" and "false" ancient historical writings with respect to their different manifestations. Their scientific stance is based on a knowledge that some ancient scholars would intentionally or unintentionally make false, fictive or imaginative historical writings about the historical reality referred to.

## 2. The Necessary Distinction between Reality and Discourse

In terms of the above modern scientific experience, this author suggests a basic criterion regarding the classification of traditional Chinese historical writings: the features of historical discourses, rather than the related historical processes (or reality). In other words, a modern historical theory should first of all make clear what is the object proper of their operation in historiography practices. In other words, the object of the operation is said to be not the historical reality itself but rather the related documentation. The true object of a historian's operation is the verbal and non-verbal documents rather than the historical processes referred to. Accordingly, we should not accept a historical strategy directed to the related historical reality as such, which is in fact inaccessible except through its broken material; therefore historical reality should not be confused with its corresponding documentation. In light of this point of view, different kinds

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<sup>71</sup> Among his works, the most important is the 7-volume book series *Gu-Shi-Bian* (Reflections on Ancient Chinese History), edited by Jiegang Gu (or Ku Chieh-kang) and others, published by the Ancient Classics Publisher in 1982.

of documentation systems can refer to the same historical period. Accordingly, we should organize two different types of studies with respect to the same related period, although the relationship or connection of the two kinds of studies can and should be examined separately in future. This specially chosen approach is to reject a naïve point of view that the different kinds of documents can be used in mixed way or at random for the same historical period referred to. Historical reality and its related historical discourse belong to two different epistemological categories. But a clearer distinction between reality and discourse will lead to a more reliable approach to understanding historical reality through a more effective examination of the written discourse.

### 3. Four Types of Chinese Historiography

In comparison with the traditional classification of historical studies based on related periods, the new criterion suggests a new classification of historical studies according to different structures and functions of historical documentation. For example, concerning Chinese history, they could be in turn:

- **A-Discourse:** Modern History, called Type A, starting from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; this is characterized by a more scientific way of thinking as well as by much richer techniques for constructing historical discourse, just as we see in modern western history;
- **B-Discourse:** Standard Traditional History (*zheng shi*), called Type B, organized by the imperial academic institutions for 2,000 years, and which is characterized by its moral-pragmatic historical ideology, the certain consciousness of historical truth and the stereotyped writing procedures;
- **C-Discourse:** Pre-Qin Written History (*xian qin shi*), which is characterized by its complicated mixture of discourses based on true records, imaginative myths and oral legends. This Type C, as the earliest form of written history in China, has a special significance but its authenticity is widely unfounded. The most important and difficult problems emerge with respect to C-discourse;
- **D-Discourse:** Real Historical Documents, called Type D, consisting of pre-historical words and physical remnants based on the findings from archaeology. The development of modern archaeology has led to a seemingly more promising perspective for

ancient history. And for Chinese archaeology, its relationship to historical studies is much closer because of the findings from the inscriptions on bone and tortoise shells that are indeed the records of sacrificial activities of the remote theocratic regimes (Shang times). The physical existence of the primitive pre-historical writing as Type D presents a great potential for exploring the historical reality that has been presumed to correspond to Type C, for they share a reference to the same historical period of the legendary Shang Dynasty.<sup>72</sup>

The four classes of historical discourse are defined by the constitutions and functions of the related documentation, while each can be freely connected to any historical period. For example, all kinds of historiography can deal with problems relating to the same Shang Dynasty. But in fact, different types of Shang discourses should not be directly combined merely because of their common historical referent. In particular, C-discourse, which consists of written documents, and D-discourse, which consists of special written documents (inscriptions and epigraphs) as well as unearthed findings, roughly share the same reference to the Shang period and the early Zhou periods. This distinction is related to an understanding that what is written in C-discourse cannot be naturally taken as authentic records of the events in the related periods.

A typology of Chinese historiography is therefore required to be different from the conventional division of Chinese historical periods. The former is based on the composition, constitution, structure and function of different historical disciplines, while the latter is based on the temporal demarcation of historical processes, although both seem to maintain a natural corresponding relationship. On the one hand, any type of historiography can deal with all possible historical periods; on the other, one kind of historiography has its main corresponding temporal period, especially the A, B and D types. Type C is more specially constituted because there is a long distance between the time of its formation and the time of the periods it refers to.

In general, contemporary history has higher authenticity in its records and descriptions because the distance between the time of the historical reality and the time to treat the reality in historiography is relatively short, such as in Type A as well as Type B. Type D has the same or a more typical feature like this, but Type D is not made by a more developed

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<sup>72</sup> This four-category model was first presented by the author in his paper given at the conference about Gu Jiegang's historical thought held at Shang Dong University in October 2006.

historiography; instead, it only makes available some physical but rather broken material. The verbal texts of the Shang oracle inscriptions as the records and relics of supernatural ritual behaviors do not imply much information about important events that can be used for reconstructing a proper historiography of the Shang. In fact, the so-called Shang history as an established discipline is made by a mixture of documentation of Type C and Type D. The epistemological problem concerned is related to the corresponding relations between C and D: both cover the same historical period referred to while the constitutions of Type C and Type D are highly distinctive from each other in different aspects.

● On the one hand, according to our above classification, there are four types of Chinese historiography with their related historical materials, while on the other there are four historical methodologies corresponding to Types A, B, C and D. That means different types of historiography require different scientific-operative procedures. In addition, each methodological category further contains two parts: the classical and the modern. ● Or, in other words, each of the above historical and related methodological categories should be combined with modern historical methodologies we are concerned with in our times.

A type is related to modern history or historiography in connection to the modern period; its mechanism of historical studies is radically different from the other three types. The multiplicity of creations of written documents in modern historical science makes the operative means of the player radically different from ancient historians. In this sense, the construction of historiography consists of two parts: the historical discourse and the method to study the former. The former contains Types A, B, C and D, as indicated above, and the latter contains both the classical and the modern. Historians respectively related to the four types of historiography have different combinations of both intellectual and practical means. The historian of Type A (the modern) and the historian of Type B (the classical) are in fact different kinds of scholars; namely their scholarships belong to different academic realms. However, the four types of historiography share the same object of “history” as the homogeneous historical reality-process. But, once more, the historical process itself cannot be reduced to the object of any historiography; instead, the object consists of different types of documentary material or historical discourse containing their special constructing ways. For the latter the four types of historiography have their respective types of object as written discourse rather than as reality.

#### 4. Reexamination of the So-called “Double-Evidence Method”

Therefore we can understand why the naïve principle, the so-called “double-evidence method” invented by Wang Guowei (1994) and accepted by many contemporary Chinese and Sinological scholars, must be reconsidered or redefined now. Their principle simplistically presupposes that any statements in C-discourse should be taken as authentic as long as they are not denied by any evidences taken from D-discourse. The principle is based on a common sense that the periods referred to by Type C and Type D naturally correspond to each other, while in fact the actual period or process is not actually accessible. What we can reach is only some written discourse as such which claims to refer to that period. Because of Type D we indeed gain some physical (written and non-verbal) records of that period, but they are not yet established historical discourse.

Another difficulty of this principle lies in its accepting any single case as historical evidence without double checks from other cross-reference supports. As a result, it tends to accept most statements from C-discourse, namely taking C-discourse as mostly authentic historical documents. This scholarly tendency has become quite popular over the past 70 years within and outside China. The consequence is less caused by scientific progress than by an emotional self-satisfaction, because so many modern Chinese historians have mixed scientific and ideological criteria with an idea that the existence of more authentic historical documents can display more “national pride” or “self-respect” for China in the world.<sup>73</sup> That is the main reason why Gu and his school has been neglected for so long by both domestic and overseas Chinese historians for the past half century.

#### 5. In Defense of the Historical Truth by Historical Semiotics

In a certain sense it seems to be true that history cannot be separated from literature. All classical historical works either in the west or in the east definitely contain literary elements. Or, more exactly, historical narratives naturally or unavoidably contain literary fictions. Epistemologically speaking, however, we should distinguish the typical history in conception

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<sup>73</sup> E.L. Shaughnessy said that the scholarly rejection of the existence of the Hsia Dynasty will hurt the sense of self-respect of the Chinese. That is the reason why most Chinese scholars tend to confirm a longer history of China in their studies (see Tu 1992: 881).

from the actual history that has been realized in historical reality. Type A, the history written in the modern historical period, exhibits a scientific model of historiography that presents itself through a variety of new methodological means of scientific nature. According to Type A, historical practice should be separated from literary practice in its constitution. This fact indicates a possibility at the ideal level that history should present historical truth rather than fictions. In other words, the literary elements actually contained in historical works should be excluded in an ideal sense. There exists an ideal type of scientific history with respect to the concept of historical truth.

In terms of actual historical practices, we should say that there exists a spectrum of historical authenticity. From the above classification of historiography we can conceive a notion of the authenticity of discourses with different degrees in historiography. This differentiation itself of historical discourse based on different categories of historical documentation and methods further indicates the validity of the concept of historical truth, which can, however, only be accepted in relative terms. Historical relativism is caused by the shortcomings implied by the techniques as such of historiography, rather than by certain historical-philosophical epistemology. This conception of the degree of authenticity in different types of historical discourse can be made sense of especially by the contrast between modern history and classical history. All kinds of intellectual and technical tools for making historiography in modern periods makes the historical representation attain a much higher level than what people could do in ancient times. This sharp distinction between modern and traditional histories implies an increased theoretical intelligibility with respect to the conception of historical truth.

In principle, the structure and function of Type A is widely similar to those of modern western historiography; or, alternatively, a general modern historical science makes itself essentially different from all traditional historiography because of its highly enhanced scientific way of thinking about historiography and its related technical conditions. Regarding “modern or contemporary history” we can obtain much more reliable knowledge than what we can do with respect to “ancient history”. In fact there are two different types of “history”: the modern and the ancient; or the scientific and pre-scientific according to their different conditions for historical constitutions. There is no longer a single discipline called history or historiography but at least two distinctive ones. Traditional Chinese history evidently belongs to the latter, which is characterized by its pre-scientific features with respect to the quality of documentation and writing with respect to historiography. The pre-



scientific feature of traditional history naturally makes itself less authentic while the fact has nothing to do with a nihilist theory about historical truth. There are a lot of practical factors actually obstructing us from reaching historical truth; the fact has not rejected the validity of the concept of historical truth. On the contrary, logically we need the concept of historical truth to make our other concepts used in our practice in historiography reasonable, in which we are only required to employ a practical rationality for establishing our scientific explorations without being misled to any other realm of metaphysical speculation. Unlike all other disciplines in the humanities, history is closely tied with our actual life and future. In history we require an operative and feasible rationality to improve our knowledge and practice concerning human fortune; namely we need to have a more reasonable way to place theory and practice in a better balance. Therefore, semiotics can be helpful for us to achieve this purpose.

In terms of the scientific approach of semiotics, we emphasize that the conceptual distinction of the historiography type and the historical period can help us more reasonably employ historical studies to more clearly know the historical reality of all kinds, including those made in both the pre-scientific and scientific periods. The terms “reality” and “truth” in history can only be relatively accepted because of the empirical nature of human social and intellectual life. What we are able to have and expect is merely the knowledge of historical processes organized by our limited capability in intellectual practices. But we should do our best to constantly increase that capability. The only principle for the objective is the rationality of methods in social practice, for we are doomed to organize our individual and collective practices in a rational way. Historical studies have become a leading branch among all human sciences today, and historical theory as a newly formed discipline is typically interdisciplinary in character. A new historical science guided by semiotics-directed historical theory will also become one of the forces of momentum in promoting the global development of the humanities.

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## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### CHINESE PHILOSOPHY AND SEMIOTICS<sup>74</sup>

The term “Chinese Philosophy” (CP) as a modern discipline about ancient Chinese philosophy has been established during the 20<sup>th</sup> century by modern Chinese philosophers and foreign Sinological scholars through the comparative studies of Chinese humanistic classics and western philosophy. At present, its academic content has already obtained a general recognition not only in Sinology but also in general philosophy. This discipline has become one of the pedagogical and academic professions in current academia, maintaining its established scholarly-institutions and educational programs; as we see in other disciplines, it has created its own scholarly criteria and aims in its disciplinary system. From a professional point of view, any questions concerning CP can be raised and solved within its currently fixed academic framework. Nevertheless, CP has recently aroused wider attention outside its professional field, and its intellectual worth has been further explored from some new angles beyond its conventional context. This chapter attempts to reevaluate the intellectual potential of CP from a semiotic perspective.

Roughly speaking, the current scholarship of CP consists of three major parts: the ethical, the life-philosophical and ontological-metaphysical. Compared with their western counterparts, the epistemological, scientific and aesthetic sections of CP seem to be relatively less inspiring. In CP, more attention has been paid to the ontological-metaphysical aspects shaped by the traditional Taoist and Buddhist philosophical speculations. This first part seems to be more easily communicated with, or more similar to, its western counterpart, but the semantic-rhetoric divergence between Chinese and western philosophical reasoning makes their mutual effective communication really difficult. The second part is taken from philosophy and literature alike. But the Chinese life-philosophical texts sound more literary than philosophical. It is this literary type of Chinese

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<sup>74</sup> Originally published in *Two Roads to Wisdom? Chinese and Analytic Philosophical Traditions*, edited by Prof. Bo Mou (Chicago: Open Court, 2001), 169-196.

life-philosophy that has aroused a wider interest among western readers who are not necessarily familiar with professional philosophy of any kind. It is the third part – Chinese ethics – that has obtained the much higher estimation of western ethics scholars, who may find the Chinese ethical experience could be quite well appreciated from an empirical and realistic point of view, although its philosophizing way seems less elaborate, compared with the western ones.

In addition, a complete understanding of the composition of CP is far from being a merely philosophical discussion; in fact it involves different aspects such as the semantic organizations, social/scholarly institutions, scholars' motivations, the intellectual condition of the audience, cultural structures, politico-historical contexts, and the traditional academic functions in Chinese history. Therefore, precisely speaking, "Chinese Philosophy" is not yet a really well organized modern discipline within the current academic world. As is commonly said in China, "philosophy, history and literature belong to one family". Moreover, the classifications of academic learning in Chinese and Western traditions are essentially divergent.<sup>75</sup> The compositional comparison between western and Chinese philosophies should be made in reference to the central epistemological structure of modern academic systems.

## 1. Chinese-Western Comparative Philosophical Studies

In reviewing the development of philosophy in China during this century, we find most Chinese philosophers have exhibited an interest more in western philosophy than in the Chinese one. If Chinese philosophy refers to all philosophical studies in China today, it will cover much more content than CP itself, which is defined as a special modern discipline about ancient Chinese philosophy. CP has indeed played an important role in modern studies of the traditional Chinese humanities at home and in Sinology, or China Studies, in the west. For different reasons and motives,

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<sup>75</sup> Julia Ching has pointed out, "One discovers Huang Tsung-hsi's inconsistencies, his moving from philosophical statements to classical allusions to polemical discussions, usually without any warning to the reader" (Huang 1987: 34). This shortcoming of Huang in philosophical composition is in fact a general tendency among many traditional Chinese "philosophers", including the theoretically more elaborated Sung scholars, in that they were obviously weaker in logical construction. Another obvious shortcoming in their philosophical discourse is a fragmentary mode of thinking and writing which can be represented by Chu Hsi's commentary style in his theoretical discourse. Like other Chinese philosophers, Chu hardly finished any systematic writings.

these two fields of CP studies have communicated to each other closely for the past twenty years, and both are scholastically related to another new discipline – comparative philosophy. In a narrow sense, the modern content of CP has been established partly in reference to the western philosophical model. In a wider sense, however, following the development of Chinese-western comparative studies, the theoretical part of CP has been always reorganized with respect to its western counterpart. Furthermore, both fields of CP studies have been recently involved in a wider academic interaction with other scholarly branches as well.

●n the whole, Chinese-western comparative studies, including the philosophical ones, have been established on the basis of the traditional western scholarly model, especially its scientific part. That means most Chinese scholars engaged in the studies have already accepted the western analytical tradition as a model for approaching their own cultural/intellectual heritage. ●ver the course of Chinese intellectual history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there have always been two divergent directions in studying traditional Chinese cultural/academic history: the linguistic-historically directed (*yu-shih-pai*) and the philosophically or metaphysically directed (*hsüan-hsüe-pai*) approaches. In essence, the linguistic-historical school involves not only the related special subjects in Chinese classics but also its methodology. For traditional Chinese textual criticism (*kao-jü-hsue*) seems to be in accord with the scientific spirit. Therefore, concerning the modern methodology in CP, there has emerged a double confrontation in this comparative field: that between the scientific and the metaphysical, as well as that between the Chinese and the western metaphysical. In a broader sense, the situation also exists in present China Studies in the west, because most Sinological studies belong to the former type.

Thus, Chinese-western comparative philosophy in the narrow sense has formed a special field involving more complicated backgrounds. This special field or discipline about this special comparative philosophy was first presented by the earlier New Confucianist philosophers of this century. Precisely speaking, we should not call these earlier studies genuine comparative research, because the involved comparative endeavors were only performed in reorganizing or reediting the Chinese philosophical material in terms of the western terminological and disciplinary frames. The more serious comparative studies of the subject were made later by the Chinese philosophers who belonged to the second generation of that school. Its typical trait was expressed by an intellectual tendency in which they tended to combine the western philosophy-disciplinary model and the Chinese metaphysical/ontological subject matter in a comparative way. When the Chinese philosophers of the third generation of the school and

others with a similar tendency were trained and taught in the west, Hong Kong and Taiwan, the comparative work spread internationally, making the new discipline of CP further redefined in the west. On the other hand, the comparative studies are still faced with a double confrontation, namely that between the Chinese and western philosophical approaches and that between the western philosophical and western interdisciplinary directions. With respect to the latest stage of these comparative philosophical studies, the difficulty could be made less severe if we can selectively deal with the content of CP out of a practical purpose. Or, if we only consider how to promote our educational or academic programs according to the currently feasible standards, the actual situation itself can provide the workable criteria for increasing academic benefits of any kind by any acceptable means. Instead, we intend to reconsider CP problems from a theoretical point of view in terms of the entire present-day humanistic-scholarly situation.

The contemporary efforts towards reinterpreting traditional Chinese philosophy, either in China or in the west, are tantamount to an attempt to reorganize traditional Chinese philosophical history in terms of the western academic framework; namely, to rearrange and reorder original Chinese thoughts following the related western academic models. Thus, the reorganized Chinese philosophical textual materials may function as a sketchy representation of the related western philosophical part. A typical example could be that represented by Mou Tzong-san, who, being a self-claimed believer in Kantian philosophy, still insists on the original Chinese way of philosophical reasoning, although we can hardly find real commensurability between the two approaching styles (cf. Mou 1991: 115-117). For example, he put the Kantian and the Chinese parts into a tripartite stage of ethical reasoning: the intelligent, metaphysical and humanist intuitive stages, attempting to find similar metaphysical efforts in the Sung/Ming ethical philosophy. On the other hand, however, some Chinese philosophers of this school only arrange different discussions of Chinese and western philosophies in the same textual work without processing a genuinely theoretical dialogue between the two. Nevertheless, Mou maintained clearly that “the bridge of the Chinese-Western philosophical communication should be based on Kantian philosophy” (Mou 1985: xiv). In his opinion, Chinese and western philosophies essentially tend to be in a harmonious relationship (*ibid*). This kind of comparative work appears as a comparative theoretical analysis about the two philosophical systems, but is in fact a merely artificially arranged coexistence of the two separate demonstrative discourses in the same textual system. Talking about Sung Neo-Confucianist philosophers, the

Sinological philosopher Chan Wing-tsit said, “The important thing to note now is that they put the whole Confucian system on a metaphysical foundation and a rational basis” (Chu and Lü 1967: xviii). In result, this Neo-Confucianism development of the Sung seems to bring about a reasonable excuse used by modern scholars to interpret CP in terms of western philosophy, which has been substantially more influential than traditional Chinese philosophy in different modern Chinese historical periods. As a matter of fact, the metaphysical part of CP is far from being logically commensurable to its western counterpart. It is indicated that what we obtain through reading such comparative discourse is basically similar to what we read purely in the original Chinese contexts; namely, the added western interpretations do not substantially advance our understanding of the related Chinese philosophical discourses, although there are certainly some instructive results that are helpful for us to interpret the original ancient works in the modern scholarly context. This is because the modern Chinese mind with scientific common sense has a higher capability of performing the analyzing and synthesizing processes that could more clearly represent the structure and function of the original discourses. The point, however, is that this kind of comparative study does not increase or enrich our philosophical understanding or stimulate our spiritual inspiration. If we find something metaphysically attractive, that might be mainly due to our acceptance of the western metaphysical model that is indeed logically more persuasive. A similar thing seems to happen to the Chinese historians as well, who employ modern scientific knowledge to reorganize traditional Chinese historiographic discourses. Nevertheless, the achievements of modern Chinese historians are more positive above all because they keep a critical attitude about their scholarly objects and purport to more scientifically explore the meaning of the original discourses without necessarily sharing its original ideological stance. By contrast, the New Confucianist philosophers, unfortunately, closely share the same ideological position as traditional Chinese philosophy; what they have pursued is not something scientifically represented; instead, they try to ascertain and strengthen the original values and modes of thinking implied in the classical texts by means of comparative analytical methods. The fact is that the two procedures of scientific analyses and spiritual reformulation are essentially divergent in nature; the both do not necessarily support each other, either logically or emotionally, despite a textual coexistence of different argumentative discourses given in one’s work. Thus, on one hand, western philosophy certainly does not need any additional theoretical support from Chinese metaphysics and, on the other hand, Chinese philosophy also does not

epistemologically need logical or aesthetic backing from its western counterpart either, primarily because these two sets of discourses belong to different academic institutional systems. Due to various reasons, a modern Chinese or Sinological mind can accept the two different philosophical systems at the same time, while what is added to the comparative discourses is only the historical message of the alien philosophical experience for the modern mind. As regards Chinese philosophy, it keeps its traditional intellectual autonomy, implying various levels such as the linguistic, logical, aesthetic, social, political and historical ones. Its “meaning” involves different semantic and intellectual layers, and it can only produce its spiritual inspiration or realize its values to a limited extent within its own traditional cultural context, whether historical or imaginative.

This comparative study of philosophy organized between the Chinese and western lines is a natural scholarly development in the scientific era; or, more precisely, it is a result of a spiritual confrontation between the modern scientific and the traditional Chinese cultural trends. In general, Chinese-western comparative philosophy is confronted with a three-fold difficulty: namely, the scientific, philosophical and spiritual. All three aspects are involved in our present task of evaluating the significance of Chinese philosophy in modern social and intellectual contexts. The meaning, function and value of any philosophical traditions are determined in their own cultural, social, intellectual and academic contexts. Unlike traditional Chinese learning, western humanistic thoughts are essentially in consistence with the modern scientific world. There has been a basic intellectual continuity between ancient, modern and contemporary thoughts and scholarship in western history. For the Chinese, however, there has been an absolute “epistemological break” between its tradition and its modernity. We need a special hermeneutics, rather than a mere literally comparative “short-circuit”, to deal with this cognitional gap. And semiotics is just one of the effective approaches to handle the epistemological breaks caused by different cultural patterns.

## 2. Chinese Character-Semantics

Divergences of Chinese and western academic classifying systems in connection to their mentality patterns, linguistic systems and cultural traditions have produced different semantic organizations for presenting their respective academic discourses. From Locke to Saussure, it has been well known that the stable links between the referent, idea, meaning, sound and name guarantee a constant semantic connection between the



signified and the signifier. The innate link between meaning and sound naturally limits the number of semes of a word. The specialty of Chinese culture and its philosophy is firstly expressed in its linguistic and semantic organizations, namely its character-centric writing system. This system brought about a special trait for Chinese: the form of writing is prior to that of sound and meaning. A single written unit (character) can be correspondent to several or numerous sounds and their related meanings almost in an irregular way. One character with its pictoriographic origin could keep an imagistic constancy because of a stability of the sketchy structure of the basic strokes of a character. Such an independent written entity surviving across history has become a “sign” that can carry different meanings with related different sounds in its various contexts. One written character is not the representative of one idea or concept; instead it can be the sign for different ideas. This structure of one visual sign vs. multiple meanings is obviously different from the western sound-conceptual correspondent pattern. A character can be used by different people of different times to refer to different things and to signify different meanings in multiple quite flexibly associative ways. By comparing those different meanings of the same character we should say there are different uses of the same sign, but not that one conceptual unit or category presents different varieties of a certain meaning or a certain “philosophical category”. If so, what Tang Chün-yi discusses in his work on a Chinese history of philosophical concepts about the categories of “*Tao*” or “*li*” (the principle) does not involve some single categorical set but rather involves merely different uses of the same character. Those signified-meanings and represented-objects do not exist in a logical relationship with each other; there is an etymological flexibility in their historically formative processes. The so-called Chinese-western philosophical-categorical comparison will be faced with the same problem. Chinese philosophical concepts exist neither in a logical hierarchy nor in a semantic consistence. In fact, we can hardly trace back a conceptual lineage of a character-word. Tang obviously confuses the pragmatic uses of the character *Tao* with the implied meanings in his interpretation of the different meanings of the same character or word as being logically linked to each other. Or, it seems that the category *Tao* develops itself in different stages, such as those expressing “fortune of heaven, virtue, heart, ritual, Tao of heaven, Tao of earth, Tao of human and the Tao” (Tang 1976: 10). In fact, the word *Tao* is taken by him just as the designation of a general term like “principle”, “truth” or “philosophy”. The general term itself becomes a universal concept possibly connected to different theoretical systems according to pragmatic convenience or habits. As a matter of fact, the term

*Tao* is only a character that can be used in different ways. First, the meaning of a concept represented by a written sign is not simply implied in that sign; any meaning is the combinational result of the sign and its linguistic/cultural context. It is a resultant effect of the interaction of the character and one or several of its possible contexts. The situation becomes even more complex with respect to the structure of the character-meaning. According to modern semantics there is a division between the denotational and connotational aspects of the meaning. Then we may assert that the connotational system of Chinese is much more complicated than western ones because of its having much more complicated associative flexibility/arbitrariness. The identity of the total meaning of a character in a concrete contextual hierarchy can be both multiply and heterogeneously defined, containing a flexible combination of different denotational and connotational elements. That means, when fixed by a single or a complex context, one character can present not only one or several definite senses, it presents a meaning-hierarchy consisting of different semic qualities that play different parts in the signifying processes. And Chinese semantics is characterized by its much more plentiful connotational potential, which means, when an abstract concept is signified by a character in a concrete context, there could also be several other connoted meanings functioning on the emotional, volitional, rhetorical and other layers simultaneously. All of these meanings represented or aroused by a single sign can function with different reserves of meaning-effects at the same time. A qualified reader can thoroughly or exactly accept the related meaning-complex of a character or a sentence containing that character through his plentiful reading-practices. (That is why, comparatively speaking, the Chinese language is more difficult to handle than western languages and a western Sinologist must feel more difficulty when reading both classical historical Chinese and modern theoretical Chinese texts because he can hardly spend the time required for carrying out reading practices so as to accumulate sufficient “intuitive reading experience”.) Unlike the western logical-centric conceptual organizations, Chinese philosophical terms carry many other semantic aspects besides the logical one. According to a western logically-directed classifying system of interpreting Chinese philosophical concepts, the non-logical parts of their total meaning will be easily or unavoidably excluded or neglected. Following such a logical procedure we can certainly get a more clearly defined conceptual organization while at the same time lose many other related meaningful elements. The fact is that, by means of the mode of Chinese philosophizing, all sorts of meaningful elements

involved will work together in various changeable semantic networks, producing multi-synthetic semantic effects.

Modern Chinese philosophers have tried to reorganize and reformulate the traditional Chinese philosophical discourse, attempting to make it play an effective role in modern social and academic communication. As a result, what they attempt to do amounts to disconnecting the semantically synthetic texts from their original historical-cultural contexts. The disconnecting process occurs in two aspects: the signification and context-determinative. In fact, there are several kinds of signification institutions of Chinese philosophic discourse containing verbal, conceptual, disciplinary and cultural dimensions. The last one is by no means less important in forming the meaning-effect of Chinese philosophic discourse. Modern scholars of comparative philosophy would say that they would never neglect the alien semantic organizations and the related cultural contexts in their reinterpreting practices. For those qualified comparativist scholars, what they do in their scholarship may be only the creation of a double reading process: on one hand they form a singly realized process of comparative reading of different texts and on the other they employ the implicitly parallel strategies of reading the compared texts in terms of both Chinese and western cultural and academic codes. As we pointed out above, the so-called comparative study is in essence only a co-presentation of two different sets of academic rules. They are qualified to read both sides but are not necessarily qualified to establish the intelligible linkage between the two. Or, they get used to maintaining a parallel habit of reading different textual systems in the same psychological process. In other words, there is still the lack of an effective theoretical dialogue between the Chinese historical and the western modern discourses during the single-psychological but double-logical process. For the latter, the two logical systems cannot really support or be interconnected with each other at the theoretical level, particularly the parts concerning rhetorically and pragmatically semantic elements which are more closely rooted in the respective cultural contexts.

In one of my previous essays about Chinese character-based semantics, I explained why the modern Chinese language system is capable of being used for rather exactly translating the thought expressed by the western scientific-linguistic system through systematically changing the single-character concept to the double-character one. If character A contains a set of dictionary-semes (a, b, c,...) and character B contains a different set (a', b', c',...), then their semantic intersection as the two-character concept C, formed by dint of connecting the two characters A and B, can sufficiently decrease the related number of semes involved (cf. Li 1997d: 127). Prior

to any contextual semantic limitation, the two-character concept system has already systematically restricted and fixed the semantic organization of Chinese words embodied by characters. This transition from the earlier single-character concept system to the modern two-character one accompanied the earlier period of the modernization of Chinese intellectual life. A two-character concept brings about the intersection of the two seme-sets, and accordingly the number of semes of the resultant set can be reasonably decreased; namely its dictionary-meaning potential can be more relevantly restricted and redefined. Thus, the two-character concept system provides modern Chinese thinking with a more effective vocabulary tool without changing its original character-writing stratum, which can continue functioning as the basic semantic mechanism for effectively reading the traditional texts consisting of single-character concepts.

The one-character conceptual unit based on the Chinese written-character system has established a special argumentative rhetoric, characterized by its multi-semic-layer vocabulary and signification; namely, besides the logical layer, there are also emotional, volitional and aesthetic ones simultaneously converging on the same character-word. The one-character word containing a rich set of semes can be used to convey a multi-synthetic semic compound with the logical one as the central one in the argumentative genre. However, the argumentative communications in ancient texts are related to a synthetically formed semantics; this leads to the argumentative genre conveying extra meaning effects of the non-argumentative layers as well. The Chinese philosophical genre typical of this kind thus indicates more complicated meaning effects than its western counterpart. As a verbal carrier of the logical ideas, Chinese philosophical discourse indicates a weaker inferential power but a richer emotionally-volitionally stimulating power than western philosophical discourse. Or, alternatively, the two “philosophical” discursive systems function in quite different ways even merely with respect to their dictionary-semantic organizations. This divergence becomes more obvious while involving different aspects of the academic and cultural backgrounds. When Chinese philosophical discourse is reformulated according to the stricter logical standards used in western philosophy, the other important semantic layers will probably lose their effects or at least be seriously suppressed. In extreme cases, some CP texts reorganized in terms of the western semantic and disciplinary institutions might look like the proverb: “a fish that tries to survive on land”.

That is why we can see the fact that modern Chinese scholars can translate western theoretical texts into Chinese much more precisely than

ancient Chinese scholars translated Indian Buddhist texts, which is another kind of western language, into Chinese. (By the way, the structurally-made conceptual flaws naturally happening in Chinese-translated Buddhist texts have been neglected until today.) Our present topic is primarily about the comparative studies between the ancient Chinese and western scholarly-semantic systems. Mou Tzong-san and Tang Chün-yi may pay closer attention to both types of conceptual systems, maintaining an effective reading of the original Chinese texts and their semantic details. Trained in both the traditional Chinese and modern scholarships, they are qualified in delicately grasping the rhetorical charms of the original Chinese philosophical texts and western logic. Nevertheless, what they have really finished in their comparative thinking is not something organically synthesized, but rather only a direct confrontation of the two different logical and rhetoric traditions. That certainly provides some convenient means for us to perceive the similarities and divergences of the two systems in our comparative studies. What they have maintained, and some of their followers have failed to do, exactly rests in the effective reading of rhetoric-expressive parts of the Chinese original philosophical texts rooted in Chinese historical contexts that imply a pragmatically triggering strength operative in the Chinese ethical discourse. Attempting to give a western-logical backing to Chinese ethical reasoning, they can still keep a separate focus on the original rhetoric traits. The straightforward co-presentation of the two ethical expressions might increase the rhetorical enrichment of comparative discourse excepting the weakened logical strength. A more serious problem would happen to the comparativist scholars who read the Chinese texts mainly through a prior logical filtration due to a western-centric framework. In such a kind of reading, Chinese texts would become a sketchily simplified sign system carrying quasi-western philosophical ideas added with Chinese rhetoric coloring. Furthermore, what they can gain through this semantically selective way of reading alien texts must be secondary to the western counterparts characterized by their much stronger logical strength. Conversely, what they neglect or miss in reading Chinese philosophy could just be the stronger points of the latter. A similar tendency could occur in a Chinese way of reading Chinese philosophical texts in modern Chinese or western languages. A typical example could be the case of the translation of philosophical works from Chinese to western languages. In this case, the involved semantic loss is perhaps not made by translators' insufficient understanding of the original texts. Well grasping both languages, they are still unable to attain satisfactory translations because of the natural communicative barriers existing between the two semantic organizations.

It is interesting to note that those qualified translators have no difficulty in feeling every detail of the original texts from the translated ones because the latter just becomes an equivalent index of sign systems to the original; or, the translated one becomes a reminder of the original one for the qualified reader through the original cultural context. Nevertheless, for those readers who are not expert in Chinese, the translated texts convey only a partial message of the original. Or, more precisely speaking, some quite important parts concerning the emotional and volitional elements will disappear or at least be seriously weakened in the translated texts. This will especially be the case when the texts contain more ontological and metaphysical contents. If so, how is it possible to sufficiently realize the intellectual exchange through the unqualified readings caused first of all by the two kinds of semantic-barriers: the linguistic-semantic and the disciplinary-constitutive ones? A qualified reading therefore can only exist within the specialized circles that are organized according to professional requirements. Efficient reading is thus based on the preconceived disciplinary restriction that will not help the comparative study attain a higher intellectual level. We will return to this problem again later. By the way, what is discussed above is not merely to indicate the fact about the parallel reading process involving the two kinds of philosophical texts. From a professional point of view, any multi-cultural interaction in comparative readings is useful. Our question involves another aspect: how should we substantially increase the scientific worth of Chinese-western comparative philosophical scholarship beyond the rigidified regularity formed in the current pedagogical-professional routines?

### 3. The imagistic-rooted conceptions

The comparative-philosophical barriers can be more clearly disclosed through examining the divergent conceptual organizations of the two philosophies or the different structures of the two humanistic scholarships. The well-noted ten or eight-categorical system in Aristotelian philosophy has established a logically-directed tendency in the western philosophical and scholarly tradition. Its basic conceptual system is divided in terms of both conceptual and empirical rationality in organizing notions in philosophical discourse. It was this philosophical tradition that eventually led to the establishment of western sciences. Moreover, this original rationalist mentality has in fact determined the logical direction in organizing its linguistic, ethical, metaphysical, scientific, artistic, historical and even socio-political thoughts. In contrast, with inter-human moral-pragmatics as its intellectual direction, the original Chinese mentality

indicates a much weaker capability in organizing logical reasoning in texts; this is the main reason why ancient Chinese theoretical works have not attained a higher level of rationalist argumentation. Similarly, in their quasi-philosophical discourse, Chinese authors did not attempt a systematic construction of their theoretical discourse, let alone a strictly logical one. Lacking in a stronger logical tradition, Chinese philosophical discourse is obviously weaker in establishing the criteria for conceptual definition, rules of logical and causal inference, and the establishment of a categorical hierarchy. First of all, Chinese philosophical discourse is lacking in an explicit conceptual system based on the aforementioned logical ways. In this section I do not intend to explore all reasons involved in this regard. Instead, I only point out one of its technical aspects: the pictoriographic origins of CP's philosophical words and their special semantic function indicated in its "concrete abstraction". Despite the earlier pictoriographic origins of character-words, the linguistic development in China caused pictoriographic traits gradually to decrease and character-words that express more general ideas can function effectively; namely, a "concrete or imagistic-visual substratum" can play the role of the abstract concept. The point here lies not in emphasizing the imagistic origin of abstract Chinese concepts, but rather in the independent status of the single-character concepts in forming meanings and meaningful associations. ● On the one hand, the first-rank categorical concepts in the *Book of Change* have different imaginative traces, and, on the other hand, those concepts carried by the separate imagistic characters do not define each other in a rational way. Their "logic" or operative sequences are "given" artificially by the designers of the system. In Taoist metaphysics, the major concepts indicate a similar trait. For example, the original visual images of those main concepts like *Tao* (way), *tien* (heaven), and *jen* (humanity) limit their correspondent concepts by the imagistic-associative notions. Furthermore, those concepts do not exist in a logical-connective way at the physical or psychological level. In fact, each single-character concept contains a trace of the notional evolution or the history of the using ways of that character. All of the historically emerging notions can play their role in any communication with different portions of actual effects in constituting meanings in concrete contexts. Different effective semes of one word in a context can interact with each other to form a definite set of meaning-complexes appearing through actual reading. When an abstract word works together with other related conceptual words in certain contexts, the meaningful network will become further complicated. Unlike the Aristotelian categorical system whose elements define each other logically, either at the notional or the practical level, CP only has different

sets of usages of the conceptual words embodied in the characters used. (When two-character words appear in modern times, this associative flexibility is effectively restricted.) In light of this background, we can understand why we should not regard those ancient philosophical words as some notional entities containing their own innate or fixed meanings (for different opinions, see Mou 1991: 246, 254, 302). They are only to be pragmatically used in different contexts. *Tao* and *tien* become the top categories in CP by virtue of their imaginative hints as metaphors based on the image with visual superiority: the guiding index and the spatial height. When those words obtain their logical roles formed through habitual usage, the added meanings, however, are something given in an arbitrary way. In principle, I think, any imagistic origins and their related words can play the same meaningful roles if their rhetorical effects can be expected. The category *tien* as a verbal medium can thus be used to carry different semic sets with its original imaginative association; the last factor can play a different semantic role in different intellectual and cultural contexts. Accordingly, the imagistic elements and other related semic ones can be synthetically used in a flexible way. Between the Confucian texts, original Taoist texts and later Neo-Confucianist texts, the same character (not the same “conceptual category”) of *tien* can carry different notional implications. Even when it played a more metaphysical role in Sung texts, there was still a lack of logical relations between different key concepts such as *Tao*, *hsing* (human nature), *li* (principle), *li* (ritual), *jen*, *yi* (justice), etc. All of those concepts play their respective roles directly or intuitively with respect to their practical contexts. But where are the logical links between them within related theoretical systems? They cooperate with or support each other in practical experience emerging in human nature and real life rather than in a logical hierarchy as we know from western philosophy. However, we may say that both merits and demerits can be drawn from this same mental tendency. As an indication of the pragmatic-semantic potential, by the way, those imagistic-rooted concepts can play a multiple, rather than single, function in intellectual communication (cf. Li 1997a: 191-201).

Shu-Hsien Liu said, “jen is Confucius’ ultimate commitment as well as that one thread that runs through all his doctrine” (cf. Chan 1986: 444). The phrase “one thread that runs through” vividly indicates the usage of the Chinese imagistic-rooted concept. Unlike the general term *Tao* that functions as the first-rank category in all contexts, *jen* functions at different semantic levels and aspects. It is an “index” that refers to different meaningful qualities in different contexts. Now the key question is whether the two argumentative systems can complement each other in



the way that comparative scholars have wished. My answer is not so affirmative, because the two philosophical systems work in different academic frameworks, or more precisely, in different contexts of semantic, conceptual and disciplinary organizations. The complete meanings of the two philosophical discursive systems depend on their own respective academic contexts. The impressive assertion of the possible intelligible complementarity of the two systems could be made through the special psychological and pedagogical training of the comparative scholars, as we have pointed out before. Nevertheless, the recognition of the fact does not necessarily indicate a negative aspect; it may bring about another active aspect of the comparative communication that we will elaborate upon further later. But now let us discuss the semantic role of the disciplinary institutions in philosophical communication in more detail.

#### **4. The semantic aspects of Chinese academic disciplines**

The meaning of humanistic discourse has also been deeply determined by the operative institutions of the related academic system as well as by the socio-cultural-historical conditions. Now let us turn to the semantic factors formed by the special academic programs, among which the most important one is the disciplinary system, as the classifying patterns for organizing subject matters and their related methods. In Aristotelian philosophy, as is well known, an initial five-fold division of scholarship contained the logical, metaphysical, socio-practical, natural-scientific and aesthetic-historical aspects of human intellectual experience respectively. Later, the academic classificatory model was continuously refined and readjusted until mediaeval times, whereas its initial principle remained little changed. The divisional ways concerning subject matters, scholarly techniques, pedagogical programs and academic aims have accorded with one another in terms of the western disciplinary system. Compared to this academic tradition, the Chinese scholarly activities were much more practical and less rationalistic in character, leading to quite different intellectual and social consequences in their intellectual history.

Concerning the formation of intellectual activities, there are several academic-pragmatic systems working as parts of the operative framework of scholarly intelligence. In general, the constitution of the meaning of intellectual units basically depends on the aforementioned tripartite institutionalization: the linguistic-semantic, the conceptual-semantic and the disciplinary-semantic. Compared with the western scientific type, there existed a much less rigorous classification concerning the traditional disciplines in ancient China. The initial historical record of academic

classification that emerged in the Han Dynasty indicates an obviously practical/pragmatic character. The initial scholarly classification finished in the earlier Han period, called the Seven Classes of Books, is a half-conceptual and half-bibliographic job made on the basis of book-compiling practices. The classifying principle was indeed related to the intellectual categories, for the so-called “books” were the results of compiling fragmentary articles on the basis of certain divisions about the philosophical, poetical, medical, engineering, and divinational-numerical writings. The classification method was nevertheless based on the classifying tendency of practically-directed common sense rather than on academic-rational principles. The first section of the Six Arts, which was later called the Ching or Classics, is characteristic of a Chinese synthetically pragmatic mental inclination. This category of books covers all of the ideologically important, historically original, and earlier officially compiled books in connection with various subject matters such as philosophical, historical, literary, ethical, linguistic and divinational ones. First, this class or division itself consists of six so-called sub-classes that are in part overlapped with other classes. Second, those books in this class were official educational textbooks used in various states or provinces since the pre-Ch’in period. Although there had frequently occurred great conflicts and fighting between different political regimes, those historically authorized imperial classics had been recognized and accepted by all power-holders as the basic state-authoritative textual dogmas that had been permanently/universally valid in the unified historical route of the Central Empire, which had been represented in turn by successive Chinese regimes. Third, those basic classics are also historical books in the sense that they were true historical records of the past important events and thoughts created by the set of original power-holders of remote ancient China. It is interesting to note that less philosophical-like content is expressed in those basic imperial classics. Therefore the traditional Chinese classic books could be described as historical rather than philosophical in character. Or, more precisely, the basic Chinese classics in Chinese intellectual history are pragmatically-tended, synthetically-compositional and ideologically-intentional in their composition and function. In consideration of the basic nature/purpose of the Chinese academic classics in reference to their socio-political circumstances, the weaker logical reasoning in ancient Chinese thought is certainly understandable.

Following the development of the classifying intelligence based on practical/pragmatic requirements with respect to the editing and publishing practices after the Han, the above book-classifying pattern was further

elaborated during the period of the Chin-Sui dynasties. Finally, there occurred a more satisfactorily edited pattern of textual classification named the “Four Section Book Classification”: Ching, Shih, Tzu and Chi.<sup>76</sup> Not being classified consistently according to intellectual subject matters, they followed diversely mixed criteria such as ideological utility, official and honorary grades (the Ching class, or Classics), substantial content (the Shih class, or History), and the works of individual authors (offices or private individuals). The fact was that philosophical texts were included in the third class of book-classification in particular due to a strange criterion: they were works by individual writers who were engaged in various specialties such as the philosophical, ethical, divisional, medical, literary, agricultural and strategic, or anything by an individual writer with a name. Compared with the western tradition, the most characteristic trait of ancient Chinese scholarship does not lie in the poverty of the philosophical-style content (in a certain sense) but in the lack of theoretical curiosity in genuinely scientific analyses about natural and social phenomena. In other words, there was a weaker inclination in initial Chinese academic life for reflecting upon and examining the social/intellectual causal relationship. However, as late as in the Former Han period, classical scholarship, as initial academia firstly emerged in China, was not organized according to the purely scholarly/theoretical principle but rather according to political and practical requirements. Nevertheless, this initial political-ideological-directed academic movement was indeed accompanied by two highly significant intellectual/scholarly achievements: the initial Chinese linguistic philology and classical moral-intellectual historiography.

The initial classification of books based on synthetic intellectual/bibliographic criteria laid a foundation for the later development of book-classifying principles and practices for over two thousand years in China. This historical constancy reflects stability in the Chinese way of thinking, characterized by its practical/pragmatic character. The academic-operative, bibliographic-technical and political-bureaucratic standards had been intermixed together in a synthetically shaping set of ancient Chinese academic/cultural institutions. This more ideological/pragmatically and less intellectual/scientifically tended textual-classification system has provided Chinese scholars/intellectuals with an authoritatively established framework for organizing their synthetic ways of thinking and practice.

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<sup>76</sup> Based on the original classifying system and the later development of the classifying theory and practice about Chinese texts made by Liu Hsie in the Chin Dynasty, there formed a general criterion of a half-bibliographic and half-conceptual nature, leading to the establishment of this book classification system.

When the more logical-styled categorization of western academic culture was first introduced into China through the modernized Japanese cultural inter-medium, the Chinese consciousness for scientifically classifying subject matters was immediately awakened and the multiple modernization of Chinese society and culture emerged immediately. Since then the philosophical discipline defined in the west has become the generally accepted model in Chinese intellectual life. Following the western classifying system, modern Chinese scholars began to reorganize a modern new discipline about “ancient Chinese philosophy”. As a matter of fact, the reorganizing efforts were directed towards employing the more precisely defined western standards to reformulate the Chinese counterparts. Modern Chinese comparative theological philosophy as a sub-discipline has been formed in exactly this way. Stanislaus Lo Kuang offers a typical example in this regard. By comparing Chu Hsi’s philosophy of the Sung to western mediaeval metaphysics, he employs a set of western philosophical terms and model as a comparative device, although there is a basic divergence of the two theoretical systems that makes the relevant comparisons between the two sides remain less mutually-intelligible, such as those general terms like being, mind, nature and principle. This cross-cultural disciplinary-blending practice emerges in both the Chinese and Chinese-western comparative fields through the use of the same set of terms regardless of their mutual geographic/historical/cultural distinction. Thus, we read the following: “Chu Hsi’s theory of metaphysical structure combined substance and morality, and connected ethics and ontology...its ethics are the continuation of ontology. Its ethics and ontology are mutually connected” (Chan 1986: 76). In such a straightforward comparative philosophical study, there existed a basic self-contradiction about the identity of CP itself: what significant parts should be put into this discipline from the related traditional Chinese material? According to the stricter western standard, not much material in Chinese philosophy could be accepted as being exactly philosophical in nature. That is why, until now, the main streams of western philosophy do not take an interest in CP. (The fact does not have much to do with language problems because many philosophical classics have already been translated into western languages.) Even following a flexible or extended standard, they are not easily treated within the modern discipline of philosophy. It is obvious that so-called Chinese philosophy is quite miscellaneous in composition, containing elements from different intellectual realms such as the metaphysical, ethical, historical, political, and literary ones. First of all, there exists a problem of classification of academic disciplines involving both modern (western) and traditional Chinese classifying systems. There

is also a typical semiotic problem involved with respect to the conceptual and analytical-procedural classifications. Chinese-western comparative philosophy is first of all a comparative analysis of the two different academic disciplinary systems. The problems concerning the meaning, function, and evaluation of different philosophical discourses can only be more precisely and more comprehensively defined within the related disciplinary systems. Even the evidently philosophical part functions within a certain system or in interaction with other related disciplines in the same system. It is difficult for us to put the philosophical part of system A into system B and keep its original meaning and function. The pragmatic character of the academic institution has limited the scientific potential of those disciplines. The different fields in ancient Chinese intellectual practices do not function in terms of a logically-organized scholarly system. Those empirically-tended fields such as history and literature can obtain clearer identities. However, in the more theoretically-tended intellectual practices, disciplines or sets of scholarly procedures have not yet been truly established for areas such as philosophy, linguistics, natural sciences, social sciences, aesthetics (as a more systematic description and analysis of the aesthetic experience) and logic. All of those theoretical elements are organized in a less systematical way. The lack of true theoretical disciplines indeed indicates the weaker point of the ancient Chinese mentality.

The question about CP as a modern discipline consisting of traditional materials is innately linked to the traditional Chinese academic structure which has been deeply rooted in the traditional Chinese socio-political system (cf. Li 1997b: 58-66). By reflecting on this problem today, we should further expand our problematic to a more general level: the formation of academic disciplines and their ideological backgrounds. As I argued before, the academic hierarchy itself becomes a structural reason for the stability of conservative scholarly directions (in Carr, Harbert and Zhang 1998: 427). If a modern academic ideology involves several social aspects, the traditional Chinese academic ideology has concentrated more on its political-indocinational mechanism. The relationship of Chinese metaphysics and Chinese politics will be a very important scholarly theme for inquiry; in short, Chinese scholarship has been closely linked to its socio-political underpinnings.

## 5. The semiotic approach to comparative philosophy

The above demonstration of the lesser maturity of ancient Chinese scientific rationality, however, implies a considerable pragmatic-rationalist

potential from a semiotic point of view. The semiotic approach helps us to explore the new conception of the multi-rational typology in connection with various connotational possibilities in signification and communication. Let me repeat that there are, in brief, four kinds of structural difficulty with our analysis of CP through a comparative methodology: the linguistic-semantic, the conceptual-definitional, the disciplinary-institutional and the historical/cultural-contextual. These multi-communicative barriers exist between different academic traditions. The situation will become further complicated in consideration of the current epistemological challenge shaped by the changed situation concerning the humanities in general since the 1960s. A more complex question will be related to the current semiotic-debating issue concerning the contrast between the philosophical as a strong traditionally-rooted discipline and interdisciplinary epistemology as a new general type of theorization. In other words, the aforementioned difficulty in Chinese-western comparative philosophy can be reconsidered from a larger intellectual perspective. In result, it seems paradoxical that our problematic concerning CP can therefore obtain an intellectually added significance.

In my opinion, the term semiotics today is an indication of a general research orientation that is first characterized by its strong interdisciplinary way of thinking. It involves various disciplines, but it does not center on any traditionally established single discipline. That means it can accept numerous theoretical tools from various disciplines in terms of a new methodological framework; namely, it can selectively apply theoretical elements from different disciplines to their various specific scientific projects. Furthermore, it deals with various semantic levels ranging from the linguistic, communicative, pragmatic, feeling, expressive and artistic-rhetoric, so it is far from being limited in referring to the perceptive or realistic objects. Such a multi-semantically-layered semiotics can provide comparative scholars with the theoretical tools to more precisely analyze divergent cultural manifestations. In a broader sense, semiotics as a “universal semantics” in my interpretation can treat two kinds of semantic dimensions: the linguistic and the disciplinary. What could we grasp from a concept of “semantics” as a single discipline? According to our above discussion, we know that the entire meaning of a certain discourse involves various levels, including the related academic-institutional ones that are also the determinative forces influencing the constitution of meaning. It is clear that both semantic analyses will be closely connected with the problematics of Chinese cultural history.

In general, there are three heterogeneous origins of modern semiotic theories: Saussurean, Peircian and Husserlian, which are respectively

involved in the linguistic, pragmatic and psychological dimensions. The constitutional divergence of modern semiotics presents a technical difficulty in grasping its entire range. But for the studies about multicultural theories, the three perspectives are all important and relevant, and the situation certainly presents a theoretical challenge for those scholars trained and specialized in single disciplines, including the philosophical. On the other hand, although there exist different disciplinary origins of semiotic theory, especially modern structural linguistics, historically speaking the most related one remains the philosophical. If there exists a close relationship between semiotics and philosophy, there will be a closer relationship between semiotics and comparative philosophy, including CP, despite it being quite miscellaneously-composed compared with its western counterpart.

Despite containing a great number of philosophical elements regarding its historical/genealogical aspects, semiotic theory is not characterized by what it employs but by how, why and in which contexts it does. The semiotic stance in contrast with philosophical-centrism has nothing to do with philosophical knowledge but rather with the traditional way to employ that knowledge, namely a way to operate within the discipline of philosophy that is defined by its fixed operative preconditions, procedures and synthetic function. According to recent developments in semiotic theory in expanded semantic terms, operational contexts play a very important role in sharing the efforts towards constituting the entire semantic range of any sign system. The disciplinary framework is the most direct inner circle of the related contextual network for the signification and communication of any verbal texts. When the structure of the latter is more complicated and ambiguous, the contextual analysis becomes more necessary. This is the site where one can find some serious problems about related approaches in Chinese-western comparative philosophy. The new focus in semiotic-theoretical practice is even laid on reflecting the contextual network of semiotic practice itself. That means the semiotic approach should pay attention even to its own operative conditions, both internal and external, in order to be more precautions of any dogmatic theoretical doctrines formed in the procedural rigidity of institutionalized disciplines, including those improperly produced in any pseudo-semiotic practices. Semiotics, as the general designation of interdisciplinary/cross-cultural theoretical approaches, also involves a strategic shift of academic attitudes that can break up the communicative barriers between different cultural traditions. Until today any academic events and their scholarly results have actually emerged in definite sites and dates; originators of scholarly works are certainly marked by related geographical names. The

ever-increasing international communication makes such geographically-related identity less and less meaningful as long as most cultural messages can be shared and employed by people everywhere in the world in a similar way, just as we have seen in the situation of modern sciences. CP, despite its rich historical message, should provide the more internationally commensurable and acceptable parts for common academic tasks in the global scope. It is not monopolized by the native Chinese because theoretically CP does not “belong” to the Chinese only; the same can be said about Greek/Roman thoughts. The epistemological and axiological problems concerning Chinese-western comparative philosophy will indicate the same tendency, although one can be more specialized in some technical aspects owing to his native background. For example, Chinese are better in using Chinese but are not necessarily better than non-Chinese in understanding some intellectual aspects of CP as its further modernized formulation becomes more communicable to other modern disciplines, such as linguistics, psychology, political sciences, literary theory and cultural anthropology. The same can be said about western philosophy whose philological/theoretical scholarship is certainly better mastered by western specialists, while some synthetic intellectual aspects of it could be better understood even by some non-western scholars if they were more familiar with other modern humanistic methodologies. That is why all sorts of specialists of the philological type can no longer maintain that they are authorities of everything in their own specialized fields, even if they could memorize all the texts of Aristotle or of the Five Classics. The philological and scientific approaches to understanding the same texts are related to different epistemological strategies, which may be connected to other disciplines. Or simply, the same subject matter can be treated by different methods formed in different disciplines and their different combinations. The same situation can be compared to what we talk about in connection with Sinology or CP as a historically-shaped discipline. In fact, we humanities scholars today are faced with the task of systematically reorganizing the structure of humanities scholarship. Thus, in the conventional field of comparative philosophy, the identities of the compared traditional philosophies remain unchanged, while from a semiotic point of view, those academic identities formed in history should be anatomized first. There will be a double process called “breakthrough/interfusion”: that between elements of the compared historical schools within the discipline, and that between that discipline and other disciplines. In our usage the discipline consists of subject matters and methods alike, while the latter is more determinative to its identity. On the other hand, the semiotic tendency will strengthen the



process of reorganizing the methodological network across different historical and geographic cultural sections, further blurring the boundaries of various cultural traditions. Accordingly, the semiotic dialogue will promote the process of the international redescription of historical-cultural-academic topographies. To attain this aim, the Chinese part should be first reformulated in modern semiotic terms in order to make the discourse more commensurable with the western one (cf. Li 1997c: 197-199).

## 6. Chinese philosophy seen from a semiotic perspective

The present issue involves semiotic problems, because divergences and similarities between Chinese and western philosophies are naturally related to the identity of the former, which cannot be sufficiently clarified only within the framework of the latter. The pre-scientific synthetic nature of Chinese thought, the pre-modern disciplinary basis of western thought, the modern western interdisciplinary tendency, and the contemporary new interdisciplinary/cross-cultural scientific direction in the world have combined to form an expanded context for redefining the identity of Chinese philosophical history. The present inquiry is to urge us on further, faced with a more fundamental problem of our time: what is the nature and function of philosophy as a discipline today? Although we cannot go into details on this here, the question, which is being taken as reference point, is nevertheless helpful for us to more relevantly define and evaluate Chinese philosophy.

The semiotic and thus the interdisciplinary approach implies an intellectually “*revolution-ary*” tendency: to reorganize the preconditions and operative procedures of doing research. These involve the scholarly operative strategy with respect to the epistemological and methodological conditions. As a matter of fact, the semiotic strategy functions in the marginal areas between the disciplinary and cross-disciplinary scopes, or those between the specialized and cross-specialized (comparative) ones. Furthermore, the semiotic tendency recently indicated in the Chinese-western comparative studies proves the necessity of strengthening the general analytical tendency originating in ancient Greece, but also indicates that either the analytical or the traditionally rational patterns in intellectual productions should be expanded and pluralized. The involvement of non-western materials and practices in comparative studies will certainly push this development forward. On the other hand, the dialogue between CP and semiotics is beneficiary to them both in multiple ways. First, the synthetic content of CP can be more suitably treated by the

interdisciplinary approaches of semiotics. Second, the interdisciplinary approach to CP can more creatively stimulate the cross-cultural scholarship which itself is interdisciplinary in nature.

Concerning the term “interdisciplinary”, we should first point out that any single discipline unavoidably contains interdisciplinary elements; second, any certain interdisciplinary program is liable to further develop to become a new discipline, namely a fixed set of scholarly preconditions and operational patterns. Similarly, any comparative approach in a field can later be made into a certain discipline fixed on its operative steps. The essence of semiotics lies in overcoming or avoiding any kind of dogmatic formalism, whether scientific or rhetorical, keeping constant attention on the efficiency itself in order to scientifically solve problems. For this purpose, we should firstly build up a set of more relevant problematics, and then arrange them with a group of related methods collected from various disciplinary systems. For these purposes we have to get rid of the professional routine which is more closely connected with academic utility and scholarly customs than with intellectual progress and theoretical idealism. The spirit of semiotics is therefore also expressed in neglecting the intellectual and scholarly interests determined by the current academic and pedagogical market mechanisms. Compared to the fashionable academic games shaped in the present-day commercialized society, the semiotic spirit for scientific certainty and efficiency is closer to the classical ethos, both of ancient Greece and pre-Ch'in China.

## 7. Chinese philosophy and current ethical scholarship

CP, established as a modern discipline, involves different parts of Chinese intellectual history, some of which are not easily communicable with the traditional western philosophical topics. On the other hand, western philosophy itself will be divided into different thematic parts in connection with other related disciplines following the recent epistemological development. For example, some traditional branches of philosophy like aesthetics and the philosophy of history have been largely transformed into new disciplinary fields: artistic/literary theory and historical theory. Philosophy of language shares a number of important subjects with linguistic theory, while the latter has also created a number of new subjects which have not been shared by the former. Similar disorganizing processes can be indicated in many other socio-cultural areas such as politics, economics and sociology. Philosophy today can no longer be the single or central theoretical foundation for other academic branches, especially with respect to ethical scholarship which is the very center of

CP. It is well known that western philosophy also originated in its ethical reflection. Ethics soon became an important branch of western philosophy when it obtained more and more logical elaboration following its metaphysical sophistication. Therefore the later evolution of western ethics has been closely linked with the ever-increasing amount of western metaphysical and ontological scholarship. Of course, the Christian-theological development has further strengthened this metaphysical tendency of western ethics. Accordingly, a metaphysical fundamentalism has made western ethics more and more disconnected from its empirical and positivist sources. As is well known, ethical thought has indicated a strong empirical relevance in history, especially in Chinese ethical pragmatics. Moreover, the interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approaches of today will further disclose the similar inconsistency between the metaphysical and empirical aspects in Chinese ethical thought. For example, the pre-Ch'in ethical empiricism and its Sung-metaphysical elaboration present sharp contrasts in their ethical reasoning. From the interdisciplinary perspective, the speculative elaboration based on metaphysical fundamentalism and the pragmatic efficiency based on the humanist empirical positivism belong to different epistemological levels. On the other hand, between different cultural academic systems, there are different degrees of logical subtlety and positivist efficiency. With respect to the former, western logic is much superior to the Chinese one; for the latter, however, each has their different advantageous and disadvantageous aspects. Concerning the empirical aspect of ethical thought, the western type indicates a much higher socio-empirical positivist efficiency, while the Chinese expresses a much stronger motivationally positivist technique. Therefore, comparison and complementarity between the two intellectual traditions require firstly the choice of the relevant epistemological and pragmatic-operative criteria in order to more beneficially promote the efficiency of ethical scholarship. The present problem with Chinese-western comparative philosophy has therefore essentially turned out to a more crucial problem about disciplinary ethics as such, which has traditionally been full of epistemological controversy. And in this aspect, Chinese philosophy or its main topic – Chinese ethics – can provide a more illustrative example for the current international discussion on ethics. Keeping a reasonable distance from the Chinese and western metaphysical frameworks, Chinese philosophy as a whole can become a more useful source for the present-day comparative studies, especially in the ethical field.

Modern comparative philosophy has brought about a general recognition that western metaphysics, as a much higher logical construction, has

become a theoretical backing for the weaker Chinese metaphysical tradition in a special sense, because both share a metaphysical-semantic ambiguity, creating a richer rhetorical potential for philosophical speculation, and also because western metaphysics has firmly established itself in modern pedagogical systems in the world. The modern disciplinary system, based on the current professional system, has become the factual foundation for comparative metaphysical scholarship, which does not need to focus on the genuine relationship of ethical scholarship and metaphysical rationality. This tendency is no doubt directly related to the progress of theoretical and political ethics.

Thus, in light of the former explanations, we can turn back to the question in our issue more precisely: what contribution can CP make to western philosophy today? Or, alternatively, what are the major merits of Chinese philosophy in the current humanities? We now attempt to answer that comparative philosophical studies do not need to be limited to certain related existing academic disciplines such as the philosophical, Sinological or philological-historiographical. All of those fields are certainly important disciplines rooted in the present educational system with its own routine programs. But how to classify its content and how to analyze its respective composition in the specifically designed projects are also related to the chosen perspectives and methods in connection with other disciplines and their combinations in all social and human sciences. Free from the fixed criteria set by the conventional disciplinary network, CP, after its reorganization, can increase or enrich its intellectual contribution to several other scholarly aspects of international and domestic academic fields. On the one hand, the initial reorganization of Chinese intellectual material in terms of the western philosophical system can certainly benefit both sides by promoting mutual understanding. The latter, nevertheless, also explores its own scholarly limitation because of the profound academic-cultural divergence of the two. We should not accept the standards used in the traditional western logic-centric philosophy to measure the quasi-correspondent parts in the Chinese one, except in some definite topics. For example, western metaphysics and ontology, being highly autonomous because of their strong logical and theological backgrounds, do not need any theoretical support from non-western philosophies which are historically weaker in those aspects. But there are indeed parts in Chinese philosophy which can be very useful for improving the ethical aspect of the western philosophical tradition, when the latter is firstly disconnected from its traditional reliance on the metaphysical framework which can be used to serve diverse functions, including non-academic ones. For example, the original “non-

philosophical” or “empirical” ethics in ancient China can therefore obtain an increased value through epistemologically separating its metaphysical and ethical components. Julia Ching said, “In Kantian terms, Mencius offers an empirical ground for morality: That of moral feeling, based on human nature and its spontaneous, even instinctive choice of the good in moments of crisis calling for altruism” (Chan 1986: 278). According to Ching, this empirical stance should be overcome metaphysically. From the semiotic perspective, which is closely linked to modern scientific development, however, we can have a different notion about theoretical strength. If it remains within the western moral-metaphysical framework, ancient Chinese ethical wisdom would sound less important. But when the interdisciplinary deconstruction of metaphysical fundamentalism in western ethics is attained, the more genuine nature of ethical scholarship can be further clarified. Confucian thought as the first important Chinese ethics is a typical example (cf. Li 1997a: xxix-xxxii). Furthermore, this recognition of the empirical value of Confucian ethics can promote deeper reflections on the empiricist and positivist traditions of western ethics which have been undermined or weakened by various ontological and metaphysical speculations across history. Another example is the synthetic manifestations of Chinese thought, which consists of philosophical, historical, literary and artistic elements and procedures which present a more suitable foundation for analyzing politico-ideological elements which function in the scholarly and social realities; this fact can further help us expand our understanding of the true mechanism of political-ethical scholarship in history. Such a strategic perspective can only be easily obtained after firstly avoiding the western philosophical or metaphysical centrism which were actually adopted by Mou, Tang and some of their followers. The depth and utility of any scholarly operations should be measured by suitable or relevant theoretical procedures, rather than by any kind of technically elaborate devices, keeping a distance from the traditional philosophical systems whose conceptually technicalized programs have existed for too long in history, preserving all of its historical accumulations within its own operative autonomy without being closely directed to the changeable social and intellectual reality. In light of this, we know that the present issue will involve a larger range of questions, including the reexamination of the discipline of philosophy itself. On the other hand, besides its historical autonomy, there is also a modern academic-institutional autonomy determined by several other factors, some of which are non-scholarly. From such a larger perspective, our present question is not only a matter about how to benefit CP through western methods, but also reversely about CP’s possible contribution to

western philosophy after the comparative methodology has improved. Its significance will also go beyond the cross-cultural comparative field, reaching the ethical discipline itself. In this sense we can even point out that it is Chinese philosophy that might provide a chance to reexamine the structure of western ethical scholarship now; or, more precisely, a western-centric ethical tradition should be replaced by a cross-cultural one, especially cross-cultural semiotics, which is based on a recent epistemological/methodological elaboration.

The comparative studies of Chinese and western philosophies have become more and more significant today, because they involve the promotion of the two disciplines not only in their professional routines, but also in confrontation of the current great challenge of the interdisciplinary/cross-cultural reorientation of the comparative humanities, including in philosophy. Our issue is therefore only one aspect of that larger problematic concerning the function of the traditional philosophical discipline and its relationship to comparative cultural history. The topic itself obtains a double significance: as part of the question of the relationship between philosophy and ethics and as part of the interdisciplinary-oriented multi-cultural studies. We can even say that, without treating problems in the larger context, we can hardly attain satisfactory achievements in our traditionally specialized scholarly scope. The situation indeed raises another considerable challenge from the trans-disciplinary perspective. Particularly in Chinese-western comparative cultural studies, the desideratum for a multi-disciplinary perspective becomes increasingly desirable. On the other hand, from a Confucian point of view, unlike the current professionally competitive utilitarianism, any new scholarly direction should be welcomed if it can offer a better result with respect to scientific progress itself regardless of any professional benefits or privilege. One hundred years of history of comparative philosophical studies based on both western Sinological and Chinese nationalist scholarship has gone to its end following the rapid progress of current comparative scholarship. The present question discussed in this chapter provides us with a chance to more effectively inquire into ethical scholarship through collaboration with other related disciplines.

The semiotic approach, including its comparative branch, definitely belongs to the analytical tradition based on principles of rationality, clarity, precision and efficiency in the demonstrative process. It is the recent semiotic version of this western rationalist tradition that brings us a more promising perspective to deal with Chinese-western comparative philosophy. Its further development at the cross-cultural level also extends its rational and operative scope to more effectively cover the intercultural

fields. The result, as we explained earlier in the chapter, is collaboratively caused by the interdisciplinary-tended methodological innovation. The doubly strategic innovation helps us to advance research on traditional Chinese thoughts, scholarship and culture; in particular, its ethical thought can play a more creative role in the new intellectual and scholarly context. It is time for us to promote the interdisciplinary approach to CP with a desirable result that the ethical aspects of CP can play a more active role in shaping the current ethics in the world. As one of the most significant intellectual experiences of mankind, the Chinese ethical tradition can be more relevantly involved in the collaborative reconstruction of new ethics for the world. The original structure of Chinese ethics and its related unique historical experience before the intrusion of the institutionalized philosophical methodology provide the modern ethical inquiry with an originally instructive and illuminating model for promoting ethical and politico-ethical science. The semiotic attitude reflects a more thoroughly critical attitude for reexamining the structure and function of the existent human knowledge in reference to the more successful development of natural sciences.

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## CHAPTER NINETEEN

# TOWARDS A MINIMAL COMMON GROUND FOR HUMANIST DIALOGUE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CONFUCIAN ETHICS AND AMERICAN ETHICAL HUMANISM<sup>77</sup>

Confucian humanist ethics, originating in the authoritarian ancient east, and American humanism, originating in the democratic modern west, share a number of moral principles because of their common empirical approaches to the ethical situations and ethical doctrines of mankind. A comparative analysis of these two ethical systems can show why the present world, suffering as it does from multiple crises, needs a more empirically-directed and operatively-stratified ethical science. This ethical humanism, a humanistic ethics based on an empirical or naturalist approach, is the best hope for an ethics that is universally applicable to all communities despite historical/geographic/academic divergences.

### 1. Confucian Ethics and Ethical Humanism

Confucian ethics is a historically transmitted thought, and American ethical humanism is a modern synthetic movement. The two systems as a whole are heterogeneous in composition and cannot be directly compared. So for the purposes of this comparison, it will be primarily the theoretical system of ethical humanism, and the theoretical implication of its other constituent aspects, that will be addressed. More simply, American ethical humanism in the present essay will be considered as a dynamic instance of

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empirical ethical theory. It is its empiricism and naturalism that is characteristic of the entire movement. As regards the Confucian partner in this comparative analysis, we have to first explain what is meant by the term “Confucian ethics”, and secondly to disentangle from the popular confusion its different content and function in different historical contexts.

### 1.1 A Distinction between Confucian Ethics and Confucianist Academic Ideology

China has a continuing imperial history of over 2,000 years, characterized throughout by its successive authoritarian regimes using the name of Confucianism (the historical figure Confucius as the author of *Lun-yu* – a collection of humanist ethical proverbs – has always been fabricated as the hierarch of the political-religion of the Central Empire), which is a synthetic compound consisting of political/religious/academic aspects. It is well known that Confucianism is presented as a deeply rooted despotic socio-political system and an unchanged state-run ideology. Since the beginning of this century Confucianism and its multiple modern remnants have been widely taken to be the main impediments to China’s progress. It was generally regarded as the opposite of democracy and science during the first half of the century. Later on, different constituent elements of this ideological compound have been gradually separated through modern critical reexaminations. Some are negatively conservative while others are seen as positive with respect to the modern world. Its socio-political system is considered absolutely negative, while the involved intellectual and cultural spirit derived from the original Confucian ethics should be viewed in more positive terms.

Confucianism, which can be traced back to the first Chinese imperial dynasties (the Qin-Han), literally means *Ru*-school, of which Confucius was the legendary or fictive founding father. Much of its autocratically-directed socio-political content formed in the imperial period could be taken as a later accretion which has little to do with original Confucian humanist thought, since Confucius is supposed to have lived about 300 years earlier than the establishment of the despotic politico-academic-ideological system of Confucianism. From a cultural-anthropological point of view, then, we have to make a distinction between the earlier Confucian thought and the later Confucianist political-religious conglomeration. The former is embodied in a single book, *Lun-Yu* (the *Analects*). The main body of it was the so-called first book, which was written/edited privately and appeared in earlier Chinese history before the establishment of the first Chinese despotic empire. Confucianism as a politico-academic-

ideologically synthetic system formerly originated in the imperial period, and includes the earlier Confucian thought as a constituent part. A lot of misleading debates arise because of this initial constitutive ambiguity. In addition, there was a translation problem caused by the early western missionary scholars. Because of the linguistic-structural divergence between the Chinese and western conceptual frameworks, early cultural communications suffered from confusions arising from the different semantic organizations of both sides. Many discussions about Confucian thought and Confucianism involve quite inconsistent topics, and the misunderstandings are further increased when different readers approach the topics from different social/cultural contexts. A proper hermeneutic analysis requires that today we should take the original Confucian thought out of the Confucianist system and put it into a modern social and intellectual context for reinterpretation, in order to get a more relevant understanding of this humanist ethics based on permanent empirical human nature. As I have suggested elsewhere, the same textual content can signify and function differently in different historical and academic contexts (Li 1997a: xxxv).

● On the other hand, more precisely, Confucianism consists of a double system: the broader socio-political/religious one (referring to a socio-political system) and a narrower academic/ideological one (referring to an academic/scholarly system). But despite its ancient origins, Confucian humanist-ethical thought could still play a multiply active role in modern China if it is segregated from Confucianism. The situation could be compared with what is happening in modern western history: the constructive segregation between Christian religion and democratic politics. Similarly, the *Lun-yu*, called the “Chinese mundane ‘Bible’”, is totally qualified to play the leading role as a basic system of Chinese ethical beliefs. So, just as the ancient Bible, with similarly old or older history, has effectively functioned in modern times, the ancient *Lun-yu* would do the same in future as well. An important distinction between the two classical texts is that the Bible systematically uses supernatural and metaphorical language, while the *Analects* uses an empirical humanist language. The perenniality of the former is due to the lasting effects of the ancient Mediterranean mythological tradition, while that of the latter is due to its basis in a constant and universal human nature common to Confucius’ contemporaries and all succeeding generations. This “first Chinese book” is a valuable modern resource because it gives us access to cross-cultural and trans-historical universals about ethical human nature. Thus, we moderns do not need to employ any special literary technique or art for grasping the Confucian text. We can directly understand its literal

meaning, firstly because of its accessible daily language, and secondly because of its reference to empirical human conditions experienced in common by members of all cultures.

Confucianism in its traditional form has sometimes been formulated as a quasi-religion of a political-academic type. Many ancient and modern conservative advocates of Confucianism have tended to deify and dogmatize the Confucian texts, and invented Confucius as a founding father of Confucianism. In a broad sense, Confucianism is said to be the very foundation of the perennial Chinese civilization. Some Chinese scholars tend to compare the role of Confucius to that of the Buddha. Unlike Buddha or Jesus, however, Confucius appears in the *Analects* only as a wise human being. If the historical existence of the person Confucius remains to some extent unauthenticated, his words and deeds as presented in the *Analects* have been universally accepted and respected. In understanding Confucian thought, the point is not to ask about whether Confucius was a historical person, but rather to acknowledge his narrative role as the transmitter of the national ethical ideas that were, with amazing consistency, created, collected and edited collectively over a period of about 300 years. The *Analects* is the result of a collective practice expressing the same spirit and thought across that period. It is a set of ethical teachings deeply rooted and widely implemented in the long course of Chinese social/cultural history. The content of this historical text can be further reassessed and reevaluated entirely today just because of its positive-empirical ethical discourse. That fact, in my opinion, is the main reason why the *Analects* could keep its perennial value in the modern world.

Another distinction that needs to be drawn is that which is made between Confucian thought and Confucianist philosophies, the latter including both ancient Neo-Confucianist metaphysics (*Song-Ming Li Xue*) and modern New Confucianist philosophy (*Yin Rujia*). Modern Confucianist philosophy, based on its historical counterpart, combines Taoist mysticism, Buddhist ontology, western metaphysics and Confucian texts, has formed a modernized philosophy of nationalist-academic character. The various philosophical schools of Confucianism have their own justifications and achievements, but many of them tend to change the structure as such of the original Confucian ethics and therefore disturb its empirical-operative logic. In the current interdisciplinary and cross-cultural academic context, a return to the empirical humanist spirit of Confucian ethics becomes more and more possible and desirable. In addition to the scholarly reasons, there is a practical incentive as well. Confucian empirical humanism is badly needed today to deal with

problems of the ethical aspects of the present social/cultural/scholarly reality.

## 1.2. Relevance of Confucian Ethics to Our Times

Confucius has often been compared to Aristotle, because the two philosophers were regarded sometimes as founders of the Chinese and western ethical systems respectively. However, in contrast to Confucian thought, Aristotle's is too scientific in style and too systematic in composition, and ancient China was much weaker in scientific-epistemological character. A more relevant comparison is perhaps between Confucius and Socrates. Both of them started ethical ways of reflection in human civilizations. For both, ethical thought was still not organized in political or legal terms, although the one deals with ethical problems more affirmatively and the other more skeptically. Both of them focus on the practical wisdom of ethical choices. Confucius treats it in a more reasonably pragmatic way, and Socrates treats it in a more logically analytical way. But generally the both approach ethical problems in empirical and rational terms. At almost the same time, then, the two philosophers originally raised questions of a properly ethical character respectively in the east and the west. Unlike many later more elaborate developments of moral philosophy, they focused on the subjective aspect of the moral situation, which is the essential part of ethical thought.

Via Plato, Socrates' conceptual tradition has been widely mixed with and absorbed into later western philosophical developments. Confucian thought, however, uniquely keeps its textual, intellectual and historical autonomy as well as its existential entirety. It presents itself as an amazingly well developed subjective ethics. We might call it an attitudinal/motivational ethics, a discussion of the proper attitude of the agent to ethical values and related pragmatic wisdom, an approach that is as pertinent to modern as to ancient peoples. It can effectively participate in a theoretical dialogue with modern western ethical theories, but it needs a conceptual transformation with a methodological combination of hermeneutic, semiotic and pragmatic approaches. For this purpose, we have to establish both linguistic and theoretical commensurable grounds for the dialogue between the ancient eastern and modern western ethics.<sup>78</sup> For Confucius does not discuss ethical problems in the formalistic-logical

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<sup>78</sup> The author stresses that a semantic commensurability between the two traditional discourse systems must first be established before the ethical comparison can be effectively made (see Li 1997a).

mode characteristic of the western intellectual tradition, but rather through an intuitive, structural and pragmatic approach deeply rooted in its original realist ethical experience. Because of this difference of approach, Confucian ethics can present a useful complement to ethical reasoning based on the western logical/scientific tradition.

In pre-Qin China, Confucian ethical discourse was organized independently of any specific political system, although it employs contemporary political terms as the rhetoric frame to explain its interpersonal-related ethical issues. It was later incorporated into the social-ideological Confucianist system in the course of the historical success of the legalist “philosophy of power”. It is significant, however, that it maintained its textual identity throughout the long pre-modern period of Chinese history. Even in the authoritarian social context of the imperial period, Confucian ethical thought preserved its separate spiritual-cultural identity within the syncretic and changing Confucianist social system. It is because of this ethical autonomy that we can speak of a separable modern significance of Confucian thought. It is the basis of its ability to interact with other modern disciplines in different practical and theoretical fields, at different, though related, levels. It does not contain a primitive political science or a legal theory as scholars have long asserted, and it indeed has nothing to do with sciences and democratic procedure; nevertheless, the fact does not reduce its theoretical and practical significance from a modern purely ethical perspective (western scholars tend to handle the related scholarship always more synthetically). Its ethical autonomy is based on the unalterable empirical constancy in human nature. This subjective ethics was a product of specific historical experience, the historical interaction between a conservative authoritarian system and the critical moral personality ironically shaped in reaction to that system. This historical situation has produced a special ethical wisdom that has proved to be universally meaningful for mankind.

A further possible contribution of historical Confucian ethics could rest in its potential for helping the readjustment of the structure/function of modern ethical scholarship. It provides a historically tested model for dealing with crucial human ethical predicaments. Its universal applicability lies in a practical wisdom presented in a historical mode. It has nothing to do with some ancient sage’s supernatural power; it is the crystallization of a collective human ethical experience as such. Regarding the style, this eastern practical-reasonable coherence contrasts with as well as complements the theoretical/logical analytical type of western ethics lacking in empirical historical reality. It is time now to combine these two ethical traditions in a way that is mutually supportive and mutually

profitable. It is an opportunity for such a convergence that this comparison of Confucian ethical thought and western ethical humanism could present.

### 1.3. A comparison between a secular humanist ethics and Confucian ethics

Contemporary American secular humanism is a successful independent social and academic movement focusing on promoting an applied ethics that is deeply rooted in the achievements of modern sciences. With a serious concern for the moral life of the world, it has applied a scientifically directed ethical doctrine to various aspects of modern society, playing even a more active role that is quite unlike that of academic ethics. The direction of this ethical humanism towards social reality and practical goals leads to an especially efficient empirical autonomy of ethical scholarship in the west.

In their different social, political and historical contexts, the original Confucian movement and the modern American humanist movement express three major tendencies in common: independent socio-ethical concerns and engagement with this world; organizing efforts to pursue their ethical ideal; and an empirical-humanist approach to socio-moral problems. The both surely differ from each other in other respects, because of their originating from radically different geographical-historical-cultural conditions. However, the two systems are faced with essentially the same ethical issues. Confucian ethics initially arose as an alternative to the supernatural or primitive religious approach to moral-socio-political problems that had prevailed since early antiquity in China. Confucian thought is characterized by its emphasis on the human autonomous will rather than on any supernatural power, expressing a rational spirit emerging from the early Chinese cultural Enlightenment of the late Zhou period (*Chun-~~iu~~ Zhan-guo*). American humanism as an ethical trend was a critical movement against Christian traditional dogmatism. Both are intellectual revolts against the supernatural determinism of the moral life at an epistemological level. This commonality of reaction is due to a properly mundane-humanist ethical concern. It is directed toward the more relevant objectives of real human ethical life on earth. It is this empirical direction towards true ethical goals and its related methodology that shapes their common spiritual orientation.

In addition to this reactive commonality, there is a shared concern as well for the ethical implications of other aspects of human sociality. Confucian thought indirectly touches on every aspect of life, including dimensions of politics, education, culture, scholarship and law.

Nevertheless, its concern for these socio-political/cultural/academic topics merely focuses on their ethical implications. American humanism as a modern, scientifically directed movement deals with many more modern relevant social, academic and ideological issues than the Confucian. These modern topics, however, directly or indirectly implicate the same ethical concerns that are also displayed in ancient Chinese ethical thought. In general, American humanism places more emphasis upon moral values, while Confucian humanism places more emphasis upon the subjective attitudes towards those basic values.<sup>79</sup> Of course, Confucian thought in its ancient form lacked the technological potential to realize its political/social/cultural goals, whereas the discursive shortcomings just dialogically make it able to preserve its own ethical-thinking purity.<sup>80</sup>

We have already pointed out that Confucian ethics could more obviously maintain its ethical-operative coherence or autonomy when separated from the historical Confucianist system. This characteristic becomes more salient after its realignment with modern theoretical thoughts and social reality. American humanism, especially in its recent developments, seems to share a similar ethical autonomy. This centrality of the ethical dimension makes it worthy of serious attention despite its relatively modest academic profile.<sup>81</sup> Both ethical doctrines share the same intensive ethic-centric stance. In order to more clearly express the value of a possible intellectual collaboration between the two ethical systems, we will next turn to a background discussion about the categorization of ethical scholarship.

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<sup>79</sup> In different essays Paul Kurtz explains the basic values or excellences for personal and social ethical norms, especially his list given in *In Defense of Secular Humanism* (Kurtz 1983: 8). Sharing all of the values Kurtz mentions, Confucian ethics uniquely organizes a special experience about the rationale the ethical agent gives for his ethical actions. This belongs to the same category as the Kantian problematic. But Confucius treats it purely intuitively, expressing a “quasi-objective” regularity rooted in the common empirical-practical domain shared by all human beings. This special kind of ethical wisdom has apparently been ignored in the western ethical tradition.

<sup>80</sup> It is very interesting and instructive to note the double role Confucian ethics played within the Confucianist system as an independent as well as a collaborative element (see Li 1997b: 263-268).

<sup>81</sup> Corliss Lamont pointed out that the American humanist movement has suffered from the limited expansion of its membership (see Lamont 1990: x).



## 2. Basic Ethical Autonomy of Humanism

We have several reasons for using the term “humanism” to represent an ethical doctrine as well as for an ethical movement developed in critical reaction to religious, metaphysical and irrational moral philosophy. The most remarkable feature of humanist ethics is its strict orientation to an empirically conditioned autonomy of ethical thought. This intellectual autonomy becomes the kernel of the entire humanist ethical system. Both Confucian ethics and the western ethical humanist movement exhibit the same inclinations for insisting on basic ethical autonomy.

### 2.1 Minimal definition of humanist ethics and a model for classifying ethical discourse

In order to promote a wider international ethical dialogue, Paul Kurtz raised the question of the minimal definition of Humanism (1998: 6). I have suggested a model for classifying ethical discourse that may be useful for further considering Kurtz’s requirements (Li 1997e: 1-4). I hope that this analytical model can contribute to the discussion on humanist ethics in general. The model consists of four main categories of ethical discourse as follows:

- M1: Moral teaching and customs: The intuitive-empirical presentation of ethical-related values, norms and instruction, which are displayed in oral and/or written form. Confucian text is one of its earliest types.
- M2: Semantic and semiotic approaches to M1: The discourses of Socrates, the Sophists and the Taoists offer some ancient examples of this type.
- M3: Scientific/rational approaches to M1 and M2: This category can be further divided into natural, social, human and interdisciplinary sub-classes. Each of the sub-classes contains a number of branches.
- M4: Philosophical, religious and poetical: This comprises all super-empirical approaches to M1, M2 and M3, such as metaphysical, ontological, theological, mythical and poetic-rhetorical interpretations, including both rational and irrational styles.

This typology of ethical studies stresses a two-fold scheme for dividing ethical discourse in history. Practical-oriented moral teaching is the basic category and the three related, theoretical categories supervene upon it. A

so-called minimal definition of an empirical or humanistic ethics (MHE) should provide an adequate system of moral doctrines covering both personal happiness and interpersonal justice. It must encompass subjective attitudes towards happiness and justice, as well as proper methods to attain them. Those ethical issues do not contain many topics in the way of interpretation or explanation; they deal with more practical but quite coherent moral teachings. Their pragmatic logic is formed on the basis of rational practices of human beings in their struggle for survival in the face of natural and social hardships, without necessarily involving other related or derived scholarly subjects. As a pre-scientific ethical system, Confucian thought provides a typical example of minimal humanist ethics. A desirable minimal definition of humanistic ethics could fall in the category M1, particularly one formulated in the pre-scientific period. American secular humanism, despite its modern scientific background and its more systematic expression, provides a modern example of a minimal definition of a humanistic ethics as well because of its epistemologically empirical direction of ethical thinking. Not all minimal definitions of humanistic ethics as such need to be directly presented. A MHE can present itself in society directly or indirectly. A system of MHE can be indirectly embodied by other theoretical discourses in ethical scholarship. No doubt, even complicated or sophisticated ethical systems can incorporate a basic ethical autonomy.

The meaning of the terms “humanist”, “empirical” and “naturalistic”, which are used in American humanism, are similar to each other; they can all be used to describe the basic traits of the MHE. The MHE, on one hand, is minimal in that it comprises mainly empirical moral principles but little theoretical elaboration, empirical or non-empirical. On the other hand, it should also be maximal in content as a common ground for all ethical systems that contain positive-empirical parts in their theories and practices so as to allow and encourage a larger/wider ethical dialogue among different ethical systems. Because most elaborated ethical systems exist in mixed forms, so this four-fold classifying model can help functionally separate different sections of each ethical system and more precisely redefine their connections to the MHE for each. If we define the empirical basic ethical part, some related ethical discourse will be found to fall inside and some outside it. Generally speaking, the semantic, scientific and philosophical operations usually fall outside the MHE, as do all religious and other transcendental discourses. The more scarcely the basic principles are employed, the larger the applied extent could be widened. In practice, the minimizing and maximizing strategies are employed simultaneously. On one hand, it is desirable to put all unnecessary parts

outside the basic zone and organize them into different related categories of ethical science. On the other hand, however, we need to appeal as much as possible to empirical and positive reasoning, including that taken from natural and social sciences, in order to strengthen the inner structure of MHE. Those empirical scientific elements must be widely accepted as irremovable principles in any ethical doctrines concerning interpersonal justification in this world.

There are thus two possible types of MHE: one in its primitive form like the Confucian and some other ancient empirical ethical systems, and the other in its modern scientific form, which will produce much more scientific results that have already been accepted as universal norms/regularity in modern times. So the demarcation between different categories of ethical discourses could be made flexibly. In general, the scientific type M3, more than the philosophical type M4, is closer to M1, for it is also primarily empirical. It is for this reason we may find that American ethical or naturalist humanism contains many more empirical or scientific elements, functioning contextually as the MHE. The same naturalist ethical discourse can alternatively function as M1, M3 and M4 in different contexts.

The modern intellectual world has been pluralistic in its social, intellectual and ideological compositions, which contain varying rational and irrational elements, including some very absurd and disgusting ones. All of those miscellaneous phenomena have different historical, sociological, psychological and ideological sources that cannot be changed or replaced merely by stronger rational arguments. The desired objective of empirical-rational humanist ethics does not lie in unrealistically anticipating the disappearance of its opposites, but rather in more effectively restricting their range of theoretical impact. The danger of superstitious and irrational rhetoric devices does not lie only in its social impact, but rather in its influence on more crucial problems in human life, such as those related to political/religious conflicts as well as to the modernization of human sciences. The classification of ethical scholarship and the definition of a MHE attempt to help shape different ethical discourses. Each concrete category contains different degrees of empirical, rationally operative elements, with the MHE as the direct empirical and practical basis. Thus, on one hand, there is the basic system of ethical values and pragmatic instructions that are directly shaped in human historical processes; and on the other there are different types of related interpretative and explanatory ethical teachings. The MHE can provide an operatively more effective common denominator for the communication of different ethical systems across different historical and geographical

settings. Using this classifying principle, most scientific, philosophical and religious theoretical supports for the MHE will not be confused with the MHE itself. The importance of this classification of ethical discourse is both practical and theoretical. Ambiguity about and confusion of ethical discursive categories will obstruct effective dialogues among different ethical theories. The mixture of categories and resulting ambiguity in this regard would lead to inferential invalidity in ethical reasoning.

We know that the traditional concepts of humanism, naturalism and empiricism can be more precisely and more pertinently defined according to their different preconditions, regulated functions and practical usages. We have indeed learned a lot from the intellectual history expressed in those traditional ethical theories, however we should selectively use their concepts and terms in the correct contexts and pertinent programs we choose. The ethical humanism of the future can be inspired and developed by dint of specially recombined intellectual sources that could be richer and more suitable than any past scholarly thoughts concerned. Still, there remains a basic, or historically constant, empirical autonomy concerning human ethical situations. This is the very essence of humanist ethics, which is different from any traditional moral philosophies that are more complicatedly constituted.

One of the most fundamental empirical concepts is the human nature that is the epistemological basis of our concept of MHE. Unlike the post-moderns, who reject the existence of a constant human nature, Confucian and western humanism both accept it. We can better expand the term as “essential nature related to humanity” and therefore acknowledge different kinds of “nature”, which include physical, bio-physiological, psychological and biosocial traits/inclinations. Naturalism should cover both biophysical and psychosocial natures; these two kinds of naturalism are respectively stressed by American humanism and Confucian humanism alike. All these different referents of the term “nature” are empirically defined and therefore implied in the empirical realm. According to our definition, humanism should be empirically and pragmatically defined; empirical ethics certainly consists of different theoretical levels. Whether it is the basic or derived type in its theoretical construction depends on the chosen inferential sophistication and the operative-applicable stages concerning the chosen ethical projects.

The so-called basic ethical model, the notion of MHE, can be firstly intellectually and empirically justified by the actual persistence of objective human ethical situations across all historical situations. This innately close link of ethical problems to historical reality is what makes basic ethics particularly empirical and practical, in contrast to its various

transcendental/metaphysical rivals. It is this empirical orientation that allows empirical ethics to maintain a theoretical and practical intelligibility that is shaped and tried within human historical experience. This form of ethics can be judged as quasi-objective and naturalistic because of its close fixation on two objective conditions: the internal human nature and the external historical reality related to ethical problems. That explains why an ancient Chinese ethical thought and a modern American one can share so many principles across their mutual historical and geographic distance. Of course, this comparison is only applicable to the basic level, or that of the MHE. For the Confucian, that might be its intellectual entirety, but for the American, it is only one component of a more complicated ethical system. The redefinition of ethical autonomy or basic ethics is increasingly important today, not only because it is a theoretical and practical requirement of contemporary humanist movements, but also because it provides a link to similar historical movements. As Paul Kurtz said, "Humanist ethical principles are autonomous, in the sense that they do not derive from theological or metaphysical premises, but grow out of our own sentient experiences" (1998: 7).

## **2.2 The role of a "minimal humanist ethics" (MHE) as regards general humanist ethics**

There are several important tasks facing general humanistic ethics. There is a methodological need for forming a common ground that is mutually acceptable and agreed upon by different ethical thoughts. Both the theoretical and the practical aspects of ethical practices need to expand their range of communication with various humanistic scientific fields. It also needs to deal with any damage caused by various forms of irrational and transcendental ethical thoughts. Most importantly, humanistic ethics needs to continuously contribute to the rationally feasible solution of challenges and crises in our present-day global situations. All of these tasks can be positively furthered by the development of the thought of a "minimal humanist ethics", which cannot be avoided by different schools of faiths and dogmas as long as they survive on the same earth.

A modern version of MHE should try to absorb some theoretical or scientific elements as long as the latter keep consistence with the primitive mode of MHE. Both primitive and modern versions of the MHE attempt to include within their basic scope only the necessary/minimal elements in order to encourage more humanist-tended schools to engage in dialogue with them. What that minimum consists of depends on the social and intellectual contexts. The specification of a MHE is made in light of the

answer to another practical question: who will be the chosen dialogic partners? Will they be fellow humanists, or people excluding any humanist interest? The definition of this minimum itself is flexible. For example, the present author used E1 to refer to an ethical problem about personal happiness, and E2 to refer to problems about interpersonal justice (Li 1997c: 279). In cross-cultural ethical dialogues, it might be advisable to focus on the issues of social justice, E2, and to exclude ethical debates about what constitutes personal happiness that cannot be settled objectively because those issues involve a number of different religious and philosophical positions. On the other hand, regarding the discussants between different humanist schools, a secular and social-directed axiological merit is already a widely accepted value, and therefore problems concerning both categories E1 and E2 can be included in communication based on the MHE. Thus we see that the specification of the MHE is always made for the sake of stressing an ethical-practical priority in our inquiry and practice. Moreover, different elements from different basic systems can be linked to each other. In fact, we can assume a universally accepted common dialogic ground related to the basic empirical-ethical situations empirically shared by the entirety of humanity despite the additional constitutional difference of various related theoretical scholarships.

In the modern intellectually and socially expanded context of ethical inquiry and practice, both “inquiry” and “practice” involve some additional or further derived elements. The current ethical inquiry should be linked to the expansion of human-scientific knowledge at the updated epistemological level; accordingly ethical pragmatics should also modernize itself at the applied-theoretical level. The polar binary concepts “ends” and “means” should be taken as relational terms defined in a relational term; and it is the same for problems concerning the relationship of “practice” and “theory”. On each stage or step of ethical-pragmatic projects there are simultaneously both practical and theoretical aspects involved, which are in interaction or complement each other. Theory requires practice, just as practice requires theory. In this sense, ethical inquiry is practice and theory at the same time. It seems appropriate that ethical inquiry should be sufficiently open to new intellectual/theoretical horizons that are to be ceaselessly enriched and advanced too.

The most desirable and most feasible policy of ethical humanism is to first strengthen itself in reference to the epistemological development of current social/human sciences. To this end, the minimal definition of humanist ethics could pragmatically provide a more feasible intellectual and practical division between the ethically basic and the ethically derived

or elaborated learning; and it can naturally facilitate the operations of the two, both separately and interactively. Having in the MHE a practicable system of ethical principles will increase the consistency of ethical understanding and activities among different people and can also effectively exclude the harmful interference of various non-scientific or transcendently-directed ethical speculations. The dangerous impact of the superstitious and irrational trends of various kinds is increasingly obvious in modern intellectual and academic realms. A crucial and difficult task of humanist ethics today lies in determining how to resist the incursion of various irrational and amoral ideologies, either secular or theistic, into academia. We need to more seriously emphasize the ethical implications of the humanities by stressing the importance of this basic common ethical ground in connection with different scholarly/theoretical factions. For example, we as humanists will seriously doubt post-modernist nihilism and extreme relativism when they represent a theoretical threat to our basic empirically-organized ethical foundation. So epistemological criticism against some obvious and latent academic dominations and efforts to more relevantly strengthen the theoretical humanities belong to the central tasks of humanist ethical inquiry. In my opinion, any kind free humanist ethical inquiry should further outline a two-fold objective: an inward and an outward. Internally, modern ethics should further purify its basic composition through excluding all non-ethical elements from its more exact reformulation; and externally, it should attempt to expand its interdisciplinary dialogues with all related theoretical knowledge that would help humanist ethics deepen and widen its theoretical horizon. The relevant interaction between the two practicing directions is another field of related studies; namely, firstly there is a need to reasonably narrow our operative range within ethical practice; while secondly it must expand its intellectual contact with other related disciplines for the sake of solidifying its own theoretical foundation, which is an additional preparation for more precisely modernizing the model of the MHE in future. In this sense we may say that the definition of the MHE can promote a two-pronged effort towards the desirable reconstruction of ethical science.

### **2.3 Contemporary ethics and its relations to the new perspective of the humanities**

Humanist ethics is facing two major tasks today: to shape its basic ethical theory, and to develop related ethical science at a higher level. The first task is important and pressing, not only practically, but also scientifically.

Nevertheless, the materials required for this task are mainly derived from human historical experience, and can be practically organized with the appropriate methodology. The second task is more complicated and extensively involved in modern social and intellectual conditions. By separating the two goals, we can better see how to achieve them both in future. The formulation of basic humanistic ethics can more effectively promote our practical objectives of various kinds, but the latter is related to a long-term goal of developing a more comprehensive and more satisfactory ethical science.

Ethical inquiry, as one branch of the humanities, is related to the much larger issue of the rational reconstruction of human sciences. It is true that the most successful production in the human rational/empirical practices is made in natural science, which has become the very model for all kinds of scientific studies. But because of the different compositions of physical, psychological, social, axiological and pragmatic domains, different sciences should develop in their own respective specialized fields. Relatively speaking, the human sciences, including philosophy, face more difficulty than the natural sciences in pursuing their goal of genuine scientific establishment. Despite their longer history, the social and human sciences have been in their modern form for a relatively short period. The present-day humanities are faced with the task of systematically reconstructing themselves in the future. The current interdisciplinary and cross-cultural developments in the humanities will hopefully lead to a readjustment of ethical scholarship as well.

Both Confucian thought and American humanism, because of their common emphasis on empirical ethical autonomy, have an important role to play regarding the tasks of ethical discipline and its actual applications in the international context. The interdisciplinary and cross-cultural turn of ethical theory means that the new ethical inquiry, especially its theoretical development, will be freer and more open in the future, while still keeping a constant MHE as the basic/essential substance for carrying out any ethical practices. Firmly based on the empirical, positivistic and pragmatic levels, the new ethical inquiry will strive for a more extensive dialogue with all possible theoretical partners. Thus, a new Enlightenment, in the present humanist perspective, is not a simple return to the rational spirit of its earlier historical stages; rather, it will be a much-expanded intellectual movement incorporating both ethical scholarship and the theoretical developments of the social and human sciences.

The western academic ethics has been institutionalized over the past two hundred years and tends to be more and more rigidified and separated from modern social/academic reality. Consequently, academic ethics,



despite its constant theoretical sophistication, has been inclined to be somewhat separated from a sufficient or precise focus on actual human ethical situations; therefore it can hardly provide effective methods for grasping the relevant ethical problematic in the actual world. There are the technically speculative and scholastic-type moral philosophers specializing in historical texts as a mere professional routine; on the other side, there are rhetorical players in the same academic market aiming to invent new brands of “academic commodities” for creating influence. Both types are oppositional to the empirical-positive direction of realistic and humanist ethics. On the other hand, our MHE model indicates clearly that regarding any ethical-related social/scientific projects it cannot concretely attain its scientific goal without combining other related social/human theories. Unlike its historical predecessors, contemporary ethics as a single discipline is unable to solve synthetically-shaped moral problems alone. The question becomes, in our practical ethical programs, how to design and arrange certain more suitable intellectual and social combinations of ethical and other related scholarly parts. Nevertheless, as regards this situation, the role of humanist ethics will turn out to be not less but rather more significant. Within its own proper scope, ethics naturally needs to improve its quality and efficiency ceaselessly. It is only through the advance of the ethical discipline that the required scholarly-strategic combinations could be securely created.

### **3. Significance of the Dialogue between Confucian Ethics and Ethical Humanism**

We are now in a position to summarize the major points shared by American and Confucian ethical humanism. The two ethical thoughts have the following points in common:

- a) An empirical, rationalist, humanist-centered stance in ethical reasonings;
- b) Personal happiness, interpersonal love and social justice taken as preeminent ethical values;
- c) A firm personal devotion to inquire about ethical truth and to ethical commitment;
- d) A focus on the ethical dimension of politics, society and culture;
- e) An empirical-ethical-epistemological minimalism, which makes the both more flexible and open-minded to be combinable with other related disciplines and fields for realizing ethical goals.

The similarity of the two positions in presenting, organizing and realizing their respective ethical missions is certainly due to their common empiricism and mundane realism. Shared content at the level of the MHE is rooted in the unchanging part of human nature positive-empirically experienced across the entirety of history. The long historical experience in the east and the most recent social experiment in the west form a reliable common ethical ground for us to more relevantly understand the human ethical situation and the related ethical reflections.

However, I have to point out several essential distinctions between Confucian ethics and American humanism, especially also at an epistemological level.

- a) Unlike the purely empirical/positive identity of Confucian ethics, American humanism as one type in the western philosophical tradition is still based on a naturalist-metaphysical and logical-centric philosophy. The fact naturally involves a theoretical complicity that is not necessary or useful for supporting the mundane humanist ethical spirit. In light of the MHE model we can easily find another inconsistency between its empirical ethical principles and its unnecessary metaphysical elaboration.
- b) Regarding the attitude of humanist ethics towards religious doctrines, the modern reformulated Confucian ethics holds a friendly and neutral stance to all humanity-beneficial religions under the understanding that there exists a natural functional distinction between religious beliefs and ethical thinking in history. The former has been a social/psychological necessity for the majority to release the instinctive fear of death ever since the start of the civilized history of mankind; this functional necessity is just like what we see in music/paintings that are also not of a rational/scientific nature. The latter nevertheless is another instinctive need of humanity-intellectuals for inquiring into human-scientific truth, which can be proved by the millions of books standing in each big library.
- c) Therefore Confucian ethics has nothing to do with the interest of American humanist ethics in a professional task for confrontation with different religious schools. On the contrary, in terms of Confucian humanist ethics there should be peaceful separate existences of religions and sciences without theoretical discussions between the two. Besides, Confucian ethical humanism could provide all natural and supernatural systems of beliefs with a universal dialogic platform for making a universal agreement about

common worldly interests on the common understanding that meaningful communication among different belief-systems should be restricted to the worldly ethical issues so as to effectively solve the commonly faced empirical conflicts. Religions and theologies can of course pursue their goals about their respective supernatural themes within their own special realms. In this sense, Confucian humanist ethics could become the uniquely qualified neutral dialogic ground serving all systems of faiths and beliefs just because of its empiricist purity or lack of metaphysical/ontological language, including a naturalist-metaphysical one.

- d) Perhaps a basic functional distinction between Confucian humanist ethics and American ethical humanism could be found in that the former remains just ethical learning and the latter is a social/academic organization. In a strict sense the latter's theoretical foundation cannot really be described as based on an ethical minimalism represented by Confucian ethics.

It should be emphasized that our comparison is not made between the two actual ethical systems as such, which have emerged in completely different historical and social circumstances, but only between some of their ethical tendencies. In order to reveal its MHE, Confucian ethics must be first detached from its historical shroud of imperial socio-political and academic Confucianism. This political-nationalist ideology of Confucianism can only hide the true ethical value of Confucian thought and must distort its intellectual spirit. Similarly, a more intensive focus on its ethical dimension would allow American humanism, already notable for its attention to worldly ethical practices, to enrich its other related human-scientific (other than natural-scientific) theoretical connections. A possible scholarly union between the two ethical doctrines, the historical eastern and the modern western, could help lay a foundation for a new universal ethics to be shaped within the modern natural-social-human scientific framework that has attained such important progress in the past decades.

Ethical humanism and modernized Confucian ethical thought share the same intellectual potential for advancing ethical-epistemological and moral-methodological rationality. In my opinion, this possibility will lead to the desirable emergence of a new humanist/positivist-directed ethics in the future. First, their basic empirical tendency reinforces an orientation towards real ethical situations. Second, their positive potential for integrating related scholarly fields and social activities would constitute this task as an attainable goal in terms of social and human sciences. Confucian ethics could present a unique holistic pragmatic learning,

leading the ethical agent to more consistently (owing to its exclusion of any metaphysical elaboration) operate with different ethically-related elements, and accordingly is conducive to shaping a more independent and adamant moral personality. The social ethics of the one and the personal ethics of the other could perhaps complement each other, working together to pursue a more scientifically satisfactory ethical system.

It has been rumored that modern Mediterranean orientalism could pose a desirable alternative to western moral culture. If so, Chinese Confucian thought would posit a more radical as well as equally relevant “the Other”.<sup>82</sup> It is perhaps just this cultural polarity that constitutes the possibility of forming a common operative ground in the modern social-cultural world. As one of the latest western ethical traditions, American humanism has realized two kinds of ethical synthesis. At the theoretical level, it combines different empirical ethical trends in western history ranging from ancient Greek to American naturalism; and practically, it unites humanist ethical theory with the multiply secularized socio-political activities of the United States. We have suggested that the ways by which this latest ethical development originating in the most developed country in the world can be traced back to its western spiritual founder Socrates (rather than Aristotle, whose metaphysical/socio-logical orientation tends to undermine the earlier ethical autonomy on which Socrates focuses). American ethical humanism, opposed to current irrational and dogmatic trends of various kinds, becomes the most consistent modern successor of the Socratic tradition. Meanwhile, a new Confucian ethical humanism, after being scientifically reformulated and epistemologically clarified, will be the natural successor of the long Confucian ethical tradition. The two ethical humanist movements, originating respectively in the largest historical-cultural eastern country and in the largest modern scientific-industrial western country, with Confucius and Socrates as the co-founding fathers in human ethical history, could logically represent a unified empirical and positivist tradition of humanist ethics which will be capable of coping with the current ethical irrationalism and dogmatism alike.

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<sup>82</sup> In his *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Humanism*, Paul Kurtz said, “The ethics of humanism draws deeply from the well of philosophical wisdom of Greece and Rome, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and modern scientific learning” (Kurtz 1988: 252). I may add that Confucian ethics plays a double role in confrontation with western humanist ethics: it was indeed its historical-cultural “alien”, but it is also its cooperative partner in both theory and practice. It is only through a structuralist reading of the Confucian text that modern people can better grasp its ethical-epistemological traits and strength.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY

# SIGNIFICANCE AND PERSPECTIVE OF THE CHINESE-WESTERN SEMIOTIC DIALOGUE<sup>83</sup>

### Summary

This international congress implies both substantial and symbolic historical significance. First, as far as I know, the present international dialogue in the humanities could be the first one like this in the world. A conference like this can hardly be held in the west because of the existing institutional and professional compartmentalization formed in the western academic establishment. I mean a special form of dialogue between the Chinese scholarly classics and the western theoretical frontiers. Certainly, as an initial attempt at interdisciplinary and intercultural-directed scientific pursuance, the substantial aspect of this conference remains tentative and elementary with respect to the depth of the related discussion; nevertheless it indicates a great symbolic importance in consideration of a desirable new orientation of both semiotics and the humanities in the world. The classic slogan “west is west and east is east” must be given up from a semiotic point of view. In general, the total knowledge of mankind must be grasped and developed in a sufficiently unified scientific framework from now on. That means a pluralism of the global humanities should after all be set up in a unified intellectual context of mankind, no matter how complicated the constitution of the latter could be. Therefore this meeting between the IASS and CASS has a remarkably historic meaning. The

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<sup>83</sup> Originally published online at [www.semioticsli.com](http://www.semioticsli.com) (2005). This paper was read as the concluding lecture of the Semiotics and the Humanities international congress in Beijing on March 28, 2004. The conference was co-organized by the CASS and IASS, and the co-chairmen were Prof. Ru Xin, the former vice-president of the CASS and the director of the Center for Comparative Civilization Studies (CCCS) of the CASS, and Prof. Roland Posner, president of the IASS. The designers and coordinators included Youzheng Li, the associated senior fellow of the CCCS, Qineng Chen, vice-director of the CCCS, and Roland Posner, TU Berlin.

CASS is an academic family of multiple disciplines while the IASS is a workable dialogic ground for all-round interdisciplinary practices. The intellectual exchange between traditional Chinese scholarship and modern western theory could present an encouraging new horizon and set up a more workable model for the unified academic practices of the humanities in the world.

## Preface

The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences is one of the most all-inclusive institutions for human-social scientific research in the world. The International Association for Semiotic Studies is one of the most successful multinational academic societies for organizing interdisciplinary-directed scientific-theoretical investigations in the world. The scientific encounter of the two institutions will lead to significant consequences in the promotion of the development of global studies of human sciences through a comparative semiotic discussion like this. As the first step for this scientific cooperation, international semiotic experts offer a systematic presentation of their semiotic theories to Chinese scholars, making the latter more clearly grasp the spirit and techniques of western semiotic scholarship today. The bilateral discussion also offers a chance for international scholars to grasp the relevant meaning and huge potential of Chinese historical semiotic sources. The meaning of this cross-cultural scholarly encounter is not limited in its immediate outcome; it signifies a promising perspective for cross-cultural semiotic cooperation in future regarding semiotic scholarship and human sciences alike.

Is there any special significance to the Chinese-western semiotic dialogue when Chinese semiotic study remains in its primary stage in comparison with the highly developed western one? I attempt to say that there indeed exists a rich potential of Chinese semiotics that is highly significant for both Chinese and western humanities. I will explain my viewpoints in the following five sections.

### 1. Identity of Semiotics

As early as in the IASS Congress at Berkeley in 1994, I stressed that the identity of semiotics should not be defined as one more new discipline among others; it is an operative ground or working field for multiple/interdisciplinary academic practices. Here we should first distinguish between the professional and the scientific institutions. Semiotic activity exists within the established academic network following the general rules of the

disciplinary compartmentalization rooted in the academic establishment, while its essential part is indicated in playing a creatively synthetic role across different disciplinary boundaries. If so, it cannot search for a theoretical foundation or justification from any existing disciplinary authority. For example, semiotics can have neither a pragmatic nor a phenomenological foundation; neither can it base itself on some philosophy of language. Semiotic theory goes beyond any existing philosophical frame that has been traditionally regarded as the foundation of the humanities. The semiotic approach indicates several basic aspects in its typical operation such as: the sign-formative, semantic, syntactic, pragmatic and academic-institutional. All such aspects are about the knowledge of the structure and function of sign systems of all kinds. It is exactly in this sense that Chinese and western cultures or learning can be described and analyzed in terms of the same analytical procedure. The divergent cultural manifestations can be commonly treated with respect to their formalist dimensions at first. And the formalist manifestations of different cultures share some common procedures to be analyzed according to the same scientific methodology. The special efficiency of semiotics rests in exactly this interdisciplinary tendency.

## 2. Human Sciences

Unlike natural and social sciences, human sciences or the humanities have a rich historical dimension despite their modern scientific-directed development. The disciplines in human learning such as philosophy, history and literary/artistic studies contain their own different historical dimensions respectively. Modern studies of the results of those traditional disciplines must be faced with both historical and scientific dimensions. If the scientific dimensions of disciplines in different cultures tend to be convergent with each other in constitution, their historical dimensions must be linked to or determined by different historical experiences containing different intelligent and pragmatic features in mental operation. Regarding the compositional comparison between Chinese and western scientific cultures today, there is no difference between them for natural sciences, less difference for social sciences, but much more difference in human sciences. A genealogical reason for the latter is due to the historical divergence of both sides. A more essential reason is due to the complicit structure of the humanities as such which consists of divergent planes such as the semantic, psychological, axiological, and pragmatic ones. All these planes, besides their related academic operations, are connected to the establishment of faith and attitude in the human mind. The human



mentality of choosing faiths and beliefs of various kinds is the most complicated as well as the most crucial in nature. However the modern semiotic approach is found to be more capable of dealing with these difficult issues. With respect to the above triple academic compartmentalization, the special tie between semiotics and the humanities seems to be the most noteworthy. It is natural that the present intellectual globalization with respect to the humanities should cover non-western ones. The historical dimension has its own existence regardless of its special cultural characters. For the sake of unifying the historical experiences of different civilizations there emerges a general task for mankind at present to firstly unify or make commensurable different formulations of the humanities in different traditions. Therefore a modern academic practice named as cross-cultural humanities becomes more and more relevantly constructive for human academic progress today. Therefore, besides being an “Esperanto” tool for interdisciplinary exchange of ideas in the west, semiotics is also the one for cross-cultural “Esperanto” in the world.

In light of the above, far from being an isolated discipline, semiotics should live and operate within the entire academic world, especially in the entire context of the theoretical humanities of the world. Because, compared with natural and social sciences, the humanities suffer from various kinds of semantic ambiguity and inferential weakness, which semiotics is more capable of dealing with.

### 3. Traditional Chinese Humanities

Therefore the study of the non-western humanities should also be a relevant part of western humanities today through establishing different comparative studies. The key point for this purpose lies in promoting methodological feasibility for cross-cultural studies of the humanities at the theoretical level. It is semiotics that can provide us with several approaches to the comparative theoretical analysis in divergent traditions of the humanities. Please permit me to explain why the Chinese traditional humanities could be one of the most important “Others” for the western humanities in the present cross-cultural academic practices shared by the both. Briefly, the Chinese cultural tradition presents the following unique traits compared to the western: 1) it is the longest cultural continuum in the entire non-western civilized world; 2) it is a pure cultural stranger to the west with respect to its substantial and formalist contents in comparison to other intellectual “strangers” of the west such as the Middle East and India, with which the west has kept lasting interactions in history; and 3) a current understanding of the Chinese humanities within the

modern scientific framework becomes necessary for the whole task of the present-day human sciences in the world. It looks like that the regular ways of studying the Chinese classics in western academia have already existed. But the latter is generally restricted by its descriptive and philologically-directed scholarship formed in its special historical-cultural conditions. What we crucially require today is more relevant methodology effectively operating at higher theoretical and systematic levels that can be fully communicable with the theoretical achievements of the western humanities. Another important development is that theoretical practice today is far from being limited in its traditional philosophical type. It is semiotics that provides multiple theoretical potentials and is therefore especially related to the development of the comparative humanities as a whole.

In contrast with natural and social sciences, the characteristic traits of the humanities are especially related to issues such as meaning, value, belief and morality. For dealing with such highly important but frequently misleading themes, the modern western humanities essentially require the complementary experience from its major "academic others", which nevertheless should be at first reformulated in terms of a more communicable mode of discourse. Based on a rational epistemological position, the traditional humanities should be transformed to the human sciences in a modern sense. In a narrower sense, that means the Anglo-American mode of the humanities should be largely unified to the continental human-scientific theories of all kinds; in a wider sense, the expanded western mode of human sciences should be further unified with the historical-scholarly achievements of all non-western civilizations. Besides, both the western and Chinese traditions in the humanities are faced with different types of modernization. The present Chinese human sciences have their two compositional dimensions: the historical one and the scientific one. The latter must be linked with all related scientific sources on the globe, connecting naturally with all western sciences. Since its modern period, therefore, the Chinese humanities should be transformed into Chinese-western comparative humanities; in other words, the present-day Chinese humanities should also include various scientific elements originating from the western theoretical humanities that cannot be absurdly confused with the current international comparative literature. This desirable modernized mode of the Chinese humanities will lead to two consequences: the developments made along the general modern scientific direction and in turn their impact on the development of the western humanities. In brief, the Chinese humanities today and in future consist of original Chinese and derived western elements alike.

Let us point out a basic fact that most of the Chinese population shares the same structure of knowledge with western people today, including in both the scientific and technological aspects. Today there is still quite a limited number of Chinese scholars specialized in the theoretical humanities, but there are indeed more and more Chinese scholars studying the western humanities than those studying the traditional Chinese one. Moreover, even for most Chinese scholars specialized in the Chinese classics, the western theories of different disciplines also become an important part of their learning and knowledge. In other words, a current Chinese scholar engaged in the traditional humanities must be the knower of both Chinese and western learning. In such a sense, the western humanities have already become a constitutional part of the present-day Chinese humanities.

#### 4. Chinese Semiotics

The term “Chinese semiotics” implies three references: the historical source, the geographic scope of its current academic activities, and the cultural-professional category. As a description of the academic area, Chinese semiotics is part of both eastern Asian semiotics and global semiotics. But we mostly use it as a cultural conception that contains both its historical traces and its modern multi-comparative practices. It is easy to perceive the significance of Chinese semiotics for Chinese humanities, but the point here lies in that Chinese semiotics is also closely related to the correct development of international semiotics. Consider the eighth international congress of the IASS in Lyon, the first one this century, whose general theme was phrased by the two words “interculturality and globalization”, which happen to be especially linked to Chinese-western comparative semiotics. The semiotic movement, which started in the 1960s, has spread to the entire world today, naturally progressing beyond its original European-American soil. More importantly, the term interculturality means semiotic studies have also gone beyond their original European-American origin. Semiotics is increasingly becoming a cross-cultural academic practice from now on. That means European-American semiotics will invite its cultural “Other” for dialogues and cooperation. Among all semiotic “Others”, the Chinese one is certainly noteworthy from a western point of view because of its typically historically and culturally alien status. The historical-cultural speciality of China is an even more relevant reason for western semiotics to choose Chinese semiotics as one of its main dialogic partners. No doubt, the participation of Chinese semiotics in the world’s semiotic activities will in

turn widely and deeply influence the intellectual topography of the semiotic practices of the world. Therefore we can even say a breakthrough in the semiotic movement in the new century will be first promoted by western-Chinese comparative semiotic studies when the latter is more effectively reorganized.

## 5. Chinese semiotics and International Semiotics

The IASS, or the present world semiotics rooted in its European-American origin, will obtain a new perspective after it pays attention to the potential of Chinese semiotics. How to measure the potential of Chinese semiotics and its positive contribution to the growth of world semiotics is now quite a relevant topic to the latter. The meaning of the development of Chinese semiotics is not limited to China or Asia; in a deep sense it is related to the entire semiotic world. A developed Chinese semiotics in future is not a mere geographic expansion of the activity of world semiotics; it is also an energetic factor to cause an essential readjustment of the scholarly structure of modern semiotics itself. The developed Chinese semiotics must be characterized by its stronger interdisciplinarity and interculturality. These two academically/intellectually revolutionary tendencies could someday become a fresh impetus to the international semiotic practices, even probably launching a new semiotic turn, namely a comparative turn, in the semiotic world. It is semiotics that tends to break up the boundaries of disciplines and gaps of cultures, leading to an all-round reorganization of the world's humanities. If the humanities of mankind must someday be a common global practice, the same must be the case with semiotics as well. So the interaction and cooperation between western and Chinese semiotics will function at two levels: the semiotic practice in its tactical level and the expanded practice in connection with the entirety of humanities at its strategic level. In other words, Chinese and western semiotics will share cooperative practices at the semiotic level as well as at the idealistic level of the global human sciences. Chinese semiotics is far from being the mere application of western theory to Chinese material; its scientific achievements will in turn expand and deepen the empirical foundation of western theory, including its semiotic part, as well. Accordingly, the expanded experience of human history must influence the formation of the theoretical practices of mankind that were first shaped in the west. Semiotics will provide the tool for effective interaction between non-western intellectual history and western modern academic theory. Academic globalization will strengthen and speed up this process. Therefore "Chinese semiotics" as a cultural/academic category is not

limited to studies of the Chinese tradition; it must be related to the entire academic scope of the world. The scientific exploration of the Chinese tradition logically includes the application of the theoretical sources of the world to the Chinese historical material.

In light of this perspective, there is no doubt that the reorganized Chinese humanities are far from merely being the historical reservoir of their intellectual past. Human sciences should be scientific in character, while the related scientific mode should be pluralized in future beyond its historical modalities. The scientific should be reasonable and intelligible in any case, in contrast with epistemological irrationality, including its so-called post-modernist trend. The semiotic essential should refer to the scientific operation rather than to any quasi-artistic one. Therefore the constructive development of Chinese semiotics is related to all epistemological and methodological discussions concerning the present-day human sciences. In light of this strategic perspective, we should consider the future of Chinese semiotics and its connection to social-human sciences. With respect to this intellectual challenge concerning Chinese-western semiotics, the related practical methodology must be readjusted accordingly. The expanded area of Chinese-western comparative semiotics also means the expansion of international semiotics and the progress of the semiotic movement as a whole. Semiotics, far from being a set of fixed academic procedures, is the operative ground to provide multiple possibilities for its scholarly creations.

Therefore there could be two important consequences following the establishment of Chinese-western comparative semiotic practices. First, the Chinese side will keep learning from all useful western human-scientific theories. Second, the result of the Chinese-western comparative semiotic practices will be an organic development of the international semiotic movement on the globe. As a result, Chinese semiotics will certainly make its independent and original contribution to the further development of world semiotics in future.

# CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

## MODERN THEORY AND TRADITIONAL CHINESE HISTORIOGRAPHY<sup>84</sup>

### 0. Introduction: Significance of Cross-Cultural Historical-Theoretical Studies

With the dynamic changes in the composition of all disciplines and the recent developments in multicultural studies worldwide, the interdisciplinary tendency in the humanities needs a cross-cultural dimension (cf. Li 1997c: 47-48). Not only will this expand domains of research, but it will bring about more original theoretical progress as well. The recent hermeneutic-semiotic turn in comparative studies in the humanities suggests that current theoretical reflections on traditional non-western scholarship can also expand the theoretical horizon of the humanities in the west, including general historiography. This interdisciplinary/cross-cultural development will more relevantly and energetically stimulate a further elaboration of present-day western theoretical practices as well. The point is not merely in enriching cultural experiences in studies, but rather in the intellectual encounter between modern/post-modern western theoretical approaches and cultural materials in non-western historical traditions. Needless to say, Chinese is one of the most important cultural strangers for the western humanities. Western historiography can greatly benefit from examining Chinese-western comparative historical theories that have three main aspects. One is an effective expansion of the historical experience, namely, a greater knowledge of the characteristic non-western historiographic tradition. Another is increasing the relevance and precision of theoretical practices in western historical science. The third is the development of a universal framework to deal with theoretical problems in human history.

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### **0.1 The Necessity to Distinguish the Historical from the Literary Operative Domains**

The main achievements in historical science today have been attained by scholars of modern western historiography. But this scholarly success is restricted by two geographic-historical conditions. They are: the European historical processes and the related western-centric historiography. Since history is a universal phenomenon, its recorded experience is much larger than just a European one. Therefore most investigations of comprehensive historical experience are based primarily on European history which is not comprehensive enough to develop a general science of history. The first goal of cross-cultural historiography lies in enlarging the historical-observational scope of study. An expanded and enriched historical experience logically requires readjusting and refocusing current historical theories. However, this presupposes a “quasi-objective” historical process regardless of whether this is the case or not. Without this presupposition the so-called expansion of historical experience is meaningless since any added historiographic content can be produced arbitrarily. From an operative point of view, it is first necessary to make a distinction between history and literature. **On** the one hand, modern studies emphasize shared and overlapping aspects of the two disciplines, but on the other there is still a gap between the two at the strategic/operative level. Despite sharing content or described objects in their respective discourses they have different intellectual goals, with one being the representative and the other being the fictive. This realistic character of historiography as a discipline has nothing to do with its lack of practical capability for completely attaining its scholarly goal. Historical processes are preserved through direct memories of historical heroes and the indirect recordings of historians. This historiographic representation is certainly incomplete and imprecise. It seems natural to maintain that people can never grasp historical reality in its entirety, primarily owing to a variety of technical weaknesses in historiographic practices. Still, we cannot reject a quasi-objective presupposition of historical processes at an epistemological level. For example, we cannot deny the current reality of our own personal past experience, nor can we easily deny the existence of our close relatives or friends. Because our existence itself implies the inlaid function of memory, we cannot help but distinguish the actually occurring in reality from the fictively creating by imagination in our daily experience. Therefore, what is called the objectivity of historical processes should not be examined by our capability to attain them; it should be dealt with according to the trait of our operative goal: an intellectual direction

towards an objective reality. This can be shown indirectly or dialectically through contrasting it with the literary-styled operations that have a different epistemological status. According to Paul Veyne and many others, history seems to be only an art. But there is still a division between the available materials and the subjective operation in historiographic work. The point is that the objective part is the main goal for historians' constructions. Moreover, historians cannot arbitrarily construct this part in a literary or artistic way without paying attention to the restrictions imposed by objectivity that becomes the criterion a historian must obey. This epistemological distinction between history and literature is first established by their operative goals and intellectual horizons, not by historical data riddled with descriptive details.

## **0.2 The Relevance of the Chinese Historiographic Alien to Western/Modern Historical Theory**

While a historiographic work combines the real and the unreal, the historian seeks to enlarge the scope of the real and decrease the scope of the unreal. In short, the historian seeks to know more "truth" about history. Without this yearning a historian is little more than a literary man. For a science of history, the panorama of historical processes of mankind should be written as completely as possible. Historiographic works come about through different historiographic patterns formed in different cultural traditions. It is obvious that there are differences in the way scholars of different historical traditions represent and evaluate human history. This historiographic divergence is primarily caused by different historiographic-strategic procedures formed in the different historical stages of a civilization or, more seriously, in different civilizations. Therefore, before embarking on modern comparative historical studies, there should be a strengthening of comparative historiographic methods. This would lead to a greater understanding of the relationship between non-western historiographic patterns and non-western historical processes, as well as to enlarge and precise our understanding of both non-western and western histories. Thus, for western or modern historical-theoretical studies, an advanced knowledge of non-western historiography and its theoretical practice is more and more relevant and useful today.

For the past two centuries, western learning has already successfully contrasted the differences between the west and the orient. But we should recognize that Said's orientalism remains within a pan-western intellectual framework. After all, both the European and Arabic traditions sprang from the same Mediterranean origin. But for westerners, China's case is



completely different. This genuine stranger has existed outside the European circle and maintained its strangeness in linguistic semantics, artistic rhetoric and mental typologies. The distinction is far from being expressed only in language. That is why translating traditional texts literally into English cannot overcome its strangeness. If one works within its strange semantic frame, there is still a lack of a thorough understanding. China is said to be the unparalleled “historiographic power” in the world. If this is true, modern western historical theory is still without a solid basis without effectively including its Chinese counterpart. China, as one of the major non-western civilizations, is habitually called a land of history or historiography not only because of its long history but also because of its deep-rooted custom of organizing historical writings. It is obvious that without a Chinese component, a general history of mankind is incomplete and less than comprehensive. Developing a dialogue between non-western and western historiography would meet a two-fold powerful alien in China: both her history and her historiography. As is the case with all ancient histories, traditional Chinese historical representations are conditioned by uniquely formed historiographic patterns. Traditional Chinese culture is first of all characterized by a continuing interest in maintaining its historiographic tradition. But the pre-modern character of Chinese historiography makes it very different from that of western historiography, be it the classical or the modern era. On the one hand, a modern understanding of Chinese history is still based on traditional Chinese historiographic records which are less than scientific and therefore provide a much less precise picture of historical processes. On the other, traditional historiography, with different goals and methods in its practice, is embodied in a Chinese writing system that is still strange to most western scholars. In order to understand the function of Chinese historiography in modern scientific terms, it is not enough merely to master the language and to unquestionably accept Chinese historiographic representations. Because of the linguistic and organizational differences between western and Chinese historiography, a direct dialogue is difficult to establish in the present framework which is compartmentalized by our academic system. The current academic situation in fact causes a scholarly barrier between the two approaches. In Chinese studies, the more philologically-practically-oriented historiography is carried out primarily at a less systematic and less theoretical level. The present-day discussions in the west about historical theory and historiography are limited by a less than inclusive informative horizon.

Modern historical theory, with its western-centrist orientation, should be extended to all geographical-historical areas, including those least

western in outlook. For the sake of better understanding a historiographic alien such as China, modern historians should first explore the structure of non-western historiographic patterns by employing recent interdisciplinary theoretical achievements emerging within contemporary western humanities. This can help overcome the communicative barrier between different academic traditions. In the case of the Chinese, scholarly contact between classical Chinese (material) and modern western (theory) has an important epistemological as well as a practical significance, considering the unparalleled richness of the sources of Chinese history and its historiography. After a fruitful interdisciplinary and cross-cultural interaction between western and Chinese intellectual traditions, the deep chasm between western ideas and Chinese ones will diminish. Our global village in the 21<sup>st</sup> century certainly requires a more comprehensive and more coherent knowledge about a genuine universal history. Multiculturalism should not exclude efforts for intellectual commensurability between different cultural traditions. Quite simply, pluralism cannot be an excuse to give up making consistent different types of human knowledge. If there is an order in society and natural science, we should expect the same in the humanities, although in the latter an intellectual order belongs to another type. If we still feel it is useful to call history or historiography a science, that only means we insist on a linguistic and logical order in our discourse. But, of course, poets have a right and reason to destroy this kind of order. Is there any necessity to make every historian become a poet in the post-industrial era?

## **1. The Western Realistic Historiographic Tradition and the Traditional Chinese Moral-Pragmatic Historiographic Tradition**

There is a sharp contrast between the ideological-pragmatic tradition of ancient Chinese historiography and the realistic-positivist tradition of ancient Greek historiography. According to Le Goff's analysis, there are principles of Greek historians such as "evidence" (Herodotus), "intelligibility" (Thucydides), "causal analysis" (Polybius) and "truth" (until Cicero) (cf. Le Goff 1988: 267). In contrast, Chang Hsüeh-cheng's description of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, a masterpiece of traditional Chinese historiographic theory, is significant since it illustrates "deleting and rearranging material" (*pi-hsiao*, literally, to cut off with a pen knife) (Chang 1985: 470). Out of these two very different intellectual origins have come two different historiographic traditions. In fact, western cultural history has a realistic tendency to emphasize observation and

representation, explained not only by its unique scientific history (logic, mathematics, biology, and physics) but also by its style in the arts, grounded in a perspective principle. Western scholars have had a scientific/realistic orientation since the time of the ancient Greeks. In contrast, the Chinese artistic tradition has continued to employ a “spirit-expressing” or “literary-symbolic” principle regardless of the representational criteria. In general, Chinese culture stresses the principle of expressing spiritual-philosophical and moral-ideological contents in a variety of artistic ways. Chinese scholarly activities are also more artistically inclined than their western counterparts (cf. Li 1997c: 204). This artistic/moral/pragmatic scholarly tendency can be contrasted with the scientific tendency originating in the western tradition. Since the time of modernization in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese scholars have increasingly moved in the direction of western scholarship both in natural and social sciences. With this remarkable modernization movement, Chinese historiography has made a conscious attempt to become more scientific and to critically evaluate traditional non-scientific styles in its traditional scholarship. This movement has placed a responsibility on historiography to be as objective as possible about the historic past; namely, historians want to search and grasp for more historical “reality” and “truth” in contrast with fabrication and distortion in formulating historical discourses. If people are unable to determine absolute truth, they still have reason to obtain more, rather than less, rationally acceptable knowledge as to what “really” happened in the past. Unless this is done, modern Chinese historiography cannot undertake a new scientific direction which differs from its own tradition. The different composition and style of the Chinese historiographic tradition, weak in realism and positivism in historical writing, can provide reversibly a justification for the necessity of maintaining the concepts of reality and truth in historical representations.

### 1.1 Historical Truth and Historiographic Distortive Representation

China has preserved its systematic historiographic literature for over 2,000 years and 24 dynasties with continuous, officially authorized, and edited historic works. The main academic historical works, or *cheng-shih* (authorized and official historical works), are compilations of narrative records, causal analyses, moral judgments and ideological predictions about Chinese history that were required, organized and supervised by dynastic rulers and imperial officials. Those historiographic organizers had a united Confucianist view of history, humanity, society and the world.

This traditional historiographic system provides the basic writings about social, cultural and political experiences of China through which we can, to differing degrees, understand the historical processes and imaginations of the Chinese people. *Cheng-shih* is, with a few exceptions, the only “window” through which to peer into the past life of the Chinese. This writing system was developed in China’s pre-modern period and has a unique organizing principle and style of writing historical texts. This “window”, with its particular perspective and way of thinking, is characteristic of the traditional Chinese social and psychological framework. The reflected pictures and written texts were first determined by the organizing (administrating and editing) and writing (semantically and grammatically interweaving) principles set out by the ruling political system of imperial China. It is obvious that the historiographic system was first devised to serve the security and welfare of traditional Chinese political regimes. This indicated its strong socio-political pragmatic tendency in the way it worked. In other words, the relationship between the principle of writing historiographic texts and political ideology played a crucial role in the constitution of the writings. The historical pictures obtained in reading the historiographic texts had to accord with a previously fixed ideological direction. In our modern scientific approach, we have to take into account various constitutive aspects, ranging from the ideological to the substantial and the writing-procedural, in order to be able to intelligibly judge the quality and utility of traditional Chinese historiographic writings. When Ku Chieh-kang said, “Such a kind of historical material cannot be safely used by us modern scholars until it is sufficiently reorganized scientifically” (cf. Tong 1963: 101), his main concern was with the less than scientific principles and customs of writing history in the traditional period.

## 1.2 Historiography: Scientific or Literary?

There is an extreme relativist historiographic point of view which blurs the distinction between historiographic and literary writings; namely, both truth and fiction, and representation and fabrication in historic writings are so extensively mixed that a science of history becomes almost impossible. If the concept of a historical truth is discarded, the problem is of little concern to the historian. However, this extreme relativist historiographic rhetoric first confuses two different oppositions: that between truth and falsehood in historiographic writings as well as that between actual events and the wrongful recording of events. The word “truth” can refer to the description as well as to the real process. However, the rejection of one

does not automatically lead to the rejection of the other. While the actual occurrence of a process is one thing, the verbal description of the same process is another. Therefore we should be concerned about establishing a relationship between the two despite the technical difficulty of doing so. Being conscious of the distinction increases our sensitivity to the quality of verbal descriptions. If we can understand the distinction and its effect on historiographic writings by first understanding the principles of producing the writings, we can better know the function and semantic potential of traditional Chinese historiographic texts. Since this kind of reflection is usually neglected in modern scholarship, the traditional texts are readily used to provide reliable records of historical processes and as main sources of material for modern historical inquiry.

The distinction between (actual) process and its (verbal) description and that between (verbal) description or recording and (verbal) fabrication or imagination belong to different ontic levels. While rejecting the possibility of exactly describing the process, one should not reject the existence of process in historiographic writing. However, we are able to ignore the existence of the described content in literary writing. Although the same signifier in both cases can have the same signified, they would have different referents. They are the actual process for the former and the imaginative process for the latter, although the expression units used in both kinds of discourse can have the same referents in their semantic function. The tricky point in this analysis is expressed in the way that verbal representation of the actual process can be employed in both the positive-directed and fabricative-directed operations; or rather, the verbal record of the former can become the semantic material for building up the latter. With the same story material, the ontic status of the same event, with the same description, the historiographic text and the literary text differ, although it is difficult or unnecessary to actually make this distinction. According to the above explanation a distinction has to be maintained between the historiographic operation and the literary operation in writing. The two disciplines are distinguished not by the materials used but by their operative strategies. A consequence is that the concept of truth in historiography is both necessary and justified. But this truth should not be confused with metaphysical or philosophical truths, since it possesses a definite operative meaning. In contrast, truth as an epistemological concept in literary works is unnecessary (of course, its metaphysical or religious meaning can be kept as well). Accordingly, one is justified in asking how much truth in the above sense can be expected from traditional Chinese historiographic writings. With regard to truth, historiographic epistemology should be able to safely avoid the semantic

ambiguity of the term. “The word truth itself is only a verbal operator to be manipulated in one way or another. How can the term truth ‘itself’ be opposed?” (Li 1997c: 65). If we have no doubts about the everyday use of the term, we should not question its historiographic use. Unlike the metaphysical discourses, the historical and the everyday discourses function at the same epistemological level.

### 1.3 Moral-Ideological Restrictions to the Historiographic Direction

Traditional Chinese historiographic texts are replete with ideological restrictions which purport to manipulate historical material in a certain utilitarian direction (*pi-hsiao*: to keep the useful and to cut off the useless in the editing and writing) rather than to straightforwardly express an objective historical truth. This is the case even though truthful documents and records can also largely be kept in the texts if they accord with ideological requirements. A historian’s honesty is basically expressed by the person’s loyalty to the regime, rather than in a loyalty to historical objectivity. Traditional historiography allows, and even encourages, a desirable representation of objective processes. But this function of truth is multiply restricted. In our use of truth we distinguish between the actual process and “faith” or “worship”, which is also often called “truth”. This paper indicates why those principles blur, distort, and hide historical truths in certain ways. In a negative sense, if it is recognized there is distortion in historical writings, whether deliberate or not, it points one in the direction of a certain truth. Simply put, ideological preconditions and related intellectual techniques predetermine the nature and function of traditional Chinese historiographic writings by systematically mixing factual, fictive and axiological elements together.

## 2 The Axiological-Ideological-Directed Description of Historical Processes

### 2.1 Historical and Literary Aspects in Historiographic Writing

The origin of Chinese traditional historiography was due primarily to the practical needs of ruling groups who invented and used divinational, ritual, and other practical records. The practice of scribing was undertaken by feudal officials to meet those practical needs. According to Wang Kuowei, a leading modern Chinese historian, ancient Chinese historiographic praxis originated with the official recording of rulers’ practical matters

(Wang 1983, Vol. 6). However, the recording of historical narratives began much later in China than in the Mediterranean. Despite its long history, ancient China, dating back to long before the late Chou period, had few narrative records which were kept because of this pragmatic-oriented tradition. The formation of the Chinese historiographic practice was due less to an intellectual curiosity for recording and understanding events than it was for practical concerns. There are few narrative texts found in Chinese archaeological relics. Instead, there are more relatively short texts about the simple records of rituals as well as other kinds of practical activities. In the later Chou period, there was a further development of written records about the court life of various levels of the ruling class for practical and aesthetic purposes. But generally, the spirit of ancient Chinese intellectuals during that period was still lacking in a mind for organizing a narrative form of writing. Accordingly, China has a longer tradition of lyrical poetry but lacks an impressive tradition of epics. It was quite late on before there was a maturity of consciousness in recording and describing historical events. Ancient narrative poems stressed a lyrical and moral nature while ancient historiographic narratives stressed the moral/ideological and emotional/aesthetic tendency. In both cases, stories were the means to be used much more for pragmatic and emotional expressions than for scientific or positive representations.

As Ku Chieh-kang points out, ancient historians, namely scribing officials, did not have a “scientific” interest in honestly recording and carefully analyzing historical processes (cf. Ku 1963, Vol. 3: 134). In other words, they were the users rather than the researchers of historical processes and materials despite the fact that many other intellectual operations were added to the same practice. Scribing officials, especially those in the pre-Ch’in period, were mainly technicians since they organized, edited and wrote historiographic texts according to a fixed pattern of an ideological/pragmatic way of writing. Not only did they serve rulers in this way, but they worked according to the same principles as the ruler since they shared the same values. In other words, the huge reservoir of Chinese historiographic writings was strictly controlled by a fixed ideology of a despotic system. The products of those principles, namely the historiographic texts, are basically a combination of historical materials (the eventual, the material and the verbal) and axiological selections (the writing-traditional, the pre-conditional and the scribing-operative).

Unlike literary practice, historical writing has to have factual sources. Although any description must contain referents from the actual world, there is a distinction between what actually occurs and what is actually possible. All effective referents in historiographic texts should be

immediately (rather than indirectly or imaginatively) directed to the actual processes involved. A qualified historiographic signifier must have a dual semantic direction and deal with the signified in the texts and facts in the world, regardless of how much the historian reaches the latter. It is worth noting that this point only pertains to the ideal historiographic text. In fact, what we have is a mixed type; i.e. a historical-literary type. More precisely, a historiographic text contains both historical and literary aspects as well as the factual and the imaginative. The distinction between the two genres has nothing to do with shared writing/expression techniques, since it is a function of the intentions of the writer and the person's operative goals. Historiographic writing is actually formed by factual representation and an imaginative filling-in of historical voids. The point is that the imaginative role, a literary technique, is intentionally and structurally employed in a historiographic-operative framework. Compared with the western tradition of historical writing, the mental inclination of ancient Chinese historians resulted in a less positivist composition of historical texts with a mix of both historical and literary elements. If ancient history at its legendary stage was only the blending of fact and fiction, or as Wang Kuo-wei has said, "facts and legends cannot be split" (Ku 1963, Vol. 1: 264), the polished historiographic writings of the Han scholars were still full of fabrications. As Ku notes, they fabricated names, actions, and documents, and mixed the truthful with the wrongful to gain the confidence and praise of the rulers (Ku 1963, Vol. 5: 6). Or, put another way, "The wisdom of ancient Chinese historiographic art is expressed in blending the true and the false; or pragmatically to use the true of the broken documents to support the false of the fabrications..." (Li 1997d: 12).

## 2.2 The Fictive Operation is Ideologically-Pragmatically-Oriented

The two kinds of fictive operations in traditional Chinese historiographic writings are technical and ideological. Historians have frequently been imaginative in their writing because their documents were invariably insufficient and their scholarly methods were less than scientific. For example, narrative links were widely fabricated to form complete, impressive, and readable stories. There were many such stories created during the pre-Ch'in period when the official system and the technical capability for historiographic writings were not yet developed. We are more interested in the second type of these imaginative operations; the



ideologically distortive, whether intentional or not.<sup>85</sup> In this kind of writing the factual elements are systematically combined with the axiological ones, or, the factual elements are developed in the axiological framework. On the one hand, the historiographic agent was attentive to the actual processes and their records, while on the other, he had to use both in a pre-determined way, guided by axiological or ideological principles. The principles for organizing historiographic texts fall into two categories: general preconditions and practical methods.

### 3 The General Preconditions of Historiographic Writing

A newly emerging discipline, “Chinese historiographic semiotics”, has connections with many historical-theoretical attempts. Among other things, the most original is an “institutional analysis of historiographic writings” which is helpful in analyzing the Chinese historiographic system. We attempt here to outline a few pertinent examples to discover the structural-functional patterns of Chinese historiographic writings.

#### 3.1 The Metaphysical Framework

##### a. The Cosmological Rule

According to the primitive cosmological philosophy of ancient China there is a system of natural circulation or circular evolution. Particularly importantly, human history is said to change with natural circulation. Behind this historical change there is said to be a determinative force of a supernatural nature. Thus, there is a parallel evolution between the cosmological and the historical. The theory not only provided the writing with a metaphysical framework for ordering historical events but also a way to morally judge the actual processes. The historical process unfolds in a predetermined temporal line arranged by a supernatural power. This then becomes a theoretical basis for producing causal inferences in historical processes or for providing rules to understand history. With this metaphysical framework, historical causality is systematically distorted, although the primitive theory provides a working frame for organizing an initial form of Chinese history-writing.

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<sup>85</sup> There is a mixture of politico-pragmatic and axiological-ideological operations in historiographical-epistemological discussions. Nevertheless, intentional political manipulations and attitudinal determinations in writings should be distinguished in order to make explicit the pertinent semantic organization.

### b. Heaven's Intention and Judgment

A heaven with a supernatural but less religious origin played a major spiritual role in the society and culture of ancient China. Heaven in the traditional Chinese earthly-mentality played the twin roles of substantial-symbolic and empty-symbolic. The former represents an imaginative guiding force over humanity, while the latter is a source for an imaginative moral-centric interpretation. As a void sign it can be morally referred to for any purpose. Dialectically, it can even strengthen a general empiricist spirit or a humanist position. This is because heaven can only function within an anthropocentric frame. It is used empirically, although it adopts a supernatural signifier. It is only a pseudo-supernatural source because it is humans who define and use heaven, rather than the reverse (cf. Li 1997a: 82–84). More precisely, the image of heaven functions as a pseudo-religious rhetoric to strengthen what many consider to be mundane practices.

Speaking historiographically, heaven plays a convenient role in Chinese moral ideology, for it is a sign of moral judgment with the morality organically interwoven with a humanist utilitarianism. The relationship between benefit/loss (utilitarian) and good/evil (moral) becomes the most important and most ambiguous phenomenon in Chinese reasoning. During all of Chinese history, moral doctrine has served the political system, while by contrast, Confucian ethics attempts to separate moral doctrine from the political system. Thus, we see a constant disharmony in Chinese ethical logic; in the same sense we say China is a pragmatic-minded nation. The power-holders and intelligentsia always use morality-hermeneutics to strengthen power and social stability and use heaven as a supernatural source of moral authority. Therefore, the power of humans and their morality have dual supernatural support consisting of the dynamic and ethical, or, the physical and spiritual. The power-holders arranged themselves ideologically so they would be stronger in both the aspects of force and morality. Therefore power is operated in both physical and spiritual dimensions. The military-political and the moral-ideological are combined to play a synthetic role in historical situations. In historiographic writing a heaven-hermeneutics plays a determinative role in various aspects. The more straightforward way is performed through reading “the signs of the strange natural miracles and disasters”.

Many natural and fabricative phenomena of both negative and positive natures were regarded as signs from heaven of praises or warnings. Examples were natural disasters, legendary appearances of strange animals, stars in abnormal positions, and meteor showers. The link

between humanist affairs and a supernatural judge is imaginatively embodied by physical symbols that become also hermeneutic key-nodes in organizing and interpreting historical narratives. Consequently, historiographic writings were widely interwoven with superstitious expressions, producing various kinds of pseudo-causal analyses. Causal analysis also fell under the sway of supernatural hermeneutics. As a consequence, the Chinese “hermeneutics of the heaven” had the dual function of being quasi-metaphysical/quasi-religious and politico-ideological. The latter was extensively influenced by the former. This pragmatic-oriented causal scheme in the writing of history substantially influenced Chinese historiographic representation.

### **3.2 The Ideological Preconditions of Power-Lineage**

According to ancient China’s world-view there were two power hierarchies, consisting of that of the supernatural and that of humans. Heaven and the Yin-Yang system belong to the former, while the royal lineage belongs to the latter. In fact, the secular spirit of China made it easy for people’s imagination to serve the political power structure. There were also two orderly sequences consisting of the lineage within a dynasty and the lineage between different successive dynasties. The rules are contradictory for the transition of power for the two, since one is based on absolute loyalty and the other on brutal revolt. A hermeneutics of power based on the supernatural-ideological system was developed to unite the two contradictory theories. Historic events were explained in such a way as to justify the two-fold lineage theory that was the underlying determinative mechanism for superficial historical processes.

### **3.3 The Hermeneutics of Morality-Determinism**

Humanist theory, as it pertains to the sequence of power, is based on a complex dual structure consisting of cosmological/metaphysical and moral/ideological determinism. The mechanical force of the former was said to be the physical support for the spiritual force of the latter. Thus, force and spirit could be pragmatically united in order to play a coordinating role in maintaining political order. Nevertheless, the spiritual component had an independent effect, best encapsulated as a form of moral determinism. This theory of power-morality could be ambiguously and arbitrarily used by both the ruler and the ruled, namely, the absolute loyalty of the ruled to the ruling class and the love and mercy of the ruling few for the masses. Historical debates about this complicated dual theory

were frequently about which one was more predominant. Theoretically, the Confucians came down on the side of the ruled and the Legalists on the side of the rulers. Then, after the Ch'in Dynasty, the Confucianist despotic system attempted to harmonize the two moral-political lines to ensure both the security of the regime and the happiness of the people. Accordingly, Confucianist intellectuals' and historians' writings were enveloped in this academic-ideological framework. For a pragmatic-oriented Chinese historiography, this theoretical point of view becomes a hermeneutic technique providing guidance in organizing and explaining the principles of writing history.

After the establishment of the First Empire, the Ch'in Chinese moral system was institutionally interwoven with a despotic system comprising an orthodox lineage of royal power. Ever since, moral ideology has been found in the political system. Moral concepts were transformed into politically operative ones and the ethical good was transformed into political loyalty. Historiographic morality became an ideological tool in order to better serve and influence the ruling class. Scholarly honesty, or historiographic morality (*shih-te*), was eventually defined in terms of the politico-ideological system, namely that morality is not defined in ethical but in political terms. This highly ideological-pragmatic historiography paid much more attention to performing morality-directed historiographic procedures than to searching for scientific truth. Writing practice in observing, recording, composing, and editing historical stories was determined by this ideology-guided pattern.

What emerged was a special form of dual logic of morality/utility in Chinese historiography and philosophy. The pragmatic-bent Chinese mind tried to unite two diverse systems of rule, one based on a moral good, and the other on a profitable good. This dual system has been used in various ways by a variety of people for a multitude of purposes. Its diverse moral aims and methods are found in historiographic texts and became the basis of a particular form of politico-ideological practice. The dual logic is also divided into a forward (profitable) and backward (moral) direction. While the latter is said to be the source of the former, in fact, a moral direction becomes the means to search for a profitable direction. Historiographic writings attempted to demonstrate the unfolding of this convoluted historical logic. According to this ideological-pragmatic logic, historiographic writings are highly utilitarian in character. One can speculate that this great but ideologically guided tradition of Chinese historiography resulted in a loss of a great number of correct recordings and writings on historical events. This of course has adversely affected the quality of present-day history in reconstructing the past. Although there is never a complete

reconstruction of the past, there are certainly both better and worse historical reconstructions.

## 4 Factual Material and Historiographic Pragmatism

### 4.1 Pressure out of Factual Occurrences

With a pragmatic mentality, Chinese intellectuals in ancient times were attentive and interested in historical facts and events and grasped at them as empirical occurrences. The Chinese term *shih* means “history”, “events”, and “historians” alike. Early on, historiographic practice was based on much less sophisticated metaphysical speculation. Consequently, the recording of historical facts tended to be practical and technical in nature, with less intellectual expressions. During the pre-Chou period (ca. three thousand years ago) facts were chosen pragmatically and used for governing and divination practices. But, as society developed, particularly in the late Chou period (ca. 1200 B.C.-200 B.C.), gradually it was necessary to treat factual and theoretical components in a more coordinated manner. Put another way, factual material needed to be interpreted theoretically. Quite simply, the mechanism of power required an ideological means to confront both positively and negatively the increased intellectual requirements of the time. It became necessary then to synthetically and pragmatically employ factual material and theoretical ideology in historiographic practice. Within this ideological-hermeneutic framework, historians, if not all intellectuals, continued to have an instinctive interest in more honestly recording historical facts as true occurrences. Thus, the historiographic profession was intellectually restricted by observational conditions despite its ideological preconditions.

Tension between this positivist imperative and ideological rule began to play a major role in historical writings. Indeed, among ancient historians, loyalty to a ruler and loyalty to professional morality was in constant conflict, although the both might be theoretically needed for the ruling class. This is because there were two levels of benefit for the rulers, one to the individual ruler and the other to the lineage system. These two kinds of loyalty to the power-holder later became the primary source of debate about the professional morality of intellectuals.<sup>86</sup>

Since the Han Dynasty, techniques for recording historical events have substantially advanced and enriched classical literature. However, there

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<sup>86</sup> In contrast, for pre-Ch'in Confucian ethics, this theoretical tension existed between loyalty to ethical principles and loyalty to the power-holder.

was still a strong tension between the factual and the ideological in historiographic practice because of its pragmatic nature. On the whole, this tension occurred at several points including scholarly honesty, ideological restrictions, loyalty to an individual ruler, loyalty to the lineage system, and the self-interest of the historian. These factors have strongly influenced the representational capability of Chinese historiography.

#### 4.2 The Use of Historical Facts

When dealing with historical facts in Chinese historiographical writings, the two major issues involved are how to record facts and how to arrange them in a historiographic writing structure. For each issue there are two aspects, namely, the technical and the ideological, both of which set limits on historiographic writing. The technical limitation of recording historical facts and events did not hamper the progress of Chinese historiography. In fact, any of the components referring to facts were effectively employed in historiographic constructions. The purpose of historiographic writing is primarily moral-ideological rather than quasi-scientific. On the one hand, there is a problem of historiographic technique, while on the other there is a problem of historiographic pragmatics. Chinese traditional historiography relies on the latter rather than on the former. In other words, under pre-modern intellectual conditions, any number of historical facts could be equally employed in serving Chinese historiographic pragmatism.

### 5 Typology of Ideological-Pragmatic Determinism in Organizing Historiographic Writing

Another important theme is how the ideological/axiological/pragmatic-oriented historiography of China, the *cheng shih*, influences the potential of expressing or representing historical truth. In one sense all the ideological, pragmatic, axiological, and moral concepts refer to the same mind set of the time. In another sense, the four are based on a pan-moralist attitude. Usually we distinguish between the ethical and the moral to stress the behavioral and customary aspects of the latter as socially fixed value patterns. The ethical is a theoretical justification of ideological-moral reality. At the cognitive level the intellectual aspect and the ideological one are interwoven into a textual mixture. In one sense the semiotic approach is directed towards splitting this semantically mixed textuality.

## 5.1 Moral Ideology and Moral-Ideologically-Organizing Principles in Historiographic Texts

This paper does not deal with the ideological content of traditional Chinese morality that has been widely discussed during the modern period. Instead, our focus is on the text-organizing principles in Chinese historiography. The two sets of principles are about the preconditions and writing practices mentioned above, and which have already been discussed in the case of the former. Those metaphysical factors, which are preconditions for the framework of Chinese historiographic writing, can also be called the ideological conditions of historiographic practices. The more elaborate principles are embodied in the writing technique, namely a second kind of guiding principle in writing and editing historical texts. They can be further divided into linguistic, descriptive, inferential, and predictive types. These four levels of historiographic discourses are based on special moral-axiological patterns.

### a. The Linguistic Level

The pictoriographical tradition of Chinese language indicates a strong pragmatic trait mixing reference-denotational, emotion-connotational, moral-axiological and stimulating-behavioral meanings/effects into a single verbal unit. This necessarily plays a multiple role in discourses involving the significative, communicational and actional layers of Chinese semantics. This semantic tendency hampers the precise expression of the denotational signifieds, although it enriches the connotational and pragmatic ones. According to the author's analysis, this special function is realized by the ancient single-character/sound word system, but has been changed by a modernized system composed of two-character/sound word units (cf. Li 1997d: 126–7). **One** word in a synthetic semantic unit can refer to a different ontic status (thing, action, value and stimulus). For example, the word *wang* refers not only to the ruler, but also his actions in becoming the ruler. It also implies a higher hierarchical position in both a physical and moral sense. Implicitly, it forms effects to stimulate the imagination with an impulse to act. Almost all noun and verb key words are a semantic mixture of factual and evaluative elements. As an example, *fa* refers to the action of attacking as well as the moral or hierarchical nature of the action. The mere description of the act also signifies its moral implication. Similarly, a political rival or an enemy is officially called a “bandit” or a “thief” (*fei*). This adds a moral-attitudinal dimension when referring to a fact meant, with a purpose of strengthening a moral-

pragmatic stimulating effect. A word plays its role in different levels of indicating (cognitionally distinguishing), evaluating (axiologically selecting) and stimulating (actionably deciding).

According to this moral-guided selective pattern of naming and describing individuals, actions and events, the precision of the linguistic function is hampered in both describing and selecting the observed objects in historical narratives. On the one hand, the historian works on the principle of ideological selectivity in observing and recording events, and on the other the linguistic-semantic tools are morally-ideologically constructed for a fixed pragmatic purpose. At the descriptive level, traditional Chinese expressions of historic facts and events are inherently led by a writing technique that has been ideologically defined in the historiographic tradition.

With this pragmatic tendency, the Chinese conceptual framework exhibits a pragmatic flexibility and efficiency. Semantically, the single-character system has a one word function which is very flexible with its denotative, connotative and pragmatic referents/effects in different contexts. Semantic working in this way further strengthens the pragmatic trait of the Chinese conceptual system that is more oriented towards moral-hermeneutic than referential/cognitional signifiers. As a result, the same word can be differently interpreted. There is not a precise corresponding relationship between a verbal unit and the related concept. The same verbal carrier can refer to different conceptual compounds with different semantic focuses or layers. The confusing states of philosophical debates in ancient China were primarily caused by a semantic character with the same word signifying different signifieds in a different context. This phenomenon is a function of the non-phonetic-centrism of Chinese. Instead of sound-determinism, Chinese semantics is based on written-centrism (cf. Li 1997c: 59).

The fragmented textual remains of the early Chou, as well as earlier periods, left later generations seemingly “true” historical records but no acceptable historical pictures. That is why it is impossible to compose a reliable pre-Chou history on the basis of its primitive historical and archaeological material. Rather, there is a presentation of history mixing historical remains, legends, and fiction. According to ancient Chinese historiographic logic, historical “facts” are accepted pragmatically. In ancient China, there is a pragmatic historiographic epistemology employing any kind of “genuine” historical documents or verbal remnants to bring about a “genuineness” in historical narratives. In other words, true historical documents formed pragmatically were always fragmented and used as building materials for narrative constructions without a clear



guideline about the relation between true historical documents and related historical processes. The narrative gaps could only be filled with a fictive imagination. The genuineness of historical reconstructions depends on the nature of what is missing in the historical narration as well as the nature of the fragmented documents. When a reconstruction is shaped by ideological-pragmatic historiography, historical truth in a modern sense suffers. Nevertheless, a fascination with truly historical remnants (this archaeological-aesthetic Chinese preference continues today and neglects the historiographic-epistemological distinction between narrative truth and archaeological truth) has certainly furthered traditional historiography. This linguistic tendency also explains the synthetic/pluralist character of semantic organization in Chinese. By dint of semiotic analysis, different semantic planes can be distinguished, ranging from the referential to the institutional. While the same word may have different semantic contents in traditional historiographic texts, the precise meaning of the word can only be further distinguished on the basis of modern micro-semantics.

### **b. The Inferential Level**

Historic texts mainly consist of narrative composites, historical events, and their linkages. Chinese historiography can be divided into pre-historiographical documents and historiographical narratives. The historical narratives were organized along three dimensions consisting of the temporal (calendrical), motive-deductive and behavioral-causal. An event was arranged along this triple frame as the traditional calendrical system made it possible to organize events in a primitive fashion in a fixed temporal order. Pre-Ch'in historical documents and narratives were worked out by officials at both a central and local level according to a recording system arranged in temporal sequence. However, the pragmatic character of pre-Ch'in historiographic practices had written records organized at a lower administrative level. What we see in the historical narratives in the classics, the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (春秋) and the *Records of the Grand Historian* (史记), are a combination of earlier broken records and a later narrative reconstruction, made up of a mixture of fact and fiction. Put another way, historical "facts" were employed in shaping historical stories fictively organized in a particular ideological way. There are at least two kinds of historical truths here: "broken bricks", which might come from true historical sources, and tales linked with true narrative reality. In Chinese historiography the former cannot be used to sustain the latter. In this sense, we must reject the notion that the classic *The Book of Changes* is the oldest Chinese historical book. The earlier

date of its “broken bricks” cannot be used to show the entire text was written earlier. Those “broken bricks” have only an archaeological value and not a historiographic one. In fact, the earlier divination remnants differ from later narrative components in the book that date only from the late Chou period.

### c. The Motive-Effect Deductive Logic

According to the ancients’ straight-line inference about human behavior, the observers and analysts attempt to form a one-to-one corresponding relation between a psychological motive and its behavioral effect with an external result traced back to its origin. If this way of simplifying the causal relations of historical narratives is technical in nature, the historiographic motive-psychology is highly influenced by ideological preconditions. Human conduct in ancient China can be described as being two-fold, made up of the positive and the moral, and the latter must be linked with motivation. With this inferential logic, the causal links between related events are dimmed by moral-motivational speculation. This is because it was more difficult to ascertain moral motivational speculation under primitive intellectual and technical conditions even though the relatively simpler political conduct of earlier periods made it easier to carry out intellectual operations than in later periods.

This moral-motive-directed historiographic logic functioned in a more systematically distortive way, because moral logic and utilitarian logic overlapped for the ancient Chinese. As a result, the cause of success and failure was customarily reduced to the effect of good and bad. This kind of inferential logic widely misinterpreted historical events. Chinese morality-directed hermeneutics was pragmatic and utilitarian in character rather than directed towards historical truth. The historiographic interpretation served the ideological pragmatism of power-holders and conveyed a message for stimulating actions in the future rather than positively knowing the past, which is claimed to be the goal of historiography. Pseudo-causal logic based on morality-hermeneutics dominates the Chinese mentality even today.

### d. The Level of Causal Analysis

Less developed scientific practices of the ancient Chinese had the effect of minimizing both inductive and deductive reasoning at a higher intellectual level. This weakness, also found in Chinese historiography, has prevented a more solid inquiry into problems of causal inference about related

events. This is due to both intellectual and technical reasons. This pragmatic-oriented historiography, based on the morality of the times and a ruling-class centrism in academic life, establishes the ideological and technical patterns of operative selectivity in observing, recording, writing, editing and stylizing historical processes, which led to the establishment of a writing-pattern of distortive representation which weakened the historiographic capability for representing historical reality. Among other things, the imperial centrism in Chinese historiography neglected and excluded a great number of social and cultural events. Consequently, modern historians can barely reconstruct a comprehensive history of the past on the basis of traditional historiographic texts. All modern sociological and economic historiographic efforts have the same difficulty with the reliability of written materials that were not originally collected and organized for scientific inquiry.

## 5.2 Causal Reality

Historical reality has basically two discursive layers, a nominal/descriptive one and a causal/motivational one. The former deals with reports on features, things, situations, and occurrences of historic events, while the latter deals with more complex causal networks of events. The so-called historical reality more properly refers to causal networks of events. In this sense, traditional Chinese historiography is weaker in its realistic representation because of a paucity of scientific spirit. A less than precise causal representation is mainly explained by its ideological-pragmatic direction of carrying out historiography. In short, the scholar's priority is primarily one of moral-ideological utility rather than searching for scientific truth. Modern studies of traditional historiography still have little chance to remedy this past deficiency. Even less possible is a sociologically-directed approach confounded by a lack of accessible historical-sociological materials. Whatever can be done is based on written materials organized by pre-modern scribes with a less than scientific mind. If written historical documents are the main sources for reconstructing Chinese history, we are left with only an incomplete outline lacking rich, precise, and interconnected details. This basic shortcoming is even more damaging owing to the very structure of traditional Chinese historiography.

An important aspect of historical facts is the causal links between the precedent (both external and internal) and the consequence. Historical events, in particular, are related to causal networks of events making it possible to have a more complete description of historical processes. Nevertheless, the basic weakness of causal analyses in Chinese

historiography is that it makes this part of historical facts less readable. So-called historical truth is in essence causal truth, which is exhibited in correct descriptions of the causal linking of factual events. Or to put it another way, it is a definite historical process containing both factual units and their causal links. For this central issue, Chinese historiography, with its overriding function of ideological morality, is especially weaker in its representational efficiency.

## 6 Problems of Historical Truth in Traditional Chinese Historiography

Both in a broad and a narrow sense, Chinese historiography occupies a central position in Chinese intellectual history. From the period of modernization early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century until now, Chinese scholars have been reconsidering the nature and function of traditional Chinese historiography. How to make Chinese historiography more “scientific” has been the prime concern of Chinese historians since their initial contact with the more positivist-scientific western historiography. The goal of modern or western-directed historiography has been to have a scientific orientation. One of the leading thinkers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Liang Ch’i-ao, wrote that “Chinese historians have not treated historical documents in a scientific way, so their writings are full of false and silly statements. We present-day historians should start renovating a new Chinese historiography, first trying to obtain the correct historical documents and then attempting intellectual and critical historical studies on the basis of the correct documents” (Liang 1984: 147). With a less than scientific Chinese historiography and a more scientific western one, Chinese historians, in order to obtain more truth about their historical past, have attempted to be more scientific in reflecting on their own traditional historiography. It is instructive to compare this situation with the current historical-epistemological discussions about historical truth in current western post-modernism. For present-day scientifically-minded Chinese historians, there are problems in determining what is acceptable as being true and what is unacceptably false in historiographic texts. There are problems with:

- a) True and fabricated ancient books;
- b) Honest and dishonest descriptions of historical events;
- c) Correct and incorrect descriptions and analyses of historical events;
- d) Positive and legendary written materials;

e) True and fabricated events.<sup>87</sup>

In modern Chinese historiographic criticism, the topic of fabricated and false books is crucially important. This is linked to another topic of historiographic epistemology about how to judge the quality and function of ancient historiographic writings.

The brilliant scholarly tradition of philological studies in Chinese intellectual history, because of its purely technical character, is not a part of modern studies about either historiographic writing patterns or ideological preconditions, although it instrumentally serves both of them. Nevertheless, it provides a technical means which is of help in unraveling the less scientific nature of Chinese historiography. This modern scholarly tradition has provided a foundation for the special study of distinguishing true segments from false ones in the classical historiographic texts (*pien wei hsiieh*). Consequently, a number of ancient books, which were regarded as being produced in ancient times, have since been proved to have been written or fabricated much later. Therefore, the veracity of the books and the related historical facts are now in doubt. If there are “false” historical texts it logically follows that there are “true” historical texts. If we characterize traditional Chinese historical literature as being “unscientific” in terms of modern western historiographic theory, there must be a “scientific” criterion upon which to base the discussions.

Deliberate fabrication of texts and events frequently occurred in Chinese history. Being aware of these fabrications that have taken place in the past is important in judging the quality of Chinese historiographic texts. Either for moral-ideological reasons or for practical ones, the history of fabricating texts justifies making a distinction between what is true and what is false in historiographic texts. Many contemporary historiographic fabrications, either for ideological reasons such as denying or distorting the Holocaust and the Nanking Massacre, or because of a technical unavoidability of fictionalization in organizing narratives, belong to the same category. This further proves the existence of deliberate false descriptions of historical events. In such examples we must make a

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<sup>87</sup> Cf. Liang 1984: 131-147. In the first Chinese book dealing with a typology of written literature published some 1,500 years ago, the author, Liu Hsieh, clearly shows that books about ancient history are replete with false records. He writes that “the older the period was, the more false stories its history contains”. The main reason is the intentional fabrications which are meant to attract and convince the reader (Liu 1981: 171). For less than scientific historians, fabricating operations and rhetorical creations are not necessarily contrary to the principles of historiographic writing.

distinction between right/honest and wrong/dishonest historiographic descriptions. This proves that historiographic discourse can present truer and less true representations of history, as well as true and false ones. After all, historiographic discourse, unlike literary discourse, is only a verbal medium to convey ideas that must have external referents separate from their verbal signifiers. In any case, historical fact cannot be reduced to its conceptual representation.

The principles of writing Chinese historiography outlined above are the primary reasons why modern Chinese historians are prepared to adopt a scientific methodology. In their minds, first and foremost, scientific historiography presents a higher truth of historical processes. Consequently, there is a distinction between historical process and historiographic description. This problem, found throughout modern Chinese history, becomes clearer because modern historians are now aware of:

- a) The historical process (objective);
- b) The related historiographic descriptions (representational);
- c) The possibility of having better historiographic descriptions (more correct representational).

In addition, historians are constantly aware that they:

- a) Cannot invent the process and therefore they must try to find the external object;
- b) Should be critical of unsatisfactory descriptions of the process;
- c) Presume they can present better descriptions with better methods in order to better understand the external process.

The distinction between b) and c) is an epistemological rather than a rhetorical problem because of the referent-direction of historiographic semantics; its expressive freedom is limited by facts shared by different people. With the availability of rich information today, people have more confidence in reaching an objective process. For example, there can only be a true and unique reality about the Kremlin leaders' international strategy during the Cold War period.<sup>88</sup> But there could be different reports

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<sup>88</sup> The term "truth" can be used either to refer to discourse or to reality. It is due to pragmatic semantics that, depending on the context, the same signifier can have different signifieds. When proclaiming a discourse to be true, the word "true" means the description is "correct". But when saying an event is true, the word "true" also means the description is "correct". The representation involves both representing and represented. Therefore the term "true" can be used to characterize

of this strategy. The rejection of the objective existence of historical events is certainly wrong from a moral point of view, but it is even more wrong for historical-epistemological reasons.

The modern Chinese historiographic movement before World War II, which tended to definitely distinguish the true from the false regarding ancient texts, should become an important topic for the current international historiographic-epistemological debates. The reason is that historians have experienced multiple epistemological tensions and dilemmas. They are:

- a. The methodological: modern and traditional; more and less scientific; more and less rational;
- b. Material: evidence for fabricated and false Chinese historical literature implies the opposite, i.e. true materials and true historical processes;
- c. Narrative causality: fictive and moral-ideological factors involved in weakening the reliability of historiographic texts.

Pre-scientific Chinese historiography logically implies there is a more scientific historiography. Flaws in Chinese historiography are also found to different degrees in modern western historiographical works. This is particularly the case with ideological fabrications and the professional ignorance of non-western cultures and societies.

The above explanation just touches on the complexity of “historical truth” as a concept in modern discussions in historical theory. Since Nietzsche, Barthes and Foucault, a naive positivism has been more strictly criticized and the meaning of historical texts has been more elaborately analyzed. Simply speaking, we become more careful in believing and judging what is said in historical discourses. But on the other side, Nietzsche’s perspectivism should not be employed in an extreme way. Nietzsche’s writing is more critical than constructive, and we should be careful about inferring anything positive from his words. In brief, all of those traditional philosophical terms are too broad to be employed without considering their relevant context. The same can be said about the concept of historical truth. The example of traditional Chinese historiography discussed here presents an opportunity for us to more precisely redefine historical-theoretical terms with a more suitable classificatory system based on an interdisciplinary/cross-cultural approach.

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either side of the representational relationship. In essence, it refers to the relationship itself.

## 7 The Significance of Rereading Chinese Historiographic Writings

It is clear that Chinese historical documents are the major source for understanding Chinese intellectual history. They may not be the precise records of history, but they still qualify as intellectual history. It is possible we might have a less useful knowledge of Chinese history than we might wish for after critically examining the quality of these documents. But, after all, we also inversely increase our knowledge of history by deleting improper material from documents. There are questions that need to be answered about the socio-political utility of historical documents. Living in a modern international world, we must approach the problem in a scientific manner. Politicians today appeal more and more to contemporary sources of wisdom than to historical ones. In such a rapidly changing world, historical records, especially ancient ones, are less valuable for solving today's practical problems.

Both inside and outside China, historiography continues to be important intellectual material for ideological manipulation; it is a part of the foundation of modern nationalism. With traditional historiographical-ideological pragmatism, the scientific tendency of modern historiography requires a more reasonable historical realism and a more rational ethical judgment. This can help overcome the social and political wrongdoings that a non-scientifically-oriented historiography ignores along with many of the original referents outside of the discourses. Either the humanities in general or historiography in particular should cherish such a goal in promoting human welfare. This is perhaps the final reason why we should carefully reconsider the relationship between historical epistemology and social reality.

### Postscript: the intellectual background concerning the publication of this article

This article was originally written in 1998 with the intention of participating in a symposium about Chinese-western historiography at Buffalo, supported by the Taiwan Chiang-Chinkuo Foundation. The two main speakers were Prof. G. Iggers and Prof. Yingshih Yu, representing western and Chinese historical scholarship respectively. In his article "On contemporary French historical thoughts" in *History and Theory* (1980), this author first introduced the French thought of the *Annales* to the Chinese audience as well as some new European historical perspectives introduced by Iggers.



After having sent this article and his translated *Structuralism* (by Broekman) to Ying-shi Yu, generally regarded as the leading historical Sinologist abroad, he visited Yu in Yale in late 1983. During their dinner talk, Yu requested that this author send him more works about current western theories written and translated by him in the future, thus expressing Yu's strong interest in Chinese-western comparative theoretical studies. This author then sent another two recently published articles about Gadamer and Ricoeur (the same articles about these two hermeneutic thinkers led Prof. Shu Sien Liu, another leading Taiwanese philosopher in Hong Kong, to invite Li to attend an international philosophy conference in 1985) to Yu in 1984 when he returned home. (Later on he comfortably read a paper by Yu in which he mentioned hermeneutics and which was given at an international conference about Zhu Xi's philosophy in 1986, indicating his interest in the hermeneutic method applied to traditional Chinese philosophy.)

Because of these earlier personal contacts and his recently finished project on "An Analysis of International Philosophical Sinology" (subsidized by the DFG Foundation), and also because the topic of the Buffalo conference was so closely related to Li's just published English books about Chinese ethics and traditional historiography in terms of semiotics/hermeneutics, this author spontaneously contacted Iggers, initially about his intention of attending the conference (out of his own budget). Iggers suggested to him that he contact the organizers, so this author sent his application to several organizers including Yu, who is also an advisor of the Foundation. Unexpectedly, however, the application was eventually refused by the conference, despite several participants from the Chinese mainland and Taiwan being aware of Iggers' historical thought, first of all from reading Li's article mentioned above.

So this author contacted Iggers again with an alternative suggestion about whether the selection of papers of the conference could include an article by Li in the planned anthology to enrich an interdisciplinary dialogue (for all participants came from history and Sinology). The insistent requests of this author were due to his idea that the comparative studies of Chinese-western historiographies should be open to newer, scientifically modernized methodologies to promote the theoretical intelligibility of the discipline. And the Buffalo conference was then a rare chance to realize a historical-hermeneutic dialogue.

After this alternative suggestion was also rejected, this article was finally published in the *Nachrichten: fuer Natur-Und-Volkerkunde* ●*stasiens* journal through the kind recommendation of Prof. Per Fischer of the Department of Political Science at Bonn University and the retired

German Ambassador to China (we once worked together in an effort towards establishing a new type of institute for modernizing the scholarship of traditional Chinese humanities in Germany but eventually failed).

This background explanation is given here to point out once again the difficulty of organizing interdisciplinary/cross-cultural dialogues in the humanities today. (A similar case was repeated many years later; see Chapter Two in this book.) The basic reason is certainly owed to the current professionally rigidified disciplinary-centric compartmentalization. But a more significant factor is related to the modernization of the Chinese traditional humanities. Regarding this issue, this author deeply differs from his Taiwanese colleagues, criticizing the conservative approaches of the latter for suffering from and being obstructed by a kind of academic nationalism. This conservative intellectual tendency has even influenced its counterpart in the Chinese mainland; many leading Taiwanese humanities scholars have undertaken advanced studies in the west and their scholarship closely follows the lines of international Sinology. This close international connection makes their learning more respected by the Chinese academic authorities.

An interesting example about the epistemological divergence between this author and his Taiwanese colleagues is the fact that almost all of his works about current western theories published during the 1980s were republished in Taiwan, while his later works about the traditional Chinese humanities have not been republished there. One of the possible reasons for this could be that the semiotic-hermeneutic approach would damage the spiritual dignity of the Chinese classics. According to this author, however, the consequence must be the contrary: the new modernized methods will certainly increase the interpretive potential and empirical-rational value of traditional Chinese historiography and humanist ethics in the present-day international context. Furthermore, we may understand that the current educational compartmentalization obstructs not only the creative progress of the western theoretical humanities but also the modernization of the traditional Chinese humanities.

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# APPENDICES

# A BRIEF INTELLECTUAL RETROSPECTIVE TO THE CAREER OF THE AUTHOR AND HIS SEMIOTIC/THEORETICAL HUMANITIES PRACTICES<sup>89</sup>

An explanation of this author's special personal scholarly experience in connection with the contemporary Chinese historical/academic context may be helpful for foreign readers to more relevantly grasp the special ways of reasoning/judgments presented in the articles in this volume. As an independent self-taught scholar specialized in comparative Chinese/western human-scientific theories, this author, growing up under the Maoist period, automatically took a strong interest from the late 1950s in contemporary western philosophical thought, especially those expressed in the German/Austrian theoretical-streams around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These philosophical streams had been notoriously attacked by Lenin as reactionary bourgeois ideologies and they were therefore strictly prohibited/suppressed in the then entire Communist world. It is curious that the author had initially although only fragmentally found out some intellectually attractive ideas just through reading Lenin's work *Materialism and Empirical Criticism*. Immediately after the anti-rightist movement launched by the Maoist faction, all Chinese universities were systematically reorganized to be half-labor/half-military camps from 1957. With a passionate interest in philosophical knowledge and facing a rapidly

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<sup>89</sup> This personal memory was originally written as a supplement for the first article in the book to help explain the author's special intellectual background concerning his position in the involved topics. So it converges mainly on his semiotic experiences. With the editing of the entire collection, the author has decided to arrange this text as a supplement for the whole book without much extending the described scopes. This supplement can play a double role: to help understand the complicated academic contexts regarding the independent scholarly unfolding of the author over 40 years; and to help understand the particular situations of the Chinese academic/ideological evolutionary change since it has moved away from the former extreme-left orthodoxical orientation in 1977-1978. The latter has been mainly displayed in the changeable manners of Chinese/western ideological interactions.

changed circumstance, the author made a decision, by using an acceptable excuse, to withdraw from the department of Civil Engineering at Tian-Jin University in early 1959. As an almost full-time day-dreamer living in classic European literature during his entire middle/high-school period (in the first few years after 1949 some good middle schools in Beijing still kept libraries full of the available translated books of western literature) and being forced to face a serious challenge to his intellectual ambitions for the future, he, as a young man of 21 years old, imagined that he should be courageous enough also to withdraw from the totally organized community forever in order to escape from the community to his home to secure an independent life devoted to serious study. Just by chance, that unpractical and even childishly romantic decision eventually led him to luckily spend almost 20 years of independent research life at home during the rest of Mao's times. Besides the minimal availability for survival provided by his family, a determinatively favorable condition for realizing this self-taught career was the existence of the largest national library nearby that was still accessible to the public until 1966. This was the National Peking Library that had been built by an American foundation at the start of the century. Leaving the university, he was luckily able to spend his free new life at this library during 1959-1966 until the breaking-out of the 10 year period of the Great Cultural Revolution. For the purpose of possibly reading modern theoretical books in western languages, his first schedule contained the intensive learning of several major foreign languages at the same time. This library was then unique in China in that it was allowed to keep and further collect current social/human theoretical books/journals from the west and Japan to provide a limited number of the party's chosen experts with modern western social-scientific information. And he, as a single person disconnected from any social organization/institution in China, became almost a unique "freelance" reader at the library, being intensively engaged in reading western theoretical books (firstly those in translated material published before 1949 and then, following the progress of his foreign language studies, in their original versions) that had been collectively eschewed or taken as dangerous by the majority of intellectuals working in various official institutions since the severe anti-rightist drive was triggered in 1957. During that period, few of the professional scholars specialized in teaching foreign philosophies and Marxist theory would have liked to get access to such kinds of "highly dangerous" modern western ideological material for various reasons. Firstly, this kind of western literature had been officially called the most "reactionary evils" based on Lenin's teaching and therefore this kind of

reading conduct had been strictly prohibited; secondly, no free time was left to intellectuals owing to the regularly held self-critical meetings and volunteering labor commitments organized everywhere; and thirdly, and more basically, the majority of intellectuals had gradually formed a self-disciplining conscience because of the universal fear caused by several political/ideological campaigns, resulting in severe punishments. Therefore this exceptional case of a suspicious intellectual hobby, which was just owed to the author's status as a social outcast, could luckily escape the ideological surveillance prevailing in the entire Chinese society. Honestly, there did indeed exist such a unique free intellectual corner in red China before the Cultural Revolution. So these 6-7 years of self-taught/free-research life in that library (the famous national library directly facing the Central-Southern Sea, the site of the central government, which neighbors the historic North Pagoda Park), together with his totally independent personality free of any domestic/international institutional training, made him one of the few Chinese living in Maoist times who was still able to partly keep a ceaseless intellectual contact, merely through reading, with the modern western theoretical thoughts. It was the same library that, when it was allowed to open again one year after Mao's death in late 1977, provided him with updated Western humanities theories, including those on phenomenology, structuralism and hermeneutics. Having almost become the only Chinese person knowing something of the general situations of contemporary western philosophy/humanities theories at the start of the post-Mao period, he was unexpectedly and luckily appointed to be a researcher at the top Chinese academic institution – the Institute of Philosophy, CASS, in 1978, due to his translated text of *Structuralism* by Broekman and two introductory articles about Husserl and Levi-Strauss for the Institute, in addition to having passed exams of translating philosophical texts in five languages. The specially prepared theoretical knowledge that he had mainly acquired from the Library and the modest family library eventually led him to enter the top institute of philosophy in China through the special recommendation of an open-minded leading party-philosopher, Prof. Du Runzhi, who had been the student of M. Horkheimer in pre-War Germany and had been put in Mao's prison during the Great Cultural Revolution period. It was curious that a jobless outcast surviving Maoist times suddenly became a "quasi-expert" about contemporary western philosophy, appointed by the top philosophical institution in Communist China, given that his main task had been organizing the struggle against modern western philosophy during the entire history of the Communist Camp, which was only because he knew better about the theoretical information that had been the serious

ideological taboo of the Camp! For the same reason he became the first scholar officially sent to the American departments of philosophy for advanced study and was later appointed as a member of the first Chinese Delegation of Philosophy attending the 17<sup>th</sup> World Philosophy Congress in Montreal in 1983. From this dramatic story we can see how open-minded the post-Maoist authorities of China were during the first 10 years after 1978!

Without being trained under the regularly-fixed educational procedure, the author could pursue his favorite philosophical topics purely out of personal free choices made in terms of a multiple rationalist taste. His originally formed division between “contemporary” and “classical” western philosophies implicates a young man’s mental inclination that was exclusively directed towards those theoretical works implying more multi-realist references in his age; therefore his independent theoretical interests were especially concerned with the basic axiological concepts of reality, meaning, valuation, logical foundation, life-faith and social-political beliefs judged from the contemporary (namely, the more immediately experientially reachable) rather than the classical western philosophical point of view. Retrospectively today, this basic division of theoretical orientations was obviously based on the distinction of pre-scientific history and scientific history; the amount of accumulated scientific knowledge seems to be the key parameter in determining the reality-referential degrees of theorization.

Briefly speaking, the development of the author’s western theoretical interests consists of three main stages: a) the analytical philosophical school starting from Russell, which had become quite famous in Chinese academia from the early 1920s; b) the new German-Austrian philosophical/theoretical trend prevailing in the earlier period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century around Husserl, which the author found out spontaneously during his study at the Library; and c) the French structuralism/semiology movement embodied in a variety of interdisciplinary-theoretical works of human sciences, which he also automatically found out by himself when he was able to re-enter the same Peking Library in late 1977. In some sense he has never been restricted by the authoritatively regulated set of philosophical masterpieces produced in the long course of western philosophical history. His utmost intellectual authorities have never been individual persons and works; instead, final beliefs can only be founded on the relevant rationality as such.

But it was only in 1975 that the author firstly became aware by chance of French Structuralism, represented by Levi-Strauss, through translated information from Russian sources; this new theoretical way of thinking



immediately opened a new intellectual window in front of him. However it was only when the Beijing Library reopened in the latter half of 1977 that the author, after spending the past 10 years continuing his full-time independent studies about cross-cultural humanities and classical works in multiple languages, was able to access the new foreign theoretical books and journals again, especially to that new literature about structuralism, semiotics, hermeneutics and updated phenomenology. Retrospectively, one of the intellectual shocks caused by his energetic understanding of the developments of contemporary western philosophy and the theoretical humanities prior to his first visit to the USA was that the philosophical/logical-centric mode of rationality in past times should be transformed to the interdisciplinary-theoretical typology of expanded rationality. At an epistemological level, he had begun to stay in a theoretical tension between the western philosophical-logical tradition and the contemporary interdisciplinary-theoretical reasoning. At any rate, his new explorative efforts had immediately been related to various branches of the theoretical humanities since his becoming a professional researcher, touching on disciplines such as philosophy, historical theory, literary theory, film theory (as an important alternative branch of philosophical aesthetics), theoretical anthropology, structural linguistics, general semiotics, and even the modernizing projects of classical Chinese humanities. This newly formed interest in theoretical pluralism had been superficially driven by an exceeding curiosity but rather more seriously by an awakening to the arrival of a new rationalist age of human-scientific development. Naturally giving up his philosophical-fundamentalism, his next efforts to acquiring some unifying/unified rational approaches were converging on the above four theoretical orientations. As a matter of fact, since then, these four continental humanist theoretical schools, with their multiple disciplinary branches, have become the main theoretical guiding lines for carrying out his next projects.

Another important cognitional conclusion he reached during his first professional period of five years prior to his visiting the US was that all great western theoretical achievements, including the most recent ones, could only be taken as the working grounds on which we can organize our future collaborative projects with respect to the unified human-scientific target of mankind. Having being a professional agent himself, he could now still continue thinking about his theoretical plans following his own inclination regardless of any established institutional regularities. (By the way, in the first ten years of the New Period starting in 1978, the CASS provided researchers with almost uniquely liberal research conditions so long as the topics were not related to current domestic politics.) ●owing to

his non-utilitarian-tended research projects and because of his lack of educational background and specialized training, he never had an ambition to be a successful expert specialized in the learning of any masters or schools, taking some academically-authorized theories as the foundation for shaping his own academic career. That means, despite this continuously chosen epistemological orientation, however, the author can only take these important theoretically instructive sources as temporary, tentative and practicable instruments for his projects and that they would be further constantly examined/improved upon along the general human-scientific rationality. In other words, these more productive/acceptable theoretical achievements function as some finished "semi-products" to be scientifically used in order to promote further interdisciplinary-theoretical exploration on the basis of relevant human-scientific rationality. Stimulated by the new theoretical insight, the author became more conscious in taking interesting theorists and their excellent works only as some finished/completed masterpieces for direct application or as certain ready working bases on which to continue organizing his own projects in order to reach success in the competitive academic profession. Without a mind for attaining competitive success, his only must has been related to scientific-theoretical requirements and practical desirability.

Generally speaking, during the first decade of his professional period, owing to this special personal intellectual inclination and practical attitude, the author started his singly adopted scholarly plans that proceeded mainly in two fields. The one was performed in continuously introducing the above-mentioned four kinds of modern western theoretical trends realized in various disciplines to the Chinese audience who had remained almost completely ignorant about the long-prohibited (since 1949) as well as long-neglected (since the outset of modern Chinese history) contemporary major continental humanist theoretical thoughts. Since the national ideological restrictions were relaxed, the relatively understandable theories for Chinese intellectuals have always been Anglo-American pragmatism, behaviorism, analytical philosophy and scientific philosophy of all kinds, including the recently popular cognition science. The other lay in more systematically and constantly introducing current western semiotic scholarship to China, starting as early as late 1977, especially that about French/Italian film structural-semiotic theories and new French historical theories. At an epistemological level, during this beginning period, he had already experienced a constant tension of theorization between the interdisciplinary-theoretical and the contemporary philosophical directions. His earlier theoretical devotion to modern western philosophy had now

been transformed into his new efforts towards a holistic human-scientific theoretical reformation.

Another unexpected dramatic event that occurred in 1982 started to change his intellectual life more radically. As a first officially supported scholar at the Institute he was, after examination, sent to American universities for research between 1982-1984. His two-year stay at the Universities of Princeton and Columbia, including a three-month visit to Munich University and TU Berlin supported by DAAD, provided him with an opportunity to directly contact western academic societies. (Born in a family with a pro-American life style, he had even incultivated himself with American films and translated novels during his primary school days in Nanjing before 1949.) This chance physically opened a door for him to the American and international academia, especially to the fields of philosophy, semiotics and film theory, and allowed his participation in the Toronto structural/semiotic summer school in 1982 (the news was told to him by Richard Rorty, his sponsor at Princeton). In Toronto he saw and had short conversations with Eco, Foucault, Searle, Sebeok, Posner and many others. This participation started his subsequent long-standing cooperation with the IASS. During his visit to the Department of Philosophy at Columbia University, he was appointed as one of the members of the First China Philosophy Delegation for the Montreal World Philosophy Congress in 1983. (From the above personal story we may imagine how liberal/flexible the political air was during the first years after Mao's death.)

In 1988 his intellectual life underwent a more radical conversion. He got an invitation from Prof. Roland Posner to go to TU W.Berlin for a writing project. He could hardly anticipate that this travel would eventually lead him to leave his home country forever for the rest of his life; nevertheless, the permanent change of residence would make him obtain better conditions to make additional intellectual contributions at home and abroad. During his life in Germany between 1988 and 1997, he got three successive German grants from the VW Foundation and DFG for independent research and writing in Germany (firstly in Berlin and then Bochum). This totally free research life in German universities for almost one decade provided him with an opportunity to more deeply experience current western theoretical humanities and Chinese-western comparative scholarship. This special academic experience was characterized by the fact that the observed/experienced contexts had been in various western (mainly German and French) academic institutions. This academically free period enjoyed by him made him finally settle his intellectual/theoretical orientation. As a result, his way of thinking had become naturally further

separated from and critical of both his western and his Chinese colleagues regarding the problems of the general orientation of the theoretical humanities and semiotics.

As a visiting senior fellow at the German institutes, he published three works in turn with aid of German grants: one in Chinese and two in English. The last one was about Chinese-western comparative ethical studies, the first about the comprehensive introduction of western theoretical semiotics, and the second about a hermeneutic/semiotic analysis of traditional Chinese humanist ethics and academic ideology. The book on semiotics was published in Beijing in 1993 (also with a subsidy from the same VW Foundation). This book introduces, as much as possible, significant modern semiotic-theoretical achievements, with a focus on the developments around Swiss, Danish and French structural linguistics and semantics, the relationship between semiotics and analytical/phenomenological philosophies, and the rhetorical/hermeneutic-directed historical origin of theoretical semiotics. This publication, as well as the publication of his translation of Husserl's *Ideen I* (finished in 1987) in Beijing (1992) and Taiwan (1993), provided the new generations in Chinese academia with the knowledge of completely novel theoretical horizons. These publishing events, together with his earlier translated works of Levi-Strauss, Barthes, Ricoeur, and Rorty and his many introductory articles, including those on western thinkers such as Husserl, Foucault, Gadamer, Lacan, and Le Goff, became a strong intellectually-stimulating force for the next possible developments of Chinese semiotic and phenomenological studies (all his publications, translated and originally written alike, appeared firstly in China). On the other hand, in the middle of the 1990s, after getting another long-term grant from the VW Foundation, he simultaneously started another writing project about semiotic/hermeneutic studies of traditional Chinese historiography/ethics; after performing interdisciplinary-directed theoretical-semiotic studies, partly stimulated by his earlier studies about film theory (this presented a model for semiotic-institutional-ideological analysis), historical theory, theoretical anthropology, and literary structuralism, he also opened up a completely new field of a cross-culturally-directed semiotic approach about Chinese traditional classics that has persisted until today. Unfortunately, despite the fact that several scholarly-theoretical streams of semiotics, hermeneutics and phenomenology have aroused a lot of curious followers in different Chinese fields, few serious effects have really been produced in the main academic fields until now. For example, little semiotic/hermeneutic interest has been aroused in the fields of philosophy (both Chinese and western ones), and the traditional Chinese humanities,

including a possibly productive field of the semiotic analysis of traditional Chinese opera, a sketchy blueprint of which he has given several times since the 1980s. The so-called impact/spread of Chinese semiotics since the publication of that monograph has gradually emerged, although less seriously, in the disciplines of logic, foreign and Chinese language studies, and the newly built-up media studies. All those disciplines, for historical reasons, have still suffered from weaker educational preparations concerning their social/human scientific-theoretical knowledge. International and domestic academics are generally liable to neglect a hidden historical fact: serious Chinese humanities academia has only been recovering since 1978 after 40 years of stagnation from 1937, and especially since its complete nation-wide shut-down for over 10 years during the Cultural Revolution. On the other hand, the new generations of students and scholars have lived in a radically changed world characterized by its comprehensive individualist/utilitarianist life style.

Since finishing his long stay as a visiting researcher in Germany and not being organized within the CASS, the author moved to San Francisco for a new stage of his independent research career. As another unexpected result, his international and domestic academic practices for the next two decades were even strengthened. A not unnecessary factor involved in the development is due to his special status as an independent scholar living in America (with access to the libraries of Stanford and Berkeley) while still keeping effective connections with Chinese and Chinese/international-related academic communications and co-operations regarding all of his scholarly-practical fields, especially those of semiotic, phenomenological and modernizing traditional Chinese scholarship. Concretely, since 2000, after getting the new title of specially-invited senior fellow at the Center for World Civilization Studies, CASS, he started gradually to organize several domestic/international cooperative projects in China. (It is curious to note the absurd institutionalized paradox in our commercialized world: without meeting the objective bureaucratic requirements, nothing significant could effectively work. Thus, as early as 1978, if he lived abroad he would never get a way to enter any academic institution directly, that is to say, either in Taiwan or in Hong Kong; similarly, without this merely nominal title (there was no pay) he obtained in 2000, he would never complete any contributions to the enterprise of the global humanities. In short, no independent creative efforts of subjectivity in the humanist learning profession is recognized or encouraged today. In his judgment, this fact is just one of the main reasons why the global humanities is suffering from its present bureaucratic stagnation.)

As is well-known, since the outset of the New Chinese Period (1978), contemporary/current western humanities' theoretical works have aroused more and more interest among the younger Chinese humanities scholars, and the studies of modern western-theoretical trends have been further developed after more and more students have got regular advanced education in the west. Nevertheless, we have to pay serious attention to the real historical background that China has undergone a long history of high-cultural/humanities-educational stagnation and intellectual disconnection with the world, even since the beginning of the Anti-Japanese War. When the New Period started, all intellectuals, whether younger or older, came from the same social/cultural historical circumstances – the Cultural Revolution – that have permanently been notorious for totally destroying all cultural/educational activities all over China for over 10 years (any independent interest in contemporary western thought would certainly bring about personal disaster if disclosed). Then the strenuous younger scholars with little regular educational training, merely based on a short period of intensive western language training, suddenly had an opportunity to grasp the so profoundly complicatedly formulated western theoretical texts. With so little basic educational preparation beforehand and living in unfavorable intellectual circumstances, what they were able to acquire was mostly limited to the level of imitating and repeating the original discourses of the western authors. The verbal and logical repetition of the same contents gives the impression of their substantial understanding of what was repeated! A more serious negative factor obstructing the general progress of their theoretical knowledge is of course due to the ever more commercialized (even much more than in the west) academic context. They suffer from the same commercialized situations facing the western humanities, perhaps worse because of their lower scholarly-technical level, as well as from the less regular competitive systems in which they study and work.

Although this author started his spontaneous efforts in promoting Chinese semiotic studies (almost by himself, without any substantial help from Chinese institutions for his individually chosen plans) as early as the late 1970s, he only started his closer collaborations with scholars in the field of foreign languages in 2006 after almost three decades of experience in contacts and collaborations with domestic/international scholars of various disciplines, including philosophy, logic, history, film studies, literary theory, Chinese literature and linguistics. Considering the necessity of theoretical preparations and the convenience of his own institution, the author certainly tried to put the philosophy at the center when organizing interdisciplinary collaborations among different disciplines, but these

kinds of efforts were reduced to failure. Anyhow he indeed co-organized (with some leading scholars in other disciplines) several domestic (1988 Beijing, 2002 Hangzhou) and international (2004 Beijing) conferences with a lasting passion for setting up a Chinese semiotic organization based on democratic principles, despite the failures that he had suffered from one by one. The two main reasons of the failures were the following: first, any attempt for organizing academic groups was strictly restricted objectively in the state; second, the scholarly limitations of single-disciplinary knowledge leads to the temporary impossibility of forming any meaningful interdisciplinary collaborations. Ultimately he was only able turn to people in the field of foreign languages of which he had always been suspicious, for he knew that in general they are regularly weaker in specific preparations of theoretical training of any kind. The fact has nothing to do with the intelligent potential of scholars in the field but is caused by the traditional policy concerning foreign language education, which was modeled on that of the earlier USSR.

After a successful Beijing international conference co-organized by the IASS and the CASS in 2004, in which the author played a role as coordinator and his anticipative dream then was to establish a true semiotic center at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences through the conference, the related efforts were reduced to a total failure again. (It is curious again that the Center at the CASS offered him a title for performing communicative contacts but had neither the wish nor the capability to allow him to organize Chinese semiotic activities on behalf of the Center!) Later in the same year he was elected to be a vice-president of the IASS at the Lyon congress on behalf of China (ironically, however, it was only thanks to the help of Prof. Levi-Strauss for the second time that he could once again get a budget for a one month visit to Paris from MSH, which made it possible for him to attend the Lyon IASS Congress. ●otherwise he would have had no chance of being elected as a vice-president of the IASS). With this added commitment he decided to refresh his lasting efforts towards organizing Chinese semiotic scholarship through more actively and flexibly organizing scholarly collaborations with people from those fields – foreign languages, Chinese language/literature, comparative literature and media studies – which had indicated strong wishes to join international semiotics, despite the fact that all those disciplines in China had less scientific-educational training.

●On the other hand, the aforementioned situations explain why we can hardly promote any meaningful semiotic studies in the main disciplines of the Chinese humanities, especially those of philosophy and history, because of the long theoretical negligence in the fields and the current

disciplinary-specialized training methods. The scholars in those fields naturally prefer to follow the popular and influential theoretical streams in the west. Nevertheless, paradoxically enough, Chinese semiotic studies has eventually spread in the field of foreign languages, despite the fact that their scientific training of any sort is even lower than that of the major social science disciplines in China. Owing to objective limitations, the author's individual efforts to promote Chinese semiotic studies eventually had been mainly reduced to the field of foreign languages. Since then, he has tried to readjust his persuasive strategy again: firstly, to awaken the passion of Chinese semiotics scholars for scientific-devotion along the proper orientation and then to persuade them to seriously undertake another role as the semiotic-organizers. (For the author, the semiotician must play a double role: as the researcher and as the organizer.) In addition to this long hesitation concerning their possibility for theoretical studies owing to their lack of deep enough scientific training, the more serious worry is always concerned about whether they could carry out the proper functioning of academic organizing activities because the collective-organizing conduct for scholarly activities could so easily deteriorate to some interpersonal profit-competition. If so, the scientific elements involved will be used as the mere instruments for winning interest and power seizing by competitive colleagues. As a matter of fact, this general concern had been aroused even as early as in 1988 when the author was engaged in organizing the first Chinese semiotic conference organized mainly by the Institute of Philosophy, CASS (the main involved activists came from the newly formed discipline of "comparative literature" that had been especially supported by the authorities, for it had established an international relationship earlier than other disciplines so it expressed a stronger ambition for spreading its power under official support). From this very first semiotic gathering in China the author felt that a "semiotic platform" could become the more suitable stage on which the sharp "semiotic-fighting" would occur among different factions from different disciplines for seizing privileges in connection with the planned national association. And consequently he gave up the idea of supporting the suggested proposal for the immediate establishment of some semiotic organization; in spite of that, he himself had never had any idea of joining its leadership in the Chinese context. It has become more and more clear that in the academic community every discipline/institution's leadership is held by small groups of "academic leaders" who are officially appointed; therefore any interdisciplinary organizational plans would logically lead to a chance of intensifying conflicts/struggles among different disciplinary-centric power-groups. In this case, semiotic scholarship of an interdisciplinary



nature would be doomed to become either a fighting front or a utilitarian co-monopoly team where no serious scientific standard could be expected to play a role! If so, what we would anticipate is: the quality of the scientific research is nothing; the force of the power-holders (leaders) is everything!

Changing his practical attitude towards academic reality, at home and abroad, the author, without any other choice, decided to establish contact with the field of foreign languages in 2006. The new idea, which had been formed following his past domestic and international experience, consisted of the following parts: a) to help establish bilateral collaborative sides between the semiotic group in the foreign language discipline and the IASS; b) to try to inspire some active organizers of the former that they should be broad-minded enough to become the honest organizers/leaders to solidify a true interdisciplinary association with a view to firstly advancing semiotic knowledge and secondly modernizing Chinese humanities; c) as a related preparative step, to unofficially organize a true interdisciplinary forum consisting of scholarly volunteers and interested departmental leaders from different disciplines with which he had had somewhat collaborative contacts for the past three decades (the number of members representing various disciplines had reached 70-80). This unofficially formed forum, named the “Chinese Semiotic Forum”, guided by the author himself, would be nominally affiliated with the College of Foreign Languages, Nanjing Normal University, as required by the authority. This forum was productively maintained until 2012 when the Nanjing 12<sup>th</sup> IASS congress was held at the College. Retrospectively, the temporary feasibility of the unofficially formed dialogic forum on the Internet worked for several years until it was finally snatched by the expanded power of the foreign language field at the end of the IASS Congress. For the author, as the general advisor of the Scientific Committee of the IASS Congress of Nanjing, this forum had provided an experimental platform for spreading the ideal of genuine interdisciplinary/cross-cultural semiotic practice, and it could keep its scholarly purity for years only because no institutional titles/privilege were involved among the participants, many of whom even belonged to the disciplinary leadership. For them, besides getting some new western scholarly information from the forum, they could easily feel that the Internet forum was convenient for realizing certain intellectual exchanges and could be less vulnerable to the political criticism caused by probably breaking up any possible political correctness. In short, the author had indeed co-arranged a double-academic team about two separate but also connected tasks: the one was to promote scholarly contacts between the

loosely existent Chinese semiotics and the IASS, with a view to realizing an IASS congress in Nanjing; the other was to spread the semiotic ideal of the author in an attempt to construct a special discipline called “China Semiotics” that specialized only in the efforts to create an embryonic form of modernizing Chinese traditional scholarship through gathering scholars from various disciplines (and that should be clearly separated from the prevailing discipline called “State Learning” whose members are exclusively experts of the traditional Chinese philosophical, historical, religious and philological scholarship. But all these traditional-type scholars, who have occupied the discipline for over one hundred years in every Chinese academic communities at home and abroad, should be invited to join the interdisciplinary collaboration in this new disciplinary-like working field.)

About six years’ experimental process for carrying out this new program of developing domestic/international semiotic exchanges had proved at any rate to be a successful experience on the semiotic-organizing tasks as well as to gain a much deeper understanding of the genuine character of semiotic studies and activities today, both domestically and internationally. During this experimental period, the author was constantly concerned about the difference between the seriously scholastically-interested and professionally-profitable motivations indicated by his various collaborators. The risk had been more and more clearly disclosed by the fact that if the “semiotic material” had been used as the mere instruments for searching for professional profits, any cheap cultural/scholarly studies could be arbitrarily chosen to play that instrumental role. In this regard, the international semiotic fashion could even become a substantial obstacle for promoting the genuine development of the theoretical humanities!

At the beginning of this century, the author thought that, at any rate, he had to do his best to participate in promoting the educational/scholarly revival and intellectual refreshment in Chinese academia after such a long humanistic-scholarly stagnation, and accordingly a specific emphasis should be put especially on the organizing function taken by a “semiotician”. In fact a semiotician should play a double role: as the interdisciplinary-directed researcher and as the scholarly organizer for promoting interdisciplinary scholarly activities in general. Thus, since he got an objective possibility to restart promoting semiotic/interdisciplinary scholarship in China since 2000, he has widely reintroduced his new conception of semiotic science to collaborators in various fields. While the China Semiotic Forum remained online, despite knowing the insufficiency of the semiotic knowledge of most members, he still expected that many

of them could at least become the China-semiotics organizers. Thus the purpose of the forum had been focused on encouraging the participation of various different disciplines within his new conception of semiotics, although most participants still came from the fields of foreign languages, the newly-formed media/broadcasting technique and the discipline of Chinese language. More exactly, scholars in these fields were pedagogically deficient in their social/human scientific-theoretical training. (Even today, that is to say, there could be no semiotician in those officially established semiotic organizations that comes from the field of western philosophy! This fact definitely discloses the weaker theoretical-analytical potential of the present-day Chinese semiotics scholarship.) It is clear that without certain social/human-scientific-educational backgrounds, no serious theoretical semiotics could be anticipated. And this spontaneously formed forum had to be maintained within this intellectual tension shown between the stronger semiotic interest (at the professional-practical level) and the weaker scientific training (at the semiotic-scientific level). The author's own efforts had therefore especially converged on a quasi-ethical inspirational pursuance that those disciplinary-organizers should become the fair broad-minded "scholarly leaders", paying their attention to the true scientific development of the emerging Chinese semiotics in general and surpassing their respective disciplinary-centric concerns about profits. An additional admonition was directed towards their deeper understanding of the true identity and function of this great semiotic mission that was much more significant than any popular scholarly fashions agitated by some semiotic opportunists. In addition, he also repeatedly emphasized in the Forum that semiotics should not be taken as a new or fashionable single "discipline" but an open scholarly platform for multi-disciplinary dialogues and mutual learning.

Agitating scientific idealism is one thing but carrying out projects at a professional level is another thing. The latter has certainly been applicable, for it is only based on professional-organizing potential, while the former, despite it being impossible to actually realize, is indeed initially showing its true presentation of a scientific idealism at a time when scholarly idealism in the global humanities has already been seriously weakened. As a result, partly via the medium of this really multi-disciplinary forum, several domestic/international semiotic-related conferences have been held, including the 12<sup>th</sup> Congress of the IASS in Nanjing in 2012. This epoch-breaking academic event in modern Chinese academic history indeed was apparently a marvelous success for the IASS, but unfortunately it also reached the end of the lasting efforts of the author to formulate a genuine Chinese semiotic platform. Yes, since then there has appeared a well-

organized Chinese semiotic society that has been officially recognized by the IASS, but the majority of its members come from the field of foreign languages, a special-typed discipline defined in professional-operative rather than scientific-requisitive terms. This special Chinese academic phenomenon has been highly important, for it also involves the developing character of many other Chinese theoretical studies of modern western human sciences (the problems of those other disciplines will not be discussed here for they do not belong to the present semiotic topic).

For the sake of understanding the result of the story, we should further explain the scholarly ecology of the field of Chinese foreign languages. Then we may better understand the confusing story about the relationship between the author and his earlier Chinese semiotic colleagues during the times of the Forum, most of which still come from the profession of foreign languages. It is interesting to pay attention again to the phenomenon that there are two different factors used to explain why most Chinese semiotic scholars come from that field. The one is clearly understandable: that their knowledge of practical western languages allows them to easily access new information about international trends of semiotic scholarship. The other one is more related to the following phenomenon: most of the time of the study period lasting 4-5 years in universities and colleges is spent in intensive training of practical foreign languages, even starting from the primitive linguistic grade. (The level of English taught in most high schools remained quite elementary compared to that of good high schools before 1949. Therefore, that is to say, the task of the English Department in China is far from being equivalent to its counterparts in the west with respect either to the content or to the task.) All other substantial scientific knowledge they learn during those 4/5 years remains secondary. This limitation of teaching social/human scientific knowledge in the field is also due to the fixed task regulated for most colleges of foreign languages that most graduate students will become foreign language teachers at middle schools or universities. Besides, either in the study period or in the professional period, most people from this field have little time left for them to pursue additional amateur scientific learning. Practically speaking, a semiotic organization consisting of scholars like this cannot be expected to become the solid preparative ground for substantially developing Chinese semiotic scholarship. But on the other hand, the actual situation would not obstruct the scholarly leaders in the field from choosing the highly flexibly combined “semiotic studies” as the ground for organizing the new academic collective as long as they have an established international-cooperative relationship that has always been confirmed and encouraged by the academic authorities as the

certification of international scholarly achievements; namely, the achievements have already obtained “international recognition”, which is officially taken as the higher academic standard. With this double support of the international and domestic academic authorities, the scholarly collectives formed in this way would become more capable of organizing competitive plans. No doubt, the development of such a result is just what the author has always been worried about. In short, at any rate, such organized collectives can never succeed in undertaking the big academic mission of approaching the expected semiotic idealism. We talk so much about the status of the “quasi-discipline” of foreign languages here because this disciplinary collective has played a central role not only for semiotics but for all human-scientific developments; their scientific potential will substantially influence the progress of theoretical Chinese humanities in future, while this fact remains widely unknown and unrecognized by international academia. The level of mastering western languages would be easily misjudged, in the same way as the level of the learning of western humanities theory.

The reason why this author talks so much about the field of foreign language studies in China is far from being its mere connection with the development of Chinese semiotics. This phenomenon implies a more extensive relationship to various issues concerning the consequences of the lasting efforts towards the modernization of Chinese social sciences and the humanities. For all kinds of learning from the western social and human sciences have mostly been performed by scholars who have come from the field of foreign language studies. Generally speaking, this is indeed a natural or even a necessary training step, while on the other hand this educational tradition plus the current utilitarian contexts will shape a constant imitative/passive manner of absorbing new social/humanist knowledge. This situation would obviously retard the constructive development of Chinese spiritual civilization and its possible contribution to the world in the future.

Still, this author clearly knows what the true task of his own job in various academic relationships is. Far from being a professional-minded scholar, he can clearly distinguish two matters: the true objective of the semiotic mission and the temporary workable projects that are really directed towards or are favorable for the ideal. When involved in an interdisciplinary-directed scholarship, the participants should firstly be somewhat specialized in one discipline; this discipline cannot be simplified only as a certain occupational collective, regardless of its scientific composition; the training of practical foreign languages can perhaps be called an “occupational discipline” but the latter cannot be

blended with a scientific one. An actual reason for this apparently strict requirement is of course connected with the total utilitarian ecology of the academic world today. Belonging to this institutionalized field, the scholar can hardly be expected to continue advancing his own studies if the latter is not consistent with the fixed task of his professionally affiliated occupation, either objectively or subjectively. This self-contradictory identity of scholarly agents caused the author to vainly keep arguing with some departmental leaders in that field, and he always one-sidedly hoped to stimulate their scientific conscience to be more insightfully ambitious and more operatively reasonable with respect to their scholarly prospects. He pointed out frankly to them that the direction they have adopted will not lead to true scientific progress and would perhaps bring about a negative effect on the collective task of promoting/establishing Chinese semiotics. What they can really gain is only professional success/profits, being simply engaged in forming certain international collaborative relationships to show the existence of that international relationship. The professional-utilitarian attitudes of both the Chinese and international humanities, with their respectively different motivations and contents, have almost collaboratively converged on the same academic-operative orientation at a general level: the priority of professional profits over scientific goals. In our globalization times we can see a general tendency concerning the status quo of the humanities scholarship; led by an all-round commercialization, it has been reduced to permanently separating the professional-operative and the scientific-developing lines; furthermore, the risk is hinted that the latter could be changed to be the mere instrument of the former.

The account of the personal story given here is to end with the successful holding of the 12<sup>th</sup> IASS Congress in Nanjing that became a demarcation-line in the developing history of Chinese semiotics and also a symbolic announcement of the call that it was time for the modernization of the Chinese humanities at the centenary of the modern China that was firstly established in Nanjing exactly 100 years prior to the congress. Historical China was a civilization characterized by its remarkable flourishing of literature and historiography in classical terms. Entering the global modern times, one of the great missions of the oriental civilization should be focused on transforming the old type of its traditional humanities to the new type of modern social and human sciences. For this great mission, the sufficiently rationalized semiotic-hermeneutic approaches should certainly play a significant role at the epistemological/cross-cultural level.

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