

Organizational Power and Ethical Subjectivity

Organizational Power and Ethical Subjectivity:

*In Light of Comparative
Historical Semiotics*

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 traces 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

his understanding encouragement and friendly help during the preparation of this book.

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 20th 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 11th 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.

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.¹ This artificial division of

¹ 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

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.²

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 20th 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 19th 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

² 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/embodyed 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