

On the Cross-cultural Semiotic Turn

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Abstract: During the current transmitting period of semiotics and humanities in the world the term semiotics can and should be only a general index about a new direction of doing theoretical scholarship in social-human sciences without being able, however, to attain a more precise definition about its identity, aim, zone and methods. Semioticians have got used to organizing their scientific practice according to the related professional frames and channels that are often motivated by some competitive-utilitarian aims easily losing insight into the internal criteria of the semiotic elementals. The present paper proposes to go back to the internal criteria to pay attention to the semiotic merits as such. A proposal is raised here about the possible change of some basic conception in the current semiotic practice that the general semiotic scholarship can be further divided into several different categories or types implicative of different criteria and procedures. Thus, the main division should be made between the American-communication-directed trend (semiotics 1) and the French-signification-directed trend (semiotics 2). The so-called cross-cultural semiotics (in an exact sense it amounts to global semiotics; but in a popular sense it is used as an alternative of the non-western semiotics; in this paper it means almost the latter) or part of it could become another category so as to be able to more pertinently grasp the semiotic elementals in more detailed ways. Then we could find out or create more pertinent signifying units to carry out more effectively anatomizing and recombining operations in semiotic practice.

Keywords: semiotics, cross-cultural semiotics, global semiotics, identity of semiotics

1. Disciplinary-professional Success vs. Interdisciplinary-scientific Truth

The coming-up event of the 11th IASS Congress of Nanjing 2012 has further aroused a general discussion about “what is global semiotics” among IASS members. In fact, this new question is directly linked to the old one about “what is semiotics”. For Chinese scholars the two questions are even further connected with the problem about the identity of “Chinese semiotics”. The term semiotics has been definitely created and fixed in the European-American history where semiotics as an established academic field has its definite historical background and suitable social basis. In the West, semiotics refers to a concrete academic field containing relatively fixed topics, aims, methods and procedures which amount to a large discipline rooted in their academic-sociological world. Therefore Western semiotics has existed in its already institutionalized procedure and operative systems. In general, a scientific discipline may refer to two things: the set of scientific-conceptual elements and the fixed social-operative framework. These two things almost build up a profession working and rooted in western society and history.

When the non-western scholars learn about semiotic knowledge from the West they may be at first only confronted with the scientific part that is separated from the original western professional background and therefore presents a purely conceptual phenomenon in their non-western social contexts. On the other hand, however, for the sake of understanding the identity of original semiotics, the focus can be laid either on the scientific-conceptual content or on the social-operative channels following the international academic exchange. However, in light of an enlarged global context the two parts should still be hopefully segregated in order to make the former play a more creative role and to make the latter decrease its restricting impact; namely the scientific content should be allowed to play an independent part in different social contexts for the sake of strengthening the positive development of international semiotics. Nevertheless, a deeper understanding of the relationship between the scientific and social parts in its original context, or a sociological study of semiotics, is also useful for precisely grasping the identity and function of semiotics itself.

Considering current semiotic practice in the West tending to become more and more a professional discipline in the academic world, I tried to remind the audience, at the Berkeley Congress 1994, that semiotics should avoid becoming a new discipline in our competition-motivated academic world exactly because the essence of semiotic operation is interdisciplinary in nature. Therefore our semiotic activity shouldn't work in contrary to its own essential character despite that the professional competition could urge or stimulate it to become a new discipline; for otherwise the present semiotic practice could someday decrease or lose its

creative or productive potential. The fact is that the institutionalized elements of any kind of organized scholarship tend to cause the agents of certain disciplined group to form a protective professional autonomy in order to increase their competitive privilege. Seen from a scientific point of view, however, the semiotic way of thinking is made by interdisciplinary practice through interaction of different disciplines in the humanities. A semiotician, especially a disciplinary-semiotics scholar, should first of all be an expert in some regular discipline(s); he applies some interdisciplinary methods in his specialized projects. Accordingly, even general semiotic theory should also be the result obtained through some interdisciplinary operations in connection with theoretical activities in other disciplines including philosophy; so it is far from being a by-product made in some special philosophical practice. The tendency implies that semiotic practice is the one performed in regular scientific fields although it applies multiple methods adopted through some interdisciplinary interaction.

This epistemological point of view will also bring about a practical consequence concerning the proper direction of the organized semiotic activities. Being regarded as some disciplinary-professional activity the semiotic-group tends to be more concerned about some utilitarian benefits concerning their membership and social influence. The distinction between the disciplinary and the interdisciplinary operations is therefore developed into that between the genuine-scientific direction and the professional-utilitarian direction in semiotics. For the sake of advancing the truly scientific quality of scholarship the semiotic groups should consider how to organize the truly meaningful discussions among different disciplinary agents more effectively rather than searching for any competitive success. If so, what should be the goal of our IASS in future? Certainly, the organizational expansion of the Association can be helpful for increasing semiotic activities anyhow, but it would accordingly neglect a concern about the genuine progress of theoretical and practical studies performed in the Association. (It is interesting, however, that because of the mere organizational expansion of IASS for the past two decades the cross-cultural or the global semiotics could have remarkably developed in the new century.) As a result, the problem of the above-mentioned epistemological distinction of semiotics has turned to be that of the distinction between the scientific-orientation and the utilitarian orientation in semiotic activities. It is worth noting that any utilitarian-directed academic goal of course accords with the present trend of all-round commercialization of our modern world.

As we just pointed out, the European-American semiotic schools of various kinds have been deeply and inextricably rooted in their historical, cultural and academic structures, keeping their stable social existence in their long history. In other words, western semiotic scholarship has already been professionally

institutionalized within their entire academic framework. The professional institutionalization of semiotic activities tends naturally to make the semiotic scholarship become a regularly ruled discipline that can be powerful enough for pursuing its professional goal in the competitive academic system. Nevertheless, the tension between the genuinely scientific-creative practice and the utilitarian-competitive efforts has probably also become one of the main reasons for obstructing the semiotic-theoretical development in the past two decades; namely the disciplinary-institutionalization of western semiotics could have become an obstacle for its own further development owing to this tension. If the semiotic scholar is more concerned about his success (reputation, recognition, publication, position, title, etc.) in his professional career he would be more concerned about the technical ways and feasible means for attaining his professional achievements than about seeking genuinely scientific truth and reality in his semiotic practice.

2. Emergence of Cross-cultural Semiotics and its Epistemological Stimulation

Different from the continuous process of European-American semiotic development, the non-European-American semiotics (particularly the Chinese one) has emerged as a quasi-synchronic phenomenon: namely, different kinds of European-American semiotic thinking and scholarship had appeared in their academic life during quite a short period. Therefore the non-European-American academic areas were “simultaneously” faced with different modes of western semiotics, which had been originally formed in different areas and several periods, without sufficient preparation for fully grasping and absorbing the adopted thoughts. However, this special situation could lead them in other ways to pay sharpened attention to the problems about rationale, foundation and evaluation concerning various western semiotic schools that have not yet been sociologically rooted in the non-western cultural and academic contexts.

Let's take Chinese semiotics as an example. When contemporary semiotic scholarship of various kinds were suddenly introduced into the post-“Cultural-Revolution” China, what emerged there then were the semiotic thoughts as such without involving other related western institutional aspects. In some sense, the specific situation created a chance in the “strange” academic arena for an independent reconsideration or reexamination of topography, nature and value of European-American semiotic culture. We may say that it was the same case with the unexpectedly sudden emergence of all modern western social and human sciences as well in the Chinese New-Period. Owing to the much weaker institutionalization of semiotic scholarship as well as to the stronger curiosity for reevaluation of western semiotics Chinese cross-cultural semiotics could have been disconnected from the competitive system of the international semiotic world

as well; namely semiotics there has not yet become a means for winning academic power or benefits of any kind in China; or, the cross-cultural semiotics there would not have been dominated by any academic power rooted in the not-yet firmly set-up academic market, so it could have offered a favorable chance for some scientific new-comers to keep a concentration on the purely epistemological problem.

In terms of its special experience, Chinese semiotics maintains its independent recognition about modern western semiotic movement as follows:

- (1) Modern semiotics is the product formed only after the development of modern sciences; namely, regarding the scientific contributions to the formation of modern semiotic movement, the modern semiotic development is much more important than the long pre-modern semiotic-intellectual history;
- (2) Modern semiotics is part of the synthetic development of modern social and human sciences; it cannot be separated from the latter;
- (3) The modern semiotic-theoretic revolution is due to the modern interdisciplinary theoretical practice within social and human sciences; it is not the result of development of any single new discipline;
- (4) Therefore the identity of semiotics is defined by its innately interdisciplinary operation (the cross-cultural semiotics is the natural expansion of the interdisciplinary semiotics); that means it cannot be taken as a new discipline without losing its creative energy;
- (5) Similarly, any genuine general semiotics must also be the product of some interdisciplinary-theoretical interaction that cannot be reduced to any established philosophical school; the semiotic-theoretical direction is doomed to be contrary to that of any philosophical fundamentalism.

3. Philosophical-theoretical Background and the Semiotic-elementals

Different from regular products of natural sciences, the semiotic achievements are characterized by their less regular or more amorphous forms. In terms of our foregoing discussion we can further distinguish between the two criteria for the scientific-axiological judgment about semiotics: one is the degree of academic-social successes once attained in history and the other is the genuinely thinking-stimulating factors. If the former is more easily discerned in the related professional records the latter are more difficult to be perceived because it is related to the scientific value itself involving any merits of semiotic way of thinking that is characterized by its theoretically enlightening and practically creative strength as such. How to perceive the scientific value or merits of semiotic practice depends on our sufficient understanding of the nature of the whole human knowledge that progresses constantly forward. In other words, the

scientific value of semiotics, far from being a matter to be defined in any single discipline (even if in philosophy), can only be judged on the basis of the entire knowledge of mankind. The fact proves once again that the nature of interdisciplinary practice of semiotics is logically linked to the intellectual backgrounds rooted in much larger cultural and academic contexts, both western and global.

In terms of the above understanding we become more doubtful about the tendency of some general semiotic theoretical practice that is eventually reduced into the principles or foundations of philosophical type. The habitual tendency in our international semiotic family is in fact due to a common sense that in our times philosophy remains the basic or fundamental part of human knowledge. It is understandable that the mixture between the semiotic-theoretical and the philosophical-theoretical practices has originated in western semiotic history because some semiotic-theoretical reasoning had been indeed evolved from western philosophical history, and the present-day philosophical way of thinking remains to be one of the main sources of the present-day semiotic-theoretical activity. The close interconnectedness between the semiotic-theoretical and the philosophical activities in intellectual history cannot be reasonably reduced to the very mixture of these two different ways of thinking. In fact, the semiotic-theoretical operation characterized by its interdisciplinary-orientation already clearly indicates a significant distance existing between them. It is worse that some semiotic-theoretical practice tends to make its philosophical reduction strategy as the easier way to obtain any theoretical alternative in the professional competition. The fact indicates that the agent with this tendency still lacks the proper feeling about what is the essence or the elemental of the semiotic way of theorizing. In some sense we may infer that this philosophy-reduction strategy could actually become one of the main obstacles for the true progress of semiotic theory today, and it will even more seriously obstruct the progress of a global semiotic theory in future, because this western-philosophy-reductionism will also bring about an epistemological disorder when western philosophy is gradually more and more faced with non-western philosophy.

We can also perceive a quasi-philosophical reductionism in its special version expressed in philosophical sign-history. Without grasping the modern semiotic spirit from interdisciplinary strategy played within the entire current humanities this quasi-philosophical reductionism based on sign-history relies on the same simplistic sign-reductionism based on the pre-modern philosophical history. As we pointed out in this paper, modern semiotic movement has developed mainly due to the achievements of various new sciences originating in modern times; it has been far from being a mere consequence of so-called traditional sign history. Either the philosophical or sign-historical reductionism

reflects a one-dimensional way of thinking lacking an evident consciousness about the interdisciplinary interaction caused by the development of modern social and human sciences as a whole. Therefore some kinds of semiotic philosophical reductionism still have kept an innate tie with the traditional philosophical way of theorizing. Within contemporary human sciences philosophy as their constituent part remains to be the “first discipline” that indeed constantly provide scientific practices of all other humanities disciplines with the determinative theoretical inspiration. Considering that we are still in the intellectual transmitting period nowadays we should certainly continue to promote the meaningful interaction between semiotics and philosophy anyhow, encouraging their effective dialogue about the theoretical problems, although we should keep in mind that the semiotic theorizing and the philosophical theorizing belong to different epistemological modes and come from different intellectual sources.

4. *Semiotics 1 and Semiotics 2*

When Chinese semiotics was firstly confronted with contemporary western semiotic movement immediately after the end of the Cultural Revolution the American-French bifurcation of the western semiotic movement aroused a lasting and even confusing curiosity for us. On one hand there was a unified semiotic organization IASS and on the other hand contains at least two major different lines of doing semiotics as we described above. If the well-established western semiotics has got already used or tolerant to the actual co-existence of the two divergent semiotic-trends mainly because of the practical and utilitarian reasons, the not-yet-well-established Chinese semiotics would tend to first of all analyze the phenomenon purely with respect to the principle of theoretical or rational consistence. In a larger term the cross-cultural semiotics, because of its less established background and neutral social-context, could otherwise pay refreshed attention to the semiotic bifurcation of epistemological orientation. Or, we have to inquire about a more reasonable or acceptable principle for reorganizing our semiotic platform with reference to the divergent western semiotic models. The necessity for this reconsideration of the problem lies in that with different social and historical backgrounds should we just blindly follow some apparently attractive western models to organize our semiotic studies when there exist in fact at least two major different semiotic ways? As a matter of fact, we are confronted with the two divergent streams in our modern semiotic movement that originated either from the Peircean or from Saussurean sources; the Anglo-American semiotic trend and the French semiotic one. One is a more pragmatic-philosophical-directed while the other a more structural-linguistic-directed; and the latter has later become the real basis for the comprehensive interdisciplinary-directed semiotics in the Continent after the Second World War. If the American

one tends to be the thinking about the new formulation of some general theory based on logic, sign history and philosophical schools, the French one tends to be the linguistic-semantic with a view to reorganize the structure of human sciences. They two still form a loose totality consisting of the philosophical-central efforts and the linguistic-interdisciplinary efforts in the big semiotic family. Now we want to point out that these two constituting parts in the movement are actually in an inconsistent relationship regarding their intellectual lines. Epistemologically speaking, the two theoretical directions are heterogeneous in essence despite that they share the same basic word "sign" and others. After more than three decades of contacts with international semiotic activities, may I suggest to redraw our "division of labor" between the American and the French schools within IASS that we may call them *Semiotics 1* and *Semiotics 2* respectively in order to avoid any unnecessary conflict or irrelevant arguments between the two different semiotic powers?

The utility and necessity for distinguishing the two semiotic lines would become more understandable when cross-cultural semiotics is involved. Without the internal division the different semiotic directions could compete with each other mainly for the authoritative status within the artificially claimed single profession or a tactically united semiotic organization. In fact, the two lines are not only sharply different from each other but also obstruct each other in their semiotic life. Despite some practical reason for maintaining a big family of semiotics that can include all kinds of semiotic practices in confrontation with the larger non-semiotic academic world, an internal "division of labor" for these different autonomous semiotic zones could produce some more positive scientific results at the present stage. Thus, we may recognize that instead of one single semiotics there at least exist two semiotics, namely two major semiotic mainstreams in our big semiotic family: the American-philosophical-scientific orientation and the French-linguistic-interdisciplinary orientation. Of course all possible serious attempts for combining the two directions at any practical level may be useful and workable in some sense, as we have seen much till now. Still, the point is that the more detailed division of labor within the semiotic movement would be helpful for us to more effectively increase the function of semiotic operation in our academic world.

Furthermore, a deeper consideration will lead us to recognize that the two semiotic schools are based on the two divergent epistemological preconditions and even two different spiritual temperaments in theorizing. One of them adopts the structural-semantic direction, which was linked more to the theoretical-linguistic, positive-sociological and introspective-psychological disciplines originating from the 19th century while the other the pragmatic-logic-scientific direction, which was more linked to the traditional-philosophical, natural-logic and

behavioral-scientific disciplines that also originated from the 19th century. For the sake of promoting our present-day increasingly pluralist semiotic practice the two different intellectual directions should be pursued in their respectively more suitably defined operative autonomies. On one hand, the division may make the two semiotic lines separate enough from each other within the semiotic movement; on the other hand, however, the division could cause agents to focus more on the semiotic-elements of various types and therefore to obtain more available “operative-elements” from each different semiotic practice. This positive result would become more obviously recognizable when cross-cultural semiotics plays an active role in the international semiotic forum. Without being restricted by the present-day disciplinary demarcation in the semiotic profession the cross-cultural semiotics would rather more likely focus on finding the relevant semiotic-elements as well. Otherwise agents of cross-cultural semiotics would be firstly confused about who is more genuine, more authoritative or more productive among different western semiotic schools.

The above reconsideration about a suitable strategic combination and division of different semiotic sources does not tend to deny the usability and value of the original attempt to include all possible partners in the big family of semiotics; we less try to neglect the fruitful achievements attained by various semiotic schools which intend to promote the solidarity or collaboration between different theoretical lines. Although the division of the two major semiotic-operative zones is basically made according to the scholarly-geographical criteria, the suggested terms *Semiotics 1* and *Semiotics 2* could be largely grasped as representing the ways of theorizing themselves rather than any professional practices. Accordingly, the semiotician can obtain more possibility to make his semiotic-elements form interaction with other semiotic sources from non-western geographical areas. Briefly, we may describe different semiotic ways of thinking as directed to either the (humanities’) textual-analysis-central goal or to the (natural-cultural) sign-analysis-central goal. If so, the former could be more involved into all kinds of discourse-semantics of the humanities and the latter more into all kinds of sign studies in nature and culture; or, we may even briefly describe the two lines as the discourse-direction and the sign-direction, particularly when the sign mainly refers to the units of the perceptual world while the discourse to the textual manifestations. The meaning of epistemological demarcation of the two major streams in contemporary semiotic movement also reflects a deeper problem involving semiotics, philosophy, and even total human sciences. That means it involves the task for restructuring human sciences that include both semiotics and philosophy as their constituent parts. In fact we need to strengthen our inquiry along the two different lines in our world of signs: the verbal-textual-analysis and the natural-social-sign-analysis. Verbal sign-systems

and actual sign-systems belong to different levels that focus respectively on signification and communication. Accordingly, as for anthropological studies of any kind, the psychological-directed and the behavioral-directed manifestations also belong to different ontological dimensions that require different ways of scientific treatments at certain stages. In any case the two different approaches to the humanities must lead to different theoretical results that cannot be reduced to any monist logic functioning as some authoritative semiotic philosophy. In any case the theoretical inquiry of semiotics will bring about some new theoretical modes that should just get rid of the traditional philosophical framework basically fixed prior to the emergence of the modern semiotic movement. However this tendency doesn't mean semiotics would exclude the traditional philosophy from modern semiotic studies. Instead, the more meaningful interaction between two different kinds of theoretical practice will always be needed and often employed by semiotic theoreticians. Viewed from the other angle, the same tendency also leads to a more profound reexamination of the structure of the humanities as a whole when the philosophical part of the latter would have to change its traditional way of theorizing in the renovated intellectual context in future.

5. Significance of the Cross-cultural Semiotic Turn

The emergence of cross-cultural semiotics could even lead to a triple important consequence concerning the reformative progress of semiotics at the three levels: western semiotics, non-western semiotics and the global semiotics in connection with the global humanities. The interdisciplinary-performed scholars should exercise a dialectic tactic enough to keep a strategic balance between the consistent operative autonomy on one hand and the interactive-collaborative field on the other hand. In different developing stages and working levels the agent needs to redirect his attention to either autonomous side or collaborative side. The former is expressed in a need for the more detailed divisions of labor, and therefore several different practicing autonomies could be hopefully organized such as Semiotics 1, Semiotics 2 and Semiotics 3, and even more, if needed. Regarding semiotic strategy, the unity and demarcation of semiotic performances are alternatively useful and necessary.

This possibility had been gradually realized in the post-Cultural-Revolution China because it was in the Chinese academia at that critical turning point of history that Chinese intellectuals had a stronger ambition to more relevantly and rationally reconsider the potential and future of social and human sciences from a purely scientific angle. Such an intellectual ambition was obviously caused by the characteristic semantic ambiguity displayed in human knowledge about history, society, culture and arts. Therefore we suddenly found that the semiotic approaches of various kinds seemingly provided some more effective ways to

improve our theoretical knowledge and practical capability in those fields. Without such an important intellectual significance involved how could Chinese scholars begin to fall in love with some formalist games called semiotics immediately after the end of the Cultural Revolution? Our appreciation or judgment of modern European-American semiotics was deeply based on our strengthened reflection on the entire comparative intellectual context of mankind. Please notice a fact that our initial attitude towards modern semiotics and its way of performing the new scientific practice was built up gradually through our independent investigation about the updated development of human knowledge rather than because of some professional training on Western campuses. The fact has made the main stream of Chinese semiotic studies able to keep its characteristically independent position from the very beginning. Thus, Chinese semiotics with the above-mentioned independent background and special ethical position has made efforts much more toward the inquiry about the true value of the semiotic practices than simply following the professional powers prevailing abroad. Accordingly, with a more serious motivation, we have eventually distinguished between the two different existing criteria: the utilitarian-professional standard and the purely scientific standard. Without the related careful distinction we could be just blindly attracted by the international semiotic fashions. In light of the above-mentioned backgrounds, as we pointed out above, we have learnt to be able to grasp an operational notion of “semiotic elements or elementals” which indicate some idiosyncratic roles in forming some genuinely semiotic merits in intellectual history of mankind. For attaining the related judgment and evaluation of the semiotic problems we must first of all reconsider the entire field of human knowledge. These motives and purposes have enabled Chinese semiotics to be able to adopt an as wide as possible intellectual horizon to deal with semiotic studies without being a simplistic follower of semiotic-formalistic charms. The effects of the strategy are naturally displayed at several levels regarding our semiotic scholarship: such as the western level, the non-western level and the global level. The typical cross-cultural semiotic strategy is related to the theoretical goals at the three levels. That means its effect could spread over the entire semiotic world. The meaning of cross-cultural semiotics is not limited here; it can even influence the advanced European-American semiotics, in the global context, to reflect its own objective, situations and problems when they are faced with their new intellectual partners coming from the strange non-western traditions; namely cross-cultural semiotics would possibly stimulate its western partners to expand their theoretical as well as intellectual horizon that should be more comprehensive and more complicated than its present-day professional ones formed in the West. Furthermore, the interdisciplinary and cross-cultural semiotic practices urge the semiotician to adopt a more collective and more

collaborative attitude in doing semiotics in various fields. For the purpose of promoting the collectivist enterprise a semiotic agent should play a double role: as the scholar and as the organizer. Both roles are contrary to the mere professional utilitarianism and individualism that prevail in the current commercialized world.

What we discussed above are mostly about the principle and ideal in connection with semiotic scholarship today. Regarding the concrete situation of Chinese semiotics, we may point out an interesting phenomenon as follows. Despite the obvious contrast of the theoretical modes of western philosophy and western semiotics, many western semiotic theoreticians come from philosophy departments. In China, we may say, few semiotic theoretical scholars come from the field of philosophy. There are several reasons for this phenomenon. First of all, for the past three decades Chinese philosophers have been busy in acquiring western philosophical knowledge but still lack time to attain a high enough level for making independent judgments. That also means they still lack rich enough updated information for appreciating multiple theoretical values, such as the semiotic-theoretical one. On the other hand, lacking an independent experience in the current genuinely valuable theoretical problems they could be simply content with keeping any philosophical knowledge occasionally obtained on camps as the authoritative mode of theory. Their theoretical curiosity is mainly determined or limited by their knowledge of their teachers of western philosophy. Consequently, most of Chinese scholars taking interest in semiotic theory today come from the fields of Chinese literature, foreign literature, film and video, media and communication and even arts. As we know, all of these fields lack a theoretical tradition themselves in former times. But the situations have changed a lot recently. Firstly, the scholars in these fields become more and more aware that their subject-matters need a related theoretical knowledge in the new age. Secondly, without being restricted by the traditional bondage of any philosophical dogmatism they become much more open-minded to the new types of theory. Then modern semiotics with its widely applicable wonderful fruits has played an ever-increasingly important influence on their studies. Thirdly, the situation could have an epistemologically profounder reason that the other fields in the humanities than philosophy could have more direct contact with various real objects in their respective fields. Despite the fact that philosophers usually and professionally have fewer chances to touch reality in their scholarship and that the emergence of modern semiotic theory has been largely due to the newly increased consciousness of the necessity for the theoretical interpretation about all kinds of reality in any human sciences, in some sense the development of contemporary semiotic theory has been exactly due to this urgent necessity for more effective theoretical interpretation of reality in human sciences. In former

times scholars of the humanities, except philosophers, were content with the descriptive way of working on their studies. But the new age has made them more and more interested in theoretical practices in doing all humanist studies. Then there has emerged the term "human sciences" beside social sciences since the Second World War that has been certainly the main reason why contemporary semiotic movement has rapidly and fruitfully developed. The fact also hints that the humanities as a whole need to be more scientific or more theoretical, while by contrast the traditional philosophy becomes more and more unsuitable to handle the multiple theoretical problems arising from the humanities. The so-called theoretical interpretation also implies that the relevant theoretical practices must be something more fitting in explaining various related reality, while the traditional philosophical way of theorizing has proved its obvious lack of true capability for or interest in analyzing true reality appearing in the humanities.

The problems become more serious when cross-cultural semiotics has emerged because the non-western traditional humanities, including their philosophy, more obviously lack the rational habit for scientific way of thinking. Therefore, the so-called Chinese semiotics of traditional culture can hardly be taken as only a redescription or representation of the old Chinese texts by means of some formalist terminology directly obtained from western semiotics. In this sense Chinese semiotics implies a necessary task to explore modern semiotics more cautiously in order to grasp more deeply and widely the relevant semiotic elements really applicable and productive. Then what are the semiotic elements or the semiotic elementals? Briefly, they should be able to stimulate or renovate our scientific wisdom concerning meaning, values, structures and functions in all historical, social, cultural and academic phenomena.

Thus, the meaning of the so-called cross-cultural semiotics doesn't hint that as the late-comers in the field they could even play a more important role in semiotics than their western partners who must be much more specialized in their semiotic scholarship. The fact remains to be that western semiotics, particularly its theoretical achievements of various types, is always the main and basic source of the development of non-western semiotics. But for the latter a comprehensive study of western semiotics is only the first step, while the next step must be more originally rearranged through the creative procedure of alternatively disorganizing and recombining all positive results of western semiotics as well as all social-human sciences. In other words, we always need a double policy about the learning from the West: first, the serious and honest study of its specialized knowledge, and second, more creative and more critical reinterpretation, reevaluation and reapplication of western scientific achievements of all kinds. At this second stage, without any racial discrimination, scholars from all lands will become collaborators in our global-semiotic adventure. Thus, our

suggestion only hints that the emergence of cross-cultural semiotics provides all people in international semiotics with a common chance to reconsider and reorganize the present results and potential of semiotic scholarship in terms of a much larger epistemological and methodological framework formed at a true global level. This epistemological-methodological turn in the global semiotic movement is also connected with the renovating progress of all human sciences. The great scientific turn cannot of course mean that we semioticians would be therefore able to present some more reliable knowledge to really solve various critical problems remaining in the global humanities, but can only mean that we may accordingly be capable of presenting the more relevant formulation about the “problematique” of semiotics as well as of human sciences. The more pertinent presentation of our major series of questions as such could be indeed an important achievement in our present semiotic movement. For the semiotic is after all a scientific approach to first clarifying our meaning and values in our thinking, along with our entire inquiry about social and human sciences. The cross-cultural semiotic turn is also the global-semiotic turn as well as the turn of human-scientific investigations of cultural heritages of all civilizations.

Cross-cultural semiotics originates from the European-American semiotic traditions. The historical fact itself indicates that the latter remains to be much more developed and elaborated than cross-cultural semiotics in semiotic specialties. Still, the former cannot be taken as the mere simple follower of the latter because all semiotic agents are faced with a common epistemological problem that can be grasped like this: the scientific-technical knowledge historically obtained is one thing while the more reasonable restructuring of it is another.

6. Conclusions

The basic line of our reasoning in the paper can be outlined here once again.

- A necessity to distinguish between the professional semiotic-operative practices and the significant semiotic-elements; the former includes working groups, disciplines, schools and fashionable ways; all of them have had relatively fixed systems and procedures in their semiotic profession.
- The semiotic elements refer to the scientifically significant parts in any semiotic works; their significance is defined not only by themselves but also by their possible combinations with each other as well as with the related scientific contexts outside semiotics.
- So the semiotic elements are contained in various semiotic practices or procedures as the social-academic phenomena which also contain or are connected with various non-semiotic parts.

- The semiotic approach is characterized by organizing semiotic elements and related parts; its first task lies in finding out semiotic elements. But the synthetically and multiply formed semiotic practices based on the discipline or the profession tend to obscure the existence and function of semiotic elements and their combinations, so we need in our large semiotic family to redraw semiotic demarcation lines focusing our attention mainly to the significant semiotic elements, rather than to the socially or professionally formed practices as such.
- The intention further strengthens our knowledge that the semiotic is interdisciplinary-directed and we should make any professionally formed quasi-disciplinary procedure anatomized to highlight the existence and function of semiotic elements. The cross-cultural semiotics naturally strengthens the same process.
- On the other hand, for the sake of more relevantly grasping semiotic elements or the semiotic-significant factors we need to step beyond the semiotic field itself to think about problems in total social and human sciences, which were in part developed following the model of natural sciences in history. The attitude displays the interdisciplinary nature of semiotics further as the constituent part of total human knowledge that is the additional proof that semiotic problems remain part of the latter.
- The so-called cross-cultural semiotic turn refers to an objective situation where all agents can get useful stimulations or inspiration from their own different angles to reconsider and represent all semiotic-related problems at a higher epistemological and methodological level.