

# Intersubjectivity: The Best Congenial Stock to Link the Western Thoughts with the Chinese Culture

## INTERACTIVETE DE SUJET, CENTRE DE LA COMBINATION DES CULTURES ORIENTALES ET OCCIDENTALES

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**Abstract:** The theory of intersubjectivity is the development of the Western ideologies in modern times. It derives from subjectivity and it is the transcendence over subjectivity. Rather than as a theory of philosophy or aesthetics, it had been a concept and methodology infiltrating through the Chinese aesthetic practices, social concepts and culture. This thesis probes into the possibility of combining the Chinese culture and the Western thoughts by analyzing intersubjectivity embodied in the Chinese philosophy, social and political thoughts and the Chinese literary and art thoughts, thereby, proving that intersubjectivity is the best congenial stock to link the Western thoughts with the Chinese culture.

**Keywords:** Subjectivity, Intersubjectivity, Epistemology, the Moral Philosophy

**Résumé:** Théorie d'interactivité de sujet, le développement moderne des idées de théorie d'interactivité de sujet, prend sa source dans la nature de sujet et la passe. En Chine, l'interactivité de sujet ne se pose pas comme une théorie dans les domaines de philosophie ou esthétique, mais elle s'est infiltrée dans les idées sociales et esthétiques chinoises. Cet article se présente l'interactivité à travers des idées de philosophique, société, politique et littérature chinoise, et il se présente la possibilité de la combinassions et la point de départ -----interactivité de sujet.

**Mots-clés:** Subjectivité, intersubjectivité, épistémologie, la philosophie morale

### 1. INTRODUCTION

As Chinese culture has come into thorough contact with the Western thought systems of the world, the two completely different ideological systems inevitably collide. During the processes of contact, it would surely be a great loss to mankind at large if the acceptance of

this new civilization should take the form of abrupt displacement instead of organic assimilation, thereby causing the disappearance of the Chinese traditional civilization. The real problem, therefore, may be restated thus: How can we best assimilate modern civilization in such a manner as to make it congenial and congruous and continuous with the civilization of our own making? How can we combine the two thought systems organically? What counts is to find a congenial stock with which we may organically link the thought

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systems of modern Europe and America, so that we may further build up our own ideological system on the new foundation of an internal assimilation of the Western thoughts. Intersubjectivity is the best congenial stock to link the Western thoughts with the Chinese culture.

There is a generally accepted idea that the Chinese culture and ideologies and the Western thought systems seem to be two parallel theories that will never meet together. As a result of it, the Chinese scholars have always ignored the Chinese traditional thoughts resources while introducing the Western ideologies. But in fact the most important contributions of modern ideologies in the Western world can all find their remote but highly developed precursors in those great Chinese schools of the fifth, fourth, and third centuries B.C. Intersubjectivity is a best case in point.

Intersubjectivity derives from subjectivity and it is the transcendence over subjectivity. Husserl firstly put forward intersubjectivity, followed by Heidegger, Sartre, Martin Buber and etc. They elaborated their views on intersubjectivity from different angles in succession. In a word, intersubjectivity holds a leading position in the modern Western ideological theories.

Although the theory of intersubjectivity is the development of the Western ideologies in modern times, the Chinese aesthetics and social concepts were originally intersubjective. However, in China there has never formed a perfect organic ideological system like that of the Western world. Rather than as a theory of philosophy or aesthetics, it had been a concept and methodology embodied in the aesthetic practice and social concepts and culture. There never formed epistemology, and never emphasized that man should subjugate and conquer nature in China, so the theory of subjectivity never came into being in the Chinese ideologies. But the Chinese philosophy is indeed intersubjective, because they show fervent concerns of the human relationship, that is, the intersubjective relationship. Thus it is the Moral philosophy.

So we can safely say that intersubjectivity is the most important and valuable heritage of the Chinese aesthetics, philosophy and social concepts. It is undoubted that we should try to bring out and study these long-neglected native systems in the light and with the aid of the modern Western ideologies combine them organically on the basis of the identical views, and thereby further the development of the native culture.

## 2. THE WESTERN IDEOLOGIES FROM SUBJECTIVITY TO INTERSUBJECTIVITY

### 2.1 The Western subjective theory

Subjectivity is the core of the Western ideological theories, even if in the ancient ideologies which focus on ontology. The turn to epistemology of modern ideologies was the turn to subjectivity. Subjectivism tries to draw the presumption of universality and necessity of ancient philosophy back to self-evidence of subjective ego, and the development of the contraction between the principle of self-evidence and the principle of universality and necessity outlines the development of modern subjectivism. Neither of these two principles did Descartes completely carry out. D. Hume stuck to the former but abandoned the later, while I. Kant did the contrary. Only in the phenomenology of Husserl were these two principles guaranteed.

The Western subjectivity theory went through three stages involving the formation, the triumph and the twilight. Descartes put forward his famous idea of I think therefore I am (Danial Kolak, 2002, p.243), which firstly clarified subjectivity in the Western ideologies. From the substance of ego that Descartes saw it as the opposite to the substance of material to the transcendental ego of Kant which tolerated the thing in itself, to the transcendental ego of Husserl as the singular point and the limit of the world, modern subjectivism reached its highest point; while the subjectivism reaching its summit, the defect of monism based on subjectivism, such as solipsism and anthropocentrism, as well as the peeling off the human meaning of subject of the transcendental turn, evidently exposed.

### 2.2 The Western ideologies from subjectivity to intersubjectivity (Husserl, p.113)

Husserl's ultimate failure testifies to the dilemma of a philosophy of subjectivity. This dilemma becomes more acute in the domain of practical philosophy. The later works of Husserl and the post-Husserl ideologies manifested the tendency of dispelling subjectivism of monism and the tendency of turning back to anthropology. And the rebel of subjectivism of post-modernism naturally appeared. Thus the modern Western philosophy was turning to intersubjectivity.

Husserl put forward intersubjectivity on the basis of transcendental ego in order to get rid of the dilemma of solipsism; Heidegger transferred from historical subjectivity to intersubjectivity (being-with); Schutz emphasized to form the genuine intersubjectivity only

through the communication of self and other; Martin Buber considered the relationship between self and world as the relationship between I and Thou, and it could exist harmoniously only in the communication and dialogue between I and Thou (Buber, 2002, p.13); Sartre still stuck to historical subjectivity, and developed it into nothingness as the result of the subject's free choice having been predestined, so that the subjectivity was put to an end while he actively carried it forward; this theory was further developed in Habermas' The Theory of Communicative Action, who transformed the atomic isolated individual into interactive subjects. In a word, the modern western ideologies discarded subjectivity and developed into intersubjectivity.

Intersubjectivity is based on being or existence and it goes beyond the limitation of epistemology. Instead of regarding existence as the domain of subjective over object on the base of the split of subject and object, it considers existence as the interaction between different subjects, as the dialogue and communication between self-subject and world-subject, and as the identification of each other between self and others. Thus it is a way of free existence and a kind of experience for the meaning of being.

### 3. INTERSUBJECTIVITY IN CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

There are fundamental differences between the Chinese and the Western philosophy. The major difference between the two types of concepts is that Chinese concept is achieved by intuition and pursues the unity and co-existence with the nature; while the Western concept is achieved by postulation and emphasizes subjugate and conquer of the subject over the object. Those philosophers who start with concepts by postulation have a liking for the distinction between Being and Non-being (Lao Tze, p.87), the limited and the unlimited; while those who start with intuition value the indistinct ion between them. This explained why epistemology has never developed in the Chinese philosophy, since epistemological problems arise only when a demarcation between the subject and the object is emphasized. And in the Chinese aesthetic continuum, there is no such demarcation. In it the knower and the known is one whole. That is, the self-subject and the object subject are considered as one whole, which cannot be divorced. Thus, the theory of subjectivity and later intersubjectivity never came into being in the Chinese ideologies.

The Chinese philosophy is indeed intersubjective in that it is Moral philosophy as a result of the fervent concern of the human relationship, that is, the intersubjective relationship. The Chinese philosophy as

a critical investigation of human nature and the way of right living has its beginnings in the sayings of Lao Tze, Zhuangzi and Confucius.

#### 3.1 The Tao of Lao Tze

Lao-tze's conception of the unity of universe and man and his political philosophy of Wu Wei (The Way does nothing, yet it leaves nothing undone.) require the man to abide by the Tao, the origin of all things, and to let all the things be so of themselves. The origin of the Tao is so of itself, which means not to govern anything.

Taoism seeks its principles and rules for human life not within humanity, but within nature. Consequently, instead of emphasizing human society, this philosophy emphasizes the metaphysical foundation of nature. Constructively, Taoism offers a view of the universe and man as a unity. Human knowledge transcends the limits of percepts and concepts. It is direct and immediate, not being dependent upon a false duality between the knowing subject and the known object. The principles that should guide life and regulate the actions of human beings are the principles that regulate nature. Life is lived well only when people are completely in tune with the whole universe and their actions are the action of the universe flowing through them. The institutions of society are regulated by allowing them to be what they are naturally; society, too, must be in tune with the universe. In this sense, Lao Tze's idea coincides with that of Merleau-Ponty: The subject is an intersubjective field that realizes itself in its presence to the world and to others. It reveals continuity between, intersubjective life and the world.

#### 3.2 The Absolute Freedom concept of Zhuangzi

Zhuangzi develops a philosophy not basically different from Lao Tze's though he does develop further the concept of the total spontaneity of nature, the incessant activity of things, and the underlying unity of all existence. He emphasizes that ultimate freedom is achieved through identifying with the Tao of reality.

Zhuangzi thinks that uniformity of things is the only natural law to follow by the perfect man who makes no arguments and conforms himself to nature. By so doing, he reaches the supreme spiritual realm, that is Heaven and Earth and I come into existence at the same time; all things in the world and I are one uniformity (Zhuangzi, p.29), therefore, the absolute freedom of man is fully realized. This is not only the foundation of the Moral philosophy but the highest realm for man to go for. The above thoughts all insist on rendering the nature and the others an equal subjective position and showing fervent concerns about the human relationship, thus they are the best embodiment of intersubjectivity.

### 3.3 The Humanity of Confucius

According to Confucius, what makes human beings uniquely human is *jen*. When his followers asked what *jen* was, Confucius replied, "It is to love men"(Confucius, p.157), suggesting that our ability to love constitutes the core of our humanity(Koller, 1985, p.265). From the principles of *jen* we can easily conclude that the Chinese emphasize showing understanding and sympathy for the others and laying stress on the inter-relationship between the people. Therefore, the connotation of Confucius' humanism is to love others.

Not only in the early times, the ancient Confucian code had laid down quite clearly a set of appropriate behaviors in interpersonal communication; but also in modern times, we usually encounter the problem of human relationships. We usually have to be considerate of the others' feelings and their feedback. In such a way, the stress on the intersubjective relationship permeates through the whole Chinese history.

### 4. INTERSUBJECTIVITY IN CHINESE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHTS

The Chinese social and political thoughts can be best manifested in The Doctrine of the Mean. It is like the Aristotelian idea of the Golden mean, which means neither too much nor too little, that is, just right. The Doctrine of the Mean says: " All things exist together but never harm each other, all ways function together but never harm each other"( He Baihua, 998, p.49), which insists on the fairness to all, avoiding opposing ways and choosing the middle course, by which various relations among individuals are regulated. The mean is more than a sublime and idealized virtue; it is a highest and best principle to deal with the world. Thus, the mean is the best principle for the Chinese people to deal with the intersubjective relations. Intersubjectivity has originally existed in the concept in the Chinese attitude toward the nature.

Like Aristotle, Mencius maintains that man is a political animal and can fully develop these relationships only within state and society. So men have their full realization and development only in human relationships and the state and society have their origin in the existence of these human relationships. Mencius gives his earnest attention to the relationship between the ruler and the subject, who advocates the principle that the people are more important than the ruler. He aims to advise the ruler to attach great importance to the people's strength and the people's will. So if you win the support of people, you will win the world (Mencius, p.255). He highlights the significance of the

interpersonal or intersubjective relationship taking effect on the stability of society.

Mo Tze maintains the idea of substituting all-embracingness (Fung Yu-lan, 1962, p.55) for discrimination against the others. He believes the ideal world can be created only through the practice of all-embracing love. In this way the society will be ideally stable and harmonious. His idea shows great consideration to the others. In other words, every subject should treat the other as the equal one just like himself, then the equal intersubjective relationship establishes, thus the idea world realizes.

From the above concrete principles of the Chinese people's dealing with the world and governing the world, there is little dispute that intersubjectivity has played a decisive role in regulating the interpersonal relationship and preserving the stability of the society.

### 5. INTERSUBJECTIVITY IN CHINESE LITERARY AND ART THOUGHTS

The Chinese aesthetic and literary theories emphasize the resonance of the works among readers, the appreciation of beauty and the literary activities are considered as the communication and fusion between the man-subject and the world-subject. The fusion between the man and nature, and people's getting along well with each other are the perfect realms of appreciation of beauty.

The Chinese poetry and paintings are the best cases to this point. The Chinese poets and painters see to exert the skills of expressing their affections and opinions by means of the description of the scenery. The ancient Chinese literates and artists show fervent concern about establishing the interactive relationship between self and world. They open their minds to be close to and to be merged into the nature as its friend so as to build up an intimately emotional relationship between self and nature instead of situating on a commanding position as a subject to look down upon the nature. Hereby the fusion between the affections and the scenery and the unity between the mind and objects are put into reality.

The novels and dramas reflect the social lives of the Chinese in comprehensible words from another aspect that is closer to and well accepted by the populace. Thereby, it provides the possibility to establish a dialogue and communion between the self-subject and the literary images. Not only authors but also readers regard the experience of the literary images as that of themselves, in this sense they acquire the mutual understanding and self-awareness as well. Therefore, the literature and art becomes fully intersubjective activities.

## 6. CONCLUSION

From the above analysis, we can safely say that the Chinese aesthetic ideas and social concepts have originally been intersubjective, although it is the development of the Western ideologies in modern times. This thesis doesn't aim to be understood as a claim for China to be the priority in the discovery of this theory, but to emphasize that the thoughts of the West are not

totally alien to the Chinese culture and they are interlinked in many respects. Despite many controversies on it and unresolved corresponding questions about it, intersubjective theory is indeed the main constituent of the Western ideologies and the Chinese culture. In order to further develop and perfect the Chinese ideological theories, we have to absorb the eminent resources of our own traditional thoughts, thus we can successfully connect our traditional civilization with the best in modern Western ideologies. The best congenial stock is intersubjectivity.

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