

Problems with Paradigms and Their Possible Solutions in Comparative Studies of East and West

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Abstract: The heat of theory has long cooled off, but the controversy over theory in cross-cultural studies is far from over. A reconsideration of resistance to theory in China-West studies will be of value for the field of comparative studies of East and West and for finding answers to these questions: Do theoretical paradigms still possess guiding efficacy and explanatory power for literary and cross-cultural studies? Should we still pursue the formulation of new theories? If we should, how can we formulate conceptual frameworks that may have genuinely practical value? Moreover, it may offer clues to how to patch up the split between pro-theory and anti-theory advocates and bridge the gap between traditional and postmodern approaches to comparative studies of Eastern and Western cultures.

Key words: East-West studies; paradigm formation; resistance to theory; cultural theory; hermeneutics

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标题：东西比较研究领域的范式问题及其可能的解决方法

摘要：理论之热早已消退，但是跨文化研究的理论争论远远没有结束。重新审视中西研究中对理论的抵抗将有助于东西方比较研究，并对回答如下问题有一定的价值：理论范式仍然对文学研究和跨文化研究具有指导意义和解释力量吗？我们还应该追求建构新的理论吗？如果应该，我们如何建构真正具有适用价值的理论范式？此外，重新审视理论范式问题也许能在支持理论和反对理论的提倡者之间弥合分歧，并在研究东西方文化研究的传统路径和后现代路径的隔阂之间构建桥梁。

关键词：东西方研究；范式构成；抵抗理论；文化理论；诠释学

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The late Chinese leader Mao Zedong has a famous saying, “Where there is oppression, there is resistance.” I wish to change one word in his aphorism to describe a phenomenon in the academia: “Where there is theory, there is resistance.” Before the rise of theory as dominant critical discourse, there was no such a thing as resistance to theory in the field of Chinese and Asian studies. Since the introduction of postmodern theories into the field, however, resistance to theory has existed like a shadow that doggedly follows a shape. It has taken many forms, some openly hostile, some mildly skeptical, and still some sympathetically polemical. Because of this, there has been a split among scholars in the field, which has by now developed into a clearly demarcated divide between pro-theory and anti-theory orientations, traditional and postmodern approaches to scholarship. Acknowledging the effects and consequences caused by the controversy over theory long ago, Paul de Man famously described the criticism of and attack on theory as “resistance to theory.” The controversy over theory is also widely spread in China-West studies.

Over three decades have elapsed. Has resistance to theory disappeared in the field of East-West studies? Obviously, it has not. In some areas, it has been strengthened by the fact that even theorists begin to challenge the value of theory and talk about the end of big theory, call for the practice of theory, or insist on a return to old paradigms.¹ This is duly reflected in the most recently published edition of *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. In the latest edition (2018), traditional criticism and rhetoric are given more emphasis and F.R. Leavis who openly disliked theory is anthologized (1052-63). At a time when the heat of theory has long cooled off, a reconsideration of resistance to theory and its various forms will have considerable theoretical and practical significance. It will certainly be of value for the field of comparative studies, and for finding answers to these general questions: Do theoretical paradigms still possess guiding efficacy and explanatory power for literary and cross-cultural studies? Should we still pursue the formulation of new theories? If we should, how can we formulate conceptual frameworks that may have genuinely practical value? Moreover, it may offer us clues to how to

1 For a full account of these views on theory, please refer to “Preface to the 2003 Critical Inquiry Symposium,” *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 324-335. The resistance to theory appeared when theory the heat reached an incandescent intensity in the 1980s. Some theorists challenged the notion that literary theory has any real work to do or any results to show. See W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *Against Theory: Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

patch up the split between pro-theory and anti-theory advocates and bridge the gap between traditional and postmodern approaches to scholarship.

Why the Resistance to Theory

In his influential essay “Resistance to Theory,” originally commissioned for a special MLA volume but eventually published in *Yale French Studies*, Paul de Man made this observation: “The most effective of these attacks will denounce theory as an obstacle to scholarship and, consequently to teaching” (4). In an attempt to find answers to why there is so much resistance to theory, de Man raised a question: “What is it about literary theory that is so threatening that it provokes such strong resistances and attacks?” He offered some answers: “It upsets rooted ideologies by revealing the mechanics of their workings; it goes against a powerful philosophical tradition of which aesthetics is a prominent part; it upsets the established canon of literary works and blurs the borderlines between literary and non-literary discourse” (11-12). These answers suggest that the resistance to theory grows out of a conflict between new and old frameworks, approaches, and paradigms. As such, it should be examined in terms of the anxieties brought about by paradigm shift. But instead of examining the resistance from that perspective, de Man sought to locate its built-in reasons at the conceptual level of the theoretical enterprise itself. After critically analyzing the internal mechanism of resistance, he pronounced it to be a “resistance to the use of language about language” and “resistance to reading” (13 and 15). To the conceptually oriented theorists or theory sympathizers, de Man’s article may have helped the cause of theory, but as it argues for theory in theory’s own terms unfamiliar to those who resist theory precisely on that ground, it seems to have silenced few theory critics and converted still fewer theory skeptics. Small wonder that he drew a paradoxical conclusion: “Nothing can overcome the resistance to theory since theory *is* itself this resistance” (20).

De Man seemed rather pessimistic about resistance to theory in his conceptual inquiry. In my view, rather than treating resistance to theory as a pure conceptual issue, we ought to explore it from the perspective of paradigm changes and critically examine its various forms. In this essay, I will use mostly Chinese materials in the field of Sinology and focus on various responses to theory--enthusiastic adoption versus strong resistance; intricate endeavors in constructing conceptual frameworks versus sympathetic discontent with them. From this point of departure, I will move on to some general issues concerning theory and its discontent, paradigm shift and its accompanying anxieties, and attempt to find ways

to cope with the split between approaches, and gain insights into the formation of widely acceptable paradigms in literary and cultural studies.

The worldwide spread of contemporary theories has greatly shaped paradigms in cross-cultural studies. But the fate of theory differs from tradition to tradition, region to region, and even field to field. In the field of Chinese studies, for example, theory fares well in Mainland China, quite well in modern and contemporary Chinese studies, moderately well in pre-modern cultural studies, and worst in premodern Sinology. The different receptions of theory in different areas may be reduced to two major trends: one is characterized by a warm embrace with moderate complaints; the other is dominated by a cold rejection with hostile criticism. The warm reception is marked by a wholesale importation of contemporary Western theories, which started in the late 1970s when China started its openness and reform. Closed to the outside world, especially the West, for over two decades, Chinese intellectuals were more than eager to embrace almost any Western theories, from Freudianism to postmodernism, from political theories to economic theories, from literary theories to cultural theories, which inundated the Chinese academia as the gate was flung open. Amidst a neck-breaking frenzy of introduction, digestion, assimilation, and application, a paradigm gradually emerged. It may be described as a blind faith paradigm: most Chinese intellectuals held a blind faith in the efficacy of Western theories and applied them to their studies indiscriminately. This enthusiastic embracing of new theories coincided with a warm reception among young scholars of Chinese culture, especially in literary Sinology. But unlike their Chinese counterparts, the theory practitioners of Sinology have never gone uncontested and unresisted. The enthusiastic adoption and assimilation have met with enduring resistance in Western studies of Chinese culture. As a result, there is a split situation. While premodern Sinology is minimally informed by postmodern theories, modern and contemporary Chinese studies are soaked in postmodern theories so much so that one can hardly have a foothold in the modern field without some knowledge of postmodern theories. The enthusiasm for theory in Mainland China still seems to have a long way to cool off. One just needs to attend an international conference held in China to have a sense of the popularity of Western theory among Chinese intellectuals. I have often heard Western scholars who attended Chinese conferences raise the questions: Why were the conferences dominated by Western ideas and theories? Where have Chinese theories gone?

But the indiscriminate introduction and zealous application of postmodern theories has also given rise to a good deal of discontent. Critics complain about

the inability of postmodern theories and their practitioners to adequately address the radical otherness of Chinese cultural objects and the disconcerting dislocation between Western theories and Chinese practices. They argue that Chinese cultural tradition differs from its Western counterpart almost in all aspects, from language and history to ways of thinking and expression, and theories developed in the white, Christian West and applicable to Western materials do not always work well in the study of Chinese cultural objects, be they material objects or textual objects. These moderate complaints have given postmodern theories a mildly derogative name: *houxue*, which, literally translated, means “postisms.” Accordingly, scholars who are active practitioners of postmodern theories have earned an epithet with satirical connotations *houzhu*: literally “postmodern masters.” The dissatisfaction and complaints have constituted a mild form of resistance, which I call “discontent.”

By contrast, in the field of Sinology in the West, “discontent” is far from adequate to describe the complaints against theory. Indeed, nothing short of what de Man describes as “resistance to theory” may be able to capture the fate of theory in premodern Chinese studies. Some scholars have openly displayed an antipathy and hostility to postmodern theory. To some of them, a mere mention of Derrida’s name or deconstruction may trigger a tirade and a torrent of denunciation (Chaves 77-82). As a result, as late as in 1992 when postmodern theories were on the decline in the mainstream US academia, one scholar in Chinese and comparative literature still bemoans that the project of integrating postmodern theories with pre-modern Chinese literature is “essentially a utopia project” (Palumbo-Liu 195). There have been some conjectures on the reasons for this strong resistance. One reason is that the critical paradigm in traditional Sinology is philologically oriented, predicated on the notion that serious scholarship should rely on neutral recovery of objective truth in the text through recoverable language. The other reason, as some postmodern Sinologists remark in the private among themselves, is that the strong resistance is a symptom of a deep-seated critical inertia on the part of some traditional scholars and of a fear that the injection of new theories may deprive them of their authority in and scholarly hold onto a discipline. But to be fair, the strong resistance was mostly brought about by a strong discontent with the blind faith in and indiscriminate application of theory. The discontent takes a number of strands. First, some theory opponents have rightly pointed out that scholars of new theories have completely turned their back on traditional Chinese theories. Consequently, Chinese literary theory as a system does not exist anymore. It exists only as materials that serve to prove the correctness, efficacy, or universality of Western theories (Chaves 77-8). Indeed, the present day Chinese literary theory

has almost become a de facto branch of Western literary theory. Second, opponents have voiced a dissatisfaction with the fact that while introduced Western theories frequently turn out to be square pegs in the round hole of Chinese culture, efforts at application always give the impression that someone tries in vain to soothe an itching toe by scratching it outside the shoe. Opponents also complain that applications of theories are replete with new-fangled jargons, deprived of which, some scholarship is devoid of substances. Third, strong resistance to theory comes from a loath of ideological criticism. In his widely read book on postmodern literary theory, Terry Eagleton conducts a critical survey of literary theory from New Criticism to poststructuralism and draws the conclusion that all literary theory is political and ideological criticism (195). No doubt, all criticism is political and no criticism is free from ideology. This is especially so in the case of cross-cultural studies. In Chinese and Western studies, however, political criticism has often been stretched to its limit. In many ways, a large measure of discontent with theory emanates from the complaint that theory has made examinations of text and artifacts secondary to questions of political ideology, forms of oppression and resistance, thereby diminishing the rich varieties of texts and cultures.

Theory and Its Discontent

No one would completely deny the usefulness of theory, but as I have shown, for various reasons, theory has generated its discontent. In the reactions to theories, there is an intriguing phenomenon in cross-cultural studies that I would call “discontent with discontent,” or “meta-discontent.” Faced with the distinctive differences of cultures, cultural studies scholars have always aspired to formulate theories that may serve as constants in the sea of cultural variables and use them to construct theoretical frameworks or paradigms that may cope with the alterity of cultures. But after a theory is proposed, it will invariably arouse criticism. Because of their dissatisfaction with a proposed theory, some scholars will go ahead to pull it apart and in its place propose a new theory. Again dissatisfied with the newly constructed theory, some other scholars will come along and blast the newly formulated theory. This deconstructive process may go for several rounds. Here, I will critically examine a case of meta-discontent and articulate some meta-discontent myself.

In the field of Chinese and Western studies, there has been, since the first direct contact between Europe and China, a long lasting ambition to formulate paradigms that may possess total explanatory power and account for the vast knowledge about

Chinese history, language, literature, art, religion, and thought vis-à-vis the West. This ambition has attracted numerous scholars, Chinese and Western, and given rise to many hypotheses, speculations, assumptions, and theories, from which some paradigms or conceptual frameworks have arisen. The earliest framework may be called “accommodationist paradigm.”¹ It is so called because scholars attempted to accommodate the vast knowledge about China within the European system. This paradigm may be said to have initiated by the famous Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) and won hearty endorsement from Leibniz. Ricci, in his attempt to convert the Chinese to Christianity, adopted an approach to Chinese culture that attempted to smooth out the Chinese differences. Leibniz’s purpose is somewhat different. He adopted the accommodationist position because he considered it essential for Europe to learn about China for its own benefit and for China to be receptive to European ideas and artifacts. In other words, he aimed at the lofty goals of mutual understanding, closer cooperation, and cultural exchange between civilizations. One of the basic characteristic features of this paradigm is to see similarity and compatibility between Chinese and Western cultures.

As Europe’s knowledge about China increased, the paradigm was unable to cope with the cultural differences. The paradigm of compatibility was therefore replaced by a paradigm of difference. In their attempt to deal with the distinctive differences between China and the West, scholars have resorted to the anthropological theory of “cultural relativism,” which spawns a series of conceptual frameworks that conceive of China as the antithesis of the West. Curiously, the irresistible trend of globalization seems unable to dampen the popularity of cultural relativism. In the postmodern age, when cultural relativism turns into some radical forms, the paradigm of difference has been radicalized as well and developed into an arch paradigm that sees China as the ultimate “other” of the West. David Buck, a former editor of the *Journal of Asian Studies* observes that cultural relativism is so predominant in East and West studies that “[c]utting across the disciplines are epistemological and methodological problems involving the issue of whether any conceptual tools exist to understand and interpret human behavior and meaning in ways that are intersubjectively valid” (30).

Under the influence of the arch paradigm, various conceptual frameworks arise in different areas of China and West studies. In the areas of literature and art, there appeared a paradigm constructed on a series of dichotomies. It has been

1 I borrowed this term from what came to be called the “accommodationist” position in the seventeenth-century Roman Catholic Church’s debates concerning the conversion of the Chinese to Christianity.

adequately summarized by Rey Chow: “[T]he assertion of the Chinese difference tends often to operate from a set of binary oppositions in which the Western literary tradition is understood to be metaphorical, figurative, thematically concerned with transcendence, and referring to a realm that is beyond this world, whereas the Chinese literary tradition is said to be metonymic, literal, immanentist, and self-referential (with literary signs referring not to an otherworldly realm above but back to the cosmic order of which the literary universe is part.... Accordingly, if mimesis has been the chief characteristic of Western writing since time immemorial, then nonmimesis is the principle of Chinese writing” (10). This paradigm is quite ironic. For in a conscious effort to resist the wholesale borrowing of contemporary theories, it falls under the influence of a not so contemporary cultural theory, which is anthropological culturalism. It is for good reasons that Rey Chow views it as “an a priori surrender to Western perspectives and categories” (10).

The arch paradigm has produced more dichotomies in other areas of Chinese and Western studies. Whereas Western language is highly abstract, Chinese language is barely capable of expressing abstraction; whereas Western literary writings are largely allegorical, Chinese literary writings are generally non-allegorical; whereas Western poetry emanates from *ex nihilo* creation, Chinese poetry grows out of immediate responses to real situations; whereas Western literature is founded on imaginative fictionality, Chinese literature as a whole is dominated by historical fidelity; whereas Western art is perceived to be the result of artificial making, Chinese art is the result of natural growth; whereas Chinese aesthetic theory is impressionistic, unsystematic, and lacking clearly defined terms, Western aesthetic theory is profound, systematic, couched in rigorous categories; whereas Chinese philosophy is predicated on intuitive concretization and sweeping generalization, Western philosophy is rooted in thoughtful abstraction and logical analysis.

Superficially, this oppositional paradigm may have risen under the influence of cultural relativism, but in its deep structure, it grows out of a historical perception of the patterns of human development and metaphysical conceptions of the differences between Chinese and Western thought. In historical development, the Chinese civilization is believed to have followed a pattern of continuity between past and present while the Western civilization is viewed as following a pattern of rupture. In modes of thinking, it is believed that while correlative thinking is predominant in Chinese thought, analytic thinking is the hallmark of Western thought. Metaphysically, Chinese thought is construed to be wholly monistic while Western thought is held to be thoroughly dualistic. While Western tradition

is understood to be founded on a disjunction between nature and culture, Chinese tradition is perceived to be based on a continuum between the human and natural world. Whereas there is a creation God in the West, who is viewed as the creator of all things, it is widely believed that in the Chinese tradition, there is no creation god. In consequence, whereas Western worldview displays a tragic tension between god and man, Chinese cosmology features a harmonious collaboration between the human and divine beings.

In these series of dichotomies, we may find a greater irony. Cultural relativism is meant to counter cultural universalism, which often leads to ethnocentrism and cultural chauvinism, and to challenge Eurocentric paradigms as well as to correct the imposition of Western views on non-Western cultures, but as a scholar of Indian culture perceptively points out: whether in the colonialist and imperialist eras of Rudyard Kiplin or in our own time of postcolonialism, those who defend the Eastern difference and those who devalue it “share the most important descriptive presumptions, differing primarily in terms of evaluation,” and even those who “see themselves as struggling against imperialism, racism, and sexism share with their professed antagonists the bulk of relevant ideological beliefs” (Hogan, 6 and 8). Indeed, radical relativism is supposed to deflate the sense of superiority in Western cultures in cross-cultural studies, but the end result often turns out to be the opposite and reinforces Eurocentrism and Western superiority. In the established dichotomies concerning China and the West, whether the Chinese terms are criticized as negative categories or celebrated as positive values, an implicit and sometimes even explicit bias is inscribed within their internal structure. A closer look at the series of binary oppositions reveals that they implicitly allude to a hierarchy in which the Chinese system always occupies the lower position. This bias is clearly seen in these contrasts: Western artifice, abstraction, figurative tropes, *ex nihilo* creation, transcendental spirituality, logical analysis, and rational systemacity versus Chinese naturalness, concreteness, literal fidelity, stimulus-response transcription, immanentist worldliness, random commentaries, and impressionistic generalization.

Although we do not know exactly when this oppositional paradigm started to take shape, we are certain that it was not conceived by a single theorist or scholar. In fact, it gradually took shape in the scholarship and metaphysical speculations by many scholars including philosophers like Leibniz, Voltaire, Hegel, Weber, and scholars like Marcel Granet, Fredrick Mote, Benjamin Schwartz, Joseph Needham, K. C. Chang, A. C. Graham, Tu Wei-ming, David Keightly, David Hall, Roger Ames, Stephen Owen, Pauline Yu, and many others. It has exerted a

profound impact upon Chinese and Western studies as well as general studies of human civilizations, but at the same time aroused much discontent and has been subjected to critical scrutiny. While we must admit a certain degree of validity in the oppositional paradigm, one would ask: To what extent is it valid? In due time, most of the dichotomies have been proved to be problematic or simply false and untenable. In the comparative studies of Chinese and Western languages, literatures and aesthetics, scholars who have disputed the oppositional paradigm include Haun Saussy (13-73), Longxi Zhang (117-150), Ren Yong (98-119), Jonathan Chaves (77-82) and Martin Ekström (251-285). Among scholars of historical studies who challenge the contrastive paradigm in historical patterns and metaphysical thinking, Michael Puett convincingly argues that the various dichotomies concerning China and the West should not even be “construed as dominant assumptions; they were, on the contrary, consciously formulated claims made within a larger debate” (2001, 17). After a well-researched study of early Chinese thought, he draws a conclusion: “It is not true, then, that early Chinese thinkers assumed continuity between nature and culture, between past and present. Neither is it true that sages were assumed to be inherently linked to the natural world. On the contrary, the very attempt to claim continuity implied a strong concern with discontinuity” (2001, 17 and 214). In another book, he addresses the general issues of cosmology, worldview, god, and religion, and comes to a conclusion that “the categorization of early Chinese thought as ‘monistic,’ in opposition to a ‘dualistic’ cosmology of the West, breaks down at every level when we explore the historical contexts and implications of specific statements” (2002, 321).

In her criticism of the dichotomy between Western mimesis and Chinese nonmimesis, Rey Chow views it as “a classic example” of a “reactive construction of a fictive ethnicity in literary studies” (10), but at the time when she articulates her critique, there existed no solid scholarship, theoretical or evidential, to refute that dichotomy. It therefore still stands as a pillar in the conceptual framework of Chinese and Western studies. Indeed, it is the basis upon which the fundamental dichotomy between Chinese and Western literary traditions has been perceived and, the contrastive paradigm with a series of binary oppositions between the metaphorical, figurative, transcendental nature of Western art and the metonymic, literal, immanentist nature of Chinese art has been constructed. Then, one scholar has scrutinized this claim. From the evidential perspective, he has collected a large amount of incontrovertible data to prove that there is a mimetic theory in the Chinese tradition (Gu, 202-16). From the metaphysical perspective, he examines the ontological and epistemological basis of mimesis in the West and

located similar conceptual underpinnings and critical observations in the Chinese tradition. Indeed, all the cultural determinants for the rise of mimetic theory do exist in the Chinese tradition (Gu 459-499). Clearly, in order to argue for the dichotomy between the East and West, the scholar who claims Chinese nonmimesis forgets an Aristotelian common sense: mimesis is a basic human instinct (50). The cultural conditions for the rise of mimetic theory may vary from tradition to tradition; so may the ontological and epistemological conceptualizations. But the conceptual rationale for mimetic theory is basically the same irrespective of cultural differences: mimesis in art occurs when a copy is made after a prior model, be that model an abstract idea, the natural world, or the social world. It exists in large quantities in the discourses of the Chinese tradition. And it is certainly not a cultural invention unique to the West. With the removal of this last underpinning, the oppositional paradigm in East-West studies falls apart in its entirety.

Paradigm Formation: Top Down or Bottom Up

In my criticism of the nonmimetic theory of Chinese culture, I myself have expressed some discontent with the discontent. In my opinion, this meta-discontent has positive conceptual values. In fact, it is another form of meta-criticism. It has offered us some insights into what has been problematic in theories and paradigms and may give us some hints at the direction in which we should approach formations of theories and conceptual frameworks. It has at least revealed these insights. First, it implies that a theory can be revised, refined, and perfected. Second, a new idea or theory should not bypass common sense and must be able to stand the test of traditional scholarship. Third, it allows us to have a deeper insight into why scholars of traditional paradigms are so resistant to new theory and paradigms. One main reason why people resist paradigm change is that new paradigms are more often than not invented from borrowed theory and not the natural growth from a native soil. By natural growth from a native soil, I have two aspects of concern in mind. On the one hand, it means theories inductively abstracted from a culture or tradition. On the other, it refers to theories generalized from a certain field. Traditionalists do not resist theory for the sake of resistance. My critical examination of some discontent shows that solid scholarship frequently problematizes and proves false established theories and paradigms. In terms of natural growth, resistance is a kind of discontent with a mismatch between borrowed Western theory and Eastern cultural praxis. Thus, the contention between postmodern and traditional approaches is essentially a contention over priorities.

What should come first: theory or scholarship? In terms of an anecdote, it is a contention between the head and bottom.

I recall an anecdote related to me by one of my teachers. In that anecdote, when asked how he accomplished so much in scholarship, one scholar modestly said that he does not have a good head, but has a good bottom. He means that he is not as clever in the head as some scholars who constantly spin out new ideas, but is more industrious and, sitting at his desk, he makes full use of his good bottom to accumulate scholarship. My critique of the discontent with theory makes me feel that in the field of cultural studies, there has been perhaps too much of a good head while there is not as much of a good bottom. In formulating paradigms that may have theoretical value, we need both a big head and a big bottom. The inherent weakness of the repudiated theories and paradigms reside in the fact that they are generally formulated out of a clever head, not constructed on a solid bottom. As those paradigms are supported by thin scholarship, they are castles in the air, or castle on the sand. Perhaps, at a time when scholars advocate a return to old models of paradigms, we need a good bottom more than any other times. Of course, I think we need to balance out the head with the bottom. A sturdy bottom guided by a clever head will be able to crank out good ideas that may have applicability in a field, if not total explanatory power for all fields. The repudiated theories found to be wanting are, of course, not entirely formulated by the head alone. They are also based on some forms of scholarship. But the problem is that the scholarship base is not thick enough or broad enough to cover the general conditions of a tradition, and the data collected are often purposefully selected to suit a preconceived notion. In a word, the head is too big while the bottom is too small. That is why paradigms formulated in this manner are frequently found to be shaky and deficient. In the formulation of cross cultural paradigms, what we need is not just a balance between the head and bottom. More than anything else, we need a right order for the head and bottom. The correct order is not one in which the head guides the bottom, but one in which the head is squarely placed on the bottom. In non-metaphorical terms, it means that a paradigm should be formulated on solid scholarship guided by a tentative, self-adjusting fore-conceptions and speculations.

My critique of resistance and discontent convinces me that we need to seriously consider our approaches to cultural paradigms. This is highly necessary because we have come to a juncture at which some scholars claim that “the great era of theory is now behind us and that we have now entered a period of timidity, backfilling, and (at best) empirical accumulation”; others reject speculative theories and insist on the “practice of theory” in the present, and still others call

for “returns” to formalism and aesthetics, and to rollbacks to earlier paradigms (Mitchell, 330-31). I still believe that theoretical paradigms with universal value and explanatory power are still desirable and even possible. But such paradigms cannot be formulated from the top down but should be constructed from the bottom up. By “bottom-up” approach, I mean an approach to paradigm formation, predicated on solid scholarship, rather than on a theory borrowed from another field or another tradition. In the dynamics of bottom up and top down approaches, we may derive some insights from René Descartes’ similar approach to philosophy—his celebrated tree analogy. Descartes’ analogy emphasizes the unity, practical value, and foundationalism of knowledge. His comparison of metaphysics to the roots of the tree is meant to express his belief that knowledge should be constructed from the bottom up and no knowledge can be taken for granted before it can be established from basic principles. In cross-cultural studies, the basic principles should be derived from systematic studies of specific areas. For example, if we want to formulate useful paradigms in the field of East and West studies, we need to adopt a bottom-up approach and formulate some first principles from solid scholarship. Equipped with these principles, we may construct descriptive paradigms inductively from observations and meticulous studies of Eastern and Western ideas and data, in contrast to prescriptive paradigms that evolve from borrowed theories through deductive reasoning. A descriptive paradigm should be based on objective observations and assessment of the similarities and differences in Eastern and Western cultures rather than on speculative reasoning guided by certain theories. The formulation of such a paradigm requires scholars to have patience, industry, and an overall command of their field, and engage in large quantities of rudimentary studies. However, we should not lose sight of the use of theory. Although I emphasize the need to return to intellectual scholarship, I believe that scholarship should be informed by familiarity with contemporary theories. This return rejects a top-down approach supported by a shaky bottom; it also rejects a fixation on the bottom with a muddled head. In common sense, I may call this approach a head-on-bottom model.

A Hermeneutic Approach to Paradigm Formation

In conceptual approaches to paradigm formation, one is likely to think of Thomas Kuhn’s theory about paradigms. Kuhn’s theory about paradigm formation is well-known in the scientific world and in the history of sciences. I, however, argue that we should leave out Kuhn’s theory about paradigm formation because his theory is

not suitable for human sciences. Paradigms in natural sciences and human sciences are very different. According to Kuhn, discoveries and invention of new theories in sciences are the main contributing factors to paradigm shift. The changes caused by the discoveries and inventions are both destructive and constructive. They destroy old, existing paradigms and build new and unfamiliar paradigms. Paradigm shift is an exceedingly unsettling process. Indeed, as Kuhn notes, the emergence of a new paradigm “is generally preceded by a period of pronounced professional insecurity,” and the insecurity is usually caused by a strong sense of crisis (67-68). In his opinion, “crises are a necessary precondition for the emergence of novel theories” (77). In the human sciences, however, the situation is very different, and almost the opposite. It is not so much the crises that lead to a paradigm shift as the invention or introduction of new theories that throw a field into professional crises. In literary studies, for example, if there had been no poststructuralist theory, the world of literary scholarship and criticism might still have continued their course of development with no sense of crisis at all. Literary critics might have continued to view a literary text as a “well-wrought urn,” or a “verbal icon” created with balance, harmony, and at most a tension caused by irony and ambiguity. In cross cultural studies, if there had not been postcolonial theories, Western scholars might have continued their study of Oriental and non-Western cultures and traditions, thinking all the time that they were carrying out scientifically objective, bias-free research. But the appearance of postmodern theories is like a bomb that destroys the serenity of time-honored scholarship. For this reason, some scholars openly blame the rise of theory for the crises in humanities (Wolfe 3-4; Shaw 5-9).

In the scientific world, no scientists who want to command respect and authority in the field can possibly ignore new discoveries and new theories. In the human sciences, however, scholars of traditional approaches can simply ignore new theories, approaches, and methodologies and still enjoy professional authority and command respect in their field. In fact, in order to maintain their status, some may deliberately resist new theories and paradigms and try to fend them off as though they were defending against the invasion by aliens. Their defensive measures sometimes may succeed in keeping scholars using new theories and approaches out of the field. Take traditional Chinese literature for example, quite a few competent scholars who have done fine work using postmodern approaches eventually left the field for modern Chinese literature, film, or comparative literature due to pressures on their approaches. It seems as though the older paradigms and newer paradigms can no more co-exist than fire and ice do in the same stove, to use a Chinese saying. An important question then arises: Are older and newer paradigms destined to be

exclusive of each other? My answer is a resounding “no.” I argue that not only can they coexist but also complement each other. The crux of the matter is how to get each side see the strengths and weaknesses of the other, and how to orchestrate the bottom-up and top-down approaches into syncretic paradigms.

In common sense, I call a complementary approach to paradigms a head-on-bottom model. In conceptual terms, I wish to call it a hermeneutic model of paradigm formation. The hermeneutic circle immanent in the production of meaning in interpretation may offer us useful insights. The “hermeneutic circle” posits: interpretation is circular in nature and the circularity of interpretation involves the relation of parts to the whole. The interpretation of each part is dependent on the interpretation of the whole, which is also dependent on the interpretation of each part. It is in the constant interaction between part and whole that adequate interpretation is achieved. Schleiermacher conceives of hermeneutic circle as a prerequisite for adequate interpretation. It is in essence an inductive-cum-deductive paradigm for reading and interpretation. We may further tap its potentials for paradigm formation in literary and cultural studies. We are able to posit a hermeneutic approach to paradigm formation on the fact that hermeneutic circle is also the basis for all scientific knowledge: “Complete knowledge always involves an apparent circle, that each part can be understood only out of the whole to which it belongs, and vice versa. All knowledge which is scientific must be constructed in this way” (Schleiermacher, 84). A theory is a kind of knowledge; so is a conceptual framework in the study of a field. In terms of the hermeneutic circle, the paradigm formation for cultural studies does not involve a circular movement between part and whole of the text, but embraces an alternation between the analytical data of a whole field and the abstracted common themes governing those data. To continue my metaphor, it is a two-way communication between the head and the bottom.

I have stated in the above a general reason why we should leave out Kuhn’s theory. Here, I will further explain my reason. I believe that Kuhn’s model of paradigm formation is not compatible with the nature of human sciences. Kuhn’s approach is basically geared to natural sciences and, the paradigm changes he envisions is revolutionary in nature, as is clearly indicated by the title of his book, and by his emphasis on the parallel between political revolution and paradigm shift (93). By contrast, a hermeneutic approach to paradigm formation is more attuned to human sciences, which have their orientation in the interpretation of texts. The paradigm change that I envision in human sciences is not revolutionary in nature. As it involves interplay between change and continuity, adjustment and

readjustment, it does not abandon former structures altogether but builds on top of them. It is therefore reformist in nature if we wish to follow the analogy of political change. Revolution means radical changes, re-orientations, and disruptions to existing order. In adopting a hermeneutic approach to paradigm formation, it is necessary to play down the disruption in Thomas Kuhn's conception of scientific paradigm formation. Kuhn argues that a scientific paradigm gradually emerges from some foundational principles and it will remain in dominance for some time until it is replaced by a new paradigm. In order for the new paradigm to prevail, the old paradigm must be removed. The new and the old are so incommensurate that the existence of one must depend upon the riddance of the other. Copernican astronomy became accepted only when Ptolemaic astronomy was proved to be wrong. Similarly, "Einstein's theory can be accepted only with the recognition that Newton's was wrong" (98).

I suggest that because of its revolutionary nature and exclusiveness, Kuhn's theory of paradigm formation is not ideal for paradigm formation in cultural studies. Paradigms of natural sciences and paradigms in human sciences are different in many ways. The most crucial difference is that the latter is formed as a result of cumulative developments and receptive to continuity and resistant to disruption because of the continuous nature of human culture. A hermeneutic approach to paradigm formation is able to address the continuous nature of human culture. In the hermeneutic circular model of paradigm formation, a cultural paradigm is not a fixed structure that, once formulated, is forever completed. And practitioners are not compelled to make a choice: he either sticks to an old paradigm or abandons it for a new one. In my conception, a cultural paradigm is like the correct understanding of an interpretation. It should be a shifting, constantly adjusting one, adaptable to the changes in social conditions and in intellectual scholarship. In this respect, a hermeneutic approach should be informed by Heidegger's existentialist grounding of the hermeneutic circle. Before Heidegger, hermeneutic circle seems to have finite destination, which is clear in Schleiermacher's classical theory: "the circular movement of understanding runs backward and forward along the text, and ceases when the text is perfectly understood" (Gadamer, 293). But Heidegger's existentialist hermeneutics does not contain that sense of closure. Gadamer thus comments: "Heidegger describes the circle in such a way that the understanding of the text remains permanently determined by the anticipatory movement of fore-understanding. The circle of whole and part is not dissolved in perfect understanding but, on the contrary, is most fully realized" (293). Like understanding in the hermeneutic circle, a paradigm can constantly seek its full

perfection, but not its completion.

A hermeneutic approach to paradigm formation has many advantages. First, because it does not aim at formulating a closed system, it allows new elements to be added and new adjustment to be made. In this sense, it is much like T. S. Eliot's ideal order of the Great Tradition in literary canon formation: "The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered" (38). Second, because of its sense of continuity, the hermeneutic model can explain why nowadays there is a visible trend to return to old theories like formalism and aesthetics and is capable of accommodating reactive rollbacks to old paradigms. Third, the hermeneutic model can patch up the split between theory and criticism, and theory and scholarship. Criticism and scholarship are guided by theory and they in turn feed new data to alter and perfect existing theory. Fourth, the hermeneutic model can mediate between theories themselves, especially high theory and low theory. High theory, as Mitchell puts it, refers to "the aspiration to total mastery, coherence, explanatory power associated with metaphysics" while low theory refers to "the realm of 'futures' speculation-of market theories, opinion, belief, conviction, hunches, lucky guesses, and premature generalizations" (Mitchell, 332). In terms of the hermeneutic approach, I view the relationship between high theory and low theory as one between full understanding and fore-understanding. Low theory is like the hermeneutic fore-grounding or fore-understanding, or Gadamer's creative re-conception of "prejudice" in hermeneutic understanding (265-307). In paradigm formation, one needs to be first armed with haunches, intuitions, and fore-conceptions, but those speculative preconceptions need to be constantly modified by solid scholarship and perfected by rigorous reasoning and logical analysis until their perfected versions successfully stand the test of rigorous scrutiny. By then, low theory has transformed into high theory with heightened explanatory power. Last but not least, a hermeneutic model of paradigm formation has immense accommodating power that may pacify the conflict that has split traditional and postmodern scholars and unite the academic community. Kuhn compares paradigm change to political changes which "aim to change political institutions in ways that those institutions themselves prohibit" (93). A hermeneutic approach to paradigm formation has the potential of avoiding that confrontation in the academia and is conducive to formulating viable approaches to cross-cultural studies.

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