

Transculturality as Semiotic-Discursive Syncretism:

Historicization and Internal Critique

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The Question of Transculturality

How should we think the question of transculturality? Do we adopt this concept merely as a mode of description of cultural phenomenon that has already happened in history and is still going on globally, or as an affirmation for a utopian vision for mutual understanding between different “cultures” without breaches? Does the concept of transcultural flow or cultural fluidity suffice to offer a methodology for our study of the colonality in the transcultural histories of ideas? How would it be different from traditional national studies, area studies or comparative studies?

In this essay, I seek to contribute a response to these questions by pursuing the following two objectives. First, I propose to adopt a critical methodology by historicizing and contextualizing the moments of transculturality in the history of ideas as processes of *semiotic and discursive syncretism*. By *semiotic and discursive syncretism*, I mean the process through which foreign and local discursive forces traverse and meet in historical conjunctures and materialize through local semiotic practices and cultural institutions. These semiotic and institutional processes are inevitably subsumed to particular subjective positions and power structures of the time, both locally and globally. To historicize and contextualize these transcultural moments, especially the moments of critical transitions in history, is to re-politicize these moments and to examine the operative mechanism behind the semiotic and discursive practices in relation to the historical, social and political conditions. In doing so, we could then understand and explain better how the *semiotic-discursive syncretism* in these moments were prompted

by particular political power structures and had affected the course of history in a paradoxical way.

Second, I would offer a case in the intellectual history of modern China that I have studied in order to explain how these transcultural moments played significant roles in the history of modern China. Revisiting the crossroads and the nodal points of the historical conjunctures and analyzing the operative mechanism of the local and global discursive apparatuses, we could obtain a better perspective to think the questions related to some of the paradoxical moments in the intellectual and cultural history of modern China.

My central thesis in this article is not only to reiterate the fact that there is no “pure” local culture or uncontaminated intellectual tradition in any society, but also to argue that there is no innocent exchange of ideas in the transcultural moment. What is presented as pure and authentic in a culture oftentimes is a case of ideological operation. The spatialization of knowledge, such as national literature, national history or area studies, as many thinkers have pointed out, is a misleading mode of thinking that assumes the centrality of space in the constitution of social orders. The rise of national literature and comparative literature in the nineteenth century in Europe, and the similar emergence of area studies at the end of the second World War and throughout the Cold War in the last century in US, have informed us the fact that the motivation to delineate a foreign society in order to comprehend a different “culture” tend to base on the presumption of the comparability of cultural differences according to the logic grounded on the same measurement and a pre-given perspectival grid (Harootunian 2005, 2010; Sakai 1989).

In order to resist the Euro-centric perspective of the historical interpretation of global modernity, the “alternative modernities” developed in the third world countries paradoxically resorted to their own traditional cultures or to a particular spot of time in previous history in order to seek justification of their contemporary regimes, and utilized the same spatialization and reification of culture (Harootunian 2005: 35-37, 50). Such mode of hypostatization and even fetishization of the geographical space, be it Europe or Asia, the West or the East, is to ignore the reality of the simultaneously intertwining and interacting historical processes and the co-existence of different temporalities in the same place that co-constitute the local cultural and social orders.

Histories are always long processes of syncretism and acculturation. Whatever knowledge or concepts circulated and imported from foreign places always need to be translated into domestic language so that these knowledge and concepts could be understood and accepted by local communities. Such transcultural encounters in fact occurred repeatedly in histories, energizing and enriching local semiotic creativity and discursive formations that altered the normative values and the modes of thought of the time and the subsequent generations. The transcultural traffic of ideas, however, is never without rivalry of power structures. The project of translation through which foreign ideas are introduced into domestic linguistic and discursive practices, complex semiotic operations are involved. In such semiotic exercises, uneven power relations oftentimes are at play, not only through external power structure, but also through internal power structure as well. Foreign concepts with particular preference for certain values could be transmitted and naturalized through local vocabularies; likewise, traditional local power relations could infiltrate into the borrowed ideas translated from abroad. The project of

translation not only involve linguistic and conceptual transference, but also institutional and materialistic establishment that would alter epistemological infrastructures in local societies. In the process of translation through selecting, filtering and re-inscribing, many changes took place. What is at stake is that in these processes particular discursive modes of power structure were prioritized with the normalized disguise of local vocabularies and cultural institutions.

To me, it is crucial to analyze how the existing power structure of the local society actively suture with the new system imposed or translated from outside and transfer into newly devised institutions. It is also crucial to engage with the related questions such as what discursive modes and semiotic practice from historical past that have been revived or conjured up through the process of translation in order to meet with the demands of the time, why does the hierarchical order either in domestic societies or in foreign societies remain or transform itself through the transcultural moments and re-appear in different discursive forms and through different institutions. To historicize these moments of conjunctures is to examine the complex articulations of power structures behind the semiotic and discursive games.

Transculturality as Semiotic-Discursive Syncretism

The reason that I prefer to use *semiotic-discursive syncretism* instead of *hybridization* is because *hybridization* would incur the assumption not only of the mixture of previously pure blood and pure culture, but also of the smooth process of liquid flow and blending of different knowledge. In this regard, I found Walter Mignolo's critical discussion of Fernando Ortiz's terminology of "transculturation"

(Ortiz [1940] 1995) relevant here. Though endorsing Ortiz's corrective of Malinowski's "acculturation," Mignolo nevertheless pointed out that Ortiz's application of the concept "transculturation" invoked the "biological/cultural mixture of people" that he preferred to refrain from. Mignolo wrote, "Ortiz conceived the entire history of Cuba as a long process of transculturation. [He] was interested in defining a national feature of Cuban history." Rather than identifying national distinctive features, Mignolo himself was more interested in "critically reflecting on coloniality and thinking from such an experience" (Mignolo 14). For Mignolo, global modernity/colonial modernity had gone through a long process of "subalternization of knowledge," privileging the particular frame and conception of knowledge based on the distinction between epistemology and hermeneutics derived from Europe while subalternizing other kinds of knowledge. Instead of "transculturation," Mignolo proposed the term "colonial semiosis" and emphasized the analysis of "the conflicts engendered by coloniality at the level of social-semiotic interactions ... in the sphere of signs" (Mignolo 12, 14).

In addition to Mignolo's concept of colonial semiosis, I suggest to consider the process of the transcultural social-semiotic interactions as *semiotic-discursive syncretism* because this process necessarily involved the transportation and mutations of semiotic tokens. Even in the phenomenon of religious syncretism, the mixture of different belief systems and visual icons are not a smooth process. The etymology of syncretism tells us that this term refers to the federation of the Cretans who compromised and reconciled their differences and came together in alliance when faced with external dangers. The visual icons displayed on the shrine in one temple, mingling visual images or motifs of local deities with imported deities, carrying different belief systems, also function as

some sort of alliance or federation, in a form of collage or pastiche, in order to defend their own establishment. Similarly, the composition of certain words and phrases through discursive syncretism also presents a complex epistemological context with internal ideological and conceptual combats or secret transformation in complicit ways. Such visual or verbal federations are in fact semiotic practices.

We could consider such semiotic-discursive syncretism as a process of cultural arbitrage both activated through intellectual comprador bourgeoisie's voluntary engagements and disseminated by popular practices. *Foreign* cultural values are re-inscribed through invented semiotic tokens and re-instituted in the contemporary domestic society. These *foreign cultural values*, however, are not only borrowed from different countries but could also be resurrected from local ancient histories. Even though these semiotic tokens are coated with seemingly innocent façade and equivalent values, we still could discern fundamental correlatives of hierarchical and tributary power relations attached to the balance sheet of pseudo-equivalence. We are here talking about the colonality of power structure in knowledge production. The epistemic regime that establish the conceptual correlatives need to be examined rigorously so that we could challenge the binding power inherent in the hierarchical orders that could easily justify the oppressive hierarchical structure and even the capitalist logic behind it.

It is here that I need to put Mignolo's discussion of Tu Wei-ming and his concept of Confucian virtue into question. Though Mignolo's concept of "colonial semiosis" is helpful in discussing the conflicting intersections of colonial knowledge and the local/subalternized knowledge, I found his discussion of Tu Wei-ming's concept of

Confucianism as a “powerful exercise of border thinking from the perspective of epistemological subalternity” quite troubling. Apparently Mignolo was aware of the stake he played to take non-Western knowledge, such as Confucianism or Native American thoughts, as alternatives to modern (Western) epistemology, because he was fully conscious that Tu Wei-ming had been criticized by the Chinese leftist intellectuals as using Confucian ethics to replace the Protestant ethics in support of Eastern capitalism (Cf. Wang 1997: 64-78; Mignolo 7). He was also aware of the fact that the world views in collision do not remain the same, and the “diachronic contradictions” exist within the “internal (conflict between empires of the same world view) and external borders (world views in collision).” He nevertheless still put his trust in the epistemological potential of Confucianism to perform with different purposes from the capitalist logic, and suggested that Tu’s “analytic and critical reflections” of the “limits of modern epistemology” demonstrated a “powerful exercise of border thinking from the perspective of epistemological subalternity.” He further emphasized that “alternatives to modern epistemology can hardly come only from *modern* (Western) epistemology itself” (Mignolo 8).

Tu’s statement concerning the “Confucian selfhood as creative transformation,” the “elegant and deadly sentence” in Mignolo’s words (Tu 1985, 16; Mignolo 6), to me, is exactly where the struggle of colonial difference took place and where the colonality of power was enacted. It is not the confrontation between Confucianism against Christianity, or that between Confucianism against mystical Daoism, but exactly due to the capacity of the “creative transformation” of the Confucian selfhood that, in Mignolo words, the *global design* was adapted, adopted, implemented and re-invented through *local*

Confucian knowledge. The semiotic-discursive syncretism through Confucianism at the end of the nineteenth century through the beginning of the twentieth century can provide a perfect case that epitomizes the question of epistemological transformation of modern China.

To me, each and every re-interpretation of the Confucian classics is an intellectual endeavor of hermeneutics and is bound to bear the historical imprints, and transcultural processes, due to different political and contextual conditions. Furthermore, we need to question the assumption of any *pure and authentic* Confucianism owned by the *pure and authentic* Chinese culture. The traces of borrowings from Daoism, Buddhism, and even Christianity over thousands of years in Chinese history are self-manifest in various texts by Confucian scholars. There are much more instances of syncretism with as diverse cultural systems as the Turks, Mongols, Tibetans, Manchuria, Islamic, Arabic and other cultures from South Asia, South East Asia and Middle east that Chinese history had witnessed in the long historical process. Finally, the hierarchical power structure embedded within Confucian Ideology betrayed the collision not only between empires and peripheral tribes within the tributary system of the same world view but also between different tribes, ethnic groups and social classes within the same empire.

The annotations of the Confucian classics and even the explications of the same terminology, such as *zhong* (loyalty 忠), *xiao* (filial piety 孝), *ren* (humaneness 仁), *yi* (righteousness 義), or even the complex term *xin* (mind-heart-psyche 心), would function as *linguistic shifters*, carry different subjective positions in different historical and political contexts, and vary from one thinker to the other and from century to century.

Confucian phrases such as loyalty and filial piety, for example, were appropriated by Confucian scholars such as Dong Zhongshu (董仲舒 179BC-104BC) in Han Dynasty, and implemented in the penal system in the service of the imperial bureaucratic governmentality. Zhou Yutong (周予同 1898-1981) pointed out early in 1920s that the Book of Filial Piety (*xiaojing* 孝經) was not written by Confucius, but composed by Han scholars in order to promote obedience and loyalty for the sake of the unified empire. The concept of filial piety was in fact a technique, together with the feudal system and the patriarchal clan system in China, to govern and stabilize the society. (Zhou Yutong 2010[1936]: 338-340, 342-343) The concept of loyalty and filial piety was even also re-appropriated by the Japanese colonial government in Taiwan in 1940s and the Chinese nationalist government in 1950s during the martial law period for different purposes. These Confucian phrases should then be analyzed as *linguistic shifters*, as what Lacan suggested, that refer not to the signified but to the act of signification (Lacan, [1964]1978: 136-142), or as Agamben explained, indicate the pivot upon which metaphysical system of oppositions is hinged (Agamben, 23-26).

The enlightenment intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century translated and appropriated foreign concepts from another language to respond to the questions and demands of their time and their worldview. By using traditional Confucian phraseology, or newly coined Chinese words, and adapting or altering the Japanese translated texts that they consulted, these phrases were inscribed and overlaid with mixed references. Western ideologies, Japanese cultural politics and Chinese semiotic and political networks were merged in one figure. This process of translation through semiotic-discursive syncretism appropriated knowledge from the West, and normalized it through Confucian

phraseology, while at the same time invoking ancient imperial-hierarchical Confucian ideology so that it could perfectly justify the governmentality of power over life according to the interest of the contemporary state.

These highly invested *shifter-terms* not only signify both the assumed content and the act of enunciation itself, but also function as pivotal nodal points that hinged together the complex processes of translation and appropriation. Through these processes, both foreign sources and local sources were incorporated into the present texts, and the re-used traditional terms or newly coined phrases, just as the syncretized icons displayed on local temples, were like tokens that could exchange compound meanings and enact parallel signifying networks. The *shifter-terms* in the practice of the semiotic-discursive syncretism, therefore, could be viewed as indexes, pointing to diverse conceptual and epistemic frameworks, both as conceptual objects and as subjective and historical positions, that highlighted the coloniality of power structures hidden behind the games of the signifiers.

The study of the hypostatization of certain syncretized concepts and take them as the markers of the particular historical moment, as Theodor Adorno puts it, could allow us to analyze the historical conditions that undergird the inner composition and constellation of the subject and object, and to unveil the mechanism that justify the subjugation to historical situations, as if it were the command of being itself. To problematize these fixated concepts, to me, is to historicize the processes of semiotic-discursive syncretism, re-examine the complex historical conditions, and to expose the unequal exchange of values and the demands of the time. Adorno wrote:

Becoming aware of the constellation in which a thing stands is tantamount to deciphering the constellation which, having come to be, it bears within it. The chorismos of without and within is historically qualified in turn. The history locked in the object can only be delivered by a knowledge mindful of the historic positional value of the object in its relation to other objects—by the actualization and concentration of something which is already known and is transformed by that knowledge. Cognition of the object in its constellation is cognition of the process stored in the object. (Adorno 163)

Adorno's analysis of the complex composition of the historical constellation corresponds to my past studies of the transcultural moments in the history of modern China. Here, I would like to foreground the question of the semiotic-discursive syncretism at work in the Confucian phraseology of *xinli* 心力, psyche force, that triggered the birth of ethico-political economy in Chinese context and affected the path of modern China. I would like to examine the limits and paradoxes of the dialectic routes of the intellectual history of modern China through re-historicize and re-politicize these moments of semiotic-discursive syncretism.

Constellation of Epistemological Transformation in Early Modern China

The process of transculturation as symbolic operation and discursive syncretism at the turn of the twentieth century in China have imprints of various epistemic and ideological sources. It was a time of drastic political as well as epistemic paradigm shift, and the complex alteration of the knowledge system behind the discursive formations was related to the changing global and local conditions and relational networks of social life.

In the massive translation works of enlightenment knowledge in early modern China, Western governmental paradigms were also introduced into modern China, along with a large corpus of the translations that were published as enlightenment pamphlets, articles appeared in popular newspapers, magazines, and textbooks for different levels of school education. Such production of knowledge presents a process of translation through semiotic-discursive syncretism: the writer translated and appropriated heterogeneous disciplinary concepts from another language to respond to the questions and demands of his own time and his worldview.

Liang Qichao's 梁啟超(1873-1929) essay "On the New People" (*xinminshuo* 新民說) (1902) was an exemplary and symptomatic text that demonstrated how the ethical subject was constructed in the way that the *bio* (life) and the ethics of the individuals were discursively formulated in an system of ethico-political-economic in order for the subject to contribute to the collective good defined in the name of nation.¹ With the borrowed Western knowledge of modern physics and chemistry on the one hand, and the theories of political economy and the civil society/nation state on the other hand, Liang and other Chinese intellectuals, through the aids of the missionaries in China and the translated texts from Japan, build up a mode of hermeneutics on psyche that stresses on the countable, utilizable, controllable, accumulative, and correctable nature of psyche. Psyche force (*xinli* 心力) was described as the force of mind, using the metaphor of electricity, to be tamed and directed so that it can serve the aims of the State. Moreover, the individual's psyche force was accounted as part of the national capital and as a share that is responsible for the production of the national interest in Benthamian reasoning.

The epistemological paradigm shift achieved through Confucian “creative transformation” is the crucial question that interest me here.

Liang Qichao was the most prominent revolutionary intellectual among those who promoted the concept of a new China through the rejuvenated psyche power of the new people. Liang Qichao fled to Japan with his teacher Kang Youwei after the failure of the short-lived Hundred Days’ Reform in 1898, and stayed abroad in exile for 15 years. During this period of exile, he studied Western knowledge extensively through Chinese translations as well as Japanese translations, and he reintroduced them into Chinese, embedded with his erudite knowledge of classical Chinese texts. His enormous amount of writings greatly influenced the path of Chinese modernization.

To reform and build a modern China, Liang Qichao places his hope not in the leader but in the people. Liang develops his idea of the capacity and the rights of people in his seminal book *On the New People* (*xinminshuo*, 新民說 1902) as the foundation for a strong nation-state. He stresses that, to resist the expanding forces of the national imperialism of the foreign nations, the only method to take was through reinforcing the people’s own sense of nationalism. (Liang, *On the New People* 657) He uses the analogy of biological body to compare with the State: The State is composed with its people, as if a body is composed with its limbs, intestines, nerves and veins. If the parts and limbs were weak, diseased or even broken, the body could not maintain its proper condition and would even perish. The same case could be applied to the State. If we wanted the State to be strong and wealthy, Liang suggests, we first had to consider the ways to maintain the nutrition and life of the State by ways of cultivating its new people. (Liang, *On the New*

People 655) This mode of discourse apparently echoes the Hobbesian organic portrayal of the state as a natural body. Commenting on Rousseau, Liang emphasizes the importance of the public opinion and the juridical contract, in addition to the physiological vision of the state, as the foundation for the operation of the nation. On top of the physiological formulation of the juridical and contractual relation between the individual and the State, Liang further situates the ethical position of the individual in the mode of economic production. Liang lists and elaborates the meaning of each of the moral virtues, so called common virtues (*gongde* 公德), the aim of which, according to Liang Qichao, is to lead to the people's political ability of *qun* (群 community), as a social member, and to enhance the interest of the community (*liqun* 利群): to consolidate the group, improve the group and make it progress.

The common virtues, such as responsibility, autonomous self-governing, self-esteem, bravery, endurance, progressiveness, aggressiveness, **enterprising spirit**, cooperativeness, are indispensable in Liang's portrayal of a new society. Between the lines, Liang brings in various classical Confucian texts to reinforce the concepts of the virtues so that his Chinese readers can appreciate his reasoning, and the texts he cites includes not only the four classics, *Analects of Confucius* 論語, *Mencius* 孟子, *Great Learning* 大學, *Doctrine of the Mean* 中庸, but also *Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋, *Mozi* 墨子, *Xun Zi* 荀子, *Liezi* 列子, and *Zhan Guo Ce* 戰國策 (strategies of the Warring States). (Liang, *On the New People*, pp. 656, 657, 661, 691, 705, 712) There is an obvious move toward a positive, aggressive, warring and martial interpretation of Confucianism in Liang's selection of the passages in these classical texts.

Liang defines the community as *qun*. “Qun” 群 in Chinese stands for the community, the group and the society. Liang states that the capacity for *qun* as the demarcation that differentiates the human from the beast. He says that if a society cannot be formed among the people, then humanity could barely exist. The best form of society that suits people, Liang suggests, is nation-state (*guojia* 國家). According to him, due to the differences of languages, customs, thoughts, laws and institutions, it’s necessary and natural for people to establish their own nation-state. Nation-state is the proper group established for the people to deal with foreign groups. The people should fight for and protect their nation-state till the last minute, even to the extent of sacrificing their own lives, so that the sovereignty of their nation-state would not be endangered. (Liang, *On the New People*, 663) Liang Qichao denounces the utopian notion of the cosmos as the existential frame for human beings and insists that if there were no nations-state, then there would be no competition among one another, and hence no progress of civilization. He further stresses that if the boundaries among nations-states disappeared, then the human gatherings would regress into the tribal conditions. It would then be what Liang calls the barbarian or even savage states. People would remain in a savage or barbarous state if they could not form a nation-state. Therefore, the nation-state is considered as the best evolved form that is suitable as human society and as the convergence of self-love and benevolence. (Liang, *On the New People*, 663)

In regard to the question of “interest” or “profit” (*li* 利), Liang reminds people to aim at the “real self-interest” or “real self-profit” (*zhenliji* 真利己). So-called “real self-interest” or “real self-profit” is defined in terms of the nation-state. One has to

nourish the thoughts of interest of community and society, that is, the nation-state, so that they can forever secure their own interests. Liang even analyzes the modes of production according to the interest of the nation-state and specifies that education and cultivation are mandatory methods to strengthen the nation-state. He characterizes the State as a corporation (*gongsi* 公司), and the imperial court as the business office (*shiwusuo* 事務所). In order to produce and maintain the interests or profits (*shengli* 生利) of the nation-state, it is necessary to demand the force of production from the people. Liang defines the forces of production as physical force and psyche force (*xinli* 心力), the later concept involved the intellectual force (*zhili* 智力) and the moral force (*deli* 德力). He emphasizes that the prosperity or the fall of a nation-state depends on its capacity for production and its total capital and total labor. (Liang, *On the New People*, 696) To make sure that the people take production as the individual's responsibility, he reiterates that people should be educated so that they would even feel "ashamed" of being only the one who share the profits but not the one who produce them. (Liang, *On the New People*, 702, 732-733) In his formulation, not only physical productivity but also intellectual as well as moral productivity are counted in the line of production. Everyone is considered as a member in the system of the production machine. Education is crucial in the production system in this reasoning so as to secure the optimal interest of the nation and to build up the people's "psyche force," that is, their intellectual and moral capacities.

Throughout his argumentation for the new people project, Liang Qichao inserts here and there his passionate and poignant lamentations. "Alas, alas, how can we not fear and alarmed!" (657) "It is painful and mournful for us not to have our nation to protect us,

just as the orphans without their parents to cling to.” (664-665) “Horror! Horror! I could not see how our nation could stand on its own feet.” (666-667) “I’m deeply ashamed to see our current situation.” (672) “I’m all tearful when I observe the current conditions of our nation.” (693) “Our young people are all so fragile that I do not see even a solid society form by a hundred people. Our nation is coming to its end!” (706) Such strong emotional exclamations, including his identification of the situation to be ashamed of, feared, worried and alarmed, as well as his rhetoric of the parent-child metaphor, the cutting line between the beast and the humanity, the imminent danger of the nation-state, all reinforce the legitimacy of his argumentations for the ethico-political economy for the individual in society. The free competition of the liberal economy in the framework of the autonomous equation in the nation-state-community trio structure therefore is at work for the new national subject of the modern China.

The Count of Psyche and the Birth of Ethico-Bio-Politics in the East Asian Context

What is striking in Liang’s text, to my mind, is that his mode of argumentation perfectly represents a typical type of semiotic-discursive syncretism in late nineteenth century Japan and China. In the texts of this period of time, different disciplinary textbooks, social theories or public forums are all embedded with the epistemology of the eighteenth and the nineteenth Western thoughts views, especially those of John Stuart Mill, Adam Smith, Herbert Spencer, Jeremy Bentham and so on. Liang demonstrates a representative case that incorporates and conflates the political, the physiological, the economic and the ethical laterals into the count of the subjects, and he further entrusts the individual the responsibility of the management of his own personal virtues and his forms

of life, or *bios*, in order to contribute his share as a part of the national capital. Liang's project of moral revolution reverberates the rationale of the liberalist's principle of *laissez faire* that grounds his sketch of the new people and the new subject of modern China.

The way that psyche or the force of psyche (*xinli* 心力) is presented as capable of being counted, calculated, regulated, governed, utilized in order to serve as the production force for the benefit of the nation is a popular notion in late nineteenth and early twentieth century China. The direct source of Liang Qichao's use of *xinli* is from Tan Sitong's 譚嗣同 (1865-1898) *Renxue* 仁學 [studies in humanity] (1896), but Liang's interpretation is totally different from Tan.² Instead, he follows the inspiration Tan takes from a little book *Zhixin mianbingfa* (治心免病法) [*A method for the avoidance of illness by controlling the mind*] published in Shanghai in 1896, a translation by John Fryer (傅蘭雅 1839-1928), a Scottish missionary, basing on Henry Wood's *Ideal Suggestion through Mental Photograph*.³

John Fryer was involved in the translation of more than 130 books, mostly scientific textbooks, such as biology, mathematics, chemistry, physics, medical sciences, and sociology. He was very much disturbed by Qing's defeat in the first Sino-Japan war in 1895, and started actively to promote moral education in China. One thing he did was to announce on *Wanguo Gongbao* 萬國公報 [the Ten Thousands Nations Common Newspaper] and *Shenbao* (申報), popular and widely distributed newspapers, and invite submissions for public contest for "the New Novel" to carry out the mission to criticize the backward customs of opium-smoking, the examination systems, and foot-binding, and to offer proposals for solutions. This activity was later supported and continued

eagerly by Liang Qichao. Liang wrote in many of his articles to elaborate the importance of moral education through the genre of the New Novel as revolution through the world of novel *xiaoshuojie geming* 小說界革命.

Liang had read John Fryer's translations and was influenced deeply by him. In his translation of Henry Wood's *Ideal Suggestion through Mental Photograph*, Fryer uses *xinli* (心力) to refer to several different notions associated with the power or the procedure of thought, and employs the concepts of ether and electricity as analogies to explain the operation of thought. According to him, the force of thought is like electricity, transmittable through "ether," and can be tamed, utilized and harnessed for utility as long as we learn the laws that govern the force of thought.⁴ The phrase "*zhixin*" (治心) used by Fryer in the title of his translation and throughout his book conveys explicitly the meaning of "mind-cure" and "mind-governmentality," both ideas highly welcomed by late Qing intellectuals.

It is significant to note that the Christianized New Thought Movement popular in the United State starting from mid-nineteenth century was also introduced into Chinese through John Fryer's translation. The author of this book Henry Wood is considered as one of the precursors of the New Thought Movement.⁵ The advocates for the New Thought Movement present it as a science to promote the ideas that thought is power, and that positive thinking and thought control could fundamentally correct people's mode of thinking, but underneath it, according to William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, it is actually a religious-oriented movement (James, 83-84, 93-94). Wood's method of mental therapy works particularly on the rhetoric of mental hygiene. In his

argumentation, mental hygiene for the healthy mind is as important as the physical hygiene for the healthy body. Passivity, pessimism, hesitation, doubtfulness, weakness and gloominess all were regarded as vile forms of mind. Negative thoughts were untouchable, and negative feelings were even worse. The body's negative or decadent behaviors must be corrected because they indicate the degenerate state of the mind. Consequently, the mind had to be exposed, monitored, controlled, educated and modified so that it could be improved and evolved into a better state. This mode of psyche governmentality resonated very well with the eagerness of the late Qing intellectuals who were trying very hard to seek a new path for the modern China.

Another translated text by John Fryer that influenced Qiang Qichao's knowledge of political economy was his *Zuozhi Chuyan* 佐治芻言 [humble words in aid of governance] published in 1886,⁶ a text translated from John Hill Burton's *Chambers's Educational Course: Political Economy for Use in Schools, and for Private Instruction* (abbreviated as *Political Economy*), one of the educational textbook series published by the Edinburgh W. & R. Chambers. In Burton's *Political Economy* we see a clear line of argument that follows the liberalist and Benthamian utilitarian reasoning of self-interest, free competition, as well as labor division and cooperation for the optimal benefit. Burton's *Political Economy* was translated into East Asian languages not only by John Fryer into Chinese, but also was translated into Japanese by Fukusawa Yukichi (福澤諭吉) as *Seiyo Jijo* 西洋事情 [*Things Western*] during 1867-1870, and into Korean by Yu Gil-jun (유길준, 兪吉濬, 1856-1914) in 1895.⁷

The famous *Bunmeiron no Gairyaku* 文明論概略 [*Outline of a theory of civilization*] (1875) by Fukusawa already demonstrates the characteristic features of the political economical reasoning of his time. Firstly, Fukusawa differentiates civilization with barbarianism basing on the national subjects' intellect and spiritual forces (46-49). Secondly, he suggests that the sum of the opinions and intellect of the whole nation could show the possibility for revolution or transformation of the society. Consequently, he proposes to use statistic calculation of population, price, wages, marriage, birth rate, disease and death so that the prosperity and decline of a nation's civilization could be measured (59-72). Thirdly, Fukusawa believes that the wealth of the nation should be dominated by the will of the nation, and the intellect of the nation should accumulate the wealth of the nation according to the will of the nation (159-167). Fukusawa's arguments clearly demonstrate the political economic reasoning of the link between the nation's wealth and the management of its people's production forces.

Fukusawa's knowledge of political economy started in his translation of Burton's *Political Economy* in 1867, and his teaching of political economy at the same time. He translated only the first one-third of Burton's book and left the practical aspects of trade and international commerce aside.⁸ The reason that Fukusawa did not translate the entire book might be that he did not think it was necessary to retranslate similar texts that were available in Japanese translations. Nevertheless, it was mainly because, according to Paul B. Trescott, that he was attracted by the moral aspect of this section that was close to the Confucian idea of natural order, family relations, human relations, as well as the right and responsibility of the individuals. (Trescott 485)

In discussing Burton's *Political Economy* as the common text in the East Asian context, Liang Taigen 梁台根 points out that Yu Gil-jun's book on his foreign learning (서유견문, 西遊見聞) was highly influenced by Burton's *Political Economy* through Fukusawa's *Things Western* and *Outline of a theory of civilization*, and that Yu Gil-jun was the first Korean intellectual who introduced the social evolutionist theories and the concept of enlightenment and civilization (*Gaehwa* 開化), as well as Edward Sylvester Morse's (1838-1925) evolutionist theories, into Korea. (Liang Taigen 323-351)

It is significant for scholars such as Trescott and Liang Taigen to observe the reception and circulation of Burton's book on political economy in the East Asian regions. However, either in Trescott's emphasis on the moral dimension in Fukusawa's writings, or in Liang Taigen's emphasis on the evolutionist version of enlightenment and civilization, the role political economy played in the process of ethical subjectivation was overlooked by both of them. In Burton's text, the free and autonomous economic agent is crucial in the entire system of the political economy. He writes:

Political economy ... is not a system for controlling men's actions, but for discovering *how men are induced by their natural propensities to act*: it has not so much influence in teaching men how to direct each other, as in teaching them the cases in which control is useless or mischievous. (Burton 1982, p. 49, emphasis mine)

The issue of government is not in its control, but in its capacity to induce the capacity or the appetite in each individual, be it intellectual or moral, so that the agent is freely and

autonomously willing to offer his service for the larger community. When the logic of the political economy is superimposed and incorporated into the logic of ethical economy, the individual's intellectual state and moral state are counted as part of the productive capacity according to the national interest or the collective good defined by the state; likewise, the ethical and economic subject, or the national subject, is placed and measured in the line of production.

By the time Liang Qichao exiled to Japan, Fukusawa's *Outline of a theory of civilization* was read by almost every intellectuals in Japan, of course including Tokutomi Soho 德富蘇峰, whom Liang was deeply indebted to. Liang had read Tokutomi's essays in the news magazine *Kokumin no Tomo* 國民之友 (Nation's Friend) and in *Kokumin shimbun* 國民新聞 (The People's Newspaper), and translated them into Chinese. He then published these translations as his own essays in the news magazines that he established and edited during his stay in Japan after the Hundred Day Reform, such as *Qing Yi Bao* 清議報 (Commentary Newspapers), *Zhongwai Gongbao* 中外公報 (Public Newspapers of Chinese and Foreign Affairs), *Shiwu Bao* 時務報 (Times Newspaper) and *xinmin congbao* 新民叢報 (*New Citizen Magazine*). We have detected obvious close resemblance of Liang's *Shaonian Zhongguo Shuo* 少年中國說 [Of Young China] with Tokutomi Soho's *Youth of New Japan* 新日本的青年, Liang's "guomin shida yuanqi lun" 國民十大元氣論 [on ten great spirits of national citizens] with Tokutomi's discussion of the spirit of civilization, Liang's "wuming zhi yingxiong" 無名之英雄 [anonymous

hero] with Tokutomi's opinion on anonymous heroes, Liang's analysis of the competitiveness of modern nations 論近世國民競爭之大勢及中國前途 [on contemporary situation of national competition and the future of China] with Tokutomi Soho's analysis in his book *Japan in the Future* 將來的日本. Liang even calls himself "Chinese Tokutomi Soh" (*zhongguo de defusufeng* 中國的德富蘇峰) without being aware of the fact that Tokutomi is the one who preaches the importance and necessity of the expansion of greater Japan in Asia in his book *Dai Nihon bochoron* (大日本膨脹論 The Expansion of Greater Japan) published in 1894, a precursor of the Great East Asia Co-Prosperous Sphere during the pacific war. Tokutomi clearly lectures to the young people in Japan on the importance of the spirit of empire that every Japanese citizen should acquire. Tokutomi's friend Goto Sinpei (後藤新平), the head of civilian affairs of Taiwan under Japanese colonial rule and the first director of the South Manchuria Railway, published a similar book *How Japan Expanded in Asia* (*Nihon bochoron* 日本膨脹論) in 1916 and explicates the nationalist political economy concerning how to include Taiwan, Manchuria and Korea in the domain of the greater Japan so that the resources produced there could serve the purpose of the use for Japan.

The ethical subject formulated by Liang Qichao, combined with Confucian concepts of loyalty and filial piety, as well as the European enlightenment version of civilization and political economy popular in Japan, is consequently a subject of truth prescribed to

fit the best interest of the state and is defined by the physiology of the state. Furthermore, this physiological structure of the state treats the human psyche as the object of its governmentality with the logic of political economy. The true subject, or rather, the true ethico-economic subject in Liang's vision, is the individual as human capital within the total labor (*zong laoli* 總勞力) and total capital (*zong ziben* 總資本), expected to join the line of production for the nation, basing on the *raison d'État*. Tuned with such liberalist vision of the society, the principle of the least government with the maximum effect is demanded. It is exactly like what Foucault has analyzed: "[Instead of] continuing to saturate this site of the formation of truth with an unlimited regulatory governmentality, it is recognized — and this is where the shift takes place — that it must be left to function with the least possible intervention precisely so that it can both formulate its truth and propose it to governmental practice as rule and norm." (Foucault 29-30)

It is interesting to note here that in Foucault's analysis, the site of truth for the state here is "the market." The useful and the utilizable now turn out to be veridical and desirable. Through the token of interest, the government can hold on everything that exists for it, "in the form of individuals, actions, words, wealth, resources, property, rights and so forth" (Foucault 45). The entire strategy of governmentality therefore relies not on the total control but on the law of life, that is, the rules for a game "in which each remains master regarding himself and his part, then the judicial, instead of being reduced to the simple function of applying the law, acquires a new autonomy and importance" (Foucault 175). The autonomy of the individual therefore is essential in the self-governmentality in the regime of ethics as well as the regime of truth. To analyze the mechanism of this regime, Foucault suggests, we do not need to analyze the historical

logic of processes, but should undertake instead the analysis of the “internal rationality” or the “wage” of individuals’ activity. The wage, or the income, reconsidered in this context, is the capital or, as Irving Fisher points out, the source of future income (Foucault 223-230).

Liang’s entire project for the new people is certainly based on such type of the reasoning, through cultivation and education, to mold and shape the people into the ethico-economic subject of the modern China. The individual in this economic and political framework is then viewed not merely as human labor but as the source of future income, as an earning machine or the human capital for the nation and the state. The formation of the human capital into effective productive machine is the *telos* of governmentality and of educational investments. Liang’s repeated emphasis of the threat of the invasion by the foreign countries successfully depicts a picture of imminent danger. The self-interest and self-preservation, viewed with the interest and preservation of the nation and the state, is the anchorage for subjective will and action. Partaking in the act of the production/preservation in the name of national interest then is rationalized as a moral imperative for the new ethical subject. The question arises exactly when the logic of ethics is superimposed with other logics and other *telos*, be it the religious supreme imperatives, or the political common good for the nation-state, or the economic interest of the entrepreneurs.

Conclusion: Semiotic-Discursive Constellation and Crossroads of Early Modern China

It is not a surprising coincidence that Foucault's analysis of the political economy of the liberalist governmentality could shed light on how Liang Qichao's syncretism of the diverse epistemological contexts is structured. Liang's project of the new people echoes the Japanese discursive contexts of the national body with its combination of the Hobbesian version of the physiological and contractual nation superimposed with an Adam Smithian model of national wealth and his theories of moral sentiments.⁹ The European epistemological systems of the 18th and the 19th centuries have been incorporated into the Chinese contexts through various channels, with numerous efforts at semiotic-discursive co-figurations. When Liang identifies psyche force and the moral force as the productive labor that the individual could and should offer to the group, he also measures such qualities in terms of the interest of the nation in the name of true value. In addition to the political economy of this line of thoughts, we actually see in Liang Qichao's discourse of the new people the converging point of both the *Political Economy* by Burton and the *Ideal Suggestion through Mental Photograph* by Henry Wood, both translated by the famous minister-translator John Fryer. Rüstow's definition of *Vitalpolitik* perfectly illustrates the practice of bio-politics in the early modern China: a "a policy of life" with which not only the worker's labor but also "the worker's whole vital situation, his real, concrete situation, from morning to night and from night to morning," as well as the "material and moral hygiene, the sense of property, the sense of social integration," are all counted (qtd. Foucault, 157n). John Fryer's translation of Burton's *Political Economy* and Henry Wood's *Ideal Suggestion through Mental Photograph* symptomatically foreground the emotional demand of the age for the appropriate forms of knowledge to govern human behavior and human psyche, the former moving from the

management of the market to the management of individuals' moral behaviors, and the latter moving from the internal government of the moral hygiene and extending to that of the social hygiene. The meeting place of these two strategic movements of governmentality is the semiotic-discursive knot of *xin*, psyche.

It is at this transcultural discursive conjuncture in history that the images associated with the notion of the *xin*, the psyche, are threaded and the images around the central nucleus are the discursive practices popular in the late nineteenth century China. Fryer's usage of *xinli* (psyche force), with an analogy of Western knowledge such as physics and electricity, as the tamable, correctable and utilizable forces, points to the governing and the monitoring of thought that would be practiced in later governments, while his translated terms of total capital and total labor (*zong ziben* 總資本, *zong laoli* 總勞力) and the production of profits and interests (*shengli* 生利) echoes the ancient text of *Daxue* (大學 *The Great Learning*) and persuades the Chinese intellectuals the necessity of the individuals' serving the nation as human capital. Liang Qichao cleverly appropriates the term "*xinli*" introduced by Fryer and situates this *xinli* in the ethico-political economic regime for his project of the new people and his moral enlightenment. Liang's careful deliberations of the virtues for individual's political capacities manages to involve the individual's ethical position in the frame of the society or the nation-state that allowed us to discuss the connection between the question of politics and the question of ethics. Liang's semiotic and discursive efforts of intellectual syncretism demonstrates what Tu Wei-ming describes as the "Confucian selfhood as creative transformation" (Tu 16) that answers to the demands of the time in different historical conjunctures.

Research into the *shifter-terms* such as *xinli* as indexes during the Chinese enlightenment movement, a critical moment of epistemic paradigm shift, should aim to contextualize and historicize the traces of the complex routes of transcultural processes that consolidate certain problematic modern concepts. In what context of scientific knowledge, intellectual climate and symbolic systems were these cases of semiotic-discursive syncretism constructed? In what academic disciplines were they developed? What traditional Chinese vocabularies were used and displaced to help them achieve acceptability through pseudo-equivalence? What rationale was concealed in the translated texts, which excluded and subalternized other modes of thought, and had significant effects on the Chinese discourse?

The shifter-terms from Confucian ideology, as what I have discussed in this paper, were woven into a linguistic texture on the surface and new epistemological implications of the terms were transported, internalized, reverberated and reinforced in later texts in various modifications. These shifter-terms then could also serve as indexes to these semiotic and epistemic operations that we need to look into so that we can study the specific mechanism and the colonality of the structure of power at each phase of the discursive development and to unveil what has been displaced, concealed, foreclosed or negated so that the existing dominant ideology could be put into question again.

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¹ An earlier version of the following arguments presented in this article were made in “The Count of Psyche: The Birth of Biopolitics and Ethico-economics in Early Modern China.” (Liu 2011)

² I've discussed Tan's question in “Force of Psyche: Electricity or Void? -- Re-examination of the hermeneutics of the force of psyche in late Qing China.” *Modern China and the West: Translation and Cultural Mediation*. Eds. by Peng Hsiao-yen & Isabelle Rabut. Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2014. 153-182.

³ See Liu 2011:70.

⁴ John Fryer started his translation after the defeat of the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895. His translation reflected his enthusiasm and anxious engagement in the contemporary political and social conditions of the late Qing period.

⁵ Henry Wood was a successful businessman from Boston before his retirement. He had written *Natural Law in the Business World* in 1887 when he was fifty-three years old. Afterwards, he suffered a long period of depression, chronic neurasthenia, insomnia and dyspepsia. In order to seek mental equilibrium, he started to write extensively on the concept of New Thought. His *Ideal Suggestion through Mental Photography* was one of the many writings that he wrote during this time. His writings were very popular at the time, and some of them were published up to fourteen editions. His writings include: *God's Image in Man*, *Studies in the New Thought World*, *The New Old Healing*, *The New Thought Simplified*, and *Ideal Suggestion Through Mental Photography*, and a pamphlet, *Has Mental Healing a Valid Scientific and Religious Basis?* According to Beryl Satter, in the first serious study on the New Thought Movement in the United States, there were only 26 members in the Congress of New Thought Movement in 1879, while there were 86,000 members in 1906, 202,000 members in 1926, and 269,000 members in 1936. (Satter 5) Cf. also Dresser, Horatio W. (2001) *A History of the New Thought Movement*.

⁶ Apparently Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei had read John Fryer's translation of Burton's *Political Economy* before they fled to Japan.

⁷ Yu Gil-jun was a Korean reformist and politician of Korea's late Joseon Dynasty.

⁸ Fukusawa Yukichi visited London in 1862 and was acquainted with the Chambers brothers who introduced him Burton's book on political economic. Fukusawa Yukichi started teaching political economic since 1868, using texts such as William Ellis's *Outlines of Social Economics* as well as Francis Wayland *Elements of Political Economy* (1837). Cf. Hiroshi Mizuta ed., *Western Economics in Japan: the Early Years*, Albert M. Craig, "John Hill Burton and Fukuzawa Yukichi", Paul B Trescott, "Scottish political economy comes to the Far East: the Burton-Chambers Political Economy and the introduction of Western economic ideas into Japan and China."

⁹ Adam Smith's concept of the wealth of nation and his theories of moral sentiments effectively enhanced the physiological model of the calculation of individual's productive capacities in relation to national interest and wealth.