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Editorial

It is always difficult to present the first issue of a new journal, let alone one with a scope so challenging. *Signs & Media* focuses on semiotics, communication studies, and art theory, and aims to bring Chinese scholarship into conversation with international research. In doing so, it gives itself a task that concerns two forms of dialogue: one between different disciplines and the other between scholars writing and working in different languages. Why do we want to present these two forms of dialogue to readers?

Though semiotics, communication studies and art theory seem to be different disciplines in academia today, they are essentially correlated with one another on the fact that communications and works of art are impossible without meanings, and semiotics studies nothing but the very essence, the *eidos* of meanings that can be expressed by signs, though particular studies from these disciplines may even have radically different understandings of the term ‘meaning’ itself. Thus the first form of dialogue that readers can expect to find in this journal is not of the interdisciplinary type so popular today, but rather between different groups of studies that focus on the same realm of phenomena from different perspectives and with different approaches. This has precedent: were we to limit ourselves to a conventional history of academic scholarship, we would find that the method of semiotics has been a crucial tool in the study of modern media and communication. This is evident, for example, in the works of scholars such as John Fiske, Stuart Hall, and John Peters.

With meanings, people think. With words that carry meanings within themselves, the thoughts of human beings are expressed to one another, constituting the foundation of all civilizations within which works of art are created, enjoyed, interpreted, and even traded. Is this description of our world of meaning overly simplified? Perhaps, but it is sufficient to bring us to the second form of dialogue the journal seeks to facilitate: to invite scholars from different traditions across the globe to pursue fruitful exchanges with Chinese traditions of theories of meaning and form. As readers will discover in this first issue, semiotics which is foreign to the Chinese tradition may not only be compared with thought in Chinese philosophy, philology, and linguistics. It may also be inspired by it.

In short, as a long-term project *Signs & Media* seeks to build a platform for all possible studies, discussions, and debates that emerge from the radical changes in forms of media and communication in modern society, as well as the dazzling spectacle of signs, symbols, texts, and art being produced, read, and interpreted in this cyber age of globalization. As is shown in the first contribution to this inaugural issue, “2018 Annual Report of Chinese Semiotic Studies”, within this new horizon, many books and articles have been written, many conferences held, and many students have begun their careers as scholars in the field. We believe that in the future, more minds from both China and the wider world will join this emerging field, in which *Signs & Media* may be a bridge between scholars and civilizations.

Since the task of *Signs & Media* is based on the universal importance of meanings and their expression in communications and works of art, this first issue concentrates on the semiotics rooted in the ‘world of meanings’ in China. Obviously, one of the most important challenges this world must face today is the COVID-19 virus which is still threatening the whole world when this issue is addressed. As Leone himself states, this contribution is “seeking to strike a balance between attention to current events and scholarly detachment, empathy for the painful conditions of fellow humans and anthropological and historical perspective.” In other words, it shows the way through which semiotics deals with events happening in this world: to clarify the essential structure of the world with both intelligence and passion.

While Leone is interested in the contemporary world, Michael Harrington’s article digs into traditional Chinese theories of meaning. As a classic work of Chinese civilization, the *Book of Changes* (易经, *Yijing*) inspired multiple works of interpretation which themselves constitute systems of signifier and signified. Among these interpretations, the commentary of eleventh-century philosopher Cheng Yi (程颐) is especially important. Harrington’s article is among the first to introduce Cheng’s commentary to the modern world. By applying the concept of ‘postulate clarification’ to both the classic itself and Cheng’s commentary, Harrington’s research is both an endeavour of comparative philosophy and a philosophical illumination of the process of interpretation that is crucial to every semiosis.

While Harrington’s contribution demonstrates the role that interpretation plays in the Confucian tradition, Zhu Dong’s 祝东 article portrays the Taoist view of the function of language. As Zhu successfully demonstrates, there is an irreducible tension in the Taoist tradition between words and the way (道, *dao*), for the Taoists refuse the processes of differentiation and articulation that, from the perspective of structuralism, are fundamental to all systems

of language. This implies that ancient Chinese thought realized early on the essential structure of signs.

This idea that traditional Chinese thought had a profound understanding of signs is one of the main impressions offered by Meng Hua 孟华 in his article. This paper is aimed at a new semiotics of Chinese characters. What makes Meng's research unique is its endeavour to renew the theory of Ronald Barthes, or, in Meng's own words, to offer 'a "creative misreading" or "remoulding" of Barthes' concept of 'neutral'. In other words, for Meng cultural phenomena in the Chinese tradition are not only passive 'subject matters' that await the method of semiotics to interpret them, but are also inspirations to renew and 'update' the method itself.

Confronted with a world that is becoming increasingly complex, scholars in both the humanities and social sciences who are interested in meaning and expression are giving their responses to the challenges of a changing world. The liveliness and urgency of their words is the very reason we have established this journal. We hope our readers will find the papers collected in this first issue enriching and leave them thirsty for more in the future.

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