

Chapter 2

Culture as Humanization

The answers to many complicated problems usually lie in simple and basic facts, so is the same with the problems of culture. We believe that the problem of culture is the problem of man: We shall search in the facts of “being human” for the nature of culture. In short, culture is a process of humanization, both the humanization of the world and the man itself (civilization).

2.1 Culture and Non-culture (Nature)

Where and how the word culture comes from is a complicated question. British anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor thus wrote in his book *Primitive Culture*, published in 1871:

“Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”¹

Later, American scholar Clyde Kluckhohn and A. L. Kroeber noted that:

“A culture is a historically derived system of explicit and implicit designs for living, which tends to be shared by all or specially designated members of a group.”²

American scholar Philip Bagby, after repeated examinations and comparisons, defined it as “modes of behavior, internal and external”,³ excluding modes that are hereditary. Despite of unanimous definitions, there is certain fundamental common feature perceivable among these theories that “to change man and the world around him according to human standards and ideals in order to establish himself.”

¹Edward Burnett Tylor. *Primitive Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, digital version, 2010. p. 1.

²Kroeber, A. L. and Kluckhohn, Clyde. *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*. New York: Vintage, 1963.

³Bagby, Philip. *Culture and history: prolegomena to the comparative study of civilizations*. U.S.A: University of California Press, 1959. p. 81.

On general, the word “culture” originally means the opposite of “natural state,” specifically, a “human state” and “socialized state.” The antithetical words of “cultural” are mainly “natural,” “inborn,” “instinct,” “primitive,” etc. In Western language, “culture” comes from Latin (*cultura*), meaning “to cultivate, nourish, educate, develop, and respect”; hence, we know that it initially means the cultivation of land and planting, then refers to the physical and spiritual development of mankind, then the definition extends to cover all the wealth and experience obtained by man during the process of conquering and evolving. Heinrich Rickert thus differentiates “culture” and “nature”: “Natural products are what grow naturally out of the earth; while cultural products grow from the seeds we sowed in the soil.”⁴ Culture is not about natural, intrinsic things or states, but about the state and result of how man changes the world (including himself). Nature existed and will continue to exist with or without human act to change the world—it has nothing to do with culture. Without man’s activities and influences, planets continue to circulate on their orbits, rivers flow after its course, plants flourish, and whither away; they follow the law of nature. There are no wills, no aims, no emotions and feelings, and no intentioned pursuits or pretensions. Nature’s creatures look disciplined, aimed and harmonious to man’s eyes. This impression, however, is in fact no more than a coincidence that happens when some characteristics in nature, by chance, have evoked esthetic experiences or feelings in man, rather than a conscious will to please and entertain. The adaptability to environment in some species is exceptionally marvelous, as if governed by some outstanding wisdom, which, again, is only the result of natural adaptation and selection. We cannot say those species possess aims and voluntary consciousness in a strict sense.

In conclusion, what is antithetical to “non-culture” is essentially a “human act.” “Culture as humanization” suggests that culture is a human act to change the environment and make improvements based on what suits him and befits him, and the activity and its result constitute culture. In other words, culture is about how one lives and exists: pursuing and enjoying certain value-loaded products, while improving oneself and the world around him through realization of these values.

The emergence of man interrupts the unity of nature and develops a man-made world apart from the natural one. This world is manufactured out of man’s needs, goals, ideals, and abilities. Although it cannot be severed from its material ground, it has taken on a completely different nature and significance—it is essentially a product conjured up, designed and created by man. It is on this level that we will discuss about culture. It makes sense to say that culture is a man-made state that starts from nature and transcends it.

Apart from his biological features (culture, of course, is not about pure biological issues), man is the only living species that is different from natural state, the only one who’s blessed with unique emotion, wisdom, and character. These features unique to man are what culture is about. Man alienates himself from natural state out of his own free will and by his endeavors in practice, hence beginning his

⁴Rickert JH. *Cultural Science and Nature Science*. The Commercial Press: Beijing, 1996. p. 20.

creative activities. According to natural discipline, his own needs for developments and esthetic ideals, man designs, works, and creates, changing nature in a way that fits his purpose. He makes use of rivers, improves species, and explores the universe. Nature awakens to find its imprinted on human features such as aims and meanings. In this sense, primitive forests are natural, while forests planted, protected, and enjoyed by men is cultural; raw stones are natural, while stones moved (for appreciation), grinded, and carved by men are cultural; wild animals are natural, while fowls fed by men are cultural; mountains and oceans whose esthetic value remains hidden are natural, while scenic views whose esthetic value discovered by men are cultural; the mystery of the universe inexplicable to men is natural, others that have been provided explanations (whether authentic or not) are cultural, the list goes long.

“Human act” is a human-oriented act that changes natural world and imprints it with human behaviors to make better living environment for man according to his own standard, aim, ideal, and need. The word “cultural” being antithetical against “innate” or “natural” suggests the fact that it consists of activity and its products to go beyond and change natural state, of conscious, aimed-at actions and its results, of artificial, skillful creative activity and its products, of conquering one’s distinction to create values backed by ideas and convictions, and of getting rid of estrangement toward nature, alienation, and gloominess to shed light on nature. In general, it is a willing act for survival and development, an act to humanize the natural world and its products.

Our act to humanize nature is done simultaneously on a conceptual and a practical level:

(i) Conceptually, during the process of thinking and spiritual activities, man turns the whole world and everything in it into objects to observe and change. This is humanization done in the most prevailing, universal, and fundamental fashion. The word “object” itself indicates someone’s “behavioral objective.” Once an object becomes man’s behavioral objective, it has established with him a subject-and-object relationship. By viewing everything in the world as his objects, man assumes the role of subject and lives actively. One of the expressions of this subject-and-object relationship is for him to observe, describe, think about, imagine, and build the world from his perspective and in his own way. Such a world is tinted with the color of man. The fact that this objective world is viewed with human viewpoint and explained with his logic and granted with significance in human world means that it has been “humanized.”

Mankind comes from nature. But one feature that makes man being man lies in his ability to alienate himself from nature, to live independently in the world, to distinguish himself with other natural beings, and to treat his surroundings from where he stands and in his own way. Consequently, what’s purely objective becomes “good” or “bad”; nature is divided into “resources” and “non-resources”; species fall into categories of “good” or “bad”; we have good weathers and bad weathers, congenial and hostile environment, fertile and sterile land, etc. Things that naturally exist with or without man, once thus viewed by man, becomes something related to man, something exploitable or non-exploitable; even things

that did not exist in the first place or whose existence is beyond proof—say, imagination, association, mystery, fiction, speculation, fortune-telling and many designs—can be associated with and created out of observation and knowledge through watching and thinking. For example, languages, thinking, religion, science, philosophy, or art do not spring from nature but out of man's life and mind, and they assume the role to reflect the world from certain aspects.

Normally, man grasps the world with a set of semiotic, linguistic, and interpretive system, through which he can first reassemble and can make sense of the natural, chaotic world. Out of the same reason, some regard culture as a set of semiotic system.

Basically, once man objectifies something, he is including it into his range so as to represent, describe, pass judgment, and make choices from his viewpoint. Hence, the world in man's eyes is a conceptually humanized world.

(ii) In a practical sense, by means of hard work and other practices, man has changed the natural world into a habitable, humanized world. He not only understands the world in his own way, but also materializes those humanized concepts, turning what he has seen, thought and hoped into reality, changing nature and creating a man-made world in his own fashion. He changes nature out of needs and ideals, produces results via creative work, including wares, systems, or spiritual arts, and these products as objects serve the end of man's survival and development. For example, what nature has to offer are primitive forests, lakes, lawns, and caves, out of which man has created material necessities such as clothes, food, houses, roads, and even cities.

To sum it up, men's practice is essentially a voluntary act to render nature (including external world and man himself) into a more suitable place. Hence, the more advanced man's practice gets, the more advanced human civilization will be; therefore, the more widespread and universal the coverage of this humanized world will become, further estranging man from the natural state and pushing him into an artificial environment. The difficulty to set foot on natural soil is a common feeling shared by modern city dwellers. The land under our feet, even if not being paved by asphalt, cement, or marble, has been turned over, organized, and decorated long time ago. We were living in a self-objectified world, one in which what we create become our objects. Instead of breathing natural air, we breathe through air-conditioners; instead of drinking natural water, we drink all sorts of beverages. We socialize in a more and more unnatural way, relying on advertisements, mass media, phones, e-mails, and blogs rather than face-to-face interactions. Our dependency on automobiles, airplanes, and so on grows heavier and heavier. In a word, we move farther away from nature and closer to a more humanized world.

Despite of the fact that "moving further away from nature" is not the whole story (the other side of the story is that we were actually digging deeper into and relying more heavily on natural resources. Such as the reliance on electricity is in fact a reliance on electricity-generating resources such as coal, hydraulic power, gasoline, solar energy, and nuclear energy) or the only trend, it is a fundamental fact which is becoming more and more overwhelming. Confronted by this fact, people are perceiving problems, around which arise serious doubts and scruples: Is this increasing

estrangement from nature good or bad? Whatever the answer is, there is one thing undeniable: Increasing estrangement from or heavier dependence on nature means changing nature according to human standard, just as environment contamination and protection both occur through action to make it a more friendly, congenial place to live in.

The humanization of nature, whether in theory or in practice, means personifying nature based on men's knowledge and mastery of natural laws, and turning one's demands, goals, and intentions into reality through creation, that is what we call "culture" "humanization" and "subjectification of objects." Further speaking, "humanization" means lending the world certain significance and set of values through human interference. This process epitomizes human values like needs or aims. He wants to realize and experience values such as truth, goodness, interests, happiness, harmony, freedom, sublimity, and nobility. They form the motivation and urge in man to change nature. Judging from these values, we have good reason to view values as the essence of humanization, the core of culture.

All in all, in man's pursuit, creation, and experience of certain value system, culture emerges with a human face because of the penetration of value.

2.2 From Humanization to Civilization

Culture signifies both the humanization of nature and the man himself. As man push the external world to the pole of human and civilization, he is also pushing his natural state to the pole of civilized state, moving from being beastlike, primitive, and ignorant to being human and more humanlike. We call this process "civilization."

Finding himself in an unnatural, non-distinctive existence different from other animals or living things, man's essential characteristics are not naturally ordained, but selected and created on his own. As he chooses and becomes the individual, he or she is also pondering upon and responding to a series of problems: What is and should be human? How shall he live, and with what kind of spirit? Where lies the meaning of this life and living? Toward where shall the race move? Questions like these make up the core issues of culture.

These reflection and resolution are shown in the following aspects: (i) the extent to which man as a natural being is humanized; (ii) how he has become fully socialized and how he builds up his spiritual homeland.

2.2.1 The Humanization of Man as a Natural Being

The humanization, or the progress of civilization, is preconditioned that man's natural features, such as his physical condition and distinctive needs, are improved and civilized. Back to when human race first came into being, man does not differ

much from animals. We can conjure up the image of Yuanmou man, Java man, and Neanderthal man, who were not that dissimilar with apes. The sight of them eating raw meat, living in the wilderness naked must be very uncivilized too. But what set them apart from any other living beings lies in that they live by labor. And as they labor (even in the dumbest or lowest form), their activities and products also shape them in return. As man makes fire for warming, cooking, and self-protection, fire and the way it is being used also work their changes on him—cooked meat changes his diet structure and his physiological functions, fire-making teaches him how to make best use of natural resources, and the power of fire sparkles his imagination, encouraging the advancement of thinking power. Learning to distribute different tasks to limbs, development of the brain and other developing physiological features are all symbolic of becoming human and civilized. Man prides himself so much on features different from other animals that he decorates himself in different ways, wishing to look better and appear more “civilized.”

Culture means gradually replacing animal features with humanities. When contrasted with beastly, animalistic, and distinctive state, culture means the suppression of one’s primitive inclinations, and what’s vulgar and material in how he lives and what he produces. Among other living species in nature, animals stand the nearest in relation to man; hence, there is still a lot of animalistic traces left in man. Physically, man belongs to the category of animal; hence, there are difficulties for differentiation from man and animal. Sighed Mencius once: “How little man differs from beasts!” But man is the last one that wishes to be confused with animals. The severest way to insult a man would be calling him “beastlike” or “below a beast.” The word “culture,” incidentally, suggests lifting oneself from animalistic state. A “cultured” man is someone who improves upon his animalistic instincts, purely physical nature through education, cultivation, and training to satisfy the standard of civilization and human expected by the majority in certain society and time, thus becoming a man in a real sense. Therefore, only when something or some act must encourage one to go beyond his animalistic nature and beastlike qualities so as to achieve sublimity and nobility can it qualifies as “cultured.” If certain living style or act can only arouse one’s primitive instincts and satisfy his animal needs, possessing no other virtue rather than meeting the most vulgar material desire, then it is not cultural, or even anti-cultural.

Of course, the change of one’s nature takes place over a long span of history; hence, culture, as a concept, is also a relatively historical one. On their long way to depart from homo-erectus, some may look more “human” than other, their human features more eminent and polished; or vice versa. From its extent to which animalistic qualities are replaced by humanities, we make distinctions between the civilized and the primitive, the enlightened and the ignorant.

The word civilization receives different interpretations and applications from one linguistic system to another. Fukuzawa Yukichi once noted that: “... Hence the term civilization in English. It derives from the Latin *civilitas*, which means ‘nation.’ Civilization thus describes the process by which society gradually changes for the better and takes on a definite shape. It is a concept of a unified nation in contrast to a state of primitive isolation and lawlessness.” And he further explained,

“Civilization is all-important; it is the goal of all human endeavors. We can discuss civilization in terms of its various aspects... Civilization is like a great stage; the institutions, learning, commerce, and so forth are actors.... Civilization is also like an ocean, and its various institutions, book learning, and the like are the rivers which feed into it.... Civilization is also like a warehouse. Everything goes into the warehouse—daily necessities, capital, human energies.... What, then, does civilization mean? I say that it refers to the attainment of both material well-being and the elevation of the human spirit. It means both abundance of daily necessities and esteem for human refinement.... Civilization ultimately means the progress of man’s knowledge and virtue.”⁵

We can see then the expansion of civilization and culture overlaps completely or partly; their distinction lie in their essence: Civilization is more direction-conscious, suggesting the direction of progress. It is mainly posed as a comparatively developed civil state and its products in contrast to that of an ignorant, primitive, underdeveloped condition. Compared to the neutrality of culture as a descriptive word, civilization is more directional word in a favorable sense. This distinction is demonstrated in Chinese contemporary linguistic system, in which we call our human ancestors, who then were still somewhere between apes and men, and a step from enlightenment, we can only refer to them as “Lantian tribe” and “Yuanmou tribe” instead of “Lantian culture” or “Yuanmou culture”; it is after they have acquired qualities present in modern human beings and possessed basic humanities do we start to think of them as culture entities, such as “Longshan culture,” and “Hemudu culture”; and after they reached maturity as human being, we call their cultures civilizations, such as “Chinese civilization,” “ancient Egyptian civilization,” “ancient Indian civilization.”

2.2.2 *The Completion of Man’s Socialization*

The process of humanization is not simply a biological development or physical transformation, but also a process of socialization.

One of the characteristics of culture is its power to civilize, pushing man to change himself according to human criteria and demonstrate the qualities of and potential as man in order to enjoy his rightful status. Therefore, the nature of culture and man do coincide. But what is man? What’s the criteria and rightful state of being man? To this complicated question, Marx has famously provided an in-depth answer when commenting on man’s nature: “human nature is not an abstraction inherent in a single individual. In reality, it is the sum of all social relations.” It cautions us against observing man as isolated individuals, which reveals more physical and animalistic features, whereas the nature of man remains something

⁵Fukuzawa Yukichi. *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*. Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1995. pp. 30–33.

abstract and permanent. It is revealed through their social attributes. Only when man connects to and interacts with each other in the society can we spot his real existence and his nature. Culture shows how man is shaped by his social relations and conditions, its conveyor, and embodiment being society as a whole.

How man is shaped by society and becomes civilized can be analyzed from the following two aspects:

As a group, civilization happens on a social level. With isolated individual (if such individual exists at all) without profound social connections, he accumulates his experience, thoughts, and wisdom from scratch; his power and mobility being limited, he lives narrowly with no possibility to create culture. His discoveries, thoughts, skills, and labor experience sparkle and vanish, with no means to be preserved, developed, and disseminated, bearing no chance to breed culture. Only when living in a social community can one really enjoy the advantage of predecessors' accomplishments to develop intellectually and accumulate power and experience. Each man's labor and its products will not die with the laborer but join into the society as a whole. Society enables the sharing of experience and progress, thus developing common languages, living styles, conformities and mass psychology, and forming common thoughts, wisdom, knowledge, skills, and values. Social culture is based on languages, lifestyles, knowledge, skills, techniques, and values that go beyond the individual.

A set of complex social relations are thus formed economically, domestically, ethically, politically, and judicially. These social relations, on the one hand, are determined by social realities; on the other hand, are also the creation of each country, nation, and its people. It embodies their understanding of humanity and culture, of human existence and fundamental values; it is the crystallization of reality and ideals, and represents the way man exists, hence belongs to culture. Every social relation is permeated with certain humanistic spirit: The way a society holds itself up as a whole shows people's understanding and pursuit of values such as truth, virtue, beauty, benefits, justice, right, and responsibility. Its economic, political, and judicial relations can also be viewed as the objectification of its ideology. Culture lies deep in such relations.

For each individual, humanization and civilization are exemplified by how he participates and lives in the society; how he accepts its knowledge, values, modes of behavior, customs and traditions, and social role imposed on him; how he develops his social subjectivity and cultural character, thus becoming civilized in a real and complete sense, forming a core element, a cell in a certain social system. Meanwhile, society will convert outsiders into ones it acknowledges through the influence of complex social relations, rules of the game, and cultural values.

We were born into a pre-established social network with certain fixed characters, identities, status, and social roles. We were standardized and ruled by this complication as a social reality. Our cultural characters are built up according to the mold in which we are located. We acquire cultural characters and value identities through social interaction, whereas we acquire humanity by being accepted into social network through interaction with family members, relatives, and community. We are assimilated and cultivated as we live and "play the game." We apply what

we learn about socialized culture as we connect and interact. Ancient Chinese has it that “the law of man and nature lies in our daily life,” “the ultimate wisdom of Tao can even be found in labor as base as cutting woods and getting water.” Emerged in social life, we find ourselves learning in a spontaneous and unconscious environment of culture. This give-and-receive training happens as we apply cultural rules, ceremonies, and discourses to real life. Philosopher Wittgenstein compares social activities in life as “games.” To follow the rules of games in social lifestyle is the basic and best way for individuals to be incorporated into society. Apart from this, we can also acquire knowledge, values, means, and skills via systematic, professional training in school, under the help of teachers, through reading, having classes, doing experiments, etc. Feasting on the fruits of civilization already acquired in society is accepting culture and being civilized. Hence, people capable of reading and learning are called “the cultivated.”

2.2.3 The Spiritual Homeland Created by Man

In spiritual homeland, human culture reaches its highest form. Ultimately, the nature of living lies in contemplation. To live is not enough, one has to locate himself, inquire over major fundamental problems in his life, work out explanations, provide answers (accepted as answers by people in certain ages; its authenticity is another story), establish rules, criteria, standards and bases, etc. The explanations, “answers,” and rules proposed by man, on the one hand, are embodied by various cultural forms as mythology, legend, religion, philosophy, science, liberal art, and so on; on the other hand, has infused into human minds, becoming the spiritual ground for conviction, belief, and other spiritual life. The significance, goal, principle, and ideal for any individual or race rest on such cultural contents, which constitute the spiritual homeland for an individual, a race, and even a nation.

Spiritual homeland is spiritual system built up by human knowledge, convictions, beliefs, and ideals. Throughout one’s life, it is the fountain sustaining emotion and reason, generating will and wisdom. It exists in our mind, beyond house (physical one), and family (social one). It takes no form, but can always be felt. Agnes Heller refers to “home” as “a firm position” from which we start culturally and psychologically and to which we return from time to time. She states that: “‘Home’ is not simply house, roof, family. There are people who have houses and families but no ‘homes’. For this reason, familiarity is not in itself equivalent to ‘feeling at home’ though familiarity is, of course, an indispensable ingredient in any definition of ‘home’. Over and above this, we need the feeling of confidence: ‘home’ protects us. We also need the intensity and density of human relationships—the ‘warmth’ of the home. ‘Going home’ should mean: returning to that firm position which we know, to

which we are accustomed, where we feel safe, and where our emotional relationships are at their most intense.”⁶

In spiritual homeland resides the eternal root of life. Its existence rests on our natural need for spiritual life. Man is both a conscious and a social being. His consciousness and spiritual activities are unique evidence of man’s being. The natural need for living is not only material, but also spiritual. He needs both a substantial home and a spiritual one; a smaller one and one in a broader sense. During its long history, cultures of 56 ethnic groups in China converge to form a common conviction and belief system that is embracing and cohesive—a spiritual homeland for Chinese people.

A spiritual homeland can be built up by knowledge, ideas, contemplations, discussions, debates, and so on. Ultimately, however, there is only one fundamental approach—the experience of living. A spiritual homeland is essentially a value system, which is made up of subjective consciousness. The values and concepts held by an individual and the way that they’re acquired and changed are rooted in the subject’s existence in society. That is to say, only value system formed in practice to live and develop can become one’s spiritual homeland in a real sense. Any borrowed or existing ideas will not be accepted into this place until their values being testified in people’s practices and by time. This spiritual homeland, the soul’s fertile soil, grows the plants of our emotions, intelligence, and power. Though formless, it can cover the former substantial homes, lending them an emotional and intellectual dimension, thus connecting roof and family to the outside world and becomes a social member, a cell in the social organ. When roof and family are yet to be built or already wrecked, this spiritual home can complete and rebuild them in a most tenacious and persistent way.

Take a nationality as an example. Its people can still be themselves and possess a sense of belonging once their culture, the homeland they can return to, remains. The death of culture means the loss of a spiritual homeland, which announces the death of its people. Therefore, many people, especially those who suffer from marginalization or even distinction, invariably stick to their own culture with great determination. The most typical example will be the Jewish people. After losing their homeland to Assyrians, Babylonians, Romans, and the likes in successive wars with these countries, the Jewish people commenced on an ethnic exile of thousands of years. Wherever they are and whatever they have gone through, the Jews have shown great tenacity to preserve their national culture. It is their culture that guarantees the continuity of their survival as a people.

The history of the development of man’s spiritual homeland, like that of economy, politics, science, and technology and war, is filled with hardships of searching and glories of discovery, full of perplexity and conflicts. This repertoire is never lack of earthshaking, mind-blowing materials, and records.

Now, it is time for us to rebuild our spiritual homeland.

⁶Heller, A. (Au.), Yi J.Q. (Trans.). *Everyday Life* Chongqing: Chongqing Press, 1984. p. 258.

2.3 Life Is a Two-Way Trip

The culture of men and the world, including the humanization of nature and the civilization of man, is up for man to create. Generally speaking, man shapes himself while shaping the outside world, changes the subjective world while changing the objective world. This means that culture is a unified, interactive process of humanization and civilization.

Here we might come across some interesting yet difficult questions: When did culture come into being? Does man come before culture or vice versa? In another word, which one happens first, humanization or civilization? The question does not sound unlike that famous debate: Does chicken come before egg? In the past, it is a prolonged exaggeration that this question is unanswerable. Historically, however, questions unanswerable on an abstract level have never posed any difficulties in a real practice. Just like that biological development has solved the chicken-and-egg puzzle by acknowledging the two to have developed into what they are now, respectively, in their own ways, the relationship between culture and man, and humanization and civilization follow the same logic.

Humanization and civilization form a two-way historical process: Man changes nature and himself through practice, thus the humanization of nature and man begins with the first man in natural world; while the birth of man is marked by the creation of culture, the way man lives and develops. In reality, the two processes comes hand-in-hand; while in our imagination and narration, we find it difficult to speak of them as if they are one. We have to speak of them separately, first “this aspect,” then “another aspect,” but it does not mean they are two separate processes. This realization is significant to cultural thinking.

For instance, “Labor creates man” obviously cannot be taken literally as man was created, in a Godlike manner, by something called “labor.” It actually means that a more advanced animal anthropoid (not developed enough to qualify as man), forced by certain circumstance, adapts to environment by changing his way of living (not labor at first), and changes environment in this new way (which gradually develops into labor) into a more habitable place (while gradually he becomes man). During a very long process, some apes evolve into a new species that labors to live—ape—man and man. If the anthropoid is the initial state of man, then labor is the initial presentation of human civilization, which later on becomes the most fundamental, important, and basic form of representation. The long and grand journey from anthropoid to man, primitive labor to advanced labor, is the result of interaction between humanization and civilization, a two-way generating and developing movement between man and culture, civilized man and civilized environment.

All of this are achieved by man with his unique way of living—practice. Practice constitutes the nature of human activities to shape himself and the world. Labor practice not only enables the biological progress from ape to man, but also guarantees, eternally, man’s continuing to live and develop as man. It is the fundamental condition for the sustainability of human progress. Material production, production

of spiritual culture, social relations, and so on are all essentially extended reproduction. It is continuous, progressive, and incremental. The quality and quantity of practice rise along with increasing variety in the form and content of practice. Being activities of humanization and civilization, its sustainable way of development, once projected culturally, is a two-way intensification of humanization and civilization—the world is becoming more and more the world of man, while man is becoming more and more civilized.

So is the dialectical movement between man and cultural environment, humanization and civilization:

On the one hand, man gives concrete forms to his intellect, wisdom, strength and cultural ideals, bends primitive nature into what he wants, and creates a completely artificial world. He practices, creates, and labors, building up objective social relations and lifestyles. This is how he “objectifies” his intellect, quality, goal, and ideal (called by Marx as “man’s essential power”), and creates a uniquely human and civilized world by changing the natural, non-human world. All of our cultures and achievements of civilizations are the fruits of human wisdom, or, to summarize from another perspective, the materialization of the intellectual data in our minds. The greatest function of our brain and wisdom is to imagine, design, and create a brand new world. Plans and designs, be them originitive, fantastical, miraculous or smart, flow from human minds and crystallize as tangible realities. To use our words, this is the humanization of the world.

From another aspect, the acts, facts, and results of humanization will educate and influence one in a subtle fashion, carving one’s character and shaping one’s knowledge, thinking mode, ability, value, and mode of behavior; this process is known as civilization. Where does the flow of intelligent data stored in our brain spring from? How does our brain come to be the fountain of intelligence? Are our cultural characters, talents, and qualities something inborn and innate? The answer is no; it has also gone through a long way to where it is right now. The subjective power to “change and cultivate” nature (including the subject himself as a natural species) has to be changed and cultivated; it is also the result of changing and cultivating. Man practices and acts to work his impact on the world and be changed by it; he changes and cultivates a humanized world and is changed and cultivated by it; the product he produces (together with the process of production) breeds civilized people. Guided by the silent mentor in the world of culture (a world changed and cultivated by him), man completes his journey toward civilization.

How does the act and result of humanization civilize man in turn? The humanization of nature, whether through the interpretative method of language, myth, religion, science, and so on, or through the cultivation, taming, and improving of natural species, has encapsulated human concepts, emotions, intelligence, ideals, and strength, thus turning into an objective fact beyond individuals, an atmosphere around us. The result of humanization serving the progress of civilization is the part of human effort to create, develop, and improve. As we live under the insusceptible influence of ideas and feelings impregnated in such an atmosphere, we were embracing the humanistic quality in the natural world.

Humanization, therefore, is not solely about adapting natural state to a habitable state, but also about contributing to the civilization of human beings.

Apart from being influenced by material civilization created by men, the products of humanization such as social relations, ways of living, spiritual achievements, will also exert their impacts on man. The fruits of humanization belong not to individuals but to the society as a whole, such trait determines that they can only exist as a whole in human interactions on a level beyond individualities. They exist before an individual is born and continue to exist as he breathes his last breath. The limitation of the life length and power of a single individual is contrasted with the infinity of the humanized world as a whole. As a result, each of us is destined to confront one of the social systems that stand far beyond ourselves and subject to be enveloped in its atmosphere. We are, to some extent, the children of such social atmosphere. We live in such a way that demonstrates the varied cultural implications penetrated in life and influences people around us. We cannot escape from it as much as we can reject its influence on us. The humanized world known as society forms a unity with our life and existence. As long as we live, we are civilized by our culture.

This two-way interactive and generative relationship between culture and man, humanization and civilization is not completed once and for all; it is a continuous and repetitive process. It is not taking place in a static, balanced way, but is sending positive feedback all the time: We see the progress of humanization works its influence on man; and the cultivated man changes the world in a more effective way. As such progress goes along, human being will grow more civilized, and the progress of human civilization will be more fruitful.

2.4 Text for Cultural Interpretation

With culture as our subject, we try to figure out questions such as “what is it?” and “how is it?” in the same way as we read and understand a book. Now where is this “book”? Where and how shall we read it properly? What kind of text is suitable for our interpretation? From our point of view, the answer is in real-life practice. Life and practice is the authentic text for any cultural interpretation.

A grasp at culture in real life lies heavily on observation on patterns of how people behave and live. Culture is unveiled not only by what people do, but, more importantly, also by how and how well they do it. Marx has it that: “An individual’s performance in life determines what kind of person he is.” Individuals and society of a certain age is in keeping with what they produce and how they produce it.⁷ To put it more simply, the real representation of people and their society is marked, not by what they think and say, but by what they do and how they do it. What people at

⁷Marx K. Engels F. (1995) *Marx and Engels: selected works*, vol 1. Beijing: People’s Publishing House, Beijing. 1995. pp. 67, 68.

different times do and the way things are being done rest upon how civilized they are, how advanced the society is (the most fundamental factor being its productive force), and with what attitude they make use of such condition, which lingers somewhere between total passiveness and complete arbitrariness. Ultimately, a man is determined by how he lives, not by what he says or imagines of himself; a society is judged by what it does and how it does, instead of what it says about itself. Culture (spiritual culture included) also has to distinguish what happens in reality and in imagination. What people say and promote concerning their spiritual life have some distance from what they actually think and put to action. The relationship between a culture and its articles, and documents and archives resembles that between how this people lives and what they do and what they say out of some prejudice. Human life and practice constitute the real embodiment of culture, while what we say about culture is no more than one of the interpretations. It is a proven truth that the culture of a people or a person is known, not through his words, emotional statements, or what he agrees to, but through why he agrees and how he expresses it. People's attitudes toward and choices made in life speak louder about culture and traditions than the cultural classics in their hands. It is way more difficult to search what is in human minds than to refer to books; hence, the former is more qualified as an approach to evaluate the real width and breadth of a culture.

There is a misunderstanding that has missed our attention during many years of cultural interpretation: An inclination to take culture narrowly and limit the research to book studies instead of interpreting culture in a broader sense in the real life. For instance, some articles keep talking about "promoting the merits of traditional culture" while remain silent on issues like what and where the so-called traditional culture lies, what kind of text their interpretations are based on, and so on, as if these questions are axiomatic. These issues, however, are ones that merit our attention: We are bent to search among ancient archives, crowning classics, and documents as the primary, if not the only, source of text. Such equations stand for many of us:

Culture = Spiritual culture = Classical works;

Tradition = Something in the past (ancient times);

Chinese traditional culture = Analects and classical works written by ancient Chinese sages.

It follows naturally that talking about culture is equivalent to quoting famous sentences and passages, and talking about Chinese culture is no different from quoting sentences and passages spoken and written by ancient thinkers in classics based on one's own imagination and wishful thinking. There are some, taking pains to eulogize the values of Confucianism, end up, often than not, in picking up a few sentences expressing certain goodwill in Confucian works and exaggerating their implications and significance. Seldom do they attempt to find out whether and to what extent such goodwill becomes materialized, what role it has played in real life, etc. Such approach to culture, avoid of reflection, is susceptible to cultural misinterpretations, thus leading to two kinds of mistakes in cultural reflection.

The first mistake is the inclination to dismiss culture as merely “words” spoken or written, rather than the historical realities of human life. A Chinese idiom has sum up such inclination of “reading words only while stay blind to facts.” Treating the interpretations done by ancient people as final texts will only limit our research to “the interpretation of interpretations.” We blunder in missing the pivotal facts if we turn to books instead of real human interactions in realities for culture interpretation, studying for ancient culture interpretation what ancient people said and wrote instead of what they actually did. This approach will lead us to read a one-time wish as a permanent rule, to mistake the sentiments and opinions of the minority for universal facts, and to view propaganda as accomplished feats. Quoting the observations of Luxun, a famous modern thinker and essayist in China, interpreting history in such a way is like “observing one’s painted cheeks without looking at his spine.” Interpreting culture by such means will end up in the dead circle of “commenting on Six Books” and “being commented by Six Books,” and cultural study will be reduced to a mere play of words and abstract concepts, bearing no real relations to neither past, present, or future life, or, what’s worse, replacing objective realities with subjective wishes.

The second mistake lies in the tendency to forget one’s identity and subjectivity when talking about culture: forget about the rights and responsibilities of researchers as contemporary civilians, treating the works left by ancients and predecessors as one’s national culture exclusive of one’s own realities. We make the mistake of focusing on ancient people and their life instead of our contemporaries and our modern life in cultural studies; of choosing a few men of letters as primary cultural subjects instead of the mass; of summarizing essential qualities of Chinese culture, not from the realities of billion odd population in current days, but from abstract doctrines by ancient saints; of preferring national culture represented by the minority of elites to that embodied by the mass. As a consequence, the more we talk about culture, the more blind we become to the real cultural subject, and as the more blurry our rights and responsibilities for cultural construction becomes, both the courage and the creativity to face realities lack. Instead of leading the mass to look forward, we leads them to look backward; instead of getting rid of gaining control over old values by adopting popular values in contemporary life, we were dragged along by old conventions. Envisaging future with such mentality will end up in losing oneself in past glories, the present will be predetermined by the past, and we will never get rid of the passive “contra-clockwise” mindset.

The vitality and value of culture lies in the actual movement and creation of history. What is traditional is not tantamount to the past; traditional culture does not belong to the dead culture. Like a ceaseless current, cultural flows in the contemporaries possessed by each generation, representing itself in countless branches of “present” and “being.” Culture is not static but unfolds and evolves itself gradually in the procession of history. What is known by us as antiquity is something contemporary during certain historical period. The value of a piece of bronze ware in the eyes of its ancient user, say, is different from its worth evaluated by its modern collector. The contemporary meaning of the ancient culture is the result of rein-terpretation conducted by contemporaries; and traditional culture refers only to the

part of culture that survives till today. Therefore, the cultural text for our interpretation can only come from the life experience, thoughts, and feelings of contemporaries. It is, ultimately, the rights and responsibilities held by people today. We reflect upon culture with the end to determine and clarify our rights of and responsibilities for our existence and development. The vitality of culture has the features of being contemporary and realistic. Without contemporaries, culture is dead.

From this, we know that the study of Chinese culture is primarily a study of our citizens, their economic, political, and moral behaviors, and values behind these behaviors. Here lie the contemporary realities of cultural text. But the misinterpretation of cultural text treats ancient classics as the primary, if not the only text source of Chinese culture; hence, the only way left open to later scholars is to interpret and rely on what people before them have said and written, forgetting what they can, should, and must do; forgetting that they are to create, build culture as well as being civilized by it. For example, when we are discussing about Chinese culture, few has done in-depth research work on the values, lifestyle, and education level of current Chinese people, not to speak of trying to grasp the essential qualities of Chinese culture based on its result and compare it with Western culture and other cultural entities. There are great advantages for one to study classics and follow ancient authors: If one has good luck, he will achieve something; if he fails, he is got ancient sages as scapegoats. If, as an unoriginal generation, we have made nothing contributive to promote cultural tradition, then we shall feel too ashamed to face our ancestors.

The text for cultural interpretation shall stands on contemporary reality, which requires that the patterns, rules, and standards of culture shall come from real life instead of presuppositions. Cultural interpretation is nothing like putting demands and rules on society according to certain ideals and arbitrary conditions conceived by the minority of elites. On the contrary, workable cultural rules and moral standards stem naturally from our social life. For instance, before the reform and opening-up, the socialist construction in China often starts from presupposed ideas such as what the real standards for socialism is like, what the ideal modes and patterns are like, etc. Then they force reality to function according to this presumption and bend reality toward it. This way of thinking is unrealistic: It is based on some imaginary and wishful ideas. What is more, when mismatch between reality and blueprint occurs, instead of re-examination, we blame the reality. The bitterness brought by such thinking mode is not unfamiliar to us.

Based on discussion above, the precondition for cultural construction in China is a firm grasp of our cultural text. Through interpreting cultural text from reality, we can confront life and its colorful phenomena. We need to discover, describe, and demonstrate our culture in contemporary real life, observing it from different aspects such as economic, scientific, educational, moral, religious, and esthetic ones, thus grasping the essence of vigorous Chinese culture in its real sense.



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Li, D.

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