

ПЛЕНАРНОЕ ЗАСЕДАНИЕ

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Language in the Chinese Classic Theory on the Mind and Action

Abstract: Similar to the traditional theory on soul and body, there is a classic theory on mind and action in China, which pays more attention to the priority of the mind or the action rather than to the interplay between them. This presentation argues that language plays a crucial role for the relationship between the mind and the action, or say, between the soul and the body. Language is too important and significant to be absent from any theory of this relationship. Without it, with neural system of the body only, the action will not be triggered off, controlled by and improved with human thoughts and feelings. Similarly, without language, the thoughts and feelings will remain constant in its primary states. Therefore, it is language that interplays between mind and action ever since human civilization. Based on this argumentation, it is concluded and evaluated that language is the «operation system» between mind and action for the construction of individual beings and societal world.

1. Introduction

The classic theory on the mind and the action in China is very popular and influential. It draws attentions from almost all the important figures of each generation in history and thus it is reproduced now and again ever since. Because of this, Song Zhiming (宋志明) states that the history of

this theory can be regarded as the history of cognition in China, a fundamental part of Chinese philosophy (2001).

The review shows that it is true that sometimes the mind is more important when it is the condition for an action, for it is stated that we are the living creature with conscience guiding and governing our actions. The vice versa is also true that sometimes the action is more important when there is no ready thought and knowledge in mind or in human world. In this situation, only action can bring out new understanding and idea. From the very beginning of this theory when Confucius states «知之匪艰，行之惟艰» («Difficult to learn and more difficult to practice»), and from all the reproductions of this theory ever since, we can see that the question «which of the two, the mind or the action, enjoys the priority?» is more demanding than the question «How the two interplay with each other?», just like the relation between the egg and the chicken. For the egg-chicken issue, the more important question is «what makes the continuous and gradual evolution possible?» And for the mind-action issue, the question should be «what is the condition for the interplay between the mind and action?» Or, put it the other way, «what is the possible medium for the interplay between the mind and action?» This question to my understanding is more important in that it serves as the basis for the individual and societal development.

There is a notion that now and again appears in the mind-action theorizing, which might suggest the mind-action relationship is a matter of cognition and the mind-action theory is not complete without something serving as the medium. It is the notion of the activity of «学 (learning or studying)» (See Appendix 1). However, this notion of learning or studying cannot be regarded as medium to explain all the interplays between the mind and the action. This seems show that there is a logic bug in the mind-action theory.

So, the present study will take an alternative approach to this theory, trying to understand the mutual relationship between the mind and the action, discussing what makes it possible that the mind guides the action and the action enrich the mind.

2. Theoretical context

The discussion in this paper is mainly based on works by M. A. K. Halliday¹ and J. Searle², S. Reid³, M. Heidegger⁴, L. Wittgenstein⁵ and J. Habermas⁶, N. Fairclough⁷, N. van Dijk⁸ and S. Kara-Murzar⁹.

Halliday points out repeatedly that the world we live in can be categorized into two main realms: matter and meaning. He also points out much early that language is the fundamental and key system of meaning making.

Searle, following Austin, argues further that «speaking is doing». From this understanding, he looks into many cognitive and social issues such as intentionality, consciousness, mind and society and so on. According to his philosophy, there is only one world we live in, which demands a kind of understanding of the relationship between the two realms suggested by Halliday. In what way, the two realms are merged into one? For example, he states that money exists but its value does not exist in its form of matter, rather, in its meaning.

And almost two hundred years ago, Smith Reid suggested his version of speech act theory, in which the use of language is classified into two categories: solitary action and social action.

¹ *Halliday M. A. K. On matter and meaning: the two realms of human experience // Linguistics and the Human Sciences. 2005. Vol 1. No 1 ; Halliday M. A. K. Matter and Meaning: Why Language should be at the heart of university studies // The University of Hong Kong: a lecture handout. 2004 ; Halliday M. A. K. On Language and Linguistics. L. ; N. Y., 2003.*

² *Searle J. Mind, Language, and Society: Philosophy in the Real World. N. Y., 1998 ; Searle J. Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind. Cambridge, 1969.*

³ *Reid S. Essays on Intellectual powers of man: (76 editions published between 1785 and 2005 in English and Polish and held by 825 libraries worldwide). S. I., 1785 ; Reid S. Essays on the Active Powers of Man: (113 editions published between 1788 and 2010 in English and French and held by 829 libraries worldwide). S. I., 1788.*

⁴ *Heidegger M. Being and Time // tr. by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson. Oxford, 1962.*

⁵ *Wittgenstein L. Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. L. ; N. Y., 1922.*

⁶ *Habermas J. On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction: Preliminary Studies in the Theory of Communicative Action. Oxford, 2001.*

⁷ *Fairclough N. Discourse and Social Change. Cambridge, 1995.*

⁸ *Dijk N. van Discourse and manipulation // Discourse & Society. L., 2006.*

⁹ *Kara-Murza S. Mind Manipulation / Manipulation of Consciousness. S. I., 2000.*

Either from linguistic or philosophic perspective, Halliday, Searle and Reid show us that language is very much close to thoughts and action. Halliday pays more attention to grammar's potential in meaning making, Searle to what is behind speech act such as intentionality, mind and so on, while Reid to the active power of civilization development.

As for Habermers and Wittgenstein, they also discussed a lot of the fundamental function of language in philosophy (See some key expressions in Appendix 2).

The essence of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Kara-Murza's work is the notion of «manipulation». Here, though negatively, has been proved again, the power of language in terms of a negative exploitation of language.

The research context formed this way raises a big question: if language is closely related with thought and action in the west culture, why is it absent from the classic theory on the mind and the action in China? If so absent, what is the theoretical and social consequence?

3. Research question

What is the real medium of interplay between the mind and the action?

The first candidate for the medium between the mind and action is of course the neural system of human physical body. It is true and the truth is so strong that any other possible candidate might be ignored to an extent, if not rejected completely. Though this substantial medium cannot be ignored, this medium alone cannot explain the different intentions and social affects for the action. This can be illustrated some simple physical action like kicking. The action of kicking is ordered to be carried out through the working of neural system. However, we cannot explain the difference between the action of kicking a ball and the action of kicking a person. What is more? We cannot explain the different social nature and consequence of kicking a person who loves the kicker so deeply and kicking a person who is trying to kill the kicker. The meaning of a kick is not determined by the function of neural medium but by the intention and the conscience in the mind, which make and deliver the mental decision.

Let us ask what helps mind to form and deliver the decision of kicking.

What Kara-Murza said in the following quote might give a possible answer to our question here raised.

«...仅仅靠内置于我们体内的生物程序还不足以使我们成为人。人得要有以文化为代码的程序作为补充才行。(中文版 P. 17)»。
 («Значит, заложенная в нас биологически программа поведения недостаточна для того, чтобы мы были людьми. Она дополняется программой, записанной в знаках культуры») (P. 12).

Then, what is the code of culture that serves as the cognitive and social medium of interplay between the mind and the action?

4. Evidences

Since our research question is of a great significance, what we can manage to start with is to present some possible evidences.

Evidence 1. Everyday philosophy on language.

Not mentioning the expressions concerning language in general both at home and broad (some examples can be seen in Appendix 2), there are several Chinese four-character idiomatic expressions directly on the relationship between mind and action. These expressions are used for thousands of years, which can be regarded as part of the everyday philosophy concerning the mind-action relationship in China.

One group indicates that language is closely related with mind, such as «言为心声» (words are the voice of the mind); «心口如一» («Speak from the heart; to speak honestly») or «言不由衷» («Not speak from the heart; to speak insincerely/dishonestly; speak with one's tongue in one's cheek»).

The other group shows that language is also closely related with action, such as «言行一致» («Be as good as one's words»); «言行不一» («One's deeds do not match one's words»); «坐言起行» («What is said should be done»).

The overlapping of the two groups of four-character expressions strongly suggests that language play a two-way function between the mind and action and thus the most possible candidate as the medium interplaying between our mind and action.

To this point that language might be the medium of mind and action, Master Gui Gu (鬼谷子) more than 2000 years ago even said figuratively that the mouth is the doorway of mind (口者, 心之门户也.). It is language that makes it possible for thoughts to come in and out of mind. With language, everyone can consciously elaborate his or her thoughts and

feelings which is the innermost and delicate part of any individual. We simply cannot imagine the living situation without language.

Confucius argued from another perspective that we cannot learn about a person without learning about his language (不知言，无以知人也。). A statement like this also suggests that one's language mirrors one's mind better than any other means. The language used by an individual is the best and living ID, for it represents the person's personality, soul and mind. There is no other cultural code that is so closely related both to the mind and the action.

Evidence 2. Language is everywhere.

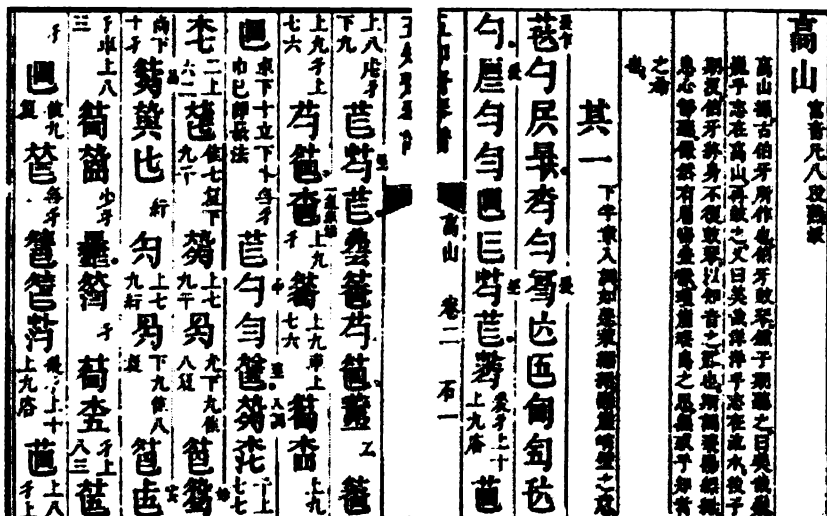
In addition to what stated in Evidence 1, language is ubiquitous and omnipresent in all kinds of learning and education. That is perhaps the reason why Michael Halliday argues that language should be at the heart of university studies. In the talk, he stated that «... that educational knowledge is constructed in language, and that learning any subject in school — learning science, or maths, or history — means the language of that subject.» (Halliday, 2004)

Kong Qingdong (孔庆东), one of the Chinese professors from Beijing University even argued that Language is way-making (Dao), leading forth everything as Lao Tzu said in Dao De Jing.

Of all the symbolic systems, language is the key medium between the mind and action and the other systems are complimentary with language one way or another. Look at the music notes for Gu Qin (most ancient musical equipment in China with 7 stings) below, which is the traditional representation of Gu Qin music.

The form of the music is obviously borrowed from parts of Chinese characters. The musical notes in such a traditional form can not only mark off notes, but also instruct which string of the seven to play on and what is the way to play with. Music is a part of culture, consisting more than notes. For the relationship between language and other systems of symbols and sign like music, Halliday expresses his opinion as the following: «But there are plenty of human semiotics that are not made of language: music, dance, the visual arts; ritual, and semi-ritualized forms of behaviour, like clothing; and images and graphic representations of all kinds, charts, graphs, maps, diagrams and so on. These human semiotics all depend on language in one way or another, from literature, which is made of language though

having its own mode of meaning and value, to music, perhaps the least dependent of all but still depending on the factor that those who practice it also possess language»¹⁰.



From what he said we can argue again that language is the key culture and social medium between the mind and action. Learning and education can only be done through language mainly.

Evidence 3. Social actions are the realization of Rules and Regulations.

Not all our actions are random and original, all of sudden, out of air. By saying that we are habitual animals, it means that we usually do things following this or that rule and regulation. In this sense, actions and behaviours are the realization of social norms consisting of rules and regulations of all and different kinds. We live in system of rules and regulations.

Even as is often the case, the rules and regulations are often forgotten. Or say, we usually ignore the «software» of objects, entities and substantial systems and social institutions. Take a chess game for instance by asking «what constitutes a set of chess». The answer might be the pieces and board of chess. Yes, but should the definitions of chess pieces and rules to

¹⁰ Halliday M. A. K. On matter and meaning... P. 8.

play chess be included? This is a fact that without rules of the game, we cannot play at all. We cannot deny that they are part of the game, though we never need to pay for them when we buy a set of chess.

Not is unusual the change of game rules. Take table tennis for instance. For various reasons, the size of sport ball has been increased from 38mm to 40mm and 21-point game has been changed into 11-point game by International Table Tennis Federation. Because of these changes, sportsmen are affected favourably or unfavourably, so is the competition. In short, the world we live in will change if the governing rules and regulations change. For the details, see Searle's discussion on the relevant issues.

Now for our discussion purpose, we need ask only the nature of rules and regulations. My answer is straightforward: they are the fossilized thought in language.

Again, language is there between the mind and action.

Evidence 4. Where is Lao Tzu's thought, or theory?

It is said that history is written, so is thought and theory. Lao Tzu's thought and theory, as part of human culture, cannot be found anywhere except in his carved and printed Chinese words: Dao De Jing. I will not argue that there is no such a thing as THOUGHT but we will argue that 1) thought and language are so closely related that they can hardly be separated, especially theories, that is, the systematic thoughts as part of public knowledge and memory; 2) the understanding of those thoughts and theories has to be done with language, that is, the transition of thought from one person to another is possible only through language. This can be better illustrated by the cross-cultural translation.

For instance, what is the real thought Lao Tuz wanted to share with us in the famous expression «信言不美, 美言不信», which can be understood with fine and subtle difference even by native speakers. This phenomenon is zoomed in on further when the expression has been cross-culturally translated. (See and compare the various versions of the expression in Appendix 3) Lao Tuz is still living and alive forever in his book Dao De Jing, just like Karl Marx is still in Capital. Leaving behind one's words means leaving behind his thought and theory. This is the real sense of «立言» for those intellectual masters to be immortal (See No. 3 in Appendix 2) and that is why we prefer to read the origin and classics, for we can see the real thought and theory only there.

If language is absent from the theory on the mind and action, it is easier to miss the distinction between thought and language, and exclude the mental action from doing things in the age of information and electronics.

Evidence 5. Writing can bring out new idea and inspire people systematically.

Anybody who has the experience of writing with great effort to be original and creative, that is, to explore existed things but unknown to human beings or to describe and express the things we are familiar but from an inexperienced perspective, or do it but in a new context will agree that the active and productive way using language such as academic writing can bring out something new based on the knowledge he has learned before already, and can bring out something out of expectation, though he plans in advance for the writing. This fact shows that language is not an ordinary tool, constant and passive all the time. Different from most of other tools, language can be shaped by its user and at the same time, it can shape its users as well. Such a writing as part of thinking, in essence, is basically a matter of using language to do mental process. This is the philosophy believed in by many intellectual figures.

5. Conclusion

Based on our previous discussion, we now can reach a conclusion that language is the cognitive and social medium between the mind and action. It is this medium that makes human distinct from other livings and enables them to act and behave humanly. The input of language is the «food» of the mind while its output is the guideline of the action. In turn, the meaning and the feel of the action can feedback into the mind and thus enrich the mind while the change of the mind can improve the further action. Without the presence of language, the classic theory on the mind and action in China is not complete, for the mutual communication and transformation between the two is not possible. Because of its function and significance for the theory as stated in the present study, it can be stated that the quality of language use determines the quality of its users: individual and/or collective.

What is the theoretical consequence if language is recognized as the cognitive and social medium between the mind and the action? Generally

speaking, then, the transformation between spiritual and physical world, the meaning and matter, the first- and second-hand experience and so forth can be understood and explained better. The nature of natural world and the nature of the man-made world can be distinguished. The existence of Mountain is different from the existence of a mobile phone. The former is part of nature, not created by human while the latter is a kind of knowledge accumulated ever since, a kind of thing we human beings as a whole learned from natural world. Along this line, we can understand all the existences of entities and beings of the world we live in this way: there are the things that exist before and after the existence of mankind. As our civilization advances, we live more in the world we have built up that is based on our knowledge of meaning. We do things in accordance with our knowledge about the world of nature and we do things in accordance with our knowledge with which we think the world should be like. So, we do not just live in the world of things we build, we also live in the world of all kinds of knowledge, the meaning we learned from the natural world and history. We live with cars, computers, internet and mobiles in the knowledge of physics, mathematics, chemicals and all kinds of arts and technologies. We do things and behave in accordance with what we think solid science and right morals. We are governed in the end by knowledge in the mind learned from nature or derived from nature through language.

In order to emphasize the position for language in the mind-action theory, the famous expression «I think; therefore I am»(Rene Descartes) can be paraphrased and expanded as the following:

I listen; therefore I am.

I read; therefore I am.

I speak; therefore I am.

I write; therefore I am.

In short, I am in the way I use language and our society is in the way she uses her language. Again, the quality of language use determines the quality of our civilization. Language is the «operation system» between the mind and the action, which is omnipresent and irreplaceable, in moment and ever since.

Appendix 1

**Key original and classic expressions on the relationship
between mind and action (in chronological order)**

| 引文 | 出处 |
|--|------------------------------|
| “知之匪艰，行之惟艰” | 孔子 前551-前479 《尚书·说命中》 |
| 政者，口之言，身心行之。今子口言之，不行，是子身乱也。 | 墨子 |
| “不闻不若闻之，闻之不若见之，见之不若知之，知之不若行之，学至于行之而止矣”。 行之，明也，明为圣人。 | 荀子前313-前238 《儒效篇》 |
| 或生而知之，或学而知之，或困而知之，及其知之一也。或安而行之，或利而行之，或勉强而行之，及其成功一也。（成语：困知勉行。） | 西汉 戴圣《礼记中庸》 |
| 人有知学，则有力矣。《效力》 论则考之以心，效之以事，浮虚之事，辄立证验。《对作》 事莫明于有效，论莫定于有证。空言虚语，虽得道心，人犹不信。《薄葬》 不学自知，不问自晓，古今行事，未有之也。人，物也，万物之中有智慧者也。 天地之性人为贵，贵其识知也。 所谓圣者，须学为圣。 | 东汉 王充《论衡》 |
| 学者贵于行之，而不贵于知之。 | （司马光1019-1086 “答孔文仲司马户书”） |
| “知先后后” | 程颢1032-1085、程颐1033-1107 |
| “知轻行重、知行互发并进” | 朱熹1130-1200 |
| “知行合一”，即“知是行的主意，知是行的功夫，行是知之始，行是知之成” | 王阳明1472-1528 （《传习录》上卷） |
| “知也者，固以行为功者；行也者，不以知为功者也。行焉，可以得知之效也；知焉，未可得行之效也”，即“行可兼知，而知不可以兼行” | 王夫之1619-1692 《尚书引义》卷三 |
| 学而必习，习而必行。 | （颜元1635-1704 《习斋言行录》） |

| | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| 能知而不能行者，非真知，真知则无不能行矣。 | (谭嗣同1865-1898 《仁学》) |
| “以行而求知，因知以进行”，即“知” 和“行”“进行不息” 不知固不欲行，而知之又不敢行，则天下事无可 为者矣 行之非艰，而知之惟艰 知者不必自行，行者不必自知 行其所不知以致其所知 必待行之成之而后乃能知之 | 孙中山先生 1866-1925 《孙文 学说》 |
| 行是知之始，知是行之成。 行知行。 | 陶行知“行知行” |
| 人的正确思想只能从社会实践中来。 实践是检验真理的唯一标准。 | 毛泽东“实践论” 邓小平“ ” |

Appendix 2

Quotations on language importance

| Quotations | Source |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Facta non verba. «Deeds but not words» or «Practicing outweighs preaching» (Chinese translation: 行胜于言。) | Latin motto |
| 口者，心之门户也。«The mouth is the doorway of mind» | 鬼谷子 (Master Gui Gu) |
| 立德、立功、立言 (To practice forever virtue, to achieve forever achievement, and to express forever expression) | 左传 (Zuo Zhuan) |
| 信言不美，美言不信。 (As honest words may not sound fine. Fine words may not be honest ones) | 老子 (Lao Tuz) |
| Language is the house of the truth of being | Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) |
| The limits of my language mean the limits of my life | Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) |

| | |
|--|--|
| Language is the picture and counterpart of thought | Mark Hopkins (1802–1887) |
| Thought is the blossom; language the bud; action the fruit behind it | Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) US «philosopher, poet, essayist» |
| The reading of all good books is like a conversation with the finest minds of past centuries | Rene Descartes (1596–1650) |
| A good book is the purest essence of a human soul | Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881, Scottish essayist, historian in Speech made in support of London Library |

Appendix 3

The different English translations of the famous words

«信言不美，美言不信»

| No. | English version | Translator and time |
|-----|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | As honest words may not sound fine. Fine words may not be honest ones | R. B. Blakney, 1955 |
| 2 | Truthful words are not beautiful; Beautiful words are not truthful | D. C. Lau, 1963 |
| 3 | True words are not fine-sounding; Fine-sounding words are not true | Arthus Waley, 1997 |
| 4 | Sincere words are not beautiful. Beautiful words are not sincere | Richard John Lynn, 1999 |
| 5 | Credible words are not eloquent; Eloquent words are not credible | Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, 2003 |
| 6 | Trusty speech is not embellished; Embellished speech is not trusty | Edmund Ryden, 2008 |