

### **Book: *Chinese Discourse Studies***

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This book aims to provide a systematic introduction and explanation of a Chinese paradigm of discourse studies (CNDS hereafter). It is composed of two main parts together with a preface, an introduction and an epilogue.

In “Preface”, starting from the fact that current studies on China are predominantly from a Western and often American-centric and nation-state-based perspective, Shi-xu points out the necessity for fast-developing China to construct its own culturally conscious, critical, comprehensive and systematic framework of discourse and communication. The proposed ‘Chinese’ discourse studies have a crucial global and human-cultural dimension and orientation, not merely about China or Chinese. In “Introduction: De-Westernizing Discourse Analysis”, the author claims that deconstructing universalism is the first step towards decolonization of the field of discourse and communication studies (p. 7). He criticizes the Western discourse tradition, which presumes an ‘isomorphic relationship’ (p. 11) between the form of communication/ discourse and the meanings, and attempts to construct culturally conscious discourse frameworks.

Part I deals with paradigmatic construction, comprising three chapters. In Chapter 1, “Cultural Discourse Studies” (CDS), the author explains the interrelation of CNDS with CDS. CNDS is the central object and objective of this book and is a part of CDS. CDS in general and CNDS in particular mutually feed upon each other and are motivated by two general and common concerns: ‘globalism in society’ and ‘Westcentrism in scholarship’ (p. 22). CDS pays special attention to the culturally unfamiliar or marginalized discourses to purposefully combat the ethnocentrism in current discourse and communication scholarship, and eventually contribute to human cultural coexistence, peace and prosperity. The author proposes SIMPHC (subject, intent/form/relation, medium, purpose/effect, culture, history) (p. 29) as a shared suite of interrelated categories for describing, analyzing, explaining, interpreting and evaluating discursive events. As CDS is more concerned with issues of cultural struggle, harmony and development, its SIMPHC takes the historical and intercultural elements more seriously and treats all the categories dialectically and holistically (pp. 31-32).

With such a mindset, the author reiterates the dialectic relationship between the Eastern and Western paradigms of discourse studies in Chapter 2, “Eastern Discourse Studies”, (EDS). The two paradigms should not be perceived as dichotomized or homogeneous entities, but as interrelated categories of cultural entities, each with its own internal differences and external connections, open

to dialogue and subject to change (p. 40). In this chapter, the foundations, principles and strategies of EDS are explained respectively. In constructing the EDS paradigm, three central themes are discussed and emphasized: (1) de-imperializing universality; (2) reconstructing culturally pluralist, dialogic and egalitarian paradigm; (3) being open to dialogue and modification. This chapter demonstrates the author's multicultural and dialogical pursuit in discourse studies.

Chapter 3, "Chinese Discourse Studies", is the core chapter of the book. It strictly follows the research steps designed in the Introduction: (1) Begin with its practical and academic motivations, (2) continue with its intellectual milieu, (3) present the system proper, (4) illustrate and substantiate with case studies, and (5) end with an account of future directions and strategies (p. 16). Through constant contrastive and comparative studies of Western and Eastern discourse paradigm in terms of philosophical component, theoretical component, methodological component and topical component, the author constructs an encompassing, holistic, dialogic and dialectic CNDS paradigm on a solid basis. To highlight certain significant aspects and issues of contemporary Chinese discourse neglected or misrepresented in Western perspectives, the constructed theoretical framework mainly deals with ten theoretical components, including China's weak position in the current world order of communication, changes, harmony, history and culture, discrepancy rules, dialectics, authority, face, importance of the hearer and nationalism. Different theoretical components are interrelated, rather than isolated in discussion. Harmony principle, the discrepancy rule and the high dialogical place and imaginative right to the recipient/hearer/reader can all be traced back to Chinese cultural and scholarly tradition (p. 97). Practical and empirical meanings of the differences in terms of each theoretical component between Eastern and Western discourses are discussed respectively. For instance, the chapter has a clear list of questions to be examined and solved for practical research on contemporary Chinese discourse with CNDS paradigm (p. 83, p. 88).

The encompassing components under headings of 'philosophy', 'theoretical framework' and 'methodological principles' offer rich sub-topics and evidence for in-depth CNDS research. Regarding research topics and questions, CNDS diverts from the fixed topics without specific context and national concerns, such as identity, ideology, politeness, coherence, metaphor, power and party politics, etc., to non-fixed and open topics which reflect socially broad and significant concerns of the changing contemporary China. These topics will be examined around the questions and categories suggested in SIMPHC. Furthermore, the researcher's Self and research process should also be incorporated as an essential part throughout the research agenda, so as to make a thorough discovery about and useful judgement on the topics of enquiry about China's complex and multi-level discourses.

The uniqueness of CNDS is its holistic perspective of scholarship, which is different from the linguistic approach. Instead of investigating linguistic forms, the author borrows and integrates key concepts and frameworks from Chinese philosophy, culture and literary works and literary essays in particular. This book itself is a good demonstration of CNDS, following the Chinese holistic tradition in developing the arguments. In constructing CNDS paradigm, the author makes full use of traditional Chinese classics, proverbs and sayings to support his generalization of the philosophical, cultural and discursual features of contemporary Chinese discourses. For instance, 《老子》 (*Lao zi*), 《庄子》 (*Zhuang zi*), 《文心雕龍》 (*Dragon Carving and the Literary Mind*) (pp. 89-90), are frequently quoted to explicate the relations between meaning and discourse. They serve to emphasize the importance of recipients' open

interpretations and researchers' perspectives, which causes discrepancy in understanding the same text or words. Shi-xu constructs Chinese methodology also from the insights of Chinese classics, such as 《易經》 (*The book of Changes*), 《論語》 (*The Analects*) and 《孟子》 (*Meng Zi*). He also draws novel insights from more recent works, such as 《管錐篇》 (*Limited Views*) (p. 104). He justifies the unique and subjective Chinese scholarship, which is criticized in Western scholarship, from China's long research tradition of dialectic epistemology (p. 104). In other words, traditional Chinese literary methodology can be transformed and synthesized with the modern scholarship to construct a new methodological system with the available historical resources from China (p. 105).

Through intercultural and historical dialogue and critique, the author exposes the methodological parochialism of mainstream discourse analysis and develops the outline of a first Chinese methodology for discourse research. It includes five general methodological principles and some methods, which is composed of an overarching set of all-compassing, dialectical, historical, intercultural, objective-and-intuitive, modest and self-reflexive principles, on the one side, and a set of particular open, eclectic and cross-disciplinary methods on the other side (p. 102).

Chapter 3 in particular and the whole book are developed in a reader-friendly manner, which is good evidence for the author's idea that CNDS pays more attention to hearers/ readers in discourse production, differently from writer-centrism and priority of producer's intentions in Western tradition. In discussing theoretical components, the author briefly bridges the theoretical explanation with case studies in Part II, which reduces the difficulty of readers' understanding of the cases. For instance, under Item 8, the author starts with the implications for practical research: 'to pay attention to the entire communicative loop of participants involved—and the absent and excluded.' (p. 98) And he follows this point closely by saying 'so, in Chapter 5 where..., attention will be paid not only to the former, the accuser, but also the latter and in particular to who amongst the Chinese responded, who not and, if so, how.' (p. 98) He then points out the second implication in this paragraph that one may examine whether or not and how a speaker takes the hearer as the primary concern in communication. After this, he continues: 'In Chapter 6,...' (p. 98), so on and so forth. Such an expounding pattern shows the reader how to apply these abstract theoretical components in practical research on a specific case.

Part II presents three case studies on discourses of contemporary China. It mainly discusses the problems of major local and global, significant Chinese hot concerns, along the lines of questions in SIMPHC. Part II is composed of three chapters: Chapter 4, "Discourse and Human Rights"; Chapter 5, "Discourse and Trade Disputes"; Chapter 6, "Discourse and Urban Development". The three chapters are showcases for the CNDS paradigm proposed in Part I, which present the open and eclectic nature of cultural discourse and CNDS in particular, with empirical and practical case studies.

In "Epilogue: Agenda, Dialogue and Practice", the author recaps the whole structure of the book, pointing out that the CDS and CNDS paradigms proposed in this book are still sketchy, with many tentative and incomplete details. But he reiterates the advantages of the new paradigms for its systematic, culturally conscious and critical framework. As a locally grounded and globally minded paradigm, CDS and CNDS should rejoin the Western discourse paradigm to help solve some of the problems of mainstream discourse analysis and lead to greater cultural discovery, academic innovation and human understanding (p. 197). The most important intention and function of CNDS are to help appreciate, analyse and assess the

discursive practices of present-day China. But CNDS also needs to go global by finding out the possible meeting points of Eastern and Western discourses.

The book is the first attempt to construct an eclectic, open, holistic and dialogic paradigm for contemporary Chinese discourse studies. This locally grounded and globally minded paradigm is well constructed in Part I with its unique principles, philosophy, theory and method. The empirical and practical illustrations are also clearly presented in Part II with specific cases and hot topics in contemporary China. Starting from the opposing tradition and reality in Western and Eastern discourses and social order, the author establishes a peaceful and multicultural discourse paradigm, which is of great significance in promoting equal cross-cultural understanding and dialogue between the Western and non-Western communities. Negating the isomorphic relationship between language and meaning, Shi-xu emphasizes the importance of context in the meaning-making process. As opposed to traditional CDA paradigm, which takes context merely as an interpretational tool (p. 176), he proposes an integrated system by integrating linguistic analysis with contextual analysis (p. 106). To be specific, he states that there should be four types of data in data collection, analysis and evaluation, among which, background data comprises the first category (p. 110). Details of the participants and the communication process should also be incorporated in the examination to fully weigh the role of context in meaning-making beyond language.

Nevertheless, one of the possible problems of the CNDS paradigm proposed in this book lies in its overgeneralized delineation of methodological tools. The outlined methodological-constructive strategy featuring ‘creative synthesis’ (p. 105) fails to offer an operational toolkit. After a detailed list of methodological goals, principles and SIMPHC notions, the author only briefly describes some basic characteristics of the methods instead of constructing his own methodological roadmap. Open, eclectic, cross- or multi-disciplinary, intercultural and synthesized approach and tools, as proposed in the book, might lead the CNDS paradigm and its researchers to an encompassing but vague, subjective or overlapping analysis. As admitted in Chapter 3 (p. 111) and the Epilogue (p. 196), intercultural dialogue, synergy and more work are needed to further substantiate and refine the sketchy and tentative paradigm proffered in the book. In conclusion, this book is a milestone and most important handbook in the long march to an established Chinese cultural discourse paradigm.

### Reviewer Note

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