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Rationality as a Challenge for Relativism

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Rationality as a Challenge for Relativism

Introduction

Relativism serves as the driving force behind cultural studies, providing a methodological framework that enables the examination of cultures from perspectives distinct from our own. Pure rationality, an outcome of the Enlightenment during the advent of modernity, emerged with a positivist scientific approach and laid claim to universality in knowledge production. This paradigm, with its preconceived notions, disregarded relativism in its endeavor to validate itself, thereby imposing its views on inclusive cultural contexts. Its enduring impact on various cultures worldwide, including China, can be observed through the influence of Christian missionaries, colonialism, and capitalism. The present study focuses on the Western historical trajectory of rationality, tracing its roots from ancient Greece to the critical reflections on pure reason in postmodernism. Drawing extensively from David Hall's and Roger Ames' work "Anticipating China" (Hall & Ames 1995) the study argues for an enhanced cultural sensitivity through the lens of cultural relativism. Given the prevalence of biases and the potential for distorted perceptions of Chinese culture, the aim of this research is to foster greater cultural sensitivity by elucidating the foundations of Enlightenment thought. Moreover, it seeks to provide introductory guidance for comprehending the ancient Chinese culture and philosophy.

Within the topic of Chinese philosophy, due to the lack of cultural sensitivity in sciences, this term paper addresses the question, in which way rationality challenges the relativistic paradigm of post-modernity's human sciences. This paper answers the question through a historical outline of the co-existence of and competition between the so-called first and second problematic thinking modes. Whereas the first problematic as aesthetic-correlative thinking rather harmonizes well with relativistic studies, the second problematic as logical-causal or rational thinking neglects a hermeneutic way of understanding foreign cultures and philosophies. By broadly reflecting on Western analytical methods and promoting an awareness for Chinese cultural uniqueness, the paper strongly argues for the necessity of relativism.

Following an exposition of the first and second problematic modes of thinking, this study elucidates pivotal milestones within the Western intellectual trajectory that have contributed to the emergence of the modernity paradigm. Subsequently, a concise overview is provided on the Western impact on the Chinese tradition; afterwards I highlight the parallelism between rational thought and capitalism, which is then followed by an outline of the postmodern critique of Western hegemony. A succinct presentation of distinctive elements within Chinese culture and philosophy is offered, intended solely as an introductory guide to the Chinese intellectual tradition for

novices. The investigation concludes by presenting Roger Ames' conceptualization of culture and the application of relativism as an approach.

First problematic thinking

First problematic thinking contains the fundamental framework of a specific cognitive style. It revolves around the interpretation of information and encompasses both aesthetic explanations and the utilization of analogies and correlations (Hall & Ames 1995, p.xvii). This mode enables individuals to intuitively grasp their environment as a dynamic system characterized by change and ongoing processes (ibid. p.33). First problematic thinking, as a mode of comprehending the world, was prevalent in various societies and particularly dominated the European tradition until the Revolution of Thought during the Age of Enlightenment (ibid. p.xvii). In ancient Greece as well, analogical and correlative thinking found expression in both philosophical discourse and the non-discursive myths of Homer (ibid. p.115).

Correlative thinking in the realm of first problematic thinking involves the use of metaphors and metonymy as cognitive tools (Hall & Ames 1995, pp.143-135). Metaphor allows for the mapping of one domain onto another, facilitating the comprehension of complex ideas through familiar associations. Metonymy, on the other hand, substitutes closely related words or expressions to convey specific meanings or mental images. These mechanisms enhance the expressive capacity of correlative thinking, enabling the exploration and communication of nuanced concepts beyond literal interpretations.

The correlative or analogical system of thinking entails the relational arrangement of concepts, events, and objects that are interconnected within a network of meanings (Hall & Ames 1995, pp.124-134). This characterization of the interdependence of meanings bears resemblance to Clifford Geertz's notion of culture as an intricate web of significance (Geertz 1973). While Geertz perceives culture as a holistic amalgamation within the field of interpretive ethnology, Hall and Ames share a similar perspective and refer to the influence of individuals' thinking on their perception of the environment and their own culture (Hall & Ames 1995, p.125).

Analogies and correlations play significant roles within the realm of first problematic thinking. On the one hand, analogies serve as a tool that allows individuals to establish connections between seemingly unrelated concepts or domains. They enable us to comprehend complex ideas by drawing parallels to familiar situations or objects. By finding similarities between two disparate entities, analogies provide a cognitive bridge that aids in understanding and interpreting new information. On the other hand, correlations involve identifying and understanding the relationships between different variables or phenomena. Individuals who engage in first problematic

thinking possess a unique capacity to perceive clusters of correlations. They are adept at recognizing patterns, associations, and interconnectedness between various elements, allowing for a holistic understanding of the world. Through these correlations, individuals can derive meaning and extract insights from the information they encounter.

One notable characteristic of first problematic thinking is the presence of vagueness in knowledge (Hall & Ames 1995, pp.104/166 et sqq.). Individuals thinking in terms of analogies and correlations tend to have a higher tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty, therefore not seeking concrete, definitive answers (ibid. p.126). While knowledge is often multifaceted and complex, individuals usually seem to be open to interpretation accepting vagueness (ibid. p.166 et sqq.). Furthermore, first problematic thinking relies on the comprehension of meanings through images and clusters of correlations (ibid. pp.11/167-168). Instead of relying solely on verbal or logical reasoning, individuals in this thinking mode utilize mental images and conceptual clusters to grasp the culturally-biased essence and significance of ideas. These visual and holistic representations help capturing the interconnectedness and nuanced aspects of complex concepts (ibid. pp.124-134).

Second problematic thinking

Second problematic thinking encompasses rational, logical, and causal modes of thought. A key characteristic of this type of thinking includes the following elements: (1) the presumption of a shared world, (2) which can be comprehended through the application of logic, (3) as it can be reduced to quantifiable aspects and causal relationships. (1) The presumption of a shared world originates from the notion that reality encompasses multiple perspectives, yet there exists a singular universal truth (Hall & Ames 1995, pp.2/55/64/68/104/156). The perspective is developed or constructed based on an accurate representation of the world, as if the observer were absent (ibid. p.44). With the advent of modernity, the objective bias carries an assertion of universality that disregards diversity and diminishes alternative thought approaches (ibid. pp.14/68-69/90/145). (2) Logic is perceived as both an a priori and dialectical method of scientific inquiry, often overlooking empirical evidence (ibid. pp.3-11/39-40/55/114/145/156). (3) Individuals adopting the rational mode of thought operate on predetermined rules of causality that underpin the functioning of the world (ibid. pp.11/52/76-78/129).

Rational definitions typically establish precise boundaries (Hall & Ames 1995, pp.xiii-xxiii). Consequently, Davis Hall and Roger Ames characterize the second type of thinking as "Squaring the Circle," employing this metaphor to illustrate the process of rationalizing an object, such as a circle, through mathematical calculations and static numerical sequences (ibid.). Despite its aim for accuracy, this second type of thinking's qualitative approach represents only an approximation of reality, particularly

considering that a circle, when represented with Pi, possesses an infinite number of decimal places. Instead of seeking significance and effectiveness, second problematic thinking strives for certainty and precision within quantitative frameworks (ibid. pp.138-139). As concepts, events, and objects become increasingly individualized and accentuated within an aesthetic order due to their uniqueness, second problematic thinking quantifies them within a rational order, seeking to unify them based on universal characteristics (ibid. p.12). In contrast to the inclination towards dynamic change in first problematic thinking, second problematic thinking aligns with the prioritization of tranquility and enduring quantities (ibid. pp.12 et sq.).

Prior to the establishment of causal argumentation, philosophical discourse in ancient Greece predominantly relied on the formulation of theories as ad hoc solutions to questions and problems (Hall & Ames 1995, p.49). An ad hoc solution refers to a theory that simplifies reasoning based on the Principle of Sufficient Reason by rejecting a premise of another theory (ibid. pp.49-52). This approach resulted in a proliferation of dubious theories (ibid.). Such reasoning often employed thought models as justifications, which are ad hoc tools utilized for explaining or validating principles or doctrines by isolating any intentional aspect of the theorist (ibid. p.51). These models serve as simplified, hypothetical analogies or "suppressed metaphors" to reduce complexity (ibid.). An instance of ad hoc speculation in ancient Greek antiquity can be seen in the theory of atoms proposed by Leucippus and Democritus (ibid. pp.49-54). It was only later, after Aristotle, that the norm of causality was established as the primary principle (ibid. pp.52/78).

Historically, the process of rationalization, often linked to phenomena such as secularization, urbanization, and industrialization, can be traced back to the Enlightenment period. David Hall and Roger Ames examine the two types of thought as products shaped by historical developments, delving into the nature of second problematic thinking from antiquity through the Enlightenment era (Hall & Ames 1995, pp.xiii-xxiii/91-92). Throughout ancient Greece, the pursuit of social harmony held great significance (ibid. pp.39-40/113/156). However, the growing diversity of theoretical perspectives posed a threat to social cohesion (ibid. p.57). Even amidst the multitude of languages, ethnic groups, and modes of thinking in ancient Europe, achieving unity in terms of myths, customs, and rituals was essentially unattainable (ibid. p.156). In response to this pluralism, transcendental standards were established to foster social peace and facilitate orderly discourse (ibid.). This gave rise to a quest for a logical, rational, and objective truth emerging from the multitude of scientific, moral, and aesthetic perspectives (ibid.). The relatively unrestricted expression of opinions stemmed, in part, from the separation between theoretical and ideological discourse on one hand, and political practice on the other, as well as the demarcation between the private and public spheres (ibid.).

As a result of transcultural interactions, commercial activities, migrations, and the diffusion of ideas, Hall and Ames highlight a transcendent resemblance among

cultures in Europe, particularly in Eurocentric dimensions of science (Hall & Ames 1995, p.183). During the early stages of modernity, the disciplinary consensus among European nations embraced the belief and misconception that the conceptual foundation of the worldview was universally applicable (ibid.). An instance of such ethnocentric presumption and interpretation of the world is evident in the concept of teleology, which posits that objects and agents possess transcendent objectives and strive for a specific state of perfection (ibid. pp.186/191).

The transition from first problematic thinking to causal thinking occurs because correlations, which rely frequently on personal experience, are sometimes deemed unreliable and inconsistent (Hall & Ames 1995, pp.128-131). As reality often diverges from aesthetic explanations, tensions emerge between factual observations and correlations (ibid. p.129). Causal thinking gained dominance in the Western tradition because of its precise predictive capabilities within the realm of modern science (ibid. p.129).

Hall and Ames posit that the emergence of rational thinking, grounded in the cause-effect principle, can be attributed to the metonymic operations of correlative thinking (Hall & Ames 1995, pp.134-135). Causal reasoning developed in response to the temporal contiguity observed within metonymy (ibid.). Models of thought, a significant component of argumentation, also trace their roots back to metaphorical processes (ibid. pp.135). Particularly, analogies serve as the foundational elements in the systematic theories of Plato and Aristotle (ibid. p.116). Over time, both the metaphorical and metonymic aspects of correlative thinking have undergone formalization (ibid. pp.55/135), leading to the objective representation of analogies as concepts and models, while concealing the observer and their intentions (ibid. p.51). However, does this not entail the risk of uncritical and unexamined utilization of rationality?

When considering the pursuit of universal truth, Nietzsche also recognized that concepts and ideas possess an illusion of objectivity solely due to their detachment from the theorist: „What then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms – in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people; truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without serious power; coins which have lost their picture and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins“ (Nietzsche 2000).

Main factors of Western Movement towards Rationality

David Hall and Roger Ames charts the evolutionary trajectory of the progressively rationalized Western intellectual tradition from ancient times to the modern era in Europe (Hall & Ames 1995, pp.1-108). During the transition from the first to the second problematic mode of thinking, they discern several significant milestones: (1) the emergence of the universe concept, (2) the preference for enduring stability and certainty, (3) the distinction between nature (physis) and reason (logos), (4) Plato's categorization of knowledge into four levels, known as the divided line, (5) Aristotle's doctrine of the four causes, and (6) the incorporation of theological ideas into rationality (ibid.). Additionally, Hall and Ames delve into the discourse opposing rationality, particularly concerning the diversity prevalent in ancient cultures (ibid. pp.105-108).

(1) Whether it is Genesis or the Babylonian creation myth, ancient myths held a shared understanding regarding the origin of the world (Hall & Ames 1995, pp.7-10). The inception of the world was characterized as chaos, depicted at times as disorderly movements, at times as a dividing void, and occasionally as an unsuccessful creation (ibid.). The term "cosmos" originates from the Greek verb "kosmeo," signifying the act of arranging or organizing something (ibid. p.4). This term carried the implication of necessitating the triumph over chaos and was associated with concepts like "order," "structure," "housekeeping," and "harmony" (ibid. p.4). The establishment of a cosmos, interpreted as the logical structure of the world and the basis for a rational system of thinking, was indispensable to overcome the chaos described in myths as emptiness, confusion, or shapelessness (ibid. p.3). The cosmos emerging from chaos was not a random occurrence but a conscious initiation and construction, a human endeavor (ibid. p.5). According to Hall and Ames, myths, with their cosmogenic drive, laid the foundation for rationality by giving rise to three distinct modes of explanation: accounting for literature, scientific inquiry, historical narratives (ibid. pp.13-14). They served as a stabilizing medium for the classification of tumultuous human situations often driven by emotions (ibid. p.15).

(2) Considering the diversity in public discussions and taking into account the development of the cosmos, there emerged a prevailing emphasis on tranquility, stability, and enduring permanence as the primary framework for understanding the world, overshadowing the intuitive perspective of dynamic change and continual transformation (Hall & Ames 1995, pp.12 et sqq.). However, the so-called paradoxes of Zeno present an intriguing contrast to the prevailing emphasis on tranquility, stability, and enduring permanence in understanding the world (ibid. p.25 et sqq.). Those paradoxes revolve around the description of motion in time and space, presenting seemingly unsolvable problems (ibid.). "The Arrow" paradox states that points and moments are infinitely divisible, so the arrow remains at rest at every point in time despite being shot (ibid. pp.26-27). "The Stadium" paradox argues that neither points nor moments are infinitely divisible, leading to difficulties in moving objects (ibid.).

"The Bisection" paradox addresses the infinite divisibility of points but not moments, making it impossible to traverse space as distance becomes infinitely divisible (ibid.). Finally, "The Achilles" paradox considers the infinite divisibility of moments but not points, resulting in Achilles never being able to overtake the tortoise, even if he catches up to it (ibid.). These paradoxes concerning the paradigm of enduring permanence raise fundamental questions about the nature of motion and its description, regarding the divisibility or continuity of space and time (ibid. pp.30-31).

(3) Concurrent with the conception of chaos-cosmos and the preference for permanence, a distinct opposition between physis and logos emerged, giving rise to a duality between body and soul (Hall & Ames 1995, pp.15/23/72 et sqq.). Physis (referred to as "Natura" in Latin) represented the objective essence of things, while logos served as a tool for investigating physis (ibid.). Consequently, the dualism between body and soul was fostered, partly by Pythagorean cosmology centered on numerical principles (ibid. pp.16-20), partly by Plato's Doctrines of the Tripartite Soul (ibid. p.72 et sqq.), and ultimately by Christian theology (ibid. pp.82-91). Plato's teachings on the Tripartite Soul elucidated the understanding that the soul could be divided into the rational faculty for wisdom (nous), the spirited aspect for courage (andreia), and the appetitive or desirous aspect for temperance (sophrosyne) (ibid. p.72). By utilizing the analogy of the Polis-Psyche, Plato illustrated the similarities between the functioning of the ancient city-state and the soul, drawing parallels between the interplay of practical and theoretical domains within the polis and the interplay of rationality and the non-rational aspects of the mind and desires (ibid.).

(4) Plato's Divided Line, known as the doctrine of the four levels of clarity of knowledge, presents a hierarchical framework for understanding knowledge in four distinct stages (ibid. p.72 et sqq.). The first stage, Eikasia, encompasses conventional experiences and indirect, unreliable knowledge sources such as myths and second-hand opinions (ibid.). The second stage, Pistis, involves practical, technical knowledge without a comprehensive understanding of underlying principles (ibid.). The third stage, Dianoia, encompasses principles and universal ideas, providing answers to the question of "why" (ibid.). The fourth stage, Noesis, can be seen as a form of a priori rationalization and involves the critical evaluation of Dianoia by elucidating and reflecting upon the conditions of the third stage of knowledge (ibid. p.73). In the final stage, knowledge, virtues, and values intertwine to form an interpretation of the concept of the "good" (ibid.). Plato's teachings lay the groundwork for an objective idealism that is integral to rational thinking (ibid. pp.68-73).

(5) Aristotle, in his doctrine of the four causes, categorized them as material, final, formal, and efficient causes (Hall & Ames 1995, pp.75/95-98). These causes, alongside the Divided Line, established specific "primary semantic contexts" within discourse, which continue to persist today as sub-domains of extensive theoretical traditions (ibid. pp.95-98). The examination of material causes led to the development of the positivist tradition and subsequently physics, addressing inquiries into the existence

of different types of entities (ibid. pp.95-96). This theoretical sub-domain is founded on the pleasure-pain principle and remains indifferent to human freedom (ibid.). The study of final causes falls under organic naturalism, exploring the interactions of biological organisms governed by certain rules while being capable of pursuing their own objectives (ibid. pp.96-97). The contemplation of formal causes within formalism encompasses an understanding of a world with fixed structures, relationships, forms, or even ideal principles, perceiving the world as a dynamic process or eternal change (ibid. pp.97-98). Finally, efficient causes are explored within the theoretical tradition of volitionalism, which focuses on the human capacity to determine the standard for all things (ibid. p.98). Irrespective of the existence of various entities, volitionalism examines the persuasive actions of individuals (ibid.). During the 17th century, the natural sciences primarily concentrated on material and efficient causes (ibid.).

(6) The chauvinistic undertones of modernity can be discerned in the pursuit of human liberation through the amalgamation of ancient philosophy and theological principles (Hall & Ames 1995, pp.176). Through the reinterpretation of ancient history within the framework of sin and grace, the ancient Logos, exemplified by Augustine of Hippo, gave way to the Christian Logos, which emerged as the driving and creative force (ibid. pp.87-90). Thomas Aquinas further emphasized the agency and efficacy of individual human action, advocating for the individualization and personalization of the self (ibid. pp.85-86). He interpreted Plato's concept of the thymos, representing the spirited element, as an active volition for decision-making (*voluntas*) and the locus of self-perception (ibid.). Together with the doctrine of the Trinity and divine transcendence, the Christian paradigm laid the groundwork for the scientific acceptance of universality (ibid. p.90). Unfortunately, during the era of missionary and colonialism, this universality was misused as a rationale for violent annexation. Western thought was significantly influenced by a theological perspective that viewed history and culture as transcendent, progressive, and morally interpreted (ibid.).

Western Influence on Chinese Philosophy & Culture

Since the emergence of modernity, the West has exerted a significant influence on China. This influence has been both direct, as seen in events like the Opium Wars, and indirect, through the dissemination of the modernization paradigm following Japan's path (Defoort 2001, p.396). China has also embraced the Western capitalist economic system, while both China and the West continue to pursue geopolitical strategies and exert mutual influence in the political arena.

However, when it comes to scientific endeavors, there exists a subtle power imbalance between China and the West. This discrepancy can be understood within the context of earlier debates, prior to the postmodern era, regarding whether Chinese history possesses a distinct disciplinary philosophy (Defoort 2001). These debates primarily took place within Western scholarly circles, without active engagement from Chinese

scholars. This hegemony originated during the modern period but has gradually diminished due to postmodern criticism in literature and cultural studies. Nevertheless, the influence has already permeated deeply and become ingrained. The rich cultural heritage of China, spanning over two and a half millennia, has already undergone significant transformation, for example through Feng Youlan and Hu Shi, who used the lens of Western concepts, categories, and terminology (ibid. p.398 et sqq.). The extent and implications of these changes, as well as their recognition and value by both Chinese and Western scholars, remain unclear and necessitate further investigation. Various unresolved questions persist regarding the notion of an authentic culture, which must be examined critically and liberated from preconceived notions.

The emergence of rationality as a paradigm during the period of modernization in China resulted in the arrival of Christian missionaries in the 17th century (Hall & Ames 1995, p.120). Jacques Gernet highlights the cultural disparity in thinking between China and the West, wherein analogical thought prevailed within the Chinese tradition of thought (ibid.). Gernet notes that in order to facilitate comprehension of Christianity among the Chinese population, the missionaries first had to instill rationality and impart the concept of dualism between the body and soul (ibid.). The Christian missionaries undertook the task of instructing the Chinese in rational thinking and familiarizing them with the notion of the dichotomy between the physical and spiritual realms (ibid.).

Within his written works, Paul Cohen places significant emphasis on conducting a critical examination of the narrative surrounding Chinese history within the framework of Western values, particularly universalism (Hall & Ames 1995, p.121). Cohen highlights that during the 19th and 20th centuries, distinct paradigms emerged in China, which were closely associated with Western influence (ibid.). These paradigms encompassed the impact/response aspect, the process of modernization, and the era of imperialism (ibid.). They have exerted a profound influence on the comprehension of historical processes within China (ibid.). Cohen also directs attention to an intriguing phenomenon, namely, the assimilation of Western categories and structures, prevalent in encyclopedic literature and academic disciplines, which have been adapted in the Chinese context for the purpose of historical research and analysis (ibid.). These aspects serve to illustrate the intricate relationship between Western influence and the construction of the historical narrative in China.

Postmodern Critique of Rationality

In the realm of scientific inquiry, there has been a discernible decline in the exclusive reliance on pure rationality as the sole means of logically constructing our understanding of the world, without due consideration of empirical evidence. An example of this shift can be observed in the evolving perspective towards the

utilization of lexicons (Hall & Ames 1995, p.165 et sqq.). Rather than focusing solely on providing a rigid, objective definition of terms, there is now a greater emphasis on employing etymology and historical context to elucidate the origins and development of words and concepts (ibid.). Furthermore, the conveyance of meanings is approached by elucidating the contextual frameworks within which these terms operate, acknowledging the inherent ambiguity that may arise (ibid.). This paradigmatic transformation underscores the diminishing significance attributed to pure rationality as the exclusive tool for constructing our understanding of the world in scientific endeavors, giving way to a more nuanced and contextually sensitive approach (ibid.).

During the transitional phase leading up to postmodernism, conventional models and unequivocal claims regarding knowledge and understanding have encountered challenges. The paradoxes inherent in quantum theory and the incommensurability of disparate concepts have demonstrated the inadequacy of absolute models, necessitating probabilistic and statistical generalizations instead (Hall & Ames 1995, pp.114 et sqq.). Criticism has been directed towards positivism, which places emphasis on empiricism and logic but falls short in capturing the full complexity of reality (ibid.). A multitude of theories have emerged, presenting alternative perspectives (ibid.). Social movements, such as those centered around gender and ethnicity, have raised concerns regarding the objectivity of established methodologies, while non-Western cultures, including those of China, Japan, and Korea, have contested Western hegemony in knowledge production (ibid.). Postmodernism embraces the coexistence of diverse movements that engage in deconstructing traditional thought patterns and subjecting the rationality of language to critical scrutiny (ibid. p.145). This transformative process yields a more comprehensive and diverse understanding of knowledge and insight (ibid.).

The postmodern critique of the so-called transcendental monism, as a rationalistic approach to thinking, encompasses various dimensions (Hall & Ames 1995, p.144 et sqq.). Firstly, it questions the assumption of unambiguousness in ideas and challenges the notion that "Truth is one" (ibid.). Furthermore, the notion of attaining universal knowledge solely through logic, reason, or rationality is subjected to scrutiny (ibid. p.145). Moreover, the understanding that there has been a linear progression from myth to logos, signifying a transition from a mythical mindset to a rational one, is outdated and flawed (ibid.). In the framework of transcendental monism, concepts such as "impact/response" and "modernization" used to be applied to countries like China (ibid. p.147). This tendency reflects an evolutionary perspective in ethnology, positing a universal and linear development of cultures from primitive stages to civilizations (ibid.). Such a perspective is deemed biased and revisionist as it entails presumptuous and disrespectful rational reconstructions of target cultures (ibid. p.154). Despite the recognition among some proponents of transcendental monism that exporting Western solutions to Chinese problems would be ineffective, there remains an expectation for China to acquire and implement Western dialectical strategies (ibid. p.157).

We often forget that the rational method of science already includes inherent a priori as well as certain anthropocentric assumptions (Hall & Ames 1995, p.117). Cultural relativism aims to supplement the purportedly objective results of reasoning in such a way that the conditions of knowledge are revealed and reflected upon, which presupposes the visibility of the theorist or scientist.

Interconnectivity between Rationality and Capitalism

Not only certain similarities and correlations can be identified between the rational mode of thinking and capitalism; both are interconnected and mutually influence each other in various ways. This connection becomes apparent as early as the initial stages of modernity and industrialization when both concepts emerged concurrently. While capitalism has successfully established itself as a global economic system, rational thinking has played a crucial role in legitimizing, consolidating, and propelling this system forward.

Firstly, there exists a reciprocal association between pure reason as an outcome of humanity's self-imposed immaturity and capitalism, in conjunction with the process of human emancipation. The rationalist mode of thinking provides a structural foundation for the emancipation of individuals, while capitalism facilitates the emergence of a novel paradigm of personal liberty and autonomous agency. Moreover, the emancipation of humanity engenders a feedback mechanism that influences both rationalism and capitalism: it impacts rationalism by shaping its trajectory, and simultaneously influences capitalism by cultivating an environment conducive to the cultivation of individual ingenuity and proactivity.

Secondly, within the realms of capitalism and pure reason, the concept of humanity is viewed as an agent of creativity, guided by theological principles. Individuals employ their abilities, ideas, rationality, and labor to attain economic prosperity. This association between capitalism and the Christian paradigm is substantiated by Max Weber in his notable work, "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" (Weber 2005).

Thirdly, the societal transformation linked with capitalism manifests as a shift from collectivist social frameworks characterized by indeterminate social norms to individualistic structures governed by stringent legal frameworks. This transition is evident in the evolution of the capitalist system, elucidating the influence of capitalism on social conventions and institutional arrangements. Furthermore, the shift, whether from ambiguous rituals to orthodox regulations or from relationship-oriented social structures to bourgeois arrangements, substantiates the dominance of second-order problematic thinking.

Fourthly, within the realm of capitalism and rational thought, there exists a pursuit of objectifying and quantifying nature as a resource. Nature is perceived as an entity that can be exploited and utilized for the purpose of attaining economic advantages.

Fifthly, both rational thought and capitalism share a common objective of achieving unity through the implementation of universal principles of global organization, which are manifested in logical conceptualizations and the monetary system. This unification establishes a shared foundation, enabling a systematic discourse that favors a deductive, logical generation of knowledge while disregarding alternative perspectives. Additionally, it establishes a global system of ecological relationships intertwined with debt, which, according to Marxists, has superseded colonialism (De Ploeg 2022).

Indeed, there exists a significant linkage between these concepts to the extent that individuals operating within capitalism tend to embrace the Aristotelian primary semantic field of materialism (Hall & Ames 1995, pp.95-96), which encompasses rational thinking as well.

Regarding the interplay of rationality and capitalism, the first and second problematic modes of thinking can be juxtaposed. Rational and logical thinking involves a linear and temporal documentation of the evolutionary progression of cultures, whereby stages of development are structured in a clear sequence of causality and effect. Conversely, analogical and correlative thinking facilitates a hermeneutic comprehension of cultural meanings. Culture is perceived as a complex fabric of interrelated and analogous image clusters that shape human behavior. This perspective encompasses the entirety of literary works and myths, presenting an avenue for the application of methodological relativism in the understanding of cultural phenomena.

When examining the historical origins of the economy, the rational approach relies on Adam Smith's myth of exchange and operates under the assumption of humans as rational agents driven by profit maximization (Graeber 2011). The barter myth presents a fictional mental exercise wherein individuals, driven by their specialized professions, transition from simple commodity exchange to the use of money as a transactional medium (ibid). Nevertheless, this perspective has become outdated. An alternative viewpoint, advocated by David Graeber, highlights the social, irrational, and communist aspects of human nature (ibid.). Graeber emphasizes the significance of social relations and solidarity as essential dimensions of human behavior (ibid.). This example illustrates the limitations inherent in seeking accurate historical reconstruction solely through the rational and logical exploitation of the past.

An interesting perspective on the relationship between culture and capitalism is presented by Igor Kopytoff (Kopytoff 2006). He argues that culture can be seen as a counterforce to capitalism (ibid.). In capitalism, there is a strong tendency towards

commodification, where goods and services become tradable commodities (ibid.). Everything is reduced to its monetary value. In contrast, Kopytoff emphasizes the tendency of singularity within culture (ibid.). Here, it is emphasized that cultural objects, practices, and expressions derive their significance and value from their uniqueness and specific contextualization (ibid.). Cultural artifacts thus defy pure commercialization and unfold their meaning beyond economic exchange (ibid.). This viewpoint highlights the role of culture in preserving identity, authenticity, and individual expression in a world dominated by commodification (ibid.). While capitalism conflicts with culture, so do the divergent perspectives of rationality and cultural relativism engage in a confrontational discourse.

Although the concept of pure reason or humans as rational agents, as well as the notion of evolutionary cultural development, continue to influence the mindset of globalized nations today, it is fortunate that the trajectory of development is no longer strictly unidirectional as advocated and instigated by Western countries. On one hand, China, with its considerable heterogeneity, embraces the challenges posed by the capitalist paradigm (Hall & Ames 1995, p.157). On the other hand, it attains economic autonomy from the United States through the implementation of Chinese Marxism as a political doctrine (De Ploeg 2022). Therefore it is imperative to first comprehend the developmental processes in China using a relativistic approach before passing judgment based on Western standards, such as norms and values. Following the insights of Paul Cohen, it is essential to adopt an emic perspective, respect specificities, and refrain from allowing personal biases to influence our evaluations (Hall & Ames 1995, p.122).

Western starting point of Understanding Ancient Chinese Perspectives

This chapter focuses on fundamental aspects of comprehending ancient Chinese thought and philosophy, which proved invaluable in providing me with orientation. It serves as a selective overview, intended as a primer for newcomers to Chinese philosophy and explicitly avoids conveying a sense of comprehensiveness. Acknowledging the significance of relativism does not necessarily entail a comprehensive understanding of the various dimensions and extents to which cultural relativism operates.

Paul Cohen's approach to understanding China involves three key aspects (Hall & Ames 1995, p.122 et sqq.). Firstly, he emphasizes the importance of adopting an emic perspective, which entails examining China through its own cultural lens and utilizing its unique vocabulary and conceptual framework (ibid.). This approach allows for a deeper and more nuanced comprehension of Chinese society, history, and values. Secondly, Cohen highlights the significance of "appreciation," which encompasses showing respect, recognition, and valuing alternative cultural dynamics (ibid.). By

appreciating the richness and diversity of Chinese culture, one can overcome ethnocentric biases and engage with Chinese perspectives on their own terms (ibid.). Lastly, Cohen emphasizes the need to transcend one's own preconceived notions and biases (ibid.). This requires a conscious effort to critically reflect on and challenge one's own perspectives in order to foster a more open and inclusive understanding of China and its people (ibid.). By incorporating these principles into the study of China, scholars can strive for a more comprehensive and objective analysis, promoting cross-cultural understanding and dialogue (ibid.).

Analogical and correlative thinking in the Zhou Dynasty finds its origin and persistence in various developments and influences (Hall & Ames 1995, p.132 et sqq.). A central factor lies in the establishment of a unified state and the subsequent process of standardization and systematization across different social domains, including legal systems, units of measurement, and language (ibid.). The relative geographical and cultural isolation, coupled with limited linguistic and ethnic diversity, may have contributed to the relatively homogeneous development of analogical and correlative thinking (ibid. p.157). Moreover, the prominent religious and philosophical currents of Confucianism, Daoism, and Chinese Buddhism were closely intertwined with the prevailing consensus on the concept of a Daoist principle (ibid.). Unlike in Western antiquity, there was no absolute separation between the practice of action and its psychological, social, and political ramifications (ibid.). Given the integral role of practice in theory, measures such as censorship, discipline, and control were implemented to steer analogical and correlative thinking along appropriate paths and maintain social order (ibid.).

The first problematic thinking pattern in China diverges from Western rationality in several aspects. Firstly, the Chinese perspective does not involve the creation of a unified cosmos, but rather embraces the coexistence of multiple worldviews (Hall & Ames 1995, p.184). This is exemplified by the concept of the "myriad things" in Chinese Philosophy (ibid. pp.11-12). Secondly, the Chinese approach does not exhibit a prominent dualism, and thus does not reflect the relationship between physis and logos or between personal and objective perspectives (ibid. pp.32-33). Instead, Chinese thinking primarily focuses on the creation and correlation of mental images, without necessarily engaging with the problem of movement and change in rational thought (ibid.). Thirdly, China does not condemn perspectiveism; rather, it emphasizes the perspective of the actor through the use of analogies (ibid. p.55). Fourthly, the pursuit of social harmony takes precedence in Chinese thinking, leading to the suppression of dialectical discourse and the acceptance of alternative viewpoints (ibid.). Models and examples are frequently referenced instead of relying solely on abstract terms (ibid.). Dialectics do not hold a significant role in traditional Chinese thought, as the emphasis lies on transcendent principles embodied by cultural heroes and wise rulers (ibid. p.91). Lastly, a certain degree of vagueness or ambiguity is observed in Chinese thinking, which contrasts with the Western Enlightenment's inclination of universality and sole truth (ibid. p.104).

The framework of ancient Chinese philosophy encompasses various elements; however, I will only show a few important aspects. Firstly, there is a distinct Chinese indifference towards distinguishing between myths (mythos), philosophy (logos) and history (historia), as they are perceived as inseparable and intricately interconnected (Hall & Ames 1995, p.200). Cosmogenetic concepts in Chinese philosophy are characterized by ambitious aspirations to trace the origins of things (ibid. pp.185-186). In the realm of natural philosophy in ancient China, particularly during the Han Dynasty, cosmogenetic myths assume a relatively diminished significance, with greater emphasis placed on the social model (ibid. p.195). The focal point shifts towards the practical sphere of human life and the particularities of things themselves, rather than their essence (ibid.). The Dao is regarded as an ongoing process intrinsic to the world, devoid of a transcendent actor like the Christian concept of God (ibid. p.186). Order is not viewed as an universal principle or an inherent necessity, but rather manifests through correlations such as the interplay between yin and yang, the dimensions of time and space, and the dynamic relationship between heaven and earth (ibid.). These correlations are further illustrated through various elements including directions, the elemental composition, five olfactory perceptions, five auditory perceptions, five gustatory experiences, as well as through trigrams, hexagrams, which in sum create holistic image clusters in the end (ibid. p.125).

Despite the dominance of first problematic thinking, David Hall and Roger Ames highlight that there were indeed experiments with rationality within the Chinese intellectual tradition (Hall & Ames 1995, pp.201-209 et sqq.). One significant period that exemplifies this is the Hundred Schools of Thought, which emerged between the death of Confucius and the birth of Mencius (ibid. p.202). During this time, various philosophical schools challenged the ideas of Confucianism (ibid. pp.203-204). The Mohist school, led by Mo Di, questioned Confucian principles and advocated for universal love and utilitarian ethics (ibid. p.201). Legalism, represented by figures like Shang Yang and Han Feizi, promoted a rational approach to governance, emphasizing laws, punishments, and sanctions as means of achieving social order and efficient political administration (ibid.). The discourse during this period became increasingly complex, with a multitude of thinkers engaging in debates and conflicts over the interpretation and validity of arguments (ibid. p.203). Notable figures such as Zhuangzi, Hui Shi, and Gong-Sun Longzi contributed to the sophistication of the discussions (ibid. pp.203-204). The Mohists and the School of Names, in particular, developed intricate and technical vocabularies for engaging in discourse (ibid. p.204). They explored paradoxes within language, recognizing the limits and challenges of verbal expression (ibid.). In the midst of these debates, there was a recourse to second problematic thinking, which involved questioning fundamental principles and engaging in conceptual conflicts (ibid.). This provided a platform for a more critical examination of philosophical concepts and ideas (ibid.).

Rational thought in pre-modern China, however, experienced stagnation and was overshadowed by the first problematic thinking tradition (Hall & Ames 1995, p.204 et

sqq). This phenomenon can be attributed to various factors. Socio-political dynamics played a significant role, whereby the increasing gap between the general populace and the classical bureaucratic institutions led to a decline in the prominence of rational thinking (ibid.). Moreover, the collapse of the Mohist school, a prominent intellectual group, contributed to the diminishing influence of the rational tradition (ibid.). Additionally, the centralized empire's pressure, rooted in conservative values and traditions, marginalized the significance of rational thinking (ibid.). Another influential factor was the state-orchestrated "Burning of the Books" in 213 BC, which aimed to suppress and control written knowledge, further stifling rational thought and leaving a lasting impact on the intellectual landscape (ibid.). Even though the philosopher Xunzi developed a rationalism based on history and culture, his philosophy ultimately rejected rational thinking and embraced a return to analogical and correlative modes of thought rooted in his so-called nominalistic historicism (ibid. p.204-209). Confucianism, functioning as a state ideology, also played a pivotal role (ibid. p.209 et sqq.). Its emphasis on traditional values and social harmony fostered conservative thinking, perpetuating the suppression of alternative intellectual frameworks (ibid.).

Confucianism emerged as the predominant ideology in ancient China by skillfully assimilating elements from various philosophical traditions, including Daoism, Legalism, Mohism, and Buddhism (Hall & Ames 1995, p.210). This integrative approach fostered an intellectually flexible society (ibid.). For instance, the Analects by Confucius exemplifies this adaptability through its utilization of a comparative method and the construction of vivid mental images (ibid. p.201). Rather than universalizing abstract qualities, ethical deliberations in Confucianism stem from retrospective and analogous reasoning (ibid. pp.200/207-208). Consequently, Confucianism stands apart from abstract thinking and theoretical abstraction due to its emphasis on concrete and practical perspectives (ibid.).

The Chinese philosophical discourse exhibits enduring characteristics in contemporary times. Given the inherent vagueness found in ancient philosophical literature, a primary objective is to achieve proximity to the original ideas or texts through a process of interpretation (Hall & Ames 1995, p.210). Many authors employ their imaginative faculties and adopt creative approaches to engage with and comprehend literary works (ibid.). This practice reflects a paradigm of "rhetorical skepticism," whereby the acceptance of alternative interpretations serves as a strategic measure to uphold consensus (ibid.). Moreover, Chinese sciences and social discourse often avoids a rigid demarcation between the individual and their belief systems or opinions, as these elements intertwine closely (ibid. p.211). Notably, the Chinese discourse demonstrates a cautious inclination towards criticism.

Roger Ames' concept of Relativism

For over two millennia, the unresolved philosophical quandary of the blurred boundary between reality and individual perception persists, as referred to by Claude Lévi-Strauss as the concept of true and concrete reality (Heidemann 2019, p.105). In line with the structuralist tradition, David Hall and Roger Ames view cultural expression as akin to language (Hall & Ames 1995, pp.176-177 et sqq.). The issue of blurring gives rise to two opposing viewpoints. Firstly, the idiolectic view posits that languages are as numerous as the speakers themselves (ibid. p.175). This perspective highlights the individualistic and context-dependent nature of language or culture. Secondly, the notion of a universal language emerges, encompassing logical and grammatical constants, serving as an embodiment of rationalism (ibid. p.176). Aligned with Enlightenment ideals, this stance regards a shared language as a catalyst for unity and collaboration. However, it is crucial to recognize that the belief in a universal language, again, can foster chauvinistic tendencies, attributing superiority or dominance to a particular language or culture (ibid. p.176).

David Hall and Roger Ames employ Wittgenstein's analogy to describe culture as a language (Hall & Ames 1995, p.177 et sqq.). Wittgenstein's analogy equates communication between two individuals to a game with shared rules (ibid. p.177). In this analogy, the context, which encompasses mutually incoherent language games, represents culture (ibid.). According to this perspective, there is at most one language and at most one culture in our world (ibid. et sqq.). The definition of culture is rendered indeterminate due to the incoherence of ideals, principles, concepts, and values (ibid.). In contrast, holistic and coherent approaches aim to reduce the cultural significances by generalizing and formalizing theories of interrelations, ultimately rationalizing them.

Therefore, David Hall and Roger Ames propose the following cultural model, which distinguishes between a Capital-C-Culture and multiple small-c-cultures (Hall & Ames 1995, pp.178-179). In this model, the interaction between two small-c-cultures leads to the articulation of alternative meanings within a single incoherent complex, which constitutes the Capital-C-Culture (ibid.). Small-c-cultures are viewed as local distortions of specific values in a general field (ibid.). The Capital-C-Culture is characterized by chaos, as it encompasses all orders, rules, and interpretations, exhibiting heterogeneity (ibid.). Small-c-cultures, on the other hand, are flexible and dynamic (ibid.). They possess different meanings that prioritize interests and priorities over universal human dimensions (ibid.). The boundaries between these cultures are vague, and transcultural discourses are possible, such as in the fields of physics, mathematics, and others (ibid.).

David Hall and Roger Ames outline the scholarly approach of interpretive pluralism as a counterposition to transcendental monism (Hall & Ames 1995, p.144 et sqq.). This approach embraces relativism by rejecting the existence of a singular truth regarding

content, methods, and analytical instruments (ibid. pp.145/174). It advocates for the liberation from unexamined methodological assumptions, allowing for a deeper understanding of China from an emic perspective and engaging in dialogue with Chinese culture (ibid. p.158). Ames emphasizes the distinction between small-c cultures and Capital-C Culture, recognizing the inherent vagueness in cultural boundaries (ibid. p.166). By adopting interpretive pluralism, scholars can navigate the complexities of cultural analysis and promote a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of diverse cultural phenomena (ibid.). In summary, interpretive pluralists celebrate the plurality of content and methods, according to the motto: "the more tools we have at our disposal, the more likely are we to find the tool best suited for the task at hand" (ibid. p.173).

The significance of vagueness, particularly in the field of cultural studies, cannot be overstated (Hall & Ames 1995, p.166 et sqq.). Vagueness encompasses a conglomerate of phenomena, concepts, and theories that allows for diverse and multifaceted interpretations (ibid.). Firstly, it involves the productive historical dimension, wherein events are stored without hasty conclusions until their relevance becomes apparent (ibid. p.167). This approach maintains tolerance for alternative perspectives and embraces ambiguity and tensions. Secondly, the conceptual dimension entails the preservation of rich and open conceptual clusters, facilitating a diachronic network of interpretations (ibid.). The acquisition of vagueness through complexity adheres to the principle of "Per obscurum ad obscurius" (ibid. p.168). The Chan Buddhist maxim "Avoid choosing by choosing both (or all)" emphasizes that communication always encompasses an abundance of meanings (ibid.). Furthermore, it is recognized that rationality may not be the sole source of meaning (ibid. p.170).

An example that illustrates the advantages of vagueness can be observed in the context of interpersonal relationships and the experience of love (Hall & Ames 1995, p.169). When attempting to articulate love and devotion, two approaches can be taken: 1) The precise definition of the concept of "love" risks generating ideological conflicts, as individuals may hold divergent viewpoints (ibid.). 2) Despite these divergent understandings, harmonious relationships can still be formed (ibid.). In this scenario, the inherent vagueness associated with the concept of "love" allows for a more flexible interpretation, accommodating individual perspectives and enabling the coherent coexistence of diverse viewpoints (ibid.).

The significance of rituals in ancient China lies in their embodiment of vagueness, replacing explicit laws (Hall & Ames 1995, p.209). Rituals are conceptualized as schemes facilitating mutual adaptation of diverse attitudes, beliefs, and values during social interactions (ibid.). They function as ambiguous patterns of behavior or guidelines to reconcile differences in desires, attitudes, and actions within the community. By utilizing rituals, a shared understanding and cooperative engagement can be fostered without imposing rigid regulations or comprehensive legislation. Consequently, rituals serve to enhance social cohesion and uphold communal order,

providing flexibility and adaptability to accommodate the diverse array of individual needs and behaviors, while concurrently establishing a common framework for social interaction (ibid.).

Conclusion

Considering the escalating intricacy in cultural, social, and political domains, a noticeable inclination arises towards a heightened sensitivity and nuanced social consciousness, particularly concerning the plight of marginalized or discriminated individuals. At the same time, this term paper suggests that the field of cultural studies should always employ an active approach of relativism, encouraging critical introspection and cautious engagement with the interpretations and significances embedded within a given host culture and its contextual circumstances. The imposition of rigid criteria or uncritical adherence to paradigms proves counterproductive to the progressive advancement of sensitivity within the realm of scientific inquiry. Hence, the faculty of pure reason and rationality necessitates continual scrutiny and critical examination.

In conclusion, this study provides an outline of the genesis of the coexistence of the first and second problematic modes of thinking and examines the conflicting intentions inherent in both approaches within the realm of science. Analogical and correlative thinking are prominent features of both Chinese and Greek antiquity. Given the power dynamics between China and the Western world, coupled with the covert hegemony of Western science, it is imperative to approach the historical classification and semantic interpretation of Chinese culture and philosophy with sensitivity. The extent to which the paradigm of modernity continues to influence contemporary mentality remains to be explored. Nonetheless, this research has demonstrated the historical association between capitalism and the concept of pure reason, suggesting that the effects of rationalism should be scrutinized within the framework of methodological relativism in the sciences. A discerning alternative, Roger Ames' interpretative pluralism, is advocated for the cautious interpretation of cultural elements.

The inquiry into the concept of "shared humanity" (Hall & Ames 1995, p.122) within the framework of historical conditions influencing the development of diverse modes of thinking necessitates a critical examination. It becomes imperative to investigate and contemplate the Chinese populace either as constituents of our collective human identity or as individuals with distinctive characteristics. This query encompasses the exploration of the extent to which human thought exhibits universal traits and the significance of cultural multiplicity in comprehending the entirety of human existence. The application of relativism within the context of interpretative pluralism advocates for the contextualization of cultures, exemplified by China. Devoid of methodical

relativism, scientific progressivity would wane, and the rational paradigm would perpetuate its own preconceptions about the world, thereby veiling reality.

In my prior research on creativity (Keilhack 2023a, b), I have previously classified analogical thinking as a distinct cognitive process within the creative domain. Conversely, I identify rational thinking as a fusion of deductive reasoning intertwined with aspects of systemic thinking and the cognitive process of abduction, regarding the results from this term paper. While the methodology of relativism permeates nearly all forms of thinking in the creative process, pure rationality appears to be confined within the boundaries of its own frameworks and principles due to its universal perspective. Although the second problematic thinking type has emerged from the first problematic thinking, its dynamic creative potential remains restricted in scope.

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