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Creative Globalization

The age of Global Studies

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Transition

This paper is a comment on a conference “New Horizons of East Asian Studies in the Age of Globalization” organized by Professor Huang Chun-chieh, director of the Institute of advanced studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences, at Taiwan National University on 13-14 December 2008. This remarkable conference offered the possibility to explore and synthesize how Globalization is transforming research in the Humanities and Social Sciences as well as the role played by East Asian Studies in this transformation¹. “Globalization” is an ambiguous notion encompassing many different problems and conflicting issues. For some specialists Globalization is the new and last stage of the Modernization process. This interpretation explains many phenomena but it conceals the emergence within globalization of a new and different process. The French language allows a distinction between Globalization and *mondialisation* (“Worldization”), understood as the emerging awareness of a world common to all individuals, cultures and nations². In the 1990ies, Globalization meant the inexorable emergence of a economic process containing all societies and even all aspects of

¹ I am very grateful to Professor Chun-chieh Huang for having invited me to comment on the various papers and debates. This article is derived from these comments. I express also my gratitude to Professor Ming-huei Lee.

² The distinction between “global” and “common” is beyond the scope of this article.

each society, a new historical dynamics and power: the new Leviathan. Globalization was something one had to adopt and adapt to. The idea of *worldization* dispensed with and reject the idea of a whole and totality subordinating, dominating or controlling the diversity of cultures, histories and nations. In this paper, Globalization simply names the historical moment when cultural, intellectual and institutional traditions have started to interact with each other to such a level that a new page of world history is opened. It is too early to assess what will be the outcome of this historical transition. But the Taipei conference proved that a major change and progress are underway.

Until the 1990ies, specialists in the Humanities and Social Sciences remained within the realm of National Studies, be it Chinese, Japanese, French, German, African, etc. National Studies remain within historical boundaries and tend to reproduce and justify these boundaries. The source of these boundaries is usually identified as “cultural”. In this sense, “culture” is reduced to what divides and opposes. Hybrid cultures are considered marginal, non pure and inauthentic. What takes place between the boundaries is reduced to “exchange”, “dialogues”, “comparison” and “transfer”. Boundaries are the black box of the Humanities and Social Sciences. Cultural boundaries have such a long and deep history that it is impossible to ignore or overcome them. But Human Sciences have been explaining for decades how these boundaries were and are still constructed. Furthermore Globalization has intensified dialogues and comparison to such a point that it is now possible to shift from comparing national or regional cultural traditions to building joint research on common problems and issues. This is an historical change. This colloquium is a significant contribution to this transition.

These comments have their own boundaries. They tend to reproduce the presuppositions of my own field of research, epistemology of Human and Social Sciences. I study the cultural and social conditions of innovation, of knowledge production and distribution in advanced industrial societies. My objective is to synthesize from this perspective the impact of East-Asian Studies on the Humanities and Social Sciences.

1. Self-reflexivity: beyond National Studies

Because of the diversity of their methods, objects and presuppositions, East-Asian Studies have introduced in the Humanities and Social Sciences a self-reflective process, which has been questioning for years their established presuppositions. This questioning is starting to have a strong feed back effect on the nations and cultures where these disciplines

originated, in these nations traditionally called the “West”. This is a decisive evolution for these disciplines. For instance, my own research was deeply transformed in the late 1980 when I started to be invited by Japanese universities. To discover Japan was also to discover Japanese Studies. The sophistication required to apply Human & Social Sciences to the Japanese context, the need to rectify their presuppositions in order to explain Japan’s evolution and present situation, resulted in a critical examination of these presuppositions³. The demarcations introduced by Humanities and Social Sciences, between religion, politics, society and economy, reshape and reorganize social experience and societies themselves. This is particularly true concerning the conception of the “market” and of a “market economy”.

The new level of reflexivity introduced by East Asian Studies acts as an embedded epistemology. When presuppositions become explicit, they are tested, proven wrong or validated, reshaped or discarded. This progress in raising problems and redefining concepts is so powerful that these innovations are now providing a new framework extending far beyond the case of Japan or China. If this framework is valid, it can be used to study Europe as well as East Asia or the rest of the world. This is the reason why East Asian Studies, when they themselves adapt to this historical conjuncture, are progressively reshaping the demarcations between all Human and Social Sciences. This is real scientific progress for these disciplines. The impact is deepest in the Humanities. Indeed, Social Sciences, typically Economics, are supposed to be already global. But this assertion conceals the fact that Economics, Psychology or Sociology are disciplines born in Western Europe. Even reshaped in the U.S., according to the American context and interests, they carry with them the weight of European history and societies, including colonialism and imperialism. Until now, they participated in the globalization process and even reinforced it. They have until now escaped the self-reflective and critical process generated by this process. If Social Sciences are supposed to be “global”, the Humanities have a paradoxical status. On one hand, they are supposed to be regional, national or local; on the other end, they are supposed to search for universal or common values. This paradox brings about that they are considered less or even non scientific, a sort of by-product of historical prejudices and “imagined” identities. But in fact, economics and Economics are themselves historical constructions. If there were laws in Economics like in Physics, our societies might have predicted and avoided the 2008 financial and economic crisis.

³ See A-M Rieu, *Savoir et pouvoir dans la modernisation du Japon*, Paris, P.U.F., 2001, 332 p.

One effect of Globalization is therefore the integration of East-Asian Studies in the main stream of Human and Social Sciences. Their internalization transforms in return these disciplines, the role they play in International Relations, in the evolution of societies, in cultural and cognitive innovation in general. Overall, new knowledge is produced. This new knowledge is disconnected from French, European, American, Chinese or Japanese presuppositions or hypotheses. This evolution is a sort of deconstructive/reconstructive epistemology, a case of creative globalization. This self-reflexive process generates a degree of abstraction and generality, beyond usual “national studies”, “area studies” and other “civilizational” perspectives in the style of Samuel Huntington. This comparative process is properly *scientific* without having to rely on formal and quantitative models in order to ground its validity. It leads to the construction of a proper theory, independent from its source contexts. It is or should be capable of explaining on the same conceptual pattern and method the evolution of different societies, wherever they are geographically situated. This is a typical case of “symmetric epistemology⁴”. Such a theory is a substitute for a conception of the Universal always based in the end based on some cultural presuppositions.

The meaning of the colloquium “New Horizons of East Asian Studies in the Age of Globalization”, of its communications and debates, can be summarized as such: in the age of globalization, East Asian Studies are merging within Human and Social sciences and, because of the distinctive characters of East Asian societies, this merger transforms Human and Social Sciences in proportion to the capacity of each discipline to evolve. The result is that Human and Social Sciences emancipate from their Western origin. They are shared and practiced all over the world by people specialized in their theory as well as in a specific area or culture. Societies are certainly different, but the way to study them is more and more similar and even unified. These differences are an appeal **for** both theoretical progress and empirical studies. This conjuncture opens a new field of research and teaching, even a new discipline: Global Studies.

2. Advancement in Human Sciences

Various communications in this conference contributed to this progress in Human and Social Sciences and also to a better understanding of social, cultural and economic diversity, without falling into the trap of relativist ideologies and philosophies. Relativism is spreading a dangerous doubt on the validity of Human and Social Sciences, on their capacity of

⁴ A notion introduced by Bruno Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes. Essai d'anthropologie symétrique*, Paris, La découverte, 1991.

explaining the diversity of societies according to common (scientific) standards. Multiculturalism is a positive and strong political claim but with toxic epistemological and philosophical consequences. The Taipei conference developed five main conceptual perspectives and themes, which are structuring research in Global Studies.

2.1. Decentering and distancing

Huang Chun-chieh explained how decentering and distancing have become a method and research requirement in order to reformulate concepts and problems⁵. He insisted on the diversity of East Asian Confucianisms, on the method and concepts required to analyze this diversity. Confucianism is not a word commonly used in the plural, on the contrary. What is at stake in Huang's approach is to constitute as a full theme of inquiry and debate the role and meaning of Confucianism in each East-Asian societies, without denying its major historical role and meaning. Huang Chun-chieh transforms an established and imagined evidence into an object of inquiry. Such a transformation is always a sign of progress. In retrospect, it is not sure that such a distancing and objectification are fully achieved in Europe. There are still many heated debates on Europe's distinctive characters, on "what makes Europe Europe or European". The list of answers always repeats the same assertions: democracy and market-based economy, science and innovation, Human Rights and International Law, freedom and the role of the individual, Christianity. Today these usual assertions and their universalist implication have become more questions than answers. However important for the emancipation of mankind, the processes introduced by these notions can only be further implemented by questioning and reducing their presuppositions. This is the only way of preventing relativism.

The work of Mme Mireille Delmas-Marty, professor at the Collège de France in Paris⁶ is a typical example of such an approach. In the last six years, she has exploring the concept of an "international common legal system". The objective of her seminars was to solve "the enigma of a world community, which, in order to become inter-human instead of international, needs to build itself without any preexisting or universal ground⁷". Her solution is based on the three "principles of interaction", required for "ordering pluralism":

⁵ Title of his communication: "Some Reflections on the Study of East Asian Confucianisms: Its Rationale and Its Problematiques".

⁶ Her 2007 and 2008 seminars are available as podcasts at the Collège de France's Web site. They belong to the general enquiry *Les forces imaginatives du droit*, Paris, Le seuil, three volumes, 2004-2007.

⁷ My translation, seminar, 25 April 2008. I reinforce the meaning of « preexisting (*préalable*) by adding "universal".

“coordination”, “harmonization” and “hybridization”⁸. These principles create the possibility to effectively open a path beyond the opposition between “comparative Law” and “international law”. This method in International Law theory replicates the opposition between Globalization, Self-reflexivity, Decentering as well as Deconstruction. Such a theoretical approach is also a practical method: to collaborate in a joint project by negotiating a conceptual framework, with the goal of constructing not a universal or transcendental philosophy but a common public philosophy⁹.

This decentering and distancing effect¹⁰ constitute an efficient methodological procedure. Decentering was achieved first by introducing a point of view, which is both inside East Asia and outside the debate on “State-centrism as the basis of Confucianism”, then by introducing the case of Japan with all its historical and ideological weight. Since the late 19th century, Japanese intellectuals in the media, policy making and academia have tried to express, fabricate or imagine an “essence” of Japan by interpreting and reinterpreting various sources. This exclusivist approach resulted in “Ultra-nationalism”, an extreme nationalism and a vision of Japan as the center, model and leader of all potential modernization of East-Asian nations. Decentering and distancing tend to immunize research in the Humanities and Social Sciences against repeating the same mistakes at another level or on another case.

2.2. A standard for research

Decentering and distancing were also the main issue raised by Professor Jörn Rüsen’s communication¹¹. These two requirements were introduced as the outcome of a powerful procedure, similar in many ways to Huang’s. This convergence proves that a decisive step is reached for building future research. Jörn Rüsen’s argumentation was constructed upon a detailed introduction leading to the following statement: “the first step of my argumentation is criticism”. This first step and introduction were expressing the presuppositions presiding over the later steps of his argumentation. They opened a debate on these presuppositions. Jörn Rüsen’s argument was made explicit, so that it could be evaluated, criticized, modified, reproduced or rejected. This academic procedure sets a standard essential for Human and

⁸ *Le pluralisme ordonné*, 1^o partie “Les processus d’interaction”, *Les forces imaginatives du droit*, volume 2, p 39-138.

⁹ Such a joint research was started in April 2008 with Professor Yang Guorong, Eastern China Normal University, Shanghai. The second meeting will take place in Lyon in September 2009. See <http://w7.ens-lsh.fr/amrieu/spip.php?rubrique153>.

¹⁰ In a sense similar to what Bertold Brecht called “*Verfremdungseffekt*“, a defamiliarization and estrangement effect.

¹¹ Title : “Intercultural Humanism: how to do the Humanities in the Age of Globalisation”.

Social Sciences at the age of globalization, at an age when all systems of thought interact with each other. This standard strengthens the integrity and validity of the Humanities.

In this approach, presuppositions become a full object of research and criticism. Those who criticize or even reject presuppositions reject assertions and conclusions derived from these presuppositions. But presuppositions cannot be simply denied or rejected by being replaced by other presuppositions or prejudices, coming for instance from national cultures or regional traditions. Such criticism has any legitimacy and value only if based on open inquiry and debate on all presuppositions, wherever they come from. The resulting decentering and distancing effects formulate problems situated at a *global* level, beyond national studies. This level is purely conceptual and theoretical but these concepts and their theory are based on case studies with practical consequences. This global level cannot be said “universal” because universality supposes an *a priori* or transcendental universal ground (if not a cultural, national or religious taboo), which is finally always criticized and contested. This is quite a challenging task and such a task can only be achieved by collaborative research.

There is of course no ideal situation of transparency, free from all presuppositions. But this collective and reciprocal examination and rectification of presuppositions is probably the initial progress introduced by Global Studies. These are prerequisites for producing new knowledge¹². This explains why the emergence of Global Studies is an historical transition. It challenges academic, cultural and national traditions. It modifies the way societies both understand themselves and study each other. This transforms the relations to one’s own culture. This call for innovation has unpredictable consequences.

2.3. History reopened

Jörn Rüsen explained in detail his presupposition and this explanation became his communication. This approach and method opened a debate and inquiry on the diversity of discourses, interests and theories covered by this confusing notion of Globalization. His presupposition is a Hegelian conception of history reformulated in order to express the end and goal of the Globalization process. This style of argument explains how the universalist approach proper to the European Enlightenment was understood as a progress of Reason. It also explains why it led in the late 18th century to the recognition of differences, of distinct people and nations requiring from each other reciprocal recognition. This universalist conception of Reason has been the historical ground for the study of these differences. It also

¹² This rectification process satisfies the basic Popperian scientific criteria. Presuppositions are treated as conjectures considered as historical, social or cultural hypostases.

required a mutual recognition of these differences as the basis for a new conception of a world order and international Peace. The Universal ground justified its own dialectical specification in effective particularities. But the spirit of universal reason and rationality was not lost. It continued its process and this evolution led to overcoming particularities in a new version of the Universal identified as the Global. The Global is the Universal at work and taking an effective shape. Therefore, according to this Hegelian presupposition developed by Jörn Rüsen, Globalization is understood as a major step in the advancement of universalism and Humanism. It is the effective interaction of distinct political and cultural identities in search of their mutual recognition. The resulting conflicts and tensions lead in the end to their overcoming in the conception and construction of global institutions. This explains why Globalization does not bring Peace but a world order made of tensions, conflicts and even local wars, why it generates an unstable equilibrium, which Mankind has to learn to organize and manage. It does not lead to the “end of history” as diagnosed by Francis Fukuyama¹³. It has opened a new historical cycle, beyond American historical identification with Universalism.

This is a practical statement on the present world situation and a conception of a goal for the future of Humanity. It means that international organizations established after World War 2 express an abstract, formal and ideal conception of the world order. This explains also why the United Nations Organization is generally considered as powerless. The new step introduced by the globalization process is the effective construction of a world order associating into one another nations and cultures, economies, conceptions of politics, social institutions and even religions. However dangerous and violent, competition, conflicts, rivalries are conceived as a step toward the emergence of a different world order. This is the meaning and message of Jörn Rüsen’s communication. It is both a practical description of the present situation and a conception of an emerging common goal for Humanity. This conception of Globalization is explicitly structured around the dual notions of identity and recognition within the realm of the Hegelian dialectics and its multiple interpretations.

2.4. Subjectivity

A convergence and common horizon between Huang Chun-chieh, Jörn Rüsen and other participants could be observed. This convergence expresses a mutation typical of the

¹³ “The End of History?”, Review *The National Interest*, Summer 1989.

emergence of Global Studies. The lines of convergence leading to this transition are the following: the self-reflexive process of a given society or culture cannot today be separated from research and innovation in the Humanities and Social Sciences. These disciplines are the mirror in which societies build a fragmented image of themselves in order to recognize themselves and act on themselves. This mirror operates at the same time within each individual and group composing a society. Research and debates in these disciplines express and reinforce change in cultures and societies. The search for identity and recognition is therefore both an individual evolution as well as a collective process. These two levels are different but closely related to each other. Collective representations shaped by individual experience and fields of research and communication studying behaviors and evolutions associate these two sides of the same mirror. All these micro and macro images are not bounded by national cultures and histories. They integrate various and distant societies in an open and unpredictable set of connections. This unlimited system of mirrors associates from inside and within. Things do not happen *between* but *within*. This emergence is not a “global village” or “global community”. It is not “global” because nothing is there to *globalize*. This is a world *à la Leibniz* where everything is connected and resonate from inside. But such metaphors are in the end misleading: what is important is theory, joint research, communication and collective debate.

Subjectivity is the idea expressing today this conception of the world¹⁴. Subjectivity means first an interaction with oneself (*rapport à soi*), how an individual appears to himself, see and think himself in relation to others in a given society with its institutions and in a culture with its values and patterns of behavior. Subjectivity also designates how all entities, individuals, cultures, institutions and environments are connected within each other and form a complex or network. Subjectivity finally expresses how evolutions take place within individual subjects. In his interaction with and within him or herself, an individual is situated both in a theoretical complex (ideas, language games, established knowledge, etc) and in a practical world (institutions, conventions). Collective evolutions converge in the “*rapport à soi*” where subjectivities are shaped and evolve, where the Self is formed and transformed. All different, all connected. Within these subjectivities, a *world* is expressed and communicated, a *complex* is thought and debated.

¹⁴ These comments are very much influenced by the evolution of Michel Foucault at the end the 1970ies until 1984.

The study of Globalization is therefore just one aspect of Global Studies, one level of contemporary reality. It supposes other sets of issues and perspectives. Problems, which cannot be solved at a given level, should be addressed or reformulated in the light of different perspectives. This is a perplexing situation, transcultural and transdisciplinary. Large-scale entities like “culture”, “religion”, “politics”, “economic system” and even “society” become quite different issues and problems from the point of view of individuals, of the formation of the Self, the expression of subjectivities, of group and class behaviors and values, from the point of view of power structure and power relations.

This shift from Globalization to subjectivity, from global issues to the formation of the Self and even intimate issues is perplexing and a major challenge. According to the initial perspective, Humans, societies and nations are searching throughout History for their identity and fight for recognition. The problem of the subjectivity, the formation of the Self and the internal relations of subjectivities reach far beyond the search for identity and recognition. The Hegelian model associating the individual and the collective is transformed: the notion of “society” covers many different levels and modes of investigation. Internal interactions of subjects generate a community and a society. This society resides within each individual and within their relations, beyond institutions, States and cultures. Therefore, at that level, a society is a multifaceted complex of subjectivities, all different from one another but also all related to each other. Each level constituting a society is a specific field of inquiry and knowledge. At the level of interacting subjectivities, the problem is to study the formation of various types of subjectivity according to different historical and social contexts, in East Asia or Europe. But the level characterized by the couple identity/recognition is constituted by discrete entities in situation of conflicts and competition. The level characterized by the notion of subjectivity tends to dissolve entities in order to study the emergence of subjectivities, the resulting trends in society, their evolution and adaptation. The conception of culture is quite different according to the level under study. A typical contemporary phenomenon is the hybridization of cultural patterns, values and individual attitudes. This hybridization has a major impact on the formation of the Self and on the relations between individual subjects. All subjectivities are hybrids.

2.5. Complexity

Professor Zhang Longxi's communication¹⁵ insisted on the idea of complexity. This is indeed a major step forward, typical of the impact of East-Asian Studies on Human Sciences. This is an interesting convergence with the work of Naoki Sakai, who explains that "complexity" is a version of deconstruction¹⁶. As a method and perspective, complexity supposes problems raised by the idea of "deconstruction". Deconstruction is the cognitive attitude, which led in Human Sciences to exploring complexity. Deconstruction seems to go out of fashion before having been sufficiently understood and its role in the emergence of Global Studies fully evaluated. Basically, as a methodological approach and philosophy, Deconstruction questions the core assumption of Modern European thought: the capacity to practice and justify criticism in all fields, from politics to science, including religion. Criticism is the core of modern philosophy. But the practice, legitimacy and validity of criticism always imply to find or establish a universal or common ground, a "corner stone" or a "truth". The problem is that this ground or truth have become themselves objects of inquiry and criticism. Deconstruction expresses the moment when criticism itself is under criticism in order to reduce and overcome cultural presuppositions and historical prejudices. Deconstruction is a progress, a form of advanced criticism. Complexity is a practical version of deconstruction.

Zhang Longxi explained how the idea of complexity raises issues reaching beyond the opposition between universalism and relativism. But these issues reach also beyond the distinction between National and Global, between identity and recognition. Zhang Longxi refers to the Hegelian source of this opposition and he explains how to overcome an opposition, which has become an epistemological obstacle. He explains that the source of universalism is the projection of the self-expressed difference of a given culture as a globalized norm. Universalism is an exclusivist version of an "imagined" cultural or national difference. From the perspective of complexity, the opposition between universalism and relativism vanishes. What emerges as a field of study is the complexity of interactions, the joint formation and co-evolution of intertwined subjectivities, the emergence of collective behaviors unpredictable from the point of view of political institutions and economic rationality.

As conceived by Zhang Longxi, complexity defines a field of research as well as method to analyze the objects of this field. To deconstruct is to complexify. Dissolving at a given level entities proper to another level is to *complexify*, to make more complex. To

¹⁵ Title : "East Asia in the Globe: beyond Universalism and Relativism".

¹⁶ See for instance "Translation" in *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 23, No. 2-3, 71-78 (2006).

introduce complexity, a new level of complexity in Human Sciences, is therefore a major progress. The practical consequences are many: to admit as a methodological perspective the complexity of East Asia transforms the comparison of broad entities, like Chinese or Japanese cultures, identities, economies, etc, into the analysis of the links, influences, interactions within and between these entities¹⁷. At this level, opposing “between” and “within” is not relevant. The formation of broader entities can be better explained from the point of view of these interactions. This applies most of all to the quasi-metaphysical opposition between “East” and “West”. This opposition is the ultimate epistemological obstacle in Human and Social Sciences, because research proves the constant historical flux of interactions between the two. To complexity pseudo-categories like “Europe”, the “West” or the “East is to dissolve them. To free the Humanities from these oppositions is to open a wide field of research, typical of the Globalization age. Globalization is an age of “creolization¹⁸”.

“Hybridization” and “creolization” are other names given to the problem of subjectivity and complexity. These notions are theoretical perspectives based on the problem of “difference” developed in the last forty years in the Humanities and Social Sciences, then in the media, politics and international relations. The search for diversity is the source of the search for identity and recognition. But it is first of all a search and experience of difference. Difference is a cognitive attitude and methodological requirement which question pre-formed entities, institutions, conventions, ideologies and discourses at the basis of societies, economies, cultures and religions. Global Studies open a world of differences and dissolve imagined entities. This explains why Global Studies are converging toward issues of subjectivity and power. Power on the formation and development of the Self, of social relations and collective representations. But, in accordance with the work of Michel Foucault, power means also empowerment of subjects and subjectivities, of their experience and ethics as well as their capacity to produce and share knowledge.

3. Overcoming Essentialism

The internalization of East-Asian Studies has been transforming Human Sciences for years. Globalizing Human Sciences is also reshaping Globalization because it transforms it

¹⁷ The complexity of relations, influences and interactions in East Asia is the object of the CEO research program accomplished by Kanagawa University, *Systematization of nonwritten Cultural materials for the Study of Human Societies*. See <http://www.himoji.jp/index.html>. My paper “Digital anthropology: the Internet as virtual museum” (*Interpreting Human Culture through nonwritten materials*, Yokohama, Kanagawa University, Bulletin n° 4, 2007, p 3-34. <http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00360153>), I argue p 28-32 that this research is redrawing maps of East Asian cultures and societies.

¹⁸ I refer here to the work of Edouard Glissant.

into an open field of inquiry and criticism. Concepts are reconstructed, problems redefined. A major outcome of the Taipei colloquium is a repeated criticism and even call for an overcoming of essentialism. Essentialism is a thought pattern, which reduces differences to identities. It supposes that each identity is grounded in an essence. In return, this essence is considered as the trans-historical source of this difference and identity. To fight for one's identity and recognition is to rediscover or invent a lost or repressed essence. Differences are reduced to identities. Conceptions of an "imagined" essence are many. But essentialism is both presupposed and *imagined* by national studies and of nationalist ideologies. At a broad level, national similarities can indeed be observed and should indeed be studied as such. But it is wrong to infer from similarities or "family resemblances" (the notion used by Huang Chun-chieh), the existence of an essence.

From this point of view, the opposition between East and West is obsolete. Edward Said's legacy is to question the relevance of this opposition. When Edward Said explained how the West had invented the "Orient"¹⁹, he was explaining that there was no essence of the Orient. European "high and low" culture had constructed a set of features as proper to the Orient and had projected these features as the essence of the Orient. But the construction of an essence of the Orient was also a construction of an essence of the West. If there is an Orient, there needs to be another entity according to which this imagined Orient is defined, a non-Orient called the West. By explaining there was no the Orient, Edward Said was also implying there was no Occident. This reciprocal construction and deconstruction of an Orient and an Occident is until today an issue. There was a major dissymmetry: the West is the origin of this construction and its deconstruction is initial task of Global Studies.

This paradigmatic case shows how intertwined are the Orient and the Occident, how essentialism is a pattern of thought which is repressing this reciprocal construction, how it has historically reduced the complexity of interactions to a list of oppositions classifying what is Eastern, Western, Asian, East-Asian, etc. Geographical positions and observed differences are transformed in an ontology through a complex cultural, religious, political and economic process. Refuting essentialism is crucial for Human Sciences at the age of Globalization. Due to the history of both East Asia and Europe, it is essential for both East Asian Studies and European Studies to overcome essentialist biases.

Essentialism is paradoxical, false and dangerous. Essentialism is first paradoxical. If the essence of a cultural, national or regional entity is an object of knowledge, this study is

¹⁹ *Orientalism*, New York, Random House, 1978.

producing cognitive results, which are communicated and debated. The essence vanishes because the cognitive results, which are supposed to be expressions of this essence, become a substitute for this essence. Research presupposes the existence of the essence this search is looking for. Therefore the knowledge of this essence becomes a substitute of this essence and dissolves it. If one decides, for whatever reason, that such an essence indefinitely remains beyond the knowledge produced, this essence is posited beyond knowledge, as an ultimately unknowable source. How something, which cannot be fully known, can be taken as the essence of a culture or of a region? How does one know that there is something in this culture or region, which always remains beyond actual and potential knowledge, as an endless source of identity and difference? The work undertaken in this colloquium is a criticism of all approaches supposing the existence of “substantive” differences in any given “place”, beyond all possible study by Human Sciences. The definition of this imagined essence is necessarily so broad, confuse and general that it explains anything, everything and nothing: it cannot be communicated, tested, refuted and rectified. It is the “degree zero” and a denial of knowledge. In the end, Essentialism simply asserts that what people have in common is what distinguishes some of them from others.

Secondly, if it is false to assert that this difference is beyond study, it is also false to interpret this difference as a spiritual or transcendental unknown and to transform this unknown into the essence or character of a nation or civilization. Either the content of these differences is observed, studied and communicated. In this case, it becomes an object of knowledge. Or this essence is defined as being beyond word and knowledge. In this case, because it is a non-object of knowledge, it is a myth, a creed, a collective belief or ideology. But all Studies, East Asian, European, American or African, transform creeds or ideologies into objects of knowledge. Therefore the assertion that such an essence is beyond knowledge is false and as such it becomes an object of study.

Thirdly, if essentialist positions are false and are still asserted, then they are dangerous. This danger is clarified by asking the question: who are those stating that there is an essence beyond knowledge and who also pretend to know that such an essence exists and is at the same time unknowable? Another version of the same idea argues that the people of a given nation are the only ones able to understand the spirit of this nation. Foreigners, the others in general, cannot understand it simply because they are foreigners²⁰. This is confusing:

²⁰ For many years, Japan has been a place where one could find many people sharing this creed or prejudice that Japan had an essence, which made it exceptional and that only Japanese could truly understand the spirit or essence of Japan. This idea was a typical feature of Japan's nationalism.

individuals, who assert such ideas are often considered “intellectuals”, like those working in universities and other places of higher learning. But by holding such ideas, these individuals situate themselves outside the scientific community. Because the essence is posited beyond word or knowledge, they implicitly assert that they have a special access to the national spirit or the national essence and that their cultural mission or social duty is to express this essence and communicate it to those, who are not endowed with the same privileged access. The fact that they pretend to have access to an entity, which others cannot know, is not only a contradiction but it is also dangerous: it delineates a community by excluding the non-members, the others, eventually the potential enemies. This pattern of thought contradicts the historical meaning of Globalization: knowledge beyond borders. It also contradicts the advancement of Human Sciences induced by Globalization: an open access to knowledge based on shared problems, issues and methods. It is also a counter effect of a conception of Globalization reduced to industry and trade.

Huang Chun-chieh’s communication offers a good example of this progress: by using the word “Confucianism” in the plural he opens a study of Confucianism within its historical and geographical diversity, without the frequent supposition that Confucianism is the essence of China or the unifying principle of a “Chinese world”. Furthermore, the historical construction of Confucianism, its diverse appropriations and related power struggles, become objects of study with great significance for East-Asian Studies. Another example proves the danger of essentialism. In the second half of the 1990ies, in different sectors of the American intelligentsia and power structure, it became clear that Globalization, this “new world” emerging after the Cold War, was detrimental to US interest and dangerous for US security. In contradiction with the international institutions established after 1945, a new conception of foreign policy and foreign relations was designed in order to identify threats for US interests and security and respond to them. Samuel Huntington synthesized this conception in the late 1990ies²¹: the world is divided into broad areas identified as “civilizations” and each civilization is supposed to have at its source a religion or a transcendental set of belief acting as a religion. This religion (or religious function) is the essence and the defining difference of this civilization. From this essence, are deducted typical collective behaviors as well as a level of danger for American civilization and interests. Because an essence has many variations around a stable core, a consequence was implied: it was necessary to be prepared against potential dangerous actions expressing this essence. Preemptive polices were justified and

²¹ “The clash of civilizations?”, *Foreign affairs*, vol. 72, 1993, n° 3.

even necessary. Samuel Huntington's conception asserted the existence of a Confucian civilization, having its core in China and a sphere of influence covering all East Asia. This analysis intends to make clear that Huntington's conception is essentialist and therefore false, paradoxical and dangerous. If his conception had been a real heuristic hypothesis, it would have produced knowledge on the diversity of regions, societies, histories and cultures. This knowledge would have contradicted the initial essentialist conception, which would have been abandoned. So if Huntington's conception had not been an ideology but a biased hypothesis, we would have never heard of it. The problem with such a conception is not that it is valid or not, but who are those individuals and groups who manipulated such a conception, gave credit to it, promote it and eventually transformed it into a vision of international relations.

A consequence of this criticism of essentialism concerns the distinction between the Humanities and Human Sciences. If the Humanities are producing knowledge, then nothing should distinguish them from Human Sciences²². The difference between the Humanities and the Social Sciences should be a simple problem of definition, convention, field of study and method. But this distinction is often conceived as an opposition. In this case, the Humanities are for object the core values and even the real ground of a society, culture and civilization; the Social Sciences are considered technologies studying how people, nations or societies are organized and how they have been managed and can be managed today. This opposition is false and potentially dangerous: disciplines considered as the Humanities do not have objects or fields of inquiry beyond knowledge, above or below "science". To discriminate the Humanities because they are not "scientific" is a common and potentially dangerous mistake. The difference is a simple problem of definition and convention. The denomination "Human and Social Sciences" intends to overcome this opposition. It also indicates their function: to express and articulate the reflexive process at the core of society.

4. A set of interlocked oppositions

Essentialism is a pattern of thought with many different aspects, with deep presuppositions often difficult to overcome because deeply embedded in established

²² For a more precise réfutation of this distinction, see my report *Emerging Knowledge Societies in the EU and Japan: reconfiguring collaboration in the Social Sciences and the Humanities*. A study for the Delegation of the European Commission to Japan, July 2006, p 18 & 19.

(http://jpn.cec.eu.int/data/current/Rieu_EmergingKnowledgeSocieties.pdf).

“language games. As a pattern of thought and a frame of mind, it is probably as old and common as the distinction between male and female. Essentialism is based on a series of interlocked oppositions. At the age of globalization, criticizing essentialism begins with overcoming the opposition between East and West, the Occident and the Orient and other related oppositions enveloped into it. Drawing a tentative list of these interlocked oppositions is a step forward:

Western	Eastern
Rational	irrational
Universal	particular (local)
Global	local (indigenous)
Knowledge	faith
Science	technics (technology)
Technology	Science (absolute knowledge)
Scientific (positivistic)	intuitive
Science	religion
Hard science	soft science
Social sciences	Humanities
Rationalism	phenomenology
Explicit	tacit
Transactional (contractual)	relational
Work	interaction
Society	community
Rationalization	spontaneous expression
Artificial	natural
Modern	traditional
Capitalist	socialist (society as community)
Advanced	backward
Developed	underdeveloped
Domination	harmony
Predator of Nature	in harmony with nature
The Occident	the Orient

This list finds its source in an exclusivist opposition between separate entities, instead of perceiving or studying the differentiation and interplay presiding over the formation of these entities. These entities do not exist behind high walls. They are just names given to processes associated within one another and which remain intertwined. Furthermore, oppositions on this list are external to evaluative oppositions between Right and Wrong, Good or Bad as well as True and False. What is considered good for some is obviously bad for others. Several value judgments on this list are reversible: what was good in the past might be bad in the present or for the future. Furthermore, this series of oppositions is the source of many different and even contradictory narratives. For instance, western societies are considered masculine, rational, scientific, based on hard science and rationalization. As a result, they are supposed to be capitalistic, advanced and imperialist. This leads to the domination of nature and mankind, to a conception of society based on exploitation and contractual relations between individuals instead of cooperation and harmony. This list of oppositions is a matrix of prejudices. When intellectuals intend to *think*, to build “conceptions” or narratives, these interlocked oppositions are actually controlling and guiding their thought. It is this series of oppositions, which thinks, not the people who reproduce them.

This pattern of thought is therefore an obstacle for effective knowledge. In the age of globalization, at this historical moment when all cultures and societies interact with each other, no society or culture can assert that it has its own separate essence. These interlocked oppositions should be abandoned. They are indeed commonly found in European intellectual history but they also are commonly found in many East-Asian ideologies. This is the reason why East-Asian Studies are transforming Human and Social Sciences, emancipating these disciplines born in Western Europe from their historical presuppositions, potentially transforming the visions Asian and European societies have of themselves and the others. For instance, to presume that there is something like the West and that this *something* can be characterized by instrumental rationality and to presume that there is *something* like the East characterized by relational rationality cannot be substantiated and justified anymore.

5. Conclusion: the age of Global Studies

This 2008 Taipei conference proved that Humanity is leaving behind the period when intellectuals in the East and the West were studying each other in the hope of finding the defining characters of one another. The more we study each other, the more we become part of each other. This does not magically bring peace and harmony but it certainly produces new knowledge. Essentialism is the problem to overcome: when one searches for an essence, an

essence is always found. Each essence is excluding another one²³. Essentialism implies, supposes and leads to the opposition developed by Carl Schmidt between “us” and the “others²⁴”. The Taipei colloquium asked to change this pattern of thought deeply rooted in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Differences do not separate and oppose; they distinguish and associate at the same time. All depends on the cognitive attitude, on the preselected “language game”. Essentialism is just one language game or pattern of thought among others. All over the world, these oppositions are deeply embedded in National Studies. Deconstructing and overcoming these oppositions is a decisive opening for Human and Social Sciences.

Participants in this conference have performed this opening. I simply tried to extract from the communications and debates the main ideas and themes. But these ideas could be formulated only because people from different countries, cultures and disciplines were associated and freely interacted. This is a strong lesson. At the age of globalization, Human and Social Sciences are in a situation where joint research and collaboration are required in order to produce new ideas. Themes of study do not have to be new. What is new is the attitude and method. This conference proved that what makes today a difference is the recognition that transnational and transdisciplinary collaboration is necessary. Particular cultural or academic traditions are certainly able to innovate. But these innovations will have a real impact and meaning when they overcome their cultural borders and become a theme of joint research. Where an idea is born does not really matter anymore. What matters is when an idea becomes a theme of collaborative research. Academic institutions need to adapt fast to this evolution. Finally, the will and understanding required to produce new ideas, to deconstruct, compare and imagine, shape a new Ethics of knowledge, a new Enlightenment. Kipling’s time is past. His famous formula is completely rewritten: the West is not the West, the East is not the East and the two have always met. They need to meet even more in order to generate a shared knowledge on common issues.

²³ The impact of the Globalization process on the theory and practice of political sovereignty is beyond the scope of this study. See my Web site: <http://w7.ens-lsh.fr/amrieu/>; publications; teaching (graduate seminars).

²⁴ In *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George D. Schwab, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996. Original publication: 1927.