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§ 研究討論 §

Making Sense of Time: Towards a Universal Typology of Conceptual Foundations of Historical Consciousness

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Abstract

The article conceptualizes a general theory of cultural strategies to give time experiences in the human world a cultural meaning. It refers to anthropological universals of time experience and related universal cultural strategies of interpreting them. So, **e.g.**, the interpretation of contingency in the change of the human world is done by telling a story. The enormous complexity of time experience and time interpretation is reduced to some general structures and typological differences. It **characterizes** modes of experience, dimensions of ordering it, sense criteria for the interpretation of time, modes of realizing this interpretation and, finally, some ideas about comprehensive developments in the understanding of time across different cultures. This theoretical and typological approach to understand the understanding of time is presented as a means for empirical research, mainly in intercultural comparison.

Keywords: time, historical consciousness, philosophy of history, typology of time interpretation.

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The following argumentation¹ is developed in the context of research dedicated to historiography in a comparative perspective. Such a comparison can be easily done within a cultural context which is grounded on the same or at least on similar principles of understanding the past as history. Substantial research and interpretation of Western historical thinking in a comparative way has been done. It is much more difficult to compare the treatment of the past which leads to historical thinking in an intercultural perspective. Not much work has been done in this field; and such **work** as there is tends to take the most advanced form of historical thinking, namely the Western one, as a parameter, and look at other cultures in terms of similarities and differences. This is where the problem lies; one mode of historical thinking is taken as a parameter of comparison regardless of what the other mode of thinking may be: that leads to a distortion of perspectives.

What can we do to avoid this distortion? First of all there is a need to develop the parameter of comparison in a theoretical way, so that we can check and prove how the perspective of comparison is worked out, what it makes visible and what it tends to obscure or **hide**.² In order to avoid the dominance of the conceptual frameworks of one culture over those of another it is necessary to start this theory by finding and asserting fundamental and universal elements of man's relationship to the past.

Such an anthropology of time concept is abstract and lets all differences vanish. But however generalised it may be, it can serve as a starting point. **In** order to bring differences into view, it is necessary to develop this anthropology of time concepts further into a typology of different categories for making concrete **these** time concepts.

Time is a basic dimension of human life. It is embedded in growth and decline, birth and death, change and continuity. It is structurally distracted

¹ I would like to thank Achim Mittag for extremely valuable comments, critique and hints to Chinese examples. The use of his proposals lies, of course, exclusively in my responsibility.

² Jörn Rüsen, "Some Theoretical Approaches to Intercultural Comparison of Historiography," in *History and Theory, Theme Issue 35: Chinese Historiography in Comparative Perspective* (1996), 5-22.

by contingency and can only be pursued by following temporal perspectives in the cultural framework of human activity and suffering. There is no cultural orientation of human life without a complex interrelationship of memory and expectations. Husserl has characterized the underlying two main intentions of the human consciousness as *retention and protention*.³ The human mind⁴ always mediates both by working through the experience of change and giving it a meaning by interpretation which can function as a source and impulse for future perspectives.

History as **we** are used to understand it, cannot be found in all cultures and all times. But in every human culture the human mind conceptualizes time in a special way so that it distinguishes between different time dimensions related to past, present and future (in a very variable way); and in every **human** culture the experience of the past is brought into a pattern of significance which makes temporal change in the present day world conceivable and understandable and enables people to guide their activities (and suffering) along the line of an idea of change however vague it may be. Then they can understand what change means and how it is related to the human mind, its threats and hopes, its expectations and memories. In all cultures there is one mental procedure and cultural practice which brings about this interpretation in a way that change itself is presented as sense-bearing and significant for the purposes of human activity. This is the universal and fundamental mental strategy of telling a **story**.⁵

³ Edmund Husserl, "Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins", ed. Martin Heidegger, 2nd ed. (Tübingen, 1980).

⁴ Speaking of 'mind', I want to point out that its scope of meaning embraces what in the Chinese tradition was called *hsin* ("the heart-and-mind").

⁵ Cf. Paul Ricoeur's fundamental philosophical analysis: Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*. 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1984-1988). I have discussed narration as a fundamental operation of historical thinking in a closer relationship to historical studies: *Studies in Metahistory*. (Pretoria 1993), 3- 14; *Historische Vernunft. Grundzüge einer Historik I: 'Die Grundlagen der Geschichtswissenschaft'* (Göttingen, 1983); *Rekonstruktion der Vergangenheit. Grundzüge einer Historik II: 'Die Prinzipien der historischen Forschung'* (Göttingen, 1986); *Lebendige Geschichte. Grundzüge einer Historik III: 'Formen und Funktionen des historischen Wissens'* (Göttingen, 1989); *Zerbrechende Zeit. Über den Sinn der Geschichte*. (Köln: Böhlau, 2001).

