**relation/关系(Guān Xì)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Final Remarks | YANG Huilin, Erik Guignard | 30 May 2022 |

YANG Huilin: Prof. Erik Guignard's explanation blends perfectly with his mapping of "relation" in the link and exchange made of gifts, the relation to "give, receive and return", the relation positive, negative, neutral and ambivalent, or the relation as a deferred reciprocity, etc., which would greatly reactivate Confucius' interpretation of "do unto others as you would have them done unto you", James Legge's translation in the term of “reciprocity”, and Van Rompuy’s definition of “reciprocity” as “the most important notion in the framework of strategic partnership”.

Erik Guignard: According Pr Yang Huilin, going back to its origin, the word “Guanxi” is derived from the word "Guan" which is originally a bolt for a door, and is later derived from the word "strategic pass" and the word “Xi, tie” is "claw" on top and "silk" on the bottom, which means "to link the silk with the hands”. The original meaning is "to relate to".

Even if the present Chinese word for "relationship" is not easy to translate and so that the phonetic translation Guanxi has to be sometimes used. The original meaning seems however to be not too far from the main meaning of “relationship” in the present European context when used in a very general way to describe or account for interactions between any two entities but, primarily, for human, individual and social, relations.

Looking at the West from a Chinese perspective, Prof. Yang Huilin see a chain of thought that has been in place for over a hundred years: the “relationship” (Beziehung), which Martin Buber called “ontology” to a method of "correlation"[[1]](#footnote-1) (Tillich, Levinas, Bataille … ) and mediation( Badiou), meeting Zhang Dongsun’s idea to distinguish between the Western logic of "identity" in opposition to a Chinese logic of "correlation".

But, he also shrewdly points out that Buber proposes to use “Beziehung” in a meaningful way: It does not inquire into the "components" of the relation, but into the relation as a relation.

Buber, in my opinion, meets here the mathematician Hilbert who, in 1899, renews the concepts of Euclidean geometry whose axioms designate five fundamental relational concepts[[2]](#footnote-2) which are:

* either, in ancient logic, dependent or secondary to the terms they unite (for instance: “X is the friend of Y” unites two logical terms united by the predicate of the relation).
* or, according to a new logic, independent or primary to the terms (persons, objects , facts, events or concepts, etc…) they unite. Thus, relationships can now be combined between themselves into complex networks, beyond simple dyadic relationships.
* This logic may be relevant for correlations, for instance yin-yang complementary thinking; it is also at the root of the ceremonial networks of gifts highlighted by M. Mauss, of C. Lévi-Strauss's “generalized” cycles, and of deferred or non-deferred reciprocal exchange whether dual or triangular (antithetic or mediatized, …).

Among the multitude of definitions of “relation-guanxi “, may I underline as a concluding remark, that the human relationships have their own specificities by the importance of the ethics that run through them and requires to distinguish the relations centered on a personal ego-pragmatism (cost/benefice, …) from the relations governed by a community ethics (family and friendship relations, …). In China, the distinction between family and non-family relations dates back to ancient China when Confucius prescribed a governance frame- work of five cardinal relations known as wu lun (五伦): emperor-official, father-son, husband-wife, elder brother-younger brother, and friend-friend, prototypes for extra-familial relations. In Europe, the family relationships are still deeply rooted by two millennia of Christianity, mixed by two hundred years of republicanism...

1. A correlation proposes or states a logical relation (whether scientifically proved or assumption under current test or not) between things, facts, events or concepts: *A is to B as C is to D* … or a causal relationship when Darwin suggest that the loss of vigor of herds of cows is linked to the presence of cats (via the relational chain between cats, field mice, wasps, rape). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Membership, order, congruence, parallelism, and continuity [↑](#footnote-ref-2)