



Opinion

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Culture Renovating Society: The Uses of Humanities— —From Perspective of Cultural Industries and Digitalization's Integration

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Abstract

Many humanities researchers are confused about the social and practical value of their professional researches which they think can only survive in ivory tower. In fact, humanities was organically and directly related to human life and living at birth, but it was separated from them by some events in thought history. The integration of cultural industries and digitalization can provide opportunities for humanities to get involved into social reality. Such involvement may be generalized as "culture innovating society". It cannot help humanities to return to its original state, but it can make it play a solid role in social reality with cultural attitude, which explained the uses of humanities.

Keywords: Cultural industries; Culture; Digitalization; Humanities; Uses.

Humanities analyzes, explains, and deals with various problems related to human's life and living on cultural dimension, objectively and profoundly, expressing sincere and deep humanitarian concern, as it is basic science. However, many humanities researchers, including who are known as experts and the ones in famous humanism university such as Shandong University, are confused about the social and practical value for their professional researches. Such confusion is not only confined to one country but pervades the whole international academic community. Humanities, seems to be surviving only in ivory tower, solely valuable for pure theory exploration, as it is far away from the actual society. It neither directly solves problems in practice, nor helps for seeking stable social position, within ordinary understandings. This paper, therefore, borrowed Angela McRobbie's "the uses of cultural studies" and combined with the new trend of historical

development of cultural industries and digitalization's integration, hoping to make a clear explanation for the "uses" of humanities.

Why humanities is regarded as "useless"? Although current humanities is basic science, its fetching, analyzing, explaining and solving problems are rational and representational, instead of grasping reality without obstacles. Humanities, in fact, was organically related to human life and living at birth. It can even be regarded as a life and living style. In pre-Qin period, the philosophies of various schools of thought represented by Confucius, Mencius, Laozi and Zhuangzi, all derive from the thinkers' own life experience, most of which reflecting in daily dialogues with kings, friends and students. In ancient Greece, similarly, the philosophies of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras and others are also the direct observation and understanding of life by the thinkers themselves, which are also usually presented in the form of prose or daily

dialogue. These works of Chinese and Western philosophers also have literary and historical value, which can be seen as the source of humanities. Generally speaking, humanities' separation from human life and living started from Dong Zhongshu's "deposing all schools of thought and respecting confucianism alone" in China. However, in the west, it began from the Christian rule of "unification of politics and religion" in middle age. "Deposing all schools of thought and respecting confucianism alone" set up the theoretical presupposition of Confucian ideology for humanities, making it representation for Confucian ideology unconsciously. The Christian rule attached the missionary responsibility to humanities, making it tool for "interpreting scripture" insensibly. All these cut off the organic connection between humanities and human life, giving birth to humanities' academic rationality and representationality.

Although, later, China had the May 4th New Culture Movement and the "letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend", "emancipating the mind and seeking truth from facts" initiatives advocated by government; and West had a series of ideological emancipating movements as Enlightenment, Romanticism, Modernism and Post-Modernism, etc., the organic relationship between humanities and human life has not been fully resumed, whether in using terms, thinking mode or expression logic. It still creates a space separated from daily life unconsciously. This makes humanities extremely difficult to involve into social realities.

At the end of the 20th century, the British Blair government advocated promoting national economic development through creative industries, which is known as cultural industries in China. The advocacy got results. UNESCO highly affirmed it in World Culture Report published subsequently. Therefore, the cultural industries has gained the public opinion attention and policy support from governments in various countries, constituting organic part of politics and economy for almost all the nations. Integrating with digital technology, the importance of cultural industries to political, economic and cultural development of countries has become increasingly prominent. Under such context, relationship between humanities and social reality has also presented a new trend for development. This new trend provides an opportunity for current humanities intervening in social reality.

The present academic community reaches agreement for taking cultural industries as complex of culture and industries, but has no consensus on whether culture leads the industries or otherwise. As far as China is concerned, the emphasis on industries leading culture will, to a certain extent, liberate social productive forces and stimulate creative vitality of culture. This is also necessary for development of domestic social modernization. Nevertheless, in the long run, if cultural industries would continue to play an important role in political, economic and cultural development of a country, it is still necessary to adhere to culture's guidance on industries.

The reason lies that, if on the contrary, the industries will not only fall into cultural development alienation, but, to a certain extent, destruct dynamic balance among politics, economy and culture, resulting in abnormal economic development and driving a country's social order into chaos.

For the reasons above, digital technology's integrating with cultural industries in fact also needs culture's guidance, as its deep involvement into human social activities makes human society rapidly enter into "accelerated era". Such "acceleration" is not only reflected on the production level, but on the consumption level of human society. Under such context, cultural industries consumers will not content with the attentive experience, spiritual precipitation, aesthetic meaning and ideological idea of culture, but will pursue to occupy cultural products as many and as quickly as possible. This makes their cultural understandings perfunctory, even being trapped into certain luxury and conspicuous consumption. With digital technology's thrusting, alienated cultural consumption can constantly force society to expand cultural reproduction. There will be a contradiction between rapid and unlimited expansion of reproduction and cultural content of cultural products, which will result in mass reproduction and shoddy manufacturing for cultural products, producing batches of "pseudo-culture" with only cultural appearance, but no cultural connotation, imbued with hypocrisy and empty. To enter into cultural consumption orbit and complete cultural capital cycle as soon as possible, the "pseudo culture" will cater to audience's low-level consuming psychology to great extent, even at expense of transmitting morbid, stimulating, anxious and panic emotions. As it is going on, the society will not only just fall into "predominant one-dimensionality" [1], but even worse. If the integration of cultural industries and digitalization would build a virtuous circle of "production—consumption" for cultural industries, leading relationship between cultural industry and politics, economy, culture into healthy and orderly track, establishing ecological human social development structure, it really needs guidance from accumulated and in-depth culture. Such culture usually comes from profound reflection on cultural issues.

Humanities, on the whole, is profound reflection on current cultural issues. Such in-depth reflection will not only consider how to correct "accelerated" cycle of cultural capital in context of digital integration, but also concern about what kind of culture should be built with digital integration, and how to deal with the relationship among national heritage, modern development, digital integration and international communication of culture in the process of building new culture. The ecological relationship among new political situation, economic development and audience psychology is being discussed, as well, under the background of culture and digitalization integration. Such thoughts will be carried out over several dimensions, and eventually form a certain consensus on new culture. At the same time, the disadvantages of

cultural industries and digitalization integration will be eliminated in an appropriate way, and the ecological balance among culture, politics and economy of a country and even the world can be built through cultural industries.

Of course, the intervene of humanities in current reality does not mean that it is to be giving up academic rationality and representationality, nor does it mean that it will establish its authority by displaying “academics” anywhere anytime. Although Confucious ideology and Christianity seperated humanities from human’s real life and living, they have already been inoculated into history of humanities,forming its body. Therefore, humanities can neither get rid of academic rationality and representationality rootly , nor return to the situation directly related to human real life as it did in pre-Qin and ancient Greece.And in the context of cultural industries and digitalization integration, it is also impossibly to deny changes which has already happened. It will use many new methods of social sciences such as investigation,statistics and quantitative management,in order to grasp, analyze, explain and solve new problems, and as well as natural sciences such as mathematical calculation, chemical evaluation and information management. It will also add more accurate and appropriate terms and expression logics to describe new problems and new phenomena. And it will pay attention to dealing with relationship between political and economic system when adapting to integration of cultural industries and digitalization as well. Thus, in context of integration of cultural industries and digitalization, humanities can strengthen interdisciplinary awareness and increase interdisciplinary methods as maintaining the original in-depth understanding of culture and becomes more popular and flexible in using terms and expression logic. Meanwhile, it will also pay attention to handling its relationship with ideology and industrial mechanism strategically, under digitalization background. Then, even with the help of the latter two, humanities can spread its conclusions to the public in forms of policy or popular culture. This kind of communication will help humanities, which was originally confined in ivory tower, directly to intervene in reality and produce effect.

As what has been concluded above, the integration of cultural industries and digitalization can be regarded as providing opportunities for humanities to involve into social reality through reflecting cultural issues. So, such intervention is not only a simple cultural communication, but shoulders responsibility for educating and enlightening audience. It also has the function of constructing ecological development structure for human society. Then, we can summarize it as culture “renovating society” [2]. The “renovating” does not just mean improving management and governance, but also mean renewing one’s knowledge and understanding. Therefore, we can use culture “renovating society” to summarize the “uses” of humanities in context of cultural industries and digitalization integration.

Culture “renovating society” may not help humanities return to its original state directly related to human life, under background of cultural industries and digitalization integration, but it can make it play a solid role in social reality with a cultural attitude. What Henry David Thoreau wrote in *Walden* is:“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to reach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived ”[3]. Perhaps there will be one day in the future, culture “renovating society” will enable everyone in the world understand Thoreau’s words and voluntarily put it into practice, acquiring “bright heart” praised by Wang Yangming. Thus,human beings may be able to establish a relationship of real equality, fraternity and mutual assistance, and join hands in a new civilization by then. And in such civilization, the boundary between culture and material, culture and technology may have disappeared. Culture will become the basis of social production and the basic organization of social life. Then, could we take it as a more profound level of “uses” for humanities? Maybe we could.

So, the “uses” of humanities can be generalized as constructing ecological humanism developing structure for society by educating and enlighting human beings under background of cultural industries and digitalization’s integration at present, and laying basis for social production and life organizing system in the future. This uses can also be named as culture “renovating society”, if we would like to recall the the title of the article and what we discussed about the humanities’ intervening opportunity provided by integration of cultural industries and digitalization.

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Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest

References

1. Herbert Marcuse (2002) *One-Dimensional Man:Studies in the ideology of advanced industrial society*,London and New York: Routledge, pp. 69.
2. Culture “renovating society” is expressed in Chinese as Culture “Zhi Shi ”. “Zhi Shi” is ancient Chinese term. It contains several meanings, including managing and governing the world. As “Zhi” is a phonetic loan character to “reach”, the term also means “doing research to make the world understand”, which can be equally taken as “doing research to educate public”. (See Dictionary Editing Team, Institute of Language Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (2000) *The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary*, The Commercial Press, pp.1623.) Then, Culture “Zhi Shi” in fact means both cultural managing and governing society and cultural educating public. However, the exactly same expression in English is quite hard to find. So, we select “renovating society” to express.
3. Henry D. Thoreau (2004) *Walden: The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, pp. 90.