New Interpretation of Western Semiotics from the Perspective of Symbolic Concepts in *Zhouyi*

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Abstract

Semiotics is one of the core concepts in contemporary philosophy, linguistics and many other ideological fields. Although it is a new discipline founded in the 20th century, researchers from both the East and the West have studied the phenomena of symbols for a long time. Western semiotics came into existence as a new discipline during the 1960s, whose origin could be traced back to ancient Greek philosophy. In ancient China, there was no concept of semiotics, but Chinese ancestors practiced divination by some special symbols, which might be considered the sprouts of semiotics. Those methods in divination were called *Lianshanyi* in the Xia Dynasty and *Guizangyi* in the Shang Dynasty. In the Zhou Dynasty, the forms of divinations and their explanations were more plentiful, which were collectively called *Zhouyi*, posing as "the leading classics and the source of 'Tao'". The study on *Zhouyi* found that its symbolic concepts possessed explainable relevance to those in Western semiotics represented by Saussure, Peirce and Morris, especially between the three key elements: "hexagram image", "hexagram judgment" and "hexagram meaning" in *Zhouyi* corresponding to the three core formulas: "Sign = Signifier + Signified", "Sign = Relation (Medium, Object, Interpret)" and "M = ME + MP + MF" of Western semiotics. The study suggested that exploration into the symbolic concepts of ancient Chinese philosophical classics might provide new perspectives for the interpretation of Western semiotics.

Keywords: Western semiotics, Zhouyi, relevance, new interpretation

1. Definitions of Semiotics

The word "symbol" originated from ancient Greek—*Semeion*. It is not only a kind of sign, used to represent other things, but also a carrier of information sent by the communication sides. As early as medieval times, St. Augustine (354-430), an ancient Roman philosopher, defined "symbol" as "something that reminds us of other things beyond impression" (cited in Yu & Ye, 1988, p. 12), which boasted a long-term influence on the academic field. There have been many definitions of "symbol" in modern times, which can be divided into three categories based on phenomenological thought, logical psychology and the dual meaning of both. Although the definitions of "symbol" are different, its core meaning is "the material carrier of equal and shared information" (Wang, 2004, p. 13), which highlights its materiality, representativeness, equivalence and conventionality. Whitney (1827-1894), an American linguist, put forward for the first time that "language is a sign that can be spoken and heard and it is mainly through this sign that human thoughts can be expressed" (cited in Liu, 1995, p. 81). Whitney was highly acknowledged by Saussure for bringing linguistics into the right orbit, especially emphasizing the arbitrariness of symbols (Hu & Ye, 2010, p. 47).

Semiotics is regarded as one of the most core theories in contemporary philosophy and other ideological fields. As an emerging science, there are many definitions of semiotics: Eco (1976, p. 7) described it as any subject regarded as a symbol; Tobin (1990, p. 68) defined it as a general philosophical theory to study the generation and function of symbols and symbolic symbols as part of the code system for information exchange; Crystal (1985, p. 275) generalized it as the science of the characteristics of natural or artificial information systems; Hartmann (1981, p. 311) summed it up as a systematic study of verbal symbols, non-verbal symbols and so on. The author deems that semiotics itself is in the process of dynamic change, so it is difficult to have a unified definition.

2. Semiotics in the West

Although semiotics is a new discipline founded in the early 20th century, it has existed for a long time. Taking ancient Greece, the cradle of Western civilization as an

example, the study of semiotics originated from the field of philosophy: Hippocrates (460 BC-370 BC) was regarded as the "Father of Semiotics", Plato (427 BC-347 BC) reflected the relationship between the name (symbol) and the reality (meaning) in his *Cratylus*, and Aristotle (384 BC-322 BC) discussed the issue of symbols in *Rhetoric* and *The Organon*. The Stoics pointed out that the relationship between "object, symbol and meaning" should be distinguished; Epicureanism published the monograph *Designis*. Semiotics focused on the semiotic process, which mainly included three layers: signification, communication and interpretation. In the semiotic system used by human beings, language played a dominant role.

The concept of modern semiotics originated from two distinguished scholars: "the Father of Modern Linguistics" (Culler, 1976, p. 7)—Saussure of Switzerland (1857-1913) and "the Giant among American Philosophers" (Preucel, 2006, p. 38)—Peirce (1839-1914). They put forward "modern semiotics" almost at the same time: Saussure emphasized that semiotics was a system of meaning that regarded linguistics as the most important constituent element, focusing on social functions. Peirce insisted that human beings not only represented and interpreted reality to participate in the process of meaning, but also used symbols, focusing on the logical functions, with the former being expressed as "semiology", and the latter as "semiotics" (Yue, 1994, p. 27). Although Saussure and Peirce were the forerunners of semiotics, the appearance of the *Principles of Semiotics* of Barthes (1915-1980) in 1964 marked that semiotics officially became a discipline (Wang & Song, 2005, p. 9). From then on, research on modern semiotics was further expanded in the United States, the former Soviet Union and other countries. In January 1969, the International Association of Semiotics Society (IASS) was founded in Paris, France with the publication of *Semiotica*, which was considered a remarkable sign of modern semiotics.

Saussure's linguistic thought was embodied in the *Course in General Linguistics*, which was compiled and arranged by his students. He envisaged "the establishment of a science to study the life of signs in society—semiotics to explore the compositions and laws of signs" (Hu, 1988, p. 294). He defined language as "a system of signs to express ideas" (Saussure, 1980, p. 37), believing that language was a science based on signs and meanings. Signs consisted of two parts: the signifier and the signified. The former was the psychological imprint of sound, while the latter was the meaning expressed by words or signs. He emphasized that language signs had two

characteristics: arbitrariness and linear sequence. In addition, he pointed out that (1) language was always a system used by social members and the speaker accepted it passively, so it had continuity; (2) the things represented by linguistic signs and the forms of signs themselves could be changed with the passage of time, so language was in the process of continuous evolution and development. Saussure's theory indicated the direction for human signs and linguistics and took language structure as a possible starting point for the study of signs.

Peirce emphasized that "nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign" (Peirce, 1933, p. 308). He defined that a sign is something that stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity with the nature of "trichotomy" (p. 303). The three elements related to the function of signs were: the Medium (M) indicating something to someone, the Object (O) being indicated, and the Interpret (I) causing meditating. He listed a variety of "sign triad classification systems", of which the core category was divided into index, icon and symbol as the relationship with the object. The semiotics founded by Peirce included all the "natural" and "conventional" signs, which mirrored the accumulation from Plato, Aristotle and other Greek philosophers.

Cassirer (1874-1945) constructed the cultural philosophy of "symbolic form", whose systematic thoughts were mainly embodied in the multi volumes of *Philosophy of Symbolic Form* and *Human Relations*. He argued that human beings were the animals that made symbols, who in practice reflected, explained, and understood the world by making symbols. It was through symbols that human beings created culture. Symbols made the natural world cultural and the natural human cultural. In his view, human beings, symbols and culture were the "triad" (Cassirer, 1981, p. 3).

Barthes (1915-1980) drew on the semiotic thoughts of Saussure, Hjelmslev and other linguists to form his own semiotic theory. He proposed that semiotics was a branch of linguistics and opposed to Saussure's research method of emphasizing "language/langue" rather than "speech/parole" (Barthes, 1964); he also believed that the signifier and the signified of semiotics were different from those of linguistics (Huang, 1992, p. 2).

Morris (1901-1979), an American philosopher, is one of the founders of modern semiotics. He had a wide and in-depth understanding of symbols, pointing out that symbols were all "pointed" things, including both verbal and non-verbal symbols. In his monograph, Morris (1946) emphasized that semiotics research covers three kinds

of relationships: "symbols and objects (ME)", "symbols and persons (MP)", and "between symbols (MF)". Semiotics belonged to the research objects of semantics, pragmatics and syntactics, respectively. It was the sum of these three disciplines, belonging to the concept of "meta science". Accordingly, on the basis of the concept of symbol and its related terms, the central subject of semiotics was "the mode of signifying". Morris' main contribution was the classification of five elements, including: sign, interpreter, interpretant (or interpretation), denotatum (or denotation) and significatum (or signification) (Wang, 2004, p. 130).

Nowadays, the theoretical research systems of semiotics include: the Saussure theory system of Switzerland, the Peirce theory system of the United States, the Morris theory system of the United States, the Barthes theory system of France, the Eco theory system of Italy, the Jacobson theory system of the United States, and the Bakhtin (Бахкин) and Lotman (лоттман) theory systems of the former Soviet Union (Wang & Song, 2005, p. 14). There are four development models of semiotics: Saussure's linguistic model, Peirce's logic rhetoric model, Cassirer's cultural semiotics model and Bakhtin's formal research culture model. All of these make semiotics an international research subject.

3. Semiotics in China

Zhao Yuanren, a famous Chinese linguist, put forward the Chinese term "符号学" (semiotics) in an article written in 1926 (Zhao, 2012, p. 5). He also proposed to provide the English equivalent expressions as "symbolics, symbology or symbolology" (Wu & Zhao, 2002, p. 177), which had not been utilized by Western semiologists. After that, the study of semiotics was unfortunately inactive for decades, only to appear in the translation of foreign works and documents. In 1983, Jin Kemu, a famous Chinese scholar, published *On Semiotics* in the journal *Reading* (No. 5), which was regarded as the first article with original Chinese concepts of semiotics (Zhao, 2012, p. 6). In 1986, Lin Gangyu's *Symbol-Psychology-Literature* might be the first monograph on semiotics in China. In 1988, Li Youzheng, Zhao Yiheng, and Zhang Zhiting, etc. held a semiotics seminar in Beijing, which was the first meeting of the Chinese semiotics circle. After the seminar, a Semiotics Research Association was established. In 1993, Zhao Yiheng defined symbols as "the perception carrying

meaning: meaning can only be expressed by symbols, and the purpose of symbols is to express meaning", and semiotics as "the doctrine of meaning activity" (Wu & Zhao, 2002, p. 177). On May 18, 1994, the Chinese Association for Language and Semiotic Studies was founded in Soochow University. In 2009, *Chinese Semiotic Studies* was published with academic papers representing the research results of Chinese scholars in the field of Cognitive Semiotics. In May 2017, Nanjing Normal University, Sichuan University, Soochow University, Tianjin Foreign Studies University and Northwest Normal University established the "China Semiotics Base Alliance".

At present, the research topics of semiotics in China mainly include the study of the basic theories of semiotics, the study of semiotics, the application of semiotics, and the study of semiotics in literature, culture and other fields. The concept of semiotics is mainly based on the reflection and induction of human knowledge, failing to absorb the Chinese classical philosophy that could be an important source for the study of semiotics in China. *Shuowenjiezi* (*A Dictionary of Etymology*, 《说文解字》), compiled by Xu Shen in the Han Dynasty (202 BC-220 AD), is the first Chinese dictionary, which contains abundant semiotics to interpret the Chinese characters as a symbol system and embodies the core ideas of language and characters, including the nature, source and evolution, body structure, font and meaning relationships of the Chinese characters. As for the origin of the Chinese characters, it was recorded in *Zhouyi* (also known as *The Book of Changes* or *I Ching*, 《周易》) that "In ancient China, Pao Xi (Fu Xi) was the Dominator under the heaven. He looked up into the sky to observe the celestial phenomena, looked down on earth to discern the seasonal changes, geographic features, colorful patterns of feathers and furs on birds and beasts, and then concerned signs and symbols near and far to create the 'Eight Trigrams' (八卦) as a means to manifest the virtues of mysterious gods and the natures of myriad things" (Xu, 1991, p. 373). The surface layer of "image" (xiang, 象) is "the imprint of birds and beasts", which was actually the category of semiotics, corresponding to the surface layer. It was also emphasized that "sages set up images to fulfill their meanings, and 'hexagrams' (gua, 卦) to express all the truths and falsehoods". Both "images" and "hexagrams" indicate that ancient Chinese philosophers created the symbol system on the desire to express their thoughts.

4. Relevance of *Zhouyi* to Western Semiotics

As early as the Xia and the Shang Dynasties (22nd century BC-12th century BC), the ancestors predicted the future through symbols, having the budding thought of "semiotics". In the Xia Dynasty, there appeared *Lianshanyi* (《连山易》) (Shennong, 神农, The Agricultural God, also named Lianshan) and *Guizangyi* (《归藏易》) (Huangdi, 黄帝, The Yellow Emperor, also named Guizang) in the Shang Dynasty. In the Zhou Dynasty (from the 11th century BC), King Wen of the Zhou (周文王) created *Zhouyi*. During the Spring and Autumn Period (770 BC-476 BC) and the Warring States Period (475 BC-221 BC), ancient Chinese scholars launched a "hundred schools of thought contend" (百家争鸣) on the "dispute of name (名) and reality (实)" that could be regarded as the origin of the initial symbol ideas of the Chinese philosophers, with "name" being similar to today's "symbol". The arguments on "the relationship between name and reality" have become the debate on the relationships between concepts and things (thought and existence), and evolved into the most fundamental philosophical issue (Xiao, 1989, p. 8).

The Chinese Taoists took "Eight Trigrams Taiji Diagram" (八卦太极图) as the core symbol. Laozi (老子) proposed the ontological thinking of cosmological philosophy on the connotation of things represented by symbols, that is, the relationships between language, symbols and "Tao". *Zhouyi*, known as "the leading classics and the source of 'Tao'", belonged to the cultural and ideological phenomenology of the Chinese civilization. It was the only Chinese classical works that combined "symbol" and "trigram" organically. It consisted of two parts: *Yijing* (*Text*，《易经》) and *Yizhuan* (*Appendices*，《易传》). *Yijing* was composed of 64 Hexagrams (卦) and 384 Yaos (爻). It was the oldest symbol collection in China, which contained the most simple and subtle pattern forms in the history of Chinese philosophy, symbolizing the basic changes of everything. The hexagram possessed the features of both pictograph and symbol with the universal characteristics of the sign. It was the most perfect system with the most logical and abstract structure. As the cultural gene of the Chinese nation, symbolic thought determined the development trend of the Chinese pictograph. "As the carrier of connecting heaven and man, the symbol system of Yi Studies (易学) shows the ontological consciousness, cognitive method and human feelings of ancient Chinese philosophers" (Xu, 2013, p. 2).

"Hexagram image" (卦象), "hexagram judgment" (卦辞) and "hexagram meaning" (卦意) were the three core elements to realize the symbol process of *Zhouyi*. They connected the symbol with the meaning and established the system of "the original image (induction)—the broad image (deduction)". *Yizhuan* included seven parts: *Wenyanzhuan* (*Qian-and-Kun Hexagram*，《文言传》), *Tuanzhuan* (*Hexagram Exposition*，《彖传》), *Xiangzhuan* (*Images*，《象传》), *Xicizhuan* (*Introduction*，《系辞传》), *Shuoguazhuan* (*Trigrams*，《说卦传》), *Xuguazhuan* (*Sequence of Hexagrams*，《序卦传》) and *Zaguazhuan* (*Opposite Hexagrams*，《杂卦传》). It revealed the appearance and connotation of "xiang" from different angles and systematically analyzed and interpreted the text of *Yijing* by means of images.

The author deems that the concept, the principle and the essence of connotation in *Zhouyi* achieve the similarities if not the same goal as modern Western semiotics. The whole concept of the triad of "speech, meaning and image" in *Zhouyi* can be considered as the starting point to compare its semiotic concept with that in Saussure, Peirce and Morris' semiotics, respectively.

4.1 *Zhouyi* and Saussure's semiotics

Saussure believes that "the essence of language is semiotics. To explore the nature of language, we must first know what it has in common with all other similar semiotics" (Saussure, 1980, p. 39). According to the characteristics of Saussure's semiotics, a sign is divided into two inseparable parts: the signifier and the signified. The former is the phonetic image of sign; the latter is the conceptual part of it. The "binary entity", composed of the two, is called "sign".

Since then, many scholars at home and abroad have extended the "signifier" from "sound images" to the "expression forms" of the language, including auditory form (i.e. phonetics) and visual form (i.e. writing). For example, Sapir's famous work *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech* (1964) said that sound was not the essence of the language, because language signs could easily be transferred from one sense to another, such as from auditory signs to visual signs. The essence of the language did not lie in the external means of expression and transmission, but in its internal aspects as a mode of thinking. In the *Dictionary of Semiotics* compiled by Martin and Ringham (2000, p. 123), the signifier was defined as the concrete world of sound and vision; the signified referred not only to the "concept", but also

to the "meaning". Therefore, the expression of "the signifier and the signified being equivalent to the form and the meaning" appeared in many works and textbooks (Wang, 2007, p. 59).

Figure 1: Relevance of *Zhouyi* to Saussure's Semiotics
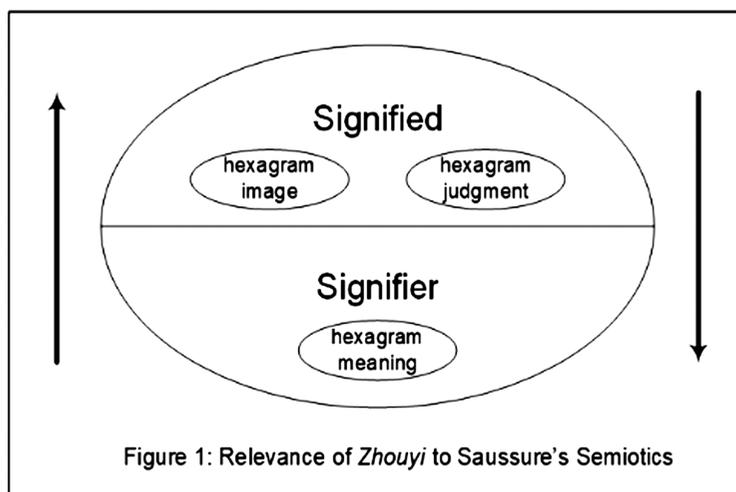
Saussure's semiotics emphasizes that the signifier and the signified are a unity of opposites, and the formula can be expressed as **Sign = Signifier + Signified**, and "the entity of language can exist only by connecting the signifier and the signified. If only one element is kept, the entity will come to a naught" (Saussure, 1980, p. 146). "Xiang" is the core symbol in *Zhouyi*. The relationship between "xiang" (image, 象) and "wu" (thing, 物) is created through association, and "taking images by viewing things" (观物取象) is to generate the image according to the connection between the two. As a symbol (象征), Yixiang (易象) is characterized as a sign (符号). According to Saussure's classification, "hexagram image" and "hexagram judgment" belong to the signified, whereas "hexagram meaning" the signifier (see Figure 1). For example: "Ding" (《鼎》䷱), from the perspective of the hexagram image, looks like a "Ding" (tripod), which is composed of "wind (Xun,《巽》) and fire (Li,《离》)". The wind is blowing below with the fire heating above. The image demonstrates a figurative analogy of diagram relationship. The hexagram judgment presents "Yuan Ji, Heng" (auspicious and smooth, 元吉, 亨), implying "The host follows the client. For the client is intelligent and depends on the host. The situation is favorable for the host and everything will go smoothly". *Tuanzhuan* (*Hexagram Exposition*) interprets it as "with wood and fire", and it can cook delicious food to serve people. In short, Xun

symbolizes smartness and smoothness. *Xiangzhuan* (*Images*) states, "There is fire on the wood, tripod; the gentleman condenses his life on the right position." Divination means symbolism. "Tripod is a great treasure with three stable legs." Burning the wood to cook the food and turning the raw into the cooked signify "ending the old and welcoming the new". The corresponding Yaos are: The first SIX (初六), the tripod is turned upside down; it is easy to make the dregs inside empty. A concubine is taken home to give birth to a son, and no blame is attached to him. The second NINE (九二), the tripod is stuffed with food just as he is resourceful. The emptiness envies him but cannot do any harm to him. He enjoys a good fortune, etc. "Taking images by viewing things" is a combination of graphics and texts in *Zhouyi*. Reading and interpreting it is a process of decoding its text code (meaning) through graphics (images).

One of the major characteristics of Saussure's semiotics is "the binary opposition". Besides "the signifier and the signified", there are also "connotation and denotation", "langue and parole", "paradigm and syntagm", "diachrony and synchrony", etc. However, from *Xicizhuan* (*Introduction*), we can find that "xiang" (象) and "li" (理) are binary opposites: "li" becomes an "image" between the heaven and the earth, so we can obtain "li" by observing all things in the universe and performing Eight Trigrams. In addition, "hexagram image" and "hexagram judgment" symbolize the relationship between form and content: "hexagram image" is the "signified" of the language, and the process of expressing the meaning of hexagram is "hexagram judgment" as the first level of the "signified" to make a preliminary explanation, and then *Yizhuan* as the second level to make further explanation. From the perspective of semiotics, "xiang" in *Zhouyi* contains a similar relationship between the signifier and the signified, which highly embodies the ternary function of symbols: the signifier, the signified and the implication meaning of the explanatory item (Xu, 2013, p. 59).

It should be pointed out that Saussure's semiotics emphasizes the "arbitrariness" (任意性) of languages and signs, while the image system of *Zhouyi* is a dual (two-layer) isomorphic system, in which the essence between the "image" and the "thing" embodies "iconicity" (象似性), and the image reflects the result of "taking images by viewing things". Of course, the emphasis on iconicity does not mean that the author denies the arbitrariness of linguistic signs which is specially emphasized upon in Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*. From the perspective of the Chinese Taoist philosophy, "image" and "thing" are two complementary opposites, embodying the

two key elements of signs.

What's more, Saussure's semiotic theory considers that language is "virtual", just a form of expression of the real world, rather than a substance. Language itself is composed of complex words or a relational structure. In the pre-Qin period of China, "the debate between 'name' and 'reality'" referred to the dispute over the relationship between the language (name) and the world (reality). What we use to talk are the names and what we talk about are the realities. We use the names to describe or imitate the realities which are of primary importance, while the names are secondary. The core concept of Saussure's ideological system is the same as the idea that "name is subordinate to reality", which is repeatedly emphasized by Chinese Taoism.

4.2 *Zhouyi* and Peirce's semiotics

Different from Saussure's analysis of signs with language as the core, Peirce recognizes signs by human thoughts, explores the logical structure of human cognition of the meaning of things, builds the "universal category" of signs on a logical relationship between thinking and judging, and focuses on the logical structure of signs themselves.

Peirce considers that semiotics is a discipline to explore the essential characteristics of signs. His semiotics theory contains the participation of human beings and the scope of nature, that is to say, all that exist in the world are considered as signs, even human beings who participate in the process of symbolic meaning. He also insists that sign refers to the concept of a certain aspect or object representing different objects. He analyzes signs through the relationship among M (medium), O (object) and I (interpret). This formula can be expressed as **S = R (M, O, I)** ("S" is the acronym of "sign" and "R" relation). That is to say: Sign is the medium for someone to indicate the object, which forms the concept and is interpreted by stimulating the senses. These three related elements are the "trichotomy". Any sign should have these three elements; otherwise it cannot be called a complete sign.

Figure 2: Relevance of *Zhouyi* to Peirce's Semiotics
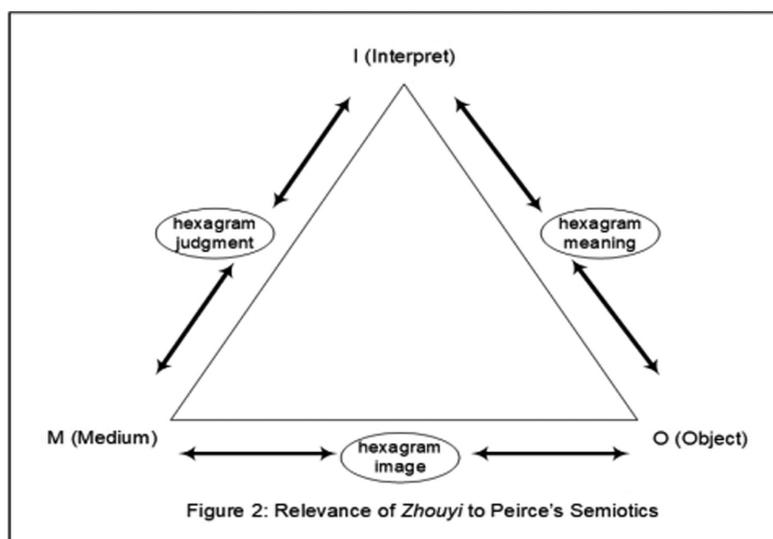
Peirce defines the symbolic connection among "M-O-I" as the process of sign, or the process of "meaning". Max and Walter used a triangle to express Peirce's symbolic nature of "triad" (Max & Walter, 1992, p. 11). In *Zhouyi*, "hexagram image", "hexagram judgment" and "hexagram meaning" are the three elements of symbolic process, relevant to Peirce's "M-O-I" (see Figure 2). The 64 hexagrams in *Yijing* are composed of two groups of eight trigrams, which are arranged in two directions. The names of the hexagrams are Qian (《乾》), Kun (《坤》), Zhun (《屯》), Meng (《蒙》), Xu (《需》), Song (《讼》), Shi (《师》), Bi (《比》), Xiaoxu (《小畜》), Lü (《履》), Tai (《泰》), Pi (《否》), etc., used to express images.

For example, Qian 《乾》, the "hexagram image" is ䷀, symbolizing "the heaven moves constantly, likewise the superior man makes unceasing efforts to improve himself". The "hexagram judgment" embodies: "The first Nine" (初九): The hidden dragon should not act; "The second Nine" (九二): The dragon appears in the field. This is the time for the great man to come out; "The third Nine" (九三): The superior man works hard during the day and remains discreet at night. Therefore, he is free from any harm though in difficulty; "The fourth Nine" (九四): Whether the dragon soars high or remains in the deep, he will be free from harm; "The fifth Nine" (九五): The dragon soars high in the sky, it is the time for the great man to come out; "The sixth Nine" (上九): The dragon has ascended to the zenith and will feel regret. "Hexagram meaning" (to take only the first as an example) states that "the hidden

dragon should not act, for the Yang stirs only under the earth. Literally, it means that the dragon lurks in the water, and the hidden virtue is not obvious. It is a metaphor for a superior to hide his strength and wait for the opportunity in the future. Therefore, "he should not act rashly" (Fu, 2000, pp. 4-5), which means that "although he is not born ordinary, he is still in the cultivation stage and should not take action now".

Peirce (2006, p. 278) further expands that "the signifier or the medium belongs to the first, and it forms a real three-group-relationship with the second of the object, so as to determine the third of the interpret, which must be the same corresponding relationship".

On the basis of the visual and physical connection, *Yizhuan* makes a universal thought, embodying a trivalent relationship with the medium (the first) and the object (the second), connected with the interpret (the third) of Peircean theory. It makes a series of explanations for the first two items of *Yijing*, corresponding to the interpretive body in the ideographic trisection. For example, Jin (《晋》), the "hexagram image" is ䷢, symbolizing "the earth is higher and the fire is lower", which means that the light comes from the earth. It is the visual expression of the image and the sign as "the first". The "hexagram meaning" is that Marquis Kang was favored by the emperor with chariots and horses as gifts and interviewed many times a day. The description of the hexagram connects the image of it with the reality, playing the role of the symbol as "the second". In *Tuanzhuan*, it is written that "when the light comes out of the ground, everything will be smooth and soft. It is the interpretation of the meaning of the hexagram. "Kun" (《坤》, earth) expresses the meaning of the earth and softness, whereas "Li" (《离》, fire) presents the meaning of fire and light. That is "the third" of the symbol.

In *Zhouyi*, hexagram image, hexagram judgment and *Yizhuan* (hexagram meaning) are independent with the unity of mutual interpretation and connection. From the analysis of the processing, it can be found that the three parts of the sign system in *Zhouyi* and Peirce's semiotics have a relevance to a certain degree. Regarding the relationship between *Zhouyi* and images (象), judgments (言) and meanings (意), we can get the three parts of meaning in *Zhouyi*: Images (the images, the first, the media), judgments (the words, the second, the object), and meanings (the biography of changes, the third, the interpret). The three symbol subsystems in *Zhouyi* echo the three parts of Peirce's semiotics.

According to Peirce's classification, the "hexagram image" corresponds to the media, but the "hexagram judgment" and "hexagram meaning" do not exactly correspond to the object and the interpret; The hexagram itself can be regarded as a medium and it can also be interpreted as the meaning content that corresponds to the association of hexagram; the meaning of hexagram includes the object that the symbol of hexagram refers to, and it also constitutes the interpret.

Peirce also divides signs into three types: index, icon and symbol (Peirce, 1988, p. 21). Fang Ren and Lin Haishun (2015, p. 39) summed it up as follows: First, "index" refers to the causal relationship between symbols and concepts, which forms a connection with the object body. Second, "icon" refers to the symbol that is similar to its object in a certain nature, which constructs the object with similarity. Third, "symbol" refers to the combination of a certain rule or concept, which indicates an ideographic symbol. According to Peirce's definition of semiotics, the signs in *Zhouyi* are iconographical with a prescriptive nature, so they belong to iconographical specifies.

4.3 *Zhouyi* and Morris' semiotics

Morris divided symbols into three dimensions in his classic *Signs*, *Language and Behavior* (Morris, 1946, p. 37) with the relationships of "symbols and objects, symbols and persons, and between symbols". He elaborated on the relationship between symbols and objects as "ME" (object), between symbols and persons as "MP" (subject), and between symbols as "MF" (reality). The formula can be expressed as **M=ME+MP+MF**.

Morris deems that semiotics consists of semantics, pragmatics, and syntactics: semantics (symbol + signified) studies the relationship between symbols and thoughts, and the meanings of symbols; pragmatics (symbol + user) studies the meanings of symbols and the applications of symbols; and syntactics (symbol + symbol) studies the idealized symbolic structural relations. From pragmatics to semantics, and then from semantics to semiotics, the scope of research goes through a process of gradual abstraction (see Figure 3). All of these identify with the thoughts of the construction of symbols in *Zhouyi*.

Figure 3: Relevance of *Zhouyi* to Morris' Semiotics
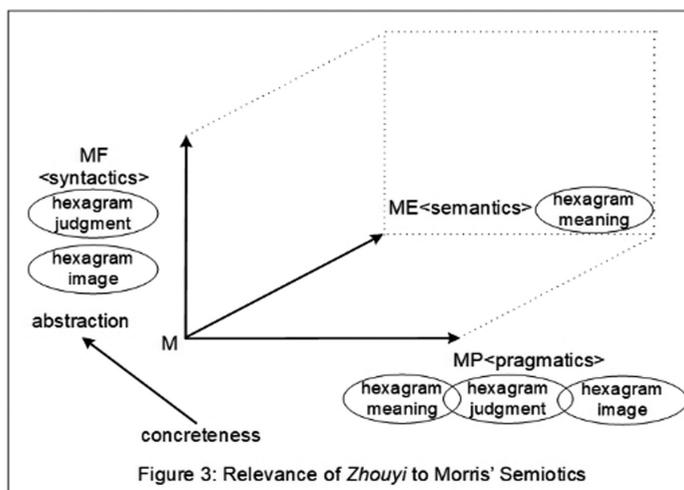
The semantic thoughts reflected in *Zhouyi* are demonstrated in many aspects. Here, the author would like to take the five aspects of "definition", "classification", "category", "word meaning" and "image theory" as examples.

(1) *Yizhuan* is used to define and clarify *Yijing*; for example, Meng (䷃), the original meaning of the hexagram is a kind of grass, with the extended meaning "childish, hoodwinked, and ignorant", etc. The lower hexagram is Kan (《坎》, water) and the upper hexagram is Gen (《艮》, mountain). The combination of the hexagrams and the meanings of "Meng" present an artistic ambience of drizzle and the mist between mountains and rivers. From the perspective of semantics, the interpretation of Meng mirrors the importance of grasping the opportunity to succeed. Enlightenment is to eliminate ignorance and make people grow healthily and cultivate pure and innocent noble quality. It is the approach and cultivate the saints. *Shuogua* in *Zhouyi* can be regarded as a collection of definitions.

(2) Logically, each classification is sorted as its attributes. At the beginning of the *Xicizhuan*, it emphasizes that "birds of a feather flock together". The main meaning of Tongren (《同人》 ䷌) is to distinguish between ourselves and enemies, to get rid of private opinions, to seek common ground in differences and to be with people in order to realize the ideal of the world of great harmony. In *Xiangzhuan*, it is interpreted as an old Chinese saying: "Gentlemen distinguish things by their classes", emphasizing that humans should distinguish and classify things (Fu, 2000, p. 82).

(3) Category refers to the essence of variety, which is a standard for classifying

things. As a propositional structure concept with the highest degree of abstraction, it is the most important and core concept in the philosophy and its logical system. There are many basic categories in *Zhouyi*. Taking "image" (象) as an example, it is a method for the ancients to classify and analyze things as well as a strategy and method to recognize the world. *Xicizhuan* wrote, "In the sky, it creates an image, and on the earth it makes a form" and "images are laid on similarities" (Xu, 1991, p. 349). "Xiang", also known as *Xiangzhuan*, is divided into two parts: *Daxiang* (Hexagram Images, 大象) and *Xiaoxiang* (Linear Images, 小象) to explain the divinatory symbols in *Zhouyi*. In fact, the category theory of the "image" in Zhouyi is a theory of interpretation as well as a theory of meaning.

(4) Word meaning is one of the core contents of semantics research, among which polysemy is the most common phenomenon. Each of the two characters of *Zhouyi* has a variety of interpretations, whose meanings form a system. Take the important term "image" as an example: ① phenomenon (object image) ("现象"或"物象"), such as the natural phenomenon and the social phenomenon; ② sign (迹象), such as the natural changes expressed or implied by the hexagram and the sign of human matters; ③ image (意象), such as the "sages setting up images to fulfill their meanings and using hexagrams to express all the truths and falsehoods"; ④ symbol (象征), such as the "sages viewing the world and describing it like things, which is the reason why they call it image"; ⑤ imitation (效法), such as "from the sky, images hanging to help people judge good and bad, and sages following them". The former four "images" refer to the phenomena, while the latter "image" is a simulation, with the original text of *Zhouyi* stemmed from the imitation of all things in the world; ⑥ model (模型), such as "those making tools still having their own image", etc.

(5) Ancient Chinese Taoism emphasizes that language cannot fully and completely express people's meanings. Laozi insisted that "The Tao which can be expressed in words is not the true and eternal Tao" (Sha & Xu, 1989, p. 1); Zhuangzi deemed that "Tao cannot be expressed by words" (Zhang, 1991, p. 394). In *Yizhuan*, it is said that "Books cannot fully express what the author wants to say, and words cannot express human minds, so it is put forward that "Saints set up images to fulfill their meanings" (Xu, 1991, p. 369). The approach of "image-taking or meaning-taking" is also focused. Ancient scholars laid the emphasis on the discussion of the relationship among "words, images and meanings" and the debate of "xiang" (象) and "li" (理).

The chapter of *Waiwu* in *Zhuangzi* wrote: "Bamboo basket is used to catch fishes, but when you get fish, you will forget the basket; rabbit net is used to catch rabbits, but when you catch rabbits, you will forget the rabbit net; words are used to convey ideas, but when you understand the meanings, you will forget words." (Zhang, 1991, p. 497). The hexagram judgments are used to explain the hexagram images, from which hexagram meanings are elaborated. If we get the hexagram meanings, we can forget the hexagram judgments and the hexagram images. That is to say, the hexagram meanings are more important than the hexagram judgments and images.

Morris was the first to propose the term "pragmatics" in the field of philosophical research (He, 2000, p. 2). The pragmatics thoughts incarnated in *Zhouyi* are embodied between the symbol and the user. As users of symbols, human beings live in a specific time, place and environment, so the meanings of symbols have "context" limitations, while the 64 Hexagrams and 384 Yaos in *Zhouyi* are closely related to the context. Here, the author would like to take three aspects of "time change", "words and actions" and "rhetoric" as examples.

(1) In pragmatics, *Zhouyi* is characterized by the "change". One of the meanings of "Yi" (易) is change itself. The interpretation of the hexagram judgments takes "change" as the core concept, which shows that everything in the world is full of "variables". *Xicizhuan* said, "It is changeable. It is full of six illusions, changed from the top to the bottom. It is easy to be firm and soft. When the sun goes down, the moon rises. When the moon disappears, the sun comes out. In the alteration of the sun and the moon (Notes: the Chinese Character '易' is composed of two components— upper '日' and lower '月'), the cycle is complete" (Xu, 1991, p. 369). Scholars in Western countries generally translate *Zhouyi* into the *Book of Changes*, which presents the importance of "change". The concept of "time" is extended from the "change". In *Yizhuan*, the concept of "time" appears 57 times (Li, 2004, p. 646). For example, in *Tuanzhuan*, the concept of "time and meaning" has been used many times, and the proposition of "moving in order" has been put forward. It is emphasized that gentlemen should conform to the conditions and wait for the time. In addition, the concept of "time and use" indicates the utility of a hexagram at a certain time. "Time" (时) and "change" (变) are the key concepts in the pragmatics of *Zhouyi*.

(2) "Speech act theory" was proposed by Austin, a British philosopher. It is an important aspect of pragmatics in Western linguistic theory. He distinguished two

kinds of discourse: constative and performative (Austin, 1962, p. 51). "Words and actions" in *Zhouyi* share many similarities. In *Zhouyi*, there appear 60 "words" (言) and 125 "actions" (行) (Li, 2004, p. 647), and "words" and "actions" are combined. "Speech" belongs to the "concrete language", which is similar to "parole" rather than "langue". Speech should be cautious, such as "the cardinal of a gentleman in speech and action"; speech should have substance, such as "a gentleman being virtuous and persistent"; speech should have order, such as "order of speech", that is, logical. *Zhouyi* also emphasizes that speech should have criterion and act consistently, etc.

(3) The rhetorical pattern is an important pattern for the formation of Yixiang (易象). The hexagram judgments construct a rich system of "metaphor" by establishing hexagram images to express hexagram meanings. The whole *Zhouyi* is the embodiment of "metaphor", which makes the language Yixiang enough to replace graphics and transmit complex information. Yuxiang (喻象) covers animals, such as dragon, ox, horse, tortoise, fox, crane, falcon, deer, leopard, sheep, genus, etc.; plants, such as willow, thorn, mulberry, wolfberry, melon, tribulus, etc.; human body parts, such as nose, ear, tongue, foot, toe, abdomen, heart, body, etc.; utensils, such as bed, machine, bottle, gui, fou, urn, etc.

Zhouyi possesses a complete concept of semiotics in form: the Hexagram (Gua) is composed of three layers of the "heaven (天), human-being (人) and earth (地)". Each of them can be subdivided into two elements: odd "—" (Yang Yao, a whole line) and even "- -" (Yin Yao, a broken line). The 64 hexagrams are derived from eight single trigrams. The images of eight trigrams and 64 hexagrams are also the links between them. The change of images of Yaos will cause the change of hexagrams, that is, the change of one trigram will cause the change of the whole image of hexagrams, which is generally connected and mutually restricted in *Zhouyi*.

The hexagrams from Qian (《乾》), Kun (《坤》) to Jiji (《既济》) and Weiji (《未济》) are a sequence of causality. The latter hexagrams originate from the former hexagrams, or inherit or oppose to each other. From the perspective of divinatory symbols, the relationship between 64 divinatory symbols is "two two coupling" (两两相偶), that is, each two divinatory symbols is a pair, and they cooperate with each other, which is embodied as "subvert or change" (非覆即变): "subvert" means that the two divinatory symbols are completely reversed, such as Pi (《否》 ䷋) and Tai (《泰》 ䷊) divinatory symbols; "change" means that the six

divinatory symbols of the two divinatory symbols are completely opposite, such as Kan (《坎》☵) and Li (《离》☲) divinatory symbols. *Zaguazhuan* (literally means Opposite Hexagrams) of *Zhouyi* is a document that explains 64 hexagrams as 32 opposites as the names of hexagrams. 64 hexagrams embody the relationship between opposites and transformations between the symbols. There are also "continuing, inheriting, comparing, and echoing" (乘、承、比、应) and "crossing, synthesizing, changing, and interacting" (错、综、变、互) relationships between the two. When formed, different hexagrams are generated due to the structural relationship. This rigorous logical and dynamic relationship enables the simple and complicated hexagrams to reflect the diversity of the whole world.

Morris' trichotomy theory has great contributions to the study of semiotics. It provides a framework or reference system for the study of semiotics. The semiotic system of *Zhouyi* realizes the transition from the abstract hexagram, the symbol to the specific character. What's more, it makes "Chinese Characters" (汉字) the only hieroglyphs in the world handed down from generation to generation.

5. Conclusion

The globalization of semiotics is a bridge linking Eastern and Western civilizations. Although Western semiotics and *Zhouyi* have the characteristic of "heterogeneity", there is such an important combination between them. The essence of symbol lies in its conceptionalness and the basis of symbol is that it can play the feature of "representation". The basis of the connection between semiotics and *Zhouyi* lies in the fact that human beings explain, use and create symbols fundamentally. In essence, symbols are used to communicate ideas, so they are the main means to convey feelings and exchange ideas. The thought of semiotics is not only embodied in specific fields, but also permeates almost all fields of human social activity.

China's long and splendid history and culture, profound philosophy and its unique pictographic characters contain great research potential. The concept and principle of signs proposed in *Zhouyi* are very similar to the basic concepts and discussion scope of modern Western semiotics. The main reason is that *Zhouyi* is a completely self-sufficient system. Although there are not many basic signs, they have strong generating capacity and wide range of interpretation. Its isomorphic and analogical

models build signs into an open large system, which can decipher various cultural codes. Therefore, the concepts and principles of signs put forward in *Zhouyi* are quite similar to those in modern Western semiotics. It can assist the Chinese to acquire the essence of theories from Saussure, Pierce and Morris.

The author holds the view of "homogeneous language", considering that human beings always construe the world (universe) phenomena through their own signs. When writing this paper, from the perspective of Western semiotics, the author analogized and analyzed the semiotic system in *Zhouyi* which uses hexagrams to express meaning, highlighting its similarity and its underlying relevance. In addition, the author proposed that while drawing on the brilliant and varied theories of Western semiotics, we should also review and sort out the philosophic thoughts that were born in early China. To promote the development of Chinese and Western cultures, we should not only draw on the research results of modern European and American linguistic masters, but also make comparisons between Chinese and Western cultures to carry forward and innovate the traditional semiotic theory and concept of the Chinese nation, and provide reference for promoting the theoretical research of Chinese and Western semiotic linguistics and constructing a "community" for semiotic research in the world.

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