

The Disciplinary Independence of Bioculturology

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Abstract: In order to become an independent discipline, it should have clear attributes, clear boundaries, unique research value, research characteristics of its own discipline, its own meta-theoretical system and core problems. Through the analysis of the development of life culture, think life culture in the above has its own characteristics, in the development of the future, the independence needs independent subject discourse, form the independent of life culture discourse system, prevent discourse plunder, but also to avoid discourse expansion and self expansion.

1. Introduction

We deemed it safe to hold that bioculturology is an independent discipline according to established criteria of disciplinary independence. I desire to shed some light on the problems of the development of bioculturology as a discipline, and to discuss the construct and methodology of bioculturology.

Nowadays more and more scholars are asking these questions: Whether bioculturology can become an independent discipline? If it can, how its theoretical system can be constructed if it can. This paper held that bioculturology can gain its independence as a discipline according to the standards of judgment of disciplinary independence. Having elaborated the theoretic structure and research methods of bioculturology, this paper analyzed many problems of bioculturology and proposed some solutions to them.

Chinese “Bioculturology” is a discipline conceived in China when the “Cultural Craze” gained its momentum during 1980s. However, its theoretic structure was not shaped up until recent years. The concept of bioculturology was firstly mentioned by Martin Soukup in his paper entitled Concept of Culture: Bioculturology and Evolutionary Social Sciences. It was worthy of noting that there were many differences between western cultures and eastern cultures regarding the meaning of bioculturology.

In western context, the word bioculturology derived from Greek. In Greek, “bios” was used to refer to “life”. However, in English words prefixed by “bio” often contains the meaning of “organism”. In Chinese, the authentic bioculturology would be “culturology of life” which paralleled to “the philosophy of life”. Soukup did not made this many scholars in China to consider that the human life should be observed from the perspective of culture, which exhibited two

shortcomings. Firstly, regarding to the subject matter of bioculturology, in English context, the subjects not only referred to human life, they also included the life of other animals and plants; in contrast, in Chinese context, the subjects only referred to the lives of human being.

Secondly, in Chinese context, the meaning of the word “life” differed often from that of in English context. Concretely speaking, in ancient Chinese, “Shengming” (life) denoted two words, namely, “Sheng” (give birth, grow) and “Ming”(life, fate), which connoted much metaphysical meanings instead of the “living things” we used to think of.

If bioculturology was defined as a discipline designed to study human life form the perspective of culture, then it was largely a duplicate of cultural anthropology, which slipped from its goal established by western scholars.

In my opinion, bioculturology in western cultural background, as such a discipline featured many characteristics as follows: it had many novel research methods, and its subject matter was the interaction of biological genes and cultural genes (meme), with the former ones including the genes of animals and plants, and the latter ones were limited to the cultures of human beings.

On a worldwide scale, the theoretical construction of bioculturology was underway only a decade ago. Much progress was made in the studies of life cultures, but many scholars would rather attribute these researches to the fruits of social biology or cultural anthropology than to that of bioculturology; correspondingly, there was no curriculum on bioculturology in all the universities and colleges in China, which was caused largely by the lack of disciplinary independence.

2. The standard of Disciplinary Independence

Generally speaking, the standards of Disciplinary Independence might differ a little due to the differences between evaluation systems. However, there were some conditions and standards generally acknowledged regarding the disciplinary independence. Some scholars held that there should be independent research content, mature research methods and specific disciplinary systems, should a discipline gain its independence.

Whereas others proposed that the standard of a independent discipline was as follows: “the subjects and research range are specific; a community of scholars engaged in studies, propagation or education; the classic works or papers were published; there were relatively independent categories, principles or laws, as well as emerged or emerging disciplinary system; there were originality and foresight in the fledging discipline. According to “The people's Republic of China national standard of discipline classification and code” issued by China State Bureau of Technical Supervision in November 1992, the discipline is a relative dependent knowledge system, which reaches following requirements: “formation of theoretic system and specific methodology; emergence of related scientists community; establishment of research institutes, teaching groups and academic communities, and the effective organizing of activities by above groups or communities; the publishing of related monographs and other publications”.

Mao Zedong held in his famous article “On Contradiction”, the differentiation of scientific studies is based upon the specific contradiction of scientific objects. Therefore, the studies on specific contradiction of certain phenomena domain constitute an object of certain science.” To sum up, the subjects featured particularity of contradictory and differed from each other with its individualities.

As I saw it, the following five conditions must be met for a discipline to become independence. Firstly, it must have specific disciplinary attributes; secondly, it must have clear cut disciplinary boundary; thirdly, it must have unique research value; fourthly, it must have unique research characteristic, which largely means its research method; fifthly, it must have meta-theory and core problems^[1].

2.1 The disciplinary attribute of bioculturology

The disciplinary attribute of bioculturology should be defined firstly. “There are many subsystems in a culture system, accordingly, the studies of subsystems become concrete disciplines” Therefore, bioculturology was one of the disciplines.

Bioculturology should be an interdisciplinary science, in which the traditional biology infiltrated into culturology and cultural anthropology.

This was much like the situation in which ethnic culture studies emerged as traditional Ethnology infiltrated into culturology and cultural anthropology^[2].

Therefore, bioculturology was a sub discipline of culturology. However, many problems remain in this definition. The concept of bioculturology cannot be defined until the concept of culturology be defined firstly. By definition, culturology is a discipline that studies the relationships between all the subsystems of cultural system, in order to know the nature, characteristics, contents, forms, structures, functions, types and evolving of the culture system as a whole, thereby to master the general law of the development of culture.

If bioculturology was defined as a sub-discipline of culturology, then it should be a science designed to study the law of development of cultures that related to living things. Bioculturology was a discipline that studies the culture of life, or more specifically, studies the cultural characteristics of living things. Therefore, bioculturology was a sub-discipline of biology.

The definitions mentioned above were the final definitions of bioculturology, which had an uncomfortable ambiguity. Culturology and biology have different interests and objectives, which made the disciplinary attribute of bioculturology uncertain, and thereby impeded the development and advance of its theories^[3].

2.2 The disciplinary boundaries of bioculturology

There is no guarantee of discipline independence if the boundary of discipline cannot be demarcated. The existing works on bioculturology had made the cultures of living things its subjects, but it did not demarcate its boundaries clearly with other adjacent disciplines.

What biology studied was the law of development of organism, and what bioculturology studied was the behavior modes of organism. The behavior modes of organism might cover the law of development, and the studies on the law of development could enrich our knowledge on the behavior modes of organism.

Social biology is a systematic study on the biological foundations of the social behaviors of organism, and bioculturology concerned on the cultural foundations of the social behaviors of organism. Bioculturology pay special attention to the law of culture development affected by biological factors rather than to the one by other factors^[4].

However, the above mentioned boundaries between bioculturology and social biology, between bioculturology and culturology were rather vague. Cultural anthropology and anthropological social biology were the most near akin to bioculturology.

Cultural anthropology studies the human beings from the perspective of culture, and bioculturology studies the law of development of culture from the perspective of the interaction between the biological genes and the cultural genes of human beings.

The “gene-culture” covariant theory reveals the bottleneck of the social biology, which was expected to be broken through by bioculturology, for bioculturology might reshape the prospect of “gene-culture” covariant theory.

What was of interest here was that bioculturology not only highlighted the dominant and independent role played by culture, but also extended the range of genes, which included the genes of all organism, rather than the genes of human beings, as did in social biology.

3. The value of bioculturology

The value of bioculturology was the basis upon which to discuss the rationality and legitimacy of the disciplinary independence of bioculturology.

What was the value of bioculturology? Bioculturology can bring about four benefits as follows. Firstly, it can guide the practice of life culture, for instance, the practice of life culture education. Secondly, it can improve the theories of culturology and biology. Thirdly, it can help the development of culturology. Fourthly, it can enhance the value of individuals' lives^[5].

The value of bioculturology can only embody the necessity and conditions of its disciplinary independence. However, whether bioculturology can assume the responsibility to facilitate the social progress and to enhance the values of individuals' lives, it is a different affair.

Meanwhile, the necessity of value cannot prove that the disciplinary independence has been acknowledged widely. The justification of a discipline and the practice of the knowledge gained from the discipline are seldom agree with each other, and even differ from each other.

In the "ought" dimension, the value and significance of bioculturology determined that the disciplinary independence should be endorsed by the majority of people, and the practice of life culture should maintain the good momentum. However, in the "is" dimension, the disciplinary independence of bioculturology are far from being popular, and there is a long way to go for bioculturology.

3.1 The characteristics of bioculturology (research method)

A new disciplinary seldom develop smoothly, as occasioned by the development of bioethics and cultural anthropology.

There are many disadvantageous factors for a discipline to gain its independence. For instance, the lack of uniformity of concepts and terminology, the transplant of research method, the weakening of research team, the shifting of focus of research to application, the duplication of researches, and the incoherence of theoretic system. Particularly, the transplant of research method and the shifting of focus of research to application are fatal the healthy development of a discipline. Nowadays, in the research of bioculturology, many scholars tended to adopt the theories and perspective of culturology, which diminished the space of development and system construction of bioculturology, and in turn made bioculturology lose its discourse power and be reduced to a appendage of other disciplines.

The main disciplinary features of bioculturology lie in its subject matter and methodology. As mentioned above, the subject matters of bioculturology are the rules of cultural development, which rend it necessary to view the rules of cultural development from the perspective of interaction between the culture and the genes of human beings and other species.

Taken as a whole, the research methods used in bioculturology are mainly brought from philosophy, sociology, culturology, psychology and other disciplines, which revealed the fact that bioculturology has no signature research method of itself. Furthermore, the overemphasis on practical application made the theoretical construction of bioculturology lose its momentum and thereby prevented it to unfold its uniqueness.

The evolutionary game theory had become a basic tool for population biology. As a matter of fact, the evolutionary game theory is essentially a population biology which studies the frequency dependence fitness.

The classic population biology did not use the framework of game theory in the majority of 20th century. According to Eshel and Feldman, evolutionary game theory can be used to express the fitness reward of genes (culture gene), which can make the mutant genes be related to game strategy. They demonstrated that under restrictive conditions, the Fisehr Principle can be reformulated.

The most natural place for the subjects of bioculturology was evolutionary game theory. The “gene-culture” covariant model based upon fitness was a good tool to explore the law of culture development, which can be considered the signature of bioculturology. The genes included ones of all the organism, and the culture denoted the one of human beings.

3.2 Meta-theory and core problems

The disciplinary independence of a discipline can be reflected by the independence of metathery and the uniqueness of its core problems.

The metatheory system of bioculturology include following aspects: 1) the mechanism by which the individuals interact with each other; 2) the mechanism by which life influence culture 3) the mechanism by which culture influence life 4) the mechanism by which cultures interact with each other

Bioculturology has three core problems to deal with. The first problem concerned with the complete altruism of human beings. The second concerned the pedigree of values of life, namely, the value hierarchy hold by different cultures. The value hierarchy signified the difference between different peoples.

4. Conclusion

Bioculturology need to carry out many difficult tasks in the near future. For instance, researcher form a relative mature research group, establish special research institutions, and publish many works and papers of considerable quality, initiating a journal designed to publish researches on bioculturology. They establish the research association and offer courses or even to grant degrees in field of bioculturology.

There are many problems need to be resolved in the development of bioculturology. Firstly, regarding the understanding of disciplinary independence, many scholars still focused on the subjects, research method, the knowledge system and other aspects, which obscured other very important problems.

On the one hand, the definition of the terms are very clear, on the other hand, the relationships between them are very complicated. This apparent clear and narrow and limited definition of terms impeded the thinking over the authentic independence. Therefore, the narrow and limited definition of disciplinary independence should be avoided as possible during the early stage of the development of bioculturology.

Secondly, generally speaking, many the development of many disciplines depends on other related disciplines. However, if one discipline depend so much on other disciplines that it reduced to a mere appendage of them, then its legitimacy as a discipline is undermined seriously. Therefore, bioculturology should keep itself from depending upon other disciplines.

To sum up, the disciplinary independence of bioculturology calls for relatively independent discourse, which in turn calls for the self-consciousness of the power of discourse.

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