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An Edusemiotic analysis of the *wenming* concept in the People's Republic of China

The term 'edusemiotics' was coined by Marcel Danesi in 2010, as an amalgam of several epistemologies: semiotics being a science of signs, a theory of learning (i.e. a theory of how signs are learned) and education, which he describes as "philosophy coupled with the practical art/science of teaching individuals of how to interpret and understand signs" (Danesi 2010: vii). The motivation for such a move was that semiotics, as a science of signs, is an intrinsically suitable tool to investigate how signs are learned (Danesi 2010: vii). Throughout the years, edusemiotics has solidified as a platform and point of contact for the scholars developing various theories of education with those engaged in semiotic practices (Nöth 2010; Semetsky et al. (2016). In the presentation, we intend to show the epistemological power of blending the *science of signs* with the science of *how we learn* in a case study of the Chinese concept of *wenming*. In the analysis, we will see how the concept of *wenming* binds the two paths: the educational, in particular with an emphasis on *Bildung*, and on meaningful experience through action with the hermeneutic grounding.

The Chinese concept of civilising – *wenming* [文明] may be translated into English as: 1) nature, a natural phenomenon; 2. culture [in association with the character 文, constituting the word *wenming*]; 3) something new, modern, or even "western" (used in this context during the Qing dynasty and the early Republic of China); 4) civilization, achieving a certain level of social advancement and the sum of material and non-material wealth achieved by the given society; 5) (...) – civilizational advancement, achieving a higher level of culture, becoming civilized – acquiring good manners; 6) good manners, politeness; 7) civility, good upbringing, displaying good manners or creating and spreading culture. In the presentation, we will evaluate the concept of *wenming* as a strategy to "ecologise" Chinese society. The collected corpus of digital documentation of all types of visual and verbal texts related to propagating this concept, collected in the years 2010-2021, constitutes the database of the analysis.

We single out several threads that are prominent in trying to capture the hermeneutic 'density' of the *wenming* concept with respect to references to nature, connected with the concept of *Bildung*. The features that we singled out that define the semiotic prominence of the concept were: references to nature, with the concomitant total absence of references to *techne*, processual character, centripetal, cohesive dynamics (towards the center, which is, of course, also related to the fact that China is referred to as a country of the center) with the absence of centripetal dynamics; *wenming* being an attribute to be acquired, which involves a fortitive aspect, and a fusion of horizons. *Wenming* was thus isolated as a paramount edusemiotics marker, of a hermeneutical nature, and is pivotal in creating an ecosystem of cultural significance.

Word count of the abstract: 461

Key words: edusemiotics, hermeneutics, wenming, social engineering, Chinese economic culture

Acknowledgement: The presentation received funding under the internal university grant „Delta“ (Opole University of Technology). Project leader: Katarzyna Mazur Włodarczyk

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Fig. 1 A token from our analytical corpus (photo: Katarzyna Mazur-Włodarczyk : on the plate) 俭 - sparingly (on the right) 文明餐桌 - civilized table; 厉行节约 - practice strict economy (applying austerity measures).