Call for Papers: Special Issue of *Chinese Semiotic Studies*

"Building ecocivilizations in dialogue between social organizing and Chinese philosophy"

In Western traditions, autonomy is the hallmark of opposite poles such as individual and social structure. The individual is thought to be autonomous in choosing, say, moral maxims, while an institution or a State is autonomous in that it sets its own internal rules or laws. In proposing an alternative, the 3M model stresses autarkic organizing in the middle world. The move allows for the self-government of little worlds (James) and transient and interpersonal transactions that connect individual and socially organized neurophysiologies to operant social institutions. The middle world is not self-legislating, but an emplaced domain of continuous and agonic/cooperative mediation of life-sustaining relations that can be described and transformed by human use of signs. While the 3M model is used practically by formalizing interdependencies of the micro, the meso, and the macro, its methodology builds on a participatory ethnography. It treats the middle world or the meso as a reportable reality where agency meets languaging, practices, and an emplaced history of transactions. On this view, the work unknowingly reworks many ancient Chinese principles and insights. Hence, the importance of dialogue with the cultural semiotics of *Jingshen*, which knowingly relies upon Chinese ascending knowledge. In this SI, we propose that the ecolinguistics of languaging in the middle world and the cultural semiotics of *Jingshen* enter into interdisciplinary dialogue with scholars in Chinese philosophy and the many others inspired by Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism.

Despite Orientalist prejudices about Chinese civilization being heteronomous and conformist, the idea of human life between Heaven and Earth shows parallels between social and cosmic harmony and how autarkic organizing can sustain a middle world. The move opens questions such as:

- How was the interplay of body and society in lived personal agency thought of in Chinese traditional philosophies and their continuation in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam?
- Can the 3M model suggest a way of modelling and internationalizing Chinese and East Asian traditional or tradition-inspired ways of intellectually and practically engaging in social organizing?
- Seen through Chinese eyes, is the middle world a reworking of dichotomies based in dualistic thinking and/or a break with the anthropocentrism of Western tradition?
- Can such questions address the ecolinguistic mission of working for life-sustaining relations by, perhaps, building place-based ecocivilizations?

Building directly on tenets of the Chinese philosophical tradition (*san jiao*, 三教) and their legacy across East Asia, the SI seeks intellectual interlocutors and sparring counterparts that consider how social organizing theory relates to the pitfalls of Western Modernity. By aspiration, bringing how Chinese philosophy informs everyday life together to work on social organizing might help revive older ascending knowledge, shape new practices, and contribute to building ecocivilizations out of little or emplaced worlds. First, Confucian emphasis on social roles and human relations indicates a stronger focus on the middle world than on the individual as a separate organism or the society or the State as an organic whole. Indeed, social and political relations can be thought of as an extension of family roles, so that the cultivation of the self for virtuous social and political life passes through education for a meaningful family life. Hence, Confucian tradition seems to make the middle world central to social management. If *yong* is understood as what is ordinary and at hand or common practice, then *zhongyong* (中庸) becomes the first known attempt to single out the middle world. Yet, Confucian tradition is polarized by Mencian emphasis on the autonomy of the thinking-and-feeling heart (*xin*, 心) and Xunzi's heteronomy, which lead to a counterbalancing emphasis on sage kings,

masters, and ritual as cultural invention. Can the 3M model's emphasis on social organizing re-articulate this tension? Can the richness of Confucian tradition be used to pursue life-sustaining outcomes in the middle world? In the second tradition, Daoist thought seeks a return to the spontaneous origin of all human and phenomenal organization. Its counter to ritual and civilization offers challenges for social organizing theory. In these terms, the balance among individual, middle, and structure seems to lean towards the individual, understood as an autarkic, as opposed to the autonomous source of vital energy and charisma. The ruling sage or, in modern terms, the leader is the governor of the inner social organization of his body, understood as a land or kingdom to be ruled not by laws or maxims but by *wu wei*. The lawless and effortless self-government allows the leader to govern the body politic as his own limbs. How would this affect *corpora popularia* or organized bodies? Can some kind of balance favor work for ecocivilizations? Third, Fazang's doctrine of principle or non-dualist *arche* (*li*, 理) and the non-dualist *pragma* (*shi*, 事) can be read as showing one way in which Chinese Buddhism might challenge the 3M model. If the individual and the structure are mutually contained without identification, might the meso be unnecessary in seeking to overcome any conceptual tension between the autonomy of structure and phenomena? So, is a rigorous non-dualist social organizing possible? Could this use Chinese philosophy and, if so, how would it depart from the 3M model? How can the cultural semiotics of the holistic flux of mind, vitality, and creativity (*jingshen*, 精神) provide cognitive homeostasis between the 3M model and Daoist and Buddhist tenets? And, finally, can non-dualist cultivation of enlightenment be used to build ecocivilizations or, in other ways, address the issues of ecosocial injustice, destruction of biodiversity and how to mitigate and, later, stop (or reverse) climate change?

Important dates

Abstract deadline: March 31st, 2027

Abstract decision: April 15th, 2027

Manuscript deadline: October 31st, 2027

Manuscript decision: November 30th, 2027

Publication period: early 2028

Abstracts should be between 250 and 500 words long, while manuscripts must not exceed 10.000 words. The abstract must be sent to both valerio.marconi@uniurb.it and cowley@sdu.dk.

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