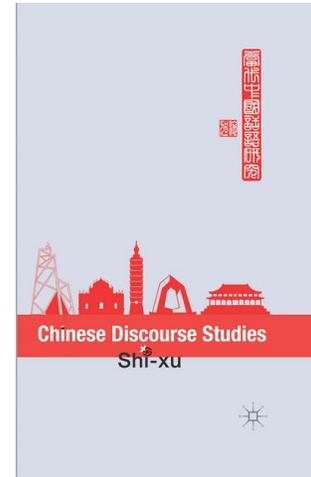


Shi-xu, **Chinese Discourse Studies**, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 223 pp., \$95.00 (hardcover).

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**Chinese Discourse Studies** is Shi-xu's latest academic achievement in his perseverant probe into cultural discourse studies (CDS). It represents the author's recent reflections on CDS in general and Chinese discourse studies (CNDS) in particular. The book presents an intercultural and cultural-political perspective as a means for understanding discourse studies and, particularly, the value of applying CDS or CNDS in the current world of communication studies. The book includes a profound theoretic discussion and paradigm construction of CDS and CNDS, followed by three case studies of typical contemporary Chinese discourse.



The purpose of the book is to introduce CNDS, which is anchored in Chinese culture and history. It begins with an introduction and proceeds with six chapters divided into two parts. The first part discusses the relevant theories and works toward a paradigm construction. The second part comprises three practical studies approached from a CNDS perspective, with each study examining a specific research question typical of contemporary China.

However, as stated in the introduction, the book has broader goals than merely providing an approach to discourse studies. It aims to serve as an alternative to the dominant paradigm of Western discourse studies. The latter is often viewed as a universal system appropriate for study of discourse, ignoring the peculiarities of different cultures. It is against this scholarly background that CDS was conceived, which finally led to the creation of the more specific research paradigm, CNDS.

Chapter 1 outlines the theoretical construction of CDS. It defines discourse "as a historically and interculturally embedded communicative event or activity" (p. 25) and obtains inspiration from intellectual thoughts in cultural studies and reflexive and critical work of de-Westernizing communication studies. Derived from that approach, Shi-xu puts forward two assumptions: (1) that there are different forms of communication and interaction among different human communities and (2) that the contemporary world order is deeply unequal and inequitable. The chapter therefore aims to work out "local-global" approaches to human communication and encourage and support intercultural examination and communication to counter "globalism in society" and "Westcentrism in scholarship." The ultimate goal is to "contribute to human cultural coexistence, peace, and prosperity" (p. 24).

Toward this end, the chapter illustrates what research we can do and how to do it. Topically, its analysis favors social, cultural, historical, and international communicative events that manifest hegemonic disorder in intercultural communication. Generally, research should follow four principles: "to

study human communication holistically and dialectically," "to draw on local, native cultural and scholarly knowledge and take global perspectives at the same time," "to use cultural harmony and prosperity as basic criteria," and "to be eclectic in the use of specific methods" (p. 28). Accordingly, CDS offers researchers the flexibility to select specific tools and techniques so long as they are "relevant and appropriate." Under this guidance, researchers collect "background data," "first-hand data" in communication ("secondary data" if necessary), and "complementary data." For a holistic discourse study, researchers tend to examine "a shared suite of interrelated categories" or, to use the author's term SIMPHC: subject (speaker or hearer), intent/form/relation of communication, mediums, purpose/effect of speaking, historical relations and cultural processes involved. To analyze and assess particular local events, researchers should follow the standards of cultural coexistence, equality, and prosperity at the global level and of the specific needs of the native at the local level.

In chapter 2, a further step is taken to form Eastern discourse studies (EDS) paradigms. For this framework, the author formulates a conception of discourse in opposition to the Western political and cultural conception. Anchored in Eastern wisdom, or Eastern philosophies, Shi-xu "explore[s] the shared reasons and conditions and thus common principles and strategies . . . that will together make up a collective framework for ongoing Asian, African and Latin American centered projects" (p. 40). These areas also share common ground in history, culture, and linguistic production and interpretation institution.

In principle, Eastern paradigms should be "locally grounded and globally minded, historically conscious and contemporarily helpful, and above all culturally inclusive and pluralistic" (p. 51). They should be aware of their cultural-intellectual identities, pay attention to Eastern past and present, and be able to converse with Western counterparts. Strategically, Eastern scholars should work together to identify and minimize hegemonic Westcentrism and revive and reconstruct Eastern paradigms and make them more widely studied, interpreted, and disseminated throughout international communication studies.

The real center of the book, chapter 3, tries to construct a more specific but comprehensive and systematic framework for studying contemporary Chinese discourses, CNDS. The theory is not created ad libitum, but strictly follows principles regarding "objectives, standards, and strategies" (p. 59). CNDS aims to enhance the Chinese cultural community's self-understanding and ability to be understood by international scholarship and to establish a characteristic voice of China in the international academic arena. Hence, the theory must be "locally grounded," "globally minded," and "internationally accessible." Fortunately, the construction of a Chinese paradigm finds a rich resource of scholarly works and contributions presenting and valuing a unique Chinese cultural tradition, which supports a theoretic construction and provides a classical practical approach to understanding and solving contemporary problems.

This paradigm is based on three major components. Within its philosophical component, it uses an ontological approach and takes the human cultural world as its research object, conceptualized as communicative events involving language use in a particular context. Epistemologically, CNDS takes a dialectic, intuitive, contextual, and cultural stance on viewing knowledge and evaluating discourse. And axiologically, CNDS researchers hold a global and culturally pluralistic perspective and give priority to

social and cultural responsibility, focusing on Chinese development issues in particular while relating China to the developing world. The theoretical component affirms that CNDS is meant to "provide identification, description, explanation, interpretation, and evaluation of contemporary Chinese discourse" (p. 77). The theory development has been enriched by 10 broad propositions (described on pp. 78–102) concerning the inequality in Chinese-Western communication, the characteristic changes in the formulation of Chinese discourse, the pursuit of social harmony, the rule of "discrepancy" for meaning making, "a dialectic strategy of problem-solving" (p. 91), a particular way of respect for Chinese authority, the Chinese notion of "face," the hearer's role in sense making, a historical approach to "valorize nationalism," as well as the Chinese aesthetic way of communication. In methodology, Shi-xu puts away the dominating Western approach. He advocates the principles of holistic, dialectical, historical, and intercultural examination with an integration of local and global perspectives, combining both evidence and experience in research and studying discourse in a continuous and dialogical way. Conforming to the approach of CDS, CNDS considers the identities of participants in communication, the content and way of speaking, the mediums used, the social/historical/cultural relations involved, the purposes intended, and the resulting effects and consequences.

Starting in Part Two, which is on particular practices of discourse studies, chapter 4 examines human rights using a CNDS framework. From historical and intercultural perspectives, the chapter shows that the Chinese discourse on human rights has gone through a period of significant evolution, seen in the intensifying sense of its relevance to China, the ascending level of participation by speakers, the broadening concept of human rights, the formalizing of discourse, the increasingly populous forms of communication, and the significant change of attitude in publicizing. The holistic view also shows that this discourse is a historical response to China's own past and an intercultural reaction to the dominant American-Westcentric discourse.

Chapter 5 puts forth the notion that a trade dispute is not just an issue of economics, trade, technology, or politics, but also a discursive one. The study centers around China's 2005–2010 disputes with the EU over the exporting of footwear. Using a historical and intercultural analysis, the author shows that the Chinese government and trade associations have failed to play the expected roles for what is crucially needed in trade disputes, largely due to their holistic and dialectic way of thinking, insufficient communication, and language barriers in international communication. However, essentially, the failure has to be attributed to the Chinese principle of equilibrium and the value of face.

Chapter 6 is a discourse study of urban development in Hangzhou, China. The research assumes that discourse, historical and cultural, plays a "central and integral"—rather than "epiphenomenal"—role in urban development. From a "discourse-and-development-dialectic" perspective, the author examines how discourse works in the location and construction of West Lake scenic spots, city branding, public consultation over city gentrification projects, and tourism advertising. The study finds that the discourse speakers historically changed from the elite class to ordinary people, and there was much success in using public mediums in contemporary discourse. The author also finds that the discourse is "lacking concern for nature and culture" (p. 185). Indeed, we are able to see explicitly the role that "discourse can play in the construction, growth, and sustainability of a city" (p. 190).

As the book shows, discourse is the de facto center of social events and activities. It should be viewed as it is in fact: holistically, historically, and (inter)culturally. The perspective of CNDS can broaden our vision from a text-based examination of language use *in* context to a deeper and wider analysis of a culture-specific and historical understanding of a communicative event involving language use *and* context. In this way, we are naturally more equipped with a paradigm in dialogue with traditional Western discourse studies while breaking out of their restraints.

It should be noted that such a non-Western paradigm of discourse studies is not to rival or replace the Western paradigm, but to provide an egalitarian and critical way of thinking with a multicultural perspective. With this perspective, the academic arena of discourse studies will become more pluralistic and lively, rather than prosaic and monotonous. In addition to CNDS, other culture-specific Eastern modes of discourse studies can also flourish to create more equilibrium in the academic community, which, coincidentally, is the ultimate objective of CNDS. However, the author has been modest and reserved in making CNDS a standard for other cultures; instead CNDS serves an example and a response within EDS, cultural and academic, to the domination of Western discourse studies. Therefore, Shi-xu invites scholars from other cultures, especially those in the developing world, to build on CDS and EDS and develop their own culture-relevant and culture-specific discourse frameworks.

The book is certainly a must-read for those who hope to comprehensively understand (cultural) discourse studies in today's academia, if they note that the developing world in general and China in particular need to and will speak louder as time goes on. It offers an effective tool for communication studies where it has already been assumed that "[linguistic] aspects constitute a particularly important and revealing reflection of, and guide to, broader dimensions of cultural contact" (Edwards, 2012, p. 37). It is also illuminating for those studying contemporary China or even cultural China (Wu, 2008) in a broader sense. Both the well-developed theoretical framework and the package of practical studies are exemplary and will be enlightening to scholars interested in the relevant fields. Additionally, in this culturally pluralistic world, its significance will only increase.

### References

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