**YANG — Enchantment**

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**The Enchantment of Civilization/Civility: The Digital Humanities Study of the ‘Obsession’ with ‘Wenming’ (文明) in Modern China**

Yang, J.

One key issue in the study of humanities and social sciences is to figure out clearly the formation of certain important ideas and concepts. Traditionally, this kind of investigation is usually carried out based on informed speculations at best. Thanks to the new methods informed by digital humanities study, the elusive process of idea formation can now be examined more accurately. By means of these methods, we can observe the trajectory of idea formation, tracing important development of ideas in terms of key word analysis. As a result, we can not only pinpoint the origin of ideas but also realize how their meanings develop and change in different historical contexts.

It is almost impossible for any visitor to today’s China to fail to notice the popularity of the term ‘wenming’ (civilization/civility) in public life. Various kinds of posters commonly invoke the term ‘wenming’ in their slogans to exhort citizens to have manners, to behave properly in public life. For example, even in the public restrooms, salient slogans such as ‘a little step forward, a giant step toward wenming’ are used to remind people of urinating in the right place. Indeed, as is well known, since the late 19th century, the term ‘wenming’ had been widely used in China to honor the European ‘modern/advanced’ ways of life and institutions. Many Chinese intellectuals had come to describe the European nations as ‘wenming guo’ (civilized nations), which are paradigms for China to emulate. To be sure, ‘wenming’ was used as a prefix to describe explicitly many things coming from the West. For example, the Western gentleman’s cane was translated in China as ‘wenming gu’ (civilized stick). In short, the popularity of the term ‘wenming’ is very indicative of the enchantment of the modern (Western) way of life in modern China, especially from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century.

However, after the Chinese Communist Party took power in 1949, many Western things were denounced as ‘capitalistic’ and ‘imperialist’ and therefore no longer appreciated, according to the official ideology. On the other hand, nationalism and patriotism are emphasized more to boost national pride. Still, intriguingly, under such circumstances, the term ‘wenming’ did not lose its allure and became even more popular. PRC government propaganda has adopted this term to strongly promulgate ‘civic orders’, to stress the importance of proper manners in public life. In other words, ‘wenming’ has come to stand for ‘civility’ rather than ‘things explicitly Western’. In a way, that many behavior codes originating from the West are now promoted as ‘wenming’ ways of life—i.e., universal, civilized ways of life—symbolizes a cultural policy and strategy aiming to maintain a balance between modernization and westernization.

My study of the changing meaning of the concept ‘wenming’ (civilization/civility) in modern China is based on the rich resource provided by the database of Modern Chinese Intellectual and Literature History (1830–1930), which includes more than 120 million words from original important historical texts. In addition, the whole content of *People’s Daily* (1946–present) is now available online, which can provide a lot of related information concerning ‘wenming’ in the modern period. In order to explore deeply the historical significance of this idea in modern China, I aim to study it with the help of the digital humanities. First of all, I will utilize the ‘pat-tree’ and ‘key word search’ methods to analyze the discourse contexts in which ‘wenming’ was used in various historical situations. Moreover, I will investigate the frequency of the appearance of this key term in important journals during the period between the late 19th century and the early 20th century, a crucial period for the construction of modern China’s collective identity. Third, I will try to analyze the significance of its appearance with other important terms, such as ‘modernity’, to further explore how these ‘family terms’ were utilized in shaping the modern Chinese collective identity and consciousness.

My initial investigation of the origin of the modern meaning of ‘wenming’ has revealed that modern Japan might be the source. In the late 19th century this term was transmitted to China from Japan, where the Western nations were also highly regarded as the models to follow. Indeed, the historical fact of this development is strongly supported by the findings based on digital methods. By surveying the aforementioned database in terms of the key word ‘wenming’, I have found that the high frequency of using the term ‘wenming’ in its modern meaning appeared in a number of famous journals published after in Japan by the exiled Chinese intellectuals and students there. By more clearly pinpointing the trajectory of the idea ‘wenming’ transmitting from Japan to China, my study will illuminate further the complicated relationship between China and Japan in terms of their modernization and Westernization processes.

By historicizing and denaturalizing the key term ‘wenming’ in the discourse of modern China, my study will not only closely probe into a new set of issues, shedding new light on our understanding of modern Chinese identity, but also demonstrate the power and importance of digital methods in the study of intellectual and cultural history.