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The terminological crisis of our science subject – on the way to ourselves or to decomposition by ourself.

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Abstract

It seems to be modern everything to set in question marks and to look at academic sciences, especially those developed in the 19th and early 20th century in middle Europe, as being in a crisis theoretically and practically. The queries and doubts mostly come from neighbouring disciplines or foreign, political fields, by artists, scientists, social workers, journalists, with their understanding of the views in past and present, but without historical knowledge of the applied science, like ethnography or ethnology. Basically, the contention is quite welcomed in the academic dialogues as well in the practical fields, because each ideology and science live and progress from the critical examination and analyses of new discoveries and knowledge, for mutual benefit.

Serious studies in an academic subject as well as improving dialogues can only bring a desired result by using a logically proved academic language with a common understanding of terms, names and subjects. As Confucius already stated in the 5th century B.C.: political disorder is grounded in a spiritual mess, and both are recognisable through the falsification of terms, having lost the definite concept in their expressions. One of his central demands has been: the correction of names! – that does not mean the names should be *changed or omitted*, but recognised in their expressed meaning and content.

The paper will contribute to the years-long discussion whether the name of ICME should be changed and why. Our ICME intern discussion shows more or less a crisis in understanding of the terms „museum“ and „ethnography“ mostly within central European countries, which initially developed the „Ethnographic Museum“ in the second half of the 19th century. The confusion and misunderstanding in the academic university institutions has created a vast crowd of deputy terms – which comprehend only parts of the basic subject term. The last funny proposal was found from students of the Berlin university institute for European Ethnology, after all better to speak from „Vielnamenfach“, „many-names-subject“ for European Ethnology. (Berliner Blätter, H. 64/2013, p. 142) This marks a serious crisis, however not of the academic subject, but more of thoughts and hypothesis.

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The terminological crisis of our science subject – on the way to ourselves or to decomposition by ourself.

During the last years the discussion/ contention about „ethnography“ and „museums“ in the naming of our ICOM committee was fired again and again. In ICME News 68 (November 2013) Per Rekdal even pleaded for a new name for ICME, because the terms 'museum' and 'ethnography' would be too much connected with the colonial past and the old „colonial mind“; it should be refined, urgently.

The ICME intern discussion shows more or less a crisis in understanding of the terms „museum“ and „ethnography“ mostly within central European countries. Initially they developed the „Ethnographic Museum“ concept in the second half of the 19th century. In dead, even in the academic university institutions the confusion and misunderstanding has created a vast crowd of deputy terms – which are more or less either synonyma or translations to or from different languages and scripts, including Latin and Greek (which are the basic roots of all middle-european contemporary languages!). In most cases only parts of the real subject term, the technical term, are comprehended. The last funny proposal came from students of the Berlin university institute for European Ethnology: after all it may be better to speak from the „Vielnamenfach“, „many-names-subject“ instead of using ‚European Ethnology, folklore, ethnography, social and cultural anthropology or empiric cultural sciences – for arts and humanities.‘ (Berliner Blätter, H. 64/2013, p. 142) . At least here, it becomes evident, that there is a serious crisis in the conception of our academic subject. It has been mutilated up to the point of being unrecognizable. - In our modern european societies, with different political disasters after two world wars, the queries and doubts mostly infiltrated from political fields, social institutions, world wide acting journalists with their conception of culture and humanities in past and present, but without the historical knowledge of the applied sciences like ethnography, ethnology or cultural and social anthropology – the basic anglophon technical term (terminus technicus). Interestingly, the academic subject term anthropology, including physical (as natural history), social and cultural anthropology (with ethnography) was never questionable in english or spain speaking countries, including South Korea, Far East and South America! It became confuse particularly

within Europe after the military and later political partition (following the end of the World War II) into two contrary fields of occupied nations. The ‚Iron Curtain‘ between East and West Europe, going right through Germany, forced just as much the ideological separation in society and culture, with orientation to the anglo-american world in the western hemisphere, and orientation to the russian hemisphere in the eastern part. One of the consequences for our subject, the anthropology as the comprehensive science of men founded in the civil society of the 19th century (in all three sections) was, that physical anthropology became subsumed to natural sciences with medicine. The rest was reduced to „Ethnography“ – descriptive folklore (Volks- und Völkerkunde) according to the main research subject of the Sowjetunion, in order to study, describe and register the many different nations, tribes and people of the vast country. It was a basic politically demanded aspect. The consequence for our Museum in Dresden, which was founded as „Royal Zoological and Anthropologic-Ethnographic Museum“ in 1878, as a research institution (not colonial!!) was, that the valuable historic- anthropological collections had to be packed and locked away . The Museum was named „State Museum for Ethnography“ – and this was it, what could and should be done: describing the ways of live and culture of the people with their material culture, saved in the regional departments of the museum and collected for spiritual traditions in archives. – Even Ethnography!

During the same time the western hemisphere of Europe with orientation to America and American academic schools and methods could proceed in the comparing science, doing ethnology, in world-wide discussions and different social and cultural aspects according to the progressing development and change of the peoples, with new materials, media and methods. Bernhard Streck, head of the Institute for Ethnology in Leipzig , described (in 2009) the „Sonderwege“, „special ways of the German ethnology in the 20th century“ and found the German ethnology as a „Science of losers“ („Verlierergesellschaft“) with a fundamental distinction to the sisters in France, Britain and USA. (ZfE 2009,p. 268).

Whenever, after the political change in Germany, I met my colleagues in Köln, Heidelberg or Munich and spoke on the Ethnography, it was clear to them, that I came from the „russian site“, it was completely politicized, without taking into consideration, that both terms are simply two sides of the coin, theory and practice of a science.

I feel, this is the crux behind our present ICME-dispute. The real contents and history of our academic subject has vanished. However: Serious studies in theory and practice as well as improving dialogues can only bring a desired result by using a logically proved academic language with a common understanding of terms, names and subjects. As Confucius already stated in the 5th century B.C.: political disorder is grounded in a spiritual mess, and both are recognisable through the falsification of terms, having lost the definite concept in their expressions. One of his central demands has been: the correction of names! – that does not mean the names should be *changed or omitted*, but must be recognised in their expressed meaning and contents; as our latin proverb says: „nomen est omen“ !

– This is it, what I like to remember: the „science of men“ , the anthropology, was produced from the realization of natural history by medics, nature philosophers, artists, anthropologists in search of men, their biology, socialization and cultur , during the epoche of Enlightenment in Europe. The german medical doctor Adolf Bastian, who became the founder of the Berlin Ethnologisches Museum, in 1872, demanded differenciated ways of looking at the complex human being while approaching systematically; he proposed the „Ethnology“ as new science, a „sister of the anthropology“. He found: the human being is not longer the individual anthropos, only, more over he is the „zoon politicon“, who demands the social contract as needed prerequisite of his existence. (A.Bastian: Der Völkergedanke im Aufbau einer Wissenschaft vom Menschen. 1881). Already in 1813 the first kind of a handbook for anthropological and ethnological sciences was published by Evans Pritchard: „Researches into the natural history of mankind“. Academic societies, for instance the Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte“ 1869, and museums were founded in search for the history of mankind, so in Leipzig 1869, in Berlin 1873, in Dresden 1875. The royal librarian in Dresden, Gustav Klemm, had developed the ideal of a „museum for the knowledge of all peoples on earth“, which should show ,the creation of arts and crafts from basic natural materials in near and far’, in order to recognize the empirical science in mankind’ (Klemm, Culturgeschichte der Menschheit 1852, 10 vols.)

Adolf Bastian drafted the task of the ethnology with museum: ,the science of men should represent the spiritual life of mankind by the products of psychological creativity, to recognize and present the development of creations of the culture step by step.’ (Bastian, Vorgeschichte der Ethnologie, 1881).

The British anthropologist E.B. Taylor referred to the 'culture of men' as the basic subject of ethnological research for the history of mankind, in order to realize the equality of human nature, on the one side, and the living situations, on the other. (Taylor 1873 in Leslie White: Cultural science. Vide Schmitz, Kultur). In 1873 he emphasized: *the humanity is homogenous by nature, although standing on different steps of the civilization. The ethnographers have to classify such details in such a way that the spreading can be recognized in geography, history and relations between each other.* – For the Britishers the museal collections demonstrated the richness and greatness of their vast empire, today's Commonwealth – nobody is talking about „colonial collections“, but they collected from and for their colonies. Only Spain, The Netherlands and Belgium established colonial museums, because they wanted to represent their own superiority according to their sight for society. However that is not ethnography in the academic sense (of the 19th century), these are no ethnographic museums. They had to be closed and reconstructed.

The academic discussion about the contents and the subject of the Anthropology or „Science of men“ was led vividly and honestly; the term 'ethnology / ethnography', mainly used in the English speaking areas, got a German parallel translation into „Kulturanthropologie“ (cultural anthropology), particularly promoted by W. E. Mühlmann. He clearly emphasized the *homo creator*, the productive, creative man, who represents himself as a highly developed cultural being in space and time. – And he together with his culture including the economic conditions which terminate the way of life is considered as the main research subject of the ethnology or „Kulturanthropologie“! Mühlmann defined „culture“ as the sum of all performances, ... which had been achieved by men for the satisfaction of their needs under determining economic conditions in a certain geographic biosphere and historical period – „Die Summe aller Leistungen... welche die Menschheit zur Befriedigung ihrer Bedürfnisse vollbracht hat.“ (bei Schmitz: Kultur, S. 2)

Now, after this historical discourse: how new, how necessary, how convenient is the dispute about renaming of ICME? If we understand the history and the academic claim of our subject, there is nothing wrong; „culture and society“ have always been the basic subject of ethnography or cultural and social anthropology, but there is something beyond to consider in „ethnology/ethnography“. There are ethnic groups with individual concepts of society identified by their own language, customs, religion,

their culture. If we address them as „cultures“, we fracture the object we like to deal with, because culture is always inherent, included naturally,

The students of the Berlin Institute for European Ethnology came to the result: ethnography has an important methodological field in the recent communication sciences, therefore it is a field of research for empirical cultural science and ethnological research. (Update in progress, p. 115)

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