



## **ISMS (Institute of Semiotics & Media Studies)** Sichuan University

The Chinese term “Fu Hao Xue” can be dated back to 1926, when it was invented by Y.R. Chao, a young Harvard professor, independently of both Saussure and Peirce. He suggested in his long essay that the English equivalent could be Symbolology. The discipline didn’t draw much enthusiasm from Chinese academia, though, until the late 1980s, when academics at Sichuan University, together with their colleagues in other Chinese universities, started to develop semiotics in China. In 2003, Sichuan University held a “Cross-Strait Seminar on Semiotics”, and a semiotic school began to take shape, with Gong Pengcheng publishing his remarkable research on classical Chinese semiotics, Prof. Li Siqu applied semiotics to advertisement, Jiang Rongchang on media semiotics, and Wu Xingming his scathing critique on consumer society.

In 2006, Prof. Henry (Yiheng) Zhao left University of London and resettled at the Sichuan University, and semiotics here entered a fast-developing period. Zhao established ISMS and launched China’s first postgraduate program on semiotics. In 2009, the first website devoted to semiotics in China kicked off, with Rao Guangxiang as its webmaster. The half-yearly journal *Signs & Media* started publication, so did a series of translation projects. Today, 14 interesting books by western contemporary semioticians have been already published, and 20 more in progress.

In 2011, Prof. Zhao published his prize-winning work *Semiotics: Principles and Problems*, followed in 2012 by the first reference book for semiotics in China *A Dictionary of Semiotic & Media Studies*. ISMS has been steadily developing along its long-term plan, and its research activities have acquired a few characteristics of its own:



- I. The research territory of ISMS is wider than usual. Much work, for instance, has been done on video games, brand, fashion, tourism, gift, celebrities and other topics of popular culture. ISMS now has developed a branch SCCI (Semiotics of Commodities and Cultural Industry).
- II. Integrating semiotics with Marxism, psychoanalysis, gender studies phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics, and post-modernism. interdisciplinary research has been an ISMS focus.
- III. ISMS encourages an innovative reinterpretation of Chinese traditional semiotic heritage. A team of scholars have been working hard on the semiotic thinking in Confucianist, Buddhist and Taoist canons, and summarized semiotic ideas on ethics, geomancy, cosmology, and other fields.
- IV. ISMS has been making the best use of the Internet: the *e-zine Bulletin of Semiotics & Media Studies* is published monthly, reaching thousands of academics in China, with a BBS on the semiotics open to all Chinese students discussing semiotic issues. An official Microblog has attracted many young students in China.

With all these efforts to promote semiotics, ISMS has spurred on many Chinese students and young scholars to study semiotics. In fact, some scholars have already put forward the title “Sichuan Semiotics School”. Sichuan, known for its wise men all along Chinese history, will certainly attract more talents on semiotics in the future.

Written by Jia Peng and Xingzhi Zhao

**Our contacts:**

**Email:** semiotics\_media@163.com

**Phone:** +86-28-8541-2121

**Fax:** +86-28-8541-2710

**Website:** [www.semiotics.net.cn](http://www.semiotics.net.cn)

**Official Mircoblog:** <http://e.weibo.com/semioticsscu>

**Postal Address:** Institute of Semiotics & Media Studies,  
Sichuan University,  
No.29 Wanjiang Road,  
Chengdu, 610064,  
China