

**Research Project of MA Dissertation:**

***Kuhn's Paradigm Theory and Its Inspiration to Intercultural Communication and Teaching***

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**Summary**

This research begins with a review of Thomas Kuhn's theory of paradigm and its incommensurability and attempts to point out the iconic role of incommensurability in scientific revolutions. In applying this theory, I will argue that Winnicott's theory of maturational processes and traditional psychoanalytic theory use incommensurable languages for similar terms, which is one of the pieces of evidence of a paradigm shift. Further research will attempt to explore effective ways of cross-language communication and teaching for Winnicott's theory of maturational processes, including the establishment of theoretical dictionaries, the cultivation of translators, the teaching of exemplars, the combination of clinical practice and case supervision, etc.

**Keywords:** paradigm, incommensurability, scientific revolution, theory of maturational processes, traditional psychoanalysis, interculturality

**Introduction**

*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* may be described as one of the most influential scientific philosophical works of the twentieth century, where Thomas Kuhn formulated the "paradigm theory," which still provides a framework for understanding the paradigm of a scientific discipline, revealing that revolutionary mutation is the main characteristic of the development of science.

In Kuhn's point of view, science is the puzzle-solving activity carried out by the scientific community, who choose the puzzles to solve and the criteria for judging answers and solutions according to something shared by its members. This shared thing defines different scientific communities, and its main components include symbolic generalizations, metaphysics or models, values, and exemplars; they form a broad sense of paradigm, also

known as a “disciplinary matrix.” Professor Z. Loparic has summarized the components of the disciplinary matrix as follows: 1) exemplars of shared problems successfully resolved; 2) theoretical commitments that can account for the success, including guiding generalizations, ontology, heuristics, values; 3) instrumental commitment; 4) teaching procedures based on exemplars and theoretical and instrumental commitments; 5) community structure; 6) institutions.

More than other components of the disciplinary matrix, “differences between sets of exemplars provide the community fine-structure of science”. Scientific knowledge and its application are mainly embedded in the exemplars. Thus, in a narrow sense, the paradigm of a scientific community are the shared exemplars. Normal scientific research is a routine problem-solving activity under the guidance of the paradigm. The main goal of scientists is to see the relations of similarity between new problems and previous solved puzzles, and to confirm if these new problems should be objects of research and if they should attempt to solve them to supplement the original paradigm and expand its scope of application. With the refinement of normal research activities, many anomalies will appear in the form of new puzzles. Resolving and digesting irrelevant anomalies can lead to progress in normal science, but some of the anomalies turn out to be persistent failures that can't be assimilated by the old paradigm. They are critical anomalies that affect the core of the paradigm and will lead to a crisis of normal science, which in turn leads to a scientific revolution and a paradigm shift.

The incommensurability argument is an extremely important component for understanding scientific revolutions and paradigm shifts. Scientific communities guided by different paradigms find different relationships of similarity when classifying their subjects, and because there is no neutral description language, their ways of seeing the world, the puzzles they confronted, their solutions, their use of language, etc. are all different. Incommensurability is one of the distinctive features of a scientific revolution. It reveals the nature of the communication breakdown between the proponents of different paradigms. However, from another point of view, it also provokes communities with different paradigms to eschew the fight for orthodoxy or for being right or wrong and try to discover the possibility of mutual translation and understanding. Some previous studies of Kuhn's thought process and linguistics address the issue of incommensurability and discuss its cognitive roots. Others attempt to reconstruct Kuhn's taxonomic interpretation of incommensurability.

My own study will first summarize general concepts in Kuhn's theory, such as paradigm, paradigm shift and incommensurability, to provide theoretical guidance for the research.

## Winnicott's Theory of Maturation Processes

Kuhn's theory has greatly influenced people's long-held notions about scientific development. In the past, many saw the development of science as a continuous process of accumulation. Kuhn, however, posits that scientific progress is the result of revolution. The new paradigm emerges from a crisis, is incompatible with the old one, but can account for the anomalous problems that the old paradigm could not solve. Eventually, the old paradigm is gradually put aside because it is no longer applicable. Instead, more and more people begin to look at and talk about the world and to carry out research work according to the new paradigm. At this point, it could be said that they are already living in a new world.

In my professional psychoanalytic career, there are signs of a paradigm shift. Kuhn's theory was a great inspiration, prompting me not only to study his body of work, but also to apply it to analyses of specific circumstances, combining examples and practical activities to really understand the theoretical groundwork. The field I intend to study is Winnicott's theory of maturation processes.

Donald Winnicott began his career as a pediatrician, and if science is a puzzle-solving activity, then Winnicott was a "puzzle-solver". To treat childhood emotional disorders that could not be effectively dealt with in the biomedical model, he strove to learn and apply psychoanalytic methods of treatment. He received formal psychoanalytic training and, at first, believed that the traditional paradigm might solve his clinical predicament. However, it was precisely this trust, and his dual role as a pediatrician and psychoanalyst, that made him more sensitive to anomalies emerging from the old paradigm. In his clinical practice, he found many abnormalities in pediatrics that were dissimilated from the traditional paradigm, leading him to adjust and reform the paradigm to fit the clinical situation. In the process of solving problems, he gradually formulated his own new exemplars. Almost inadvertently, the "backbone" of his theoretical language was injected into the new content.

From this point of view, it is reasonable to suppose that by analyzing the language of Winnicott's theory, its incommensurability with traditional psychoanalytic theory will be demonstrated explicitly, which is one of the pieces of evidence of paradigm shift. Professor Z. Loparic's extensive research on the establishment of Winnicott's theory as a paradigm are important references for this study; Jan Abram's *The Language of Winnicott* and Elsa O. Dias's *Winnicott's Theory of the Maturation Processes* will provide great help in analyzing and understanding of Winnicott's theoretical terms.

## **The Exploration of Cross-Language Communication and Teaching**

As I understand it, regardless of Kuhn revealing paradigm shifts in science and of Winnicott's plea for a revolutionary change in psychoanalysis, the emphasis should not be separating right from wrong in the old and new paradigms but drawing attention to the need for change and the importance of communication between different paradigms, ultimately leading to a better solution of puzzles. Based on a well-established theory, this study aims to further explore a solution to the practical problem of "how to effectively communicate and teach Winnicott's theory among cross-language communities". Initial ideas include editing specialized theoretical terminology dictionaries, training bilingual teachers on theoretical and cross-cultural language, the use of exemplars (clinical cases) and case supervisions in teaching procedure, among others.

### **Goals**

The main goals of this research are:

1. In the theoretical aspect, to study Kuhn's theory to achieve a relatively complete and systematic understanding of the paradigm theory, and especially of the incommensurability argument.
2. In the practical aspect, by combining Kuhn's theory and my own field of expertise, to establish my philosophical view of Winnicott's theory of maturational processes to guide my teaching and clinical practice.

### **Justification**

The starting point of this research are the "anomalies" I have encountered in my clinical practice as a psychotherapist, and in my personal experience as a translator and assistant teacher. As a psychotherapist, I was initially trained on classic Freudian psychoanalytic theory, and later studied the Kleinian object-relation theory. I often work with psychotic and borderline patients, both adults and adolescents, and when attempting to understand them, the paradigm with the Oedipus complex as the core concept shows its limitations. So, I turned to Winnicott's theory to seek answers. At first, I still understood Winnicott in terms of the traditional paradigm, but the more my studies delved deeper, the more obvious his unique language style and his different meanings for terms became. Fortunately, many of my doubts in this regard were enlightened after coming across Professor Loparic and Dr. Elsa Dias, of the São Paulo School. Since they brilliantly pointed out the paradigm shift of Winnicott's theory, I was inspired to

read and understand him from a new perspective. After much work as a translator and as an assistant teacher, the different language connotations before and after the paradigm shift not only aroused great interest in me, but also create great difficulties in application, teaching and translation. I became very curious about the essence of these difficulties, and tracing them back to their source, Kuhn's theory proved very helpful in revealing precisely this essence.

As mentioned in the *Introduction*, there are some important "examples" available for learning and interpreting Kuhn's paradigm theory and for applying it to the construction of Winnicott's theory. For instance, Prof. Suze Piza is an important contributor to the Winnicott Dictionary Project, with a profound understanding of the language of Winnicott, and I believe that following her studies will be extremely profitable.

In the long run, the exploration of cross-language communication, which is inevitably related to the cultural differences between China and the West, will broaden the range of follow-up comparative studies.

## **Methodology**

### **Literature search and review**

Focus on Kuhn's writings, his studies of issues of incommensurability, and other research related to the paradigm shift of Winnicott's theory.

### **Linguistic analysis**

Selection of key easily confused terms with distinct meanings in Winnicott's theory and in traditional psychoanalytic theory. Contrastive study and discussion of the incommensurable nature of both theories.

### **Preliminary schedule**

1<sup>st</sup> half year – Survey of Kuhn's writings

2<sup>nd</sup> half year – Survey of Winnicott's writings and of traditional psychoanalytic literature

3<sup>rd</sup> half year – Linguistic analysis of key terms of Winnicott's theory and of traditional psychoanalytic theory

4<sup>th</sup> half year – Conclude the dissertation

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