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# Humanities in China

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## The Birth of the University

When I met Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) in a Parisian café in June 2001, I could sense both his excitement and his unease regarding his pending visit to China, a country which was for him almost a continent comparable to the whole of Europe in its expansive territory, immense crowds, and diverse cultures—a familiar yet strange world that had been involved into the same historical process. On the morning of his arrival in Beijing in early September, right before 9/11, he headed to Tiananmen Square and the Beihai Park after check-in and a brief rest at the hotel. While he was taking photos near the Mao Memorial Hall, his camera broke down. The philosopher commented humorously that Mao was truly a powerful figure, as his negative capacity could negate everything, including photography. Derrida's words reminded me of the image of China in the minds of European intellectuals in 1968. In Beihai Park, an elderly woman practicing calligraphy guided his hands and taught him to write a Tang dynasty quatrain on the stone-paved ground with a mop dipped in water. He was fascinated by the “writing for disappearance” of this elderly lady. Perhaps fascination is derived from unfamiliarity, but it is also an opportunity to break through such unfamiliarity.

The next afternoon, Derrida sat in the editorial conference room of the journal *Dushu(Readings)* and discussed with Beijing intellectuals the question of the university. One of his basic arguments was that “in principle the university ought to be a site where questions regarding truth, the nature of man, humanity, the history of mankind, and so on should be raised with independence and without condition, namely, a place where one can unconditionally resist and differ.” The absolute independence of the university manifests itself in this process of questioning without condition. This is apparently an ideal university, an idea that in practice attempts to assert itself but has been negated repeatedly. Hence the university is not only a place for professional training but also a belief, a duty, and responsibility. For Derrida, the true way to redeem democracy lies in this idea and practice of the university. The university must insist on its independence as it participates in social life. Since the understanding of the university and the humanities is premised on the “inquiry

without condition,” these two concepts diverge from the types of institutions and disciplinary division we normally refer to. He talked about how philosophy separated itself from the sphere of theology through inquiry without condition and elucidated that deconstruction was in this sense not a negation of the Enlightenment. The university is a site where people not only pursue truth, but question various kinds of “truth” as well; the humanities is the medium for such inquiry. In his talk, Derrida mentioned the transformation of the university in the age of Internet and questioned what democracy could be in such an era.

At dusk, after his talk and the roundtable discussion, we sat in a courtyard near Ritan Road and talked. The topic was the university in China and its historical tradition. Derrida, as a deconstructionist philosopher who persistently questioned the tradition of the European Enlightenment within which he was situated, made the following inquiries: From what cultural tradition did the university emerge in China? Does Confucianism contain the sort of inquiry without condition of the European university?

After briefly introducing the characteristics of Song Dynasty Confucianism, I explained the three origins of the university in China. Firstly, it was derived from the official system of imperial academy (*taixue*). The name *taixue* originated in the Zhou Dynasty, but as a system of higher education it was founded during the reign of the Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty (Liu Che, 156-87 BC) based on the advice of Dong Zhongshu (179-104 BC), whose *Three Disquisitions on Heaven and Human Beings* (*Tianren sance*) urged the emperor to “set up an imperial academy and select wise masters to nurture the literati (*shi*).” In 135 BC, Emperor Wu had an imperial academy build in the capital, established positions for Erudites (*boshi*) of the Five Classics (*wujing*) and enrolled 50 disciples of the Erudites. In later historical periods, the subjects studied in the imperial academy expanded to include *The Book of Changes*, *The Book of Poetry*, *The Book of Documents*, *The Book of Rites*, *The Three Commentaries on the Spring and Autumn Annals*, *The Rites of Zhou*, *The Erya* and so on. The number of students increased from about 10,000 during Wang Mang’s reign (45 BC-23 AD) to roughly 30,000 in the late Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220). Other schools such as the School of Four Gates and the School of Local States were also gradually added to the official education system. The official school system aimed at preparing qualified officials for the country, and the subjects studied centered on the Confucian classics. With imperial colleges, however, the tradition of resistance and questioning is deeply rooted. In the Han Emperor Ai’s reign (25-1 BC), for instance, over a thousand imperial college students gathered together to protest the imprisonment of an upright official. When Neo-Confucianism spread to the imperial college in the Song Dynasty, students submitted treatises to the throne and became involved in political struggles.

Secondly, a tradition of private learning that predated the imperial college system. As far as the “inquiry without condition” is concerned, the tradition of private learning (*sixue*) and academies of classical learning (*shuyuan*) was a more fertile resource for the development of the modern discipline of humanities than the imperial college. So-called private learning is contrasted with the official education system, often traced back to the Spring and Autumn period (770-476 BC), when

Confucian, Moist, Daoist and Legalist learning were most influential. Confucius, Laozi, Mozi, and others taught their disciples and can be considered as the founders of private learning. Among these, Confucius left the most important legacy. After the rites and music of the Zhou Dynasty had collapsed and the literati class divided into groups that represented different interest groups, different schools of thought arose and disputed with one another. The Han Emperor of Wu elevated the status of Confucianism above other schools and established the imperial college, but he did not ban private learning. Although it also centered on Confucian ideas, private learning of this period provided other schools the opportunity to survive.

In the Tang Dynasty (618-907), Buddhism thrived so that temples also functioned as schools. *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions* by Xuanzang (or Hsüan-tsang, Hvenasāṃga, 602-664) notes that the Nālandā Vihāra temple in India (present-day Bihar) was a center for scholarship with about 1,500 teachers, where over ten thousand monks, including Xuanzang and others from China, studied the Buddha Dharma. They learned the Hetuvidyā logic, Sabdavidya linguistics, medicine, astronomical and calendric studies, craftsmanship, agriculture, etc. while explicating the sutra and engaging in scholarly debates. Nālandā Vihāra is hence regarded as the origin of the university in India. This tradition of learning, explication, and debating in Buddhism converged with the classical tradition of private learning in China and significantly influenced the formation of academies in the Song Dynasty (960-1279). The legacy of the four major academies founded in the early Song served as models for later academies. One most prominent distinction between the official and the private learning system lies in the latter's disregard of the boundaries of social status, region, age, or level of intelligence. Sons from commoners' households could enter temple schools; community schools taught morality and agriculture. The forms of teaching of private learning included "periodic debates" and "inter-school debates." The contents taught in private learning schools spanned a wide range: from classics, history and literature, and poetry, to Daoism, erudition in things or phenomena (*bowu*), law and politics, and so on. Even in the modern era after the examination system was abandoned, the legacy of private learning not only merged into the university system, but also played a significant role in the development of local educational practice, in particular the development of teachers' colleges, agriculture schools, and engineering schools.

Lastly, the university of modern China was neither developed directly from the tradition of the imperial academy nor a direct inheritor of private learning. As the fruit of the Westernization Movement and reforms in modern China, it aimed at preparing students with practical skills and replacing the examination system, seeing no need for humanities. Before the examination system was terminated in the late Qing in 1905, both the official- and the private education systems were inextricably linked with the system, which began in the Sui Dynasty in 605, fully developed in the Tang, matured in the Song, and prospered in the Ming and the Qing before its decline was brought about by the boats and cannons of Western powers. 18<sup>th</sup>-century European Enlightenment scholars celebrated the examination system in China as it replaced aristocratic systems for selecting

officials. In history, many talented people were able to pass through the examinations to become capable officials. It was precisely because the examinations aimed at official selection, however, that many schools of scholarly thought lost their vitality in becoming officialized. In the late Qing, Neo-Confucian education centered on the classics, and the eight-legged essay could no longer meet the demands of the time.

The new system of education, however, was not the result of an enlightenment as the event in European history but originated from the need for modern military technology. The first university in the history of modern Chinese education was the Beiyang Naval School (also called Tientsin Naval College), founded in August 1881 following the recommendation in Li Hongzhang's (1823-1891) memorial to the throne, with Yan Fu (1854-1921), the future president of Peking University, as its Instructor-in-Chief. The Beiyang Naval School had a clear military orientation, and many naval officials who died in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) were its alumni. Besides 6 hours plus Sunday spent on Chinese classics each week, its students first learned the English language and then took courses taught in English on science and technology, military affairs, ship operation, and so on.

Capital University (*Jingshi daxuetang*, later Peking University) was established during the Hundred Days' Reform in 1898 according to the principles of "national learning as the substance, western learning the function; use national and western learning together to observe their way of cooperation." Courses were divided into two categories: general courses and specialized courses. In 1910, there were seven disciplines including classics (*jingke*), law and politics, literature and history (*wenke*), science (*gezhi*), agriculture, engineering, and business. Under these seven disciplines were 13 subdivisions: *The Book of Poetry*, *The Rites of Zhou*, *The Zuo Commentary*, Chinese literature, Chinese history, politics, law, banking and insurance, agriculture, geology, mining, and metallurgy. There were no divisions such as humanities, social sciences, or natural sciences, but the discipline of classics and the discipline of *wenke* belong to what we today consider as the humanities.

In modern China, military, industrial, and political motivations facilitated the birth of the university, the product of national "salvation and survival" (*jiuwang tucun*). As such, it is not possible to elucidate the birth of the university in modern China using the framework of "inquiry without condition" of the Enlightenment that was contained within European theology. Perhaps we can compare the New Culture movement of 1919 to the "inquiry without condition" of European enlightenment, but its momentum was derived initially from concerns for national destiny and not inquiry into the knowledge of God. At its very origin, the birth of the university and of the humanities in modern China were closely associated with concerns for national destiny and with the clash of the East and the West. The inquiries that were raised largely derive from the persistent debates on why China had become backward and defeated, why the West was prosperous and powerful, and how the civilizations of China and of the West differed. The birth of the modern university was closely linked with science and technology and the formation of its disciplines was also inseparable from the notion of "science" (*kexue*).

The extensive application of the concept of science is one of the main characteristics of Chinese thought in the twentieth century. Since the late Qing dynasty, science has served as a symbol of and a call for liberation, as well as an objective criterion for all social and cultural reform. As a stand-in for a universalist world outlook, science has provided not only arguments for the necessity of the reforms hoped for by advocates of a new culture, but also objectives and paradigms for such reform. The power of science lies in the fact that it established an intimate connection between a universalist worldview and a kind of cosmopolitan/nationalist social system, and, through a rationalized classification of knowledge and social division of labor, incorporated in its broad genealogy human life in all its forms and tendencies.

### “Branches of Learning” and the Question of Taxonomy

The word science (*kexue*) is one of the most widely used key words in twentieth century China. Its earliest source comes from the Japanese Meiji scholar Nishi Amane (1829-1897) who in 1874 in the *Meiroku zasshi* (*Meiroku Journal*) translated the English word “science” using the Chinese characters for *kexue*. Nishi was deeply influenced by the positivist philosophy of August Comte and John Stuart Mills, and the term *kexue* was produced under the influence of Comte’s “branches of learning.” Besides the natural sciences, it also included religion, morality, art and society-together providing a universal method that was generally applicable. He translated “philosophy” respectively as the “study of nature and principle”(*xinglixue*), “study of principle”(*lixue*), “study of exhausting principle”(*qionglixue*), “study of the strivings of the wise”(*xixianxue*), “study of strivings for wisdom”(*xizhexue*), and finally came to settle upon the “study of wisdom”(*zhhexue*.)” The first part of “Shōhaku sakki ” (Sundry Notes of Shōhaku) states: “All of the sciences and techniques have one thread running through them, which is very critical,” because having established a unified outlook in study and technique, people’s activities can be organized, society’s order can be stabilized, family and state can become powerful and rich, and study typifies the superior man, thus “establishing a unified outlook and exhausting the subtleties of study and technique.” But one man cannot do all of this, “therefore for establishing a unified outlook, it is the philosopher’s role to construct discussion and explication, whereas to exhaust the subtleties of a particular study and technique, this function belongs to the expert in that field.”<sup>1</sup>

In a manner similar to early Meiji Japan, during the late Qing dynasty, “science” (*kexue*), “various studies” (*zhuxue*), and other concepts that indicated fields of knowledge were related to Western knowledge or Western studies, and these specialist fields of knowledge had been introduced for the purpose of political reform and self-strengthening. Therefore, the usage of scientific terms and the translation of Western knowledge are intimately connected. In 1890, when Chinese scholars began to use the word “*kexue*” (science), its direct source was from a Japanese catalogue.<sup>2</sup>

1. Nishi Amane, “Shōhaku sakki” [Sundry Notes of Shōhaku], in *Nishi Amane zenshu*, v. 1, 165-166.

2. For example, in the spring of 1898 Kang Youwei edited the Catalogue of Japanese Books published by the Datong

It is worth noting that the titles entered under “Schools of Principle” (*Lixue Men*) in the Catalogue of Japanese Books mostly included physics, chemistry, calendrics, meteorology, geography, mineralogy, biology, philosophy, religious studies, psychology, logic, and morality. Among the other volumes were separately arranged categories for physiology, religion, history, politics, law, agriculture, industry, commerce, education, literature, linguistics, aesthetics, novels, military works; the divisions are not very strict, but it is truly categorized according to the nature and function of “various studies” or “branches of learning”. In 1902, Liang Qichao in a note on “The Relation between Geography and Civilization,” defined science (*kexue*) in this way: “anything which becoming a field (*ke*) of study is called science (*kexue*), this is like ‘investigating things and extending knowledge’ (*gezhi*) and ‘various studies (*zhuxue*).’”<sup>3</sup> Here, the extent of a field of study is comparatively broader than the extent of “*gezhi*.” And the notion of “various studies” or “branches of learning” is also related to the late Qing reform of the educational system.

As with the difference of position in Nishi’s “philosophy” or “unified vision” with his “science of sciences,” late Qing Chinese scholars were prone to use the concept of “groups” (*qun*) and the category of “sociology” to unify the fields of knowledge, thus placing the classification of the study of fields of knowledge within the frame of an ideal model of society. This pattern is derived from Comte and Herbert Spencer’s sociology, while also drawing upon the concept of the “group” in ancient Chinese thought; thus the branches of learning are closely related to the overall view of society, the universe and nature. This also implies that science and its system have a close relationship with the concept of a new social community.

According to Confucian thought, the “group” is “the law under Heaven” and “the common nature of all things,” it involves “not studying but knowing, not worrying but being able to do,” that is the principle (*li*) of nature and it is one with the principle of morality. Because of this, the term “various studies” is not a mixed-up hodgepodge of knowledge classification, but is directly connected with the technique (*shu*) of the “sociology” of politics and education. The general outlook of science embodies the modern state’s politics, the ethical and technical structure in an organic whole. Following Spencer’s concepts in sociology, Yan Fu used the structure of heaven, earth, and man to establish a system of knowledge related to nature, society and morality. Within this discipline the highest position is “metaphysics,” or the study of “refining the mind and controlling affairs,” while situated at the bottom are mathematics, chemistry, electricity, botany, and belonging to the middle level are agriculture, military science, navigation, mechanics, medicine, and mining.<sup>4</sup>

Yan Fu’s “metaphysics” (*xuanxue*) is closely connected to “sociology” (*qunxue*), the former

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Translation Bureau, in which some titles of books use the term “*kexue*”. See Kang Youwei, “*Riben shumuzhi zixu*” [Self-preface to *Catalogue of Japanese Books*], in *Kang Youwei quanji* [Complete Works of Kang Youwei] (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2007), vol. 3, 263-64.

3. Liang Qichao, “Dili yu wenming zhi guanxi” [The Relationship between Geography and Civilization], in *Yinbingshi heji* [Collected Works from the Ice-Sipper’s Studio] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1936), vol. 10, 113.

4. Yan Fu, “Yuan qiang xiudinggao” [Corrected Manuscript of “On Power”], in *Yan Fu ji*, vol. 1, 22-23.

mainly includes mathematics and calculus, and is a type of knowledge which can comprehensively hold an object's "principle of inevitability (*biran zhi li*)," while the latter is capable of applying inductive and deductive methodology to politics, criminal law, finance, historiography, and other fields of sociology.<sup>5</sup> According to Yan's understanding, through the methods of classification and primary evidence, science provided a new social model and a new principle of morality.

From the late Qing up to the May Fourth New Cultural Movement (1919), "science" was translated into Chinese in many ways, with *kexue* being one among them. *Gezhixue*, *gewuxue*, *qionglixue*, *lixue*, *like*, and others all came from Confucianism, particularly from the Song-Ming school of principle's discussion of "the study of things to acquire knowledge," which during the Ming and Qing eras had become connected with knowledge of nature. This kind of translation had its origins in missionary writings. The missionaries used Confucian terms to translate the Western concepts of science and technology, some examples include W. A. P. Martin's 1868 publication "*Gewu rumen*" (Introduction to the Sciences), Alexander Williamson's 1876 publication "*Gewu tanyuan*" (The Origin of Natural Science), and others. All used *gewu* as a translation of science. In 1874 the British consulate located in Shanghai proposed establishing a *Gezhi shuyuan* in the manner of a reading room. Afterwards on John Fryer's proposal and the board's approval, it was established as an industry and technology school and a natural sciences research and educational institution. Its English name was The Chinese Polytechnic Institution and Reading Room. The use of *gezhi*, *gewu* and other concepts was not limited to missionary writing and practice, Chinese scholars and modern intellectuals also used these terms widely. Before 1902, the use of the word *kexue* was rare. For example in 1861, Feng Guifen initiated subjects in Western learning "such as mathematics, mechanics, perspective, optics, chemistry, all of which concern the investigation of things to reach the underlying basic principle (*gewu zhili*)."

The reason that the Confucian category "*gewu zhizhi*" could be used to translate the modern concept of science lies in the transformation of the concept of *wu* (things), which is a crucial point. Within the context of classical ritual and music, *wu* was not an isolated, objective fact, but was a "thing" within a certain relationship, system, order, and norm. Under the "Great Officer" in the "Offices of Earth" section of *The Rituals of Zhou* there is a passage, "in the district they use the three merits (*wu*) to teach the multitudes, and to treat them as guests and recommend them." The "three merits" refers to the six virtues (knowledge, benevolence, sageliness, righteousness, loyalty, and harmony), the six aspects of conduct (filial piety, friendliness among brothers, accordance with neighbors, harmonious relations with your wife and mother's relations, being trustful, being sympathetic) and the six arts (ritual, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, mathematics).

*Wu* was the demonstration of a natural order, while ritual and music were also the direct embodiment of the natural order, therefore the *wu* is also the model of ritual and music.

In Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, the relation of *wu* and the ordering of ritual became distant,

5. Yan Fu, "Yi *Qunxueyiyen zixu*" [Preface to the Translation of *A Study of Sociology*], in *Yan Fu ji*, vol. 1, 123.

when *wu* no longer directly presented a norm for ritual, but had to pass through an “investigation of things” in order to render up “principle.” Song-Ming Confucians saw the “Heavenly principle” as a characteristic of all things, the source of ethics and the norm for implementation, and took it as the basis for the integration of nature, ethics, politics and other fields. Similarly, the concepts of modern science and *gezhi* centered on the research into and application of nature. Moreover, they often had mutual liaisons with the categories of politics, ethics and social ordering. Therefore, the fall of the Heavenly (i.e. religious) view of the world and the rise of the scientific world view in late Qing times was not a simple relationship of rise and decline, but they existed at the same time, permeating each other.

The concept of science from the late 19th century to the early 20th century had a very close relationship to the categories of evolution, progress and natural change (*jinhua*, *jinbu*, *tianyan*). By means of an intense critique of thought, the scientific worldview ultimately replaced the Neo-Confucian outlook of the heavenly principle (*tianli*) and, established on the basis of the knowledge of objective laws, became the new public principle (*gongli*). As it is evidenced in a great number of documents dating from the late Qing Era to the May Fourth Movement, we can summarize the sharp opposition between the heavenly principle worldview and the public principle worldview from several perspectives. First, the public principle worldview reversed the historical outlook of the heavenly principle worldview: the future replaced the past as the root origin of ideal politics and morality put into practice. Second, the public principle worldview, through a concept of linear time, replaced the heavenly principle worldview based on the circumstances of the times or the condition of reason. Third, the public principle worldview used the method of atomic theory to construct a category of facts, and this unsettled the extant metaphysics of the heavenly principle worldview, by attempting to construct the basis of ethics and politics upon the logic of facts and the rules of nature. Because of the final establishment of the factual concept of atomic theory, any subsequent resistance to the logic of facts or the laws of nature had to recognize the precondition of the dualism of facts and values.

## The Emergence of Two Cultures

Just as the different branches of orthodox Confucianism used a variety of different explanations for the heavenly principle and its “investigation of things to acquire knowledge,” modern Chinese thinkers also included different paths to the understanding of science. Yan Fu and Liang Qichao represent the direction of two main streams: As the fusion of the school of *Lixue* and monism (*yi yuan lun*), Yan Fu’s public principle outlook stressed the world’s innate uniformity, emphasizing that one can understand the innate laws of the universe, the world, and man himself by means of investigating things and exhausting their principle, or through empirical methods. On the other hand, Liang Qichao’s thought, which combined the mind-and-heart school, the new learning of classics school, and philosophical dualism (particularly in German idealist philosophy), stressed

that there exists a profound chasm between the natural world and the moral world, and that the only method that can connect these two worlds is the implementation of the unity of knowledge and practice (*zhixing heyi*). Yan Fu believed that one could establish a cognitive relationship between man and things by way of the experimental method. By a cognitive process, one reaches the ultimate truth. Whereas Liang Qichao attempted to rebuild the ultimate concept of truth (heavenly principle, *tianli* or instinctive moral knowledge, *liangzhi*), on the basis of the concept of practice (unity of knowledge and practice) for the purpose of fundamentally uniting man's social and moral practice with the problem of public principle.

As for Zhang Taiyan (1868-1936), "public principle" was only a power for oppression and domination. Zhang Taiyan's exposure of scientific public principle was based on two fundamental principles. Firstly, he used the principle of subjective epistemology to differentiate two kinds of concepts of nature: nature as studied by science is not self-existing nature, but is a nature brought into a specific horizon and category (that is, nature that is constructed by science), and this nature lacks an innate essence (it does not have any characteristics of itself), it shows itself only in the pattern that is [as the result of] the law of causality. Secondly, he liberates the dynamics of nature from the framework of teleology, negating any moral connotation of evolution, and thus rejects associating individuals with an historical teleology of evolution. He thus refused to admit that the individual's ethical orientations are based on the laws of movement for the whole of society, rejecting that an individual should be looked upon as an instrument of group evolution.<sup>6</sup>

If we were to compare the dissemination and practice of science among late Qing intellectuals with the practices of scientific communities of the Republican period, we would find a distinct shift: Chinese science organizations and other scientific bodies, together with the appearance of specialized academic periodicals, indicate that Republican China's cultural field embodied a clear-cut difference between scientific culture and the culture of the humanities. By contrast, during the late Qing the dissemination of science was an organic part of the spread of reform and revolution. As a result of the shift, two clear gaps opened up between scientific culture and other cultures. Science itself or "science" as a vocabulary item became closely associated with the objective or the concept of the objectivity. Scientific bodies and their activities, using their special discipline, training, method, and accurately defined concepts reconstructed man's basic understanding of nature and humanity itself. Not only did the new concepts arising from scientific activities such as time, space, elements, atoms, molecules, electricity, steam, energy, geologic systems, etc. expand man's view of the universe and nature, but such concepts also fundamentally changed man's imagined picture of the world. Therefore, the influence of science and its interrelated concepts far surpassed the division of two cultures in becoming a universal law by which to measure progress and backwardness, truth and falsity, right and wrong.

During the late Qing, civilizations and the competition between them held important historical

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6. Zhang Taiyan, "Sihuolun" [Essay on Four Confusions], in *Zhang Taiyan quanji* [Complete Works of Zhang Taiyan], (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1984), vol. 4, 443-44.

meaning for China's scientific concepts. People believed that scientific research and the resultant social rules were the major reason that Western society had won in the competition of civilizations. According to this paradigm, the importance of science originated from the judgment concerning the new circumstances at that time, and did not originate in science itself. With such a backdrop, late Qing scientific publications developed a method for understand science during the debate on civilizational conflicts, with a major characteristic of this understanding being the situation of science within the relations of Eastern and Western civilizations, spiritual or material, so as to investigate the significance of science.

After the May Fourth East-West cultural debates, science and its association with a specific historical culture gradually was replaced by a type of universal narrative about “scientific era”. Chen Duxiu said, “Today the world has two roads: one is a bright road that goes toward a republic, science, atheism; the other is a dark road that goes toward dictatorship, superstition, and the divine rights of kings...”<sup>7</sup>

### **From the Debate on East/West Civilizations to the Debate Science/Metaphysics**

The New Cultural Movement of May Fourth, particularly the journals *New Youth* (*Xinqingnian*), *New Tide* (*Xinchao*), and other radical publications, caused an intense debate in the cultural world concerning Western and Eastern civilizations. The concept of science as an understanding of objective truth endowed the New Culture Movement's advocacy of social historical reform with a sense of inevitability that could transcend the dichotomy between fact and value. The “scientific interests” of mainstream intellectuals of the New Culture Movement, such as Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi, Wu Zhihui, Ding Wenjiang, and others, who collectively were the radical intellectuals of the time, were sparked by a concern for society, politics, economy, and culture. For example, under the influence of pragmatism, Hu Shi equated science with methodology, but he did not realize that when this method was applied to politics, ethics, and humanities, it already served as an epistemological model. In this context science represents the public principle—all public principle must be consistent with the laws of science, we can call this the making of the public principle of science.

The making of science into the public principle provides a premise for the extensive use of the adjective “scientific.” The debate over Eastern and Western civilization started in the style of historical/cultural narratives, and both sides' discussion of the legitimacy of Eastern and Western civilizations relied on the historical narratives of the respective cultures. This debate took “culture” (*wenhua*) and “civilization” (*wenming*) as its key points; the focus of the argument was over which culture and its values could be taken as a standard or goal for establishing the changing direction of China's society, culture and nation. We can largely summarize the basic views of Liang Shuming in

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7. Chen Duxiu, “Kelinde bei” [Monument to Kettler], *Xinqingnian* [New Youth], vol. 5, no. 5 (Oct 15, 1918), 458.

the following schematic:

Eastern = metaphysics = art = opinion = metaphysical talk = noumenon = private morality = returning to the past = the second, third directions

Western = science = learning = knowledge = ethics = phenomenon = public morality = modernization = the first direction

In Liang's discussion of culture, "science" is not only a problem of knowledge, and "metaphysics" is not only a problem concerning ethics, but they indicate two different civilizational problems represented by science and metaphysics. In scientific civilizations, all science, politics, economics, ethics, law, and philosophy belong to science, rationalized and understood, but in metaphysical civilizations, all science, politics, economics, ethics, rituals, and thought are metaphysical, artistic, and intuited.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, in scientific civilizations, there does not exist an incommensurability between science and ethics, because there exists an ethics of science; in a metaphysical civilization, there does not exist an incommensurability between science and knowledge, because there exists a knowledge of ethics. Incommensurability exists only between the two kinds of civilizations.

It was much the same with more marginal groups of the New Culture Movement. Intellectual orientations that questioned the absolute dominant position of science were also incorporated into a rationalized knowledge system. Whether challenges to the Western scientific civilization were informed by "cultural differences," efforts to preserve the independence of the fields of ethics, aesthetics, or affection were all transformed by their incorporation into an institutionalized, rationalized, and scientific framework of knowledge classification and institutional frameworks. The intellectual, educational, and social efforts made by Liang Qichao, Liang Shuming, Zhang Junmai, and the Xueheng School transformed categories such as culture, morality, aesthetics, and feelings into specialized fields at modern educational and research institutions. Science, and the changing view of nature that it triggers, not only dominates our knowledge of nature but also prescribes our awareness of society and ourselves.

In 1923, Zhang Junmai's talk, "Philosophy of Life," delivered to a class of Tsinghua University students preparing to study in the United States, set off the great debate concerning "science and the philosophy of life."<sup>9</sup> From the debate over "Eastern and Western civilizations" to the debate over "science and the philosophy of life," the most important change was that the former's east/west dualism was transformed in the latter into a dualism between science/metaphysics. Against

8. See Liang Shuming, "Dongxiwenhuaqi qi zhexue daoyan" [Introduction to *Eastern and Western Cultures and their Philosophies*], in *Liang Shuming quanji* [Collected Works of Liang Shuming] (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 1989), vol. 1.

9. Zhang Junmai, "Zai lun renshengguan yu kexue bing da Ding Zaijun" [Once more Speaking of a Philosophy of Life and Science. A Response to Ding Zaijun], in Zhang Junmai (ed.), *Renshengguan zhi lunzhan* [Debate on the Philosophy of Life] (Shanghai: Taidong tushuju, 1923), vol.1, 64-65.

the background of the First World War, people from two different directions launched a critical debate over scientific civilization. From a cultural direction, they established Chinese culture as the mainstream through a comparison with Western civilization, and rejected the universal claims of Western civilization; from the direction of knowledge, through the differentiating the dualism of “science and philosophy of life,” they separated ethics, psychology, and other social sciences from the complete system of natural sciences. Therefore they rejected the universal idea of scientific common examples (*gongli*) or scientific rules (*guize*). In truth they reestablished man as a main force in the field of knowledge.

Using the diversity of the spirit to oppose the universality of science, using the diversity of culture and history to oppose the universalism of “scientific civilization” (Western civilization), using the differences in principle of the subject to oppose the united principle of the common standard (*gongli*) principle of “science,” this is the historical connotation of “science and the philosophy of life” as a pair of opposing rhetorical modes in the debate in 1923. By opposing science with the philosophy of life, the problem of history and culture was ultimately transformed into a problem about abstract and universal knowledge. It was not the difference of Chinese essence and Western function, or the confrontation of Eastern and Western civilization, but rather an opposition of science and metaphysics, physics and psychology, reason and intuition, which structured the center of the discussion. With this as the axis, the system of universal scientific knowledge began to split apart into incommensurate, differing, independent fields, that is, the field of science and the field of the spirit. The differences between psychological studies and natural subjects did not prevent Mills from promoting in his methodology the scientification of psychology and sociology, while the orientation of Zhang Junmai’s efforts were in the opposite direction, with Zhang clearly striving to strictly differentiate psychology, sociology and political science from physics, astronomy, and other scientific fields.

Changes in sovereignty and the legal basis of the modern state cannot be separated from the production of new knowledge and ideology. Hence reconstituting the educational institutions and system of knowledge is an important aspect of the construction of modern sovereignty. In 1906, with the abolition of the civil service examination system, which had been maintained for thirteen hundred years, a new educational system, and the scientific knowledge to go with it, was legally established. After the founding of the Republic of China in 1912, academic reform was carried out in 1912, 1915, and 1923, modeled, respectively, on the academic systems in Japan, Europe, and the United States. Since then, every national reform has been accompanied by changes in educational institutions and the system of knowledge.

The educational system in modern China included two orientations: through the professional division of labor and a new knowledge classification system, it brought together in one process the national and global educational systems, and, at the same time, it provided institutional protection for a new division of labor in society and its mode of social operation. Within this system, the production of knowledge gradually became professionalized. In the new knowledge system, the

traditional worldview and its epistemology (morality, traditional education, etc.) lost their status as a defining worldview, and continued to exist only as elements of the new knowledge.

From “the debate over Eastern and Western cultures” (1918) to “the debate over science versus metaphysics” (1923), the affirmation of the autonomy, special status, and internal values of culture was incorporated into a rationalized classification of knowledge. Defense of the autonomy of ethics, aesthetics, feelings, and culture finally secured their positions in the rationalized knowledge system or the empire of science. National education and professional education based on a new social division of labor constituted the basic framework of the educational system. From this perspective, the process by which a scientific “worldview based on universal secular principles” (*gongli shijie guan*) reformed and replaced the traditional “worldview based on heavenly principles” (*tianli shijie guan*) constitutes the basic aspect of the transformation of modern thought. This new worldview paves the way for the division and specialization of knowledge and the institutions of modern society.

From the late Qing to the early Republic, atomism was at the core of the new and fashionable scientific positivism, and dissolved the Confucian worldview that hitherto had provided legitimation for the dynasty’s political, religious, and geographic relations. During the May Fourth era, the scientific worldview justified attacks on the family system and its ethical presuppositions, providing a rationale for the legitimacy of atomistic individualism, marriage, and other social affairs. All these show that the scientific worldview is not only the banner of a cultural movement but the legitimate groundwork for modern states. Its theory of rights and legal basis are premised upon an atomistic idea of abstract individuals. The historical connection between abstract individuals and atomism shows that atomism is not based on positivist principles but on abstract assumption. The conflict between the atomistic view of nature and the Neo-Confucian worldview was born in the transformation from consanguineous and geographical community relations into the abstract legal relations of the modern state.

### **Humanities as “Inquiry without Condition”**

The contemporary humanities in China gradually formed after the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Perhaps we can use two “departures” to describe the establishment of this new humanities. The first departure was a break from the school system of the Cultural Revolution; it was symbolized in the formal reinstatement of the college entrance exam (*gaokao*) system in 1977. This departure can also be explained as a return to the pre-Cultural Revolution system. The Cultural Revolution erupted in 1966, and from 1966 to 1969 institutions of higher learning stopped enrolling students. Starting in 1970, in accordance with Mao Zedong’s order for a revolution in education, some schools resumed enrolling students. These students were not admitted directly from high school; rather, they were recruited from groups with a certain social experience such as workers, peasants, and soldiers. The university disciplines that were rehabilitated were primarily science

and engineering. In 1977, under the guidance of Deng Xiaoping, the system of “laborer, peasant, and soldier students” was abandoned, and all those who had graduated from middle school during the decade-long suspension of the entrance exam could again participate in the higher education entrance exams. Concurrently, in May of 1977, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) was founded, which included thirty-one institutes of research in the human social sciences (today it is thirty-five institutes, and forty-five centers). The predecessor of CASS was the Philosophy and Social Science Section of the Chinese Academy of Science (CAS). Institutionally speaking, the system of the Chinese Academy of Science is a combination of Soviet-style institution (from which it derives its basic framework) and Academia Sinica of the Republican Period. The foundation of CASS also symbolized China’s attempt to locate a “break” from the Soviet system while still remaining within the bounds of Marxism. Within this new frame, disciplines such as philosophy, history, and literature were not replaced within the humanities, but rather constituted a peculiar element within the broader array of social sciences. From the close of the 1970s through the entire 1980s, despite the fact that scholars maintained a certain delineation between social science and the humanities, and viewed disciplines such as literature, history, and philosophy as different from social sciences such as economics, nonetheless it is the case that the academic system of the time did not clearly differentiate between the humanities and social sciences. Put differently, the humanities disciplines were treated as a specific category of social science. In 1984, when I entered CASS to pursue a doctorate degree, my PhD cohort within the entire academy was a mere twenty-three people, who were respectively classified into the various social science and humanities disciplines. Except for the specialized studies we pursued under our advisers, all the interactions between classmates were completely transdisciplinary.

The second “departure” was the break away from or transformation of the traditional socialist system of disciplines. According to Marxist theory, social science (including the humanities) is ultimately a superstructure, and falls within the realm of ideology. However, as regards the departments of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, in actuality the organizational system of these disciplines was deeply influenced by the arrangement and membership constitution of pre-1949 institutions such as Academia Sinica, Peking University, and Tsinghua University. The CAS faculty divisions (*xuebu*) were founded in 1955; before this, in 1952, under the direction of Mao Zedong, all the institutes of higher learning in China underwent revolution and the so-called “institutional adjustment.” Accordingly, the entirety of Tsinghua University’s Humanities and Social Sciences were merged with Beijing University and then again with the faculty division (*Xuebu*) of Philosophy-Social Science at Chinese Academy of Sciences after it formed. At the same time, despite their deep scholarly attainments, on account of their political positions an older generation of scholars at the universities were collectively moved into a department with favorable conditions but that did not enroll students. It was precisely this generation of scholars, such as Gu Jiegang and Chen Yinke (who didn’t accept the transfer) in the field of history, Yu Pingbo and Qian Zhongshu in the field of literature, and He Lin and Jin Yuelin in the field of philosophy, who were appointed

to researcher positions within various offices of the *Xuebu*. Consequently, the older generation of scholars at the *Xuebu* included not just prominent leftist scholars such as Guo Moruo, Fan Wenlan, and He Qifang, but also outstanding non-leftist scholars. The *Xuebu* became an advanced research organ composed of an older, middle, and younger generation. After the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences was formed in 1977, it was this generation, together with the generation of scholars who had matured after 1949, who constituted the core force of social sciences and humanities in China.

The 1980s has been called an era of the “second enlightenment” which continued the enlightenment project of the May Fourth Movement (1919). This era can also be roughly separated into two stages: the first, beginning in 1978 until around 1984, was a period in which occurred a “liberation of thought movement.” This movement’s most active participants were the older generation of Marxist theorists who used the terminology and propositions of Marxism to enter into discussions about areas such as economics, politics, and culture. For example, they used the notion of “law of value” to mount an attack on ideas of planned economy, or the philosophical proposition that “actual practice is the sole criterion for judging truth” to attack the framework of orthodox Marxism and Maoist thought, or the method of reevaluating history to revise classical Marxist historiography. In the second stage, after 1985, the large scale translation and introduction of modern western philosophy, economics and other classics of theory had become a tidal wave, and from this time onward, European, American, and Japanese research on China were also imported in great quantities. In this period, for the most part the introduction and importation of humanities and social sciences knowledge, as well as the attacks on old propositions, did not originate as a result of methods internal to the discipline system; rather it is better to say that they were symbolic of the criticism and attacks on older disciplinary frames, notions, categories, and subjects, while also symbolizing “inquiry without condition.”

From the disintegration of old norms in the 1980s, to the establishment of new norms in the 1990s, humanities scholars played a crucial role. In the 1990s, although quite a few scholars bemoaned the fall of the humanities, [in actuality] the debates and transformations of the field of humanities were extremely lively. Despite this, there is a great difference between the two decades. The critiques of old frames during the 1980s were accompanied by a great many translations and introductions of foreign thought, from Kantianism to Neo-Kantianism, from Hegelianism to Neo-Hegelianism, from existentialism to phenomenology, from Nietzsche to Freud, from literary realism and romanticism to modernism, from structuralist historiography to poststructuralist historiography, from systems theory and cybernetics to information theory, all were imported into China under the name of “the new” (in actuality they were non-Marxist orthodoxies). Before this swath of translations and introductions could be thoroughly sorted out and digested, it was put to use as a method for reappraising various historical and cultural phenomena. In the 1990s, the Chinese scholarly field’s translation industry had reached mature form, and a process of disciplinary development that looked to American humanities and social science—including research on China—as a fundamental standard was just unfolding. Indeed, the course of the Americanization of

humanities and social sciences is a phenomenon of this era.

Just as the “inquiry without condition” period of the 1980s passed, beginning in the 1990s, a kind of movement attempting to reconstruct the academic and disciplinary standards of fields of humanities and social sciences began to develop both within and outside the establishment of academies and universities. The first to take up this mission of reconstructing the standards were the two non-governmental journals, *Scholar* (edited by Chen Pingyuan, Wang Shouchang, and myself) and *Chinese Social Science Quarterly* (edited by Deng Zhenglai). Within the space of about ten years, these two journals firmly established scholarly standards which in truth came ever closer to contemporary standards in the west, and which were gradually taken up by the scholarly systems of university and research organs. Given the trends and resistance that *Scholar* and *Chinese Social Science Quarterly* elicited in the 1990s, their effect on the subsequent formation of the fundamental standards of humanities and social sciences should not be underestimated. The majority of contributors to *Scholar* were born in the 1950s and ‘60s, and the journal proved a platform for the most outstanding humanities scholarship in China at the time. Centering on Chinese intellectual history and the Chinese history of scholarship, this group of scholars turned their interests and gaze from translating and introducing western scholarship toward the changes in knowledge in China since the Qing Dynasty in an attempt to subsume into their own scholarship and research this very long historical thread. This effort resonates with American China studies’ “discovery of history in China,” and its turn toward local histories, and we can say it passed through a search for local knowledge and led a new trend. *Chinese Social Science Quarterly*, on the other hand, synthesized the proclivities for “local knowledge” and the standardization of scholarship, calling out for the “localization of Chinese social science.” The efforts of this kind of return to historical tradition and search for local knowledge was a response to the new state of globalization and Americanization, which, at the same time, in its standardization it accommodated the needs of globalization and Americanization. This dual strategy—which wasn’t completely self-conscious—won them a reputation. In a certain sense, the decline of these two unofficial journals does not come from a decline in the new standards they championed, but rather it is the outcome of the establishment of these new standards as a new orthodoxy. At present, in terms of the organizational system of the academic disciplines, the divisional differences and standards of disciplines in China’s universities and research organs do not differ significantly from those of the western academic system.

Compared to these two academic journals, the humanities journal that was most representative of the spirit of “inquiry without condition” of the 1980s, while at the same time facing toward the new conditions of globalization in the subsequent, post-cold war period was *Dushu* (*Readings*). Founded in 1979, its inaugural essay, “Reading has no Forbidden Zone,” embodied the “movement to liberate thought” and its spirit of eradicating old barriers. “Reading has no Forbidden Zone,” like the “inquiry without condition” of the European Enlightenment, unceasingly transcended its own era, pointing its spear at various kinds of naturalized propositions and verdicts of the post-cold war period, even going so far as to target the conditions that had given birth to itself. *Dushu* possessed

the following several characteristics: first, it was geared toward providing a forum for all the intellectuals in society, even in the entire world. It gathered together domestic and foreign scholars from all different generations, surpassed disciplinary boundaries, covered the entirety of the fields of humanities and social science, and even included some content on natural science. Second, this journal attempted to combine [political] questions of the time along with different fields of knowledge. Such contemporaneity and scholarly nature are expressed through a relatively free writing style that was not overly influenced by the norms of scholarly journals. Third, in striving toward intellectuality, this journal was separate both from the consumption-oriented popular journal, and also from conventional academic journals. Precisely because of this, in the 1990s this journal served as an important birthplace for various intellectual debates. In 1994, *Dushu* published a collection of discussions regarding “the spirit of the humanities” in an attempt to establish a value coordinate for contemporary thought within the larger tide of globalization and marketization. After 1996, it extended critical and interrogatory feelers to an even wider field: from critiquing developmentalism to highlighting ecological diversity, from debates about the “three rural issues” [agriculture, rural areas, farmers] crisis to reviews of [China’s] social inequality, from analyses of the rise of finance capitalism to the investigation of various forms of contemporary terrorism, from joint reflection over historical wars to the theorization and consideration of contemporary war, from deliberation over democracy and feminism to a rethinking of Chinese history and world history, from new discoveries in archeology to new methods in human geography . . . . . This journal’s contemporaneity did not let it turn into a news outlet, rather, just the opposite: through confronting, interrogating, and distancing itself from various kinds of trends, it strove to bring reflection to bear upon the newest advances in various knowledge fields, thereby arousing within its readers an “inquiry without condition.” This journal placed importance on unearthing China’s and Asia’s traditions, but it was never limited to this, and instead worked to broadly take the pulse of the contemporary world; in order to attain this goal, it also broke through cultural and national barriers by inviting numerous scholars from different countries to directly participate and contribute to the discussion. The roundtable discussion with Derrida I mentioned above is one example. In China’s modern history, it was common for journals to translate or publish essays by foreign scholars, but few are those that continuously invited foreign scholars to directly participate in discussions about China’s or world problems. *Dushu* thus represents the birth of a kind of transnational public space.

### Humanities as “Soft Power”

Since 2001, non-official journals like *Scholar* and *China Social Science Quarterly* have successively stopped publishing, and since 2007, the journal *Dushu* has no longer played any role in “inquiry without condition.” The reason for the decline of such non-official scholarly organs lies both in the lack of economic support, and, more importantly, in the increasing narrowness of the university system, where the quantified success of scholarship depends on the digital statistics

system, CSSCI, which is modeled after American indexes such as the SSCI and A&HCI. Various schools clearly rank the different academic journals, stipulating which journals are central to their related disciplines; scholarship results that can't be inputted into this statistical system therefore cannot be scored as scholarship results. In regards to journals that aren't included in the statistical system such as *Scholar* and *China Social Science Quarterly*, many scholars, particularly those young academics who haven't yet been promoted [to professor], have no choice but to submit their work elsewhere. *Dushu* is part of the CSSCI index, but not as a central journal of scholarship. There are other, more complex reasons for the decline of these journals during this century, but the expansion of the scholarly system is one obvious element. Put differently, the decline of these scholarly journals does not indicate the decline of the humanities scholarship in China, but the obverse: following the rise of China's economy, and the expansion of the scale and budget of China's institutions of higher education, the system of humanities scholarship has also expanded in an unprecedented fashion. According to the Education Ministry's statistics, which run through June of 2013, there are altogether 2198 colleges and universities (not including military schools) in China, including 877 undergraduate institutions, 1321 advanced occupational or specialized schools, and 292 independent institutions. The number of higher education institutions, enrolled students, and discipline categories is unprecedented in China's history. Compared with the eminent position in Chinese culture, politics, and social life enjoyed by literature, history, and philosophy in the twentieth century, the contemporary field of humanities is increasingly limited to a position as a [particular] discipline. As such, on the one hand the contemporary field of humanities has lost its former avant-garde position, and on the other hand it has enjoyed the increase in research and publishing resources brought about by the expansion of universities and the rise in budgets.

After the 1990s, in the short period of standstill after the discontinuation of *Scholar*, with the support of various governmental scholarship funds, more and more journals edited by scholars or by scholarly organs have entered into the CSSCI electronic statistical index; the subsequent scale of scholarly pieces and translated articles is unprecedented. If before we could distinguish between publication types along the lines of governmental scholarly journals and non-governmental scholarly journals, then now we can only use its inclusion or exclusion from the CSSCI. Within all of the state funds for scholarship, the National Social Science Fund is the largest in scope, and the most authoritative. Based on the National Natural Science Fund that was created in 1986, the National Social Science Fund was founded in June of 1991. The former fund is managed by the National Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Science, also founded in 1991; the latter fund is run by the administrative organization of the National Planning Office, whose "main function/duty is to formulate the long term and annual plans for China's philosophical and social science research, manage the National Social Science Fund, organize works such as reviews of projects, the management of process of them, the monitoring of results, publication and promotion, etc."<sup>10</sup>

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10. <http://baike.baidu.com/view/4901712.htm?fr=aladdin>. The below information about the Fund comes from this page.

Besides the central unit, each province and autonomous region, directly governed city [Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Chongqing], and the Xinjiang Region all have an Administrative Committee for the Planning of Philosophy and Social Science, as well as a Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Science. The National Social Science Fund includes twenty-three planning and appraisal groups on Marxism, scientific socialism, Party history, philosophy, theoretical economics, applied economics, political science, sociology, legal studies, international studies, Chinese history, world history, archaeology, ethnic studies, religious studies, Chinese literature, foreign literature, linguistics, journalism and communications, library, information, and document science, population studies, statistics, physical education, management, etc., as well as three separate groups for pedagogy studies, art studies, and military science. It also has an already-formed project-launching system for initiatives on major projects, annual projects, specially commissioned projects, late-stage subsidized projects, western projects, and projects on translating Chinese scholarship into foreign languages. The National Social Science Fund also emphasizes support for young social science researchers, as well as social science research in peripheral and ethnic zones.”<sup>11</sup> From its establishment until 2010, the National Social Science Fund has expanded from 5,000,000 *yuan* to 600,000,000 *yuan*, the number of annual report items has developed from under 3000 to 27,171, and number of annually subsidized projects from less than 500 to 2285. In this period, the fund has in total provided 2,650,000,000 *yuan* to a total of 24,283 projects, with a production result of more than 45,000 items. I did not find the data for between 2010 and 2014, but it’s certain that in this period the increase in the country’s investment in the humanities rose even more rapidly.

As a state project, the National Social Science Fund clearly takes its intellectual cue from Marxism, Mao Zedong thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, and the viewpoint of “Three Represents” and “Scientific Development” [credited to Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, respectively], and obviously differs from the unofficial journals mentioned above. The ideology of the National Social Science Fund has its limits, [so] from the beginning quite a few of its projects have had no real scholarly value. Within the framework of the Fund’s intellectual guidance, it is difficult for the spirit of “inquiry without condition” to develop fully. But it must also be said that the Fund’s “thought guidance” is very jumbled, and lacks internal coherency, and moreover, given that the scope of projects supported by the Fund is incredibly broad, it might best be described as a case of “fish and dragons jumbled together,” for there is no shortage of excellent achievements by fine scholars who have been supported through the Fund. As such, it’s an oversimplification to call these research achievements merely a form of official ideology.

Resonant with the growth of the National Social Science Fund is the growth in official support for the “going abroad” of Chinese cultural products under the rubric of “soft power.” The notion of soft power was developed in the 1990s by the Harvard Professor, Joseph S. Nye, Jr. Nye uses the concept within the field of international relations in order to remind people that besides paying

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11. Ibid.

attention to forms of “hard power” like territory, arms, military might, technological progress, economic development, regional expansion, and military strikes, we must also consider forms of “soft power” such as culture, values, ability to influence, ethical norms, and cultural hegemony. He moreover wrote an article reminding his readers that the Chinese people are fostering soft power alongside their developing economy, though he deeply believes that America has a soft power advantage. For China and its rapid economic ascension, it proved to be a timely reminder for politicians, intellectuals, and even the impatient entrepreneurs of international trade, who all came to follow with interest the imbalance between China’s “hard power” and “soft power.” This concern gave the extant state of the humanities discipline a new capacity, while creating a new, deeper crisis: as a form of “soft power” the discipline of the humanities has been elevated to a form of national strategy, in the process shoving aside questions about whether as a form of soft power the humanities can maintain the quality of “inquiry without condition,” or whether or not [the notion of] “soft power” can truly embrace and conserve the value of enlightenment through education and the fostering of a holistic form of human development.

“Soft power” extends to many fields. One field that has attracted attention and debate in the international academic community is China’s system of Confucius Institutes, which is organized and led by the Office of Chinese Language Council International (known as “*Hanban*”). Since the first Confucius Institute opened in Seoul in 2004 through the end of 2013, 440 Confucius Institutes and 646 Confucius Classrooms were opened across the globe, distributed amongst 120 different countries. The Confucius Institute focuses on language teaching while also taking on other cultural projects. It does not belong to specific field of the humanities discipline per se, but its creation is mutually resonant with the new domestic emphasis on the teaching and research of traditional culture, which is another cultural phenomenon worthy of attention. If, as a project of raising “cultural soft power,” the Confucius Institute has attracted the misgivings of the west, and America in particular (which is itself in the habit of exporting “cultural soft power”), then another effort however has not aroused the same sort of nervousness. In 2002, the State Council’s News Office and the General Administration of Press and Publication organized events such as “Public Lecture on Chinese Books, the Presentation of Chinese Books Copyright” at the Moscow and Frankfurt book fairs; in 2003, the “Year of Sino-French Culture,” it recommended 300 books to the French press, and in March the following year, with financial assistance for translation, 70 French versions of Chinese books were presented at the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Salon du Livre exhibition in Paris. That same year, building off of these initiatives, the State Council’s News Office and the General Administration of Press and Publication initiated its “Plan for Popularizing Chinese Books Abroad,” and in 2006 it established a working committee for implementing the plan. Since its beginning, this program of dissemination has only been strengthened and renovated. Besides financial support for the expenses of translation, it also supports the expenses of publishing and even marketing, thus attracting the interest of a great number of foreign academic- and non-academic publishers. In 2013, a unit within the working committee relinquished 3754 copyrights to more than ten countries

and publishing organs, including a few well-known international scholarly publishers.<sup>12</sup> What is worth noting is that, since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, following China's entrance into the Universal Copyright Convention (Berne Convention) in 1992, Chinese translations and publications of foreign works—particularly western and Russian—and China's international copyright exchange has run at a deficit, but between 2010 and 2013, the margin of this deficit greatly shrunk (although it has again grown in 2014), which has an obvious connection to the Chinese government's "Plan for Popularizing Chinese Books Abroad."

### The Return of Confucius and the General Education in a Digital Age

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century China experienced a continuous and violent anti-tradition movement, but starting in the 1980s, this wave had quietly reversed course. We might say that the birth of *Scholar* in the 1990s emblemized a self-conscious return to tradition, and, after entering the new century, this trend that began in the scholarship of a small number of intellectuals gradually developed into a tidal wave. Ultimately this new rise of cultural conservatism is due to various complex elements, about which it is ultimately hard to generalize. In the field of humanities scholarship, two separate strands are the tradition of Neo-Confucianism as well as the recent spread from America of Strauss's school of venerating the classical tradition.

Within this new wave of traditionalism there are two phenomena that have particularly attracted people's attention. The first is the return of "national studies" [*guoxue*]. The concept of national studies arose in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Japan, and rapidly spread to late Qing China; both concepts of national studies and "national essence" (*guocui*) seek to preserve the national spirit, and are obvious outgrowths of the rise of modern nationalism. But, from the "Debate over Eastern and Western Civilization" that erupted during World War I, to the "Science versus Metaphysics debate" that emerged at the end of the May Fourth period, Chinese civilization had already come to be seen as an ethical civilization in opposition against scientific civilization. In the new division of the disciplines, "national learning" was subsumed by the category of humanities. In this sense, national studies and the recent flourishing of its research organs (quite a few major schools such as Peking University, Tsinghua University, and Renmin University have formed national studies research institutions) have constructed a new landscape alongside contemporary humanities scholarship in China.

The second phenomenon is the rise of general education. The concept of general education also spread to China from America, with Hong Kong post-secondary education serving as a broker. The Chinese university system has typically emphasized specialized education. For example, in vocational education fields such as law or economic management, once one has taken the entrance

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12. This data comes from an essay by Zhang Hongbo (the Secretary-General of the China Written Works Copyright Society), "The Fundamental Transformations Brought About by Chinese Publishing's Going Abroad." See <http://data.chinaxwcb.com/epaper2014/epaper/d5850/d9b/201408/48404.html>.

exam and started the vocational training there is a lack of any corresponding cultural education. Since the 1990s, the Ministry of Education has begun advocating experimentation with “education in inner qualities” [*suzhi jiaoyu*], which, against entrance exam education (*gaokao*) system, takes as its fundamental objective the reaffirmation of comprehensive personal development. Around 2006, the notion of “education in inner qualities” was gradually updated with the more current concept of “general education,” which is also more conformant with international standards of education. All the top-ranked universities, including Tsinghua University, Peking University, Fudan University, and Sun Yatsen University, have created dedicated schools or centers for the advancement of the general education of their undergraduate students. In a general education class, the reading and appreciation of both Chinese and foreign classics, along with a training in the techniques of classical culture, constitute the core of the course. Universities are also giving unprecedented resources to general education, either in the form of personnel or material support. Accompanying the rise of general education, formerly required courses on Marxism and Leninism, Mao Zedong thought, Deng Xiaoping theory, etc. continue apace, but are not included within the category of “general education.” Now these politics courses have come under the jurisdiction of another independent institution, “Academy of Marxist Thought” (in Chinese, shortened to simply *Mayuan*). Though it officially enjoys a high position, when compared to the modishness of “general education,” it is evident that such academies’ ability to attract young people has long since declined.

This is a new era, a new kind of atmosphere. In an era defined by the pursuit of soft power, how can we excavate the spirit of “inquiry without condition” and “reading without barriers” in the discipline of the humanities? In an atmosphere that measures success financially, how can we reaffirm the objective of cultivating personhood via the humanities? In a world easily dominated by parochial identity politics, how can the humanities provide a ground for interaction between- and coexistence of different cultures? Answering these questions has become an urgent duty. In appraising the condition of the humanities discipline in China, we are at once both pleased and anxious, the former contains the latter.