

The World Humanities Report

The Past and Present of the Chinese Humanities

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The academic subdivisions of the humanities in China are much the same as those in other countries around the world, but the scale of scholars and students, the research system, and the volume of publications are among the largest in the world.¹ Using the existing humanities disciplines and their distribution as a guide, starting with the status of literature studies, history, philosophy, linguistics, archaeology, and other related fields, the eleven chapters of this report outline the development and trends of humanities scholarship and education in mainland China over the past thirty years. In that time, thanks to dramatic increases in the levels of specialization and detail of Chinese humanities scholarship, it has become difficult to make sweeping generalizations about so many different fields. Considering that the audience of this report includes not only scholars, specialists, and leaders of research institutions and universities in related fields, but also those from various countries who are interested in the development of the humanities in China, this introduction begins by briefly charting the historical tradition and modern formation of Chinese humanities scholarship, providing the reader with a broader context for understanding the humanities in China today.

¹ According to the data released by China's Ministry of Education, as of June 30, 2020, there are a total of 3,005 institutions of higher education in mainland China (excluding institutions in Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan), including 2,740 general institutions of higher education (1,272 undergraduate and 1,468 higher vocational [specialist] institutions) and 265 nontraditional institutions of higher education [*chengren gaodeng xuexiao*]. The number of institutions is second only to India and the United States, but in terms of the number of students, China is number one. With a national enrollment of 9.15 million in 2019 and a gross enrollment rate of more than 51.6 percent, China has officially entered the era of universal higher education. The number of applicants for the college entrance examination reached 10.71 million in 2020, surpassing the historical record of 10.5 million set in 2008, and the number of graduates reached 8.74 million (according to the MoE's *Gaozhao diaocha baogao, 2020 ban* [Report on the survey of higher education enrolment: 2020]). All general higher education institutions have humanities and social science subjects, as well as curricula featuring common required courses. According to the 2020 edition of the *Putong gaodeng xuexiao benke zhuanye mulu* [Catalogue of undergraduate programs of general colleges and universities], there are twelve disciplines of undergraduate programs in China: philosophy, economics, law, education, literature, history, science, engineering, agriculture, medicine, management, and art. Each discipline is further divided into specialized categories, with 93 in total, and each of these is, in turn, divided into majors, totaling 703. Also according to the

It should be noted that, due to time and other limiting conditions, this report focuses on mainland China and does not extend a focused analysis to parallel research fields in Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan.

Scientific Taxonomy and the Birth of the Liberal Arts

China has a long and rich tradition of humanities scholarship, but the system of categorization for classical scholarship differs greatly from the modern disciplinary framework. Aside from a few fields, the early categories of knowledge cannot be separated into today's disciplines. In Chinese, the term *renwen* [humanities] appears first from the phrase “Observe astronomy [*tianwen*] to observe the changes of the times; observe human patterns [*renwen*] to transform the world” in the *Zhou yi* [Zhou classic of changes].² According to conventional interpretation, *tianwen* [astronomy or heavenly patterns] here refers to the trajectory of nature's transformations, while *renwen* refers to the laws or patterning of human civilization and rituals. However, in accordance with the

figures published between 2015 and 2019 in the *Putong gaodeng xuexiao benke zhuanye bei'an he shenpi jiegou* [Record and approval results of undergraduate majors in general institutions of higher education], the bulk of the new majors added in the past five years are in engineering fields, including data science and big data technology, robotics and artificial intelligence, but some humanities majors have also been added, including networks and new media, digital arts, and less-commonly taught foreign languages. In terms of postgraduate education, in 2019, the number of doctoral degrees awarded in various disciplines nationwide was 62,578, and the number of master's degrees was 577,088. These figures include 652 philosophy PhDs, 1,986 literature PhDs, 781 history PhDs, 609 art PhDs, and 1,040 education PhDs; and 3,260 philosophy MAs, 31,419 literature MAs, 4,715 history MAs, 20,342 art MAs, and 39,149 education MAs. According to the same year's statistics regarding teachers in institutions of higher education, there were 41,939 philosophy instructors (5,508 professors, 12,195 associate professors, 15,893 assistant professors and lecturers, 4,540 teaching assistants [TAs], and 3,803 teachers of undetermined rank), 225,627 literature studies instructors (18,479 professors, 62,453 associate professors, 104,925 assistant professors and lecturers, 24,168 TAs, and 15,602 teachers of undetermined rank), 17,716 history instructors (3,299 professors, 5,657 associate professors, 6,287 assistant professors and lecturers, 1,249 TAs, and 1,224 of undetermined rank), and 151,664 education instructors (12,004 professors, 43,304 associate professors, 60,548 assistant professors and lecturers, 21,433 TAs, and 14,375 of unknown rank), and 127,483 art instructors (9,420 professors, 29,272 associate professors, 53,545 assistant professors and lecturers, 20,924 TAs, 14,322 of unknown rank). According to the 2020 *Zhongguo chubian nianjian* [China publishing yearbook], there are 10,171 journals published nationwide, of which 26.38 percent are in philosophy and social sciences, 13.74 percent in culture and education, and 6.57 percent in literature and art.

² Ruan Yuan, *Zhouyi zhengyi* [Correct meaning commentary on the *Zhouyi*], vol. 3, 25. Reproduced in Ruan Yuan, *Shisanjing zhushu* [Commentaries on the thirteen classics], 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 1:37.

classical principle that “Heaven and man are united as one” [*tianrenheyi*], these two realms are interrelated rather than distinctly separate or mutually oppositional. Therefore, in classical learning, there is no theoretical presupposition drawing a division between natural sciences and human learning. The concept of the humanities is a product of recent history, for it was only in the twentieth century that a mutually translational relationship between the Western term *humanities* and *renwen* gradually emerged. In mainland China, although the foundational humanities disciplines of literature, history, and philosophy were formed early in the modern era, for a long period there was no clear line between the humanities and the social sciences, and the triad of natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities was only finally stabilized in the post–Cold War context.

Since the emergence of the modern humanities in China, there has been a continuous dual trend within its fields of research, including literature, history, and philosophy, namely, an inclination toward the globalization (Westernization) of disciplines and their respective norms, and, on the other hand, a tendency toward exploring the autonomy of Chinese humanities scholarship. The former trend manifests itself in disciplinary categories, academic establishments, theories and methods, terminology and concepts, and an uninterrupted stream of updated scholarly practices. The latter is reflected in the tendency within all fields of contemporary humanities scholarship to reexplore their research methods, concepts, and horizons in relation to the classical tradition, as well as in the reappearance of categories and disciplines that were abandoned early on by modern humanities scholarship, such as national learning [*guoxue*], studies of Confucian classics [*jingxue*], certain forms of religious knowledge, and so on. In the last three decades, this dual trend has come into even sharper relief, appearing in the organization of disciplines, as part of the national effort to establish world-class universities, in the large-scale recruitment of overseas talent, and a greater convergence with Western scholarly and academic standards. Even as the globalization (Americanization) of the Chinese humanities and social sciences intensifies, many scholars have attempted to reconnect classical and modern scholarly traditions to their respective academic fields and establish a distinctively Chinese cultural core [*wenhua benwei*] for the humanities. Thus, it is necessary to sketch the birth of the modern Chinese humanities and its relationship to the classical scholarly tradition in order to understand contemporary humanities research and education.

How to explain the relationship between modern humanistic scholarship and the classical humanistic tradition? First of all, Chinese humanities scholarship was born out of a dramatic transformation influenced by the modern European division of knowledge, resulting in a clear break between the earlier

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classification principles of classical learning and those of modern humanities scholarship. These are two entirely different systems of rules, each formed within a different historical lineage. The difference between the Chinese classification of scholarship and the modern European disciplines is that the former is more bibli-

ographical in nature [*muluxue de xingzhi*]. The bibliographer Yao Mingda (1905–1942) writes that “classification’s application begins with things, runs through scholarship, and ends with books.”³ In other words, the classification of things and scholarship ultimately manifests itself in the classification of canonical books. Along a similar line, Zuo Yuhe (b. 1964), an expert in the history of Chinese scholarship, states: “The branches of Chinese scholarship are mainly based on the criteria of research subjects (people) and regions, rather than on research topics (objects); its research objects are concentrated within the scope of what the ancient canonical texts covered, rather than directly on the natural world; the branches of Chinese scholarship are primarily concentrated in humanistic fields like studies of the Confucian classics and philology [*xiaoxue*], in contrast to the modern West’s concentration in the social and natural sciences.”⁴ By placing the study of Confucian classics and philology within the realm of the humanities, this observation is already part of modern reclassification according to the trichotomy of natural sciences, social sciences, and the humanities.

In Chinese history, the division of knowledge and indexing of canonical works have undergone several changes, but it can be roughly traced to the *liuyi* [six arts] in the Shang and Zhou dynasties, the *qilie* [seven epitomes] of

³ Yao Mingda, *Zhongguo muluxue shi* [History of Chinese bibliography] (Changsha: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1938), 63–64.

⁴ Zuo Yuhe, *Cong sibu zhi xue dao qike zhixue* [From the learning of the fourfold bibliographical classification system to learning of the seven disciplines] (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2004), 4.

the Han dynasty, and the *sibu* [fourfold bibliographical classification] system that gradually took shape during the Sui and Tang dynasties and was finalized by the Qing dynasty's *Qinding siku quanshu* [Complete writings of the four repositories]. The so-called *liuyi* of the Shang and Zhou dynasties were the six arts of ritual, music, archery, charioteering, writing, arithmetic, and related knowledge, while in the Spring and Autumn period, they were replaced by the six "ancient classics of the *Rites of Zhou*" [*Zhouguan zhi jiudian*] and their subsequent transmission: the *Shi* [Classic of odes], the *Shu* or *Shangshu* [Esteemed documents], the *Liji* [Book of rites], the *Yue* [Classic of music], the *Yi* [Classic of changes], and the *Chunqiu* [Spring and Autumn annals].⁵ During the Qin and Han dynasties, the number of books increased, but, on the other hand, the old classics were badly damaged, scattered, and lost; the Han opened a broad avenue for amassing books by "the establishment of a book collection policy, the institution of scribe officials, propagation of the classic schools of thought, and the filling of secretarial offices."⁶ Liu Xiang (77–6 BCE) and his son Liu Xin (50 BCE–23 CE) "clarified schools of learning and verified their origins," developing the pre-Qin system of the six arts into a more granular classification of scholarship, that is, the so-called Seven Epitomes: Six Arts or Classics (besides those listed above, also the *Analects of Confucius*, the *Classic of Filial Piety*, and philological works); philosophical masterworks (Confucianism, Daoism, the Yin and Yang School, Legalism, the School of Names, Mohism, School of Vertical and Horizontal Alliances [diplomacy], Syncretism, Agriculturism, and the School of "Minor-Talks"); verse (Rhapsodies of Qu Yuan, Rhapsodies of Lu Jia, Rhapsodies of Xun Qing, Miscellaneous Rhapsodies, and Poems and Songs); military works (tactics, terrain, yin and yang, and military skills); technical and quantitative arts (astronomy, chronology, five elements, divination, miscellaneous fortune-telling, and geomancy); and medicine (medical classics, pharmacology, sexology, and longevity). The Seven Epitomes clearly surpassed the Six Arts. The six classic texts and the philosophical masterworks contained therein became the warp and weft of the Chinese knowledge system, in other words, its metaphysical sciences [*xingshang zhi daoshu*], while the other categories constituted forms of applied knowledge for realizing these metaphysical sciences, that is, the so-called physical arts of skill [*yixue*].

Following the Han dynasty, the fourfold classification system of classics, histories, masters, and collections gradually took shape. It is generally thought

⁵ Zhang Xuecheng, *Jiaochou tongyi tongjie* [General meaning and interpretation of bibliography], ed. Wang Zhongmin (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), 2.

⁶ Ban Gu, *Hanshu* [History of the Han], ed. Yan Shigu, 12 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 6:1701.

that the *Xin bu* [New catalogue] compiled by Xun Xu (?–289 CE) in the Western Jin dynasty was the fountainhead for the fourfold classification system and that the categories of classics, histories, masters, and collections, along with those of Daoism and Buddhism in the *Jingji zhi* [Treatise on bibliography] section of the *Sui shu* [History of Sui], established the framework and standard for the fourfold system going forward. The *Complete Writings of the Four Repositories*, compiled by Ji Yun (1724–1805), was the most comprehensive official bibliography of the Qing dynasty and the most common academic classification system before the introduction of the Western knowledge system into China, with ten subcategories of classics, fifteen subcategories of history, fourteen subcategories of masters, and five subcategories of collections, and an additional thirty-six sub-subcategories further spread among these. Among all these classifications, the subcategory of philology [*xiaoxue*] within the classics division, including fields of exegesis of old words and readings [*xungu*], word books [*zishu*], and dictionaries organized by rhymes [*yunshu*], “can be regarded as ancient Chinese philology, phonology, textology, and so on, which are certainly the scholarly categories in the classics division closest to the modern Western sense, but the other categories are still quite far from the modern sense of ‘discipline.’”⁷ However, from another point of view, the philological categories are not just independent disciplines, but also the basic methods for approaching the entirety of the classics and histories, more or less similar to linguistics, philology, and historiographical study in the Western humanistic tradition, while the classification of classics, history, masters, and collections is completely different from the principles of classification in the modern humanities, within which each major category contains almost all of the disciplines that can be subsumed within literature, history, philosophy, and natural science.

Since the end of the Qing dynasty, when Western knowledge began to be translated and introduced on a large scale, people have looked at traditional Chinese knowledge in terms of foreign knowledge and its classification methods. Because classical Chinese scholarship is centered on ancient texts and their classification, according to the yardstick of European humanities, all this Chinese knowledge can be included as part of the humanities and thus can be (and in fact is) regrouped according to the principles and methodologies of modern humanities scholarship, thereby constructing a continuous and universally applicable genealogy of humanities. The Dutch scholar Rens Bod published in 2010 the world’s first study on global humanities, *De vergeten wetenschappen: Een geschiedenis van de humaniora* [translated into English as *A New History of*

⁷ Zuo Yube, *Cong sibu zhi xue dao qike zhixue*, 68.

the Humanities], which “uncovered a line in the history of the humanities—the quest for methodological principles and empirical patterns that has lasted from Antiquity to today ... [and] exists all over the world.”⁸ The author overlooks the differences in underlying systems of knowledge classification in various societies and skips over the historical forms in which various kinds of knowledge subsumed within the humanities emerged (e.g., as ritual, as political instruments, as ethical and moral practices, as philosophy or natural study, etc.). Instead of paying attention to these important differences, he exclusively follows the modern (Western) disciplinary system of the humanities. This leads him to incorporate the relevant knowledge of other cultural traditions into humanities categories such as linguistics, historiography, philology, musicology, art theory, logic, rhetoric, poetics, and so on. Within each of these, he searches out a history of the methodological principles and models that have been developed. “More than once we find that there is a surprising correspondence between the humanities in different parts of the world—from China to India to Greece—yet there appears to have been little or no sharing of knowledge.”⁹ It is from this kind of universal methodological perspective that the sixth-century-BCE text the *Shangshu* [Esteemed documents] joins Herodotus’s *Histories* a century later as historiographical models, while Sima Qian’s *Shiji* [The grand scribe’s records] and Ban Gu and Ban Zhao’s *Hanshu* [History of the Han] are seen, along with Greco-Roman historiographies, as empirical disciplines arising from their “adoption of rules-based approaches.” Such a search within classical knowledge for universal rules and methods dispels a myth that modern historians harbor about historiography, namely, that it was a product of the nineteenth century.

But this methodological vision also rests upon the omission of different cultural traditions and their different uses in rituals, politics, and other spheres. By filtering out the cultural and political implications of different intellectual traditions, classical knowledge from different regions can be drawn up according to the framework of European humanities. For example, since the classical empirical world consists mainly of texts, activities based on manuscript restoration make philology an interdisciplinary field combining different approaches and knowledge such as grammar, rhetoric, history, and poetics. Based on the

⁸ Ren Bode [Rens Bod], *Renwenxue de lishi* [The history of the humanities], trans. Xu Delin (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2017), 381. English rendition from *A New History of the Humanities: The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to the Present*, trans. Lynn Richards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 352.

Here and below, quotations are matched with their counterparts from the English translation. In subsequent references, only the English version is given.—Trans.

⁹ Bod, *A New History of the Humanities*, 13.

view of Mencius, Rens Bod sees Confucius as the first philologist involved in restoration of classical texts, who subsequently initiated China's long tradition of philology from the Han dynasty onward. On the musicology side, the author goes beyond the rites and music content of the *Liji* [Book of rites] to analyze the musical forms of the pentatonic scale (*gong, shang, jue, zhi, and yu*), arguing that Liu An's *Huainanzi* [Master of Huainan] contributes to the research on "just intonation" by giving "a complete analysis of the *Pythagorean comma*."¹⁰ By the same logic, the *Yijing*, Gongsun Long (325–250 BCE), and Mozi (470–391 BCE) are grouped with counterparts in Greece and India, and the Chinese school of logic and Xie He's (fl. 6th c. CE) *Liufa* [Six principles of Chinese painting] are listed with the Roman author Pliny the Elder's (23–79) illusionism and the early Indian theoretical treatise on Buddhist painting, and the Six Limbs principles of early Indian Buddhist painting are respectively listed as sequences in the humanities branches logic and art. The list goes on: Cao Pi's (187–226) *Dianlun lunwen* [On literature], Liu Xie's (465–522) *Wenxin diaolong* [The literary mind and the carving of dragons]—both pioneering works on literary composition and literary history—are coupled with Plato, Aristotle, Longinus, Dionysus, and the *Natya Shastra* by Bharata Muni (dates unknown) to form a sequence of great works founding literature and its history. "His [meaning Liu's] work is comparable to Longinus's history of a thousand years of classical literary history, but far surpasses it in its systematics."¹¹ It is conceivable that in the author's universalist historical order (passing through stages of ancient, medieval, early modern, and modern periods), more and more works from Chinese history could be included in the gallery of world humanities, and to a comparativist's perspective, display their rich and unique charms. As a matter of fact, as early on as the birth of modern humanities, the so-called Movement to Organize the National History [*zhengli guogu yundong*] in the 1920s already regarded the Qing dynasty method of evidentiary scholarship [*kaozheng xue*] as

¹⁰ Bod, *A New History of the Humanities*, 43 (italics in the original).

¹¹ Bod, *A New History of the Humanities*, 70.

a prelude to a scientifically inflected form of the modern humanities.¹²

The discovery, restoration, examination, and interpretation of classical and historical materials are common to all civilizations, and “the quest for principles and patterns in language, music, art, and literature exists all over the world.”¹³ Thus, it is reasonable to generalize about scholarly traditions around the globe according to the basic categories of modern humanities and from the perspective of comparative humanities. However, the search for a universal method and model connecting ancient China’s system of scholarship with the modern disciplines is more difficult when one takes into account the clear distinction between the humanities as an academic institution and the humanities as an intellectual activity. Modern Chinese universities and their disciplinary distribution are derived almost entirely from Western classifications, and the basis for and the mechanisms by which these modern institutions operate are completely different from the previous system and its subfields. How might we explain the modern academic system’s inheritance and incorporation of premodern schools and the examination system amidst this apparent rupture?

The fact that the generation that established China’s modern educational system was also the last generation to have been, in different ways, traditionally educated suggests the earliest indication of the dual trend of globalization (Westernization) of the modern educational system and the reconstruction of the Chinese humanistic tradition within it. To explore the classical origins of Chinese universities is not to argue that the modern Chinese university and its academic system are a natural extension of the classical system, but rather that the latter constitutes a tradition that at some times has been criticized and rejected and at other times has been absorbed and even celebrated in the formation of the modern academic system. The classical Chinese academic

¹² The debate on Eastern and Western culture [*Dongxi wenhua lunzhan*] triggered a debate between the New Thought and National Essence camps, while the idea of “organizing the national past” [*zhengli guogu*] was first proposed by the New Culture movement journals *Xinchao* [New tide] and *Xin qingnian* [New youth]. In December 1919 Hu Shi published “‘Xin sichao’ de yiyi” [The significance of the new wave of thought] in the first issue of the seventh volume of *Xin qingnian*, putting forward the idea of “researching problems, importing scholarly principles, organizing the national past, and rebuilding civilization.” In 1923 Peking University’s *Guoxue jikan* [National studies quarterly] was launched. Its founding manifesto, also written by Hu Shi, proclaimed: “we have three attitudes toward the old scholarly ideas. First, we oppose blind obedience; second, we oppose reconciliation; and third, we advocate the organization of the national past.” It goes on to systematically suggest four steps for sorting out the national tradition, namely, “a systematic organization of methods,” “finding out how each scholarly idea occurred and what its subsequent influence and effects are,” “using scientific methods to perform precise evidential scholarship, and to clearly understand the intentions of ancient people,” and, finally, “in synthesizing the first three steps of research, returning to the original truth and value of past thinkers.”

¹³ Bod, *A New History of the Humanities*, 352.

system has a longstanding and very complex history, which can only be briefly summarized here. First of all, there is the ancient imperial college or dynastic academy [*taixue*]. The word *taixue* appears as early as the Zhou dynasty,¹⁴ but as a kind of higher education institution it originates with the proposal of Dong Zhongshu (179–104 BCE) in his *Tian ren sance* [Three strategies to harmonize humans with heaven] during the reign of Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty, which urges the latter to “establish an imperial college and install there prominent teachers for the sake of cultivating the world’s worthy men.”¹⁵ In 135 BCE Emperor Wu built such an imperial college in the Han capital of Chang’an and employed specialized scholars of the Five Confucian Classics, and later, on the advice of Gongsun Hong (191–121 BCE), he expanded the operation to a total of fifty teachers and students.¹⁶ Thereafter the curriculum gradually expanded to include the *Yijing*, the *Shijing*, the *Shangshu*, the *Liji*, the *Gongyang zhuan* [Gongyang tradition], the *Guliang zhuan* [Guliang annals], the *Zuozhuan* [Zuo tradition], the *Zhouguan* [Rites of Zhou], the dictionary, *Erya* [Approaching the elegant], and more. The number of scholars expanded, as well. By the time of Han Emperor Cheng (51–7 BCE), the number of teachers and disciples grew to about 3,000.¹⁷ The reign of Wang Mang (r. 9–23 CE) saw the construction of dormitories capable of housing 10,000,¹⁸ and by the late Eastern Han dynasty, the number of students increased to 30,000.¹⁹ The main subject of study was the classics, which gradually expanded to other fields. As a state institution, the primary aim of the imperial college was to cultivate talented men for the dynasty, and the subjects studied were centered on the Confucian classics. The critical and questioning spirit of the modern university is often compared with the traditional imperial college and its classics-centered system, and the government school system is seen as completely lacking in an intellectual tradition of skepticism, while ignoring the institution’s long history of questioning and resistance. For example, under Emperor Ai (26–1 BCE), more than a thousand students of the imperial college, in response to their classmate Wang Xian’s appeal, issued protest petitions in support of the impartial and upright official,

¹⁴ *Da Dai Liji* [Dai De’s Book of Rites] states that “The emperor entered into the *taixue*, received teaching and inquired about the Way.” From Wang Pinzhen, ed., *Da Dai Liji jiegou* [Dai De’s Book of Rites annotated] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 52.

¹⁵ From “Dong Zhongshu zhuan” [Biography of Dong Zhongshu] section of the *Hanshu*, 8:2512.

¹⁶ Sima Qian, “Rulin liezhuan” [Biographies of Confucian scholars], in *Shiji* [The Grand Scribe’s records], 10 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 10:3119.

¹⁷ *Hanshu*, 11:3596.

¹⁸ *Hanshu*, 12:4069.

¹⁹ *Hou Hanshu* [History of the later Han], 18 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 9:2547.

Bao Xuan (d. 3CE).²⁰ The flourishing of Neo-Confucianism during the Song dynasty profoundly influenced the imperial college, when students got involved in political struggles through writing numerous petitions. These subjects cannot be ignored by those studying the history of the imperial college. The tradition of skepticism internal to classical studies has been an integral part of the Chinese scholarly tradition since the Han.²¹ Specialized fields such as exegesis of old words and readings, evidentiary scholarship, and phonology developed as methods within classical studies, clearly a precursor for the broader development of the “doubting antiquity” [*yigu*] impulse that is embedded in modern scholarship on the classics.

Secondly, there is the tradition of private learning, which is even older than the imperial college. In terms of “unconditional inquiry” [*wutiaojian zhuiwen*], the tradition of private schools and academies has provided richer nourishment for the modern humanities. The origin of private schools, that is, schools run by private individuals as opposed to official schools,²² is conventionally traced back to the Spring and Autumn period, when the philosophies of Confucianism, Mohism, Daoism, and Legalism had their greatest scholarly influence, and Confucius, Laozi, and Mozi would give lectures to their followers. Among these founders, Confucius enjoyed the most lasting influence. During this period, the rites and music of the Zhou dynasty collapsed, and the scholar [*shi*] class split into representatives of different interest groups, precipitating the emergence of different schools of scholarly thought, and debates and political struggles between competing views and doctrines, forming the unique intellectual landscape of the pre-Qin era. Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty dismissed the Hundred Schools of Thought [*zhuzi baijia*], revered only Confucianism, established an imperial college, and set up the specialized scholars of the Five Confucian Classics, but he did not prohibit private learning. Although private learning was also centered on the Confucian classics during this period, the other philosophical traditions were fortunate enough to be preserved by the development of private learning. One of the characteristics distinguishing private schools from the imperial college was that “anyone can be educated” [*youjiao wulei*], poten-

²⁰ *Hanshu*, 10:3093–94.

²¹ See Huang Xianpan, *Tangdai shehui gailüe* [Outline of Tang dynasty society] (Changchun: Jilin chubanshe, 2009).

²² Here Wang Hui refers to *taixue* or dynastic academies and imperial colleges (addressed in the preceding paragraph) that emerged during the Han dynasty. These imperial colleges were “official” not only in the sense of being state-organized and politically orthodox but also due to their role in fostering capable men for filling government positions. Private schools emphasized broader knowledge that might serve as a foundation for continued study in an “official” school.—Trans.

tially breaking through the boundaries of class, region, age, and intellectual ability. Commoners could enroll in temple schools, and local schools featured the “teaching of agriculture and forestry.” Among the forms of teaching in private schools were the “periodical meetings” [*qihui*] deriving from the Jixia Academy [*Jixia xuegong*] and the “lecture meetings” [*jianghui*] of the academies of classical learning, the former referring to regular debates and the latter to scholarly debates between academies or temples. Private learning was also all-embracing in its content, including not only scripture, literature and history, poetry and fiction, but also Daoism and “dark learning” [*daoxuan*], the natural world [*bowu*], law and government, and so on. Even in the modern period after the abolition of the imperial examination system, the tradition of private study not only permeated into the modern university system, but also had a lasting influence on the educational practices of teachers’ training colleges, agricultural schools, and industrial schools.

During the Tang dynasty, Buddhism flourished with many sects. Various temples came to resemble schools. According to *Datang xiyu ji* [Great Tang records on the western regions] by Xuanzang (602–664), Nālandā Vihāra (in the present-day state of Bihar, India) was a scholarly center where, in its heyday, there gathered tens of thousands of monks and lay people, among them Xuanzang, Yijing (635–713), and other clergy from China, including “thousands of monks and disciples of great talent and high learning.”²³ Here they studied Buddhism, the system of Hindu logic [*yinming*], the science of language [*shengming*], medicine, astronomy and calendrics, the science of arts and crafts [*gongqiao*], agriculture, and other fields of knowledge, as well as discussed Buddhist sutras and doctrine and conducted scholarly debate. As such, this center came to be considered as the birthplace of the university in India. Its tradition of Buddhist learning, exegesis, and debate converged with China’s early tradition of private learning and had an important influence on the formation of academies of learning during the Song dynasty, including the long-lasting White Deer Hollow Academy [*Bailudong*], the Stone Drum Academy [*Shigu*], the Yingtian Academy, and the Yuelu Academy which served as models for later institutions of advanced study.

²³ Xuanzang and Bianji, *Datang xiyuji jiaozhu* [Great Tang records of the western regions, annotated], ed. Ji Xianlin (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 757. The *Datang xiyu qiusa gaoseng zhuan* [Biographies of eminent monks from the Great Tang who traveled to the westward regions in search of the Law] states that the monks at the temple numbered 3,500, while the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* [Biographies of eminent monks, continued] claims that “the number of monks regularly living there surpassed 4,000, while guests, secular students, and medical practitioners numbered over 10,000.” Quoted in *Datang xiyuji jiaozhu*, 752n1.

Modern Chinese universities neither directly originated in the ancient imperial college nor were the immediate inheritors of private academies. As a product of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century movements supporting foreign learning and reform, the modern university did not begin with a pursuit of humanities learning, but rather was established as a system for fostering practical or applied knowledge, one which ultimately replaced the imperial examination system [*keju zhidu*]. The latter existed for 1,300 years before the Qing court officially abolished it in 1905. Though it was an examination system for promoting men into civil service, over an extended period of time both official (state-run) and private schools came to be intricately linked with it. The imperial examination system was born during the Sui dynasty (605 CE), took shape in the Tang, matured in the Song, flourished in the Ming and Qing dynasties, and finally declined following the assaults by the industrialized navies of the European powers.²⁴ The imperial examination broke with the earlier aristocratic system of promotion by hereditary means, recommendation, and the nine-rank method for recruiting men for office [*jiupin guanrenfa*], and its relatively open, fair, and impartial approach was an object of admiration for the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment intellectuals.²⁵ Historically, this system truly provided the dynastic state with innumerable talents. However, because it was an examination system with the purpose of selecting officials, much scholarly thinking gradually lost its vitality in the process of assimilation into the exam, and by the late Qing dynasty, the Neo-Confucian focus on the Four Books and Five Classics and the eight-legged examination essay [*baguwen*] became incapable of dealing with the exigencies of a new era.

However, the new educational system that emerged from China's confrontation with the West was not a product of Enlightenment thinking, but instead originated in the need for modern military technology. The first national university recognized in the history of modern Chinese education was Beiyang University, founded in October 1895. Founded by Sheng Xuanhuai (1844–1916)

²⁴ For English-language studies on the examination system in China, see Ping-ti Ho, *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China: Aspects of Social Mobility, 1368–1911* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1962), and Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

²⁵ For example, Voltaire (1694–1778) and Johann Heinrich Gottlob Justi (1717–1771) both praised China's examination system. See Arnold H. Rowbotham, "The Impact of Confucianism on Seventeenth-Century Europe," *Far Eastern Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (1945): 224–42; Johanna M. Menzel, "The Sinophilism of J. H. G. Justi," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 17, no. 3 (1956): 300–310. Eighteenth-century England also discussed the Chinese exam system. See Edmund Leites, "Confucianism in Eighteenth-Century England: Natural Morality and Social Reform," *Philosophy East and West* 28, no. 2 (1978): 143–59.

with the approval of the Guangxu Emperor (1871–1908), the school was initially called Beiyang Great Academy [*Beiyang daxuetang*] and renamed several times afterward. The Beiyang Great Academy was established on the model of the American university, with a primary college providing a four-year undergraduate education and a secondary school for preparatory and high school classes. However, from 1917 it stopped offering courses in law and focused entirely on engineering. If we don't dwell on which school counts as the first university in modern China but rather observe the emergence of the new academic system and its erosion of the imperial examination system, the Beiyang Naval Academy, which was established in August 1881 at the request of Li Hongzhang, the governor of Zhili and admiral of the Beiyang Fleet, and later led by the future president of Peking University Yan Fu (1854–1921), was an early herald of China's modern education system. The Beiyang Naval Academy trained many of the officers who died in the first Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). Because of its clear military purpose, in addition to studying Chinese classics for six hours a week and on Sundays, the school's curriculum began with learning the English language, then the study of technical and military affairs in English, including geography, algebra, geometry, hydrology, thermology, astronomy, climatology, mapping, surveying, gunnery drills, torpedoes, the use of mechanical instru-

Unlike the humanities of modern Europe, which originated within religious knowledge and then advanced through a critique of the worldview of such knowledge, the birth of the humanities in China emerged from tension, confrontation, and reconciliation with a Western learning centered on science and technology and its view of civilization.

ments, and so on. Driven by the need to survive, this curriculum and its “Western learning” [*xixue*] contents covering military subjects, technology, and engineering have important implications for understanding the subsequent birth of the humanities in China: unlike the humanities of modern Europe, which originated within religious knowledge and then

advanced through a critique of the worldview of such knowledge, the birth of the humanities in China emerged from tension, confrontation, and reconciliation with a Western learning centered on science and technology and its view of civilization.

Beijing Normal University, born amidst the Hundred Days' Reform in 1898,

took as its guiding tenet “Chinese learning as the core and Western learning for its utility [*Zhongti xiyong*]: one can’t have one without the other, for the two are mutually dependent,” further emphasizing that “Chinese and Western knowledge are equally important; observe their convergences.” Such self-positioning repeatedly admonishes that Chinese learning cannot be neglected, otherwise there will “absolutely be no foundation, for [if one] wholly admires Western learning, they have no chance of achieving insight, but merely add to their deficiencies”; nor should one study Western language alone, but rather in concert with Western learning in its essence, for language is merely an entry point.²⁶ In 1910 the university organized seven courses of study: Confucian classics, law and politics, letters, natural science [*gezhi*, a term covered in more detail below], agriculture, engineering, and commerce, with thirteen majors, namely, the *Shijing*, the *Zhouli*, the *Zuo zhuan* (classics); Chinese prose [*wenxue*] and Chinese history (letters); politics and law; banking and insurance (commerce); agriculture; geology and chemistry (natural science); civil engineering, along with mining and metallurgy (engineering). In 1912 the Ministry of Education of the newly established Republic of China promulgated its *Daxue ling* [Decree on universities] and *Daxue guicheng* [Regulations on universities], explicitly ordering the abolition of the subject of classics, and the following year announced the categorization of the basic subjects as letters [*wenke*], science [*like*], law [*fake*], business or commerce [*shangke*], medicine [*yike*], agriculture [*nongke*], and engineering [*gongke*], the so-called seven disciplines of learning [*qike zhi xue*]. These seven disciplines did not include major categories such as humanities, social sciences, or natural sciences, but the so-called letters subject included philosophy, literature, and history, each of which spanned different humanities subjects, and closely approximates the same as the classification scheme of the humanities today. Meanwhile law included law, political science, and economics, each of which had a number of divisions, which roughly accords with contemporary social sciences and their organization, and the business or commerce subject is basically identical to its counterparts today.²⁷ It is worth noting that within the Beijing Normal University’s scheme, classics is placed at the head of the list and does not belong to the category of letters, which indicates that in the late Qing, the study of classics and its status as an academic discipline were still taken as

²⁶ *Daxuetang zhangcheng* [Statutes of Beijing Normal University] (1998), reprinted in Chi Huisheng, He Fangchuan, and Xing Yongfu, eds., *Jingshi daxuetang dang’an xuanbian* [Beijing Normal University documents, selected and compiled] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2001), 29.

²⁷ “Jiaoyubu gongbu daxue guicheng” [University regulations, promulgated by the Ministry of Education], in *Jiaoyu zazhi* [Education magazine] 5, no. 1 (1913). See also Zuo Yuhe, *Cong sibu zhi xue dao qike zhixue*, 197–98.

sacred and unassimilable to other systems of knowledge, such that the *Shijing* couldn't fall under letters, the *Zhouli* couldn't be part of law or politics, and *Zuozhuan* couldn't be in history. The complete decline of the status of classics came after the establishment of the republic in 1912, especially following the dominance of the New Culture movement [*xinwenhua yundong*] and its values in the late 1910s. The principles behind the division of the Seven Disciplines of Learning had a profound influence on the formation of the humanities as a kind of institution. For example, Tsinghua University established Colleges of Letters, Science, and Law in 1929 and a School of Engineering in 1932. The departments of Chinese literature, foreign languages and literatures, philosophy, history, and sociology were established within the College of Letters.²⁸ Diverging from an earlier discussion about locating psychology studies in the subjective studies of humankind, the department of psychology was incorporated into the College of Science along with the departments of physics, chemistry, math, geology, and biology. In contrast to the evolution from the Six Arts to the Seven Epitomes and from the Seven Epitomes to the Fourfold Classification System, the Seven Disciplines of Learning were not the product of the preceding Fourfold Classification System, but rather a new system established according to completely different principles of classification. Even though the fields of the Fourfold Classification were reorganized into the completely new Seven Disciplines of Learning, there is no derivative relationship between the two systems. In the Fourfold Classification System, the concepts of letters [*wen*] and history [*shi*] are not disciplinary in nature, and their connotations and denotations are very different from the “literature” and “history” of the modern humanities. Similarly, philosophy [*zhexue*] is not only a new discipline but a new word altogether and has no historical connection with the concepts of Daoism, Neo-Confucianism, and the Learning of Heart and Mind [*xinxue*, established by the Ming scholar Wang Yangming] that were retroactively incorporated into it. While accepting Western influence in terms of institutional organization, content, and methodology, the Chinese humanities concurrently did away with the older principles of knowledge classification, thereby incorporating canonical texts and related studies into an entirely new disciplinary system. From this, the continual reevaluation of the Chinese classical intellectual tradition and its modern significance thus became an inescapable question for the Chinese humanities.

The university in modern China is a product of survival, with military,

²⁸ “Qinghua Daxue: Xuexiao yange” [Tsinghua University: The school's development], accessed July 2, 2021, <https://www.tsinghua.edu.cn/xxgk/xxyg.htm>; Qinghua Daxue xiaoshi bianxiezu [Draft history of Tsinghua University compilation group] ed., *Qinghua Daxue xiaoshi gao* [Draft history of Tsinghua University] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 152–245.

industrial, and political motivations being the main driving forces behind its formation. Although the university system has its roots in European universities and their modern transformations, it would be impossible to retrace the birth of the modern Chinese university as stemming from the tradition of “unconditional inquiry” (enlightenment) within European theology. Perhaps we can draw an analogy between the New Culture [*xin wenhua*] of the May Fourth movement [*Wusi yundong*] of 1919 and the “unconditional inquiry” of the European Enlightenment, both of which confronted older cosmologies, values, and intellectual traditions. But the initial impetus of the New Culture movement arose from a concern for the fate of the nation and did not raise questions about the knowledge of God. On the other hand, China’s modern humanities scholarship inherited a long tradition of “doubting the classics” from within the study of the Confucian classics itself, but, at the same time, fundamentally departed from this tradition thanks to the influences of science and the New Culture movement. By implication, China’s modern humanities thus follow a different historical lineage from that of secularization in Europe. In terms of the aims, methods, and dissemination of the modern humanities, dramatic changes in the educational system and the organization of new institutions of academic research (such as the establishment of Academia Sinica in Nanjing in 1928, and its Institute of History and Philology, a division specializing in humanities research) established conditions totally different from those of Confucian studies. Today, humanities scholarship encompasses a wide range of categories, subjects, themes, and methods, which makes it difficult to lump its dynamics and goals together. But in their beginnings, the modern Chinese university and the humanities were closely linked to concerns about the fate of the nation and the clash between Eastern and Western civilizations, and the questions it raised were inevitably rooted in the ongoing search for why China had become backward and embattled, why the West was prosperous and strong, and what the differences between Chinese and Western civilizations were. The birth of the modern university is not only closely entwined with science and technology; the formation of its disciplines is also inseparable from the concept of science, and the so-called Seven Disciplines of Learning actually originated from a model of scientific classification.

The Humanities as an Independent Field

The birth of the humanities as an academic establishment was thus predicated upon the adaptation of the concept of science and its taxonomy into the Chinese

intellectual and educational system. The term “science” as *kexue* originated from a translation of the English word into kanji (that is, Chinese characters adopted for Japanese writing) by the Meiji scholar Nishi Amane (1829–1897) in the journal *Meiroku zasshi* in 1874. His use of the word “science” (pronounced as *kagaku* in Japanese) was influenced by the positivist ideas of Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill, especially Comte’s “hierarchy of sciences.”²⁹ In addition to classifying knowledge in accordance with Comte’s five divisions of science (mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, and biology), Nishi particularly embraced Comte’s positivism and Mill’s methods of inductive logic, which he believed constituted a universally applicable scientific method for studying religion, ethics, art, and society, in addition to the various fields of natural science.³⁰ Having received a rigorous training in Confucianism in his early years, Nishi also adopted Confucian categories to translate Western scholarship. For example, he rendered philosophy as *xinglixue* [learning of nature and principles; a term drawn from Song dynasty Neo-Confucianism], *lixue* [learning of principles], *qionglxue* [the exhaustive pursuit of knowledge], *xixianxue* [learning of revering meritorious persons], *xizhexue* [learning of revering sages], before finally settling on *zhexue* [learning of sages]. He argued at the beginning of his *Shōhaku sakki* [An unaccompanied man’s reading notes] that “the most important thing is to have a unified view of the myriad disciplines of learning,” because a unified view of scholarship can prepare people in their undertakings, stabilize social order, make the family, state, and the world rich and strong. The scholar’s duty is to “establish a unified view [of all knowledge], while also plumbing the subtleties of [a specific scholarly field],” but as a single person cannot achieve both, it “thus falls to philosophers to investigate the establishment of a unified view, while plumbing the subtleties of scholarship is for those who specialize in

²⁹ When translating and introducing the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Nishi states: “Auguste Comte’s classification and ordering of the phenomenon of the varied fields of learning move from the simple to the organized and establish the model of five fields (astronomy, natural science, chemistry, biology, sociology). His thesis is extremely refined, and his level of discernment very high. [His model] can be called complete in all respects.” Nishi Amane, “Chisetsu” [Knowledge], part 4 in *Meiroku zasshi* [Journal of the Meiji Six Society] no. 22 (1875), republished in Ōkubo Toshiake, ed., *Nishi Amane zensshū* [Complete works of Nishi Amane], 3 vols. (Tokyo: Nihon hyōronsha, 1945), 1:462.

³⁰ In his *Hyakugaku renkan* [Set of the 100 schools of learning; Nishi’s translation for “encyclopedia”], he differentiated between the *gaku* [pronounced *xue* in Chinese] of *kagaku* [Ch.: *kexue*; science] and the *jutsu* [Ch.: *shu*; art, skill] of *gijutsu* [Ch.: *jishu*; technology], but at the same time he indicates that “so-called *kagaku* combines *gaku* and *jutsu*, and the two latter kanji cannot be clearly separated from each other.” Nishi Amane, *Hyakugaku renkan*, in *Meiroku zasshi* no. 22 (1874), reprinted in Yamasuro Shinichi and Nakanome Toru, eds., *Meiroku zasshi*, 3 vols. (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2009), 2:236.

various academic disciplines.”³¹

Similar to Meiji Japan, in the late Qing dynasty the concepts of *kexue*/science and the “varied fields of learning” [*zhuxue*] largely referred to knowledge related to Western knowledge or Western studies, and the purpose of its introduction was to reform China’s laws and strengthen the nation. Thus, the use of the concept of science was closely related to the translation of Western knowledge.³² In the 1890s Chinese scholars began to use the term *kexue*, which was directly derived from Japanese bibliographies and booklists. For example, the *Riben shumuzhi* [Record of Japanese bibliography], compiled by Kang Youwei (1858–1927) and published by his Grand Unity Translations Publishing House in the spring of 1898, included categories from “science” [*lixuemen*] such as physics [*wuli*], chemistry [*huaxue*], calendrics [*lifa*], meteorology [*qixiangxue*], geography [*dilixue*], mineralogy [*kuangwuxue*], biology [*shengwuxue*], philosophy [*zhexue*], religion studies [*zongjiaoxue*], psychology [*xinlixue*], logic [*luojixue*], ethics [*lunlixue*], and so on. Other volumes in the series list other head categories such as physiology [*shenglimen*], religion [*zongjiaomen*], books and historical records [*tushimen*], politics [*zhengzhimen*], law [*falümen*], agriculture [*nongyemen*], industry [*gongyemen*], commerce [*shangyemen*], education [*jiaoyumen*], prose [*wenxuemen*], writing and language [*wenzi yuyan men*], aesthetics [*meishumen*], fiction [*xiaoshuomen*], and military manuals [*bingshumen*]. Kang’s classification is not very strict, but in form the volume is indeed divided into categories according to the nature and function of the “varied schools of learning.”³³ In his preface to the *Bibliography*, Kang Youwei used the term *zhuxue* in the sense of “specialized schools”, which is closer to the taxonomic concept of science.³⁴

In 1902 Liang Qichao (1873–1929) defined science in a note to his essay on the relationship between geography and civilization as “learning [*xue*] that forms a discipline (or branch) [*ke*] is called a ‘science’ [*kexue*]; it includes ‘natural science’

³¹ Nishi Amane, *Nishi Amane zensshū*, 1:165–66.

³² Kang Youwei, “Zishu” [Introduction], *Riben shumuzhi* [Record of Japanese bibliography], reprinted in *Kang Youwei quanji* [Complete works of Kang Youwei], ed. Jiang Yihua and Zhang Ronghua, 12 vols. (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin daxue chubanshe, 2007), 3:263–64.

³³ Kang Youwei, *Kang Youwei quanji*, 3:279.

³⁴ According to Wang Baoping, the book titles listed by Kang come from *Tōkyō shoseki suppan eigyōsha kumiai'en shoseki sōmokuoku* [Comprehensive catalog of books, compiled by the members of Tokyo publishing world] in 1894. He lightly revised this *mokuoku*'s [catalog] “category index” and “catalog of publishers,” reducing five categories, cutting 2362 titles and adding three. See Wang Baoping, “Kang Youwei *Riben shumuzhi* chudian kao” [On the sources of Kang Youwei’s Record of Japanese bibliography], *Jigu* [Drawing from the past] no. 57 (2010): 13–29.

[*gezhi*] and the ‘varied fields of learning’ [*zhuxue*].”³⁵ Despite the different connotations of the various division schemes, in the view of late Qing thinkers, the division of the imperial examination and the specialized branches of science were the same in terms of dispensation. In his “Bianfa tongyi: Lun keju” [General discussion on political reform: On the imperial examination], Liang Qichao called for abolishing the imperial examinations and establishing new learning and suggested “using Han and Tang methods to establish the various subjects,” where the contents of the “various subjects” [*zhuke*] of the imperial examination would span “understanding the classics” [*mingjing*], “mathematical understanding” [*mingsuan*], “legal understanding” [*mingfa*], “foreign diplomacy” [*shi jueyu*], “physiology” [*tongti*], “skills” [*jiyi*] (to understand the “principles achieved through natural science” [*gezhi*]), “in-depth learning” [*xuejiu*], “medical understanding” [*mingyi*], and “military strategy” [*bingfa*].³⁶ In a taxonomic sense, we can find some connections between Kang and others’ *zhuxue* [various fields of learning] and Liang’s *zhuke* [various disciplines], while also teasing out some oppositions between the taxonomy of the new system, on the one hand, and that of the longstanding imperial examination system and its intellectual genealogy, on the other. For Liang Qichao, Yan Fu, and others, *kexue* “science” here was genealogy of knowledge that, across its various branches, sought to obtain general rules by induction or deduction. Its scope encompassed various special subject areas related to nature and society, though not to history. If history as empirical knowledge is not within the taxonomy of science, then is there some kind of boundary between history and science, and does history belong to another field? Before the scholars of the late Qing could explore this question in depth, modern historiography as a discipline was born.³⁷

Unlike Nishi Amane, who placed “philosophy” or “unified view” [*tongyiguan*]

³⁵ Liang Qichao, “Dili yu wenming zhi guanxi” [On the relationship between geography and civilization], in *Yinbingshi heji: Wenji* [Collected works from the Drinking Ice Studio: Essays section], 16 vols. (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1936), 10:113.

³⁶ Liang Qichao, “Bianfa tongyi: Lun keju” [General discussion on political reform: On the imperial examination], in *Yinbingshi heji: Wenji*, 1:27–28.

³⁷ After commenting on ethics, law, national economy, political science, religion, linguistics and other disciplines, Yan Fu observes, “The reason why history is not cited as a discipline is that it does not come into its own as a discipline. ‘Social science’ [*qunxue*] and ‘investigating things and extending knowledge’ [*gewu zhi xue*] both have histories. History is the record of facts, writing down what is observed over time, in order to understand cause and effect and establish public precedent. It is not a special branch of learning.” Here the terms *qunxue* and *gewu zhi xue* are distinguished from one other, with each positioned as a category of a “special branch of learning,” and, at the same time, distinguished from “history,” which implicitly provides the basis for the subsequent division between the social sciences, natural sciences, and humanities. See Yan Fu, “Guojixue jiabu (cangao), anyu” [Notes on national economy studies, part one (unfinished manuscript)], in *Yan Fu ji* [Collected works of Yan Fu], 5 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 4:847–48.

in the elevated position of “science of science,” the Chinese scholars of the late Qing dynasty generally tended toward the concept of social group [*qun*] and the category of “social science” or “group studies” [*qunxue*] as governing over the various fields of knowledge, thus placing science and its branches of knowledge within the framework of a social idealism. This approach was derived from the sociological thought of Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, as well as from the traditional Chinese concepts of “group” [*qun*], where the categories of learning are closely related to general ideas about society and the nature of the universe. This also signifies that science and its genealogy were imbricated with the idea of a new social community.³⁸ Precisely on this account, the “various schools of learning” [*zhuxue*] were not a haphazard collection of subdisciplines of knowledge, but a “social technique” or “social method” [*qunshu*] directly related to “governance” [*zheng*] and “education” [*jiao*]. In the 1896 *Xixue shumubiao* [Bibliography of Western studies], Liang Qichao separated “Western studies” into categories of “learning” [*xue*] (dealing with sound, light, chemistry, electricity, etc.), “governance” (politics, law, social and industrial systems), and “miscellany” [*za*] (newspapers, natural science [*gezhi*], travelogues, etc.), stating that “all governance derives from learning, so governance and learning cannot be separated; without a deep grasp of sociology, a [specific] field of learning cannot be formed, and without a comprehensive grasp of governance one cannot raise a specific lesson from it. As such, the various subfields of learning and governance cannot be separated.”³⁹ The structure of this classification of “various schools of learning” resembles the distinctions and connections between politics, education, and skill or craft in Confucian knowledge, but unlike the Confucian genealogy of knowledge, this loose disciplinary distinction is ordered according to a principle of empiricism, wherein

the abstract or theoretical [*xu*] precedes the actual or practical [*shi*], and tangible and qualitative knowledge/learning are all born from invisible and insubstantial [principles]. Therefore, mathematics and mechanics are followed by electrical science, chemistry, acoustics, optics, the study of gases, and so on, and are in turn followed by the study of heaven and earth, people and animals. [Fields like] medicine and mapping are exclusively human affairs, so they come after these. As for Western categories of governance, the primary source is a deep knowledge of the “four nations” [*siguo*; that is, Great Britain, France, Belgium, Italy], so histories and annals come first; governance stems from bureaucracies and schools, so they come second; the law is the means for governing the world, so it comes next; wealth

³⁸ Liang Qichao, “Shuo qun xu” [Preface to On grouping], *Yinbingshi heji: Wenji*, 2:4.

³⁹ Liang Qichao, “Xixue shumubiao: Xuli” [Preface to Bibliography of Western learning], *Yinbingshi heji: Wenji*, 1:123.

comes before power, so agricultures, minerology, industry, and commerce all come after, with military strategy coming last.⁴⁰

The unified view of science suggests an organic nature that unites the political, ethical, and technological structures of both the modern state and the world system as a whole. Following the sociological ideas of Spencer, Yan Fu established a genealogy of knowledge about nature, society, and morality in relation to the (classical hierarchy) of heaven, earth, and humankind. At the top of this genealogy is the science of “metaphysics” [*xuanxue*] or “refining the mind and governing affairs” [*lianxin zhishi*]. At the bottom of the hierarchy are fields like mathematics, chemistry, the study of electricity, and botany, while in the middle level are agriculture, military science, navigation, machinery, medicine, and mining. This spectrum of scientific knowledge is closely related to a social model constructed on the basis of empiricism and positivism. According to Yan Fu’s description, Western society is organized according to the scientific method, from everyday life and production at the bottom to the state system at the top: “In conducting their [i.e., Westerners’] affairs, everything is rooted in the various sciences [*zhuxueshu*]. And their scientific study is rooted in tangible objects and observed measurements; accumulating step by step, such study results in roads of utmost refinement and grandness. As such there is no affair or event that is worthy of study but not worthy of action.”⁴¹ In fact, Yan Fu’s so-called metaphysics is closely related to social science [*qunxue*], the former mainly comprised of mathematics and calculus, in other words, a kind of knowledge that can comprehensively apprehend the “essential principles” [*biran zhi li*] of things, while the latter is a “science of groups” whose knowledge can apply inductive and deductive methodology to the fields of politics, criminal law, finance, history, and so on.⁴² “What is ‘the science of groups’? The science of groups means using scientific laws to look into the changes of a people to illuminate the past and anticipate the future. What is to be called learning [*yi*]? It is developing the meaning and objectives of specialist knowledge, researching the application of its functions, and expressing it through governing formulas.”⁴³ In this sense, with its disciplines and empirical methods science can provide a new social model, replete with new moral principles.

⁴⁰ Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi heji: Wenji*, 1:124.

⁴¹ Yan Fu, “Yuan qiang xiuding gao” [Revised manuscript of On Strength], in *Yan Fu ji*, 1:22–23.

⁴² Yan Fu, “Xixue menjing gongyong” [Keys to and functions of Western learning], in *Yan Fu ji*, 1:94.

⁴³ Yan Fu, “Yi ‘Qunxue yiyen’ zixu” [Introduction to translation of The study of sociology], in *Yan Fu ji*, 1:123.

Just like much of the Chinese philosophical lexicon, the original term used to translate “science” and its related concepts come from Song Confucianism. In addition to the imperial examination’s conception of branches of knowledge, from the late Qing dynasty to the May Fourth period many Chinese expressions for the concept of science—such as *gezhi*xue [investigating things and extending knowledge], *gewu*xue [the investigation of things], *qionglixue* [the exhaustive pursuit of knowledge], *lixue* [the study of principles], and *like* [the laws or science of principles]—were derived from Song and Ming Neo-Confucianism [*lixue*]. These translations originated from the writings of missionaries who used Confucian terms to translate Western concepts of science and technology, such as W. A. P. Martin’s 1868 *Gewu rumen* [Introduction to the investigation of things] and Alexander Williamson’s 1876 *Gewu tanyuan* [An examination of the origins of science], both of which use *gewu* [the investigation of things] to translate “science.”⁴⁴ In 1874 the British consul in Shanghai advocated the establishment of a reading room called *Gezhi shuyuan* [Academy for investigating things and extending knowledge], which, following the suggestion of the British sinologist John Fryer (1839–1928) and the approval of the academy’s governing board, was later reestablished as an industrial and technical school and an institution for the study and education of natural sciences, with the English name the Chinese Polytechnic Institution and Reading Room. On February 9, 1876, Fryer and Xu Shou (1818–1884) founded China’s first scientific journal, *Gezhi huibian* [Collection of investigating things and extending knowledge], with the English name of *The Chinese Scientific Magazine*. In 1885 Fryer further established the *Gezhi shushi* [Study for investigating things and extending knowledge], the first bookstore specializing in science and technology in China. Even after 1902 concepts such as *gezhi* were used in parallel with Western scientific concepts; for example, Liang Qichao had already started to use the term science *kexue* in 1902, but in the same year he titled his own work of early modern science as *Gezhixue yange kaolüe* [A summary history of the evolution of *gezhi*].

In addition to words such as *gezhi* and *gewu*, other translations of the word “science” that were popular in the late Qing and early republican periods include *lixue* [the study of principles], *like* [the laws or science of principles], *qionglixue* [the exhaustive pursuit of knowledge], and *yishu* [craft]. One example is the monthly magazine *Lixue zazhi* [Study of principles magazine]. Founded in

⁴⁴ Ding Weiliang [W. A. P. Martin], *Gewu rumen* [Introduction to the investigation of things] (Beijing: Tongwenguan, 1868); Wei Lianchen [Alexander Williamson], *Gewu tanyuan* [An examination of the origins of science] (Beijing: Tongwenguan, 1876).

Shanghai on November 15, 1906, it directly adopted the term *lixue* in its title. The journal's purpose was to popularize science among Chinese in search of national wealth and power.⁴⁵ Three of the four editorials [*sheshuo*] appearing in another contemporary journal, *Kexue shijie* [Science world] used *like* and *lixue* to translate “science.”⁴⁶ The concepts of *gezhi* and *qiongli* [fathoming of principles] come from Confucianism, especially the Song and Ming philosophies of *gewuzhizhi* [investigation of things and arriving at knowledge], but between the Ming and Qing dynasties these terms became increasingly associated with a set of natural knowledge. This is exemplified by Fang Yizhi's (1611–1671) *Tongya* [Comprehensive collection of refined knowledge] and *Wuli xiaoshi* [Brief knowledge of the principles of things]. As he states: “Agricultural writings, medicine, calculation and measurement, and tools of industry are all practical in nature ... all the principles of things constitute the work *Gezhi quanshu* [Complete writings on investigating things and extending knowledge] ... whereas ethics, statecraft, literary works, techniques of philology can all be classified as *tiandao renshi* [laws of heaven and affairs of man]; the essence is made up of natural principles and physical principles, and exhaustive pursuit of such principles extends to existence [*ming*], revealing that objects are *dao*, and everything accords with a grand principle of things [*dawuli*].”⁴⁷

The transformation of the concept of things [*wu*] is the key to the adoption of the Confucian term *gewuzhizhi* [investigation of things and arriving at knowledge] as a translation for modern scientific concepts. In the classical category of rites and music, “things” (or “hundred things” [*baiwu*] or “ten thousand things” [*wanwu*]) are not isolated, objective facts, but are products of a certain relationality, a system, an order, or a standard. In the *Zhouli* section “Diguan: Dasitu” [Earthly officials: The grand minister of the multitude], there is the

⁴⁵ In its seventh, eighth, and ninth issues, *Yaqian zazhi* [Yaqian magazine] serially published “Ribon lixue, shuxue shumu” [Bibliography of Japanese books on science and math], listing thirty-six titles in general science, sixty-four physics titles, eighty-six chemistry titles, four astronomy titles, seven meteorology titles, eighteen titles of studies of the natural world, plus titles on biology, anthropology, zoology, botany, geology, seismology, mineralogy, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and so on, totaling 377 science entries and 531 in mathematics. Outside of math, all other disciplines were categorized as science. See, respectively, *Yaqian zazhi* no. 7 (1901): 10–13, no. 8 (1901): 7–9, and no. 9 (1901): 8–10.

⁴⁶ Appearing in *Kexue shijie* [Science world] 1, no. 1 (1903), the editorials were as follows: “Lun like yu qunzhi zhi guanxi” [On the relationship between science (*like*) and government of the people] by Wang Benxiang and three pieces by Yu Heqin, “Xianjin shijie qi jiesheng laoli zhi jingzhengchang hu” [The competitive field of saving labor in today's world], “Yuan lixue” [On the origins of science (*lixue*)], and “Like yu Hanyi” [Science (*like*) and Chinese medicine].

⁴⁷ Fang Yizhi, *Tongya* [Comprehensive collection of refined knowledge], in *Fang Yizhi quanshu* [Complete works of Fang Yizhi], 2 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), 1:40–41.

phrase “to teach the people using the three things of the countryside, and elevate the sagely.”⁴⁸ Here the “three things” [*sanwu*] refers to three groups, namely, the six virtues [*liude*] (knowledge [*zhi*], benevolence [*ren*], sagacity [*sheng*], righteousness [*yi*], loyalty [*zhong*], and harmony [*he*]), the six conducts [*liuxing*] (filial piety [*jiao*], friendship [*you*], harmonious relations [*mu*], loving marriage [*yin*], trust [*ren*], and compassion [*xu*]), and the six arts [*liuyi*] (ritual [*li*], music [*yue*], archery [*she*], charioteering [*yu*], writing [*shu*], and arithmetic [*shu*]). This shows how the classical concept of things was closely related to the comprehensive set of ritual and musical norms: “things” are the manifestation of the natural order, as are ritual and music, thus the “things” of the natural order belong to the norms of ritual and music. In the context of Song and Ming Neo-Confucianism, the direct connection between “things” and ritual and music was loosened when “things” was reorganized into a new system of thought centered on the concepts of principle [*li*] and matter or vital energy [*qi*], such that “things” no longer directly presented the standard of ritual and music and instead had passed through a process of “the investigation of things” [*gewu*]—and related terms like “approaching of things” [*jiwu*], “the exhaustive pursuit of knowledge” [*qiongli*], “reaching the limits” [*zhiji*]—in order to apprehend its “principle.” Song Confucianism generally believed that “the principle is one, but permeates the many” [*liyifenshu*], where different things and affairs had their own principles, thus imparting the phrase “investigation of things and arriving at knowledge” with a cognitive significance. For this reason, from the Song onward, studies of the natural world [*bowuxue*] and nature [*ziran*] were often placed under the category of *gewuzhizhi*. In the late Qing, an atomistic concept of matter came to form the epistemological premise for empirical science, and the “things” of the “investigation of things” was accordingly reestablished within the fact of atomism, while the “principle” of “the exhaustive pursuit of knowledge” no longer referred to moral knowledge, but rather to the objective laws of the physical world.

Confucians of the Song and Ming dynasties regarded the “heavenly principle” [*tianli*] as the property of all things, the origin of morality, and the standard for all practice and used it as a basis for integrating all aspects of nature, morality, and politics. In this world of thought, the knowledge of nature and of the “ten thousand things” [*wanwu*] is closely related to the knowledge of the political order and the practice of moral standards. Similarly, the concepts of science and “investigating things and extending knowledge” in early modern China

⁴⁸ *Shisanjing zhushu: Zhouli zhushu* [Commentaries on the thirteen classics: Commentaries on the Rites of Zhou], ed. Li Xueqin (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999), 1450.

centered on the study and utilization of nature but were also often interrelated with the spheres of politics, morality, and order. Whether it is the structure of “politics,” “religion,” and “art” upheld by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao in their introduction of Western science or Yan Fu’s genealogy of scientific knowledge centered on social science and metaphysics, all saw scientific discovery and method as applicable to the fields of politics and morality. In such a context, science and its technological application created the conditions for using nature in search of wealth and power, and the “order” [*zhixu*] discovered by it also provided the source for human intelligence and moral principles. Therefore, the decline of the “heavenly principle” worldview and the rise of the scientific worldview were not a straightforward relation of rise and fall but harbored a mutual penetration between the two orders.

Through a process of intense intellectual critique, the scientific worldview eventually replaced the Confucian view of heavenly principles, becoming a new universal truth rooted in knowledge of objective laws.

The concept of science in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was closely linked to the categories of evolution, progress, and natural change [*tianyan*, an early translation of “evolution”]. Science was at once both an expression

of an empiricist spirit and a product of the process of evolution and historical progress. Through a process of intense intellectual critique, the scientific worldview eventually replaced the Confucian view of heavenly principles, becoming a new universal truth [*gongli*] rooted in knowledge of objective laws. From the vast range of writings from the late Qing through the May Fourth era, we can summarize the acute confrontation between worldviews of heavenly principle and universal truth in several ways. First, the universal truth worldview inverted the historical view harbored by the older order, placing the future, rather than the past, as the source for idealist political and moral practice. This reversal dismantled the Confucian worldview’s sense of historical interruption or rupture, as well as the will to maintain a successive Confucian orthodoxy that accompanies this sense, replacing it with a sense of historical continuity, boundless evolution, and a desire to break with the past. Governed by this new historical consciousness, instead of reconstructing the genealogy of the moral system by individual moral/political practice, the historical will is embodied in commitment to the cause of the future, constituting a new ethic. Second, the new universal truth worldview replaced the heavenly principle worldview’s concepts of temporal

thrust and the development of reason with a linear and forward-facing concept of time: the older concepts were embedded in the change of things per se, and they do not integrate the change of things into the broader, teleological orbit of time; whereas linear forward-facing time provides a teleological framework that integrates all the changes, transformations, and developments of the everyday world into its arc. Third, the universal truth worldview constructed the category of the “fact” [*shishi*] in an atomistic manner, and in doing so it attacked the metaphysical presuppositions of the heavenly principle, attempting to establish ethical and political grounds according to the logic of facts or the laws of nature. Because of the final establishment of the concept of atomistic facts, any resistance to this new logic or to the laws of nature would have to be predicated on the recognition of a dualism between facts and values.

Just as different schools of Confucianism have different interpretations of the heavenly principle and of the “investigation of things and arriving at knowledge,” modern Chinese thinkers’ understanding of science also took different paths. Yan Fu’s view of universal truth, built on the background of Neo-Confucianism, the *Yijing*, and positivism; Liang Qichao’s view of universal truth, built on the Learning of Heart and Mind, the “new text” Confucian hermeneutics of the former Han [*jinwen jingxue*], and German idealism; and Zhang Taiyan’s (1869–1936) anti-universalism, combining Yogachara [*weishixue*] and Zhuangzian thought, constitute three cases that demonstrate the multiplicity of thought. The paradoxes and mutual deconstruction between them provide different perspectives for rethinking the problem of modernity. Yan Fu and Liang Qichao represent two mainstream orientations: as a kind of combination of the Neo-Confucian worldview and a monistic view of nature, Yan Fu’s universal truth view emphasizes the intrinsic unity of the world and holds that the inherent regularity of the universe, the world, and humankind can be understood through *gezhi*, *qiongli*, and empiricism; while Liang Qichao’s thought synthesizes Heart and Mind, the Han school of “new text” interpretation, and dualistic philosophy and emphasizes a gap between the natural and moral worlds, only bridgeable through a practice of “unity of knowledge and action” [*zhixing heyi*]. Both of these “scientific worldviews” presuppose a methodological unity between cognition or understanding (science) and, on the other hand, practice (morality): the “unity of knowledge and action” and “investigation of things and arriving at knowledge” are both a way of knowing the world and a form of moral practice that renounces private interest and embraces public good.

Zhang Taiyan was the first systematic critic of the scientific view of universal truth and its intellectual hegemony. Rather than adopt a humanist standpoint of

subjectivist theory, he deconstructed and critiqued scientism by combining the ideas of Yogachara and Zhuangzi's *Qiwulun* [Discussion on making all things equal]. In his view, "universal truth" is nothing but an oppressive and controlling authority, and modern society subjugates the individual in the name of this truth to a far greater extent than did ancient society and its ethical system centered on the notion of the "heavenly principle." Zhang Taiyan's denunciation of the "universal truth of science" is based on two basic ideas. First, he uses the principle of subjective epistemology to distinguish between two conceptions of nature: the nature studied by science is not a self-existing [*zicun*] nature, but rather a nature that is incorporated into a particular vision and category (i.e., a nature constructed for science), and thus this nature is a nature that lacks an intrinsic essence (no self-nature [*zixing*]) and that can only manifest itself through the law of cause and effect. He draws a series of conclusions from this argument: the notions of "matter" and "nature" are illusory; science as a system of explanation cannot explain the world itself; "universal truth" and "evolution" are not principles or a priori rules of the universe, but human constructions; the process of the creation of "universal truth" is not so much a "public" (natural) development, but rather represents the complication of the "individual." Thus, "universal truth" is a synonym for control and domination.⁴⁹ Second, he liberates the operation of nature from a teleological framework by rejecting the moral meaning of evolution, and thereby dismisses any association between the individual and the historical teleology of evolution. In doing so, Zhang refuses to recognize the dependence of individual moral orientation upon the operation of society as a whole and denies that the individual is an instrument of group evolution: the individual is not a state's or juridical citizen, a member of the family and society, a subject of history and morality, or a "host" to nature's "guest." In short, the meaning and position of an individual cannot be defined through a connection with any other universal thing. Such a radical application of atomism takes precise aim at the concept of society constructed on the basis of scientific positivism. Zhang Taiyan's anti-universalist worldview can be seen as a precursor to twentieth-century rethinking of modernity, but unlike the humanist views of Wilhelm Dilthey, Wilhelm Windelband, and others, Zhang's criticism of the scientific worldview does not assume a field entirely separate from that of science.

The power of science lies in its tight linkage of a universalist worldview with a nationalist/cosmopolitan social institution that, through its rationalized categorization of knowledge and social division of labor, ultimately captures

⁴⁹ Zhang Taiyan, "Sihuo lun" [On the four confusions], in *Zhang Taiyan quanji* [Complete works of Zhang Taiyan], 6 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1984), 4:443–44.

different forms and orientations of human life within its broader genealogy. The popularization of the concept of science is closely linked to its construction as an institutionalized field. In conjunction with the reform of the educational system, specialized science training, science communication, and a system of research gradually emerged with the support of the state. The Academy for Investigating Things and Extending Knowledge and the *Chinese Scientific Magazine* of the 1870s symbolized the arrival of *gezhi* as an organized, institutionalized, and specialized field, while also marking the end of *gezhi* as a moral activity of cultivating oneself and managing one's household. Scientific journals, education, and community helped split science from the general social sphere. According to a preliminary survey, in less than two decades between the turn of the twentieth century and the May Fourth movement of 1919, more than one hundred science and technology periodicals were founded. Except for a small number of official newspapers and periodicals such as the *Nonglin gongbao* [Agricultural and forestry bulletin], published by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in 1912, and the *Nonggongshang bao* [Agricultural and industrial and commercial bulletin] run by the Guangdong Central Office of Agriculture and Industry and Commerce in 1907, the majority of science and technology-related journals were founded by scientific groups, universities, or, in some cases, private individuals. Among these, some of the most famous were undoubtedly the Chinese Science Society's [Zhongguo kexue shehui] monthly publication, *Kexue* [Science], the *Zhonghua gongchengshi xuehui huibao* [Journal of the Chinese Association of Engineers] run by the association and its representative, the railroad engineer Zhan Tianyou (1861–1919), and *Dixue zazhi* [Geology magazine], organized by China's earliest scientific group, the Chinese Geological Association [*Zhongguo dixue hui*].⁵⁰ The founders of scientific magazines were scattered across the country. Some of the higher-quality publications were the product of groups of young intellectuals who had studied abroad in the United States or Japan. Through the popularization of scientific knowledge, the propagation of scientific ideas, and the formation of a network of organizations, a new intellectual community and cultural atmosphere emerged, what C. P. Snow later outlined as the social form of “the two cultures.”

If we compare the propagation and practice of science by intellectuals in the late Qing with the scientific community and its practice following the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912, we can find a clear shift. Marked by

⁵⁰ Zhang Xiaoping and Pan Yanming, “Zhongguo jindai keji qikan jianjie, 1900–1919” [Overview of science and technology periodicals in early modern China, 1900–1919], in *Xinhai geming shiqi qikan jieshao* [Introduction to the periodicals of the Xinhai Revolution period], ed. Ding Shouhe (Beijing: Remin chubanshe, 1986), 694.

the establishment of scientific communities such as the Chinese Science Society and their specialized academic journals, a clear distinction between scientific and humanistic cultures emerged in the cultural field in the republican era. In contrast, the propagation of science in the late Qing was an integral part of attempts to spread political reform and revolution, where, in terms of social division, leading proponents of science such as Yan Fu did not constitute a unique community distinct from other intellectuals. However, along with the development of a scientific community and its institutional culture, both in terms of the organization of members of society and of the division of publications into subfields, a new kind of social group appeared that clearly manifested a division between scientific culture and humanistic (or everyday) culture. The scientific community distinguished itself from the other political and cultural spheres by its singular focus on objective, truth-seeking methods. But the impact of science and its related concepts went far beyond the two-culture division and became a universal truth for measuring progress and backwardness, truth and falsehood, right and wrong.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, we have seen the emergence not only of various fields of knowledge named after science, such as major categories like natural science, social science, and human science [*renwen kexue*], along with subcategories like political science, economic science, and science of administration, but also of the usage of “science” and “scientific” as adjectives and attributives, such as the scientific outlook on development [*kexue fazhan guan*], scientific enforcement of law [*kexue zhifa*], scientific administration [*kexue xingzheng*], and so on. The concept of science has nearly monopolized the field of “truth.” The different social theories that have appeared in this era also largely present a scientific appearance, with Marxism, pragmatism, and other theories describing themselves as scientific theories.

Along with the rising tide of science, critiques of science and its hegemony constituted another vein in twentieth-century Chinese thought. In addition to the establishment of the humanities as an academic institution, two debates that erupted in the wake of World War I provided a theoretical premise for the birth of the humanities as a field separate from the sciences. The first was the debate on Eastern and Western cultures [*Dongxi wenhua lunzhan*]. Publications such as the *Dongfang zazhi* [Eastern miscellany], *Jiayin* [The tiger], *Xueheng* [Critical review], and *Guoxue jikan* [National studies quarterly] and their contributors engaged in a fierce debate with the New Culture movement and its representatives, Chen Duxiu (1879–1942) and Hu Shi (1891–1962). Taking up the subjects of “culture” [*wenhua*] and “civilization” [*wenming*], the debate focused on which

cultures and their values should be adopted as a standard or goal for determining the direction of Chinese society, culture, and nation. Liang Shuming's (1893–1988) *Dongxi wenhua ji qi zhexue* [Eastern and Western cultures and their philosophies], published at the end of 1921, provided a view of cultural history that was in opposition to that of the New Culture movement. According to Liang's definition, "culture ... is nothing more than a nation's vital *will* [original in English]."⁵¹ This concept of culture or civilization relies on a metaphorical relationship between individual and civilization, where, like the life of an individual being, a culture or civilization is an existence with its own will and bearing. The reason why Eastern and Western cultures are so divergent and mutually irreconcilable is that the "will" that is the origin of each is completely different. Based on the above analogy between a culture or civilization and individual life, Liang takes "Westernization" [*Xifanghua*] as a reference point for comparison and distinguishes three cultural "paths" [*luxiang*]. "The fundamental spirit of Westernization is the desire to move forward. Put differently, the West is a culture whose progressivist spirit gave rise to the two splendid cultures of *science* and *democracy* [orig. in transliteration: *saiyinse* and *demokelaxi*]." "The Chinese culture is rooted in a will toward autonomy, harmony, and moderation. Indian culture, meanwhile, has as its fundamental spirit the will to turn backward and supplicate."⁵² In a modern context, the interrelationship of these three paths is firstly reflected as the incommensurability between what Liang calls "Orientalization" [*Dongfanghua*] and "Westernization." Binaries such as science/art, science/metaphysics, reason/intuition in Liang's writings are only respective characteristics of such "Westernization" and "Orientalization," the results of different "wills." According to this concept of culture, the incommensurability of science and metaphysics, or of reason and intuition, is determined by the irreconcilability of national cultures. We can roughly schematize Liang's underlying argument as follows:

East = Metaphysics = Art = Opinion = Discussions of the "Profound Knowledge" [*xuantan*] = Noumenology [*benti*] = Individual Morality = Antiquity = Second and Third Paths

West = Science = Scholarship = Knowledge = Ethics = Phenomenology = Public Morality = Presentism = First Path

⁵¹ Liang Shuming, "Dongxi wenhua ji qi zhexue: Daoyan" [Introduction to Eastern and Western cultures and their philosophies], in *Liang Shuming quanji* [Complete works of Liang Shuming], 8 vols. (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 1989), 1:352.

⁵² Liang Shuming, "Dongxi wenhua ji qi zhexue," 353, 383.

In Liang's theory of culture, "science" is not only a matter of knowledge, and "metaphysics" is not only a matter of morality; rather, the two refer to an underlying difference in the civilizations that they represent. In a scientific civilization, all science, politics, economics, morality, law, thought, and so on are scientific, rational, and cognitive, while in a metaphysical civilization, all science, politics, economics, morality, ceremony and rites, thought, and so forth are metaphysical, artistic, and intuitive. Therefore, in a scientific civilization, there is no incommensurability between science and morality, because there is scientific morality; and in a metaphysical civilization, there is no incommensurability between morality and knowledge, because there is moral knowledge. The incommensurability exists only between the two civilizations. From this debate, it is evident that the question of whether to classify knowledge according to the civilizational differences between China and the West or to establish a disciplinary system according to a taxonomy that transcends civilizational differences and is characterized by universalism has long preoccupied many scholars.

In 1923 Zhang Junmai (1887–1969) delivered a lecture entitled "Philosophy of Life" at the Tsinghua Preparatory School for Study in the US, which triggered the great so-called science and philosophy of life debate [*kexue yu renshengguan*]. The most important change from the debate on Eastern and Western cultures to the science and philosophy of life debate was the transformation of the East/West dualism of the former into the science/metaphysics dualism of the latter. Against the backdrop of the Great War, people had started to think critically about scientific civilization along two different lines: culturally, by establishing the subjectivity of Chinese culture in contrast with Western civilization and denying the universal significance of Western civilization; and intellectually, through the binary division of "science versus the philosophy of life," by removing ethics, psychology, and other social sciences from the totalizing system of natural and physical sciences, thus denying the universal applicability of the general laws of science. This latter move also proved to be a reconstruction of the place of human subjectivity within the broader field of knowledge. Zhang Junmai writes in 1923, "The European intellectual trend of the past twenty or thirty years can be named as 'anti-mechanism' [*fanjixiezhuyi*], 'anti-intellectualism' [or anti-rationalism; *fanzhuzhizhuyi*], 'anti-determinism' [*fandingmingzhuyi*], or 'anti-secularism' [*fanfeizongjiaozhuyi*]. Somewhat along the line of Comte's law of three stages, if we seek to identify one of the characteristics of the present

era, it must be called ‘New Age of Metaphysics’ [*xin xuanxue shidai*].⁵³ Another name for this new era could be the anti-scientific age.

In the science versus metaphysics debate, Zhang Junmai put the issue in the context of the opposition between science and the philosophy of life, aiming to combat the universalism of “science” using the autonomy, diversity, contingency, and unitarity of the “philosophy of life,” and thereby to clearly distinguish between natural science and science of spirit. As he puts it: “Astronomy is the same throughout the world. There is no such thing as English astronomy or French astronomy.” As for the “spiritual sciences” such as political science, economics, psychology, sociology, and so on, these do not rely on “firm or unbreakable principles.”⁵⁴ The diversity of the “philosophy of life” is directly related to the diversity of “national” cultures and the autonomy of the individual psyche. Countering the universality of science with the diversity of spirit, opposing cultural and historical pluralism to the universal meaning of “scientific civilization” (Western civilization), and contesting the unified and general laws of “science” using the principle of the individual subject’s uniqueness—these are the historical implications of “science versus philosophy of life” as a set of rhetorical oppositions. By posing science and the philosophy of life as a confrontation, the question of history and culture is finally transformed into an abstract and universalized question of knowledge: not the difference between “Chinese learning as substance” and “Western learning as application” [per the famous Qing dictum, *Zhongti Xiyong*] or the clash between Eastern and Western civilizations, but rather the confrontation between science and metaphysics, physics and psychology, reason and intuition. With this as the central axis, the universal system of scientific knowledge begins to divide into incommensurable and autonomous separate domains, namely, the field of science and the field of spirit.

By reflecting on the “limits of science” [*kexue zhi xianjie*], Zhang Junmai also proposed a new genealogy of knowledge, one that accommodates both science and “knowledge beyond science” [*kexue yiwai zhi zhishi*]. Within such a genealogy, metaphysics, aesthetics, religion, and morality are separated from the domain of “science” and are arranged alongside it as distinct fields of knowledge. Compared to the original concept of science, this organization of knowledge is still a disciplinary genealogy; however, the dominant position is no longer held by positivist sociology but rather by metaphysics. Zhang writes, “Although

⁵³ Zhang Junmai, “Zailun renshengguan yu kexue bing da Ding Zaijun: Zhong” [Revisiting philosophy of life and science, and a response to Ding Wenjiang: Middle essay], in *Renshengguan zhi lunzhan* [Philosophy of life debate], ed. Zhang Junmai (Shanghai; Taidong tushuju, 1923), 64–65.

⁵⁴ Zhang Junmai, “Zailun renshengguan yu kexue bing da Ding Zaijun,” 29.

there is no alternative but to separate research into disciplines, the right and wrong of disciplines should be weighed against the highest principle of all studies. That which can gain mastery over all of the disciplines is metaphysics. It is the ultimate judge of the other disciplines.”⁵⁵ In terms of the principle of disciplinary division and the place of the unified view in this system of knowledge, his view is surprisingly close to the formulation of the positivist Nishi Amane, but the difference is that Zhang Junmai demands not only that the domain of “metaphysics” be preserved above the territory of scientific knowledge, but also that fields like psychology, sociology, politics, economics are autonomous and fall outside of scientific knowledge—that is, they can’t be governed by science or the science of science, “social science” [*qunxue*], but only by metaphysics. This conception makes metaphysics the precondition for all other knowledge. If the Seven Disciplines of Learning established by the Ministry of Education and

The opposition of *tianwen* and *renwen*, natural sciences and humanistic study, is quite possibly only a temporary phenomenon, a presumption rooted in its specific era, and a premise that bears renewed examination.

Peking University in 1913 were formulated fully within the framework of science’s taxonomy, a decade later the debate between science and metaphysics won an autonomous space for the humanities outside the domain of science.

Zhang Junmai and the metaphysical school’s defense of fields like morality, aesthetics, and psychology is intimately related to Wilhelm Dilthey’s view that the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*), unlike the natural sciences, cannot use objective methods of calculation, measurement, observation, and the discovery of superficial laws to reveal human motives, intentions, and intuition.⁵⁶ Dilthey states:

a more thoroughgoing grounding of the independent status of the human sciences vis-à-vis the natural sciences—an independence which is central to our account of the human sciences in the present work—will be developed step by step ... through the analysis of our total lived experience of the human world and its incommensurability with all sensory experiences of nature. At this point, I shall merely clarify the problem by pointing out the twofold sense in which the incommensurability of these two realms of facts can be asserted; correspondingly,

⁵⁵ Zhang Junmai, “Zailun renshengguan yu kexue bing da Ding Zaijun,” 15.

⁵⁶ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften, Versuch einer Grundlegung für das Studium der Gesellschaft und der Geschichte* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1883), 6, 13.

the concept of the limits of our knowledge of nature also receives a twofold meaning.⁵⁷

By discussing the incommensurability between material and spiritual processes and arguing that the facts of the human world do not accord with the mechanistic concept of nature, Dilthey identifies “the boundary where knowledge of nature ends and an independent human science, shaped by its own central concerns, begins,”⁵⁸ and from this division human science forms an independent whole alongside that of natural science.⁵⁹ In fact, Zhang Junmai’s contrast between science and philosophy of life closely overlaps with Dilthey’s opposition between nature and spirituality, natural science and spiritual science.⁶⁰ However, the science versus metaphysics debate continues or extends the debate on Eastern and Western cultures, and, in the opposition between science and humanities, it implies an opposition between different cultures and their respective cosmologies. The classification of knowledge and some degree of methodologically based specialization exist both in the classical lineage of learning and in the modern disciplines, but there is no absolute incommensurability between the natural sciences and humanities research. The opposition of *tianwen* and *renwen*, natural sciences and humanistic study, is quite possibly only a temporary phenomenon, a presumption rooted in its specific era, and a premise that bears renewed examination.

⁵⁷ Wei'erhaimu Di'ertai, *Renwen kexue daolun*, trans. Zhao Xifang (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 2004), 9. *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften*, 11. English rendition from Wilhelm Dilthey, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, ed. Rudolf Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 61.

Where direct quotations are given, only the English version is cited.—Trans.

⁵⁸ Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, 63.

⁵⁹ Wei'erhaimu Di'ertai, *Renwen kexue daolun*, 5; *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften*, 5.

⁶⁰ Dilthey’s English translators render his *Geisteswissenschaften* [science of the spirit] as “human science”; Dilthey himself frequently used the phrase *Wissenschaften vom Menschen* [sciences of ordinary people], but only once did he use the term *Humanwissenschaften* [human sciences]. See Makkreel and Rodi, “Introduction to Volume I,” *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, 10. Dilthey considers the concept of *Geisteswissenschaften* to be the least restrictive relative to social science (*Gesellschaftswissenschaft*), sociology (*Soziologie*), ethics (*moralische Wissenschaft*), history (*geschichtliche Wissenschaft*), or cultural science (*Kulturwissenschaften*), designations that “suffer from the same fault of being too narrow relative to their subject matter.” Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, 58.

From “Post–Cultural Revolution” to “Post–Cold War”: Intellectual Movements and the Reconstruction of the Humanities

The modern humanities emerged from the ongoing interaction between intellectual movements and academic reform. In the case of liberal arts scholarship at Peking University and Tsinghua University in the 1920s, for example, almost all of its major contributors, whether radical or conservative, came from the two generations that participated in the Xinhai Revolution and the May Fourth and New Culture movements. They used the scientific method to “organize the national past” or made attempts at reappraising the classical tradition to identify its contemporary meaning (through so-called neo-humanism or neoclassicism), thereby reestablishing literature, philosophy, and history as humanities subjects. In this sense, although humanities scholarship as a specialized field of study had its own line of evolution, it would be difficult to grasp the changes in the humanities without taking into account the mutual influences between intellectual movements and historical developments.

The humanities in contemporary China gradually took shape after the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). The establishment of this latest phase of the humanities can be described by two “breakaways” [*tuoli*]. The first break was from the school system of the Cultural Revolution, marked by the formal resumption of the college entrance examinations [*gaokao*] in 1977. However, this separation can also be called a return to the “pre–Cultural Revolution” system. For three years following the eruption of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, institutions of higher education stopped enrolling students. In 1970, in accordance with the directives of Mao Zedong (1893–1976) regarding revolution in education, a portion of colleges and universities resumed admitting students, though not from among high school graduates, as before, but rather from among workers, peasants, soldiers, and other groups from different backgrounds. This restored university training centered on science and engineering. In 1977, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997), the system of “worker-, peasant, and soldier-trainees” [*gongnongbing xueyuan*] was abandoned, and all the high school graduates from the prior decade were allowed to sit for the college entrance exams. In May of the same year, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) was established, featuring thirty-one research institutes in various disciplines of humanities and social sciences (now grown to thirty-five institutes and forty-five centers). CASS was formerly the Division of Philosophy and Social Sciences within the Chinese Academy of Sciences. It combined the republican-era Academia Sinica [*Zhongyuan yanjiuyuan*] with the Soviet model, serving as a basic institutional framework. The establishment

of CASS also marked China's attempt to "breakaway" from the Soviet system within the broader context of Marxism. Within the new framework of CASS, disciplines such as philosophy, history, and literature studies were not categorized as humanities, but rather as separate subfields within the general category of the social sciences. From the late 1970s through the end of the 1980s, although scholars made a distinction between the social sciences and the humanities, where literature, history, and philosophy were classified as disciplines separate from social sciences such as economics, the broader academic system did clearly distinguish between the humanities and the social sciences; in other words, the humanities were treated as a special subcategory of the social sciences.⁶¹

The second "breakaway" was the extrication from or transformation of the traditional socialist system of disciplines. According to Marxist theory, the social sciences are relegated to the realm of the superstructure, dealing with ideology. Within this scheme, the humanities are no exception. However, in the case of the divisions of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the disciplinary structure was in fact heavily influenced by the pre-1949 disciplinary arrangements and membership of the Academia Sinica, Peking University, and Tsinghua University. Some of the CAS institutes were in fact directly transferred from these two universities (e.g., the Institute of Literature was originally the Institute of Literature of Peking University). These divisions were established in 1955. Prior to this, in 1952, the state carried out a nationwide reform of institutions of higher education, the so-called rearrangement of universities and university departments [*yuanxi tiaozheng*]. For example, the humanities and social sciences of Tsinghua University (also located in the Chinese capital, Beijing) were entirely incorporated into Peking University and its subsequent establishment of academic divisions. Because of their politics, some of the older, deeply learned scholars at institutions of higher education were moved into well-supported but non-admitting academic departments. Many from this generation of scholars, such as the historians Gu Jiegang (1893–1980) and Chen Yinke (1890–1969), Yu Pingbo (1900–1990) and Qian Zhongshu (1910–1998) in literature studies, and He Lin (1902–1992) and Jin Yuelin (1895–1984) in philosophy, were appointed as fellows at various academic institutes. As such, the older generation of scholars in the academy included not only eminent left-wing scholars such as Guo Moruo (1892–1978), Fan Wenlan (1893–1969), and He Qifang (1912–1977), but also distinguished non-leftists. The academy became an establishment of

⁶¹ In 1984 I tested into the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences to pursue a doctoral degree. There were only twenty-three PhD students in all of CASS, distributed amongst various social sciences and humanities disciplines. Besides studying with their advisor in their field of specialization, the interactions between the students were completely transdisciplinary.

higher research composed of older, middle, and young generations. After the foundation of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 1977, it was precisely this older generation, together with the generation of scholars who came of age after 1949, that became the backbone of the social sciences and humanities in China. Thus, although there were important transformations in the orientation of academic thought between the Cultural Revolution and the post-Cultural Revolution periods, the establishment of universities and research institutions demonstrated a clear continuity with the pre-Cultural Revolution system.

As in the May Fourth period, the major changes in the field of humanities were closely related to the intellectual movements and changes of the times. The 1980s has been called an era of New Enlightenment that inherited the spirit of the May Fourth. This period can also be roughly divided into two stages. The first is the “liberation of thought movement” [*sixiang jiefang yundong*] from 1978 to around 1984. The most actively involved intellectuals were from the older generation of Marxist theorists, who used Marxian terms and propositions to intervene in economic, political, and cultural fields, for example, using the concept of the “law of value” [*jiazhi guilü*] to attack the idea of planned economy, or the philosophical proposition that “actual practice is the only criterion for judging truth” [*shijian shi jianyan zhenli de weiyi biaozhun*] to criticize the frameworks of orthodox Marxism and Maoism, or, again, in revising classical Marxist historiography by means of historical reevaluation. Discussions unfolding in fields such as philosophy around the relationship between truth and practice and in history around “peasant wars” [*nongmin zhanzheng*] (especially the Taiping and Boxer Rebellions), dynastic changes (especially the Hundred Days’ Reform), and revolutions (especially the Xinhai Revolution) not only directly responded to contemporary issues of the post-Cultural Revolution period, but also foreshadowed the emergence of the hot-button humanities issues of the second period. By 1985 large-scale translations and introductions of modern Western scholarship (including philosophy, history, literature, economics, and other theory classics) reached a high tide. These were coupled with the European, American, and Japanese works on China that also began to be imported into China in large numbers during the same period. Together, such translations formed a major phenomenon after the 1990s and had a significant impact on China’s “post-Cold War” humanities scholarship. Throughout this period, the introduction and importation of humanistic and social scientific knowledge and its impact on older topics were mostly in the form of interactions between the inside and outside of the organizational structure of the disciplines. I am here referring to the fact that most of the scholars who participated in the intellectual movements

of this era were primarily scholars from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and various institutions of higher learning, including those who held leading positions in official research institutions in the fields of literature studies, history, and philosophy. A large number of essays were published in authoritative establishment journals, such as *Wenxue pinglun* [Literary criticism], *Zhexue yanjiu* [Philosophy research], *Lishi yanjiu* [Historical research], and *Zhongguo shehui kexue* [Chinese social sciences], that provoked in-depth discussion.

At the same time, after the resumption of the college entrance examinations in 1977, various student associations at universities sprung up in large numbers, and humanistic discussion and activities were very lively. By the 1980s many scholars formed groups outside the establishment and relied on non-specialist journals and translation-oriented publication series to promote changes in humanities scholarship and thought. The unofficial associations for humanistic scholarship that emerged during this period spanned different orientations. Among them, the editorial boards of *Zouxiang weilai congshu* [Toward the future series], *Wenhua: Zhongguo yu shijie* [Culture: China and the world], and *Zhongguo wenhua shuyuan* [International academy of Chinese culture] carried the most influence. The *Toward the Future Series*, published by the Sichuan People's Publishing House, was a series of translations of foreign works in the social sciences, humanities, sciences and arts, as well as works by domestic scholars; it employed no disciplinary distinctions at all, but excited vibrant discussions of humanistic thought in various fields. The soul of the editorial board was the pair of scholars, Jin Guantao (b. 1947) and Liu Qingfeng, who moved to the Chinese University of Hong Kong after 1989. The journal attracted overseas and domestic authors and readers, ultimately serving as one of the most important sources for "post-Cold War" thought and discussion. The majority of the members of the editorial board of *Culture: China and the World* were college students and graduate students who entered the university after the resumption of the entrance examinations in 1977, mainly specialists of Western philosophy, but the series also attracted participation of scholars in the fields of history and literature. Unlike previous studies of Western philosophy, which focused on classical works, the editorial committee and its publication series concentrated on the translation and study of modern philosophy, paving the way for the subsequent study of modern Western philosophy and thought. After 1989, the series' head editor and associate editor, Gan Yang (b. 1952) and Liu Xiaofeng (b. 1956), along with some of the other editorial board members, studied in Europe and the United States and participated in the intellectual discussions in China in the 1990s. Their ideas changed several times, gradually transition-

ing from liberal leftism to cultural conservatism and the promotion of liberal education in China by drawing on approaches to classical education in the United States and Europe. The International Academy of Chinese Culture was established by Feng Youlan (1895–1990), Zhang Dainian (1909–2004), Zhu Bokun (1923–2007), Tang Yijie (1927–2014), and other scholars of the older generation. In the 1980s, against the backdrop of surging Western influence, the academy revisited the issue of Chinese culture and invited scholars such as Liang Shuming (1893–1988), Tu Weiming (b. 1940), Chen Guying (b. 1935), and other neo-Confucians and neo-Daoists both from China and from abroad to give various forms of public lectures. The academy and its founders can be regarded as a bastion of Chinese cultural preservationism and forerunners to the 1990s revival of classical scholarship.

Throughout the 1980s the basic system of higher education remained unchanged, and the curricula, textbooks, reference materials, and teaching methods were only slightly adjusted from the pre-Cultural Revolution educational framework, but the emergence of several new translation series and the opening up of China's cultural space with its accompanying intellectual trends came together to have a major impact on the reading interests and thinking of a younger generation. Under the slogan of "There Should Be No Limits on Reading" or "Reading with No Forbidden Zone" [*dushu wujinqu*],⁶² the scholarship and thought of this era were characterized, on the one hand, by criticisms of and attacks on old disciplinary frameworks, concepts, categories, and subjects, and, on the other hand, by a surge of cultural enlightenment. This development was not monolithic but rather composed of various, intertwining strands of scholarship. If we were to identify a common trait, we would say that they all embodied a critical spirit of "unconditional inquiry" [*wutiaojian zhuiwen*].

From the time when older norms were discarded in the 1980s to the establishment of new norms during the 1990s, humanities scholars played an extremely important role. During the later decade, many scholars complained about the fall of the humanities, but in fact this field was very active in terms of discussion and change. There are, of course, major differences between the two periods. The critique of the old structure during the 1980s was accompanied by a large number of translations and introductory texts, from Kantianism to neo-Kantianism, from Hegelianism to neo-Hegelianism, from existentialism to phenomenology, from Nietzsche to Freud, from Heidegger to Wittgenstein, from literary realism and Romanticism to modernism and postmodernism,

⁶² This slogan was the title of the first essay appearing in the founding issue of *Dushu*, written by Li Honglin, then director of the Bureau of Theory in the Central Propaganda Department.

from structuralist to post-structuralist historiography, and from systems theory and cybernetics to information theory—all were imported into China under the aegis of the “new” (or anti-orthodox). This wave also affected the paradigmatic positions of Russian and Soviet literature, history, theater, and art that had prevailed since the 1950s, as the literary and theatrical theories of Vissarion Belinsky, Nikolay Chernyshevsky, Nikolay Dobrolyubov, Anatoly Lunacharsky, Maxim Gorky, Konstantin Stanislavsky, and others gradually receded into the background. Although the humanistic strand of thought in the 1980s contained within it multiple orientations, including an interest in reexploring Chinese civilization, it was, on the whole, a process of the large-scale absorption of Western thought. In the field of philosophy, Friedrich Nietzsche, Edmund Husserl, Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Ernst Cassirer, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and the psychology of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung led the way. In the field of history, analysis equipped with scientific methods such as systems theory, cybernetics, and information theory, along with different conceptions from Euroamerican (especially French) schools of history, precipitated the reassessment of Chinese history. In the field of literature, René Wellek and Austin Warren’s *Theory of Literature*, formalism, semiotics, and Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of heteroglossia were all the rage, arriving alongside the altogether new discipline of comparative literature. In the field of foreign literature and drama studies, the centrality of nineteenth-century realism was challenged, and modernism, postmodernism, and magical realism gradually emerged as a focal point for several generations of scholars. And in film and media studies, semiotics and ideological criticism rose to the fore. Before they could be digested and organized, this parade of translations and introductions was adopted as a method for reevaluating various historical and cultural phenomena. By the 1990s a translation industry had formed within Chinese academia, and a

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process of disciplinary construction was underway in which the American humanities and social sciences (including China studies) served as the basic standard. This process of Americanization of the humanities and social sciences (especially the latter) constituted an epochal phenomenon and also resulted in

a concurrent process-within-a-process, namely, the reexamination of China's premodern traditions of humanistic work and social science.

The 1980s ended in dramatic transformations of China and the world. The fabric of the era did not entirely disappear amid the end of the Cold War in 1989–91, but it clearly underwent a major historical turn. Beginning in the early 1990s, the aforementioned dual trend emerged in the humanities and social sciences: scholarly norms became increasingly globalized, while scholarly thought continued to explore the uniqueness and localness [*bentuxing*] of China's scholarship. If we consider the turn toward local history (in the field of history), local knowledge (in anthropology), and postmodernist critiques of Western-centrism in humanities scholarship in the West (especially in the United States) during this period, the search for uniqueness and effort to localize [*bentuhua*] Chinese scholarship can be seen as part of the global turn in scholarship. On the other hand, this scholarly turn is deeply conditioned by its historical moment: in the global context of the end of the Cold War and in the post-1989 Chinese context, the intellectual community undertook a complex political and historical reflection in which the waning and defeat of 1980s social movements were seen as the concurrent waning and defeat of intellectual movements. A generation of scholars gradually shifted from reflections on political radicalism to the effort to reconnect themselves with tradition. The translation, introduction, and study of Western scholarship continued to deepen, but the study of the history of Chinese thought and the reconstruction of China's traditional scholarship gradually took shape as an eye-opening trend in scholarship. This trend also included a newfound skepticism toward the interpretation of Chinese history using various Western theories that was so emblematic of the 1980s and, indeed, the entire twentieth century, and helped precipitate efforts to identify research methods and concepts from the inner threads of China's history and cultural development. The present report places comparative literature and cultural studies, digital humanities and national studies as belonging to a new trend in scholarship, which helps demonstrate the dramatic extent of epochal change: comparative literature was a new and developing discipline in the 1980s, but, among the new disciplines that emerged after the 1990s, national learning [*guoxue*] was the field that attracted the most attention. The concept of national learning originated in Japan in the early twentieth century and then was quickly introduced to late Qing China. The concepts of national learning and national essence [*guocui*], both of which appeal to the preservation of a national spirit, are clearly a product of the rising tide of nationalism, but, as mentioned above, the question of exactly how national learning relates to the

humanities emerged from the modern transformation of the scholarly disciplines and was not simply a product of nationalist thinking. From the debate on Eastern and Western cultures that erupted during the First World War to the science versus metaphysics debate in the ebb of the May Fourth movement, Chinese civilization was already positioned as a moral civilization in contrast to scientific civilization and was thus incorporated into the humanities under the new scheme of disciplines. In this sense, the reemergence of national learning and the reestablishment of national learning institutions at places like Peking University, Tsinghua University, and Renmin University offer a panorama of humanities scholarship in contemporary China: the question of what is national learning gradually evolved from reflections over the dualistic relationship between Chinese and Western scholarship to the question of how to deal with the Confucian classics and the cultural traditions and knowledge of various peoples in China. In the midst of the identity crisis caused by globalization and counter-globalization, what is implied behind this lineage is a core question of contemporary Chinese humanities, namely, to ask anew what is China, what is China's world, and what is the world's China.

In the midst of the intellectual trend of searching for an autonomous form of Chinese scholarship and thoughts, a movement attempting to reconstruct scholarly and disciplinary norms in the humanities and social sciences has developed both within and outside the academic system. The first journals to initiate this task of reconstructing norms were *Xueren* [The scholar] founded in 1991 and edited by Chen Pingyuan (b. 1954), Wang Shouchang (b. 1948), and Wang Hui (b. 1959), as well as *Zhongguo shehuikexue jikan* [The Chinese social science quarterly], founded in 1992 and edited by Deng Zhenglai (1956–2013). These are two nonofficial journals (that is, published without official approval and registration). The majority of the contributors to *Xueren*, all born in the 1950s and 1960s, were the top scholars in the humanities in China at that time. Focusing on the history of ideas, this group shifted their attention from translating and introducing Western scholarship to the changes in scholarship since the Qing, attempting to locate their own work within a longer historical lineage. This effort echoes the “finding history in China” [*zai Zhongguo faxian lishi*] and the local history turn in American China studies, which can be said to have led the way by searching for local forms of knowledge. The study of the history of scholarship or thought is a specialized field, so why, in a highly politicized period, would so many scholars be interested in a subject seemingly so far removed from politics? Why were scholars from different fields eager to express their views on a field that is in actuality so difficult to define clearly?

In retrospect, several reasons can be concluded. First, the post-1989 intellectual reflection on the 1989 social movement in mainland China paralleled the ongoing discussion of radicalism in the Hong Kong-based journal *Ershiyi shiji* [Twenty-first century]. Many scholars believed that recent social movements were not mature enough in their approach and that they were linked to excessive Westernization of, and ahistorical tendencies within, the social thought of the 1980s. As such, the question of how to understand China's history and reality became an internal demand. Research on the history of ideas provided a space to discuss relevant issues from both academic and political dimensions. Second, at that time even the scholars most concerned with overtly political issues lacked space to publish essays featuring political commentary, which diverged significantly from the situation in *Twenty-First Century*. Third, the above two aspects are intrinsically related to the repositioning of intellectuals. In an era defined by political passivity, intellectuals had both to find a way that suited themselves and transform their moral passions into a code of social conduct. This opportunity tallied with the reflections of scholars. The professionalization of scholarship became an expression of this approach.

As I recall it, many scholars pondered the question of how to deal with the relationship between politics and scholarship: we had just gone through or were still going through a social upheaval and faced an extremely grave political atmosphere. The consensus among scholars was not to intervene directly in politics, but rather to strive to form a relatively independent field of scholarship that would not be quickly subsumed into another kind of political discourse. The failure of 1989 was a lesson for the generations that had just experienced such political upheaval: that excessive political passions can influence people's judgment, and that rigorous scholarship is an important channel for understanding China's history and society. In response, both the *Chinese Social Science Quarterly's* synthesis of "local knowledge" and the tendency toward scholarly standardization demanded the "localization of Chinese social science." This effort to return to historical traditions and search for local knowledge was a response to the circumstances of globalization and Americanization, but at the same time, through standardization, it was an adaptation to the requirements of globalization and Americanization. This dual strategy, perhaps not entirely self-conscious, earned these two journals—*The Scholar* and the *Chinese Social Science Quarterly*—a reputation. Within the space of about ten years, the scholarly standards established by these two journals grew ever close to those of the contemporary West, and in the early twenty-first century they were gradually subsumed by the broader academic system of universities and research institu-

tions. In a certain sense, both of these unofficial journals played a significant role in shaping the basic norms and style of the humanities and social sciences. Their decline does not represent the deterioration of such new norms, but rather the establishment of these norms as orthodoxy. Today, in terms of the system of disciplines, the organization and scholarly standards of Chinese universities and research institutions are not all that different from those of the Western academy.

Compared with these two scholarly journals, the humanities journal that best represents the spirit of

“unconditional inquiry” in the 1980s, while at the same time facing the new structure of globalization in the “post-Cold War” era, is *Dushu* [Reading]. Founded in 1979, its opening article, “Dushu wujinqu” [There should be no limits on reading], embodies the pathbreaking spirit of

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the so-called liberation of thought movement [*sixiang jiefang yundong*]. “There should be no limits on reading,” like the European Enlightenment’s “inquiry with no condition,” continuously transcends its own era and points its spear tip at the various propositions and conclusions that are taken for granted in the post-Cold War era—and even at the conditions that gave birth to the journal itself. *Dushu* possesses a number of notable characteristics. First, it is a forum for intellectuals from all across society, even the entire world, bringing together people from home and abroad, of all generations, challenging disciplinary boundaries, covering all fields of humanities and social sciences, and even extending to some of the natural sciences. Second, it is a journal that tries to synthesize the interrogation of its era with various fields of knowledge, whose contemporary and scholarly nature is expressed through a relatively free style that steers clear of the norms of academic journals. Third, it is a journal that by its intellectual excellence distinguishes itself both from publications for popular consumption and from the typical academic journals. Precisely on this account, the journal served as the source for many of the intellectual debates throughout the 1990s. In 1994 it published a set of discussions on “humanist spirit” [*renwen jingshen*] in an attempt to establish the value of contemporary thought in the midst of globalization and marketization. After 1996 the journal extended its interroga-

tory and critical scope to a broader field: from a critique of developmentalism to concern for ecological diversity; from discussion of the “three rurals” [*sannong*, i.e., agriculture, villages, and peasants] crisis to exploration of social inequality; from analysis of financial turmoil to a survey of various forms of terrorism in the contemporary world; from reflection over the points common to all wars in history to theoretical consideration of contemporary warfare; from analyses of nationalism and feminism to multiple reflections on Chinese and world history; from new discoveries in archaeology to new methods of human geography; and from probing into Chinese and foreign literary phenomena to research into different historical texts. The topics are both numerous and diverse in their range.

The contemporary nature of this humanities journal does not make it journalistic; on the contrary, by confronting, distancing from, questioning, and pursuing various trends, *Dushu* strives to bring the latest developments in various fields of knowledge into wider consideration, stimulating interconnections between different fields and promoting the pursuit of “inquiry with no condition” in different directions. For example, the September 1996 issue published a set of articles by archaeologists that directly connected the achievements of archaeology with current changes in scholarship and thought, thereby opening interaction between the professional field of archaeology and more general social thought. In their introduction to the issue, the editors briefly summarize the multiple meanings implied by the new discoveries in archaeology. This introduction is worth quoting here at some length both in order to give a glimpse of the face of humanistic thought in the 1990s and to help readers understand the multiple significance of the chapters on archaeology and excavated documents included in the present report.

The twentieth century has proven to be an era defined by the unceasing discovery of new knowledge, along with the disintegration of old knowledge. In this century, accompanying the global expansion of modern capitalism, various social movements have profoundly changed the world picture, and Chinese society has undergone drastic transformation. We are accustomed to calling this process of change one of “modernization.” Paralleling this modernization process is the formation and construction of a modern knowledge system. Archaeology is one of the most important and successful branches of this system. Archaeology has rewritten China’s history for modern society, a process that has been unremitting. Archaeological knowledge is not merely the result of “empirical evidence,” because the excavation of the earth ultimately depends on people’s system of interpretation. Therefore, along with archaeological achievements and the development of social history, archaeology is constantly creating “history” and rewriting

it at the same time. In short, archaeology is both an organic part of the modern knowledge system and an important means for reflecting on the many conclusions of this system....

Archaeology is a rigorous science and a discipline rich with innovation: dispelling myths goes hand in hand with asking new questions. In the course of modern history, people have constantly sought after the origins of civilizations, the laws and dynamics of historical change, and the reconstruction of the complex picture of history. In less than eighty years of existence, Chinese archaeology has, in its own unique way, repeatedly provided evidence for people's inquiries and thus revised "history" time and again. During the late Qing dynasty, for example, in the face of European and American aggression, even promoters of "national essence" like Zhang Taiyan believed the theory that "civilization came from the west" [*Zhongguo wenming xilai shuo*]. Through field research Chinese archaeology "discovered the Yangshao and Longshan cultures" and "found a more solid origin for the three early Chinese civilizations of the Xia, Shang, and Zhou than the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors [*sanhuang wudi*] system of historiography" (Chen Xingcan), thus in the process of opposing Western-centrism there emerged the "Yellow River as the core [of China's civilizational history]" [*Huanghe zhongxin*] view of ancient history. But the problem did not end there. Since the 1970s the Liangzhu culture in the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, the Dawenkou-Longshan culture in the lower Yellow River, and the Hongshan culture in the Liao River basin have all been discovered outside the traditional Central Plains region. The "starry sky" civilizational landscape has shaken the longstanding view of ancient history, and the "Hua [Chinese]/foreign distinction" [*Huayi zhi bian*] turns out to be a fiction of the Zhou people (Zhang Guangzhi). Another example is that, in the atmosphere of "doubting antiquity" during the May Fourth period, the "discernment of ancient history" school [*gushibian pai*], represented by Mr. Gu Jiegang, put forward the thesis of the "layered creation of ancient history" [*cenglei di zaocheng de gushi*], "performing a systematic analysis of the record of ancient history appearing in the texts from the pre-Qin to the end of the Han, revealing the true nature as myths and legends. Thus, the old classics were laid bare, their sacred trappings stripped away, and the idols believed by people for 2,000 years have been fundamentally overthrown" (*Gushibian chongyin shuoming* [Notes on the reprint of "Discernment of Ancient History"]). But today we can say that "the work of Chinese archaeologists has greatly enriched the understanding of society of the three dynasties [i.e., Xia, Shang, Zhou]" and "offers the possibility of finally confirming the existence of the Xia dynasty" (Sun Zuchu). Yet the problem does not end there either: contrary to what ancient historiography claims, the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties were not a continuous civilization, but rather "developed in different regions ... by different ethnic groups," and "in addition to the Xia, Shang, and Zhou, other kingdoms also flourished" (Sun Zuchu). Thus, "the formation of China as a spatiotemporal framework, political idea, cultural content and cultural structure" (Cao Bingwu) is clearly a

more complex matter than one might think. As another example, after the late 1920s, under the influence of Lewis Morgan and [Friedrich] Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, Chinese archaeology and history studies introduced a series of new categories of ancient history, such as the Neolithic period, the Paleolithic period, matrilineal society, patrilineal society, and so on. These categories not only helped explain the new discoveries in Chinese archaeology and history, but also fit China's ancient period into the universal laws of history. However, the discoveries of Chinese archaeology have spurred Chinese archaeologists to constantly reflect on the applicability of their tools. Studies of early agrarian civilizations, cities, clan systems, and states, for example, have questioned the explanatory leverage of concepts such as Morgan's "league of tribes" and Engels's "military democracy," because such concepts "have little to say about how human society actually moved from prehistory to civilization," and "lack an explanation of the morphological and structural features of society" (Wang Zhenzhong, *Zhongguo wenming qi yuan de bijiao yanjiu* [A comparative study of the origins of Chinese civilization]). It was precisely under these conditions of knowledge that Chinese archaeologists began to realize that "with the arrival of archaeological techniques and methods came a whole set of accompanying terms ... which then became an important component of our discourse system ... taking the vast array of Chinese prehistoric culture's richly meaningful phenomena and simplistically incorporating them into models of matrilineal or patrilineal clan societies." Thus, while reflecting on the narrative model of evolutionary history, Chinese archaeologists began to consider the problem of "constructing their own discourse system," which would include within it the problem of how to use the concepts already extant in the Chinese record, such as *bang* [state or territory], *guo* [governmental polity, territory, feudal state, vassal state, etc.], *ye* [country-side], *shi* [clan, common family], *xing* [surname, patronymic family name], and so on (Chen Xingcan).

Archaeology is highly regarded in the history of modern Chinese scholarship, and not only has the field produced many important results and outstanding scholars, but each major discovery in archaeology has led to significant changes and advances in Chinese humanities scholarship. In the last two decades, Chinese archaeology has produced remarkable results, but attention from the intellectual community and from general society seems to have waned. *Dushu* is not a specialized scholarly journal and doesn't have the capacity to publish specialized scholarly works, but it is willing to serve as a bridge for conveying the work of the archaeological community to our readers.

Dushu will continue to organize similar discussions on other fields, with the aim of raising questions, provoking reflection, deepening our understanding of history and reality, and reflecting on our intellectual premises.

Archaeology is all around us.⁶³

⁶³ *Dushu*, 17 no. 9 (1996), 1.

Dushu's involvement in the latest developments in archaeology is both a reflection on modern scholarly methods and a response to the intellectual trend of reconceiving China. In truth, this discussion within the field of archaeology touches upon a series of major issues in contemporary Chinese humanities, such as: Were the origins of Chinese civilization monolithic or pluralistic? Are the foundational concepts drawn from European anthropology, archaeology, and early history and their respective research methods applicable to China's ancient history? What challenges do recent archaeological discoveries pose to "doubting antiquity" and the premises of modern historiography since the Qing? These questions also permeate various fields of humanities scholarship today. Seeking to break through the modern framework of an East/West dichotomy, *Dushu* focuses on the excavation [*fajue*] of Chinese and Asian traditions, but it does not limit itself to this, either, and explores the pulse of the contemporary world more broadly. To achieve this goal, it breaks down cultural and national boundaries, inviting many scholars from different countries to participate in discussion directly. In modern Chinese history, it is commonplace for journals to translate and publish articles by foreign scholars, but it is rare for journals to consistently invite foreign authors to participate directly in discussions of Chinese and world issues. *Dushu* represents the birth of a transnational, transcultural public space and a humanistic world.

The Humanities Between "Soft Power," "Unconditional Inquiry," and "Perfecting through Study"

The humanities are the soul of the university, and the humanistic spirit permeates all fields of inquiry. The openness of the university is first and foremost reflected in unconditional questioning and intellectual innovation. Challenging the boundaries of knowledge, catalyzing changes in thought, fostering development within individual disciplines and integration between them, exploring new fields out of the interaction between theory and practice, and relentlessly questioning the premises of existing knowledge: these are not only the driving force of the university's openness, but also its defining characteristics.

The openness of the university is also reflected in its inclusiveness: the university provides an open and equal learning and research environment for students with varying identities and backgrounds. The modern academic community is closely related to its particular country and society, but it has never been confined to a single or uniform society. Today, students come from all corners of the world; the composition of the faculty is similarly cosmopolitan. The humanities'

exploration of historical traditions, diverse civilizations, and different cultures and forms of living also lays the intellectual foundation for the university's fundamental spirit of equality and tolerance, heritage and innovation, critique and constructiveness.

Another characteristic of the university's openness is the close interaction between theory and practice. Focusing on the needs and challenges of the day and developing the ability to respond to national, societal, and local needs are a great tradition of modern Chinese universities. This tradition is in turn closely linked to responding to the challenges of the contemporary world and exploring the future of humanity. The future-oriented nature [*weilaixing*] of the university is reflected in its ability to keep pace with the times. Are exploring the future through the past and illuminating the past through the future not what drives the humanities' continued evolution?

The true mission of the humanities lies in unconditional inquiry, in providing a deep understanding of different cultures, and in cultivating good character. The critical function of the humanities and their contribution to democracy, inheritance and development of tradition and nurturing of cultural character, and their continual reflection on contemporary developments and the search for the future give them indispensable value. However, if we ignore the intricately entangled relationship that prevails between knowledge and power, it is impossible to understand the full dynamics and status of humanities disciplines and their development.

Since 2001, nonofficial journals such as *Xueren* and *Zhongguo shehui kexue jikan* have ceased publication one after the next, and the influence of *Dushu* has gradually waned. The reasons for the decline of nonofficial academic journals are not only a lack of financial support, but also the increasing tightening of the university system and its professionalization, as well as the growing reliance on the CSSCI (Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index) electronic statistical system, created in imitation of the SSCI (Social Sciences Citation Index) and A&HCI (Art and Humanities Citation Index) in the United States, for quantifying scholarly output. Universities furthermore rank each academic journal, specifying the core journals of the relevant disciplines. Scholarly accomplishments that cannot be entered into such statistical systems cannot be graded as academic accomplishments. *Xueren* and the *Zhongguo shehui kexue jikan* were not included in these statistical indexes, and many authors, especially young scholars pursuing promotion, had no choice but to submit their work to other journals. The source of manuscripts for nonofficial journals has gradually dried up. This is to say that the decline of nonofficial scholarly journals does not signify a decline of Chinese

humanities scholarship. Quite the opposite: along with the rapid growth of the economy and the expansion of the size and resources of China's institutions of higher education, the academic system of the humanities has ballooned. As I illustrated at the outset of this Introduction, the number of higher education institutions, enrollment levels, and the variety of disciplines are all unprecedented in China's history. But compared with the prominent position of Chinese literature, philosophy, and history in the cultural politics and social life of the twentieth century, today the humanities are increasingly confined to their position as academic disciplines. As a result, on the one hand, the contemporary humanities have lost their former vanguard status, even as they, on the other hand, have shared in the boom of research funding and publishing opportunities brought about by institutional expansion and economic growth.

Beginning in the late 1990s, with the support of the National Academy Foundation [*Guojia xueshu jijin*], an increasing number of journals edited by scholars or academic institutions have been included in CSSCI's electronic statistical system. The scale of published original and translated scholarship has grown to new levels. Among the various official academic foundations, the National Social Science Fund of China [*Guojia shehui kexue jijin*] is the largest and most authoritative. The NSSFC was established in June 1991 as an equivalent to the National Natural Science Fund [*Guojia ziran kexue jijin*], founded in 1986. The NSSFC is managed by the National Planning Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences [*Quanguo zhexue shehui kexue guihua bangongshi*], established in the same year, "with the main responsibilities of formulating medium- and long-term plans and annual projects for national philosophical and social science research, managing the National Social Science Fund, and organizing the establishment and evaluation of projects, midterm

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administration, inspection of achievements, and publicity and promotion."⁶⁴ In addition to the central level, each province, autonomous region, and directly administered municipality (i.e., Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Chongqing),

⁶⁴ "Guojia Shehui Kexue Jijin" [The National Social Science Foundation of China], accessed July 2, 2021, <http://baike.baidu.com/view/4901712.htm?fr=aladdin>. The following information about the NSSFC and quotation also come from this page.

and the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps all have a philosophy and social science leading group and planning office.

The National Social Science Fund has planning and review panels for twenty-three disciplines, including Marxist-scientific socialism, Communist Party history and foundation, philosophy, theoretical economics, applied economics, political science, sociology, law international studies, Chinese history, world history, archaeology, ethnic studies, religion, Chinese literature, foreign literature, linguistics, journalism and communication, library-information-document studies, demography, statistics, education, management, etc. as well as three independent units of pedagogy, arts, and military affairs. It has also formed a funding system for six categories: major projects, annual projects, specially commissioned projects, late-stage projects, Western projects, and projects involving the translation of Chinese scholarship into foreign languages. The National Social Science Fund also focuses on fostering young social science researchers and social science research in remote and ethnic areas.

Since its establishment in 1991, the National Social Science Fund has expanded from 5 million yuan to 2.4 billion yuan in 2018, funding 6,164 projects, with special funding earmarked for “dark horse and lost knowledge” [*Jengmen juexue*] projects and country-specific regional studies.

In parallel with the expansion of the National Social Science Fund, there has been a strong push to take cultural production global under the slogan of “cultural soft power.” The concept of soft power was popularized by Harvard professor Joseph S. Nye Jr. in the 1990s.⁶⁵ Nye deployed this concept in the field of international relations as a reminder that in addition to forms of “hard power” such as territorial control, armaments and military force, scientific and technological progress, economic development, regional expansion, and strike capabilities, we must also pay attention to fields of power such as culture, values, influence, moral codes, and cultural appeal. He furthermore wrote an article warning the Chinese that they should pay attention to the cultivation of soft power in parallel with economic growth and arguing that the United States has more advantages in soft power.⁶⁶ The concept of soft power seems to be timely for an economically ascendant China, as everyone—from officials to intellectuals, and even entrepreneurs leaping into the international marketplace—is beginning to focus on the imbalance between China’s “soft power” and its “hard power.”

⁶⁵ See Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

⁶⁶ Joseph S. Nye Jr., “China and Soft Power,” *South African Journal of International Affairs* 19, no. 2 (2012): 151–55.

Aspects of “soft power” extend to a wide range of fields. In 2002 during the Moscow and Frankfurt book fairs the Information Office of the State Council and the former General Administration of Press and Publication organized the events where books and the rights to translate them were given away as gifts; and in 2004, following their recommendation of three hundred books to French publishers during the Sino-French Cultural Year, seventy Chinese books were sponsored and translated into French for the 24th Salon du Livre in Paris. That year the same two offices launched the Chinese Book Promotion Program on the basis of this initiative, and a working group by the same name was subsequently established in 2006. This promotion program has been repeatedly enhanced and renewed and has attracted foreign academic and nonacademic publishers by funding both translation costs and publication and promotion costs.⁶⁷ China is the world’s largest translation factory, but the sheer scale of translations of foreign works contrasts sharply with the weak presence of Chinese works (in translation) on the international market. There is no question that foreign translation projects are both a means of international humanistic exchange and a way to enhance cultural “soft power.” In contrast to these heavily funded but relatively unproductive efforts, the Confucius Institute system, led and organized by the National Leading Group for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, continues to generate much attention and discussion in international academic circles and the media. Between 2004, when the first Confucius Institute was inaugurated in Seoul, South Korea, and the end of 2013, 440 Confucius Institutes and 646 Confucius Classrooms have been established in 120 countries worldwide. Confucius Institutes, with their focus on language teaching and other cultural programs, do not belong to a specialized field or discipline of the humanities, but such arrangement echoes the domestic emphasis on teaching and studying traditional Chinese culture and is a phenomenon worthy of attention. Confucius Institutes have aroused suspicion in and resistance from Western countries, especially the United States. Many scholars in the humanities and social sciences who have long been accustomed to and comfortable with their own societies’ long-term export of “cultural soft power” are changing their tune by attacking the Confucius Institute and overstating its influence.

This is also a reminder that no matter how idealistic one may be about the significance of humanistic exchange and cultural dissemination, the human-

⁶⁷ The provided data comes from an article by Zhang Hongbo, the Director General of the China Textual Works Copyright Association [Zhongguo wenzi zhuzuoquan xiehui]: “Zhongguo chuban zouchuqu geju fasheng genbenxing bianhua” [Fundamental changes in the patterns of Chinese publishing abroad], accessed July 2, 2021, <http://data.chinaxwcb.com/epaper2014/epaper/d5850/d9b/201408/48404.html>.

ities, like any other field, cannot be completely removed from the reality of competition. The state's concern for "soft power" has injected new energy and resources into the humanities, but it has also brought about questions regarding the mission of the humanities. When it is elevated to the level of national strategy as a channel of "soft power," in what kind of position do the humanities find themselves? Especially humanities that, in the process of their emergence and growth, were so involved with intellectual movements, and which manifested a spirit of "unconditional inquiry" in their specialized scholarly research? What is the place of humanities research and education that from antiquity onward sought to cultivate and teach, to nurture people's total development, to "perfect through study" [*xue yi chengren*]? It is a basic consensus in Chinese society that the mission of universities and the humanities is the innovation and transmission of knowledge, along with the cultivation of the human being.

It is precisely on the basis of this consensus that liberal education [*tongshi jiaoyu*] has received unprecedented attention in the past three decades. The concept of liberal education was imported from the United States by way of Hong Kong's university system. The Chinese university system focuses on specialized education, even in vocational education fields such as law and economic management (which begin after the college entrance examination), and gives relatively little weight to humanities education. Beginning in the 1990s the Ministry of Education has promoted "education for quality" [*suzhi jiaoyu*], which, contra the "education for the purpose of passing exams" [*yingshi jiaoyu*], reaffirms the

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fundamental goal of the all-around development of the individual. Around 2006 the "internationally standard" concept of liberal education gradually replaced the less popular concept of education for quality. Top universities such as Tsinghua

University, Peking University, Fudan University, and Sun Yat-sen University have established liberal studies colleges or centers for undergraduate students. In the liberal education curriculum, the reading and appreciation of Chinese and foreign classics and the training of traditional cultural skills have become core subjects. Universities have invested extraordinary levels of human and material resources in liberal education. This is a new era and a new atmosphere. In this era of pursuit after "soft power," questions of how to discover the spirit of

“inquiry without condition” and “reading with no forbidden zone” arise for the humanities: In an atmosphere where money is the measure of success, how can we reaffirm humanities education’s role in the cultivation of human beings? In a world that is all-too-easily dominated by narrow identity politics, how can humanities and humanities education provide a premise for contact and coexistence between different cultures? These issues chart an urgent mission for our field. It is for this reason that this report, while summarizing the accomplishments and achievements in the humanities, also invited relevant experts to analyze and make summaries of fields such as liberal arts, national language education, bilingual education in ethnic minority regions, and general and non-general foreign language education.

Challenges for the Humanities

The establishment of the modern humanities involved several important premises, almost all of which face fundamental challenges in the contemporary context.

First, modern humanistic knowledge established its own foundation by detaching itself from and critiquing the tradition of Confucian classics. Or, rather, the modern humanities formed in the process of theology/Confucianism’s gradual loss of its sacredness and dominance. On the whole, what it offers are post-theological/Confucian values, so-called secular values. Amidst the tide of the revival of the Confucian classics, how should the changing relationship between the modern humanities and classical knowledge be interpreted?

Second, the humanities emerged alongside early modern science and its disciplinary scheme of knowledge, but their claim to autonomy is in turn predicated upon the strict distinction between scientific and humanistic domains, historically and methodologically speaking. In the midst of rapid changes in which digitalization has spread to all aspects of human life, and artificial intelligence and genetic technologies have transformed not only the ways knowledge is produced but also the conditions of human existence, to what extent does the humanities’ claim of autonomy preserve their integrity and development, and to what extent does it restrict them to a limited domain of human life? Under the conditions of separation between the disciplines, how to redefine the relationship between the humanities and the natural sciences, and how to draw inspiration from the development of the latter while also maintaining critical reflection regarding this development?

Third, the humanities are closely related to the clash of civilizations between

East and West from the nineteenth century onward. The modern university and its genealogy of knowledge are based on the Western model and have completely refashioned the extant system of knowledge about history and thought regarding the Chinese nation, state, and culture. The categorization of literature, history, and philosophy as the humanities is entirely derived from the European ordering of knowledge, and although the genealogy of the latter is interrelated with the genealogy of China's traditional knowledge, the two are entirely different in their structure. In the midst of the "cultural self-consciousness" [*wenhua zijue*] that has emerged everywhere in the contemporary world, how to rethink the significance of the relation between knowledge and genealogies of categories as it plays out in different cultures and regions?

Fourth, the formation of humanistic knowledge was closely related to the waves of cultural movements promoted by the new class of intellectuals that mounted history's stage during the late nineteenth century. During the late Qing dynasty, Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, Yan Fu, and Zhang Taiyan were involved in political debates as well as a great number of intellectual disputes, thus advancing the development of humanistic knowledge. The New Culture movement from 1915 onward triggered violent conflict and debate between different cultural groups and accelerated the birth of the modern humanities, modern literature and art, modern theater and music. The cultural movements of the 1980s and the intellectual debates of the 1990s helped pave the way for the development of the contemporary humanities. Under the conditions of decline in intellectual movements, how can the humanities and humanistic education again become the wellspring for new ideas? In the face of the professionalization, marketization, and media convergence, how can its "intellectual world" [*zhishijie*] be reconstructed?

Fifth, the advance of communication thanks to the internet and other information technologies has opened new possibilities for transcultural interaction. The classical norms of the modern humanities were established with reference to the European and American models. Under our new conditions, besides continuously returning to our own historical lineage in search of its humanistic premises, how to expand the boundaries of the field, update its cultural-historical meaning, transcend an outdated Western-centrism along with other forms of egocentrism, and contribute to the formation or re-formation of a humanities that is more diverse and capable of fostering understanding between cultures?

COVID-19 has precipitated the outbreak of multiple crises. The humanities are gaining vitality as a result of the challenges they face. In the great Chinese tradition, a sense of worry has been an intrinsic motivation for cultural renewal

and development. This report presents in a limited space the past and present of Chinese humanities scholarship. The future is contained in the continued questioning of the past and the present.

Translated from the Chinese by Anatoly Detwyler

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