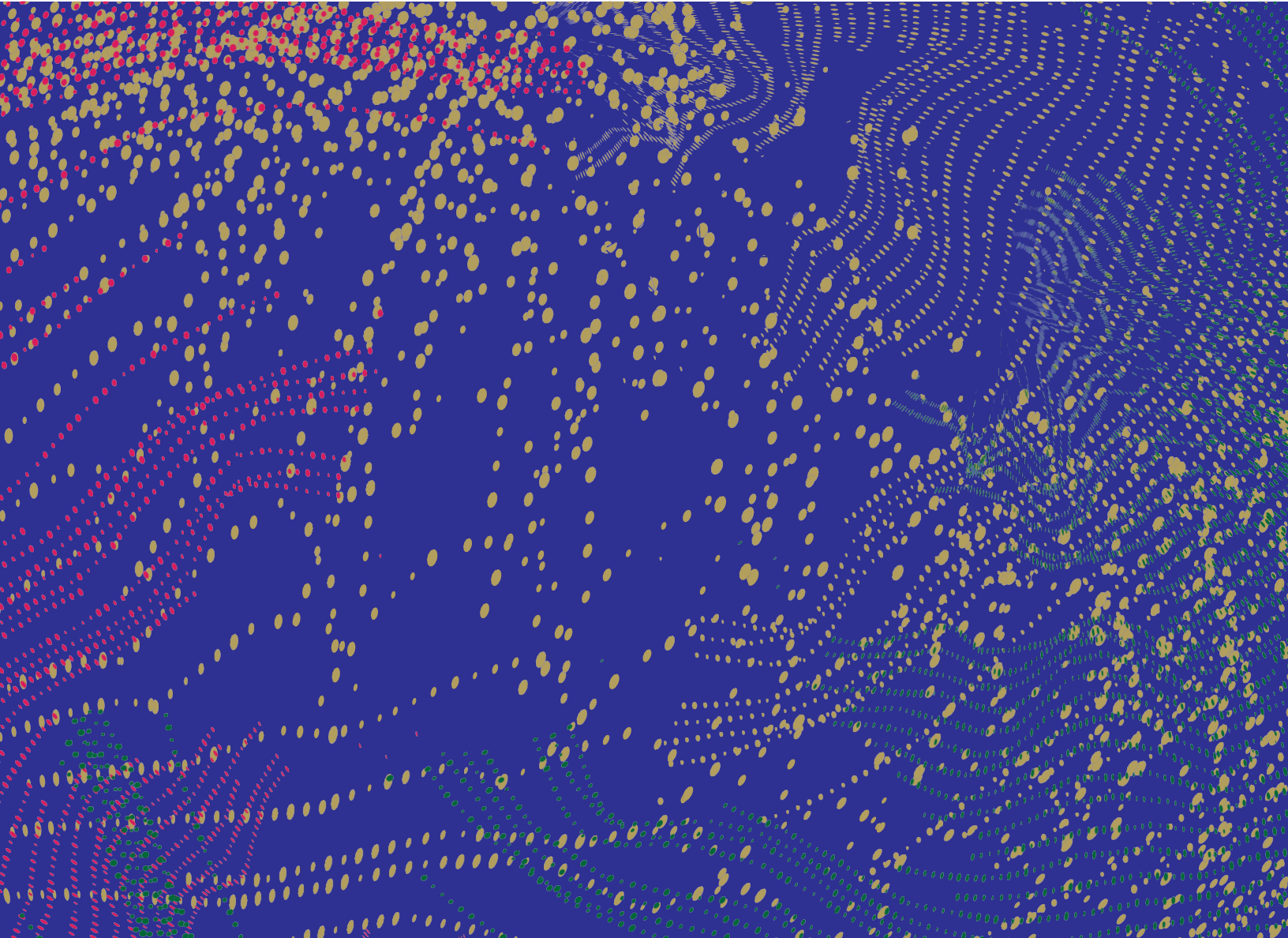


The World Humanities Report

The Development of China's Institutes for Advanced Studies

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The Development of China's Institutes for Advanced Studies

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The institutional system for advanced studies was first established during the two world wars, and after World War II it flourished around the world. It showed that the modern disciplinary system developed in the West and the academic research enterprise framed by the nation-state are no longer sufficient to meet the serious challenges posed by the evolution of world history. World crises and the major dilemmas posed by globalization, as well as the different quests of peoples and civilizations for modernization, have prompted scholars to explore in an inter- and even supra-disciplinary manner the origins of nature and civilizations and the tortuous processes of historical change, as well as the kaleidoscopic picture that emerges today in the process of understanding and imagining the world.

The Institute for Advanced Study (IAS) in Princeton, New Jersey, was founded in 1930, during the Great Depression in the United States. In a sense, the Institute for Advanced Study was designed for the unknown world and the uncertain future of human history. Its founder Abraham Flexner once said:

The Institute should be small and plastic (that is flexible); it should be a haven where scholars and scientists could regard the world and its phenomena as their laboratory, without being carried off in the maelstrom of the immediate; it should be simple, comfortable, quiet without being monastic or remote; it should be afraid of no issue; yet it should be under no pressure from any side which might tend to force its scholars to be prejudiced either for or against any particular solution of the problems under study; and it should provide the facilities, the tranquility, and the time requisite to fundamental inquiry into the unknown.¹

As a result, IAS has established two basic principles whose model continues to be emulated worldwide: scholars are selected on the merit of their scholarship

¹ "Mission & History," Institute for Advanced Study, accessed June 20, 2021, <https://www.ias.edu/about/mission-history>.

alone, irrespective of race, religious belief, and gender; and the quest for knowledge is fueled by intellectual curiosity and not limited to short-term utility and the likelihood of achieving previously established goals.

The Institute for Advanced Study seized an opportunity to develop in response to shifting dynamics in the world. Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (Wiko; Institute for Advanced Study in Berlin) was founded in Germany during the Cold War, with the goal of creating a forum for the world's academic elite to meet and to generate "new and unexpected thinking." Each year, some forty-five scholars and cultural elites from all over the world spend ten months in residence, freely choosing their projects, interacting on a daily basis, and enjoying maximum academic freedom. The Institut d'études avancées de Nantes (IEA-Nantes; Nantes Institute for Advanced Study) in France, for its part, is dedicated to creating a new system of civilizational linkages, bringing together the "North (developed)" and the "South (developing)" countries, rather than treating the latter as the former's object of study. Rather, the establishment of dialogue, interconnection, and symbiosis among civilizations in the modern world is a key direction to be explored by IEA. The Israel Institute for Advanced Studies (IIAS) attempts to advance cutting-edge interdisciplinary research by organizing visiting scholars into three to five thematic research groups each year, in order to harvest innovative thinking, perspectives, and approaches, as well as to establish new paradigms.

The above examples are only a few of the many models for operating institutes for advanced studies around the world, but they are also representative of the general design and practice of these institutes. After the end of the Cold War, this independent research mechanism began to develop rapidly. Prior to that, advanced study was mainly concentrated in Europe and the United States, but in the 1990s it began to spread to Asia and other non-Western regions.

In China advanced research institutions have been established since the beginning of the twenty-first century, and there are currently about two dozen similar institutions located in universities around the country. From the point of view of scholarship and social progress, there are several reasons for this trend. First, China's university system was transformed into a Westernized disciplinary system a century ago by eliminating the traditional system of the four branches of learning. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, a system of applied branches of knowledge was established based on the Soviet model. With the era of reform and opening up, all kinds of disciplines have been restored and developed as a result of the campaign to strengthen the

nation through science and education. However, in the past two decades, there has been an increasing trend of Americanization in discipline-building, assessment, research interests, and paradigms. The competitive nature of academia has led to the short-lived, homogenized, and fragmented development of scholarship, to the detriment of basic research on human civilization and world history and the study of overall trends.

Second, the laws and paths of development of Chinese politics and society have always had an important place in the pattern of world history, particularly, the transition from imperial rule to a republic, from the founding of the People's Republic to the era of reform and opening up. During both the Cold War and the era of globalization, China has endeavored to explore its own path within a modern world staged by the West. China's long history and civilization, as well as its unique practical experience since its integration into the process of modernization, have posed challenges to established epistemologies and ways of thinking.

Lastly, China's modern history has been accompanied by simultaneous demands for the renewal of tradition, self-reinvention amid the contrast between Chinese and Western systems of knowledge. However, the comprehensive development of China today and its full integration with the world at large have prompted Chinese scholars to break through the dichotomy of China versus the West in terms of knowledge production and to explore multicivilizational interactions.

Since the 1980s and 1990s, some insightful academic administrators and leaders have gradually realized the importance of exploring new discursive systems and research paradigms and have begun to explore an interdisciplinary and forward-looking academic system and growth model. One aspect of this exploration has been the development of forums such as the institutes for advance studies, as described below. Of course, each university in China has different academic traditions, strengths, and management styles, and there is no unified model in terms of their objectives, strategies, and practices. Some focus on building national platforms for academic exchange; some, on the integration of humanities and social sciences disciplines within universities; some, on the formation of research teams and the implementation of projects; some, on the cultivation of reserve talent for research; some, on the examination of major and prominent key issues in the world today; and others, on foundational research on civilizations and their history.

Nanjing University Institute of Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences

Founded in 2005, the Institute of Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences of Nanjing University (Nanjing IAS) was the first of its kind at a university in mainland China. Its purpose is to implement the university's philosophy of being "comprehensive, research-oriented, and international," to build a university-level liberal arts infrastructure that transcends the boundaries of departments, to break down the barriers of disciplines and specialties, to promote problem-oriented interdisciplinary research, and to create a unique "special zone" for liberal arts research. The Nanjing IAS has three levels of research seats—chair professor, distinguished professor, and resident research scholar—all of which are occupied by scholars from Nanjing University. The aim is to form a number of interdisciplinary research teams and to organize collaborative research among scholars from different disciplines with a focus on issues such as Chinese studies in extraterritoriality, environmental studies, media and cultural studies, gender studies, urban and spatial studies, and studies on the construction of modern knowledge systems in East Asia and China. The research findings are used for teaching, to form interdisciplinary thematic research courses, such as both undergraduate and graduate elective courses.

The academic exchange activities of IAS at Nanjing University involve a short-term invitation system, welcoming prominent scholars from universities in China and abroad to lecture and teach and holding two to four international academic conferences on various themes each year. The lectures are open to students and faculty members in various types of salons and workshops, and participants from inside and outside the university are invited to join the seminars. Some of the scholarly outputs are published in the journal *Wenti yu fangfa* [Problems and methods].

Si-mian Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities, East China Normal University

Founded in 2008, the Si-mian Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities at East China Normal University (ECNU) is aimed at promoting comprehensive research in the humanities, exploring new research mechanisms, and cultivating and bringing together outstanding humanities researchers. An interdisciplinary research and communication network for humanities and social sciences, the

Si-mian Institute is based on the Project 985–National Innovation Base of Philosophy and Social Sciences, a government-sponsored initiative for creating world-class institutions of higher education. It is centered around the Institute of Modern Chinese Thought and Culture and the Center for the Study and Application of Chinese Characters, both of which the Ministry of Education has designated Key Research Institutes of Humanities and Social Sciences in Universities with support from the departments of Chinese, history, and philosophy, as well as the Institute of Ancient Chinese Book Studies. One of the outstanding features of the Si-mian Institute is that it combines advanced scholarly exchanges with the cultivation of young talent. With six research centers and twenty mobile research facilities, Si-mian provides first-class research conditions; hosts research talent at all academic levels from home and abroad; accepts different types of visiting professors, adjunct professors, and visiting scholars for research residence at the institute; and independently recruits graduate students and postdocs. The Si-mian Institute sponsors a variety of seminars, forums, special workshops, and academic salons and conducts multilevel scholarly collaborations and exchanges with important university research institutions in China and overseas. It organizes the Si-mian Lectures on Humanities, inviting famous scholars from all over the world to give talks; oversees the Si-mian humanities library, which houses a collection of more than 200,000 volumes of books and periodicals; and maintains the Si-mian humanities website, which maintains large databases of Chinese ancient books, modern Chinese thought, modern Chinese literature, digitized Chinese characters, Jiangnan studies, overseas Chinese studies, and more.

Training young researchers is a priority at the Si-mian Institute. It recruits researchers domestically and internationally in the fields of literature, history, and philosophy in order to cultivate future leaders and to fortify the humanities at East China Normal University. Researchers regularly present their progress in salons and lectures. They undergo annual assessment in their three-year appointments. At the end of the appointment period, after successful evaluation, they can be transferred to colleges, departments, or institutes of related disciplines at ECNU to take up teaching or research positions. At the same time, the Si-mian Institute also independently recruits interdisciplinary master's and doctoral students and sets up a core curriculum for each of four specializations to cultivate talent with certain specialized training and interdisciplinary visions. The four specialties (history, philosophy, Chinese, and classics) correspond to

the research directions of Project 985 National Innovation Base of Philosophy and Social Sciences.

Tsinghua Institute for Advanced Study in Humanities and Social Sciences

Established in 2009, the Tsinghua Institute for Advanced Study in Humanities and Social Sciences (TIAS) is dedicated to creating a high-level academic center for comprehensive research in the humanities and social sciences. Taking the cross-ethnic, cross-religious, cross-regional, and cross-national interactions of globalization as an opportunity, the TIAS's overall goals are (1) to rethink a new paradigm of humanities and social sciences research through exchange and mutual promotion among scholars from different disciplines, different regions, and different cultural backgrounds and (2) to promote the mutual stimulation and deepening of understanding between academic research and contemporary world realities. Ethnicity, religion, society, and nation are the key themes of TIAS. Each year, a certain number of scholars from China and other countries are invited for one-year, six-months, and three-months research periods. TIAS characterizes advanced study as four Is: independent, interdisciplinary, intercultural, and international.

In addition, TIAS has adopted a setup similar to that of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, with both permanent full-time and temporary part-time researchers with backgrounds in literature, philosophy, history, political science, sociology, law, religion, ethnology, and so on. In the liberal arts, TIAS currently has five resident professors: Wang Hui, Wang Zhongzhen, Feng Xiang, Shen Weirong, and Cui Zhiyuan, who, together with guest scholars, organize twenty to thirty events each year around the four themes mentioned above. These events include international and domestic conferences and workshops and lecture series in the following three areas: humanities and society; East Asian studies and Japanese popular culture; and Sino-Tibetan Buddhist language and literature. Since 2017, they have jointly established lecture courses in philosophy, politics, and economics with Xinya College.

The book series on humanities *Quyū* [Remapping] is an important channel for TIAS to bring together scholarly research in liberal arts fields. The purpose of the series is to explore new fields, approaches, and methods in Chinese humanities from an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural perspective based on specific problems, especially important issues in contemporary China such as

national unity, religious coexistence, social stability, and national identity. Quyu's general research topics include: the past and present of ethnic theory; cross-regional studies of ethnicity and religion (with a focus on Sino-Tibetan, western regions, and Eurasian relations); regional integration and national identity in Northeast Asia; and ethnicity and religion in Chinese history and literature.

Zhejiang University Institute for Advanced Study in Humanities and Social Sciences

Founded in 2014, the Institute for Advanced Study in Humanities and Social Sciences at Zhejiang University (IAS) is an international research institution modeled on the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences (CASBS) at Stanford University. Centered entirely on visiting scholars, Zhejiang's IAS seeks to enhance interdisciplinary exchange among the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. It is committed to promoting original ideas and forming theoretical discoveries.

The residency program of Zhejiang University's IAS is unique. The program is divided into two tracks: for residential fellows and for research fellows. The research fellows are well-known Chinese and international scholars and outstanding young scholars from China and abroad with high promise, and the appointment period is generally longer than one year. After the appointment period, research fellows may be hired by Zhejiang University through a mutual selection process. For the residential fellows program, young scholars who have held doctoral degrees for at least four years are encouraged to apply, with priority given to those who work on cutting-edge topics in their discipline or who demonstrate clear promise. To ensure that residential fellows have sufficient time to complete their research or writing projects, the duration of the program is generally three to eight months, during which time there are no other obligations attached to the program other than to present ongoing scholarly work, followed by interdisciplinary exchanges with and critiques from other fellows. In addition, Zhejiang IAS has a summer research workshop program in which four to six scholars from different schools and disciplinary backgrounds form a research team to develop original ideas through in-depth readings and focused discussions. IAS at Zhejiang University does not set any fixed research topics or fields for scholars, guaranteeing freedom to explore and exchange ideas. So far, it has hosted 211 residential fellows, 184 presentations, and 36 workshops.

The Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences at Peking University

The Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences at Peking University (IHSS) was established in 2016 with the purpose of “nurturing scholarship and activating ideas.” Relying on the comprehensive advantages of Peking University and centered on research in the humanities and social disciplines, IHSS explores the basic principles and frontiers of the disciplines and promotes interdisciplinary collaboration. Drawing upon China’s history, scholars at IHSS examine the evolutionary paths of the world’s civilizations and China’s social development and revitalization. The scholarly makeup of IHSS is twofold: It provides resources and support for research activities of leading scholars from various departments of Peking University. In addition, it houses invited scholars from China and abroad, providing them with academic and administrative support tailored to their individual research plans.

IHSS is committed to achieving breakthroughs in key fields. It actively organizes forums, lectures, seminars, presentations of research findings, and exhibitions, and it supports scholarly activities such as book clubs and workshops. IHSS also cooperates with many academic and cultural institutions to conduct various forms of exchange, including public lectures, brownbag lunches, scholarly salons, publications, and more. IHSS regularly disseminates information on academic activities through various print or electronic media such as newsletters, websites, and official WeChat accounts, and supports publication of research findings in different venues and forms. Since its establishment in September 2016, 144 invited scholars from 16 countries and world regions have worked in residence at IHSS, and it has hosted nearly 700 lectures, forums, workshops, and other kinds of academic activities.

The IHSS is committed to studying five core issues pertaining to the theme “Civilization: China and the World”:

(1) Early China and Chinese civilization. This area of focus judges the historical and spiritual development of China. What is China? How was Chinese civilization founded and shaped? The recognition and confirmation of the structure of early China from the prehistoric era to the pre-Qin period requires not only the integration of various research methods, such as history, archaeology, paleography, premodern literature, geography, anthropology, and ethnology, but also the comprehensive interpretation and theoretical exploration of

the study of the classics, philosophy and mythology, intellectual history, and art history.

(2) **Ethnic cohesion and national order.** From middle antiquity to the modern Republican period, China's historical development has formed a multiethnic, multireligious, and multicultural fusion structure, which has also given rise to its unique political system and social order. Understanding this multiethnic civilizational structure and its complex transitions in different periods requires the full integration and collaborative development of various disciplines, including ethnology, anthropology, religion, linguistics, sociology, literature, art history, and transportation history, with political history as the core.

(3) **Social transformation and spiritual reconstruction.** Chinese society is often in transition, especially since the comprehensive reforms of the late Qing dynasty and the early Republican period. In the process of integration into world history, China has experienced institutional stagnation, social disorder, and cultural crisis. Such tumult, however, has always been accompanied by efforts to restore, innovate, and reorganize. Understanding the recent structural changes and operational mechanisms of Chinese civilization, as well as the efforts toward ritual renewal and spiritual reconstruction, requires the integration of multidisciplinary and multifaceted research perspectives, the promotion of exchanges and interactions between the humanities and social sciences, and the provision of a complete picture of the modern revival of Chinese civilization.

(4) **Western learning in China.** From the exchanges and collisions between East and West during the Ming and Qing dynasties to the rise of new knowledge and the republic in modern times to the spread and installment of Marxism in China—all these show that the eastward movement of Western learning [*Xixue dongjian*] and the historical process of globalization today have provided a new background and terrain for the development of Chinese civilization. Tracing and sorting out the different histories of the encounter between Chinese and Western civilizations from the multiple dimensions of thought and history, concepts and experiences, and examining the overall developmental path of Western civilization from antiquity to the Middle Ages, from modern political transformation to present-day social conditions, as well as its own composite civilizational process, require the intersection of multiple disciplines and the development of a broad vision of research.

(5) **Multicivilizational interaction and comparison.** The development and growth of Chinese civilization has always occurred in interaction with multiple world civilizations. Whether it is the juxtaposition of major premodern

civilizations from prehistoric times to the Axial Age, or the dissemination and exchange between civilizations that flourished in middle antiquity, or the interdependent relationships formed by globalization today, it is necessary to break through the existing one-way research paradigm to explore the future path toward the prosperity and coexistence of multiple civilizations by means of multidisciplinary research methods.

The institutes for advanced study in Chinese universities are exploring, each in its own way, academic paths rooted in China but oriented outward. China, with its ancient traditions, its history of exchange with other civilizations, and its position in the world today, is taking on an important mission to carry the future destiny of humanities. China's scholarly development is bound to create both a unique and a universal discourse between ancient and modern civilizations, building a bridge between the past and the future.

Translated from the Chinese

Jingdong Qu is a professor of sociology and executive vice president (2016-23) of the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences at Peking University. He is the author of many books, including *Absence and Rupture: A Sociological Study of Disorder* (1998) and *Human Nature and Education in Modern Society* (2005).