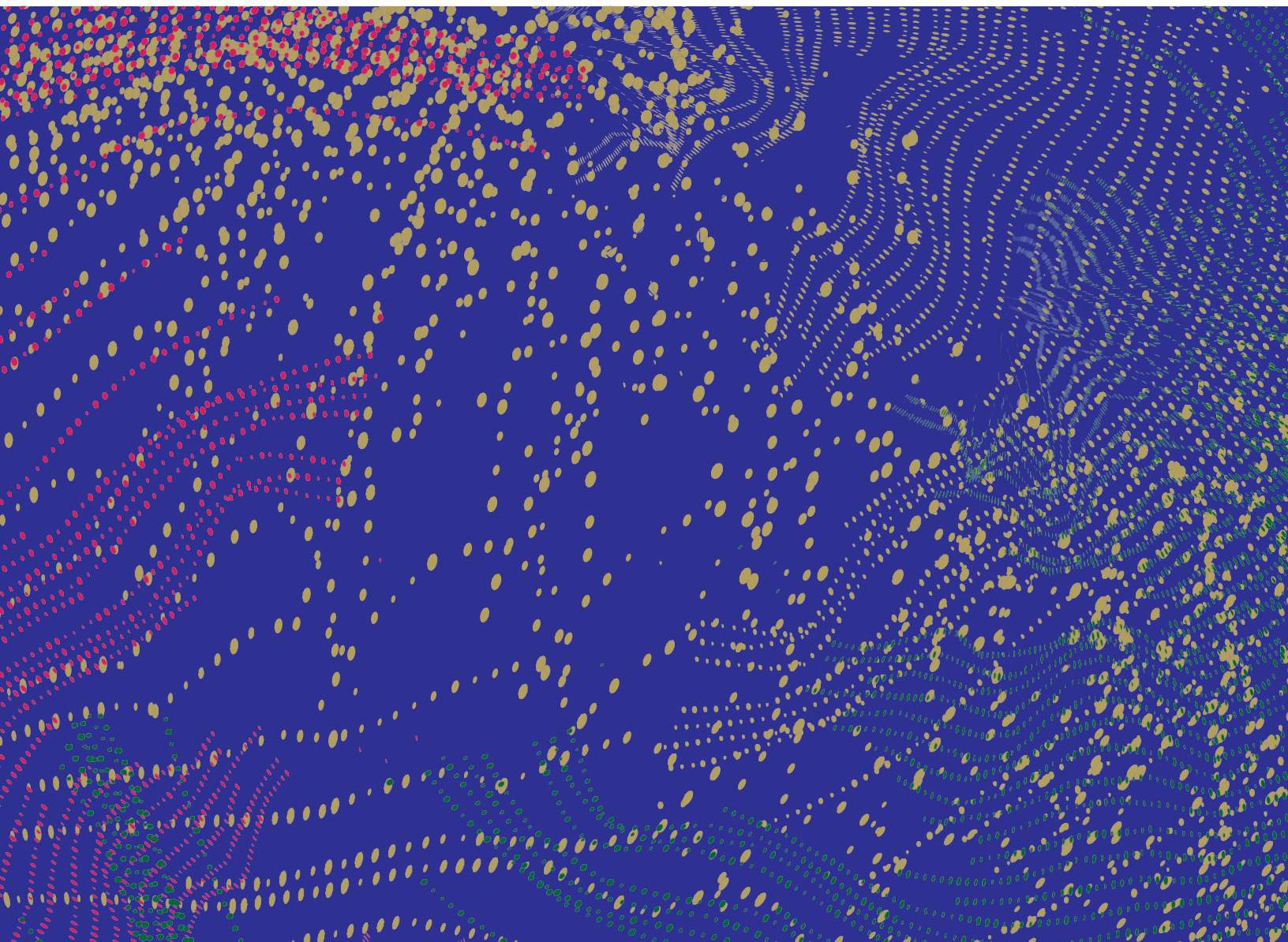


The World Humanities Report

Western Philosophy in Contemporary China

Zhang Zhiqiang

Han Xiao



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More information about the authors can be found at the [end of this document](#).

Western Philosophy in Contemporary China

Zhang Zhiqiang Institute of Philosophy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

Han Xiao Institute of Philosophy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

After the cultural fever of the 1980s, the study of Western philosophy in China cooled down in the 1990s, entering a phase of calm and rigorous academic research. Scholars widely characterized this shift as 'thoughts fade, academics rise.' However, the academic community's fascination with fundamental issues concerning individuals, society, the nation, and civilization persisted, albeit with more in-depth exploration and professional methods. This unique trend in Western philosophy research in China over the past three decades must be examined within the broader context of Western academics' spread to the East and the establishment of an independent Chinese philosophical knowledge system. Understanding this trend necessitates considering the major division between Continental European and Anglo-American philosophy in the 20th century. Consequently, it can be depicted as the intertwining of three parallel developments: firstly, the deepening advancement of Western academics' spread to the East, evident in a comprehensive grasp of Western philosophy's history and meticulous interpretation of classic texts. Secondly, the pursuit of cutting-edge issues in contemporary Western philosophy, particularly after the U.S. emerged as the global academic hub, leading to a decline in Continental European philosophy's influence and a surge in the popularity of Anglo-American or analytical philosophy worldwide. This shift was mirrored in China, with returning overseas scholars integrating into the Anglo-American philosophical tradition and following trends in English-speaking academia. Additionally, a group of scholars continued to advance Continental European philosophy, albeit more through textual interpretation and historical studies. Thirdly, the sinicization and localization of Western philosophy, where Chinese scholars, driven by the problem consciousness of Chinese civilization, selectively adapted and transformed Western philosophical resources, even attempting to integrate

Marxist, Chinese, and foreign philosophies. Whether adopting an attitude of inheritance or rebellion, this research remained intertwined with the cultural consciousness of the 1980s. From this perspective, although academics flourished, ideas did not fade but rather became embedded in the intricate logic of academic research.

Discussing the intricate landscape of Western philosophy research in China over the past three decades, this essay aims to sketch out its fundamental development trends within the academic sphere. It explores how these advancements intertwine with the discipline, academic, ideological, and cultural consciousness of the Chinese Western philosophy community. Rather than a straightforward promotion or hindrance, these elements coexist in various forms, shaped by the ideological landscape and contemporary challenges. At its core, this interplay reflects the diverse choices Chinese scholars make when confronting modernity. The dynamic tension between academia and thought not only poses challenges requiring reflection and resolution but also fosters a vast horizon for theoretical innovation.

An Overview of the Development of Western Philosophy in China from 1990 to 2010

The study of Western philosophy in China must be examined within the broader framework of the extensive influx of Western academics into the East over the past century. Despite occasional pauses or halts in this influx, the translation and examination of Western philosophy have persisted within Chinese academia. This systematic endeavor serves as a foundational backdrop for this academic era, yet it must also be juxtaposed against the ideological shifts that characterized various historical periods.

Behind the continuous advancement of ideological education is the robust construction of institutions, platforms, disciplines, and talent teams in various universities and research institutions. Over the past three decades, philosophy has seen significant development in terms of student enrollment, faculty, and research funding. According to the data available to the author, in 1990, philosophy departments and research institutes in higher education institutions across the country conferred a total of 2,991 bachelor's degrees, 676 master's degrees, and 24 doctoral degrees.¹ By 2022, a total of 2,413 bachelor's degrees were

¹ See Zhang Baoqing, ed., *Zhongguo jiaoyu nianjian: 1991* [Yearbook of Chinese education: 1991] (Beijing: Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992), 210–11.

conferred, with 12,400 students enrolled; 3,236 master's degrees were conferred, with 10,848 students enrolled; and 711 doctoral degrees were conferred, with 5,116 students enrolled.² Although there has been no significant change or even a decrease in the number of bachelor's degrees conferred and the enrollment scale of undergraduates, the scale of master's and doctoral programs has increased significantly. An important reason is that some schools do not offer undergraduate philosophy programs; however, the number of institutions conferring master's and doctoral degrees has increased significantly compared to 30 years ago. In addition, there are a large number of returned overseas students who are not included in the statistics. As one of the eight secondary disciplines in philosophy, foreign philosophy usually accounts for 13–20% of the enrollment ratio and is thriving against the backdrop of the vigorous development of philosophy.³ The above changes have fully ensured the growth of the research team in the domestic philosophy community. According to statistics, there are currently 143 universities offering philosophy programs nationwide, and 48 universities have the qualification to confer doctoral degrees in philosophy.⁴ In 2022, the number of full-time teachers in philosophy programs in domestic universities reached 41,265, including 5,645 with senior titles and 11,060 with associate senior titles.⁵ In 1990, there were only 7,455 full-time teachers in philosophy programs nationwide, including 210 with senior titles and 1,686 with associate senior titles.⁶ According to the "Survey Report on Philosophy Professionals (2022)", about 23.3% of philosophy course teachers are

² See Planning Committee of the Ministry of Education for the People's Republic of China, comp., *Zhongguo jiaoyu tongji nianjian: 2022* [Statistical yearbook of Chinese education: 2022] (Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 2023), 28,40.

³ The remaining seven secondary disciplines are Marxist philosophy, Chinese philosophy, logic, aesthetics, ethics, religious studies, and philosophy of science and technology. Taking 2023 as an example, the proportion of foreign philosophy majors in Peking University, Fudan University, Renmin University of China, Beijing Normal University, Nanjing University and Sun Yat sen University will be 13.6%, 14.5%, 19.5%, 17.9%, 13.7%, 17.6% and 16.9% respectively.

⁴ Please refer to the results of the fourth round of national discipline evaluation released by the Ministry of Education for the People's Republic of China, as well as the "Alumni Association 2024 China University Philosophy First Class Discipline Ranking" (URL = http://www.chinaxy.com/2022index/news/news.jsp?information_id=14871) .

⁵ Planning Committee of the Ministry of Education for the People's Republic of China, *Zhongguo jiaoyu tongji nianjian: 2022*, 52.

⁶ See Planning and Construction Committee of the National Education Commission of the People's Republic of China, ed., *Zhongguo jiaoyu tongji nianjian: 1990* [Statistical yearbook of Chinese education: 1990] (Beijing: Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991), 30.

foreign professionals, which is the highest proportion among all secondary disciplines.⁷ In terms of research projects and funding support, although there is no separate record for philosophy programs, we can clearly see the increase in funding support from the overall records of humanities and social sciences. According to the data available to the author, in 1998, the funding allocated to humanities and social sciences in ordinary colleges and universities nationwide was 162,392,500 yuan, with a total of 26,917 projects.⁸ In 2022, the former allocated funds amounted to 16,881,449,520 yuan, with a total of 695,010 research projects, which were 103.95 times and 25.82 times higher than those 24 years ago, respectively.⁹ It can be said that it is these strong human and material guarantees that have made China's philosophy research make considerable progress.

The development of Western philosophy as a discipline in China over the past three decades is closely related to the tradition of Western studies since the founding of the People's Republic of China. The nationwide adjustment of departments in higher education institutions that began in 1952 initially established the pattern for subsequent Western studies in China. In 1955, the Institute of Philosophy of the Chinese Academy of Sciences established a research group on the history of Western philosophy led by He Lin, and in the same year, the journal *Philosophical Research* was founded, followed by the journal *Philosophy Translation Series* in 1956. During the 1960s, universities such as Peking University, Renmin University of China, Fudan University, and Wuhan University successively established foreign philosophy research institutes and Western philosophy teaching and research offices.¹⁰ Under the leadership of scholars of the older generation such as He Lin, Hong Qian, and Xiong Wei, some universities became "the center" in specific research fields, particularly achieving results in the study of German classical philosophy, ancient Greek philosophy, and modern philosophy, while also engaging with the then-

⁷ See Yang Zhenru, Lu Yifan, Deng Aihui, Tang Meihui, Xiao Fei: Survey Report on Philosophy Professionals (2022), official account of China Social Science Network, May 7, 2024, URL=https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_27288323 .

⁸ See Planning Committee of the Ministry of Education for the People's Republic of China, comp., *Zhongguo jiaoyu tongji nianjian: 1999* [Statistical yearbook of Chinese education: 1999] (Beijing: Renmin Jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000), 370.

⁹ Planning Committee of the Ministry of Education for the People's Republic of China, *Zhongguo jiaoyu tongji nianjian: 2022*, 482.

¹⁰ See Tu Jiliang, "Research on Western Philosophy in the Past Thirty Years", *Social Science Frontline* [Shehui kexue zhanxian], (2) 2008, p.1.

cutting-edge fields of phenomenology and analytical philosophy internationally. Although the study of Western philosophy could only be conducted in a critical and translational manner due to increasingly strict ideological control, the "Chinese Translation of World Classics" series from the Commercial Press demonstrates that despite the limited volume, a relatively comprehensive framework for translating and introducing Western philosophical classics had been initially established during this period. Works from various fields, from ancient Greek and medieval philosophy to German classical philosophy, contemporary continental European, and Anglo-American philosophy, were translated, while scholars of the older generation actively formulated their research works during this period, leading new academic trends at the beginning of the reform and opening up.¹¹ The 1978 National Western Philosophy Symposium and the "Wuhu Conference" marked an important turning point, after which Western philosophy research began to flourish. During this period, the Chinese National Society for the History of Foreign Philosophy and the National Society for Modern Foreign Philosophy, and several professional committees were established;¹² professional journals such as *Chinese Social Sciences*, *Philosophical Research*, *Domestic Philosophical Trends* (the predecessor of *Philosophical Trends*), and *Philosophy Translation Series* (the predecessor of *World Philosophy*) became important platforms for philosophical research; a large number of translations and research works sprang up like mushrooms; a large number of young scholars began to make their mark in the academic community...¹³All of these are

¹¹ For the translations and research publications of this period, see Huang Jiande, *Xifang zhhexue dongjian shi: Xia juan* [A history of the Eastern transmission of Western philosophy: Part 2] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe: 2008), 712, 714, 763–64, 772–75, 789–790, 842–43.

¹² The National Society for Modern Foreign Philosophy was established during the Taiyuan Conference in November 1979. Currently, the society has 10 professional committees under its jurisdiction, including Russian philosophy, phenomenology, German philosophy, French philosophy, analytical philosophy, Wittgenstein philosophy, hermeneutics, epistemology, pragmatism, and Eastern philosophy. The Chinese National Society for the History of Foreign Philosophy was established in June 1981. The society held academic seminars to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason and the 150th anniversary of Hegel's death. The current society has seven professional committees under its jurisdiction, including Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy, Medieval Philosophy, Oriental Consciousness Studies, East West Original Culture Studies, Kantian Philosophy, Cartesian Philosophy, and World Origin Culture Studies. Refer to Feng Jun: "The Historical Development and Future Trends of Western Philosophy with Chinese Characteristics", *Philosophy Research*, 5 (2021), p. 38.

¹³ Due to space limitations, it is not possible to list representative scholars, works, textbooks, translations, etc. from this period one by one. For the academic developments during this period, please refer to Huang Jiande's A history of the Eastern transmission of Western

inextricably linked to the tireless efforts of scholars of the older generation in writing and educating for decades.

In 1981, the Chinese National Society for the History of Foreign Philosophy held an academic seminar in Beijing to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the publication of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and the 150th anniversary of the death of Hegel. At the conference, scholars engaged in a heated debate on "Kant or Hegel." Li Zehou clearly put forward the slogan "Yes to Kant, No to Hegel," which, to some extent, painted the background of Western philosophy research in the early 1980s.¹⁴ During this period, Kant's philosophy was employed to promote subjectivity and Enlightenment rationality, emphasizing human rights and individual freedom. Consequently, numerous modern Western philosophical trends, particularly existentialism, gained widespread attention and became integral to popular culture. This surge can be attributed to a growing public interest in value philosophy, human studies, and individual existence following China's reform and opening up. The primary influence of the Nietzsche, Sartre, and Freud phenomena in academia has been to elevate the prominence of contemporary German and French philosophy. Notably, the *Modern Western Academic Library*,¹⁵ hosted by the editorial board of the "Culture: China and the World Series," published a substantial number of translations and introductions to phenomenology, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, the Frankfurt School, and postmodernism. These works have become significant tools for the academic community in challenging the Soviet textbook system and the rigid dogmatism of Zhdanov.¹⁵ The intense interest in this subject

philosophy: Part 2, 992-93; Tu Jiliang: "Research on Western Philosophy in the Past Thirty Years", 2-3; Feng Jun: "The Historical Development and Future Trends of Western Philosophy with Chinese Characteristics", 38-39.

¹⁴ See Deng Xiaomang, "Chongshen 'Yao Kangde, haishi yao Heige'er' wenti" [Reexamining the question of "Kant or Hegel"], *Huazhong keji daxue xuebao (shehuikexue ban)*, no. 1 (2016): 1-7; Wang Nanshi, "Chongti yi zhuang gong'an: 'Yao Kangde, haishi yao Heige'er'" [Revisiting an academic case: "Kant or Hegel"], *Shehui kexue jikan*, no. 5 (2018): 6-13.

¹⁵ For a basic intellectual background of the 1980s and the most deeply investigated topics during this period, see Gan Yang, "First Edition Preface," in *Bashi niandai wenhua yishi* [Cultural consciousness in the 1980s], ed. Gan Yang (Beijing: Shenghuo, Dushu, Xinzhi sanlian shudian), 3-8; He Guimei, *1980 niandai "wenhua re" de zhishi puxi yu yishi xingtai (xia)* [The ideology and knowledge genealogy of the "cultural fever" of the 1980s (Part 2)], 240-47; Ding Yun, "Qimeng zhutixing yu sanshinian sixiangshi: Yi Li Zehou wei zhongxin" [Enlightenment subjectivity and thirty years of intellectual history: On Li Zehou], in *Rujia yu qimeng: Zhaxue huitong shiye xia de dangqian Zhongguo sixiang* [Confucianism and Enlightenment: Contemporary Chinese thought from the perspective of philosophical integration](Beijing: Shenghuo, Dushu, Xinzhi, Sanlianshudian [SDX Joint Publishing], 2011), 17-19. For the rise of existentialism and the frenzies around Nietzsche, Freud, and other

quickly paved the way for two distinct approaches. The first approach involves a critical reflection on modernity itself. By the late 1980s, scholars began to confront the various advantages and disadvantages associated with the process of modernization, utilizing Western philosophical resources to explore China's own trajectory of ideological modernization. This inquiry sparked the "debate between ancient and modern, Chinese and Western," which addresses the pivotal question in political thought posed by Feng Qi: "Where is China going?"—a fundamental issue with profound implications for the future.¹⁶ The alternative approach is predominantly academic. The domestic academic community began to transition from emotional bias towards a rational inquiry into the philosophies of Kant, Nietzsche, Sartre, Heidegger, and others, while further exploring traditional German classical philosophy and phenomenology, the deep roots of these thinkers' ideas. This in-depth understanding of these fields continued to evolve, fostering research in various philosophical periods. During this time, numerous classic translations and significant academic contributions emerged in areas such as ancient Greek philosophy, medieval thought, early modern philosophy, German classical philosophy, contemporary European philosophy, Anglo-American analytical philosophy, and pragmatism. The "Chinese Translation of Academic Masterpieces" series, published by the Commercial Press, also began to expand significantly following China's reform and opening up. Although these professional philosophical works and studies have not garnered the same level of "cultural enthusiasm," they continue to attract considerable theoretical interest.

During this period, two significant changes occurred that profoundly influenced the academic landscape. First, following the accumulation of knowledge in the 1980s, the older generation of scholars and their disciples began systematically advancing the translation of Western academic works in China, initiating several comprehensive collection projects. Starting from the mid-to-late 1990s, a series of long-planned major translation projects were completed, such as the nine-volume *Complete Works of Aristotle* compiled and translated by

phenomena, see Cheng Guangwei, *Yi ge bei chonggou de "Xifang": Cong "Xiandai Xifang xueshu wenku" kan bashi niandai de zhishi fanshi* [A reconstructed "West": Looking at 1980s knowledge paradigms through the "Modern Western Academic Library"], *Dangdai wentan*, no. 4 (2007), 42–43.

¹⁶ See Gan Yang, "Bashi niandai wenhua taolun de jige wenti" [Some issues in 1980s cultural discussions], in *Bashi niandai wenhua yishi*, 11–26; Gan Yang, "Cong 'lixing de pipan' dao 'wenhua de pipan'" [From "rational criticism" to "cultural criticism"], in *Bashi niandai wenhua yishi*, 543–63.

Miao Litian, the *Complete Works of Plato* translated by Wang Xiaochao, the new translations of Kant's "Three Critiques" collaboratively undertaken by Deng Xiaomang and Yang Zutao, and the *Complete Works of Wittgenstein* led by researcher Tu Jiliang. Concurrently, the academic community began to increasingly focus on collecting and translating cutting-edge international research materials to address the scarcity of research literature. Secondly, with the development of the market economy and the return of the first cohort of young scholars who studied abroad on public funds after the reform and opening up, the domestic academic community gained easier access to the latest international research developments and achievements. Many of these young returning scholars acted as bridges between domestic and international academic circles, introducing advanced information from various fields of global academia into China. This exchange facilitated comprehensive innovations in research methods, academic standards, scientific research systems, ideological perspectives, literary resources, and critical issue awareness within the domestic academic community. By the mid-to-late 1990s, these quantitative changes culminated in qualitative transformations, resulting in a group of young and mid-career scholars launching influential representative works. Phenomenology, especially Heidegger's philosophy, was a hot topic during this period, with works such as Zhang Xianglong's *Heidegger's Thought and the Chinese Tian Dao* (1995), Jin Xiping's *Research on Heidegger's Early Thought* (1995), Chen Jiaying's *Introduction to Heidegger's Philosophy* (1995), Sun Zhouxing's *Speaking the Unspeakable Mystery - Research on Heidegger's Later Thought* (1995), Zhang Rulun's *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy* (1995), and Huang Yusheng's *Time and Eternity: On the Issue of Time in Heidegger's Philosophy* (1997) being published. In the field of Husserl studies, there were works such as Ni Liangkang's *Phenomenon and Its Effects - Husserl and Contemporary German Philosophy* (1995), *A General Explanation of Husserl's Phenomenological Concepts* (1999), and Zhang Qingxiong's *Xiong Shili's New Idealism and Husserl's Phenomenology* (1995). In the field of analytical philosophy, works such as Jiang Yi's *Wittgenstein: A Post-Philosophical Culture* (1996), *Wittgenstein* (1999), Han Linhe's *The Road to Wittgenstein's Philosophy* (1996), Wang Lu's *A Study of Frege's Thought* (1996), and Chen Bo's *A Study of Quine's Philosophy* (1998) played a significant role in introducing ideas.¹⁷ Moreover, in fields such as ancient Greek

¹⁷ See Jiang Yi: "Modern Foreign Philosophy: Current Research Status and Prospects in China", in *Journal of Beijing University of Chemical Technology (Social Sciences Edition)*[*Beijing huagong daxue xuebao*], (3) 2003, 3-4.

philosophy, medieval philosophy, modern philosophy, German classical philosophy, contemporary French philosophy, and pragmatism, notable works include Fan Mingsheng's *Late Greek Philosophy and Christian Theology - The Confluence of Eastern and Western Cultures* (1993), Liao Shenbai's *A Study of Aristotle's Theory of Friendship* (2000), Zhao Dunhua's *1500 Years of Christian Philosophy* (1994), Fu Youde's *A Study of Berkeley's Philosophy* (1999), Zhou Xiaoliang's *A Study of Hume's Philosophy* (1999), Hong Handing's *A Study of Spinoza's Philosophy* (1997), Chen Xiuzhai and Duan Dezhi's *Leibniz* (1994), Yang Yizhi's *Lectures on Kant and Hegel's Philosophy* (1996), Yang Zutao and Deng Xiaomang's *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason: An Outline* (1996), Deng Xiaomang's *The Ferry Man of the Styx: Kant's Critique of Judgment* (1997) and *Speculative Tension: A New Exploration of Hegel's Dialectics* (1998), Liang Zhixue's *Fichte's Ideological System during the Jena Period* (1995), Xie Dikun's *Fichte's Religious Philosophy* (1993), Deng Anqing's *Schelling* (1995), Shang Jie's *Derrida* (1999), and Chen Yajun's *Pragmatism: From Peirce to Putnam* (1999).¹⁸ This list, while inevitably incomplete, highlights the emergence of several key figures and foundational texts within today's Chinese Western philosophy community. Many of these scholars published their representative works between the mid-1990s and the early 21st century, thus establishing their academic status and laying the groundwork for Western philosophy studies in China.

Reflecting on nearly 30 years of progress, it is evident that these works created a fundamental framework for the research of Western philosophy in China. The academic advancements accumulated in the 1990s led to explosive growth in the research achievements of Western philosophy during the first decade of the 21st century. Scholars demonstrated the capacity to organize and produce comprehensive histories—general, dynastic, and national—of Western philosophy. Moreover, these texts go beyond merely introducing Western thought; they also interpret it through various perspectives, viewpoints, and critiques, integrating the latest research findings from philosophy and its history. Notably, China's research in Western philosophy has fostered a scholarly community adept at deeply understanding these traditions, marking a significant advancement in the discipline. During this period, thousands of research monographs and translations were produced across various professional fields.¹⁹ We can

¹⁸ See Tu Jiliang's "Research on Western Philosophy in the Past Thirty Years", 3-7; Huang Jiande, *A history of the Eastern transmission of Western philosophy: Part 2*, 996-1278.

¹⁹ See Mu Weiguo's "Analysis of the Publication Status of Philosophy Academic Monographs in China Based on Google Scholar Citation Statistics", *Library Forum [Tushuguan luntan]*, (2)

highlight three trends: First, the domestic academic community began to systematically organize and write series of works on the history of Western philosophy. In terms of general history, more representative works include the eight-volume academic edition of *History of Western Philosophy* (2004–2005) organized by Ye Xiushan and Wang Shuren, researchers of the Institute of Philosophy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the ten-volume *General History of Western Philosophy* series (2005–2012) edited by Liu Fangtong and Yu Wujin of the School of Philosophy, Fudan University, and the ten-volume *Commentary on Contemporary Famous Western Philosophers* (1996) edited by researcher Tu Jiliang. In terms of dynastic history and national history, the four-volume *History of Greek Philosophy* written by Wang Zisong, Fan Mingsheng, Chen Cunfu, and Yao Jiehou has been written and published since the early 1980s. After nearly three decades of efforts, it was finally published in 2008. Tu Jiliang's three-volume *History of American Philosophy* (2000) also made great contributions to the understanding of American analytical philosophy and pragmatism philosophy in China. The composition of general histories, dynastic histories, and national histories is primarily organized by the older generation of scholars. However, many authors contributing to each volume are young and mid-career scholars who emerged after the reform and opening up and attained significant recognition by the mid to late 1990s.²⁰ These works of philosophical history exhibit the keen insights, rich experiences, and deep analytical thinking characteristic of the older generation of scholars, alongside the frontier vision, innovative ideas, and linguistic advantages of the younger generation. Additionally, domestic scholars have organized the translation of numerous anthologies and guides that reflect international research trends. Following the 1990s, major Western publishing houses released a substantial number of philosophical classics, thematic anthologies, and academic guide collections. These works encompass not only foundational and introductory texts but also authoritative and directive collections that address cutting-edge issues across various disciplines. The translation of these collections provides detailed research resources for domestic scholars and significantly contributes to the enhancement of professional

2009, 168–169.

²⁰ For an overview of publication of these works on the history of philosophy, see Xie Dikun, “Xifang zhexue yanjiu 30 nian (1978–2008) de fansi” [Reflections on 30 years (1978–2008) of research on Western philosophy], *Anhui shifan daxue xuebao (renwen sheke ban)*, no. 4 (2008): 373–78; Zhou Xiaoliang, “Woguo xifang zhexue yanjiu de huigu, xianzhuang he zhanwang” [The past, present, and future of research of Western philosophy in our nation], *Shehui kexue guanli yu pinglun*, no. 2 (2007): 44–55.

standards in the field. Currently published collections include the 10-volume *Routledge History of Philosophy* (2003–2017) translated by Feng Jun, the *Blackwell Philosophy Guide Series* (published since 2007), and the 8-volume *Translation Series of Foreign Classical Philosophy Textbooks* (published since 2006). In addition, there are also a number of book series on foreign classical humanities research works, such as the *Classics and Interpretation* series edited by Liu Xiaofeng (published since 2003, with more than 520 volumes of Western studies already published), and the *Humanities and Society Translation Series* edited by Liu Dong (published in 1999, with more than 240 volumes already published).²¹ Thirdly, in addition to highly specialized research-based histories of philosophy, various textbooks on the history of Western philosophy and modern Western philosophy were also introduced during this period, such as *A Brief History of Western Philosophy* (2001) and *New Edition of Modern Western Philosophy* (2001) written by Zhao Dunhua, *Introduction to Western Philosophy* (2006) edited by Han Zhen, *New Edition of Modern Western Philosophy* (2000) written by Liu Fangtong, *History of Western Philosophy* (2005) written by Deng Xiaomang and Zhao Lin, and *History of Western Philosophy* (2010) written by Zhang Zhiwei.²² These textbooks are grounded in professional research, emphasizing the accuracy of historical materials and the rigor of concepts and arguments. They have significantly impacted Western philosophy education since their inception. Overall, the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century were transformative periods for the domestic Western philosophy community, characterized by ongoing efforts to fill research gaps and align with the highest international standards. This era also witnessed increasingly close exchanges between Chinese and Western academic circles. As academic and professional awareness strengthened, Chinese scholars dedicated themselves to enhancing and refining the landscape of Western philosophy. Their perspectives broadened to encompass a comprehensive ideological panorama of each major philosopher and various regional interpretations of Western philosophy's history. Substantial contributions were made regarding previously overlooked periods, schools of thought, and works of thinkers. In this vibrant academic atmosphere, scholars utilized resources from the international academic community to

²¹ See Jiang Yi: "30 Years of Research on Modern Foreign Philosophy in China", National Symposium on Foreign Philosophy - Collection of Papers Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of the Wuhu Conference and the Establishment of the Two Societies, 2008, 22-23.

²² For the textbooks published during this period, please refer to Zhao Dunhua's "A Comprehensive Review of Textbooks on the History of Western Philosophy in China", in *The Chinese Social Sciences Journal* on September 22, 2009 (B01 edition).

swiftly engage with the forefront of global scholarship. For instance, in the study of the history of philosophy, several works from this period were based on the complete works of philosophers in their original languages, including manuscripts, while drawing on diverse interpretations from both domestic and foreign scholars, thereby achieving high international standards. Simultaneously, some scholars sought to illuminate their own perspectives and problem consciousness within their research. For example, Zhang Xianglong's *Heidegger's Thought and Chinese Tian Dao* is a representative work. The book astutely identifies the significant similarities between Heidegger's concept of "edge-constituting horizon" and the Chinese Confucian and Daoist interpretations of Tian Dao, fostering a remarkable dialogue between Chinese and Western philosophies through highly original insights. Additionally, regarding talent cultivation and academic exchanges, more universities became doctoral degree-granting institutions during this period, thereby providing a robust talent pool for academic development. The establishment of the China Scholarship Council enabled a greater number of young students to pursue degrees or conduct research abroad. Various universities and research institutions actively promoted international academic exchanges, hosting numerous international conferences and continuously organizing initiatives such as the "Sino-British Summer Philosophy Institute" (since 1993), the "Sino-British-Australian Summer Philosophy Institute" (since 2005), and the "Sino-British-American Summer Philosophy Institute" (since 1988), which invited prominent philosophers from the UK and US, including Peter Strawson and Hilary Putnam, to deliver lectures. Around 2000, several leading philosophers, such as Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricoeur, and Richard Rorty, visited China. These initiatives significantly advanced the cultivation of talent in Western philosophy research, establishing a skilled team endowed with a strong heritage and an international outlook in the field of domestic Western philosophy.²³

The Development of Western Philosophy Research in China Since 2010

After 2010, the expansion of university enrollment, the increasing number of practitioners, the return of overseas students, and enhanced national and social funding contributed to a notable academic flourishing in the field of philosophy, both domestically and internationally. With the support of academic

²³ See Jiang Yi's "30 Years of Research on Modern Foreign Philosophy in China", 21-22.

societies, research centers, and various funding projects, academic exchanges have become highly active. Each year, dozens of academic conferences are held within the domestic Western philosophy community alone. In addition to the annual meetings of the All-China Society for the History of Foreign Philosophy and the National Society for Modern Foreign Philosophy, there are also annual meetings and youth forums organized by professional committees focused on Ancient Greek Philosophy, Medieval Philosophy, German Philosophy, Kantian Philosophy, French Philosophy, Phenomenology, and Analytic Philosophy, in addition to various forums and workshops hosted by different universities and research centers. Furthermore, large-scale government-sponsored study abroad and scholar exchange activities funded by the China Scholarship Council or university funds take place each year. Renowned scholars such as Jean-Luc Marion, Axel Honneth, Bernard Stiegler, Charles Taylor, John Searle, and Timothy Williamson have visited China or taught courses. Notably, in 2018, the 24th World Congress of Philosophy, themed “Learning to Be Human,” was held in Beijing. This marked the first time that the world’s largest philosophy conference—established over a century ago—was held in China, and it was the first time the theme was derived from traditional Chinese philosophical thought, highlighting China’s growing influence in the field of global philosophy.

With support from government publishing funds, as well as those from universities and research institutions, a substantial number of monographs, translations, and series have been published over the past decade. Each year, the *Yearbook of Chinese Philosophy* highlights numerous outstanding academic achievements, including hundreds of translations and monographs. We only need to briefly list some publishing projects to get a glimpse of the prosperity of academic research during this period. Large-scale translations initiated or completed in the past decade or so include *The Complete Collection of Chinese and Foreign Philosophical Classics* (published since 2016, with the first batch of 30 volumes of the foreign philosophical classics published in 2024) edited by Li Tieying and Wang Weiguang, *The Complete Works of Rousseau* (2012) edited by Li Pingou, *The Complete Works of Kant* (2003–2013) edited and translated by Li Qiuling, *The Collected Works of Fichte* (2014) and *The Complete Works of Hegel* (2012–) edited by Liang Zhixue, *The Collected Works of Hegel* (2015–2024) edited by Zhang Shiyang, *The Collected Works of Schelling* (2016–2024) edited by Xian Gang, *The Complete Works of Nietzsche* (2010–2015) and *The Collected Works of Heidegger* (2018) edited by Sun Zhouxing, *The Collected*

Works of Husserl (2017-) and *Translation Series of Chinese Phenomenology* (1999-) edited by Ni Liangkang, *The Collected Works of Wittgenstein*" (2019) edited by Han Linhe, *The Complete Works of Dewey* (2010–2017) edited by Liu Fangtong, *The Collected Works of Merleau-Ponty* (2018-) edited by Yang Dachun, *The Complete Works of Scheler* (2019–2024) edited by Zhang Wei, *The Origin of Western Academics* series (published since 2007, with nearly 40 volumes published) edited by Gan Yang and Liu Xiaofeng, *Light and Heavy* series (published since 2012, with nearly 100 volumes published) edited by Jiang Dandan and He Fabi, *Thinkers and Thought Guide Series* (published since 2014, with more than 40 volumes published) by Chongqing Publishing House, *Spiritual Translation Series* (published since 2015, with nearly 40 volumes published) edited by Xu Ye and Chen Yue, etc. During this period, several significant research works have been translated and published internationally. In academia, numerous high-level monographs are released annually across diverse fields. The influence of some of these works is gradually becoming evident, and it is impractical to enumerate them all within the limits of this article. In addition to monographs, domestic scholars have achieved notable success in publishing papers through platforms such as journals and databases. While they publish hundreds of papers annually in Chinese journals, it is also common for domestic scholars to contribute articles to various internationally recognized A&HCI journals. It can be asserted that the domestic academic community has entered a new era of diversity and prosperity over the past decade. Various fields are rapidly approaching or achieving international frontier standards, and both the scale and quality of research have significantly improved compared to previous stages.

Notably, the landscape of Western philosophy research in China has undergone significant transformation since the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century. Following more than three decades of reform and opening up, and with extensive translation and introduction of Western ideas, Western philosophy research no longer primarily aims at propagating Western academic thought to the East. Instead, it positions itself as an integral part of the global academic community, contributing to the collective accumulation of knowledge and academic progress. This shift is largely attributable to improved foreign language proficiency, the widespread availability of the Internet, the increase in the number of overseas students, and frequent international exchanges, all of which enable a considerable number of domestic scholars to access cutting-edge international research materials and engage directly with the

global academic community through platforms such as conferences and journals. Although most scholars continue to use Chinese for teaching, academic exchanges, and publications, changes in the overall academic climate have led to a conscious or unconscious convergence of their research styles with those of the international academic community. Consequently, we can observe a notable phenomenon: whether in doctoral dissertations or published monographs, the comprehensive interpretation of philosophers' overall thoughts has gradually diminished, yielding to specialized research on specific philosophical issues or particular aspects of a philosopher's thought. The "fading out of thought and highlighting of academia" observed in the 1990s, which marked a shift in the academic community's focus from fundamental issues and grand narratives to specific academic topics, fields, and traditions, has culminated in distinct characteristics of the academic landscape in the past decade. Firstly, the overall landscape of academic research is becoming increasingly rigorous, professional, and refined, with topics growing more specialized and domains narrowing; there has been a pronounced degree of "involution" concerning the rigor and accuracy of literature mastery and analytical argumentation. Secondly, the emphasis on fundamental issues is gradually being supplanted by iterative branch issues within academic traditions. Without an understanding of the academic tradition within a specific field, grasping the significance of related research may prove challenging. For example, scholars who also study Aristotle may not be able to enter the problem domain of those who specialize in *Metaphysics* if they specialize in *Politics*. Thirdly, in the production of academic products, journal articles and fund projects have become the primary evaluation objects. The significance of large-scale works that we usually see in the German and French philosophical traditions has gradually diminished within academic evaluation indices, with the quantity of academic papers, journal rankings, and project rankings becoming the primary criteria for evaluation. These trends are closely associated with the increasing prominence of analytical philosophy globally over the past decade, alongside broader changes in the academic evaluation and higher education systems. In summary, during the second decade of the 21st century, the domestic philosophy community appears to be undergoing a process of "Americanization," as described by Weber. Scholars generate the necessary components for the construction of knowledge along their respective professional assembly lines. For instance, the study of the history of philosophy emphasizes precise textual interpretation and the comprehensive assimilation of ideological materials, while the exploration of cutting-edge issues in analytical

philosophy prioritizes the accuracy of mathematical logic calculations and the rigor of analytical arguments. Additionally, various fields underscore the importance of academic independence, characterized as “value-free.”

The highly specialized research approach has introduced several negative implications. For example, some scholars prioritize meeting the assessment criteria for career advancement or pursuing trending topics, leading them to focus on trivial matters. This tendency undermines a comprehensive understanding of the academic landscape and fosters a prolonged state of “out-of-focus” research. The lack of shared problem awareness and knowledge among scholars results in significant communication barriers, particularly between disciplines, whereby research on the same subject may appear as “a different mountain for each volume.” He Lin has identified three major flaws in the study of Western philosophy in modern China: the superficial, peripheral, and practical examination of Western thought. These shortcomings seem increasingly pronounced today. Furthermore, the research paradigm rooted in the Western academic industrial system often conflicts with traditional Chinese research methodologies, particularly regarding overarching goals, concepts, and methods. Consequently, the questions of whether Western philosophy retains a unique role in China and whether it should embody the humanistic concerns rooted in Chinese civilization since the 1980s require further exploration. Over the past century, the movement of Western scholarship into the East has aimed at “understanding the West.” While contemporary research on Western philosophy in China can engage in dialogue with the Western academic community, this does not necessarily imply a deeper comprehension of Western civilization itself. Some scholars have raised concerns: First, if academic research is solely utilitarian, it precludes a nuanced understanding of Western philosophical tradition and accurate assessments of the theoretical and cultural contexts of the studied subjects. Second, Western civilization cannot be adequately perceived as “the other” or as a reference point for reflecting on modern Chinese civilization. Lastly, there is a risk that Western scholarship cannot be effectively integrated into the Chinese cultural context, which would inhibit the development of theories grounded in Chinese values and concerns. Failure to explore the spiritual core of Western philosophy may result in academic research that merely replicates or distorts existing narratives. This ultimately limits meaningful theoretical engagement with today’s rapidly evolving technological

innovations and the changing conditions of human life.²⁴ From the perspective of the broader context of Western philosophy research, two significant reasons can be identified for the aforementioned changes. First, there has been a shift in philosophical research methodology. Since the 1990s, academic circles in Britain and the United States have increasingly dominated the international scholarly landscape, which has significantly impacted China. Influenced by Marxist philosophy and the tradition of German classical philosophy, domestic academic circles have historically adhered to research methods aligned with the German philosophical tradition. Consequently, the interpretation of philosophical history has often reflected the context of Western academia's dissemination to the East. However, the rise of young domestic scholars studying abroad has revealed that even in the traditional strongholds of continental philosophy—Germany and France—Anglo-American analytical philosophy exerts considerable influence. This realization has prompted scholars to adopt analytical philosophy's methodologies in traditional research areas such as ancient Greek, medieval, modern philosophy, and even German classical philosophy. They have begun to recognize that the research methods employed in China do not represent the so-called "international mainstream." The analytical philosophical emphasis on "addressing philosophical problems themselves" rather than solely focusing on "the history of philosophy" has strongly resonated with many domestic scholars, leading to a pressing demand for innovative research methodologies upon their return to China. Nonetheless, the new research traditions that align with international standards have struggled to take root in China, and an appropriate means to integrate these contemporary approaches with the established research traditions remains elusive. This situation,

24 Zhao Dunhua, Zhang Rulun, Xie Dikun, Feng Jun, Nie Jinfang, and Ma Yinmao have all suggested that contemporary Western studies in China suffer from a lack of holistic vision and an increasingly industrialized, intellectualized, and retailized predicament. See Zhao Dunhua, "Historical Examination and Realistic Reflection on the Situationization of Western Philosophy," [Xifang zhexue chujinghua de lishikaocha he xianshifansi] in *Foreign Philosophy* [Waiguo zhexue], no.1 (2018), 19–22, 43; Zhang Rulun, "The Old Learning Consultation Adds Profundity, the New Knowledge Cultivation Turns Deeper and Deeper--Reflection on and Foresight of the Study of Western Philosophy in the Past Forty Years," [Jiuxue shangliang jiasuimi, Xinzhi peiyang zhuanshenhen: Sishi nianlai xifangzhexue yanjiu de fansi yu qianzhan] *Philosophical Trends* {Zhexue dongtai}, no.9 (2018): 5–12; Xie Dikun, "Seventy Years of Review and Prospect of Foreign Philosophical Research," URL=http://www.dangjian.cn/djw2016sy/djw2016syyw/201908/t20190816_5222921.shtml; Nie Jinfang, "Establishing Scientific Orientation of Foreign Philosophical Research, *People's Daily* [Renmin ribao], March 21, 2016 (page 16); Ma Yinmao, "From Western Philosophy to Chinese Philosophy," in *Philosophical Research* [Zhexue yanjiu], no. 12 (2018), 28–30.

however, has gradually begun to improve in recent years.²⁵ Second, the change of university evaluation system. Among them, the reform of personnel system in Peking University after 2004 is a landmark event. This reform basically follows the way of running American universities, emphasizes the introduction of competition mechanism, evaluates academic achievements with quantitative standards, and implements assessment methods such as "promotion or departure".²⁶ simultaneously, an increasing number of universities have established doctoral training programs, resulting in a significant influx of domestic and international scholars into academic positions. This trend has objectively intensified academic competition. Under the complex interplay of various factors, the significance of research papers, academic journal impact factors, and funded projects has risen considerably in academic evaluations, thereby transforming the academic environment in China. It is challenging to categorically assess whether these changes are beneficial or detrimental. While it is undeniable that they have substantially heightened competition within the academic market, led to an increase in research output, and enhanced the frequency of academic exchanges, these changes are also closely associated with the drawbacks stemming from academic specialization.

Western Philosophy Studies in China and the Issue of Modernity

We conducted a preliminary review of the development of Western philosophy in China over the past three decades. To gain a comprehensive understanding of Western philosophy research in China, it is essential to explore its ideological foundations and clarify the underlying logic. It becomes evident that the distinctions between philosophy and the history of philosophy, Anglo-American philosophy and continental philosophy, as well as overarching interpretations and detailed arguments, are not binary choices. Instead, they reflect the ambivalence experienced by the Western philosophy community in China and subtly

²⁵ For example, researchers of analytic philosophy have also begun to think about the issues of "Chineseization of analytic philosophy" and "constructing Chinese analytic philosophy". However, how analytic philosophy can be combined with the cultural concerns of Chinese academics since the 1980s and the traditions of Chinese civilization itself still requires difficult exploration. See Jiang Yi, "The Influence of Analytic Philosophy on the Construction of Chinese Philosophy: A Historical Examination," in *Southland Academic [Nanguo xueshu]*, no. 3 (2022): 385-394.

²⁶ This reform constitutes a key event in understanding the basic system and direction of development of Chinese universities today. It was also the subject of heated debate at the time, see "An Overview of the Debate on the Reform of the Personnel System at Peking University," *Reading [Dushu]*, no.8 (2003): 153-159.

illustrate the complex relationship of Western philosophy research in China with issues of modernity.

As Ding Yun said, “The canonical spiritual guide of the 1980s was Kant, the guides to the 1990s were split between two Kantian extremes—Weber and Heidegger. Chinese academics in the 1990s belonged to the social sciences, so Weber took precedence over Heidegger. This is to say, modernization was the ideological tone of the era, and philosophical reflection on modernity was merely its foil.”²⁷ Broadly speaking, two primary stances emerged within Western philosophical circles in China during the 1990s: “embracing Weber” and “embracing Heidegger.” Those who aligned more closely with Max Weber inherited Enlightenment ideals that emphasized consistency in beliefs and a strong commitment to the professionalization of research methods. The ideological trajectory of this stance is marked by the resurgence of Kant’s philosophy in China in the 1980s and the vigorous proliferation of analytical philosophy in the United States and Britain since the 2010s. Conversely, advocates of Heidegger recognized the various dilemmas associated with modernity in the late 1980s. They adopted Heidegger’s approach, which involves a comprehensive contemplation of the tradition of Western civilization while also drawing on the intrinsic ideological resources of ancient China to address the crisis of modernity. This reflective path is dynamically intertwined with existentialism—focused on human individuality and living conditions—cultural conservatism, which champions both Chinese and Western classical thoughts, and postmodernism, that emphasizes pluralism and deconstruction across different eras. As Chen Lai said, scientific spirit, cultural concern, and traditional worries constitute three typical ideological types in the late 1980s.²⁸ We can clearly see that the development of Western philosophy in China in the past three decades has basically continued the ideological pattern of the late 1980s and produced new variations.

The study of Western philosophy in China has not merely embraced a “Weberian” approach; rather, a “Weberian” framework has permeated the Chinese academic community. In the early 20th century, European academia had already engaged in profound reflections on the “ideological situation of the

²⁷ See Ding Yun, “Yinyan: Chongqi gujin Zhong-Xi zhi wen” [Introduction: Reviving the questions of antiquity and modernity in China and the West], in *Rujia yu qimeng: Zhaxue huitong shiye xia de dangqian Zhongguo sixiang* [Confucianism and Enlightenment: Contemporary Chinese thought from the perspective of philosophical integration]: .1-6.

²⁸ See Chen Lai, “Sixiang chulu de san dongxiang” [Three trends in intellectual outlets], in *Bashi niandai wenhua yishi*, 569.

times.” According to Weber, in a disenchanted world that has distanced itself from rationality, the vocation of science is to present the facts of this world clearly, elucidating its operating mechanisms and underlying principles. If a scholar can contribute even slightly to the edifice of human knowledge, they have successfully fulfilled their mission. Choosing, deciding, and promoting various values, worldviews, and lifestyles belong to clergy and politicians; scientists should at least refrain from incorporating these into their responsibilities. Weber established principles for the social sciences based on this belief. Consequently, it is unsurprising that, with the advancement of reform and opening-up, Weber became the “ideological mentor” of the Chinese academic community in the 1990s and that “rationalization” emerged as the central issue in social sciences at that time. The rapid development of the market economy and the increasing precision of national and social governance have generated an urgent demand for quantitative research in social sciences, prompting a comprehensive transformation across various disciplines. The principle of the “fact-value dichotomy” has gained overwhelming acceptance in social science research. Social scientists recognize the advantages of instrumental rationality and quantitative methods, particularly in empirical disciplines such as economics, politics, and sociology, which can only be constructed in this manner. In contrast, the “alliance” of philosophy, mathematics, and empirical sciences has lagged behind, slowly evolving in the 1990s and accelerating to form a significant phenomenon in the second decade of the 21st century. Our inquiry explores why the Chinese academic community “preferred” Heidegger in the 1990s and has increasingly gravitated toward the prospects described by Weber in the past decade. Understanding the reasons behind this shift is crucial to deciphering the trajectory of Western philosophy in China since the 1990s. The “Heidegger fever” of the 1990s can be viewed as a continuation and echo of the “debate on ancient and modern, Eastern and Western” issues from the 1980s. During the 1980s, the Chinese academic community exhibited a strong interest in the existentialist movement, championed by figures such as Sartre, Camus, and de Beauvoir. Concepts such as “anger,” “fear,” “authentic existence,” “being towards death,” and “poetic dwelling,” as articulated by Heidegger, resonated deeply with individuals grappling with their own existential circumstances. Thus, it is unsurprising that Heidegger attracted considerable interest among scholars. Nevertheless, with the publication of translations like *Being and Time* (1987), Chinese scholars swiftly recognized that Heidegger’s philosophy could not be simply categorized as “existentialism.” For

instance, *Being and Time* is replete with intricate technical details, as well as profound critiques and reflections on the history of Western philosophy, particularly regarding the reinterpretation of “existence” in relation to Western ontology and metaphysical traditions. Without a solid foundation in the history of philosophy, a genuine understanding of Heidegger’s work is elusive. Consequently, the “Heidegger fever” has gradually shifted from the realm of public culture to become an intellectual event within the academic community.²⁹ Stepping back from emotional biases, Chinese scholars astutely recognized that Heidegger’s reflections were precisely directed at the overarching framework of modernity and the entire Western intellectual tradition serving as its foundation. He provided a lens that enabled the Chinese academic community to more clearly perceive the intrinsic challenges within the Western intellectual tradition dating back to Plato. Heidegger’s later endeavors to seek “another beginning” beyond the Western metaphysical tradition aligned with the Chinese academic community’s pursuit of a new path to modernization. His emphasis on “situated thinking” and his appreciation for Eastern thought, particularly Laozi, resonated deeply within the Chinese academic community, fostering a sense of welcome that echoed the aspirations of Chinese scholars to inherit and transform their own civilizational traditions. According to Ding Yun, “Heidegger’s pursuit of the ‘question of existence’ at its root ended all the clichés about idealism and materialism (Hegel-Marx context), subject and object (Kant context), and also forced Chinese philosophy to trace the entire history of ontology from its source (that is, from ancient Greece), gradually understanding the basic difference between ontology derived from linking verbs and the Chinese concept of existence and ontology.”³⁰ When Zhao Dunhua reviewed the course of “situating Western philosophy” over the past thirty years, he summarized ten representative topics of concern in the academic community. Among them, the research methodology of Western philosophy, the interconnection between Chinese and Western philosophy, the merits and demerits of enlightenment and modernity, the philosophical evaluation of post-modernism, and the relationship between Heidegger and Nazism³¹ are all directly related to the

²⁹ See Jin Xiping and Li Qiang, “Haidege’er yanjiu zai Zhongguo” [Research on Heidegger in China], *Shijie zhhexue*, no. 4 (2009): 8–31.

³⁰ Ding Yun, “On the Three Stages of the Sinicization of Western Philosophy” [Lun xifang-zhexue zhongguohua de sangejieduan], *Tianjin Social Sciences*, 5 (2017), 23.

³¹ The other four issues are the question of the Chinese translation of Western philosophical terms, the relationship between Western philosophy and Western Marxist philosophy, the location of medieval philosophy, the importance and interrelationship between Kant and

"Heidegger-Weber debate." Therefore, although the social science community did not hesitate to choose Weber, the "son of modern European civilization," in the 1990s, the Western philosophy community in China chose Heidegger, the "secret mentor," under the dual influence of passion and reason. Whether scholars agree or disagree with Heidegger, it is difficult to ignore his tremendous influence. He actually constituted an intermediary for the Chinese academic community to think about modernity issues in the 1990s.

The study of Western philosophy in China has been deeply rooted in the process of modernization and the ideological context of constructing a modern form of Chinese philosophy from the very beginning. This foundational aspect has led to a distinctive path of "localization" and "situationalization." While some works from this period exhibit a strong sense of professional research, they did not progress in the manner of "objective positivism," as described by Weber, which seeks solely to elucidate the intricacies of literature and restore the truth of intellectual history. Instead, they have a clear consciousness of reflecting on the tradition of Western civilization and modernity issues. Works such as Zhang Xianglong's *Heidegger's Thought and the Chinese Tian Dao* (1995), Ye Xiushan's *Thought, History, Poetry: A Study of Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy* (1999), and Zhang Zhiyang's *A Contingentist's Search: Between Absolute and Nihilism* (2003) are among the more representative works. Although many scholars have assimilated specialized research findings from abroad, they generally maintain the humanistic concerns and problem consciousness characteristic of the 1980s, as well as the broader process of Western academia's dissemination into the East. Some scholars have gradually recognized that deepening professional research can clarify the complexity of issues, while local perspectives can help surpass broad and simplistic understandings. This approach allows for a more nuanced presentation of the complex situations faced by Western thought during key turning points, and understanding these situations also plays a significant reflective role in today's Chinese ideological explorations.

Of course, there are also contrasting situations: while the relationship between academia and thought is not purely "either-or," the two possess fundamentally

Hegel, and the dispute between "left" and "right" in political philosophy. Since Heidegger has made a diagnosis of Western philosophy in general, and especially to the ontological tradition since Aristotle and the metaphysics of subject since Descartes, it is difficult to say that these questions have nothing to do with Heidegger. See Zhao Dunhua, "Historical Investigation and Reflection on the Contextualization of Western Philosophy", 30-36.

different logics. Macro-level observations of intellectual history often inevitably carry specific value orientations, which may conflict with professional research that pursues objective truth. Conversely, local research that seeks detailed truth and rigor is likely to yield conclusions that are diametrically opposed to the grand narrative. In this context, the dilemma of whether to adhere to established problem consciousness and ideological frameworks or to embrace more nuanced, certain, and rigorous analysis and argumentation presents a significant challenge for scholars. This issue has also been a topic of frequent debate within the academic community over the past decade. However, overall, from the 1990s to the early 21st century, a cohort of researchers with both macro-level problem consciousness and professional expertise has emerged in the field of Western philosophy in China, indicating a robust academic support for intellectual thought.

In light of the aforementioned changes, the academic community has gradually developed four “post-Heideggerian” pathways. The first pathway continues the ideological lineage of Heidegger and contemporary European philosophy, progressing towards postmodernist thought represented by figures such as Foucault and Derrida. The second pathway reflects the approaches of Heidegger’s disciples—such as Gadamer, Strauss, and Arendt—focusing on hermeneutics and political philosophy. The third pathway advocates a return to the classical tradition, particularly ancient Greek philosophy, from a cultural conservative perspective. The fourth pathway consists of a philosophical stance that critiques Heidegger while embracing Weber, incorporating analytical and scientific philosophies. Collectively, these pathways have shaped the development of contemporary Chinese philosophy. Scholars either opt for a conservative reflection on the Enlightenment, opposing the reinterpretation of traditional Chinese classics through philosophy, or they emphasize the evolution of a distinctly modern Chinese philosophical form that integrates elements of Chinese philosophy, Western philosophy, and Marxist philosophy. Alternatively, some scholars advocate for a comprehensive transformation of Chinese philosophy through contemporary analytical or scientific approaches.³² Since the 21st century, on the one hand, the specialized research of Western philosophy has progressed in an orderly manner; on the other hand, these ideologies have taken turns on the ideological stage. Among them, the “baton” that continues

³² See Ding Yun, “On the Three Stages of the Sinicization of Western Philosophy”, 23, 25. We have combined the previous analysis with the different statements in this article and have made some adjustments.

Heidegger's thought and has had a phenomenal impact on the Chinese Western academic community is another philosopher, Leo Strauss, a disciple of Heidegger and a political philosopher.³³

In the first decade of the 21st century, "political philosophy" emerged as a significant area of interest for scholars across various disciplines. However, unlike in academic circles in the UK and the US, the discourse on political philosophy in China did not focus on liberal political theorists such as Rawls and Nozick; instead, it largely centered on the American conservative political philosopher Leo Strauss. Along with this, the slogan of "re-reading the West" and the concept of "general education" were widely spread. Gan Yang and Liu Xiaofeng pointed out in the preface of the "Origin and Development of Western academics" series: "It is not an exaggeration to say that for nearly a century, Chinese people have had a morbid mentality when reading about the West, because this way of reading first treats China as a disease and the West as a pharmacy, so reading about the West became collecting prescriptions and pills specifically for treating Chinese diseases when going to the West. Studying abroad was claimed to be going to the West to find truths to criticize China's mistakes. ... The new generation of Chinese scholars in the new century needs to get rid of this morbid mentality and start re-reading the West."³⁴ And "the healthy way to read the West is first to read the West according to its own context. The way to read the West healthily... lies in this kind of reading that focuses first on the problems of the West itself and their development, rather than going to the West to find ready-made answers to Chinese problems."³⁵ The concept of "re-reading the West" is closely associated with Strauss. By examining the "three waves of modernity," Strauss advocated for a return to the political ideals rooted in ancient Greek values and the natural order. This necessitates a re-examination of certain foundational beliefs held by modern individuals, as, during the development of modern society, we have unconsciously established various modern ideological principles as underlying premises. As Strauss said, "the task of historians of ideas is to understand it just as past ideas understood themselves"³⁶, when we understand ancient Greek philosophers, we need to gain a perspective of ancient thought, and only within this perspective can we truly

³³ See Zhang Xu, "Foucault in China", in *Cross-Cultural Studies [Kuawenhua yanjiu]*, vol. 8 (no. 1, 2020), Social Sciences Academic Press, 2020: 60-103.

³⁴ Gan Yang and Liu Xiaofeng, "Re-reading the West", the general preface of the series of *The Origin of Western Academics*, Shenghuo · Dushu · Xinzhi Sanlian Bookstore.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Leo Strauss, "How to Study Medieval Philosophy", in *Interpretation* 23(3), 1996, p.322.

"re-read classical Western academics". Strauss proposed a series of reading methodologies aimed at restoring the horizon of understanding. One such method is the "reading between the lines" technique, which seeks to unveil the true meanings that philosophers aim to convey through their writing, thereby clarifying the relationships among Athens and Jerusalem, philosophy and politics, and philosophers and city-states, among others. The significance of this approach lies in its ability to illuminate the inherent difficulties and tensions within Western civilization. By continuously tracing back to the sources, it enables us to engage with Western modernity from a neutral and detached perspective, rather than through blind worship or uncritical condemnation. The Strauss school and the study of political philosophy once emerged as a prominent area of research in China, reflecting an extension of Chinese academic discourse regarding issues of modernity. Conversely, this trend reveals the Chinese academic community's dissatisfaction with Heidegger's proposed solutions and their deeper reflections on these matters. As Heidegger's disciple, Strauss targeted his critiques directly at Heidegger. According to Strauss, Heidegger, much like Nietzsche, embodies one of the most extreme and detrimental forms of modernity: radical historicism and nihilism.³⁷ In this context, neither knowledge nor behavior adheres to fixed principles; both are subject to historical change and are entirely contingent upon human will rather than reason. Extending this logic to its utmost conclusion, one might assert that no fixed principles or values exist at all. Strauss's critique of Western modernity resonates more closely with the value orientation of traditional Chinese culture than Heidegger's perspective, particularly his advocacy for a return to ancient Greece as a means of positively affirming the natural order of values. This has also become a foundational theoretical basis for domestic cultural conservatism. Under the influence of Strauss, the enthusiasm for political philosophy in the domestic academic community has reached unprecedented heights. A group of domestic scholars, represented by Gan Yang and Liu Xiaofeng, have essentially followed the roadmap outlined by Strauss, translating and studying a series of political philosophy classics, and launching various series of books such as *Classics and Interpretation*, *The Origin of Western Academics*, and *Culture: New Perspectives on China and the World*. For a time, early modern political philosophy has captivated many scholars who recognize that understanding the modern

³⁷ See Leo Strauss, "Three Waves of Modernity", in *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays by Leo Strauss*, H. Giddin (ed.), Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989, 81-98.

world necessitates a return to the foundational thinkers who established its basic principles, thereby revealing both the blueprint and the inherent flaws of early modernity. Concurrently, reflections on modern political philosophy have prompted domestic scholars to focus on the original contexts of ancient Greek and medieval political thought. It is important to note that Chinese scholars have not accepted Strauss's views uncritically; they acknowledge various issues within Strauss's philosophy that have been the subject of long-standing criticism, such as his near-total avoidance of metaphysics and natural philosophy—the areas most profoundly influenced by modern natural science. Additionally, there is a notable lack of engagement with German classical philosophy, which represents the pinnacle of both the Enlightenment and modern philosophy, despite the Chinese Western philosophy community's extensive and deep-rooted scholarship in this area. Chinese scholars have consciously made additions and advancements in the above areas, such as Li Meng's *Natural Society* (2015), Wu Zengding's *Nietzsche and Platonism* (2005), *The Moral Dilemma of Leviathan: Issues and Contexts of Early Modern Political Philosophy* (2012), and other works, although influenced by Strauss's theoretical perspective, have consciously delved into the interconnectedness and complex context of metaphysics and political philosophy.

The Strauss school has generated considerable controversy, particularly in its discussion of “what constitutes classical studies.” Its exploration of classical studies is characterized by clearly defined, problem-oriented questions, such as “the debate between the ancient and the modern,” “the debate between Athens and Hebron,” and “the debate between politics and philosophy.” This approach diverges from the definition of modern classical studies in the Western academic community since the 18th century, which aims to restore the authentic characteristics of ancient Greece and Rome through the study of classical philology, history, archaeology, and art history. The two interpretations of “classical studies” reflect the divergent perspectives of Western academia within different ideological contexts. In 2009, the domestic academic community organized a “Seminar on the 'Current Status and Development of Ancient Greek Philosophy Research in China,’” which actually aimed to explore the significance of ancient Greek philosophy for Chinese scholars and the extent to which they can draw on the resources of ancient Greek thought to help their own academic development.³⁸ The disagreement in the discussion centered on whether it is

³⁸ For a transcript, see https://www.sohu.com/a/281587422_252534. Li Meng clearly points out the significance of ancient Greek philosophy for Chinese scholars reflecting on modernity:

necessary to be faithful to the texts and arguments of the philosophers themselves, or whether it is necessary to understand the West through China's own problem consciousness. Since then, a series of debates have also emerged. Some scholars pointed out that unlike the classical studies with a strong Strauss school flavor that are popular in the Chinese academic community, the Western classical studies community has a history of over a hundred years of development, and its basic characteristic is a high degree of fidelity to documents and materials, emphasizing their careful analysis.³⁹ Following the rise of analytical philosophy, the classical studies community has increasingly adopted analytical philosophical methods to reconstruct the philosophical arguments present in classical texts, aiming to provide ideological resources for contemporary philosophy. The debate between these two interpretations of "classical studies" extends across nearly all fields of philosophical historical research. Key questions include whether to adopt an intellectual history or civilization history perspective to reinterpret traditional philosophy, or whether to strive for a nearly empirical restoration of the thinkers' original ideas. Additionally, should we focus on the significance of philosophical texts within the broader history of thought, or treat them as isolated arguments that emphasize the rigor of their concepts and the reliability of their arguments? In analytical philosophy, there is a disconnection from the history of thought and civilization. This reflects the

"Chinese scholars realized that modern Western philosophy not only weakened the Chinese tradition, but also in a certain sense betrayed the West's own tradition. The 'antiquity' of ancient Greek philosophy and the 'modernity' of Western philosophy are two forces going back and forth against one another, thus providing a path for Chinese thought to oppose Western modernity. Moreover, through using ancient Greek philosophy as a yardstick, it is possible to discover hidden followers of ancient Greek philosophy within modern Western philosophy. With the help of a 'civil war' within modern Western philosophy, space can be opened up for the revival of Chinese intellectual traditions." Li Meng, "Gu Xila zhexue yu women" [Ancient Greek philosophy and us], *Shijie zhexue*, no. 5 (2009): 25-28.

³⁹ The controversy surrounding classical studies is just one case from which one can observe the basic situation of the Chinese intellectual community over the last decade. For some representative viewpoints of the time, see Zhang Wentao, "Gudianxue yu sixiangshi: guanyu weilai Xixue yanjiu zhi yishi he fangfa de sikao" [Classical studies and intellectual history: Reflections on intentions and methodologies for future research on the West], *Zhongguo tushu pinglun*, September 2007:,68-74; Huang Yang, "Xifang gudianxue zuowei yi men xueke de yiyi" [Western classical studies as the purpose of one subject], *Wen Wei Po*, March 26, 2012, 00C; Yu Ying, "Gudianxue zai Zhongguo de shishi feifei" [The right and wrong of classical studies in China], *Wen Wei Po*, February 6, 2015, T07; Ruan Wei, "Gudianxue de xueke shenfen conglai jiu bu danchun" [The disciplinary identity of classical studies has never been simple], *Shehuikexue bao*, March 12, 2015, 006; Nie Minli, "Gudianxue de xinsheng Zhengzhi de xiangxiang, yihuo lishi de pipan?" [The rebirth of classical studies: Political imagination or historical criticism?], *Shijie zhexue*, no.1 (2017): 121-30.

complex entanglement of Weberian and Heideggerian academic traditions mentioned earlier. If we reconstruct philosophy according to Weberian scientific approaches, then philosophy should refrain from making value judgments or providing a comprehensive understanding of humanity and the world, instead focusing solely on clarifying language, knowledge, concepts, propositions, and arguments. Over the past decade, as the specialization of Western studies in China has deepened, these two paths appear to be accelerating their divergence. However, examining the histories of both Chinese and Western philosophy reveals that truly vital philosophies embody the essence of the spirit of their times, suggesting that academia and thought can fully complement and promote each other. This perspective also constitutes the conscious mission of today's Chinese scholars in developing modern Chinese philosophy and advancing the sinicization of Western philosophy.

The sinicization of Western Philosophy Studies and the Independent Exploration of Constructing a Knowledge System of Chinese Philosophy

The history of Western learning's dissemination in China is an intrinsic component of the country's modernization process and unfolds alongside its journey toward modernity. This inevitability leads us to perceive the West through the lens of China's own issues and perspectives. From Marx to Kant and Hegel, and from existentialism to postmodern philosophy; from Heidegger to Strauss, and from analytical philosophy to the scientificization of philosophy, these alternating ideological trends may initially appear as mere academic shifts. However, they underscore our ongoing re-evaluation of Western civilization and modernity. While we do not deny that "Western civilization" is primarily an Other, it is essential to understand the history of the Other, extracting its essence while discarding its dross. Nevertheless, as China modernizes and integrates various Western artifacts, institutions, and concepts, numerous elements of Western civilization have become integral to our own. This transformation renders the sinicization and contextualization of Western philosophy not just a theoretical possibility, but a reality that is actively unfolding and will inevitably occur. The stance we adopt toward Western philosophy shapes our self-understanding of Chinese philosophy and its modern iterations. The pertinent questions are: In what ways do we expect to achieve the sinicization of Western philosophy? What kind of integration do we hope Western philosophy will have with traditional Chinese culture? And what role will it play in the modern

form of Chinese philosophy?

If we re-examine the two ideological tendencies that have emerged over the past decade—“re-reading the West” from the perspective of intellectual and civilizational history, and confronting contemporary philosophical frontiers within the international academic community—we can see that they are underpinned by new developments in identity consciousness. While it is important to acknowledge the anti-enlightenment or cultural conservative value positions held by some followers of Heidegger or Strauss, “re-reading the West” fundamentally embodies a vision that interprets Western civilization through the lens of Chinese civilization’s subjectivity. This slogan emphasizes the establishment of a healthy self and mindset, advocating against merely following in the footsteps of Western philosophy and risking self-diminishment. Only in this way can we avoid “shallowing, instrumentalizing, and universalizing” Western academia, as well as “simplifying, distorting, and demonizing” Chinese civilization.⁴⁰ This attitude parallels the concept of “phenomenological suspension” mentioned in phenomenology, which entails refraining from preconceived value judgments or blind beliefs while approaching our own civilization and others’ with equal scrutiny. Only in this manner can we perceive each civilization’s strengths and weaknesses fairly. The proposition of “re-reading the West” is fundamentally rooted in the perspective of Chinese civilization’s subjectivity. When we trace the origins of Western civilization, we are, in essence, seeking to identify the comprehensive picture of “Western civilization” as an alternative “self” in a civilizational context, which constantly interacts with our own. Furthermore, we must contemplate how we can further integrate with this Other within the broader environment. In this sense, “re-reading the West” serves as a crucial premise for Chinese scholars to strategize the sinicization and contextualization of Western philosophy, as well as a foundation for developing and creating a modern form of Chinese philosophy.

In a “Weberian” framework, the vocation of philosophy aligns more closely with science, and may even be viewed as serving scientific inquiry. Many scholars contend that philosophy addresses universal issues and seeks universal truths, with no distinction between “East” and “West.” The relationship between our academic community and the broader international scholarly community is characterized not by a dichotomy of “self” and “other,” but rather by a collective “we.” Within philosophy, the sole arbiter of knowledge is universal reason.

⁴⁰ Gan Yang and Liu Xiaofeng, “Re-reading the West”, the general preface of the series of *The Origin of Western Academics*, Shenghuo · Dushu · Xinzhi Sanlian Bookstore.

However, scholars who adopt this perspective often utilize the academic tradition established by contemporary analytical philosophy as a benchmark for defining universal issues and academic communities. This reliance creates an inherent challenge, as contemporary analytical philosophy also originates from a specific context within European civilization, possessing its own situational, historical, and particular characteristics. Although reason is a shared human capability, the foundational philosophical beliefs that underlie reasoning vary considerably. Contemporary analytical philosophy frequently accepts certain beliefs from natural science without scrutiny, which is deemed unacceptable by many continental philosophical schools. In this regard, scholars who espouse this position also possess a distinct identity.

It is entirely understandable for individual scholars to perceive themselves as members of the international academic community and to concentrate on advancing research within a specific field. However, when considering the overall development of contemporary Chinese philosophy, Western philosophy researchers in China inevitably encounter significant challenges, such as addressing the relationship between Chinese and Western civilizations and evaluating the traditional ideological heritage of both ancient and modern China. To fully embrace the specialized research trajectories and problem frameworks of the international academic community may entail relinquishing the scholarly legacy of China's 5,000-year-old civilization. For individuals, this primarily concerns academic preferences and self-identity; for the broader domestic academic community, it raises critical questions about whether a nation is prepared to undertake its own civilizational mission, and if so, how it intends to do so. Starting with philosophers such as He Lin, Feng Youlan, Zhang Dainian, Mou Zongsan, Li Zehou, and Ye Xiushan, the pace at which Chinese philosophy absorbs nourishment from Western philosophy to achieve its own creative transformation and innovative development has never stopped, which has almost become the ideological instinct of Chinese philosophy researchers. In today's increasingly industrialized academic landscape, a group of scholars within the Western academic community consciously seeks to inherit the valuable intellectual heritage of Chinese civilization and to establish a dialogue between Chinese and Western philosophy. Over the past decade, it is possible to take a general overview of the efforts made within the Western philosophy community to construct an independent Chinese philosophical knowledge system.

First, based on the basic categories of traditional Chinese philosophy, explore the integration of Chinese and Western philosophy. At present, a group of

scholars in China try to inherit and develop traditional Chinese philosophy in various ways, and in the process of learning from the West, they make traditional Chinese philosophy face various problems and challenges in the modern world, and also use traditional Chinese ideological resources to overcome the theoretical difficulties in Western philosophy. For example, Zhang Xianglong first saw the fit between the Chinese concept of Tian Dao and Heidegger's thought in *Heidegger's Thought and Chinese Tian Dao*. As he delved deeper into Confucianism, he increasingly saw the way to activate traditional Confucianism and give it modern life from the phenomenological description of the original experience of subject-object dichotomy and the experience of living time; he also saw the possibility of overcoming the nihilism and historicism crisis contained in Heidegger's thought from Confucianism, and making the life experience of ancient China such as "loving relatives", "filial piety" and "benevolence" beneficial to modern life.⁴¹ "Filial piety" as a basic life experience of Confucianism gained great ideological power in the phenomenological theory of temporality. Later works such as *From Phenomenology to Confucius*, the four-volume *Lectures on the History of Confucian Philosophy, Revisiting the World: The Implications and Paths of the Return of Confucianism*, and *Family and Filial Piety* all reflect Zhang Xianglong's continuous efforts to integrate phenomenology and Confucianism.⁴² The concept of "family" is a central experience within traditional Confucianism and is thoroughly examined in Sun Xiangchen's "Philosophy of Family." Sun asserts that the family not only served as the primary means by which ancient Chinese individuals understood their world but also plays a significant role in Western traditions. Contemporary society often adopts the atomic individual as the foundational principle for self-construction, yet this perspective ultimately arises from the abstraction of familial experiences. Influential Western philosophers and philosophical movements, including Hegel, Heidegger, Levinas, psychoanalysis, and feminism, have all contributed to

⁴¹ See Zhang Xianglong, "How Does Phenomenology Conduct Confucianism Research?" — On the Affinity of the Methodology of the Two Sides", *Zhejiang Academic Journal [Zhejiang xuekan]*, no. 6 (2020), 68-74.

⁴² For the whole process of Zhang Xianglong's Confucian phenomenological research, see Yuan Tian, "Searching for Philosophy on the Margins, Lively and Seeing the Truth: An Outline of Zhang Xianglong's Phenomenology and Confucianism", in *Chinese Philosophy Yearbook 2023*, China Social Sciences Press, 2024, 299-312; Tang Wenming, "The Implication and Road of the Second Coming of Confucianism", in *Chinese Phenomenology and Philosophy Review (Vol. 32): Zhang Xianglong and the Chinese Moment of Phenomenology (Commemoration of Professor Zhang Xianglong)*, Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 2023: 132-164.

the theoretical discourse surrounding “family.” The synthesis of their insights with ancient Chinese ideological resources offers a pathway to overcoming the crisis of nihilism in modern society and facilitates a “return-type redemption” through the nurturing experience of family.⁴³

In addition to the basic experience of “home”, the two most core categories in Chinese philosophy, “Dao” and “mind and nature”, have also been inherited by contemporary Chinese Western studies researchers, who have made many original contributions. Zhang Xianglong was the first to notice the affinity between ancient Chinese cosmology and Heidegger's phenomenology. This idea has also been further developed by Ding Yun. According to Ding Yun's self-statement, from writing “Being and Yi” (2007), “Shengsheng and Zaozuo” (2012), *Introduction to the Study of Dao* (2019) to the recent two years of Qi theory in the study of Dao, he gradually transitioned from the identifying concepts of Chinese civilization from Yi, Shengsheng to “Dao” or “Daoti”. With the concept of Dao, Ding Yun attempts to simultaneously integrate Chinese and Western philosophy, incorporating the three traditional elements of heart, reason, and qi from both Chinese and Western traditions into the self-expansion and manifestation of “Dao”. “Qi theory in the study of Dao” is a tradition that Ding Yun has placed more emphasis on in recent years. Interpreting “Dao” with “Qi” can simultaneously connect traditional Chinese Qi theory, Western philosophy of power, and even Marx's historical materialism.

In contrast to the “Dao” or “Daoist principles,” there is the “mind and nature” category that has always been emphasized in Chinese philosophy. The ancient Chinese study of mind and nature, especially the Song-Ming school of mind theory, has a natural common domain with Western subjective metaphysics since Descartes, and can also engage in dialogue with ancient Greek and medieval theories of the soul. Among them, “phenomenology of mind and nature” is a particularly noteworthy philosophical path. As early as 1993, Zhang Qingxiong attempted to bridge the gap between the doctrine of only consciousness and Husserl's phenomenology in his doctoral thesis “Xiong Shili's New Theory of Consciousness-Only and Husserl's Phenomenology.” Geng Ning (Iso Kern) and Chen Rongzhao independently noticed in 1994 and 1995 that there are many similarities between phenomenology and the description of consciousness in the doctrine of only consciousness. Scholars such as Huang Yushun, Chen Shaoming, and Zhang Xianglong have also attempted to link

⁴³ See Sun Xiangchen, “Why Home: The Redemption of Modernity”, *Academic Monthly [Xueshu yuekan]*, no.3 (2024), 20-36.

Confucian mind theory with phenomenology. However, the achievements of this period were more fragmented and focused on specific topics. In 2010, Ni Liangkang published "The Order of the Heart: The Possibility of a Phenomenological Mind Theory," which laid a solid theoretical foundation for the concept of "phenomenology of mind-nature"; in 2011, he published "The Research Field and Research Method of Phenomenology of Mind-Nature," which officially declared "phenomenology of mind and nature" as an original school in contemporary Chinese philosophy. According to Ni Liangkang's definition, "phenomenology of mind-nature" covers a vast field that runs through both China and the West. It can be said that as long as it involves the essence and principles of consciousness, mind, or subject, it can be analyzed and examined again in the phenomenological method. This is a major theoretical liberation. In the past decade, scholars such as Ni Liangkang, Fang Xianghong, and Zhang Wei have made a series of efforts to give new vitality to Simeng philosophy, Yangming mind theory, and only consciousness theory under the perspective of phenomenology.⁴⁴ Similarly, Wu Fei's theory of life and death also attempts to coordinate Chinese and Western philosophy from the perspective of the original experience of life. It is noteworthy that he did not place the category of "life and death" in the perspective of Western metaphysics, but reflected on Western tradition from the perspective of Chinese life and death theory, reinterpreting concepts such as existence, universe, and subject in Western philosophy with life and death, and converging them into the common life experience of human beings.⁴⁵ This also extends the concept of "mind and nature" to a richer whole of life.

Second, based on the unique linguistic nature and way of thinking of the Chinese language, we can consider different paths for using Chinese to engage with Western philosophy. In recent years, "Hanese Philosophy" (*Hanyu zhexue*) has become a hot topic in Chinese academia. This trend mainly emphasizes that due to the special grammar and structure of the Chinese language, the

⁴⁴ See Ni Liangkang, "Research Fields and Research Methods of Phenomenology of Mind-Nature (心性现象学)", in *Journal of East China Normal University*, no. 1 (2011), 1-8; Ni Liangkang and Xiang Hong, "Phenomenology in China and Chinese Phenomenology", in *Chinese Social Science Evaluation*, no. 4 (2016), pp. 26-33; Han Xiao, "Two Approaches to Chinese Phenomenology of Dao and Mind", in *Yearbook of Chinese Philosophy 2018*, China Social Sciences Press, 2019, 163-181.

⁴⁵ See Wu Fei, "The Theory of Life", in *Philosophical Trends*, no. 12 (2020), 26-36; "The Oneness of Body and Mind and the Establishment of the Subject of Physiologicalism", in *Chinese Social Sciences*, no. 6 (2022), 71-85.

ideological content and philosophical concepts used in Chinese also have their own uniqueness. The key tasks of Hanese philosophy encompass the following: (1) elucidating the relationship between the fundamental structure of human language and the distinctive forms of Chinese; (2) addressing the interlingual dilemmas inherent in philosophical thought and exploring potential solutions; (3) examining the relationship between philosophical language and its stylistic manifestations; (4) reanalyzing, interpreting, and reconstructing the expressions found in ancient Chinese philosophical literature; (5) rethinking and analyzing metaphysics through the lens of Chinese philosophy, using the concept of Being as a reference; (6) reconsidering the issue of meaning from a Chinese philosophical perspective; (7) conducting a consciousness analysis of classical Chinese theories of mind and nature using contemporary methodologies; (8) promoting integrated studies between modern linguistics and neuroscience through the lens of Chinese philosophical research; (9) investigating the relationship between Chinese thought and social order; (10) exploring the potential limits of cross-cultural ideological exchange in the context of Chinese translations of Western philosophy; and (11) employing the unique characteristics of the Chinese language to develop philosophical theories..⁴⁶ Hanese philosophy seeks to elucidate the specific connections between the Chinese language and philosophical thought, highlighting the new theoretical spaces that emerge within Chinese philosophical discourse. In this context, the challenge of employing Chinese to engage with Western philosophy and the resulting new questions and ideological content that arise from this interaction are critical issues that scholars must confront. More importantly, engaging with Western philosophy through the lens of Chinese not only entails comprehending a “foreign civilization” through a distinct linguistic structure and grammar, but also necessitates integrating Western philosophy into the broader ideological tradition of Chinese academia, transforming the former into an enduring component of the latter. Consequently, Hanese philosophy is inextricably linked to the contextualization of Western philosophy within a reciprocal framework. Specifically, the presence of Western philosophy in China can only thrive in a mutually intertwined relationship with Marxist philosophy and Chinese philosophy, making the integration of the three a historical and ideological inevitability.

⁴⁶ See Han Shuifa, "The Task of Chinese Philosophy", *Guangming Daily*, December 5, 2022 (page 15); Sun Xiangchen, "Outline of "Chinese Philosophy": Original Thought, Domain and Method", *Social Sciences in China*, No. 12, 2021, pp. 153-175.

Third, traditional Chinese ideological resources should contribute to the construction of contemporary philosophy. Unlike the first approach, which consciously anchors itself in the tradition of ancient Chinese civilization and the identity consciousness derived from it to facilitate the integration of Chinese and Western philosophy, an alternative approach does not, or is not primarily, rooted in historical inheritance and cultural identity when applying Chinese philosophy. Some philosophers argue that philosophy fundamentally addresses universal issues, such as the nature of truth and goodness. While different civilizations may provide answers from their unique perspectives, these responses exist within the same theoretical framework as answers from other cultures and should be evaluated through public reason in a process of mutual dialogue and exchange. The tension between the “local” and historical aspects of philosophy, the communicability between different cultures, and the universality of philosophical issues collectively reflect the inherent complexity of philosophy itself. In “The Identity Mystery of Chinese Philosophy,”⁴⁷ Zhao Tingyang explored the nature of sinicization of Chinese and Western philosophy. In his view, “Since philosophy is not a local knowledge, but rather explores all wisdom as its name suggests, it must take universal reason as the main body and all possibilities of thought as the object.”⁴⁸ From this, he derived two propositions: first, a sustainable city of philosophy takes future issues as the object and always reinterprets tradition with future issues; second, philosophy only has a “contemporary” tense, and all philosophy has contemporaneity.⁴⁹ However, this contemporaneity is precisely reflected in its simultaneous inclusion of the past and the future, and understanding of its own past and present from the perspective of future issues. The focus of philosophy on universal issues is explained here as the pursuit of truth concepts that are always possible to obtain in the future. In this perspective, both the traditions of Chinese civilization and Western civilization serve human life in the present, and also serve human understanding and prospects for a better life in the future. Zhao Tingyang's views

⁴⁷ Therefore, the construction of the independent knowledge system of Chinese philosophy should also see the complex relationship between the particularity and universality, localization and internationalization of philosophy in a more comprehensive way, and uphold an attitude that not only respects its own traditions, but is also fully open and inclusive. See Wang Jun, “The Occurrence of the Relationship Structure of Wuwen Xidong: Reflections on the Study of Foreign Philosophy in China and the Construction of China's Independent Knowledge System”, in *Journal of Social Sciences of Jilin University*, no. 2 (2024), 19-24.

⁴⁸ Zhao Tingyang, “The Mystery of the Identity of Chinese Philosophy”, in *Philosophical Research*, no. 7 (2020), 17.

⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, 17-18.

have also caused some controversy. For example, Wang Qi believes that the current work of clarifying the origin of Western "learning" has a constructive significance that cannot be ignored for the creation of thought itself and the exploration of universal issues in philosophy, which enables the differentiated space of Sino-Western dialogue to be truly opened up, without falling into a situation of self-talk.⁵⁰ Wu Fei believes that philosophy focuses on universal fundamental issues, but these fundamental issues are rooted in concrete and vivid experiences, so we should understand the classics of Chinese philosophy in the way philosophy pursues universal issues.⁵¹ Chen Bisheng pointed out from the perspective of traditional Chinese classics that philosophy unfolds in civilization, and China's response to universal issues in philosophy is embedded in the classics. We should maintain the universalist quality of philosophy facing fundamental issues in the position of civilization. From the perspective of Chinese civilization, the continuous reinterpretation of classics constitutes the basic way of "doing philosophy".⁵² These discussions not only involve how to face the ideological heritage of ancient China, but also how to read Western classics, and in what sense can they truly become a fresh force for promoting the spiritual progress of humanity today, rather than just being outdated and pedantic piles of paper.

The sinicization of Western philosophy ultimately emerges as a pragmatic philosophical creation activity. On one hand, it draws on the theoretical resources of Western philosophy; on the other hand, it forges new philosophical avenues by leveraging the unique perspectives and traditions of Chinese philosophy. Notably, this endeavor does not fully embrace the Weberian notion that philosophy should adhere to the dichotomy between facts and values, nor does it adopt the value neutrality characteristic of scientific inquiry. Instead, it revisits the contexts of both Chinese and Western civilizations, striving to re-establish a holistic understanding of humanity and the world. This pursuit aligns with the Chinese academic community's quest to explore a path for modern civilization that is tailored to the Chinese nation. As we progress through the third

⁵⁰ See Wang Qi, "The Study of Western Philosophy as "Academics" and "Thoughts": Starting from the Article 'The Mystery of the Identity of Chinese Philosophy'", in *Philosophical Research*, no. 11 (2020), 48-55.

⁵¹ See Wu Fei, "Why Classics Entered Philosophy?— and Discussion with Mr. Zhao Tingyang", in *Philosophical Research*, no. 11 (2020), 36-47.

⁵² See Chen Bisheng, "Classics and Civilization in 'Doing Chinese Philosophy': Reading Mr. Zhao Tingyang's 'The Mystery of the Identity of Chinese Philosophy'", in *Philosophical Research*, no. 3 (2022), 74-83.

decade of the 21st century, these intellectual efforts are especially invaluable, delineating a blueprint for the future development of Chinese philosophy.

In summary, over the past three decades, research on Western philosophy in China has flourished, with specialized studies advancing systematically and prominent schools such as Heideggerian phenomenology, Straussian political philosophy, and analytical philosophy emerging and exerting profound influences across various domains. As Western learning penetrates the East, Chinese academia has not only introduced contemporary Western thought but has also applied Western philosophy from the perspective of its own traditions amid a heightened awareness of identity. This endeavor has further stimulated and advanced specialized research in numerous fields. While academia and thought do not always align, each possessing its own operational logic, the divergence between them has become increasingly evident in the past decade. Overall, research in Western philosophy in China presents a complex interplay between Weberian and Heideggerian approaches. Although the academic community has increasingly mirrored Weber's depiction of the modern academic landscape in recent years, an alternative path toward constructing an independent knowledge system of Chinese philosophy is continuously emerging. This path encapsulates the ideological contributions of Chinese scholars during the dissemination of Western learning to the East. Through profound reflection on modernity, a group of Chinese scholars strives to devise a comprehensive framework that integrates ancient Chinese ideological traditions with modern Western ideological elements, paving the way for a future lifestyle not only for the Chinese nation but potentially for all humanity. As we progress into the third decade of the 21st century, our expectations are filled with anticipation.

Translated from the Chinese by John O'Leary

Zhang Zhiqiang is a professor at the Institute of Philosophy of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, which he also directs. He also serves as vice president of the Society for the History of Chinese Philosophy. His main research fields are Chinese Buddhism, as well as the academic and intellectual history from the Ming and Qing dynasties to modern times. He is the author of *The Thought of Consciousness-Only School and the Studies of the Consciousness-Only School in the Late Ming Dynasty* (2001), among other books and articles.

Han Xiao is an associate professor at the Institute of Philosophy of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. He is an associate senior editor of the journal *Philosophical Research*. His main research field is contemporary European philosophy, especially phenomenology. He is the author of *Life and World in Later Husserl's Phenomenology* (dissertation, not published yet) and many articles.