The Chinese Idea of a University

Phoenix Reborn

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Introduction

I started writing this book in Hong Kong amid the global outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020. The pandemic was rampant both in Hong Kong and on the Chinese mainland. In Chinese astrology, 2020 is a Metal Rat year. From the traditional Chinese calendar, it is Geng Zi (庚子, the thirty-seventh year of the sixty-year cycle), a calamitous year of a complex series of natural catastrophes. In history, it brings crises: in 1840, the First Opium War with Britain; in 1900, the Boxer Rebellion; and in 1960, the Great Famine that followed the Great Leap Forward, during which an estimated thirty to forty million Chinese died of starvation. However, it is also a year of transformation and growth, symbolizing great change and the ending of past stagnation. As a year and cycle of new beginnings, it helps to nourish any changes that take place in 2020. By the time the final manuscript of this book is submitted to Hong Kong University Press, it will be well after the year 2020. I therefore selected Phoenix Reborn as the subtitle of this book, hoping for a pleasant future of higher education development in Chinese societies.

Another more important reason for me to choose the subtitle is the symbolic meaning of the destruction, renewal, and multi-sourcing origin of the legendary phoenix that expresses the sense I have made of the Chinese idea of a university. In mythology, the symbolism of the majestic phoenix dies and is reborn from the ashes to start a new and long life. From the pile of ashes, a new phoenix arises, young and powerful. The mythical phoenix has been incorporated into many religions, signifying renewal, resurrection, creation, and fresh beginnings. In East Asia, it represents Chinese virtues: goodness, duty, propriety, kindness, and reliability. As this book reveals, the Chinese higher learning tradition is deeply and historically rooted. It differs greatly from that in the West in both epistemology and structure. Modern universities in Chinese societies, however, are patterned after the Western model, after their tradition experienced a baptism of blood and fire in the nineteenth century. Integrating both traditions would open further space for them to explore their own academic model.

Theoretical Grounding

Recent decades have witnessed remarkable higher education development in Chinese societies, including mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore. While the achievements have been widely acknowledged, what lies ahead is much less agreed on. Higher education development in these societies has reached a critical yet uncertain stage. It is important to challenge some long-held notions of doom and gloom about Asia's higher education development based fundamentally on their traditional culture as "twisted roots."[1] However, a closer scrutiny would find that the increasingly appealing note of optimism about higher education development in the societies is not always well founded. There has been insufficient theorization to effectively come to terms with their newly gained experience, especially how it differs from Western experiences, and in what direction it would lead the higher education systems. As these societies, mainland China in particular, are rapidly becoming rising players in global higher education, an examination of the Chinese idea of a university is highly timely and is both theoretically and practically significant.

This book conceptualizes the cultural foundations of modern university development in Chinese societies. Its focus, however, is not centered on the uniqueness of such societies. Instead, it aims to prove that one purpose could be fulfilled via many paths and that most of the characteristics that the university had could be found in other institutions of higher learning. Citing the practices of four selected Chinese societies, it argues that it is possible to combine Chinese and Western ideas of a university. The impasse between them, often suggested by researchers both within and outside these societies, is not well based. The modern research university that developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries differs greatly from the medieval university. Against a backdrop of increasingly intensified globalization, the university today is a global institution rooted deeply in its own national traditions. This is not to suggest Chinese societies could simply emulate Western practices. Rather, this volume calls for bringing history and culture back into the studies of universities.

Echoing a growing awareness of multiple university identities and calls for alternatives to the West's global higher education hegemony,[2] the Chinese idea of a

1. Altbach coined the term to illustrate the cultural conflicts in the development of modern universities in Asia. See Philip G. Altbach, "Twisted Roots: The Western Impact on Asian Higher Education," *Higher Education* 18, no. 1 (1989): 9–29.
2. Scholars have argued that universities in Africa, Asia, and Latin America were often established according to European models. The 'Eurocentric' higher education in those societies has hampered universities in releasing endogenous creativity and seeking their cultural roots, causing tensions between the orientation toward indigenous values and problems on the one hand and addressing global problems on the other. See Simon Marginson, "The West's Global HE Hegemony—Nothing Lasts Forever," *University World News*, March 28, 2014; Adebayo Akomolafe and Ijeoma Dike, "Decolonizing Education: Enunciating the Emancipatory Promise of Non-Western Alternatives to Higher Education" (paper presented at the XII International Seminar on Globalization of Higher Education: Challenges

university comes into people's view as research universities develop and mature in Chinese societies. Higher education development in these societies is fundamentally about the relations between Chinese and Western cultural values. Whether or not the societies can fulfill their long-desired integration between the two value systems is the true meaning of and biggest challenge for their higher education development. The strikingly different traditional cultural roots and heritages have led to continuous conflicts between indigenous and Western higher education values. Although the establishment of modern universities in Chinese societies has been based almost exclusively on Western values, there exists an informal yet powerful system supported by traditional culture. The formally institutionalized Western-style higher education system and the informal Chinese value system often do not support each other. Instead, constant tensions between them reduce the efficiency of university operation. Since modern times, operating Western-style universities in the Confucian context has never been easy for these societies. Due to their divergent historical trajectories, they have adopted different approaches to encountering the West, giving particular meaning to comparisons between them.

However, this has proven much harder than expected. The Western academic model has not been tolerant of alternatives. The definitive feature of autonomy and academic freedom in their strict sense does not exist in the Chinese higher education tradition. In contrast to the healthy tension between truth and power in the West, as Bové has illustrated,[3] Chinese higher education traditionally relies heavily on its relations with the ruling elites. Ever since Dong Zhongshu (179–104 BCE), such a legacy of strong alliance between education and politics has survived dramatic social and cultural changes remarkably and remains deeply rooted among Chinese people. As former president of Yale University Richard Levin has acknowledged,[4] the concept of world-class university is still defined by the strongest American and British universities. China's rich intellectual and higher education legacy becomes a major barrier to the development of its modern universities. Researchers see such an obstacle: Hayhoe contends that there was no institution in the Chinese tradition that could be called a university, while Altbach has long predicted that a kind of "glass ceiling" would be reached for Chinese universities.[5]

& Opportunities, New Delhi, India, January 4–5, 2011); Berte van Wyk and Philip Higgs, "The Call for an African University: A Critical Reflection," *Higher Education Policy* 20, no. 1 (2007): 61–71; Torsten Husén, "The Idea of the University: Changing Roles, Current Crisis and Future Challenges," *Prospects* 21, no. 2 (1991): 171–188.

3. Paul A. Bové, *Edward Said and the Work of the Critic: Speaking Truth to Power* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).
4. Richard Levin, "Top of the Class: The Rise of Asia's Universities," *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 3 (2010): 63–75.
5. See Ruth Hayhoe, *China's Universities 1895–1995: A Century of Cultural Conflict* (New York: Garland, 1996), 10; Philip G. Altbach, "The Asian Higher Education Century?" *International Higher Education* 59, Spring (2010): 4.

Despite fast-growing confidence in the universities in Chinese societies, few have been able to theorize how these universities have developed differently from those in the West. Puzzlement remains regarding their significant features, such as the close alignments in Chinese societies between universities and government goals, and a resulting level of government support that few Western universities are seeing nowadays. Identity-building is doomed to be an arduous task for the universities. Reflecting the general discourse on university development, what has been lacking in the debates is empirically based studies that take cultural values and their actual impact seriously. The deep-rooted cultural heritages have led to continuous conflicts with the dominant Western values that underlie successful operation of modern universities. Meanwhile, both extraordinary achievements and enormous difficulties in the university development in Chinese societies are sufficiently substantial to challenge existing understandings. People wonder about how to come to terms with the current and future university development in these societies and their implications, especially for other non-Western societies.

The Empirical Core

This book attempts to link the historical to the present against a backdrop of an enormous impact of Western academic models and institutions from the beginning of modern universities in Chinese societies all the way to the contemporary period. Its empirical core derived from a General Research Fund project entitled "Integrating Chinese and Western Higher Education Traditions: A Comparative Policy Analysis of the Quest for World-Class Universities in Chinese Mainland, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore" funded by the Research Grants Council, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, during 2015–2017. Focusing on the quest for world-class universities in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore, it was a comparative investigation consisting of eight universities as cases in the four societies.[6] The cases included Peking University (BJ) and Tsinghua University (QH) in mainland China; The University of Hong Kong (HKU) and The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) in Hong Kong; National Taiwan University (TU) and National Tsing Hua University (THU) in Taiwan; and National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore.

The cases were chosen to be representative of comprehensive and technological types of universities in the four selected societies. Cross-case analyses were undertaken to identify common themes and major differences within and between them, to build an understanding of rapidly evolving policies on higher education

6. A case study approach was adopted due to my recognition of both the complexity and the context, informed by Punch. See Keith F. Punch, *Introduction to Research Methods in Education* (London: Sage, 2009).

in the context of globalization. The sampling was purposive, involving the selection of particular societies, particular universities, and particular participants within individual institutions. The societies were chosen based on the following reasons. First, they are mainly of Chinese settlement and share to a great extent Chinese cultural identity that influences both social elites and masses in new, popular, or other varied forms.[7] Second, they have been under considerable Western influences with different historical trajectories. Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore all have a history of colonization. Although mainland China was never a colony, Western models have had immense prestige there. Third, their rapidly improved economic situation allows and even requires them to begin to change their frame of reference in higher education policy.[8]

Within each case study institution, participants were drawn from both administrators and ordinary academics. Initial approach was made to the administration through professional and personal contacts in each society. Administrators were then asked to identify other participants for the study by snowball sampling.[9] In each university, both administrators (the president, other senior executive leaders, and administrators working in international programs) and academic staff members from various faculties of the humanities and social sciences, natural sciences, and engineering were invited to participate. Institutional participants were selected to obtain a range of seniority from assistant to chair/full professor levels and to include both men and women. Many held academic and administrative leadership positions at that time. All participants were required to have at least five years' experience in the university, in order to obtain a sense of the changes in each institution over the time under study.

Document analysis and in-depth semi-structured interviews were used to gather data. For each university, a series of high-level policy documents from institutional mission and/or vision statements, strategic plans, to leaders' speeches were collected, reviewed, and interrogated, to analyze the context for policy on building world-class universities.[10] They were also used to examine the localized context (historical, geographic, social, economic, and cultural dimensions) and specific

7. For a detailed discussion of how Confucian values spread throughout the region in premodern times and how these values were transformed in an age of modernization, see Gilbert Rozman, ed., *The East Asian Region: Confucian Heritage and Its Modern Adaptation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).
8. By creating institutions of global status on their own soil, these societies embrace international norms in the top layer of their universities. For a theoretical analysis of such mechanisms, see Simon Marginson, "Dynamics of National and Global Competition in Higher Education," *Higher Education* 52, no. 1 (2006): 1–39.
9. See Keith F. Punch and Alis Oancea, *Introduction to Research Methods in Education* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014), 212.
10. In the study, documents were seen as a rich source of data for education and social research. See Max Travers, Qualitative Research through Case Study (London: Sage, 2001). The conduct of document analysis followed the instructions in the methodological literature on social research, in particular, Zina O'Leary, *The Essential Guide to Doing Research* (London: Sage, 2004).

policies on becoming world-class in each case study university, prior to the collection of interview data. In-depth semi-structured interviews were scheduled flexibly to encourage participants to talk as much as they pleased on different issues as they arose, "core" questions asked at each case to make comparisons and contrasts for triangulation purposes between different localized sites. They were conducted in either Mandarin or English, depending on the interviewee's preference, and lasted normally for an hour, the shortest for thirty-two minutes and the longest one hour and forty minutes. All interviews were taped and later transcribed (translated and transcribed in the case of those in Mandarin).

There were two stages of analyzing the data set. Stage one identified important themes in answering the research questions, following the approaches suggested by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña.[11] Stage two used the themes for cross-case comparisons. Documents at both societal and institutional levels were collected and analyzed to identify key features of the policy on the world-class university for the society and universities. Collection of the empirical data occurred in May 2014 in Beijing, May 2015 in Taipei, and July 2015 in Singapore and Hong Kong. A total of seventy-one interviews were carried out, nineteen in Beijing, fifteen in Hong Kong, seventeen in Singapore, and twenty in Taiwan. Analysis of interview data was then conducted, followed by the triangulation of data from documents with interview data within and between the cases.

Structure of This Book

Set in a global context, this book consists of five chapters between this introductory chapter that provides readers with a narrative of the book project and a conclusion that summarizes the principal findings and major arguments. Based on a strong belief that cultural traditions play a critical role in the development of modern universities in Chinese societies, Chapter 1 traces the origin of China's higher education, chronicles its later development, and analyzes its major features, often in comparison with the European tradition. The chapter also looks at the cross-border spread of the Chinese tradition to neighboring societies in East Asia and Southeast Asia. Since China's past—imperial or otherwise—strongly shapes its views of the world, of itself, and of its place in the world, the chapter argues that it is time for Chinese policy and intellectual elites to engage in deep introspection on this historical matter.

Chapter 2 is devoted to the perceptions of foreign universities in the nineteenth century and the birth of China's modern higher education institutions. In a context of Chinese-Western civilizational conflicts in the nineteenth century, China's traditional idea of higher learning faced unprecedented challenges from the European

11. Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Source Book* (London: Sage, 2014).

university and experienced a baptism of blood and fire. This chapter first documents Chinese people's early perceptions of the universities in the West and Japan during the second half of the nineteenth century. It then elucidates how China's pioneering thinkers, including intellectuals, officials, and industrialists, explored a Chinese path to modern universities that combines both indigenous and Western traditions. It reveals that the establishment of a Chinese idea of a university predated China's modern universities that did not result from Chinese history. Patterned after Harvard and Yale Universities, Imperial Tientsin University (天津北洋西學學堂, later Beiyang University), established in 1895, was China's first perfectly justifiable modern university to acquire Western knowledge in a comprehensive and systematic manner. The chapter further expounds the great significance of the early endeavors in the histories of Chinese societies.

Chapter 3 critically appraises the literature on the Chinese idea of a university in both English and Chinese languages. Since the nineteenth century, Chinese societies, as latecomers to modernization, have prioritized Western learning. Following European and North American patterns, modern universities were created to serve this purpose, with little linkage to their indigenous cultural traditions. However, operating in Confucian sociocultural contexts, they have been constantly struggling with their cultural identity. This chapter sorts out the scholarly and professional pursuit of this theme internationally in a systematic way. It starts with Philip Altbach's well-known assessment of the tremendous Western impact on Asian higher education development in the 1980s.[12] It then moves across Chinese societies to reassess the discussions of higher learning ideas in both East and West,[13] traditional ideals of a Chinese university,[14] the Confucian model of higher education in East Asia, and the present debates over the new Chinese model for higher education.[15]

12. Altbach, "Twisted Roots."
13. Among those who have contributed to such discussions, the most prominent is Professor Ruth Hayhoe, who has written extensively and profoundly on Chinese higher education and educational relations between East Asia and the West. Her theoretical thrust is particularly in the ways in which cultural values and epistemologies from Eastern civilizations may provide a resource for new thinking in global higher education development. See, for example, *China's Universities 1895–1995*; and Ruth Hayhoe, "Ideas of Higher Learning East and West: Conflicting Values in the Development of the Chinese University," *Minerva* 32, no. 4 (1994): 361–382.
14. There has been a burgeoning body of literature on this theme, published especially in Chinese within the Chinese mainland. Few of such works, however, are well based on a sound understanding of the Western idea of a university. In comparison, a collection of Professor Ambrose King's random thoughts on fifteen divergent themes largely related to the origin, ideal, and development of modern universities, particularly in Chinese societies, has been widely read in Chinese societies. With many brilliant expositions, it covers a wide range of topics on humanism, science, and culture, including general education, the international nature of a university, modernity, globalization, and general educational issues in Chinese societies. See Yeo-chi Ambrose King 金耀基, *Daxue zhi Linian* 大學之理念 [The Idea of a University] (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 2001).
15. Such debates have become heated in a context of a rising Chinese power, due to substantial contributions by writers such as Simon Marginson. See Simon Marginson, "Higher Education in East Asia and Singapore: Rise of the Confucian model," *Higher Education* 61, no. 5 (2011): 587–611; and "'Ideas of a

Starting from Chapter 4, the line of sight turns relatively from the historical to the contemporary and from theory to practice with much incorporation of empirical evidence. With an eye on achievements, Chapter 4 delineates a lively scenario of the impressive progress the societies have made in higher education. The achievement becomes even more remarkable when compared with many other non-Western societies. It demonstrates that a Western-style modern higher education system has been well established throughout these societies. The massification of higher education has provided people with wide access to tertiary institutions. With a strong emphasis on Research and Development (R&D), the research conducted in these universities has also been growing rapidly. Through mainly a lens of the centrality of governance, this chapter details how the universities and systems in the societies have become increasingly similar to their counterparts in North America and Europe, at systemic, institutional, and individual levels.

Reporting findings from the empirical data collected at premier universities in Beijing, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taipei, Chapter 5 substantializes contemporary higher education development in Chinese societies. Viewing the experience as a cultural experiment, it unveils the products of the higher education systems with a bicultural intellectual mind that positions their flagship universities well to combine Chinese and Western ideas of a university in everyday operation. The integration opens space for ways to enrich the idea of a university and calls for a reconceptualized view of modern university development in Chinese societies. Through exploring how they have, and have not, achieved establishing world-class universities on their soil, and how their experience could contribute to the betterment of the idea of a university, the efforts and achievements by Chinese societies indicate that the idea of a university means both challenges and opportunities for them and that a university rooted in Chinese educational heritages does not have to reject Western knowledge while providing services to their communities.

The concluding chapter discusses the historical legacy of the Chinese idea of a university and its modern implications. It points out emphatically that the experience of Chinese societies in their development of higher education is essentially an experiment of interplay between different cultural traditions. It is a process in which higher education plays its most significant role and at the same time is much shaped by it. In a context of global dominance by the Western academic model, the development of modern universities in Chinese societies involves necessarily responding to the overweening power of the West. Since this has indeed been a fundamental challenge to all non-Western societies, the experiment of the Chinese idea of a university is therefore historically unprecedented and globally significant.

University' for the Global Era" (keynote speech delivered at Positioning University in the Globalized World: Changing Governance and Coping Strategies in Asia, Centre of Asian Studies, The University of Hong Kong, December 10, 2008).

Instead of providing an alternative to the Western model, it adds to the idea of a university as an asset that belongs to the entire human society.

All four selected Chinese societies have been struggling with encountering the West for at least one and a half centuries. They have also made great progress in higher education recently. Both their success and failure are substantial enough to challenge the existing interpretations in the literature. Yet, the experiences have been poorly theorized, mainly due to the unsuitability of the lens borrowed uncritically from the West to observe higher education development in the societies. While their experiences differ strikingly from that in the West, they have been measured by the same yardstick. Through incorporating the most recent progress made by the four societies, this book critiques the literature and delves deeply into the theorization of higher education development, especially in non-Western societies. It hopes to demonstrate how researchers studying higher education in Chinese societies, from outside and within, can avoid being bogged down in a quagmire of a tradition-modernity contrast in their interpretation of what is happening to the higher education systems. It also intends to reveal how to overcome an overreliance of the current conceptualization of higher education development in those societies on Western theoretical constructions and calls for new perspectives that give weight to the impact of traditional Chinese ways of cultural thinking on contemporary practices.

2

Perceptions of Foreign Universities in the Nineteenth Century and the Birth of China's Modern Higher Education Institutions

In the Chinese literature, the university was first mentioned by Giulio Aleni (1582–1649) in 1623,[1] an Italian Jesuit missionary during the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. Yet, China's first modern universities did not emerge until the second half of the nineteenth century.[2] To understand their periods of history, we need to observe how the Western idea of a university was conceived and what happened later during the pregnancy. As part of China's early encounters with the West, the birth of modern universities in China must be viewed through the prism of the late Qing dynasty's profound humiliations and transformations. It was a historically

1. Aleni was the first to translate the word "university" into *daxue* (大學), which was drawn from Chinese classics. *Daxue* in ancient China could refer to one of two things: one is the *Great Learning,* which was one of the "Four Books" in Confucianism. The other is the entire higher learning system and its institutions. See Cai Xianjin 蔡先金, "Daxue zhiming yu Zhongguo jindai daxue qiyuan kaobian" 大學之名與中國近代大學起源考辨 [The concept of *daxue* and the origin of China's modern universities], *Journal of Higher Education* 高等教育研究 38, no. 1 (2017): 73–80. According to Hayhoe, there was no institution in Chinese tradition that could be called a university. See Hayhoe, *China's Universities 1895–1995*, 10. The translation, although beautifully expressed and richly supported intellectually, could be misleading for both Chinese and non-Chinese readers if they do not understand each other well. China's ancient situation has little resemblance to what the word means in the West. Therefore, an often-seen circumstance is both sides using the same concept, but they are indeed talking about different things, while at the same time they imagine that the other side has the same understanding. Although the consequence could be quite serious, few researchers have clearly realized this in a theoretical manner, let alone addressing the issue explicitly. For a fuller treatment of this theme, see Rui Yang, "Emulating or Integrating? Modern Transformations of Chinese Higher Education," *Journal of Asian Public Policy* 12, no. 3 (2018): 294–311.
2. A number of institutions lay claim to being the first university in China. Founded as Imperial Peking University (京師大學堂) in 1898 in Beijing as a replacement of the ancient Guozijian, Peking University claims it is the first formally established modern national university of China. Tianjin University, however, makes the same claim on the basis that its predecessor, Imperial Tientsin University (天津北洋西學學堂) and later Peiyang University (北洋大學堂), was set up in 1895. Wuhan University also claims that its processor, Ziqiang Institute (自強學堂), set up in 1893, was the first modern higher education institution. If the nationality of the founders is not taken into account, then St. Paul's College of Macau was a university founded in 1594. It claims the title of the first Western university in East Asia. On the Chinese mainland, Tengchow College (登州文會館) was set up in 1864 in Shandong, by Calvin Wilson Mateer (1836–1908), from the American Presbyterian Mission with the then most sophisticated facilities and infrastructure nationwide, and St. John's University (聖約翰大學) was established in 1879 in Shanghai by American missionaries.

extraordinary period with a series of Western military victories enshrined in "unequal treaties."[3] China's repeated defeats led to growing concern about the superiority of the West and fierce debate about how to respond. Some reform-minded scholars and officials called for the establishment of translation offices and institutions where students could study Western languages and mathematics in addition to Chinese classics. This approach came to be known as "self-strengthening."[4] Its principal goal was to maintain the strong essence of Chinese civilization while adding superior technology from abroad. During the process, the image of a weak backward China adrift in a modern world, bullied by Western powers, started to dominate China's historical memory and national identity. This victim mentality entangled with profound intellectual transformations to add to the complexity, forming the wider context in which universities began to appear.

A Century of Humiliation and Transformation

Until the early nineteenth century, China had been under the illusion that other nations were barbarian and too remote from the center of the civilized world. But China was soon shaken by much more powerful Western nations. In August 1842, China was defeated by the British Empire at the close of the First Opium War. The ensuing century scarred the Chinese psyche, whose prestige as the Celestial Empire was damaged by a series of brutal invasions by the era's great powers. Great Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Russia, and the United States of America all vied for a chunk of the Chinese empire. These events brought China to its knees, and after that, China fell quickly from an exalted position in which Chinese rulers had over the centuries placed their empire in relation to the rest of the world.[5] The Qing government signed a series of "unequal treaties," conceding Hong Kong, Macau, and other major port cities to Western control. China lost one-third of its territory, tens of millions Chinese perished, and China suffered 35 million casualties during World War II. The Chinese consider this period "a century of humiliation" (百年國恥), a period of intervention and subjugation of the Chinese Empire by Western powers and Japan between 1839 and 1949.[6]

3. Dong Wang, "The Discourse of Unequal Treaties in Modern China," *Pacific Affairs* 76, no. 3 (2003): 399–425.
4. Samuel C. Chu and Kwang-Ching Liu, eds., *Li Hung-chang and China's Early Modernization* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994).
5. Stephen Platt, *"New Domestic and Global Challenges: 1792–1860," in The Oxford Illustrated History of Modern China*, ed. Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 37–62; and Robert Bickers, "Restoration and Reform: 1860–1900," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Modern China*, ed. Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 63–89.
6. Alison Adcock Kaufman, "The 'Century of Humiliation,' Then and Now: Chinese Perceptions of the International Order," *Pacific Focus: Inha Journal of International Studies* 25, no. 1 (2010): 1–33.

For China, to develop means to respond to the West.[7] Fairbank's "China's response to the West" and the "impact-response" framework make better sense than what was proposed by its critics.[8] China has had a strong sense of urgency to respond to the West strategically. Its responses can be highly emotional and go to extremes, making China's extraordinary stories of national collapse and revival. The long and painful period of dynastic decline, intellectual upheaval, foreign occupation, civil war, and revolution urged China to achieve national rejuvenation. A common goal that unites Chinese people is their determined pursuit of *fuqiang* (富強, wealth and power).[9] Over the last one and a half centuries, generations of Chinese have relentlessly pursued the goal of restoring China's greatness, motivated by a profound sense of shame and humiliation.[10] The historical experiences are the driving force for China to go from a ramshackle, quasi-feudal empire into one of the great powers of the twenty-first century. China has recently managed to burst forth onto the world stage with an impressive run of hyper-development and wealth creation, culminating in extraordinary dynamism. Its ascent demonstrates how the legacy of China's humiliation continues to have wide-reaching consequences as China plays a greater role in world affairs today.

The experience of subjugation and humiliation has become a central element of Chinese identity today. This sense is deeply entrenched in the Chinese psyche. The abiding quest for a restoration of national greatness in the face of a "century of humiliation" at the hands of Western powers even comes to define the modern Chinese character. The psychic trauma of historical memories of subjugation was inflicted on China's generations of ruling elite and intelligentsia. The determined quest remains the key to understanding many of China's actions today. A "strong nation" mentality still defines Chinese official worldview. The escalating tensions between China and the United States, up to the end of October 2021, can be seen as the latest phase in a continuing historical process: the remaking of China's ancient glory under the stimulus of Western contact. The West has mostly forgotten about the historical events, the Opium Wars relegated to a brief footnote in history, but

7. This is despite the rhetoric that modernization does not equate with Westernization. Such a theme has been well documented with classic questions including whether or not the unique Western value system needs to be transferred and how necessary are the cultural underpinnings in the form of a set of "modern" values based on individualism, as suggested by Hayek. There has been a huge body of literature and various arguments. See, for example, Deepak Lal, "Does Modernization Require Westernization?" *Independent Review* 5, no. 1 (2000): 5–24.
8. During the 1980s, Cohen presented his sympathetic critique of the dominant paradigms associated with John K. Fairbank. However, his interpretation has substantially less explanatory power. See Têng Ssu-yü and John K. Fairbank, *China's Response to the West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954); and Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
9. A more accurate translation of *fuqiang* is "prosperity and strength."
10. This is the central theme permeating Orville Schell's and John Delury's book *Wealth and Power*. See Orville Schell and John Delury, *Wealth and Power: China's Long March to the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Random House, 2013).

the Chinese have never forgotten that shame. Their sense of shame and humiliation has been underpinning the Chinese mentality until today. While China might need to walk out of the shadow of its unfortunate past and be a confident global player, for non-Chinese, especially those in the West, understanding Chinese psychology and acknowledging there might be another worldview that is as valid as theirs can help formulate policies that will avoid miscalculations and unnecessary conflicts.

With "the biggest change in more than three thousand years" as described by Li Hongzhang (李鴻章, 1823–1901),[11] the past one and a half centuries have been particularly soul-stirring to the Chinese people. Since the mid-nineteenth century, Chinese intellectuals have turned to the West for truth. China's modern education system has since been built upon Western experience, with little space for China's vast indigenous intellectual traditions. The promulgation of the "Authorized School Regulation" (欽定學堂章程) in 1902 marked an irrevocable break in the historical trajectory of the Chinese intellectual mind.[12] To some extent we can have a very broad generalization about Chinese intellectual history by dating it to two periods: pre-1902 and post-1902; that is, the traditional Chinese system up to the event and the Western system after it. The adoption of the Western system is based on a revolutionary break from China's long and rich traditions. Universities are both part of the reason for and a result of such a historical development. China's legitimized knowledge system shifted from traditional learning to Western intellectual formation. Indigenous Chinese intellectual traditions were driven out of their homeland as Western knowledge became institutionalized despite China's long and rich traditions in higher learning as the world's oldest and most durative civilization.

Facilitated by guns and ships, Western knowledge and value won the race and control the Chinese mind since the late Qing dynasty. Both institutionally and ideologically, this means a fundamental shift away from China's long and rich traditions. In an interview by *Philosophy Now* in 1999, Tu Wei-ming called this "a kind of collective amnesia, a loss of memory, in the sense of alienation from our own traditions."[13] The "loss of memory" is due to a drastic transformation from rich Chinese intellectual traditions to the Western knowledge system during the early twentieth century. The adoption was "more a matter of survival than of choice,"[14]

11. Li Hongzhang 李鴻章, "Chouyi zhizao lunchuan weike caiche zhe" 籌議製造輪船未可裁撤折 [Memo on not abandoning the manufacture of ships] (20 June 1872), in *Li Hongzhang quanji, vol. 5* 李鴻章全集 [Collected works of Li Hongzhang], ed. Gu Tinlong 顧廷龍 and Dai Yi 戴逸 (Hefei: Anhui Education Press, 2008), 109.
12. In 1902, Zhang Baixi (張百熙, 1847–1907), then-minister for education, drafted the "Authorized School Regulation" (欽定學堂章程), alternatively called Renyin Educational System (壬寅學制), "renyin" (壬寅) being the year 1902, which was put into effect by the Qing government. In 1904, Zhang participated in the establishment of the "Presented School Regulation" (奏定學堂章程, called "Guimao Educational System" 癸卯學制), "guimao" (癸卯), being the year 1904, which was the first modern Chinese educational system.
13. Anja Steinbauer, "Interview with Tu Wei-ming," *Philosophy Now* 23, Spring (1999): 28–31.
14. Yongling Lu and Ruth Hayhoe, "Chinese Higher Learning: The Transition Process from Classical Knowledge Patterns to Modern Disciplines 1860–1910," in *Transnational Intellectual Networks: Forms*

4

Increasingly Alike: Formal Resemblance

Over fifteen years ago, Schofer and Meyer employed an institutional theoretical lens and pooled panel regressions to analyze the rapid worldwide expansion of higher educational enrollments over the twentieth century. In nearly all types of countries they found similar growth patterns. The expansion was sharply accelerated after 1960. They argued that a new model of society was becoming institutionalized globally.[1] In a similar theoretical vein, Zapp and Ramirez recently analyzed the formation of a global educational regime and its influence on isomorphism. This regime is supported by a rapidly growing network of international organizations that focus on conferences, initiatives, and programs supporting a global higher education agenda, by a fast increasing number of international and national accreditation agencies, by parallel increases in regional qualification frameworks, and in the implementation of national qualification frameworks. These developments combine to create integration pressures on national higher education systems.[2]

Against such a backdrop, more and more people in Chinese societies question whether or not they are on course for a global homogenization of higher education. Indeed, signs of both homogenization and differentiation are evident in higher education in Chinese societies, depending on which dimension one looks at and what lens one employs. On closer examination, one sees that higher education institutions in the societies are neither becoming strictly homogeneous and isomorphic at an institutional level nor highly differentiated and polymorphic at the sectorial and systemic level. For Chinese societies, modern universities were established based on Western experiences as a response to the West.[3] Reformers took them as a major approach to learning from Western powers.[4] They were latecomers in modern higher education, and their development means to a great extent becoming similar to Western systems and institutions, especially in infrastructure, standards,

1. Evan Schofer and John W. Meyer, "The Worldwide Expansion of Higher Education in the Twentieth Century," *American Sociological Review* 70, no. 6 (2005): 898–920.
2. Mike Zapp and Francisco O. Ramirez, "Beyond Internationalization and Isomorphism: The Construction of a Global Higher Education Regime," *Comparative Education* 55, no. 4 (2019): 473–493.
3. See Têng and Fairbank, *China's Response to the West*; and Cohen, *Discovering History in China*.
4. Kirby, "The World of Universities in Modern China."

measures, and organizational behaviors. It is thus positive to note that, within a relatively short period of one and a half centuries, the societies have learned from the West remarkably well to establish their highly institutionalized modern higher education systems and institutions.

Observers have different assessments of higher education development in Chinese societies, often due to the perspectives they have employed consciously and unconsciously. They tend to be lopsided and stress the hardware much more than the software. The frame of reference is also to be noted, particularly because the development appears to be different when compared with that in Western and other non-Western societies. Far too often researchers, both Chinese and non-Chinese, tend to evaluate higher education achievements in Chinese societies according only to the experience from the West, failing to see the extraordinary accomplishment that becomes much more remarkable when it is put side by side with that from other non-Western societies.[5] As a matter of fact, after a century of arduous work, Chinese societies have made substantial achievements in higher education in learning from the West. They have all established a Western-style higher education system, with strong capacity in research and innovation as well as fast growth in scientific output.

Institutional Infrastructure

As noted in previous chapters, China has a rich tradition in higher learning. Yet, modern universities are an imported concept for Chinese societies. Although China's earliest institutions of higher learning appeared in the Western Zhou dynasty, its modern higher education system was introduced from the West as a social institution during the second half of the nineteenth century. This foreign transplant has now taken root in all Chinese societies, where path and trajectory diversity in higher education development began to widen when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came into power on the Mainland in 1949. Since then, higher education development in mainland China has experienced twists and turns as a result of international and domestic sociopolitical turbulences, such as "Leaning to One Side,"[6]

5. While the achievement has been widely acknowledged, assessment of future development is not. The strikingly contrastive assessments among scholars are often due to their perspectives employed both consciously and unconsciously in their research. The current conceptualization of higher education development in Chinese societies relies almost entirely yet highly inappropriately on Western theoretical constructions. The perspectives that give weight to the impact of traditional Chinese ways of cultural thinking on contemporary development are badly needed. I have done some analyses of similar issues with assessment of higher education development in East Asia. See Rui Yang, "Foil to the West? Interrogating Perspectives for Observing East Asian Higher Education," in *Researching Higher Education: History, Development and Future*, ed. Jisun Jung, Hugo Horta, and Akiyoshi Yonezawa (Singapore: Springer, 2018), 37–50.
6. On the eve of the establishment of New China, between the spring and summer of 1949, Mao Zedong advanced the principle of "leaning to one side." It declared that China would lean to the side of the socialist camp headed by the Soviet Union on the opposite of the imperialist camp headed by the United States. See Shen Zhihua and Li Danhui, *After Leaning to One Side: China and Its Allies in the*

and the Cultural Revolution (formally the Great Proletarian Cultural revolution, 1966–1976).[7] The recent thirty-five years have witnessed particularly impressive achievements. The system has been quickly transformed into the world's largest in number of students and teachers and the second largest producer of scientific papers so far. It has been well established as contributing to the rise of the Chinese power.

Higher education institutions on the Chinese mainland are divided into two sectors: regular and adult higher education. The regular sector is the mainstream, including four-year universities and colleges and two- and three-year specialized college programs, leading to a bachelor's degree and a diploma respectively. The adult sector includes two- and four-year diploma programs of study. Students in the regular sector are overwhelmingly full-time, while students in the adult sector are usually part-time. In 2020, 41.83 million students enrolled in mainland China's 2,738 regular and 265 adult higher education institutions, a gross enrollment rate of 54.4 percent. Annual postgraduate admissions reached 1.1 million, 116,000 and 990,500 respectively at doctoral and master's levels, and a total of 3,139,600 at-school postgraduate students. Teaching and administrative staff reached 2,668,700 with 1,833,000 full-time teachers and a student-teacher ratio of 18.37:1. There were 771 private higher education institutions, enrolling 2,556 master's students and 7,913,400 undergraduate and associate degree students.[8]

Higher education development accelerated greatly after the Mainland adopted reform and opening-up policies in 1978. Since then, establishing closer links

Cold War (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011). Higher education was patterned on the Soviet practices that were featured by pragmatism of practical training and clear specializations. See Alexander G. Korol, *Soviet Education for Science and Technology* (New York: Wiley and the Technology Press, 1957); Alex Kuraev, "Soviet Higher Education: An Alternative Construct to the Western University Paradigm," *Higher Education* 71, no. 2 (2016): 181–193. Although little documented, Soviet influence penetrated deeply into the entire sector and has since exerted a significant and lingering impact on China's reform and development in higher education. See Leo A. Orleans, "Soviet Influence on China's Higher Education," in *China's Education and the Industrialized World: Studies in Cultural Transfer*, ed. Ruth Hayhoe and Marianne Bastid (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1987), 184–198. The main lessons learned from the Soviet Union revolved around thought reform and structural reorganization. For a detailed account of China's learning from the Soviet Union in education, see Suzanne Pepper, *Radicalism and Education Reform in 20th-Century China: The Search for an Ideal Development Model* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 157–258.

7. The period of the Cultural Revolution was the most destabilizing decade in modern Chinese history. It forced a very different educational shutdown that devastated a generation, hobbled their opportunities for life, and has reshaped China's approach to schooling ever since. According to some, it is one of the biggest disruptions to education in the modern world. There has been a vast body of literature on the impact of the Cultural Revolution on China's education. See, for example, Julia Kwong, *Cultural Revolution in China's Schools, May 1966–April 1969* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1988). Recently, there has been some new evidence on its educational disruptions. See John Giles, Albert Park, and Meiyan Wang, "The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, Disruptions to Education, and the Returns to Schooling in Urban China," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 68, no. 1 (2019): 131–164.

8. Ministry of Education, "National Education Statistics Bulletin in 2020" 2020年全國教育事業發展統計公報 (Ministry of Education, 2021), http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_sjzl/sjzl_fztjgb/202108/t20210827_555004.html.

between higher education and the market has been a prominent reform orientation. On the phasing out of the planned economy and a much-altered role of the state, the government became increasing reluctant to continue to subsidize students. Fees started to become a reality. The rapid expansion of higher education since 1999 further accelerated this trend. The Higher Education Law (Article 13, Chapter I) stipulates decentralization in the mainland Chinese system by stating while "the State Council shall provide unified guidance and administration for higher education throughout the country," local governments "shall undertake overall coordination of higher education in their own administrative regions, administer the higher education institutions that mainly train local people, and the higher education institutions that they are authorized by the State Council to administer."[9]

Mainland public higher education institutions are increasingly corporatized, especially since the 1990s.[10] They are expected to raise a great proportion of their own revenue, enter into business enterprises, acquire and hold investment portfolios, encourage partnerships with private business firms, compete with other universities in the production and marketing of courses to students who are seen as customers, and generally engage with the market for higher education. They are run as a business producing and selling knowledge, increasingly see their students as customers or clients, and enroll as many students as possible to improve efficiency. Many public universities have a private arm (independent colleges, for example) to maximize financial gains. Corporation is also evident in other major aspects of university operation, including research. Cost-conscious corporatized universities have caused the placing of technique above ends or values, leading to the decline of the classical disciplines. The organizational principles employed under this type of regime do not engender the long-term commitment of academic staff.[11]

9. Ministry of Education, "Higher Education Law of the People's Republic of China" 中華人民共和國高等教育法 (Ministry of Education, 2009), http://en.moe.gov.cn/documents/laws_policies/201506/t20150626_191386.html.
10. For example, in the mid-2000s, two Korean researchers, Jong-Hak Euna and Keun Lee, worked collaboratively with Guisheng Wu from China's Tsinghua University to explore the experience of university-run enterprises in developing countries and their implications for the Chinese mainland. They found that Mainland universities since the market-oriented reform had a strong propensity to pursue economic gains and strong internal (R&D and other) resources to launch start-ups, and established their own firms. See Jong-Hak Euna and Keun Lee, "Explaining the 'University-Run Enterprises' in China: A Theoretical Framework for University-Industry Relationship in Developing Countries and Its Application to China," *Research Policy* 35, no. 9 (2006): 1329–1346.
11. Therefore, most mainland Chinese universities try to develop the relevant organizational structures and incentives. For the shape, the scope, and channels of university-industry linkages and their incentives to encourage and facilitate engagement with industry, see Weiping Wu, "Managing and Incentivizing Research Commercialization in Chinese Universities," *Journal of Technology Transfer* 35, no. 2 (2010): 203–224. The case study of two leading institutions in Shanghai, Fudan University and Shanghai Jiaotong University, shows that the product is often a combination of various factors, including historical legacy and institutional learning. In spite of being enticed to disclose inventions and pursue commercialization, university academics continue to be more interested in scholarly work.

Conclusion

In an essay on the historical trajectory of Christian higher education, Perry L. Glanzer borrowed the old iron curtain of communism only for the purposes of convenience, to divide Western and Eastern Europe, and declaimed that "universities as we know them today originated in Western Europe and not in other parts of the world."[1] He was echoing Jacques Verger, who earlier affirmed:[2]

> No one today would dispute the fact that universities, in the sense in which the term is now generally understood, were a creation of the Middle Ages, appearing for the first time between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It is no doubt true that other civilizations, prior to, or wholly alien to, the medieval West, such as the Roman Empire, Byzantium, Islam, or China, were familiar with forms of higher education which a number of historians, for the sake of convenience, have sometimes described as universities. Yet a closer look makes it plain that the institutional reality was altogether different and, no matter what has been said on the subject, there is no real link such as would justify us in associating them with medieval universities in the West. Until there is definite proof to the contrary, these latter must be regarded as the sole source of the model which gradually spread through the whole of Europe and then to the whole world. We are therefore concerned with what is indisputably an original institution, which can only be defined in terms of a historical analysis of its emergence and its mode of operation in concrete circumstances.

To non-Western societies, modern universities are indeed an imported concept. They originated from Europe, spreading worldwide from the mid-nineteenth century to the present time, mainly due to colonialism. Even the countries that

1. Perry L. Glanzer, "Will the Parent Abandon the Child? The Birth, Secularization, and Survival of Christian Higher Education in Western Europe," in *Christian Higher Education: A Global Reconnaissance*, ed. Joel A. Carpenter, Perry L. Glanzer, and Nicholas Lantinga (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 135.
2. Jacques Verger, "Patterns," in *A History of the University in Europe*, vol. 1, *Universities in the Middle Ages*, ed. Hilde de Ridder-Symoens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 35.

escaped colonial domination adopted Western models as well, as Philip G. Altbach wrote:[3]

> All university systems are a combination of national and international traditions. The basic model is European and goes back to the medieval universities of Paris and Bologna. These are the antecedents not only for the universities in North America and Europe, but also in Asia and Africa.

The inherited Western ideal of the solitary mendicant scholar, free to roam without interference and speak truth to the prelate and the prince, sits uneasily alongside the immense resources invested in contemporary universities charged with driving innovation, industry, and business in highly competitive national and international markets.[4] This is the basic reason for university inefficacy in non-Western societies.[5] In the case of Chinese societies, the strikingly different cultural roots and heritages have led to continuous conflicts between their traditional and the imposed Western values. Attempts to indigenize the Western idea of a university started, in a piecemeal way, with Matteo Ricci's arrival in China, which was the prologue to a massive play of China's embrace of Western learning. Foreign, especially American, missionary universities were set up in China and quickly became nationally and even internationally leading,[6] followed by China's earliest modern universities established by the Chinese. The lean to the former Soviet Union in the 1950s was also part of China's learning from and response to the West.[7] Recent decades have witnessed China's reentry into the international community. China looks again to the West for policy ideas and solutions to their own social problems.

Higher education systems in Chinese universities are twofold, the institutionalized one that is based on imported Western ideas and another informal (yet powerful) one that is underpinned by traditional values.[8] Although Western academic models have been shaping the universities over the twentieth century, bringing together aspects of their traditional and Western heritages has continued to be an arduous and unfinished task, ever since the nineteenth century. How the adopted

3. Altbach, "The American Academic Model in Comparative Perspective," 15.
4. John Fitzgerald, "Academic Freedom and the Contemporary University: Lessons from China," *Humanities Australia: The Journal of Australian Academy of the Humanities*, no. 8 (2017): 8–22, https://www.humanities.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/AAH-Hums-Aust-08-2017-Fitzgerald.pdf.
5. See Yang, "Self and the Other in the Confucian Cultural Context," 36.
6. Shen Dingping and Zhu Weifang, "Western Missionary Influence on the People's Republic of China: A Survey of Chinese Scholarly Opinion Between 1980 and 1990," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 22, no. 4 (1998): 154–158.
7. Perception of Russia and the Soviet Union is different in China from that in the West. In cultural and knowledge terms, Chinese people view Russia and the Soviet Union as part of the West, even if they might acknowledge it is a somewhat different from other parts of the so-called Western world. See Lo Bobo, *How the Chinese See Russia* (Paris: ifri Russia/NIS Center, 2010); and Sebastian Kaempf, "Russia: A Part of the West or Apart from the West?" *International Relations* 24, no. 3 (2010): 313–340.
8. I have discussed the two systems in my previous works. See, for example, Yang, "Reassessing China's Higher Education Development."

system functions in the societies depends much on its interactions with old traditions that remain deeply entrenched in people's mind and action. The cultural conflicts between Chinese and Western traditions have caused inefficacy of the higher education sectors in their service to the societies, both failing to grasp the essence of the Western academic model and losing the legacy of their higher learning traditions. None of the societies have figured out how to wed the standard norms of Western higher education with their traditions. The Western concept of a university has been taken only for its practicality.

Value disorder and confusion move beyond campuses. Since the institutionalization of the Western knowledge system, conflicts at the ideological level have never stopped. Although their intellectual mind should never be entirely transformed according to Western experiences, modern knowledge systems in all Chinese societies have been patterned after Western practices. The shift is part of their profound social transformation since the nineteenth century. At the same time, the complexity is that, even with their well-established modern knowledge systems that are based entirely on Western experience, all the societies continue to be greatly influenced by traditional values. Since the traditions have not been coherently incorporated into the institutionalized system, their legitimated knowledge does not match their socioeconomic realities. Therefore, despite some differentiation within the societies, they share certain ideological confusion that has been in the making ever since their early encounters with the West in the nineteenth century. The confusion is particularly evident among the educated elites, who often feel spiritually homeless and unsettled.

However, historical experience and lessons deserve our attention. For example, China successfully created a number of world-class universities over a century ago in its modern era of suffering. Such a fact is particularly significant for the theme of this book, because it demonstrates how tremendously China's early modern higher institutions achieved in integrating Chinese and Western ideas of higher learning. It proves that it is possible, albeit extremely difficult, for Chinese educators to adapt a Western model of the university to their Chinese situations. As a revealing facet of modern Chinese history, the achievement has great implications for university development today and deserves much research, especially when China intensifies the aspiration to catapult its premier universities to the forefront of global rankings. Unlike the Western idea of a university that developed as practical experience accumulated, the Chinese understanding of modern universities predated practice and came fast to its adulthood during the Late Qing reforms. Its high achievement in learning from the West was never surpassed later—not by the Communist Mainland, by Nationalist Taiwan, or by colonial Hong Kong.

Since the early twentieth century, missionary colleges have exerted a historical influence on the initial development of Chinese higher education and reached a considerably high level of sophistication of cultural hybridization of Chinese and Western intellectual traditions, even with a global vision of scholarship and a

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