# Incorporating Traditional Chinese Knowledge in Research

## The Case of Chinese Humanities and Social Sciences

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CGHE Webinar 14 February 2023

# Content

# Part 1

## Introduction

Chinese humanities and social sciences

research in global knowledge asymmetry

# Intellectual Pluriversality

### *Global knowledge asymmetry*

Globalisation results in the epistemic and cultural violence of Western centrism, as well as intense knowledge exchanges (Mignolo, 2018).

Several theories, including the Southern theory (Connell, 2007) and the centre-periphery model (Altbach, 2009), have provided critical reflections on the global knowledge asymmetry (Alatas, 2003).

### *Definition of Intellectual Pluriversality*

Intellectual pluriversality can be understood as a decolonial desire to break the dominance of Western (Anglo-American) epistemology and universalising tendencies, and a call for the coexistence of diverse epistemologies from many worlds (Mignolo, 2018; Oslender, 2018).

# Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) Research

***Typical Features of HSS Research***

HSS subjects are more socially and culturally based on the indigenous context (Yang, 2014), resulting in more tensions between local and global, traditional and modern epistemic practice for non-Western scholars.

***The Role of Traditional Knowledge in Promoting Intellectual Pluriversality***

Non-Western HSS research framed by Western-dominated epistemology may be unable to address non-Western societies' unique local needs and certain globally prevalent issues (Ahmad, 2018). Traditional knowledge in non-Western societies can be viewed as alternative intellectual resources, which may promote epistemic justice and diversity.

# The Case of Chinese HSS Research

### 🔍 *Traditional Chinese Knowledge*

This study understands traditional Chinese knowledge as a vast body of knowledge that originated in pre-modern China and has evolved over time.

### ⚙️ *Chinese Intellectual Traditions as Global Resources*

"Having been learning from the West for over a century with extraordinary success, together with rich and long indigenous intellectual traditions, Chinese scholars are ideally placed to make such break-throughs, searching for new approaches to educating students to be capable of navigating between different intellectual traditions, and by extension to respond to global common challenges… The human sciences then differ from natural sciences by seeking to clarify the self-explanations of social actors and articulate the norms that are essential to those explanations, instead of discovering natural causal laws (Taylor, 1985). Against this backdrop, Chinese intellectual traditions become great resources to contribute to global theoretical construction. (Yang, 2022, p.5)"

# Research Focus

***Research Question***

 Through the case of Chinese scholars in HSS, this study focuses on their recent attempts in dealing with Chinese and Western knowledge in order to promote intellectual pluriversality.

***Significance of the Study***

 The study advocates to incorporate traditional Chinese knowledge as global intellectual resources in research as one of the initial and effective steps towards realising intellectual pluriversality.

 The findings have implications for fuelling non-Western humanities and social science scholarship while also providing intellectual resources to global higher education.

# Method

### **Interviews**

The purposeful sampling was based on extensive reading about tackling Chinese and Western knowledge. We developed a sampling frame to select scholars according to the distribution of areas, subjects and age groups.

Twenty HSS academics who originated from mainland China were interviewed.

### **Thematic Analysis**

This study employed thematic analysis to describe and explain how Chinese HSS academics promote mutual respect and understanding between Chinese and Western knowledge, which was not well clarified in previous research and was difficult to grasp.

## Participants

| Pseudonym | Age Groups | Gender | Research Fields | City of the University |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Henry | 1965s | Male | Modern and contemporary Chinese literature, literacy theory | Guangzhou |
| Luke | 1980s | Male | Modern Chinese literature | Beijing |
| Zak | 1960s | Male | Chinese intellectual history | Shanghai |
| York | 1960s | Male | History of Qing dynasty and modern China | Beijing |
| Sam | 1965s | Male | Western philosophy | Shanghai |
| Park | 1965s | Male | Chinese philosophy | Hangzhou |
| Tom | 1970s | Male | Ethics, Chinese philosophy, religious studies | Beijing |
| Sean | 1970s | Male | Marxist philosophy | Beijing |
| Luis | 1970s | Male | Aesthetics | Beijing |
| Jason | 1975s | Male | Chinese Philosophy, Confucian classics | Beijing |
| Jim | 1975s | Male | Analytic philosophy | Shanghai |
| Charles | 1970s | Male | History of archaeological thought, prehistorical archaeology | Beijing |
| Zoe | 1965s | Male | Political anthropology, sociology of law | Beijing |
| Larry | 1970s | Male | Ethnographic theory, local cosmology, Asia-Pacific ethnography | Hangzhou |
| Ted | 1965s | Male | Western political thought | Beijing |
| Ralph | 1975s | Male | History of political thought, contemporary political theory | Beijing |
| William | 1975s | Male | History of law and society, traditional Chinese governance and justice | Shanghai |
| Howell | 1960s | Male | History of education discipline | Taiyuan |
| Wesley | 1980s | Male | History of higher education, management of higher education | Beijing |
| Lucian | 1980s | Male | Traditional Chinese philosophy of education | Beijing |

# Part 2

The Role of Traditional Chinese Knowledge in Promoting Intellectual Pluriversality in Global Knowledge Circulation

## Revisiting Traditional Chinese Knowledge in Response to the Epistemic Injustice in Global Knowledge Transfer

*There are two forms of promoting mutual respect and understanding between Chinese and Western Knowledge.*
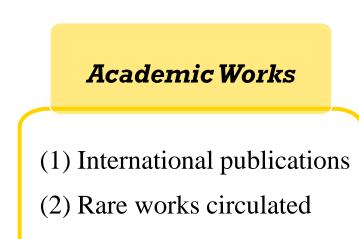
**International Academic Mobility**

(1) International visits for study and research

(2) International conferences

(3) Research collaboration

**Academic Works**

(1) International publications

(2) Rare works circulated overseas

***International Academic Mobility***

***— Direct Bridging through Human Interactions***

Among 20 participants, 15 participants explicitly mentioned their academic mobility as visiting scholars (over one year) and 2 participants mainly shared their overseas doctoral study. As a scholar born in the early 1960s, York argued: "The exchange and communication between China and the West is no longer a problem. For our generation, I think it is still very difficult to go abroad when we were [university students] in the 1980s."

He critically reflected on the intellectual independence of some Chinese scholars who were used to following the Western academic standard in order to establish a global reputation. He thought they might be manipulated by Western norms and practices, including attending academic conferences, visiting famous Western universities and publishing international papers.

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## *Academic Works*

## — *Indirect Bridging through Materials*

Ralph emphasized that Yan Fu's translation works transported much Western knowledge to China in the late 19th century and early 20th century, such as the theory of evolution which was impactful on younger Chinese generations at that time.

Tom perceived "adopting a Western philosophical approach to studying the traditional Chinese philosophy" as "a product of bridging China and the West" because "it is different from the ancient practice".

# *Epistemic Injustice*

## —*Chinese HSS academics knew too little about their own traditional knowledge, which in turn demonstrated the urgency of learning traditional knowledge.*

York articulated: "The problem is that you don't know enough about Chinese learning. Now, there are people in China who have studied in the West and are proficient in English. However, the issue is… their understanding of Chinese tradition is too limited and superficial."

He attributed this phenomenon to the "long period of anti-tradition" before the 1990s for several generations.

# Promoting Traditional Chinese Knowledge to Truly Achieve Two-dimensional Exchanges

*Chinese HSS academics need to engage in more international activities in order to increase China's cultural impact on the global knowledge system, thereby drawing attention to traditional Chinese knowledge.*

Wesley argued: "You must publish, and you must speak at international conferences. You must allow others to see you, gradually increasing your visibility and influence."

In this case, Chinese academics showed greater willingness "to revisit and reconstruct" the cultural tradition while increasing "the degree of internationalisation" (Ralph).

***Participants highlighted providing alternative discourse based on local knowledge in internationalisation.***

Howell: "As the knowledge at the frontier has been changing rapidly, going global should be the goal of constructing China's academic discourse system as well as the direction that young scholars should strive for".

Wesley: "Perhaps the next step for [Chinese scholarship] is to improve the international influence of local research, which I think [is a] focus."

Park proposed the idea of bringing Chinese knowledge to the West: "We bring [Chinese knowledge] into the Western discourse and the Western context. We provide the West with the resources of our Chinese tradition in response to some of their problems."

# Part 3

The Directions for Incorporating Traditional

Chinese Knowledge in Knowledge Production

# Promoting Mutual Understanding between Chinese and Western Knowledge in Research

### *Focusing More on One Single Tradition*

- Western-style training
- Revisiting traditional Chinese knowledge

### *Interaction as a Means of Bridging Two Sides*

- Comparative research
- Dialogues in theories and methodologies

### *Synthesising at the Philosophical Level*

- Ontological inquiry
- Moral and political philosophy

# Revisiting Traditional Chinese Knowledge

## *Reviewing Traditional Chinese Knowledge Based on Our Modern Time*

Luke contented: "The real question we have to consider is what can be reserved from Chinese culture. Maybe it's a bit pessimistic to say that. At least, many scholars after the May Fourth Movement (1919) may have understood this problem from this perspective, such as Fu Sinian…Then consider what really can be brought to modern life or what can be connected with our present life."

Sam commented: "Let's see if these [traditional] ideas can survive the modern shock and be reborn of fire under the modern impact. If they can't rebirth, then they die. But at least let them have a try, and perhaps they will lead to some new ideas, which I think there is some possibility."

# Revisiting Traditional Chinese Knowledge

***Gaining an Authentic Understanding of Traditional Knowledge while Having Different Epistemologies***

**A Neutral and Objective Perspective.** Park argued for finding the truth of "what ancient Chinese philosophers think about" without bringing in "a certain framework". He regarded seeking the truth as "similar to solving a law case", including "spider traces", and "restoring the scene". He stated: "Even though we cannot return to the truth, we have to respect the material".

# Revisiting Traditional Chinese Knowledge

*Gaining an Authentic Understanding of Traditional Knowledge while Having Different Epistemologies*

**A Compassionate Understanding of Traditional Knowledge.** Tom observed that some scholars in Chinese universities' philosophy, literature, and history departments started "doing research on classics again out of some value concern". He thought empathising with ancient wisdom could facilitate the comprehensive understanding of traditional knowledge that was more morally oriented.

# Revisiting Traditional Chinese Knowledge

### *Selectively Adopting Traditional Knowledge in Research*

Luke pointed out the importance of "identifying the various levels of traditions and cultural units, such as small and large traditions, and subcultures".

Henry also argued: "Different levels [of traditional knowledge] may be preserved differently. For example, on the political level, our Chinese tradition, which had 2,000 years of authoritarian culture, is indeed more harmful, influential and poisonous; so, we may need to eliminate or reject more of its negative aspects. However, on the aesthetic and philosophical levels, we may need to preserve and inherit more."

*Intellectual pluriversality aims to disrupt hegemony and inequity in the global knowledge system. Traditional knowledge provides the* **epistemic foundation** *for the call for intellectual pluriversality, acting as an agent of change.*

**Revisiting traditional Chinese knowledge is** **a Chinese response** **to global knowledge asymmetry, which promotes** **mutual respect and understanding** **between Western and non-Western knowledge in order to realise intellectual pluriversality.**

**Incorporating traditional Chinese knowledge in research is** **multifaceted** **and complicated but** **feasible**, **facilitating intellectual pluriversality and providing** **alternative intellectual resources** **for global higher education.**

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# Thank you very Much!

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