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Transforming Traditions into Resources: Pains and Gains of Chinese Scholars in the Humanities and Social Sciences

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Abstract

The asymmetrical global higher education and knowledge systems ordered by Euro–American hegemony have been increasingly interrogated, especially by scholars in the humanities and social sciences (HSS). With gathering awareness, more and more HSS scholars from non-Western backgrounds have called for global intellectual pluriversality. Responding to such a trend, this article sheds new light on the current conditions of non-Euro–American intellectual traditions by taking Chinese intellectual traditions as a case. Since the mid-nineteenth century, generations of Chinese intellectuals have strived to

transform their intellectual traditions into modern resources. This historical mission has been carried on by contemporary scholars with further complexities in the current global era. By unpacking the real perceptions and recent experiences of Chinese HSS scholars, this study demonstrates that Chinese intellectual traditions still guide today's knowledge production and have been transformed into three kinds of academic resources: approaches, methodologies/paradigms, and theories. However, the transformation process has never been smooth. Domestically, the great endeavours of Chinese HSS scholars are often impeded by dominant intellectual extraversion and coercive audit culture; internationally, they feel constrained by the English barrier and epistemic injustice. This article proposes an empirical approach to examining and presenting intellectual traditions in individual experiences. It reveals the pains and gains of non-Western HSS scholars to navigate through asymmetrical globalisation and the high complexities of achieving intellectual pluriversality.

Introduction

The establishment of global higher education has been based on asymmetrical knowledge systems ordered by Euro–American centrism and hegemony (Marginson, 2022). As learners of Euro–American models and experiences, non-Euro–American agents have been rendered peripheral (Gosovic, 2000; Altbach, 2009) and have faced such challenges as linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992), academic dependency (Alatas, 2003), epistemic/cognitive injustice (Fricker, 2007), intellectual extraversion (Hountondji, 2006), to name but a few. Although some have begun to play an increasingly important role and challenge the determinist centre–periphery model (Marginson & Xu, 2023), asymmetrical globalisation continues, especially in the humanities and social sciences (HSS) (Xu, 2020) that are deeply entangled with social and cultural contexts (Yang, 2014).

In recent years, reflections on Euro–American educational and intellectual domination have burgeoned, such as the decolonial perspectives (Takayama, 2016; Geerlings & Lundberg, 2018) and Southern theory (Connell, 2007). Increasing numbers of HSS scholars around the world have become aware of the importance of their traditional intellectual resources. They call for intellectual pluriversality (Reiter, 2018) that can be understood as a decolonial desire to break the Euro–American epistemic domination and intellectual universalisation to seek the coexistence of diverse epistemologies from various resources (Mignolo, 2018). By so doing, HSS research promises better to meet the local needs of non-Western societies, contribute alternative cultural perspectives on global issues, and significantly enrich human wisdom.

In response, it is important and necessary to bring more non-Euro–American intellectual traditions into global visibility. Shils (1972) defined an intellectual tradition as 'a set or pattern of beliefs, conceptions of form, sets of verbal (and other symbolic) usages, [and] rules of procedure' (p. 23), transmitted by intellectuals through time and rooted in indigenous cultures especially for Afro–Asian intellectuals. HSS scholars from various non-Western civilisations have introduced their intellectual traditions into English, such as Africa (Hilliard, 1998; Ogunnaike, 2020), Latin America (Kamugisha, 2019), Asia (Sen, 2005; Squarcini, 2011), and so on. These studies demonstrate that intellectual

traditions in many non-Western societies have survived colonisation or modernisation, to guide education and knowledge production (McDonough, 2014; Wiggan et al., 2022). Most of these studies are philosophical, historical, or biographical and lack empirical data on how present-day intellectuals are dealing with or transforming intellectual traditions.

As China becomes a rising player in global higher education, the significance of Chinese intellectual traditions has been increasingly highlighted as great resources to contribute to global epistemic construction (Yang, 2022, 2023). 'An urgent task for Chinese researchers is to explore how, and under what conditions, China's indigenous traditions of thought can serve to inspire and structure more generally applicable social and political theory' (Yang, 2023, p. 13). In response to such a call, this qualitative study explores how China's HSS scholars experience the transformation of Chinese intellectual traditions in today's modern and global higher education systems.

 Taking Chinese intellectual traditions as a case, it empirically illustrates current state of non-Euro–American intellectual traditions and thus contributes an individual perspective to fostering global intellectual pluriversality. Specifically, we focus on the following two questions:

1. How do contemporary Chinese HSS scholars transform their intellectual traditions into modern and global academic resources?

2. In doing so, what difficulties and challenges do Chinese HSS scholars confront both domestically and internationally?

Historical Background

Before moving on to the methodology and findings, we first provide some brief snapshots of modern Chinese intellectual history. In non-Euro–American societies, globalisation is both geo-spatial and diachronic as it has been inextricably intertwined with the history of modernisation, which hides a programme of colonialisation or Westernisation (Mignolo, 2011). As observed by Kim (2017), the general purpose of Asian intellectuals during modernisation is to critically reexamine and reevaluating their age-old traditions and to 'shift their traditional life patterns and modes of life in the direction of scientification'

(p. 77). Such tensions between globalisation/modernisation and traditions can be widely observed in the studies of non-Euro–American intellectual traditions. For HSS scholars in China, transforming Chinese intellectual traditions is not a new task but a journey of modernisation across generations since the nineteenth century. This journey reached a first peak in the 1920-30s and a second peak in the 1980-90s and continues today.

Globalisation has overwhelmingly brought modern universities and disciplines, knowledge systems, and intellectual life into China (Hayhoe, 1996; Yang et al., 2019; Zuo, 2004) at around the turn of the twentieth century. These gradually replaced traditional Chinese scholarship centred on Confucianism as Chinese intellectuals turned to the West for truth and universalism (Levenson, 1972). During the first peak in the 1920-30s, a group of intellectuals promoted the transformation of traditional Chinese scholarship into the modern disciplinary framework. Some even conceived of 'wholesale Westernisation' as a shortcut to modernisation (Tu, 2000, p. 202), believing that only with an objective understanding could Chinese intellectual heritage regain value (Yu, 2016, p. 299). Many scholars in the humanities advocated a 'systematic reorganisation of the national heritage' (zhengli guogu) based on the 'advanced' and 'scientific' ideas from the West. Social scientists in the 1930s strived to localise social science subjects by applying Western theories and methodologies to China's social circumstances (Gransow, 2008, pp. 504-505).

After 1949, as the Soviet education model was implemented nationwide, Chinese HSS scholars had to give up both the Western and traditional academic patterns that had enabled them to produce knowledge in the past (Zhu, 2021). This situation continued alongside political turmoil until 1978, when China's opening up ushered in an era of internationalisation. Chinese HSS scholars enthusiastically embraced and absorbed Western discourses, methods, and theories, modelling their research on international (mainly 'Western') mainstream standards (Deng, 2010). Taking Chinese philosophy as an instance, Standaert (2000) comments that '[w]hen one talks about philosophy in China today, even about Chinese philosophy, one uses a language that is based on the Chinese adoption of Western philosophical terms' (p. 293).

However, these endeavors have been accompanied by intellectual struggles and cultural identity crises (Meissner, 2006). The 'twisted roots' (Altbach, 1989) have been deeply implanted in not only China's higher education system but also the minds of Chinese HSS scholars. As King (2018) argues, building a new modern Chinese civilisation involves not only deconstructing the cultural tradition but also reconstructing it. However, the conundrum of how to make Chinese civilisation and scholarship both 'modern' and 'Chinese' has been perplexing generations of Chinese intellectuals since the nineteenth century, and it has become even more complex in today's global era. As Yang et al. (2019) point out, it is a continuing cultural mission to figure out how to wed Western higher education standards with Chinese traditional values. Only when this is achieved can Chinese HSS scholars find their spiritual homeland and feel settled. This study sheds new light on such a mission by unpacking present-day Chinese HSS scholars' explorations and attendant pains and gains.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative methodology to capture participants' intellectual reflections and experiences. We attempt to interpret what Chinese intellectual traditions mean to the participants and then build a holistic and informative picture of how the participants have transformed these traditions in their knowledge production practices (Cohen et al., 2007).

Our data collection was performed in three steps from October 2021 to August 2022. It started with extensively reading published intellectual works, to identify potential participants for purposive sampling. Fifty Chinese HSS scholars were selected as target participants, all of whom are working in research-intensive universities in mainland China and have shown great concern about Chinese traditions in their published works. Diversity of gender, age, location of the affiliated institutions, and research field was also considered.

In the second step, we designed semi-structured interview outlines consisting of basic questions about Chinese intellectual traditions. We then tailored questions based on the life experiences and academic concepts of each targeted participant and contacted them through email. Twenty of them

accepted our interview invitation. All interviews were conducted online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ranging from 1-3 hours in length.

The last step involved transcribing the interview recordings and rereading the published intellectual works of the interviewees in depth, including their papers, books, (auto)biographies, and other public interviews. We also included eight additional targeted participants who did not participate in the interviews as complementary participants, as we deemed that their experiences and perceptions reflected in their published works could significantly enrich our findings. We numbered the twenty interviewees with the prefix 'P' and the eight complementary participants with the prefix 'Pc'. Detailed information on all twenty-eight participants is listed in Table 1.

Our basic content analysis was conducted simultaneously in the data collection process described above. After organising the data, we conducted a thematic analysis (Guest et al., 2012) of (1) the twenty interview transcripts and (2) the published intellectual works of all twenty-eight participants. The two parts of data corroborated each other, ensuring the comprehensive and valid identification of themes.

Table 1 List of Participants

No.	Gender	Birth Decade	Location	Research Field
Pc1	Female	1950s	Beijing	Sociology
Pc2	Female	1950s	Jiangsu	Education
Pc3	Male	1960s	Hubei	Chinese Literature
P4	Male	1960s	Shanxi	Education
P5	Male	1960s	Shanghai	Chinese History
P6	Male	1960s	Beijing	Chinese History
Pc7	Male	1960s	Guangdong	Translatology
Pc8	Male	1960s	Beijing	Chinese Philology
P9	Male	1960s	Beijing	Sociology
P10	Male	1960s	Guangdong	Chinese Literature
P11	Male	1960s	Beijing	Political Science
P12	Male	1960s	Shanghai	Philosophy
P13	Male	1960s	Zhejiang	Chinese Philosophy
Pc14	Male	1960s	Hunan	Education
Pc15	Male	1970s	Beijing	Sociology
P16	Male	1970s	Zhejiang	Anthropology
P17	Male	1970s	Beijing	Philosophy
P18	Male	1970s	Beijing	Marxist Philosophy
P19	Male	1970s	Beijing	Archaeology
P20	Male	1970s	Beijing	Aesthetics
P21	Male	1970s	Beijing	Political Science
P22	Male	1970s	Shanghai	Western Philosophy
P23	Male	1970s	Beijing	Chinese Philosophy
Pc24	Male	1970s	Beijing	Law
P25	Male	1970s	Shanghai	Law
P26	Male	1980s	Beijing	Education
P27	Male	1980s	Beijing	Education
P28	Male	1980s	Beijing	Chinese Literature

Findings 1: Three Main Forms of Academic Resources

Our data show that the participants have transformed Chinese intellectual traditions into three main forms of academic resources: approaches, methodologies/paradigms, and theories. By exploiting Chinese intellectual traditions, many of the participants have produced academic innovations and gained national and international reputation.

Approaches

There were three mainstream approaches to learning in ancient China: 'evidential investigation' (*kaozheng* or *kaoju*), 'the study of moral principles' (*yili*), and 'literary art' (*cizhang* or *wenzhang*) (Yu, 2016, pp. 8, 129). The findings demonstrate that today's Chinese HSS scholars continue to adopt these approaches to meet various research needs.

Evidential investigation in ancient China referred to carefully examining various versions of Chinese classics (mainly Confucian classics), always based on textual evidence and minute analysis of the language. It aimed at 'sifting out the true from the false and determining the true message of ancient sages' (Ropp, 1981, p. 43). As experts in different HSS fields, nine participants (Pc3, P6, Pc7, Pc8, P20, P21, P25, P26, P28) have used this approach to examine texts far beyond Confucian classics, including all kinds of ancient Chinese classics (Pc8) and historical documents for aesthetic (P20) and literary (P28) research. Many researchers tend to associate it with textual criticism (Elman, 2015; Hein, 2019), and Pc3 is an example. He has focused on the similarities between textual criticism and evidential investigation and published a series of articles exploring how to combine them in modern Chinese literary research. By so doing he has systematically established 'the modern evidential investigation' as distinguished from the traditional one. This contribution has won Pc3 national reputation in his field.

In ancient China, the study of moral principles sought guidance from the classics to handle social relationships and establish Confucian moral principles, chiefly through metaphysical speculations and interpretations (Yu, 2016, p. 8). The participants now use it as an interpretative approach to analysing various texts (P6, P13, P17, P23, P25) and even understanding society (P26). In

philosophy it is usually associated with hermeneutics (Wilson, 2017), and three participants consider the study of moral principles as a Chinese hermeneutic tradition and an important approach to studying Chinese philosophy (P13, P17, P23). For example, P13 stated that 'there are many schools in hermeneutics [in the world], and the study of moral principles can be seen as one.'

In ancient China, literary art was rendered as the aesthetic pursuit of literary expression and the skills of stylistic excellence (Huters, 1987; Jin, 2020). Four participants mentioned literary art as simply some traditional writing genres (P10, P17, P23, P28). For example, P17 considered the traditional dialogical (exemplified by *The Analects of Confucius*) and epistolary genres are more suitable for philosophical wr iting than academic papers. P18 has taken full advantage of the biographical genre (*jizhuan ti*), which was established by Sima Qian (145-86 BC), a grand historian of the Han dynasty (Mann, 2009). This genre saw history as a record of people's lives (Moloughney, 1992). In the interview, P18 explained: 'Chinese historians had notably accentuated the character since Sima Qian. ... But in modern times, the event has become the unit of historical writing'. He integrated the biographical genre into his doctoral thesis writing with the intent to 'restore current literary research, which relies too much on social science resources, to the character-centred tradition'.

Methodologies/Paradigms

'Methodology (fangfa lun)' and 'paradigm (fan shi)' are two imported notions in China. As Shi and Yang (2010) argue, ancient China had neither the methodological system nor the paradigm as they are defined today. In modern times, Chinese scholars have customarily relied on Euro–American methodologies and paradigms in their research (Held, 2019). Seven of the participants have sought to change this condition by developing their own methodologies (Pc7 and P9) and paradigms (P6, P11, P16, P19, P21) by selecting, modulating, and synthesising Chinese intellectual traditions.

Pc7 has published many papers on how to generate new methodologies of Chinese–English translation by harnessing traditional ideas. One such idea is yin–yang, a traditional Chinese cosmology rooted in correlative thinking (Graham, 1986). Pc7 wrote in an article: 'Yin–yang as an interpretative methodology has not drawn enough attention. ... It is necessary to review

existing studies and analyse its value'. He criticised the problematic English translations of some sentences in The Analects of Confucius and retranslated them under the guidance of yin–yang. He believed that this methodology can contribute significantly to Chinese–English translation. Based on Chinese intellectual traditions and his research experience, P9 constructed an eight-dimension methodology for sociological fieldwork. Two dimensions came from The Classic of Changes (I Ching or Yi Jing): He interpreted '[g]rasping the infinitesimally small and what is manifestly obvious' (zhi wei zhi zhang) (Lynn, 1994, p. 85) meaning that anthropologists should start with noticing details, accumulate knowledge of subtle aspects of people's lives, and then construct a holistic scenario of society and culture; and 'understanding the soft as well as the hard' (zhi rou zhi gang) (Lynn, 1994, p. 85) as combining 'hard' rational data collection with 'soft' feelings and empathy.

As for paradigms, two political scientists, P11 and P21, shared a similar opinion: the 'classics-history tradition' (jing shi) should be exploited as a primary paradigm of Chinese political research, because there was no the discipline of political science in ancient China while political thoughts can be found in ancient classics (jing) and history (shi). P19 attached great importance to traditional epigraphy (jinshi xue) as an archaeological paradigm. Literally meaning 'metal and stone', the term jinshi appeared as early as the fifth century BC and then evolved into epigraphy, a tradition of antiquarian scholarship. It combined the collection and connoisseurship of antiquities and studied steles for their historical, epigraphic, and calligraphic value (Wang, 2022). P19 argued that China's numerous antiquities represent a considerable advantage of Chinese archaeology. Distinct from scientistic paradigms, traditional epigraphy can make a new contribution Chinese and world archaeology (P19).

Theories

According to our data, many of the participants have tried to avoid being trapped by the two well-beaten paths of most Chinese HSS scholars: applying Western 'universal' theories directly to the China case or using the case of China to contribute to Western theories (Zhang, 2017). They have adopted two strategies to put forward new theories based on Chinese traditions: (1)

extracting theories directly from traditional resources, and (2) theorising traditions as counterparts of existing (mainly 'Western') theories.

Six participants distilled theories from traditional Chinese notions or ideas (Pc2, P4, P12, P17, P21, P26). For example, three education researchers, Pc2, P4, and P26, called for unearthing Mohist and Confucian educational thoughts after critically examining current educational theories and pedagogies. Mohism was a school of thought in ancient China, which some Sinologists claim (Graham, 1978; Robins, 2010) contained the germs of science and logic, with a formal analysis of argumentation grounded in linguistic parallelism. Pc2 introduced it into scientific education, holding that 'reviving Mohist logical and experimental thoughts [as a theory of scientific education] can help [Chinese educators] resolve the conflicts between traditional Chinese humanistic and modern scientific ideas'. P26 extracted five Confucian constant virtues (wuchang) as a coherent theory for moral education: these are 'benevolence' (or humaneness, ren), 'rightness' (or righteousness, yi), 'propriety' (or ritual, li), 'wisdom' (or intelligence, zhi), and 'faithfulness' (or trust, xin) (Yao, 2003, p. 660). He claimed that '[t]he system of five virtues is not fixed; rather, it is dynamic through history', and '[w]hether it is still valuable depends on how we grasp and reinterpret it. Only on this basis can we fully integrate it into the current zeitgeist and educational activities'.

More participants indicated a preference for the second strategy (Pc2, Pc7, P11, P13, Pc14, P18, P20, P22, P27). They presumed that their theories are alternative vantage points from Chinese culture and can complement existing theories that are limited by a monocultural perspective. P20's theoretical innovations are telling. The most famous is Chinese 'living aesthetics' (shenghuo meixue), on which he has published many works in both Chinese and English. To summarise, his thinking followed four steps: (1) critically reviewing the growing trend of the 'aesthetics of everyday life' in Euro–American scholarship, (2) introducing the differences between Chinese and Western ideas about life and aesthetics, (3) analysing the fundamental elements of traditional Chinese aesthetics and then synthesising them into theories of living aesthetics with 'neo-Chineseness'; and (4) pointing out the universality of Chinese living aesthetics and a new aesthetic agenda shared by Asia and Euro–America.

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Similar steps can be observed in the works of P13, who has tried to promote the dialogue between cosmopolitanism and Confucianism. He believed that although cosmopolitanism originated from the West, cosmopolitan ideas do exist elsewhere. Borrowing the African American philosopher Kwame A. Appiah's 'rooted cosmopolitanism' (1997, p. 618), P13 excavated a kind of Confucian rooted cosmopolitanism by systematically examining and comparing Appiah's ideas with those of Confucius. He further argued that Confucianism, as a form of rooted cosmopolitanism or cosmopolitan patriotism, can provide a theoretical and practical resource for reconciling the tension between cosmopolitanism and patriotism/nationalism.

Findings 2: Difficulties and Challenges

Most of the participants have made notable contributions to their fields. Yet, the process of transforming Chinese intellectual traditions has been fraught with hindrances. Four types of difficulties and challenges emerged from participants' experiences: China's dominant intellectual extraversion and coercive audit culture have impeded their efforts; and internationally, they have felt constrained by the English barrier and epistemic injustice.

Intellectual extraversion

'Intellectual extraversion' is a term coined by Hountondji (2006) to describe that scientific research in post-colonial countries tends to turn to the outside world and respond to the demands of the intellectual 'centre'. Our findings demostrate that such an extraverted tendency has prevailed in Chinese academic circles, manifesting in two extremes: a Western-oriented mindset and particularism. Both have hindered the transformation of Chinese intellectual traditions.

Twenty-one of the participants reflected that a Western-oriented mindset has been deeply ingrained in the minds of many Chinese HSS scholars. They pointed out various manifestations of the Western-oriented mindset: some scholars blindly worship 'the advanced Western scholarship' and its 'logical and scientific qualities' (Pc7 and P12); some are habituated to turning to Euro–American coordinates and patterns (P17 and P20), including issues, discourses, paradigms, and theories (Pc7, P10, Pc24, P25, P26); and some define Chinese thoughts (P22) or study Chinese societies (P9) exclusively with

Western frameworks. Their Western-oriented mindset has led many Chinese HSS scholars to abandon traditional Chinese scholarship while failing to truly understand Western scholarship (Pc2, Pc8, Pc14, Pc15, P19, P28).

This Western-oriented mindset further causes Chinese intellectual traditions to be largely unknown, underestimated, and misunderstood, which in turn reinforces the Western orientation. The participants lamented that knowing what Chinese traditions are is a prerequisite for transforming or reviving them (P18, P21, P22, P28), but people, especially younger people (P11 and P25), rarely have enough knowledge of traditions (P5, Pc7, P10, Pc14). Some participants also admitted that this applies to themselves, and that they have to make up missed lessons through self-study in order to know Chinese traditions better (P9, P10, P12, P18). Researching Chinese traditions is time-consuming because it requires a significant investment of time and energy in learning about them. Even worse, Chinese traditions are sometimes seriously underestimated or misunderstood by many other scholars, who consider them totally 'useless' unless they are processed through 'Western frameworks' (P11, P13, Pc15, P21, P23, P26), or 'unadvanced' and 'unscientific' when measured against 'Western yardsticks' (P6, Pc8, P19, P23). The participants' approaches, methodologies/paradigms, and theories, which are based on Chinese intellectual traditions, are thus easily challenged or rejected by others (P21, P27, P28) and highly unlikely to become as popular as Western ones.

Another manifest of intellectual extraversion is that researchers at the periphery often confine themselves to the particular and are unable and unwilling to raise their speculations to the universal (Hountondji, 1990). Many Chinese HSS scholars exhibit such particularism, as criticised by sixteen of the participants. These participants believed that while uncritically imitating the West is infeasible, it is also untenable to return to ancient China (P12, P16, P19) or revive the so-called 'authentic traditional scholarship' (P13) because today's Chinese scholarship is a mix of ancient, modern, indigenous, and Euro–American elements (P20 and P26). The dangerous delusion that Chinese scholarship should be isolated from all 'Western discourses' (P17) can only lead to perverse nationalism, traditionalism, and nativism (Pc1, P13, P20).

Particularism has two consequences. The first is that Chinese intellectual traditions have been romanticised or simplified. As the participants noted, some Chinese HSS scholars have become obsessed with traditions and indulged in a sort of 'romantic nostalgia' without academic thinking (P6 and P17); and some have been busy chanting empty and mawkish slogans without any real action (P10 and Pc15). Additionally, Chinese intellectual traditions are sometimes narrowed to Confucianism, with other schools of thought marginalised (P20 and P22), and sometimes, they are overprotected as if 'in a vacuum without modern bacteria'(P6), just like 'antiques in the museum' (P13). P6 and Pc15 believed that scholars who hold on to the particularism are 'destroying traditions with the intention of re-establishing or reviving traditions'. The second consequence is the East–West dichotomy, which has been challenged by international researchers (Adamson, 2012) but remains quite popular among Chinese scholars. Some scholars have focused too much on the separation and differences between 'Chinese/Eastern scholarship' and 'Western scholarship' (Pc1, P13, Pc24), ignoring the interplay between them and other 'neither-Chinese-nor-Western' scholarships (Pc7 and P16). All of this means that transforming Chinese intellectual traditions into modern and global resources is not widely supported and practiced.

Coercive audit culture

Audit culture is one of the most defining features of contemporary governance. In the higher education sector, it is often represented by the officially imposed uniform categories, reckonings, evaluations, and assessments on a varied set of institutions (such as global university ranking schemes) and scholars (such as academic promotion systems) (Shore & Wright, 2015). The audit culture is so coercive in the Chinese academic community that it strongly shackles the participants' academic innovations based on traditions.

The efficiency-seeking climate of 'publish or perish' bears heavily on participants in their everyday knowledge production practice. As previously mentioned, researching Chinese traditions is time-consuming. However, overstretched by innumerable quantified tasks and indicators, the participants have always struggled to make time for innovative thinking and writing (P10, Pc14, Pc15, P20). Furthermore, external mechanisms, including the reputation

and promotion that are obtainable only through ceaseless publishing, have drawn the most attention (Pc8, P16, P25) and driven Chinese HSS scholars to drift away from the heart of their 'real work' (Strathern, 2004, p. 280). Pc8 complained that today's scholars have to publish as much as possible during a short-term project, which is detrimental to evidential investigation as it requires researchers to be patient 'bench warmers'. Some scholars have even become agents for the creation of new kinds of subjectivity — self-managing individuals who render themselves auditable (Shore & Wright, 2004), which in turn intensifies the 'publish or perish' climate (P10 and P25). P10 stated: 'Some [scholars] have even become promoters of such climate, set high publishing efficiency as an overarching goal, and have no time to conduct solid studies and care about others' works'.

The 'publish or perish' pressure also influences China's academic journals. To maintain high citation scores and ranks, journals focus on hot topics (P25), set rigid writing formats and unified academic standards (P11, P17, P23, P28), and require submissions to follow popular paradigms and definitive theories (P29). This only produces scholarship in fragmented forms and leaves little space for traditional genres and innovative thought (P5, P6, Pc15, P20). For example, the traditional dialogical and epistolary genres are more flexible for philosophical writing have been largely replaced by standard academic articles (P17). P6 is also unhappy with the prevailing academic writing formats, describing them as a 'skeleton without flesh'. However, these formats have been exclusively authorised, and to assert one's own writing style would mean being 'out of tune with the mainstream standards' (P6).

In addition, audit culture relies upon hierarchical systems and relationships (Shore & Wright, 2004). The participants admitted that to survive for long under audit regimes, they have to identify with the hierarchical university structure and the goals of higher education policy. The biggest problem is the asymmetrical official support, including financial (Pc8 and Pc15) and human resources (P4 and P19) as well as institutional establishments (P26). According to Pc8, the studies of ancient Chinese classics and evidential investigation are not sufficiently valued by universities and governments, and it is hard to win grant funding. P19 expressed concern about the lack of talents and experts in traditional epigraphy, as formal archeological education rarely takes it into

consideration. These asymmetries are intertwined with the 'publish or perish' climate, creating inadequate incentives for research on Chinese intellectual traditions (P27).

English barrier

English as the academic lingua franca and basis of academic hegemony and intellectual inequity has been widely rethought and discussed. There are also tensions surrounding the disciplinary variations in the use of English and 'one-size-fits-all' language policies, which puts HSS at a disadvantage (Kuteeva & Airey, 2014). Chinese HSS scholars have achieved far less international visibility than their colleagues in engineering and the natural sciences (Yang, 2003), largely due to the English barrier (Flowerdew & Li, 2009). Such a barrier becomes even more intractable for discussing Chinese intellectual traditions. Almost all of the participants have been troubled to some degree by English writing and publishing.

Most participants found it almost insurmountable to translate some traditional Chinese notions and concepts into English (P6, Pc7, P9, P12, P13, P17, P19). This problem involves not just the content but the possibility of knowing, raising doubts about 'the validity of cross-cultural understanding' (Zhang, 1999, p. 29). Pc7, an expert in Chinese–English translation, is unsatisfied with the existing English versions of ancient Chinese classics. He believed that many aspects of traditional Chinese thought cannot be expressed in a 'logical way', but most translations inevitably 'logicalise' them by simply finding linguistic equivalents. He has been strenuously exploring better approaches to translating Chinese traditions. P12 and P13 stated that 'English has its own thousand-year cultural traditions' (P12), and that it is extremely difficult for Chinese scholars to 'write English as sophisticatedly as Anglophone scholars' (P13). For this reason, many Chinese scholars with deep knowledge of Chinese traditions have been shut out of international academic circles (P13). P6 even admitted that he had given up writing in English because he had failed to find a way out of the untranslatability of Chinese traditions.

For those participants who can write skillfully and have published works in English, bilingual writing is a burden since it demands double the effort (P20, P22, P27). 'I'm proficient in English writing, which proves to be one of my

advantages', P22 said, 'but on the flip side, it means that not everyone can do this'. Despite his proficiency, P22 admitted that writing a paper in English expounding upon Chinese philosophy is no easy task; instead, it requires sophisticated abilities and enormous energy. P27 considered it unfair that Chinese scholars must compete with Anglophone scholars for international publications. He contended:

> We have to publish Chinese papers on the one hand; on the other hand, we also need to publish English papers. But in fact, it isn't easy to do both well. It means that we have to exert twice the effort of others [who publish monolingually] — we have to read both Chinese and English literature. For Euro–American scholars, things are much easier because reading and publishing only in English is enough. (P27)

Epistemic injustice

Ten of the participants have felt or encountered 'epistemic injustice'— an act of discriminating against someone in their capacity as a knower (Fricker, 2007) (P6, P9, P10, P12, P13, P16, P17, P20, P26, P28). They argued that 'the precondition of academic dialogue is an equal footing (P28)', but in fact not many international researchers are willing to 'listen to Chinese stories (P9)' or embrace 'Chinese literature (P10)'.

P16 and P20 had similar unpleasant experiences publishing papers in English. P16 performed an anthropological study using the Daoist thinker Laozi's thoughts as a theoretical lens. When he tried to publish it in English, he found that the international reviewers, who were great experts in anthropological theories, knew little about Laozi's thoughts. 'They told me that Laozi's idea was about an imaginary society and questioned me why his idea can be used to observe a real society', he contended, 'but, for instance, wasn't Plato's idea also about an imaginary society? Why is it so important and widely used to study China and other societies?' P20's Chinese living aesthetic theory was also challenged by an editor of a famous international journal on aesthetics. '[The editor] kept asking me: Does it have global significance? Can it be globalised or be examined under a universalist principle? Is it just local knowledge?' (P20).

Three philosophy researchers mentioned the marginal position of Chinese philosophy in the world (P12, P13, P17). Such frustration is not unique to China (Song, 2023) but can be observed in other non-Euro–American philosophical circles, such as Latin America (Sturm, 2018) and Africa (Ogunnaike, 2020). The African researcher Chimakonam (2017) states that the exclusion of African philosophy is a case of global epistemic injustice. P12's story about teaching Chinese philosophy at a German university is very typical. During his teaching, he faced many challenges from students, mainly about whether ancient Chinese thinkers' thought could be accounted as 'philosophy'. One student said, 'OK, I know what Confucius said makes sense, but I don't think it's philosophy'.

P12 understood why some students thought like this, because in the Western context, 'philosophy' is an old discipline that always refer to Western philosophy characterised by logic and reasoning. Chinese philosophy has been categorised into Sinology, along with Chinese literature and history. As the Sinologist Defoort from the University of Leuven observes, philosophy is quite simply a Western matter. In China, not one university teaches exclusively Chinese philosophy, let alone under the title of 'General Philosophy' (Defoort, 2001); in Europe, whether 'Chinese philosophy' deserves a place in philosophy departments has remained unsolved and hardly generated any meaningful debate (Defoort, 2017).

Discussion and conclusion

People usually take it for granted that tradition influences today's higher education, but few can articulate how it works. This study provides lively evidence of how intellectual traditions function in the knowledge production of HSS scholars based on the Chinese case. For the participants, Chinese intellectual traditions had various meanings and contents. Overall, they are perceived as certain notions, ideas, and ways of knowing and writing that originated from ancient China. They can be applied in today's knowledge production practices after certain modifications. They can be research approaches as well as critical components of new methodologies/paradigms and theories. Some of them have already been introduced to the world by the participants through their international publications. Today, they continue to

guide HSS scholars in China to conduct their academic research and can be transformed into modern and global resources.

This study also presents details about the most recent difficulties and challenges that Chinse HSS scholars have faced in both Chinese and international circles, including intellectual extraversion, audit culture, the English barrier, and epistemic injustice. Their experiences imply that transforming intellectual traditions is likely to be an intractable task for scholars from non-Western societies, as historical and actual, ideological and institutional, and local and global complexities all mingle together. The case of Chinese intellectual traditions also suggests that finding a way out of asymmetrical globalisation still requires concerted efforts, and that intellectual pluriversality is not easy to achieve, at least in the short term.

Meanwhile, it should be noted that some inspiring realities and trends are likely to contribute to the transformation of Chinese intellectual traditions and global intellectual pluriversality. In China, there is a growing awareness of harnessing traditional culture in universities, schools, and other social organisations and the public intellectual sphere (Deng & Smith, 2018; Wu, 2019). Stimulated by the 'going out' strategy, recent years have witnessed gathering incentive schemes for international HSS publications (Xu, 2020). At the same time, an increasing number of HSS English-language journals have contributed evidently to alternative discourses by introducing indigenous Chinese research to the outside world (Li & Yang, 2020). In international HSS communities, more traditional Chinese notions and ideas are being accepted and adopted as theoretical resources, such as *guanxi* and *tianxia* (Barbalet, 2018; Yang et al., 2022). This study also shows that Chinese HSS scholars are making great efforts to challenge the existing centre-periphery model. These movements and the present study can serve only as pieces of the jigsaw puzzle of intellectual pluriversality. To make it more complete, we must pay attention to real individual experiences, go beyond linguistic barriers, bring more non-Euro–American intellectual traditions up for global discussion, and keep promoting epistemic diversity in higher education (Marginson, 2022; Xu, 2022).

Finally, there are some limitations to this study. First, all of the participants are high-achieving scholars in their fields working at research-intensive universities

in mainland China. The broader community of scholars, especially those whose intellectual works are fewer in number and lesser in reputation are difficult to target through an extensive reading, which limited the sample pool. Nonetheless, high-achieving scholars are more likely to have good knowledge of traditions and participate in international academic activities, making their experiences more enlightening for young scholars and students. We also did not approach ethnic-Chinese scholars in Taiwan, Hong Kong, or overseas, who may have different understandings and experiences of transforming Chinese intellectual traditions. In this sense, this study can be a stepping stone to future studies of scholars with diverse identities.

Second, we use the terms 'Chinese/Western', 'Western/non-Western', and 'Euro–American/non-Euro–American' with no intention to accentuate dichotomies. Instead, we adopt them as a tool to reveal and rethink some tensions in asymmetrical globalisation. In reality, 'Western' and 'non-Western' elements are already inseparable in the contemporary body of non-Western knowledge (Yang, 2019) with a huge diversity in 'Chinese' and 'Western' as well as in 'Euro–American', and 'the non-Euro–American' spheres. Also, there are various intellectual traditions practised in diverse civilisation zones waiting for more detection. This study indicates an empirical approach to examining and presenting intellectual traditions in the actions, perceptions, and even struggles of individual scholars. It is only when we take the first step by unravelling real tensions theoretically and empirically that can we overcome hurdles, create more potential for unity-in-diversity (Marginson, 2022), and embrace intellectual pluriversality more fully.

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