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Incorporating Traditional Chinese Knowledge in Research: The Case of Chinese Humanities and Social Sciences

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Abstract

There is a growing call for intellectual pluriversality in response to global knowledge asymmetries that have been dominated by Western knowledge and have marginalised traditional non-Western knowledge. Thus, non-Western humanities and social sciences (HSS) research has witnessed a revitalisation of traditional knowledge, which has led to discussions concerning the integration of modern Western and traditional non-Western knowledge. Through conducting interviews, this study provides an overview of contemporary Chinese HSS scholars' attempts to integrate Western and

traditional Chinese knowledge into their research. We identified three steps: revisiting traditional Chinese knowledge; seeking out possible interactions with the prevailing Western knowledge; and exploring potential philosophical foundations for a synthesis of the two bodies of knowledge. The study concludes by providing new insights that can enrich the field of HSS research in China and beyond.

Keywords: Traditional Knowledge; Chinese and Western Knowledge; Knowledge Integration; Higher Education; Humanities and Social Sciences; Research

Introduction

Globalisation is a double-edged sword. While it potentially liberates non-Western intellectuals to tackle the lingering Western hegemony in global humanities and social sciences (HSS), it has also brought Western centrism and its characteristic epistemic and cultural violence, silencing and delegitimising non-Western knowledge (Alatas, 2003; Connell, 2007). Western knowledge, as especially represented by the Anglo-American West, has a far superior position in global academia. Academic centres in Western societies determine academic paradigms and control most intellectual resources, whereas non-Western societies only follow the Western routine as peripheries (Altbach, 1987; Gosovic, 2000; Geerlings & Lundberg, 2018). Recently, there has been an increasing call for intellectual pluriversality, which can be understood as a desire to decolonize by breaking away from the dominance of Western epistemologies and universalising tendencies and aiming for a scenario in which diverse epistemologies from many cultures can coexist (Mignolo, 2018b; Oslender, 2018).

Non-Western academics in the humanities and social sciences (HSS) have been more affected by global knowledge asymmetries, making them more conscious of the importance of rich traditional intellectual resources for promoting intellectual pluriversality (Oslender, 2018; Ouattara, 2018). Compared with science and technology, HSS subjects are more socially and culturally based on the indigenous context (Yang, 2014) and have their roots in traditional non-Western knowledge. The internationalisation of higher education in non-Western societies since the 1990s has accentuated the uneven global knowledge flows, as HSS scholars rely heavily on Western knowledge in terms of research paradigms, theories, concepts, and values (Li & Yang, 2020). If HSS research is continuously framed by Western-dominated epistemology, it is less able to address local needs in non-Western societies (Ahmad, 2018) and even certain global issues.

The effective integration of Western and traditional non-Western knowledge then becomes a core concern for non-Western HSS scholars (Takayama, 2016). In contemporary non-Western academia, Western and non-Western knowledge are already inseparable (Yang, 2019), but this represents more of a

cultural mix that is heavily influenced by Western dominance. Rediscovering traditional non-Western knowledge in response to intellectual pluriversality naturally calls for more effectively integrating different knowledge through an equal exchange flow. Chinese HSS scholars, with their extensive corpus of traditional knowledge, are well-placed to serve as cultural bridges between cultures (Lu, 2019), but their perceptions and practices in integrating Western and traditional Chinese knowledge in their specific research are unclear.

Based on these arguments, we aim to provide firsthand accounts of how Chinese HSS scholars integrate Western and traditional Chinese knowledge in their research. The study begins with a theoretical overview of intellectual pluriversality and how Chinese HSS scholars have attempted to practice it, followed by a research design based on interviews. The empirical findings are then presented in three parts, each emphasising a different approach or step in the knowledge integration. Finally, we discuss the findings in terms of their implications and limitations and provide suggestions for future research.

Literature Review

It is essential to clarify that we apply the terms Chinese and Western or Western and non-Western mainly for technical convenience from the perspective of non-Western scholars, for whom integrating different bodies of knowledge is extremely important. We regard traditional knowledge as rooted in the practices, beliefs, and values of a particular culture or community (Bruchac, 2014). Indigenous and traditional knowledge overlap to a great extent, and both continually change over time. The modern transformation of non-Western knowledge faces Western hegemony, and we recognise that traditional Chinese knowledge has faced a similar fate as indigenous knowledge in the global context.

The perspective of intellectual pluriversality provides insights into the autonomous integration of modern Western and traditional non-Western knowledge. Walter D. Mignolo (2018b) first put forward the concept of intellectual pluriversality, aimed at addressing the uncritical following of the cognitive models of colonisers and at shifting our worldview away from the universalising tendency of Westernisation and towards understanding the world as

interconnected and diverse. This can then change how we practically live in the world.

Revitalising traditional non-Western knowledge in HSS research directly echoes the call for intellectual pluriversality. First, this is a step further from the preliminary and prevalent effort of knowledge integration—indigenising Western knowledge through modifications in their research (Takayama, 2016), mainly by applying Western theories and methodologies to the local context. It recognises that the constraints of Western dominance should be discarded, and the coexistence of diverse epistemologies realised (Oslender, 2018).

Second, revitalising traditional non-Western knowledge entails a more profound understanding of its significance rather than merely utilising it for practical purposes. Many non-Western HSS scholars have recently articulated how their traditional knowledge is manifested in peripheral societies. Ouattara (2018) highlights the importance of griots in traditional West African society, which represent the voice of knowledge and recognition of existence, and are a bridge between the past and the future. Oslender (2018) examines local aquatic epistemologies through ethnographic engagement with a rural Afro-Colombian lifeworld, where the knowledge and actions of local people reveal complex relationships with the area's aquatic environment. He (2020) argues for establishing the subjectivity of Chinese social sciences based on a deep immersion in Chinese experience and an equal dialogue with the Western approach. However, intellectual pluriversality functions more like a normative call to action, and the concrete steps to achieve it are only just beginning to emerge.

Further strategies for dealing with traditional knowledge are required if tangible efforts are to be made to integrate Western and traditional non-Western knowledge. One strategy is transforming traditional non-Western knowledge into modern academic resources. For example, Walsh (2010) points out that *buen vivir*, 'roughly translated as living well or collective well-being' (p. 188), was the epistemology of the indigenous Ecuadorian peoples of Abya Yala, and can be the orienting concept of the Ecuadorian Constitution to foster a new style of citizen coexistence in Ecuador and the broader Andes region. Traditional Chinese evidential study (考據學)¹, which emphasises literature over

epigraphy, can be modernised by incorporating archaeological excavation, scientific methods, and logical thinking (Jin, 2009).

Another strategy is to transform Western knowledge using indigenous models (Harding, 2018). Huang (2015) argues that Western social sciences should not ignore traditional Chinese knowledge, as it can lead to theoretical conclusions with universal application in social sciences, thus leading to a win-win situation. For example, many Western psychological and sociological theories may overlook indigenous issues and denigrate traditional methodology, such as reflective thinking without empirical evidence in ancient China (Flowerdew & Li, 2009), and may then fail to effectively explain various Chinese phenomena. Therefore, Chinese HSS scholars should use indigenous theories and methodologies to make imported subjects, including psychology and sociology, more rooted in local contexts and cultures; for Western scholars, the indigenous model can serve as an alternative perspective, revealing the limitations of Western social sciences and providing new insights (Yang & Wen, 1982; Cheng, 2018).

Nonetheless, most previous attempts to integrate Western and non-Western knowledge in global academia have been rooted in indigenous studies. These focus on the integration of indigenous knowledge and Western scientific thinking, especially the practical application of indigenous knowledge in science, medicine, and social sciences (Agrawal, 1995; Le Grange, 2007; Lauter, 2020). They lack commensurate interest in epistemological study (Nakata, 2002). While arts and humanities researchers explore indigenous knowledge through culture and tradition (Mapara, 2017), they may overly focus on details rather than generating dynamic and collective knowledge based on empirical data. Further empirical studies are thus required to assess the most recent developments of integrating Western and traditional non-Western knowledge. This study takes the lead to provide an overview of Chinese HSS academics' perceptions and practices when addressing such integration.

Method

A qualitative approach can effectively reveal the limited progress made in a specific field (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and is thus ideally suited to examining

how individuals perceive traditional knowledge and how Western and traditional knowledge has been integrated in research.

Our main approach to gathering data was through interviews, which enabled us to quickly grasp how people express indigenous epistemic concerns through their stories. Purposive sampling was used for our selection of interview participants, based on an extensive analysis of how various scholars dealt with the relationships between Chinese and Western knowledge. We developed a sampling frame to select scholars according to age and subject distribution. Mainland Chinese HSS scholars who were born between the 1960s and the early 1980s were targeted as participants. We finally recruited 20 HSS academics, coded as 'P+number' in Table 1, to participate in the interviews. Those who were interested in this research topic were distributed across several HSS sub-disciplines, as reflected in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' Basic Information

Participants	Age Groups	Gender	Research Fields
P1	1960s	Male	Chinese Literature
P2	1980s	Male	Chinese Literature
P3	1960s	Male	Chinese History
P4	1960s	Male	Chinese History
P5	1960s	Male	Western Philosophy
P6	1960s	Male	Chinese Philosophy
P7	1970s	Male	Chinese Philosophy
P8	1970s	Male	Marxist Philosophy
P9	1970s	Male	Western Philosophy
P10	1970s	Male	Chinese Philosophy
P11	1970s	Male	Western Philosophy
P12	1970s	Male	Archaeology
P13	1960s	Male	Sociology and Anthropology
P14	1970s	Male	Anthropology
P15	1960s	Male	Political Science
P16	1970s	Male	Political Science
P17	1970s	Male	Law
P18	1960s	Male	Education
P19	1980s	Male	Education
P20	1980s	Male	Education

The semi-structured protocol involved discussions organised around the following questions: 1) What are your opinions on integrating Western and traditional Chinese knowledge? and 2) How can traditional Chinese knowledge be incorporated into modern research? We conducted a thematic analysis of the answers to the interview questions. We identified and coded all units of data concerning the participants' perceptions and research into integrating Western and traditional Chinese knowledge, and then established patterns among them.

Results

Revisiting Traditional Chinese Knowledge

Due to the Westernisation of China's educational systems, most of the HSS scholars, including all the participants, were primarily trained to conduct Western-style research. In this section, we discuss the perspectives of the participants in terms of why and how traditional Chinese knowledge can be revisited in their research.

Recognising the value of traditional Chinese knowledge in research, and as a response to epistemic injustice, most of the participants acknowledged that Chinese scholars have been involved in the ongoing process of bridging Chinese and Western knowledge since the 19th century, and that this has primarily been a uni-directional flow from the West to China. P1 commented on such unequal knowledge exchanges, stating that 'Perhaps the greater deficiency [of Chinese people] is not in Western learning, but actually in Chinese learning.' He reflected further on this: 'What exactly is tradition? We all just know this concept... What are we against? What should be opposed and what should be inherited? Maybe we don't know much.' P6 had a similar opinion: 'The problem is that you don't know enough about Chinese learning. There are now [many] 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.' These responses suggest that Chinese HSS academics lack awareness of their own traditional knowledge, demonstrating that more comprehensive learning of traditional knowledge is required.

To fully achieve bi-directional exchanges between China and the West, the participants suggested that Chinese HSS academics should engage in more regular international activities to promote China's culture and knowledge, thereby drawing more attention to traditional knowledge. P18 noted that 'Going global should be the goal of constructing China's academic discourse system as well as the direction that young scholars should strive for.' His response indicates that developing local Chinese scholarship can be the foundation for international academic influence. More explicitly, P19 pointed out: 'Perhaps the next step for [Chinese scholarship] is to improve the international influence of local research, which I think [deserves] focus.' Such discourses reveal an aim to move beyond the Western epistemological framework and theories and contribute to the global knowledge system. P6 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.' The approach to incorporating modern Western and traditional non-Western knowledge in research is therefore crucial.

The participants emphasised three general principles that could serve as the basis for revitalising traditional Chinese knowledge in research. The first principle is to view traditional Chinese knowledge from a modern perspective. As P2 noted: 'The real question we have to consider is what should be reserved from Chinese culture. Maybe it's a bit pessimistic to say that. At least, many scholars after the May Fourth Movement may have understood this problem from this perspective.' His response illustrates how current academia is premised on modernity and that Western learning is then inevitably the entrenched outcome. Similarly, P5 argued: 'If you were not sensitive to the times, I don't think your work would be meaningful. Certainly, I give my answers in the face of the lively life and the confusion of my times.' He continued: 'Let's see if these [traditional] ideas can survive the modern shock and be reborn of fire under the impact of the modern. If they cannot be reborn, then they will 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.' Therefore, the participants' revisiting of traditional knowledge was not to blindly follow tradition but to transform the ancient legacy into today's context.

The second principle involves gaining an authentic understanding of traditional knowledge, although based on diverse epistemologies. The dominant epistemological standpoint in contemporary China is to understand traditional knowledge from a neutral and objective perspective and to resurrect it as historical materials via the lens of specific disciplines, which can be traced to the approach of Zhou Yutong (1898–1981), a renowned classics scholar. Zhou's approach has been influential in the modern transformation and contemporary construction of the Chinese knowledge system, which is consciously and unconsciously applied by participants from various disciplines. Political science, for example, is a subject introduced from the West in the 20th century, but contemporary scholars can learn from 'a long history of Chinese politics and political philosophy' (P16). Likewise, legal scholars can benefit from the application of Chinese classical ideas found in the 'texts of litigation' to better understand the current legal framework in China (P17). With regards to philosophy, P6 compared unearthing 'what ancient Chinese philosophers thought about' without using any 'certain framework' to 'solving a law case.' This included 'spider traces', and 'restoring the scene.' He stated that 'even though we cannot return to the truth, we have to respect the material.'

Recently, 'value-oriented research' involving a compassionate understanding of traditional knowledge has gained increasing attention. P7, who disagreed with Zhou Yutong and supported the revival of classical philosophy, stated that contemporary scholars should study the classics with a concern for their value. He suggested that empathising with ancient wisdom could facilitate a comprehensive understanding of morally oriented traditional Chinese knowledge, which can help to integrate it with Western knowledge.

The third principle involves identifying specific traditional knowledge so that it can be used judiciously in research. The participants identified two types of traditional Chinese knowledge that can be re-examined with a different focus. The first is narrowly mainstream knowledge, which is centred on Confucian classics. P7 asserted that Confucian classics were 'assumed to contain an eternal truth,' and thus served as a scripture system: 'Other fields of study, like history and literature, are researched based on the understanding of Confucian classics.' These offer 'a set of ideas of order centred on the secular life of human beings with government power and everyday life as two crucial

anchoring points' and 'China's current knowledge system is still to some extent a continuation of this' (P17). Therefore, revisiting the Confucian classics is paramount to understanding traditional China and its continuity today.

The second type is ancient Chinese knowledge that has been overlooked, which was mainly identified by those whose professional fields are not concerned with Ancient China. P11, a researcher in Western philosophy, emphasised the role of empirical data in China's knowledge legacies. He 'avoided the Confucian classics in the four-part classification, and instead looked for marginal materials in the histories, masters, and literary collections.' In addition to these four parts, he paid close attention to 'the views of some excavated materials.' In addition to literary works, ancient discussions on mathematics, astronomy, and geography, 'some of which belonged entirely to the realm of natural philosophy' (P11), and studies of inscriptions 'which belonged to Sinitic epigraphy (金石學)²'(P12), are all knowledge traditions worthy of current research. Some of the participants reported that this type of traditional knowledge can help contemporary scholars gain a thorough view of ancient China and lead to fresh understandings.

The participants also mentioned other approaches to identifying specific traditional knowledge in research. According to P1, different levels of traditional knowledge should be preserved differently; for instance, while 'authoritarian culture from Chinese tradition on the political level has harmful and poisonous effects', it may be more necessary to 'preserve and inherit elements of traditional knowledge on the aesthetic and philosophical levels.' Slightly different, P2 pointed out the importance of 'identifying the various levels of traditions and cultural units, such as small and large traditions, and subcultures.' Many of the participants' responses suggested that keeping what is valuable and rejecting what is worthless in the present was important, and should be clearly and distinctly identified in research.

Seeking out Possible Interactions between Western and Traditional Chinese Knowledge

The participants suggested that both comparative research and further dialogues through theories and methodologies could advance the integration of

Western and traditional Chinese knowledge. They thought it important to incorporate traditional Chinese knowledge in these steps/approaches.

First, comparative research can increase HSS scholars' awareness of and respect for differences between Western and traditional Chinese knowledge. The participants acknowledged that these knowledge systems have many parallels and differences. In terms of similar academic traditions, P1 noted the parallels between Western and ancient Chinese literary theories: 'There are various aspects of various cultures that can be related to each other, such as caring for human beings and humanitarianism. Caring for people is a very important and basic criterion of modern Western literature, which our Chinese literature also emphasises.' P8 also agreed that 'there were parallels between ancient Chinese knowledge and Western knowledge.' The 'connotations and their relations of theory (*yi li* 義理), textual criticism (*kao ju* 考據) and the art of writing (*ci zhang* 辭章)' in ancient Chinese research are essential components of Western research as well.

Some of the participants also noted that comparisons are evident in the application of Western paradigms to Chinese knowledge, in terms of the differences between the two bodies of knowledge. As P10 commented: 'Our academic discourse is all from the West,' and thus 'we are essentially making a comparison [in our research], just using these Western concepts.' In addition, P7 thought that a direct comparison between different knowledge 'is not necessarily appropriate' and that 'an implicit comparison might be more helpful.' For example, his paper on the philosophy of Zhuzi (1130–1200), a renowned philosopher of the Song dynasty, appeared to 'be entirely about China' and 'lack some of the popular concepts of the West,' but 'many of these views can be seen with reference to the West.' P11 also espoused implicit comparison and considered it to be a more natural approach to illustrating Chinese cultural features in research:

It will not work well if you try to maintain cultural self-respect all the time and then deliberately emphasise your culture in your writing. You have to think the other way around. As a person who grows up in such a culture, your modes of thinking will naturally take on some characteristics of your own culture.

Second, some of the participants emphasised that traditional knowledge could be applied to engage in dialogue with Western theories, thus developing Chinese theories. The vast intellectual resources of ancient China could facilitate the development of new theories with Chinese characteristics. For example, P12 based his theoretical system of Chinese archaeology on traditional knowledge. He believed in the universalism of academic research, but argued that 'as our culture is often carried by material legacies, and we have our own culture, history and understanding of the history, we may have our system of Chinese archaeology.'

Some of the participants indicated the applicability of Chinese theories to global contexts. P9 believed that 'soft wisdom, such as the unity of reason and emotion in China, and the wisdom of life aesthetics, can be both localised and globalised.' Similarly, P19 supported the globalisation of Chinese knowledge: 'It is that a certain amount of universality of the concept that makes concept valid.' P14 felt that Chinese social sciences can 'appreciate individuals and human beings in their own cultural nutrition' and hence 'explain not only China but also civilisations that have nothing to do with China.' He applied Taoist concepts from Laozi in his research of Kula, the trading system of Melanesian society, which not only has 'very little influence from China' but is also 'one of the few societies today that is not fully capitalist.' P14 argued: 'Chinese scholars will notice something that those who have already studied Kula in the West have not noticed through interpreting Kula with Laozi's terms. This is convincing enough that Chinese scholars can make scholarly contributions.'

Third, some of the participants argued that interactions between Western and traditional Chinese methodologies were required. They believed that methodologies primarily derived from traditional knowledge could compensate for the shortcomings of current Western-dominated academic standards. For example, the traditional Chinese appreciation of holistic thinking can be transformed into a modern methodology that regards human beings as a whole. In addition, they noted that positivist thinking is predominant in modern research, which favours research objects that 'can be calculated rationally and researched empirically, whereas 'human beings and many things are not operationalizable and measurable' and that there are 'indefinable emotional things in the relationships between people' (P13). A developed methodology

based on traditional Chinese culture can thus provide new insights into addressing real-life questions about people.

In terms of research methods, the traditional Chinese human-centred approach can complement modern research methods that prioritise events and institutions over people. 'Traditional Chinese historians studied history from a human-centred perspective'(P2). Both P2 and P4 applied this human-centred approach in their historical research, demonstrating an attempt to integrate Western and traditional Chinese knowledge through developing 'non-Western expressions' (P4). Specifically, the biographical method adopted by Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian* can be learned, which uses 'the story to drive the whole plot and theoretical judgment of history' (P4) while 'the choice of research object contains the author's vision' (P2). This aims to 'reveal a special position of the object in the whole historical structure' and 'express some concern for the fate of the individuals' (P2).

Exploring Philosophical Foundations for Synthesising Two Bodies of Knowledge

The participants in the field of philosophy showed the most willingness and academic effort to integrate modern Western and traditional Chinese knowledge, while noting fundamental differences between the two. As P9 argued: 'Nor the ancient ones, such as the ideas of Laozi, Zhuangzi, Confucius and Mencius, or the contemporary ones, are somewhat far from Western acceptance... All the concepts we use are different, and our understandings of concepts are different.' Thus, some of the participants took a further step in exploring philosophical foundations for synthesising modern Western and traditional Chinese knowledge, particularly at the ontological level.

The term 'ontology' was recognised as originating from the West and has not been adequately researched in the Chinese linguistic world. Some of the participants argued that affection can be regarded as the most fundamental level of Chinese culture and is comparable to Western ontology. For example, P9 carried on the systematic construction of 'emotion as substance,' as developed by his teacher and friend Li Zehou:

In the Western context, the word 'ontology' is used only in the Western sense of ontology, and emotion cannot be ontology at all... In terms of the word 'emotion,' does it only mean emotion in the Western sense, such as feeling, affection, or passion? No, it doesn't. The Chinese word also refers to actual situations (shi qing 實情), sentiment (gan qing 感情), and character (qing xing 情性), right? So, this is a big gap in different languages.

P9 pointed out that 'emotion as substance' was not a familiar concept to a Western audience but was worthy of attention in global academia. He suggested that the balancing of emotion and rationalism represents philosophical wisdom that China can contribute to the world.

Slightly differently, P5 proposed the idea of a survival structure for comparing Chinese and Western ontologies, which can be identified in a context where external institutionalisation and even the historical context can be temporarily set aside. He argued that this structure, in the Chinese setting, is embodied in the notion of filial piety. He explained that Chinese culture was 'justified by filial piety,' 'which is comparable to justification by faith in God in Western culture' from a Chinese perspective:

How can I solve the problem of the immortality of life in a culture without a God? How do I solve the problem of the meaning of my existence? How can I solve the problem of love? How can I solve the problem of expectations for the future? Then, through this filial piety, all my problems are solved.

Thus, attempts to develop an alternative ontological inquiry that does not rely on the Western ontological framework have emerged among Chinese philosophical researchers, which aim at negotiating the fundamental differences between Western and traditional Chinese knowledge.

Discussion and Conclusion

As the call for intellectual pluriversality gains momentum, non-Western HSS scholars are revisiting their traditional knowledge, which naturally involves the effective integration of Western and traditional knowledge in their research.

Using Chinese HSS scholars' perceptions and practices as an illustrative case, we highlight three steps/approaches in such knowledge integration and promote intellectual pluriversality.

Our paper makes three main contributions. First, we highlight the importance of traditional non-Western knowledge in resisting epistemic injustice. Incorporating this knowledge in research can move beyond mere critical reflection on the hegemonic and inequitable global knowledge system (Alatas, 2003; Altbach, 2009; Connell, 2007). Our study also reveals how traditional Chinese knowledge can be revisited through three principles: reviewing this knowledge on its own terms and in a contemporary light; understanding it as authentically as possible; and selectively applying this knowledge. These principles are aimed at preventing traditional non-Western knowledge from becoming a 'lifeless corpus' and resisting its objectification (Hountondji, 1990), and alternative perspectives rooted in such knowledge can then be developed within the international academic community (Chen, 2010; Marginson & Xu, 2023).

Second, this study suggests how dialogues between Western and traditional Chinese knowledge can be promoted in research, supporting broader efforts to integrate the two bodies of knowledge. We suggest that an initial comprehensive understanding of traditional Chinese knowledge is required to facilitate its comparison with Western knowledge in higher education studies. This helps bridge the gaps between different knowledge (Taa, 2016), extending beyond comparing educational systems across nations (Li, 2017), an approach that might lead to methodological nationalism (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002; Kosmützky, 2017). We highlight the potential for transforming traditional Chinese knowledge into modern academic forms, including theories and methodologies. This can effectively inform contemporary HSS research and thus promote intellectual pluriversality in the global academic community (Mignolo, 2018a). We also identify the philosophical basis for synthesising Western and traditional non-Western knowledge. As noted, the 'synthesis of different knowledge has always been an important aspect of Indigenous philosophies and ontologies' (Dei, 2008, p. 12). Western academics should also be involved in integrating indigenous knowledge to co-create and re-create academic knowledge and research (Dei, 2000).

Third, by identifying exploratory research approaches through the recent progress of Chinese HSS scholars, this study provides suggestions for enhancing teaching and learning of integrating modern Western and traditional non-Western knowledge in universities. Our research is valuable for non-Western HSS academics and policymakers interested in revitalising traditional culture and integrating knowledge (Yang, 2022). An awareness of the process of knowledge integration can enable teachers to better apply such ideas in education and can thus develop students' abilities to traverse and incorporate different knowledge. The global academic community can also benefit from such epistemic-educational practice in terms of co-producing innovative knowledge and promoting epistemic justice.

Our study also has some limitations but opens new windows for future extensions. In methodological terms, the participant pool was limited, due to a lack of access to reputable scholars who have made progress in integrating Western and traditional Chinese knowledge. We are aware of the discrepancies across subjects and attempted to capture the diversity of HSS scholars as much as possible. Future research could examine other channels for dialogue with established scholars, to present a more comprehensive picture of Chinese HSS research.

Besides, we should be wary of potential risks in adopting traditional non-Western knowledge in HSS research. First, non-Western HSS scholars should note the problems of overemphasising traditional knowledge, such as the risk of extreme indigenisation or Sino-centrism when constructing the Chinese knowledge system and indigenising imported subjects like sociology (Chen, 2021). Second, it is crucial to approach the use of traditional non-Western knowledge as alternative resources for global higher education with sensitivity to the specific socio-historical or structural contexts in which it is applied (Cheng, 2018). As such, we advocate for further discussions on this topic, as it is still in its nascent stages but undoubtedly worthwhile and rewarding.

Endnotes

1. Traditional Chinese evidential study (考據學) uses textual criticism (kao ju 考據), a method of textual analysis, to verify the authenticity and accuracy of texts. It is seen as a means of uncovering the true meaning and intent of a text, which is essential for understanding its connotations and their relations of theory (yi li 義理), and of identifying the most effective and elegant ways of expressing that meaning, which is essential for mastering the art of writing (ci zhang 辭章).

2. Sinitic epigraphy (金石學) is the study of Chinese inscriptions on stone, metal, and other materials. It involves the analysis of calligraphy, palaeography, and the historical context of the inscriptions.

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