

Review

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Hanxue (Sinology) and Guoxue (Traditional Chinese Studies)—A Dialogue Between Xuetao Li and Fabian Heubel

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Abstract: In this dialogue, Dr. Xuetao Li and Dr. Fabian Heubel approach the concepts of Hanxue (Sinology) and Guoxue (Traditional Chinese Studies) from the perspectives of history and intercultural philosophy. Their in-depth analysis suggest that one of the most important problems of Chinese culture lies in the transformation of traditional values in the contemporary context. The two scholars discuss the question how Chinese studies can transcend rigid, narrow-minded, and arbitrary ways of thinking and knowledge production.

Keywords: Chinese studies; Guoxue; Hanxue; intercultural dialogue

1 Topics and questions

Li: For many years I have been thinking about the issue of Hanxue (汉学, Sinology) and Guoxue (国学, Traditional Chinese Studies), which is related to my own background of studying abroad. I was a graduate of Sinology from University of Bonn, so it is natural that I think more about the topic. Recently, it comes to be spontaneous. Historically, the conceptual emphasis of Guoxue was related to the introduction of Xixue (西学, Western Studies) into the Chinese academia, and then Chinese scholars became aware of the existence of Hanxue and this seemed to challenge the legitimacy of their own methodology of Chinese studies. It was only then that Chinese scholars began to attach great importance to Guoxue. In May 2010, when we held an international academic conference on “Interpretation of Chinese Philosophy by Contemporary European and American Sinologists—With a Focus on Heiner Roetz’s Scholarship” in Beijing, Prof. Roetz questioned the term Guoxue, arguing that the

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translation work in this field is far from sufficient, and this in turn prevents foreign scholars from approaching Chinese academic thought in another language and culture. Many of the problems are to be found in the process of language translation, and entering another context can lead to a new dimension of understanding Chinese world. I think Roetz's view is insightful.

In terms of the research perspectives, to look at China as a country separating from the world will not work anymore. In 1901, Liang Qichao (梁启超, 1873–1929) proposed, in his article “An Introduction to the History of China” (《中国史绪论》), three stages of China's historical development: China as a Nation, China as a Part of Asia, and China as a Part of the world. The third stage was marked by George Macartney's (1737–1806) visit to China in 1793, when the East Asian tribute system collapsed and China was incorporated into the world system. This period was “an era when the Chinese nation, together with other nations of Asia, communicated and competed with Westerners”. Today, there is no way to return to the first or the second stage, and Chinese scientific development has naturally become part of the world science, in which Sinology (including missionary Sinology and professional Sinology) played a very important role. Western Sinologists have adopted modern Western disciplinary classification systems and methodologies to reclassify and study Chinese disciplines, and it has greatly inspired and influenced the native Chinese scholars. After being introduced to China, these modern academic ways of classifications and methodologies soon became involved in the reconstruction of Chinese culture. The rise of Western Sinology simultaneously situated Chinese Studies in a global context with new level of significance. In fact, since the late Ming Dynasty, China has been unconsciously integrated into the global trend. The exchange of scholarship has also allowed Chinese Studies to benefit greatly from Western Science, and Chinese thought and knowledge has also had a great impact on modern current of Western thought (e.g., the Enlightenment). Therefore, I do not think it is meaningful to turn a blind eye to that and talk only about pure Guoxue today.

Heubel: Neither Hanxue nor Guoxue is a discipline in the strict sense of the word. They are rather regional studies that include a full range of knowledge, and therefore are obviously dependent on the development of other disciplines in terms of methodology or problem consciousness. A Sinologist, on the one hand, has to do very specialized research and, on the other hand, has to cover all knowledge related to China, across different periods and fields, from the past to the present, while at the same time conduct interdisciplinary studies. The dilemma of Sinology in Europe is clearly related to this. The relationship between Europe and Asia has become increasingly close and complex, and the European Classical Sinology, that is, classical studies that focus mainly on classical Chinese texts, has become inadequate and has gradually lost its central position to the kind of Chinese Studies that focuses on

modern and contemporary China. Especially in the United States, the role of this “Chinese Studies” is predominant. However, Sinology and Chinese Studies both face the problem of regional studies. At the same time, an alternative model of China studies has begun to emerge, in which the study of China is carried out across disciplines and connected through an interdisciplinary approach. I personally believe that the integration of Sinology or Chinese Studies into a multitude of disciplines is necessary. We have to consider the future development of Sinology and Chinese Studies in the light of their history.

In the case of Guoxue, you have already pointed out the key issue: it is a field of research that has been formed after the contact between China and the West. Therefore, it is impossible to separate Guoxue from the Western knowledge structures. In other words, although Guoxue is the antithesis of Xixue, it is actually a part of a modern academic paradigm. Therefore, the problem of “Guoxue” is similar to that of Hanxue: Guoxue primarily focuses on Chinese classical literature, and its definition as a discipline is not clear, not to mention that Guoxue is motivated by the quest for national and cultural identity. Chinese Guoxue can speak from a Chinese standpoint to counteract Western Sinology that speaks about China from a Western point of view—in fact, the purpose of many Western Sinologists in understanding and studying China is ultimately to defend their own culture and highlight the superiority of Western values. Shouldn’t Guoxue strike a balance in this regard? However, balancing one problematic thing with another problematic thing will hardly produce good results. In terms of contemporary international academic exchanges, Guoxue is hardly tenable. The question is, which perspective should we choose to think about the relationship between the two and to envision the possibilities for future development. I think this is crucial. There are many issues involved in conducting historical research on either Hanxue or Guoxue. I think you know more than me about the complexity of this history, especially about the history of European Sinology. If this kind of historical research lacks awareness of contemporary problems and considerations about necessary changes in the future, they both may easily fall into the trap of monoculturalism.

2 Hanxue versus Guoxue, Zhongxue versus Xixue

Li: Confucius said, “Learning from the old, so as to know the new” (温故而知新). By further categorizing the historical materials, we can also find out some problems, and this is the method of “learning from the past to know the future, and assessing the gains and losses” (鉴往知来, 品评得失) in the tradition of Chinese history. I agree with what you said, yet I still think that it may not be possible to come up with an answer of clarification in the near future, and that this issue needs to be discussed

and debated continuously with a critical eye and then it will be clarified in a gradual way. I think Hanxue and Guoxue still have their value in the transitional period, and there must be a reason for their existence. The introduction of Western disciplinary systems into China began in the late Ming Dynasty at the end of the 16th century, and there were already translations and introductions of Western university academic systems in the Ming and Qing Dynasties from the 17th to 19th centuries. In other words, they were not known to the Chinese only in the late Qing Dynasty or during the era of the Republic of China, and their acceptance took a relatively long time in China. We often assume that there is a synchronal divide between Chinese and Western academics: Zhongxue (中学, Chinese Studies) after Zhongxue and Xixue are incompatible. But from the perspective of historical development, that is to say from the diachronic perspective, this is actually a conflict between traditional agricultural civilization and modern industrial civilization. In 1905, the tradition of Chinese classics studies came to an end, and the traditional ways of categorizing disciplines (Confucian classics, orthodox historical works, philosophic works, literary collections) were gradually replaced by new disciplinary classifications, and this was related to the historical process of China at that time. In my opinion, although modernity originated in the West, once it has been introduced to and merged with other cultures, this very concept is not a pure Western product. Just like Christianity, it wasn't intrinsically a Western religion. I think the most fundamental reason for the dispute between Guoxue and Sinology is not related to academic factors, instead, more sensitive factors such as national sentiment and cultural identity are playing an important role.

Heubel: Culture often serves as compensation and consolation for experiences of loss and frustration in world in which experiences of coercion, reification, alienation, and exploitation are widespread. In today's China, Guoxue is associated with the development of identity politics in a global context. In addition to the comforting effect I mentioned above, it also encompasses the imaginary of becoming a new cultural power: the idea that China should not only become a world power economically, but also influence the world intellectually and culturally, or, in other words, develop knowledge and culture which has common value. Such a goal is legitimate in itself. But I have serious doubts about the possibility of achieving this goal through Guoxue. China's economic success is due to its integration into the global capitalist economy and the use of a Western economic logic to attack the West, as the saying goes: "Use the opponent's method to attack the opponent." (以子之矛, 攻子之盾) Consequently, that same approach might be adopted in the pursuit of intellectual and cultural influence. But the strategy of Guoxue seems to go into the opposite direction: How may it become possible to make a global impact when the intellectual and cultural connection between contemporary China and the contemporary West is broken? The contemporary Western "knowledge economy" places great emphasis on creativity, for which one main condition is cultural inclusiveness

and diversity. In fact, because China has absorbed a great deal of Western knowledge for more than one hundred years, China has accumulated complex historical conditions for cultural creativity, and therefore could have some significant advantage with regard to intercultural cooperation. To counter the West's intellectual and cultural exclusiveness with self-imposed closure would probably only strengthen the West's insistence on its own culture. Moreover, any knowledge, especially knowledge in the humanities, cannot be separated from life experience. When we look at life in Beijing today, it is somehow more Western than that of the West, insofar as it embraces certain model of modernization, which tends to eliminate traditional architecture and lifestyles, and which has been largely abandoned in Europe. During the process of Chinese modernization traditional culture has been largely destroyed or marginalized, and historical memory has been largely disrupted. Under such circumstances, how can Chinese tradition be defended by more than some kind of consolation? Because Hanxue no longer believes in the authority and superior value of the classics, the dialogue between Hanxue and Guoxue has become difficult. Guoxue tries to return to the Chinese tradition and defend the significance of the classics. If we were still living in the time of Richard Wilhelm (1873–1930), we would still be able to do so. At that time, Sinologists were happy to ask the masters of Guoxue for advice on the Chinese classics. This was a practical collaboration between Hanxue and Guoxue a hundred years ago. But nowadays Western Sinologists are by and large not interested in classical Chinese studies, and are even more reluctant to accept the idea of studying Chinese culture from an ethnocentric point of view. So, I don't know whether there will be some space for dialogue between Western Hanxue and Chinese Guoxue. If there is no dialogue, Guoxue will inevitably become a closed and isolated field, that is constantly in danger of falling into the trap of trying to imagine some pure Chinese culture.

Li: Some contemporary scholars of Guoxue believe that we should return to our own discourse system in pre-Qin China (ca. 770–256 BC) so as to express our contemporary spiritual life, because since the May Fourth Movement (1919), due to the invasion of Western science, we have become unable to speak and we have often lost our collective voices. For the introduction of Buddhism around the first century AD, of Christianity since the 17th century, and of Western thought and technology in modern times have transformed Chinese civilization into a diverse and impure form of civilization. Prior to this, Chinese thought in pre-Qin era was a so-called pure, Chinese way of thinking, with all concepts and categories being Chinese, but later influenced by foreign cultures, it became an undefinable system of discourse. Therefore, they emphasize that today we need to return to our own cultural traditions. Is there such a homogeneous Western culture that has never been influenced

by foreign civilizations, or did Western culture itself emerge from the exchange and dialogue with various civilizations?

Heubel: This is a huge debate. To discuss such an issue, one can also find many examples in the West. From the experience of Germany's history, one can only say that the rejection of modern multiculturalism and the pursuit of national cultural purity led to one of the greatest historical disasters of the 20th century. After this historical lesson, the fixation of any single cultural identity became suspect. In the field of European philosophy, the Greek origin of European philosophy is of course a fundamental view, but there is also radical criticism of this view. For example, Martin Bernal (1937–), a retired professor at Cornell University, in his *Black Athena: Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (1987, 1991, 2004), emphasizes the importance of connection between Greek philosophy, Africa and Asia. According to his view, Greek philosophy is not pure in nature, instead it is the product of a complex history of exchanges in the Mediterranean. In the history of philosophy, many scholars have already criticized the narrowness of the mainstream understanding of European philosophy, that does not take this diversity into account. In addition to the ancient history of exchanges, the contribution of the Arab world to the development of European philosophy is also marginalized. It cannot be denied that the nationalism and even racism of the 19th and 20th centuries is part of modernity. Therefore, it is also obvious that the pursuit of national cultural purity touches upon the problem of identity politics. With regard to the Nazi experience in Germany we can say that the real disaster came not from mixture, but from purity.

Li: Bernal, whom you just mentioned, is not only a specialist in political science and Near Eastern studies, but also in modern Chinese history, and in 1976 he wrote an article entitled “Liu Shih-p'ei and National Legacy” and a monograph *Chinese Socialism to 1907*. In fact, he was still very much involved with China himself. Unfortunately, many scholars in China have not yet realized that the so-called purity does not exist at all. China itself as a matter of fact is not a pure and homogeneous concept. I read Wolfram Eberhard's (1909–1989) *Typen chinesischer Volksmärchen* (Chinese Folk Tale Types, 1937) with my students in class before, and found that many of the folk tales that seemed particularly Chinese were, in the end, derived from Central Asian or Indian motifs.

3 Disciplinary classification in historical perspective

Heubel: The example you gave is thought-provoking, and it forces us to understand disciplinary classification from the perspective of intellectual and scientific history. In so doing, one can become more aware of the close connection between knowledge

and power, and between knowledge and politics. From a methodological perspective, this is very important.

Li: When I was visiting Bonn previously, I bought in a used bookstore two books published in Vienna, describing the languages of various countries: *The Language of the Straight-Haired Races* (*Die Sprachen der schlichthaarigen Rassen*, 1882) and *The Language of the Curly-Haired Races* (*Die Sprachen der lockhaarigen Rassen*, 1884). When I read these two titles, I felt my hair stand on end and I got goose bumps. The author, Friedrich Müller (1834–1898), was a linguist and vice-president of the Vienna Anthropological Society. He classified Chinese as scientifically among the languages of straight-haired races, and indicated on the title page that this book was dedicated to Georg von der Gabelentz (1840–1893), and the exercises in it are borrowed directly from *Chinese Grammar* (*Chinesische Grammatik*, 1881) von Gabelentz. Müller was an advocate of the Hamito-Semitic Languages (Hamito-semitische Sprachen) classification of languages, which today seems both misleading and ethnically charged. In fact, this classification was not replaced until the 1960s by the more religiously and ethnically neutral Afroasiatic languages (Afroasiatische Sprachen) classification of the American anthropologist and linguist Joseph Greenberg (1915–2001). We've talked before about how many historical disciplines have been eliminated, and it's surprising to read a book like this today, never knowing there was such a division of disciplines in history. You have just made a very good point that looking at this issue from the perspective of intellectual history and disciplinary history can uncover a lot of things that are hidden behind it. Knowledge and reality are often the product of social construction in different historical periods, and they equally participated in the construction of power, so the knowledge chosen by society and history is often the representation of power and serves a certain class or group. Looking at disciplinary classifications from the perspective of disciplinary history, we will understand that politics, history, and intellectual history are behind them, and we need to excavate and deconstruct these roots, and see why or why not they are reasonable, or their value of existence only during the transitional period. Tradition without critical reflection will not be viable in the end, and the problems of the present will not be solved by the mere inheritance of tradition and the selection of specific contexts. In his book *On the Reconstruction of Historical Materialism* (*Zur Rekonstruktion des historischen Materialismus*, 1982), Jürgen Habermas (1929–) refers to his reconstruction as to give a new form to historical materialism, thus achieving what Marx's historical materialism has not achieved. In applying reconstruction to Confucian ethics, Roetz argues that reconstruction means reintegrating the ideas of the ancients in a way that corresponds to their true intentions and making the most of them in the light of the ethical problems we face today. In other words, the tradition must be critically reinterpreted from a sense of present problems in order to obtain resources useful for the present.

Heubel: We cannot detach ourselves from the relationship between knowledge and power. For any academic discourse to become universally accepted knowledge, it must undergo complex power operations and historical development. In Taiwan, the scholars of Confucian classics are well aware of the issue, and have begun to explore the formation of the Chinese classics. The key questions are: How did the classics come into being, and how did they acquire their canonical status and their authority? These are questions that deserve attention. The question is, why did the scholars of that time ever consider such knowledge as truth? It is not easy to understand this. At the same time, it means that in a hundred years from now, we probably will also be the subject of ridicule, and people will ask why we ever thought this or that. This is not to say that truth does not exist or that knowledge is entirely relative, but only to emphasize that truth evolves through history and is not beyond change. Why do new disciplines continue to arise? Because the world is constantly changing, new problems appear, at the same time old knowledge and its related disciplines disappear. It is interesting to look at Guoxue and Hanxue from this perspective. Such problematization is certainly not the same as eliminating these fields of knowledge, but it highlights the historicity of this knowledge about China.

Li: What you said is very much like the New historicism advocated by Stephen Greenblatt (1943–). According to Michel Foucault's (1926–1984) understanding of knowledge and power, it is power that constructs knowledge, and therefore knowledge embodies, in a way, power, rather than the truth that it is labeled. The so-called objective historical narrative is in fact only a subjective one, no different from literature. Therefore, knowledge and history can also be analyzed and deconstructed in a literary way. But all this presupposes, as you just mentioned, that truth is featured by historicity, otherwise we would be caught in a spiral of relativism. If we think about Hanxue and Guoxue in the context of history, we can see a clear picture: "Hanxue" is under the Western classification of disciplines, and it adopts Western academic methods for Chinese studies, in other words, it is a modern academic study with China as its object. In the 1920s, Chen Yuan (陈垣, 1880–1971), the famous Chinese historian and educator, compiled the *Remains of the Dunhuang Scrolls* (《敦煌劫余录》), a catalogue of the Dunhuang fragments collected by the Capital Library in Beijing (京师图书馆). The manuscripts were "stolen" by the British archaeologist Marc Aurel Stein (1862–1943) and the French Sinologist Paul Pelliot (1878–1945). In the preface to Chen Yuan's catalogue, Chen Yinke (陈寅恪, 1890–1969), one of the most distinguished historians in 20th century China wrote, "To join the scholars of Dunhuang research have become a new trend in the academia worldwide today. In the twenty years since Dunhuang was discovered, scholars from Japan in the east and France and England in the west have made achievements in their respective fields of study. But there are only a few scholars in China whose academic achievements can be listed as world-class Dunhuang works." It can be seen that Prof.

Chen Yinke is already very worried that Chinese scholars in Dunhuang study cannot compare with those from Japan and the West. At a symposium on Chinese studies at the Peking University, held at Baobing Hall of the Longshu Temple (龙树寺抱冰堂), Mr. Chen Yuan sighed: “Nowadays, when scholars in China and abroad talk about the center of Sinology, they refer either to Paris or to Japan, but not about China. We should win it back to China, back to Beijing.” I can relate to Chen Yuan’s feelings at the time, and it was impossible not to evoke a sense of national responsibility among Chinese intellectuals seeing that most of Dunhuang scrolls had been taken away by the foreigners! But today, the Chinese studies around the world, the so-called Sinology, highlights the global value of Chinese culture, and the introduction of these academic achievement to China marks the deeper understanding of the universal value of Chinese culture. It is precisely because of its long history and its own characteristics that Chinese culture has become the common wealth of all human beings.

Prof. Wolfgang Kubin, in response to Chinese scholars who argue Western scholars should use Chinese terminology and ideological tendencies to study China, cites three reasons that I find convincing: First, we have to keep in mind that with Wang Guowei (王国维, 1877–1927) as the pioneer scholar, China has been interpreting itself from Western perspectives; second, since 1949, the Marxist view has become the predominant worldview in Chinese Mainland; and third, no one, not even a Chinese person, has been able to go back to the Tang Dynasty to examine Li Bai’s speech patterns in detail and to consider the unanswered questions about the female voice in his narrative poems. There is no way for us to return to the so-called traditional approach to conduct researches today; contemporary question awareness, modern academic methodologies, and an international perspective are the unstoppable trends. Prof. Yu Ying-shih (余英时, 1930–2021), the historian at Princeton University, also said in his *On Historical Research Experience* (《史学研究经验谈》), “We can’t keep on studying Chinese subjects in the way that Confucian classics, history, philosophy, and literary collections were studied in the past, because we have entered the so-called modern academic stage. I think the biggest change is that the questions we ask and the way we study them are slowly becoming Western in style, and it is difficult to distinguish them, and in fact we are all using the Western way to study Chinese things.”

Moreover, tradition cannot solve today’s problems without transformation. It is by reconstructing the potential of traditional culture to be relevant today and by approaching tradition with a critical consciousness that tradition can be given the vitality it deserves. Through translation, different ways of interpretations, and a critical perspective that separates subject and object, Hanxue has brought much inspiration to the Chinese academia. From the perspective of historical development, Chinese scholars have gone through a long process of understanding Hanxue and

Guoxue. I am still confused about the positioning of Guoxue. Is Guoxue the study related to traditional way of scholarship and the purely Chinese method, or is it the study related to contemporary academic methods? The former may no longer exist in Chinese Mainland today, while the latter differs from Hanxue only in its emphasis on “I and the other”, that is, the difference in the subject of study.

Heubel: It is true that the scope of Hanxue is broader than that of Guoxue. For example, the study of Chinese classics in the academic journal *Chinese Studies* (《汉学研究》) covers both (Western) Hanxue and (Chinese) Guoxue. A foreigner can be considered a Hanxue scholar but unlikely to be considered a Guoxue scholar. You mentioned earlier the relationship between European Sinology and racist thought in Europe, which is the dark side of European Sinology. Then, if Guoxue emphasizes “I and the other”, and if only native Chinese scholars can study Chinese Guoxue, then Guoxue will become a concept with very strong ethnocentric connotations. In my view, this would be a dead end in academic terms (because “Guoxue” confines Chinese knowledge to a limited realm of specificity) and dangerous in terms of cultural policy. I am certainly looking forward to thinking about contemporary issues through Chinese cultural resources, and I believe that we can explore the universal significance of traditional Chinese concepts through transcultural studies. The real difficulty lies in establishing the importance and inspiration of the Chinese classics in the dynamic development and problem consciousness of contemporary thought.

4 The contemporary transformation of traditional Chinese values

Li: You just talked about how traditional Chinese values have been transformed into a way through which the world can think about contemporary issues. I think the success of this transformation means a great contribution of Chinese resources to the world. I have read an attempt to adopt the categories and concepts of literary criticism in *Wen Xin Diao Long* (《文心雕龙》, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, a 5th-century work on Chinese literary aesthetics) to conduct Western literary criticism, but in general, I felt that it is basically unsuccessful. Maybe it is because the knowledge I have do not allow me to agree with such a way of criticism. I think the exhibition and symposium on “Contemporary Bland Painting” that you and Xia Kejun (夏可君) planned in Songzhuang this time is a very good attempt. When you came to Beijing Foreign Studies University two years ago, we taught a course together on Critical Reflections on François Jullien to study the research methodology of this French philosopher and Sinologist. We also discussed the concept of

blandness in class. In his book *In Praise of Blandness: Proceeding from Chinese Thought and Aesthetics* (2007. French original: *Éloge de la fadeur. À partir de la pensée et de l'esthétique de la Chine*, 1991), Jullien touched upon this idea. He took the ideology and aesthetics of the Chinese literati as a reference to think about the qualities of European culture. Since you organized the exhibitions and symposium, I am curious about how the traditional categories and concepts of Chinese paintings can be applied to contemporary art. Will they be universally acceptable, or how to make the category of literary criticism with traditional Chinese aesthetic concepts such as blandness acceptable?

Heubel: This is a very complicated question, and there is no way to give a simple answer. Yesterday a professor from the Central Academy of Fine Arts (中央美术学院) came to see the exhibition and invited me to give a lecture series on blandness at the Academy next year. He felt that this was a topic worth discussing because he was also looking for artistic expressions and aesthetic discourse that would help him reflect on the situation of contemporary China. The question of how the resources of literati aesthetics can work in the context of contemporary problems and our awareness of them is a difficult one to answer, because we must first answer in what sense blandness is an aesthetic category. Please do not forget that aesthetics is a category that belongs to the modern system of disciplinary classification. In this way, we are confronted with a specific, and very dynamic relationship between traditional and modern scholarship.

5 Hanxue, Guoxue and Buddhist view of Two Truth

Li: As I mentioned above, I think it is problematic to consider Hanxue or Guoxue as a discipline. The concept of Two Truth (二谛义) from the Three Treatise School (三论宗) of Chinese Buddhism, in my opinion, fits well with the relationship between Hanxue, Guoxue and the modern disciplines we are talking about now. According to the Contemplation on the Four Noble Truths (观四谛品) in the *Root Verses on the Middle Way* (《中论》), there is no such a nature (so-called entity, self-nature) that is permanent or changeless, and it is all about the emptiness that neither arise nor die. If one understands the truth of such emptiness, one understands the ultimate truth. However, the emptiness in all things must be manifested in falsely existing forms, that is to say, one can only realize the truth through its dependence on the falsehood. Knowing these false forms is the conventional truth. Buddhists do not support the idea of discarding tools after gaining the results (得意可忘筌), and they think that though the worldly truth is not the ultimate truth, the latter can be explored and approached with the help of former. Without the use of words, thoughts, and ideas, there is no way to explain to all sentient beings the ultimate truth that transcends the

worldly meaning. The practitioners of the Three Treatise School believe that understanding things only in terms of existence or emptiness is partial or even wrong, and the actual situation can be obtained only by taking both concepts into consideration. Specifically, I believe that either Hanxue or Guoxue cannot be as valid as a discipline, and they have their own value of existence perhaps for the sake of the moment or for the transitional period, but in the final sense, they must eventually be incorporated into specific disciplines such as history, philosophy, and religion. As early as 1928, Professor Qian Mu (钱穆, 1895–1990), a Chinese historian, pointed out, “There are no national boundaries in academia. The term Guoxue has no precedent and is not likely to be established in the future. It is a term of the times.” Although Chinese scholarship itself has its own characteristics, I still believe that the relationship between Chinese scholarship and the discipline, after modern classification, should become closer. For example, Chinese history is clearly more closely related to the discipline of history than it is to other areas of Chinese scholarship. Although I believe that Sinology programs should slowly separate out the various specialties of Chinese studies, and incorporate them into various modern academic sections. But I still hold that the connection of various Chinese specialties is important, for, after all, they mutually influenced each other and existed as an organic whole for thousands of years. In fact, the primary task of a Sinology program is to teach the fundamentals of Chinese culture, including language, literature, history, etc., and it should not include the in-depth study of Chinese topics in the various specialized programs. But at least in the current situation, Sinologists in Sinology programs of many German universities are rarely able to engage in dialogue with mainstream scholars in the West. Many professors in Sinology programs are only jack-of-all-trades, like encyclopedic figures about Chinese studies. To a German person, professors in Sinology programs are supposed to be knowledgeable about all aspects of China, but with today’s increasingly detailed division of labor among disciplines, it is difficult for Sinologists to engage in academic exchanges with scholars from various disciplines.

Heubel: I said earlier that, in my view, Sinology is in a serious crisis of legitimacy, but a new academic structure has not yet emerged. In the United States, Chinese studies has been gradually incorporated into different disciplines, but in Europe this development has been very slow. The question is, how should we promote this development? You have a broad vision and think about future possibilities. For example, the field of Sinology, or the development of a focus on China within certain academic disciplines, which one should we pay special attention to? This will be a very crucial strategic choice. Faced with the issue of Guoxue and Hanxue, how can we envision the future development, especially of Hanxue?

6 The legitimacy of Chinese studies

Li: If we think about the future of Hanxue, I think that in order for Chinese Studies to have legitimacy, we must first emphasize the commonality of academic categories, rather than focusing only on the specificity of Chinese studies. In particular, Chinese studies should be allowed to enter the different sections of the Western university system, since the Sinology program is undoubtedly a product of the colonial period and obviously cannot keep up with the times. Only by entering different professional disciplines will Chinese studies gain legitimacy and those who study Chinese history will be able to engage in a normal dialogue with scholars of European history. On the other hand, I have also been emphasizing the transitional value of Sinology and the horizontal, intrinsic interconnectedness of East Asian studies. To a certain extent, it is equally important to establish an institution similar to the Center for East Asian Studies.

Heubel: This is the interdisciplinary design of, for example, the Karl Jaspers Centre for Advanced Transcultural Studies at the University of Heidelberg. This center is part of the Cluster of Excellence—Asia and Europe in a Global Context: Shifting Asymmetries in Cultural Flows, sponsored by the federal government. As far as I know, this project was approved because its approach connects interdisciplinarity and transculturality. This academic policy is precisely breaking away from disciplinary exclusiveness. Thereby, Sinology is integrated into an interdisciplinary structure in which it may indeed acquire new significance. From a philosophical point of view, however, this development does not satisfy me, because it does not lead to the development of classical Chinese philosophy within the German philosophical community. Furthermore, philosophy itself has been marginalized within the new trend towards interdisciplinary cooperation. But in any case, we can see the formation of new structures of knowledge. The change in the intellectual structure has accelerated the end of the traditional way of doing research behind closed doors in Sinology programs and, of course, has led to a further disintegration of classical studies centered on texts, thought and literature.

Li: I think this project is very good, and it is a test field for future development of Sinology in Germany and even in Europe. I always think that the creation of “Guoxue” is due to the fact that there are still many people in our time who are concerned the disciplinary classification method, which originated in the West, will cause traditional Chinese culture to lose its subjectivity and uniqueness. But the real question is whether the modern disciplinary system can adequately highlight the value of traditional Chinese studies. This question, in fact, goes back to the issue of tradition and modernity discussed earlier, and it is no longer the issue of East and West. Can we still reject the modern academic system today? I think part of Guoxue

can be classified as classical studies, but I am also considering what is the point of doing that.

Heubel: In Europe, classics/classical studies or in German *klassische Philologie* used to be an important reference system for Sinology. But for today's German Sinology, this approach has been completely marginalized. In contemporary French Sinology, the situation is not exactly the same.

7 The future development of Hanxue and Guoxue

Li: I am also thinking about another question, that is, how do foreign scholars position the research of contemporary Chinese scholars on Chinese topics? For example, Professor Chen Lai (陈来), the dean of Guoxue School at the Tsinghua University, is an expert on Chinese philosophy, but according to the viewpoints in the *Regulations of the Chinese Educational System* (《奏定学堂章程》) submitted by Zhang Baixi (张百熙, 1847–1907), Zhang Zhidong (张之洞, 1837–1909) and others in 1904, Professor Chen is not associated with Guoxue, because philosophy equals the subject of Classics set up then in the curriculum of the university. From another point of view, Professor Chen Lai is definitely not a Sinologist. What kind of scholar would you call him? A few days ago, I attended a seminar on German female Sinologists at Peking University and met Dr. Kristin Kupfer, who was studying in a PhD program with Professor Gu Xuewu (辜学武), who is currently a professor of political science and international relations at the University of Bonn. Although she is a lecturer of the Sinology Program at the University of Freiburg, she introduced herself to me as a political scientist. But others always called her a Sinologist, which made her feel a little embarrassed.

Heubel: My major is philosophy, but it is an awkward situation for me that German Sinologists are not interested in philosophy and German philosophers are not interested in China. Most German philosophers know nothing about Chinese thought, whether ancient or contemporary. If I were to introduce to German scholars what Professor Chen Lai does, I would have to say that he is a scholar of Chinese philosophy or of the history of Chinese thought. There is no German word for Guoxue and it is impossible to understand it without the Chinese context. When translating, it is necessary to determine what national studies meant, so it becomes Chinese studies, and therefore cannot be separated from the debate in European and American academia about Sinology and Chinese studies. The term Guoxue in Pinyin is also incomprehensible. Then, why is it important to recognize transcultural exchange? Because it can help us to change perspectives. In today's globalized world, the very foundation of cultural nationalism has largely become questionable. I believe that the most dynamic, rapidly growing, and influential field of research

should not be based on nationalism, but on the emphasizes on dynamic exchange and mutual learning between different languages and cultures. That is why I think of this issue in terms of a transcultural dynamic. From this perspective, the special emphasis on some kind of purity of Chinese culture may be understandable in the context of cultural history and psychology, but from the perspective of transcultural exchange, it no longer makes much sense. I hope that academic research may eventually move beyond the narrow minded emphasize of national cultural positions that still is widespread today. This is not to say that the existence of national cultures or languages should be completely denied, but maybe we can think about the situation in terms of what you said about the ultimate truth and the conventional truth, we need to reconcile the opposing forces of national cultures and transcultural entanglement.

Li: I basically agree with your point above, and it is even more so if we look at a larger historical narrative. Nationalism is actually only one of many human identities, and other identities, such as identification with the human community, language, and family, all exist simultaneously. I don't want to see that national identity becomes the only self-identity; society has to allow for multiple levels of identity. The division of disciplines in the second half of the 19th century we just listed is alien to us today, and this process of mobility that was very grand over a century or two, which has certainly been exacerbated by globalization. The division of disciplines that was established a century or two ago seems very problematic. In my opinion, there would be no way out and no future for us, if we were to stick to the current camp of Guoxue or Hanxue. Therefore, if we want to make cultural progress and development, we need to think about the future and make corresponding plans. In this dialogue we have only raised questions and outlined the scope of the discussion from a broad perspective, but we have not been able to go deeper than that, and we look forward to more focused and detailed discussions in the future.

Heubel: Yes. When thinking about the contemporary situation, we can certainly choose the Chinese classics as a starting point, but we cannot just think about them in the context of Chinese culture, because we also should consider a transcultural perspective. For example, when studying the *Zhuangzi* (《庄子》), it is also important to pay attention to how it is read, for example, in the French-speaking academic world. Why did Jean François Billeter (1939–) consider the paradigm of subjectivity in the *Zhuangzi* to have contemporary significance? Because it develops a philosophy of transformation that emphasizes plurality in classical Chinese philosophy, and the problems of subjectivity and cultural identity are among the most pressing issues in the contemporary globalized world. From such a perspective, perhaps a very meaningful aspect to which Chinese thought can contribute is the development of a new paradigm of subjectivity, self-reflection, and self-transformation that may help to move beyond ideas of fixed identity that are

based on nationalism and national culture. The *Zhuangzi*, then, points to a skeptical attitude toward national culture, toward a narrow understanding of subjectivity, and toward fixed positions.

Li: So today, *Zhuangzi* actually seems to be the most contemporary representative of modern thought, whereas in the past we always thought that everything related to civilization in the modern era came from the West. This semester, I offered a seminar on Conceptions of Modern Chinese History in a Global Context to my doctoral students, in which we discussed every important concept of modern history, how it was seen in the history of the Chinese revolution, how it was seen by American historian John King Fairbank (1907–1991), how it was seen by Japanese scholars, how it was seen by German scholars, and it proved to be very inspiring. In this way, throughout the whole semester, the students felt less certain about historical facts that they previously thought were certain. They also began to understand the tension between historical accounts and historical facts, as well as the role of power and ideology behind historical accounts. And everyone began to understand that historical facts are not given, but constructed by historians of different eras in response to new questions, new ways and new objects of history. Any absolutely correct descriptions and definitions are questionable, so we need to establish the diversity of interpretive systems. And our students will no longer be gullible enough to trust any supposedly true and objective account of history. When there is only one source of opinion, people become paranoid. I think this is the biggest problem with Guoxue, because it wants to establish a new orthodoxy. In today's world, I think this is basically impossible.

Heubel: Of course, it is impossible. You can talk about the meaning of the *Yijing* (《易经》 *Book of Changes*) for management today, but you have to talk about it in the context of the international economic order; you can use strategies from *The Art of War* (《孙子兵法》) to defeat Western capitalists, but this goal is achieved within the framework of global capitalism, and I have never heard people say they want to use *The Art of War* to create a new economic system. I think that instead of criticizing Hanxue and Guoxue, we should propose some new perspectives and invite people from both fields to participate in discussion, so that we can further reflect on related problems. I am not interested anymore in criticizing (European) Sinology because I consider it to be part of an outdated intellectual structure that is already falling apart. In a future-oriented reflection, we might try to involve scholars from these fields in order to generate a deeper and more diverse historical understanding. I think this is what can be done at the moment.

Li: Your suggestion sounds very good, and such a preset, in my view, can serve as both the end of this dialogue and the beginning of the next one.

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