

Responses to Modernity: The Primary Mission and Basic Functions of Chinese University

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Abstract

The start point of modernity is interaction and communication. Any University in the context of post-modern knowledge society and internationalization process, the primary task it faces is the task of interaction, the Chinese University is no exception. Based on the reality of Chinese society needs, Chinese university should also undertake the basic function of combining the China's demands, market needs with individual interests, and promoting the reconstruction of social order and its healthy development.

Key words: Modernity; Mission; Function; Chinese universities

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INTRODUCTION

Since 1990s, Chinese society has stepped into the expressway of modernity, the transition of political and economic system as well as the reconstruction of thought and values are required to be explained by new knowledge and to be stabilized by new cognitive models.

Due to the dual desires of social practice and theory research, in recent years, the Chinese academic world has conducted extensive dialogue and research on "modern" concept, mainly involved in philosophy, literary, artistic, political, legal, economic and other areas. However, the scholars' studies on modernity were indeed broad and in-depth, but they failed to note a very crucial content: since the core of modernity is knowledge system and cognitive models, then what role did the university as the center of modern social knowledge and cognitive bases of knowledge, exactly play in the performance process of modern patterns? This is a great topic which spans many research areas from social theory of modernity to higher education research, the attention western academic world, especially represented by British scholars have paid on this topic was quite recent. However this topic is the focus of the discussions of modernity, especially in the context of contemporary Chinese society, people increasingly focused attention on educational issues, revealed the more and more evident disappointment over the current higher education system, as well as the increasing urgent expectations of the university reform, we must carefully examine the historical logic of university development in modernity patterns and innovate the era subjects of Chinese University.

1. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE UNIVERSITY AND "MODERNITY"

The birth of university depends on the special moment when religious theocratic began declined and secular power did not yet form climate, as a relative independent and powerful social institution, the emergence of university not only wedged a rational nail in the world ruled by the spirit of the church thearchy, which made

it cannot keep height unified of moral power anymore, but also planted a seed of democratic for the unformed national secular regime system which made it can easily recruit the civil servants with professional technology and good breeding and democratic consciousness for its own bureaucratic system in the ascension process. Before the crisis of external aggression the traditional China was always a steady cycle of imperial society where there was no soil for the survival of the university. Actually the emergence of Chinese modern University conforms to the modernity process of Chinese sociality. Here we need to look at a popular topic: the exotic features of Chinese University, or “latecomer and exogenous” of Chinese University. Due to weak history of modern China and the continuous process of learning from the West, the idea has considerable implications: Chinese society itself does not produce such products of university, so University—this modern institution can only be imported from the west who walks in front of the modern series.

This views derives two arguments, the first argument is aggressive, it argues that since the university is imported, and in modern society, the university system of Western mode has been leading the world, so China university must imitate and copy this complete university system from head to feet as much as possible, from system to spirit, from courses to language; on the contrary, the second argument about this views is negative and passive, which holds that the world class university can't emerge under the present Chinese social background and culture context. Therefore, overhaul must be implemented in social systems firstly and then the development and prosperity of the university could emerge. In contemporary China, the above two kinds of thinking each has its own merits and markets, particularly the first, which tends to appear in “academics elite” groups with Western education background, but lack of social practice, to a certain extent they master the discourse power and decision-making power of Chinese university construction, and they are trying to create “world first-class university in China.” Compared to the first argument, the second one is in a weak position, but it still has its own markets, and in recent years it is even provocative under the stimulation of some speeches with ulterior motives in the Western world.

The first thinking pattern ignored the China's social environment, without the deep soil of social culture, the university entirely transplanted from the west will become fragile plants and cannot grow into flourishing and towering trees. What the second assertion gave out is a helpless sign of “Orange is orange when it born in Huainan (the south of Huaihe River in China), orange is trifoliolate orange when it born in Huaibei (the north of Huaihe River in China)”, and this view has a certain degree of recognition in the transformation period of contemporary China; however its problem is, it takes it for granted that orange is only orange, and it has only one

form, but the fact that the citrus, and orange, and pomelo growing up in different areas have different tastes belong to the same category of fruits has been ignored. In fact, these two kinds of thinking are typical manifestation of narrow formal logic developing into dogmatism, their biggest problem is to conduct the simple theoretical deduction and deduction through following some kind of formulaic thinking patterns, ignoring the true historical development and social practice.

The resolutions of these issues, the most important is to encourage diversity, to allow various forms of University idea and pattern, refusing to the narrow debate of “either-or”. Meanwhile, there is no a certain concept and pattern should be optimal, and we don't need one or two universities who are predominant. Let one hundred flowers blossom, develop diversity, allowing universities to follow a different logic.

2. THE CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM OF CHINESE UNIVERSITY

“The real mission of Scholars strata is to pay high attention to the human common and actual development process, and usually promote the development of this process.” (Fichte, 1984) In the context of contemporary China, what is the base of our discussion on “modernity”, basing on the actual problems of Social Watch, or the dream words of “self-sustaining of enlightenment” in thought circle? Chinese University and its intellectuals must have a clear understanding of this issue. On one hand, we need to recognize the “absence” of the development of China's modernity, Chinese society has not yet really completed the transition from pre-modern to modern. On the other hand, although the Western society has reflected the crisis of modernity in the context of postmodern, but this does not mean that we do not need advance along the direction of modernity, what's more, this does not mean we can deconstruct and counteract modernity by means of the postmodern thought. For Chinese university, the first is to improve the system of modern University, but this is only the first step, system is only the shell of the spirit, if there is no internal cognitive patterns and ideas the imported system will not really play a role. While the Social cognitive models and ideas must be endogenous and follow the historical logic of “practice makes perfect”. Therefore, if Chinese University wants to construct its own inner character and bear all kinds of missions given by society, it must finish the double construction in cultural psychology and system design. System construction can draw lessons from the ready modern University system in the West, and Chinese university has its own special features. Several aspects of the lessons include: Firstly, there must be a boundary delineated between administrative and academic; secondly, government, university and society

should form a “triple helix” supporting relationship; thirdly, the administrative decision-making and financial support of the Government must keep a certain distance to the internal governance of the University; finally, academic production and evaluation of the University must have a professional, mature, diverse mechanisms and systems. The special feature of Chinese university is that it is impossible and dispensable for Chinese university established and reformed by the Chinese Government under the leadership of the Communist Party of China to construct modern University System jumping out of the scope of ideology.

System design is of course important, but the values behind are more fundamental. The cultural psychology and political identity of Chinese University intellectuals should be clarified. If Chinese intellectuals want to construct their own cultural psychology, they must comb and construct their own knowledge system firstly. Zheng Yongnian thought that the urgent matter of Chinese intellectual circle is to rebuild the Chinese system of knowledge, but he did not elaborate what the content of the “knowledge system” is. In this regard, scholar Zheng Yongnian thought that the Chinese system of knowledge lacks a “grand narrative” stage, while Western knowledge systems have developed since the 16th century and have made a considerable progress in 18th and 19th century, and almost completed in early 20th century. This knowledge system was built on the basis of a series of “grand narratives” and gradually formed a relatively complete system through the efforts of great thought masters such as Adam Smith, Marx, Weber, Durkheim and so on, after that, the study of knowledge system could gradually turn to the microscopic approach. Looking back in China,” since the May 4th movement, what role Chinese intellectuals have played was just the agent of the West, or in other word, there was no distinction between what they did and what Western scholars did, that is disseminating and applying the western concepts and theories to China. Until today, this tradition is still deeply rooted.” (Zheng, 2012) Zheng had a certain insight into the construction process of Western knowledge system, but failed to seize the core parts. Since the 16th century, Western intellectuals has began to plan for the development of human society from the macro-level but the fundamental motivation of the process has experienced transitions from the “divine” to “secular”, from focusing on the inner “faith” to focusing instead on the real life and the development of society.

In summary, the construction of knowledge system in China faces double challenges, the first is the recognition and comb of the China’s traditional culture value, the second is the clear insights and right reference of modern Western knowledge paradigm. From the classical age of Greece Rome, to the era of medieval theology, to the three waves of modern Western knowledge, there was a main line throughout the value of western knowledge, whether liberalism or conservatism, the philosophical thinking of

Western scholars today still continued the ideas of Plato and Aristotle. Therefore, there were Whitehead’s words: “It is fair to say that the most compelling features of Western philosophy are a series footnotes of Platonic thoughts. In the field of philosophy, there is not an issue that cannot be found in his works.” (Cui & Yang, 2014) But the difference is that the research paradigms of Western knowledge has undergone great changes from speculation to imagination, to the empiricism and positivistic science, when the Western intellectuals continued to expand knowledge domains at the same time, they focused on adjusting their cognition perspective. China’s traditional culture has a very high value, but there is one point needed to be clear that traditional Chinese culture is not single and is not equivalent to Confucianism or any thought and doctrine, no matter how long it has played a main role in history. Strictly speaking, pre-Qin philosophers, Wei and Jin’s metaphysics, Lu and Yang’s heart-mind theory and critical realism, which are the excellent cultural heritage in different historical periods and should be included in the category of traditional Chinese culture, are worthy of our careful combing and inspiration drawing. On the inheritance of traditional culture, the first thing need to do for current University of China is to focus on the real China society, and to support macro thought by micro method, which is the practical meaning and realistic point of constructing the Chinese system of knowledge. Of course, comparing to the provision of scientific knowledge, the cultural knowledge is more important and more difficult for Chinese university. That is not a short-term task that can be accomplished, but rather a long-term reconstruction of cultural identity. Jürgen Habermas believed that knowledge, interest and science are produced for illustrating experience and understanding the world.

Kernel of university is knowledge, knowledge has two forms, one is the knowledge as explanation, another is the knowledge as discovery. The former is the cognitive and expectations of human on themselves, and is the reference mode of individual itself looking for value and development road, relating to moral, belief and art; the latter is the reality evidence provided for the former, is human observation tracing on the objective things and the accumulation and summary of subject experience, relating to science, method and technology. These two kinds of knowledge are not inferior or superior to one or other, nor one can guide the development of the other, they just correspond to the human cognition to themselves or others. When the person as an individual, others and everything is “the other”, when as a group, object is the other. Regardless of which kind of importance of knowledge you lay emphasis on, there will be bias. Too much emphasis on the knowledge as cognition, one will be addicted to mystical and metaphysical thoughts because of the lack of the evidence of practice, too much emphasis on the knowledge as discovery, one will fall into the

instrumentalism and lost subjectivity. In the book named “universities in a knowledge society”, Drandi divided the knowledge produced by post-modern University into four categories: research-relevant knowledge, and education-related knowledge, and professional training-related knowledge, and knowledge associated with intellectual inquiry and criticism (Gerard, 2010). In fact, Drandi’s “four kinds of knowledge” can be summed up as two kinds of knowledge of “explanatory” and “discoverable”, what the difference is that he joined the tools of “explanation” and “discovery”. The “research-related knowledge” and the “professional training-related knowledge” respectively involve the basic methods of the research framework and professional knowledge production and operation training, and both types of knowledge are used to “discover” the objective world and solve the objective problems. The “education-related knowledge” is used to design the human experience and the formation of personality i.e. self-discipline, the “knowledge associated with intellectual inquiry and criticism.” devotes to address broader social issues, which are associated with public knowledge and rational, and these two types of knowledge are used to “explain”. In the eyes of the characteristics of the application of knowledge, it is no doubt that the knowledge as “discovery” is fundamental, universal and unitary, and it can indiscriminately flow and be used for reference; but the knowledge as “explanation” is heterogeneous, individual and multiple. China’s knowledge system in history attached too much importance to knowledge as explanation, by comparison, in history, it is short of the knowledge as discovery. Therefore Chinese university today inevitably needs to continue to complete the supplement and perfection of the latter system, but what is more important is how to inherit and build the former knowledge.

3. THE PRIMARY MISSION AND BASIC FUNCTIONS OF CHINESE UNIVERSITY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

Any University in the context of post-modern knowledge society and internationalization process, the primary task it faces is the task of interaction, the Chinese University is no exception. Based on the reality of Chinese society needs, Chinese university should also undertake the basic function of combining the China’s demands, market needs with individual interests, and promoting the reconstruction of social order and its healthy development.

3.1 The Primary Mission of Chinese University

The start point of modernity is interaction and communication. Precisely because of rational spirit based on the interaction, modern society can not sink into the recycle of social system innovation-glory-closing-decline-collapse just like the traditional communities.

Indeed, the modern has the tendency of homogenization, but the rise of post-modern thought is trying to get rid of the essentialism, rationalism, centrism and even the tool rationality of modernity, and the social crisis brought by social disciplines. Since Nietzsche has summarized the essence of modern spirit into “Nihilismus” of “physiological decadent”, Heidegger, and late Wittgenstein, and Husserl, and Scheler, and IELTS Bear tears, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Marcuse, and Habermas, and Lyotard, and Derrida, have criticized the modern social crisis of Science crisis, tool rationalism, technology rationalism, and global market, abandoned the “meta-narrative” features of modernity and put forward the solution program of overcoming the defects of modernity respectively from different perspectives, Habermas’s theory of “communicative rationality” and Anthony Giddens’ theory of “reflexivity” are most convincing, and their common feature is that they pointed out the only path of getting out of the predicament of modernity was admitting the multiple coexistence of world (the diversity of the world), discarding the uniqueness of the social constructivist paradigm, and reaching some consensus through interaction and reflexivity. Rawls also endorsed this view, but his suggestion was reaching a “overlapping consensus” based on the formation of “public reason”, and the so-called “public reason” was built on the position of Western liberalism. Based on the criticism of modernity. Jaspers in his capacity as existentialism philosopher appealed that University must respect national traditional and be committed to provide teachers and students “creative and cultural life”; Zygmunt Bauman vigorously attacked the phenomenon of institutionalization that modern University indiscriminately processing the knowledge and skills with different content into “equivalents”, and called for the formation of multiple values and thought in University; Gerard Delanty creatively incorporated the knowledge sociology, and social theory of modernity and globalization theory into the areas of higher education research, he thought that in today’s knowledge society, the University should be a place for communication, and burden three missions: reconnecting the links between University and society; recovering the contacts between the various disciplines, building the links among University, society and nation. Based on the investigation of the British college education tradition, university in China should become the main venue for cultural exchange and exploration, and as a “place to share the thought process” (Gerard, 2010), here, the intellectuals can continue to dialogue with cultural traditions and social reality, and different ideas can enjoy co-existence and co-prosperity.

3.2 The Basic Functions of Chinese University

In combination with the current trend of historical development and the reality of Chinese society needs, the basic functions of Chinese university should be associated

the national demand and market needs with individual interests through academic research, becoming a Center for social reconstruction and virtuous development, which is a core function of knowledge in modern society, and the essential of the legitimacy of University organizations.

Firstly, the knowledge society's arrival gives the University a new mission—to serve as public space and communication center. In the current countries all over the world, understanding and innovating knowledge without exception become the core force of guiding individual progress and stimulating social development. The university as a place of advanced knowledge dissemination and knowledge innovation and development, must become the core institutions of society. Along with the constant promoting of the degree of China's higher education popularization, the supports it gets and the expectation it bears are more universal and more profound. In short, the influence Chinese university has on the development of nation, society and person are becoming more and more extensive and profound. United Kingdom academic Drandi believed that the greatness of the modern University system is that it can become the most important communication place in the knowledge society. "Universities must become such a place, compared with other places, all the efforts should focus on considering social relations rather than relying on the uniform idea, whether cultural or national ideas And to institutionalize the existence of the diversity awareness and make the University a place of public debate". (Palfreyman, 2011) In this regard, the Chinese University must give response. On one hand, universities should make full use of and develop each individuals rational thinking and innovative spirit associated with this, and guide the growth and maturation of public reason, and promote the healthy development of Chinese society. On the other hand, China University also should play increasingly important role in social culture heritage and innovation, and clarify the event and value in public space relying on culture independent, and culture reflection and culture criticism, interpreting and the social value which meets the public interests, analyzing and criticizing the phenomena which impede the long-term interests, therefore, Chinese university can guide the healthy development of public society, clear and achieve public interests.

Secondly, in the framework of the current practice in China, universities should also respond positively to national interests and demands of the market. In this aspect, Chinese University needs actively adjust its own subject setting mode and science research direction firstly based on the rational thinking and long-term plan and then the real need of labor market and technology market. At the same time, Chinese University should provide intelligence support for nation, technology and guidance for market, trying to lead a way of innovative technology production and the benign social lifestyle by means of

explaining and discovering and reflect the social problems through scientific analysis and rational thinking.

The last but not the least, Chinese University must carefully examine the value of liberal education, and infuse the rich connotation into every student's mind. In the eyes of the history of university, liberal education is the embodiment of the University idea of in all ages, even in the era of knowledge economy when students and teachers must accept the market guidance and inspection, liberal education will never lose its charm. On the one hand, given the acceleration changing and complexity and nonlinear development of society, the speed and frequency of industry developments and changing in the labor market are far greater than that of in the subjects setting in the University, regardless of how university adjusts its subject setting and training model, it is difficult to meet the market needs for practitioners' various professional abilities and attitudes. Therefore, what University prepares for its students must be not only the professional knowledge and skills.

On the other hand, liberal education will give people some capacities that almost can be applied to all walks of life, and these capacities are the most wanted ones in the job market called the "transferable skills" — a capacity of reading accurately and quickly mastering various information and the ability to use them creatively; a capacity of clear and fluent oral expression and the written records to spread and transfer the new developments of the new information and problem discussion correctly; a capacity to perceive the underlying meanings of the dazzling data and draw them from a variety of forms, these is the ability." The transferable skills can be and even only can be cultivated by liberal education, since it is the ability which can be used widely in any technical industries. Apart from the practical needs, the reason why liberal education is indispensable is that it can guide people to their homes in mind. Liberal education intended to achieve some degree of mental freedom, which requires people not to follow others secular thinking track while speculating, and not to be anxious and horrible when one's own thought does not reach agreement with the authority.

The comprehension of thought is not to stay at reading the text written by former philosophers, or to understand the information it revealed and to regard it as the guidance of one's life, but to think thoroughly the concepts which are familiar and repeatedly mentioned, and to attempt to verify these concepts' feasibility in reality and the coherence in logic, and then integrate these concepts into individual experience, mind and emotion.

Indeed, people have to stand on the shoulders of giants, and put themselves in the former philosophers' ideas which are much more profound, imaginative and insightful than themselves, only by this way can our mind not be shadowed by the superficial, empty and meaningless social phenomena. However, it is far from

enough to only regard themselves as the disciples of the masters, people need to get through the thick minds of masters, surpass the peak of their wisdom, hew out a path for themselves to “freedom”, which is exactly the gist of “liberal education”. Because of this, even though “post-modern University” has approached inexorably, “liberal education” will not lose its status in the past, by contrast, it will become the most significant and unique labels of university. We even can hold like this: in the post-modern society, liberal education is the only individuality of college education, and also one of the foundations of rationality on which postmodern University rely.

Just as the preface of Chinese version of famous book by Harry Lewis—excellence without soul: How a great university forgot education:

Should Chinese university cultivate the students’ humanistic spirit, personality, and the comprehension of their social responsibilities? Should Chinese university liberate students’ minds to let them decide how to serve the community better? If the curriculum of Chinese university emphasizes general education, will students become more creative and more imaginative? The experience of Western universities has given us an absolutely positive assertion. (Harry, 2012)

The modern university can’t develop without the traditional roots. In the process of the development, either sublating and reconstructing based on the local reality and inheriting civilization, or learning and modeling by the attitude of “Foreignstones may serve to polish domestic jade, the liberal educational traditions should be treated more seriously.

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