



**A New
'Chinese Learning'
in a Quest for Values**

Yves Camus 赵仪文
Macau Ricci Institute
澳门利氏学社

A New ‘Chinese Learning’ in a Quest for Values

Yves Camus 赵仪文

Macau Ricci Institute 澳门利氏学社

Abstract

In the present context of “China’s peaceful rise” – policies and facts – it is not rare for cultural events like Olympic Games competitions, Universal Exhibition or even some book fairs to be viewed by world media as “soft diplomacy” means. Setting aside any subsequent controversy, any rise on the international scene has to be supported by the attractiveness generated by the “values” it offers. Chinese Studies are not anymore limited to scholarly research for some better knowledge and understanding of Chinese culture, history and civilisation. Beyond information on the nation’s achievements, they engage also into some reflective sharing on challenges lying ahead. In the “quest for values” just mentioned, it is worth observing and analysing what might be called a “Confucian renaissance” at home and abroad, in its various dimensions and tenets. But such a quest goes beyond the level of means. For decades, contemporary Chinese academe had to deal with what might be called an historical predicament, briefly expressed in one sentence: “以中为体，以西为用”. As Chinese society still tends to reach some symbiosis with this “substance and function” tension, the time has probably come for New Chinese Studies to engage in new vistas more respectful of Chinese intellectual traditions. Philosophy and Classical Studies are here mentioned as good examples of what is at stake. The attractiveness of the “China rise” would not suffer from it.

One cannot deny that more often than not, whenever world media refer to China, implicitly at least there is a reference to its “peaceful rise”, manifested by facts or expressed in policies. The very beginning of the “peaceful rise of China” can perhaps be traced back to 6 to 17 April, 1971, when “the American Ping-Pong team, in Japan for the 31st World Table Tennis Championship, received a surprise invitation from their Chinese colleagues for an all-expense paid visit to the People's Republic”.¹ On this successful visit — and the competition lost by the US team! — Zhou Enlai built up his “Ping-pong diplomacy”. Since then much greater but less important sports events have followed on the road of “soft diplomacy”. Yet, the will to win at any cost is misguided when the means it employs contradict the value of the goal, as a recent fake badminton competition during the London Olympic Games has shown, to the dismay of the international TV watching community.

¹ Cf. www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/china/peopleevents/pandeo7.htm, accessed on 2012.09.02.

This sad event may be applied as a metaphor to introduce this presentation. The organisers of this conference, whom I would like to thank for their invitation, are to be congratulated for the themes proposed to the forthcoming debates. Chinese Studies practitioners are called to reflect on the main issues that China on the world stage has to address, as stated in the letter of invitation, themes which I need not repeat here. All refer implicitly to the “peaceful rise of China”.

Many articles have been written commenting on the topic. In one of them, Professor 时殷弘 Shi Yinhong, from Renmin University, does not hesitate to formulate a question. After presenting the benefits and prospects of China’s “peaceful rise” policy, its requirements in terms of values in the future world order with its norms, Professor Shih adds:

« 但是(这是个最大的“但是”), 现在大概还难以预言当代中国将对世界基本的跨国价值体系有什么世界历史意义的大贡献。 »

“[...] *But* (and this is the greatest “but”) it is still difficult now to foretell what major contributions of historical world significance contemporary China will make to the compound of transnational values in the world.”²

In other terms, the rise of China cannot be denied: but what values does China offer to be influential and attractive? The same question is implicitly present in the world of literature. For instance, Bertrand Mialaret, a well-known literary critic of contemporary Chinese novels in Paris, notes that contemporary Chinese novels in Western translations enjoy great success abroad. Is that also to be considered part of some “soft diplomacy”? He writes:

“During the 20th century, one should not forget the tight relationships between Chinese intellectuals and national politics: the ambivalence towards Western influence and values, the international status of China and the desire for recognition have been important elements.

A good example is the “Nobel complex” as described by Julia Lovell,³ which “reveals pressure points in a modern intellectual entity not entirely sure of itself.” This type of complex, the dominance of cultural industries from the West while the economic world-wide position of China was rapidly developing, were the basis of a cultural “soft power” policy.”⁴

These questions on the attractiveness of the rise of China and the usefulness of soft diplomacy are new as far as China’s self-assertiveness is concerned. But for practitioners of Chinese Studies, they may signal an evolution of the disciplines concerned.

Times have definitely progressed since foreigners considered China a “curious land”, as David Mungello says in his renowned work: *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the*

² “China’s Peaceful Rise and World Order”, 《神州交流--Chinese Cross Currents》, Vol. 4, No. 3, July 2007, p. 22 — available in PDF format in Chinese and English versions at www.ricci.org/doc/freepdf/CCC_4_3_Shi_Yinhong.pdf.

³ Julia Lovell – *The Politics of Cultural Capital - China’s Quest for a Nobel Prize in Literature*. University of Hawaii Press, 2006.

⁴ “Reading Chinese Novels in the West”, by Bertrand Mialaret, 《神州交流--Chinese Cross Currents》, Vol. 9, No. 2, April 2012, p.42 — available in PDF format in Chinese and English versions at www.ricci.org/doc/freepdf/CCC_9_2_3B_MIALARET_42-57.pdf

Origins of Sinology.⁵ This “curious land” with things and topics related to China was considered an “object” of study for various purposes, including academic and scientific inquiries. So much so that later on, not only Westerners but also Easterners entered the field. Japanese in particular developed *kangaku* (漢学 "Han Studies") and Chinese scholars similarly spoke of 漢学 *Hanxue* "Han Studies" or 国学 *Guoxue*, "National Studies" at the time of the May Fourth Movement. With the “ping-pong diplomacy” mentioned supra and later on in the opening-up and reforms era, one may say that what was called “China watching” lost its purpose, so that Chinese Studies underwent new developments: Classical China studies and Modern China studies had to complement each other.

Peaceful Rise of China and a Quest for Values

However due to the diversity of the fields of research, rare have been scholars who were able to combine expertise on Imperial China with deep knowledge of Contemporary China. Among those who successfully have been able to make important contributions through the tension between the two is Professor Geremie R. Barmé from the Australian National University. Through the "New Sinology" concept, he "emphasises strong scholastic underpinnings in both the classical and modern Chinese language and studies, at the same time encouraging an ecumenical attitude in relation to a rich variety of approaches and disciplines, whether they be mainly empirical or more theoretically inflected".⁶ Professor Barmé with this concept launched “The China Heritage Project” which “provides a focus for university-wide research on traditional China, its modern interpretations and recent scholarship”. Under his direction “the Project advocates a 'New Sinology' that builds on traditional Sinological strengths while emphasising a robust engagement with the complex and shifting realities of contemporary China”.⁷ As many Chinese students and scholars have nowadays settled abroad, this ‘new sinology’ may also benefit from their contributions on an equal footing with those of their Western colleagues.

Another instance of a similar endeavour is what Professor Anne Cheng, from the College de France in Paris, proposed in her Inaugural Lecture delivered on 11 December 2008. In particular, she said:

“The historical evolution of China over the past century forces us into a kind of increasingly participative observation (to borrow an expression from anthropology). Our perception of China can no longer afford to remain at a distance and to construct a fanciful object that can be apprehended as a quintessential whole. In many respects, we still entertain conceptions which were elaborated three centuries ago in the Enlightenment period but are no longer enlightened or enlightening. One cannot help being struck by the representations, both concomitant and contradictory, which prevail at the present time: how are we to reconcile the rationalistic and aesthetic picture of Voltaire’s “philosophical China” on the one hand and the autocratic and Machiavellian China emblematic of Montesquieu’s “Oriental despotism” on the other?

⁵ Mungello, David E., *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology*, Stuttgart, F. Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1985.

⁶ Barmé, Geremie R., “On New Sinology”, first published in the *Chinese Studies Association of Australia Newsletter*, Issue No. 3, May 2005; cf. China Heritage Project, The Australian National University. See http://ciw.anu.edu.au/new_sinology/index.php

⁷ Cf. <http://ciw.anu.edu.au/projects/chinaheritageproject/>

We must accept to observe and listen more closely and thereby give up hasty generalisations, however brilliantly seductive and conveniently marketable they may be.”⁸

Obviously the rise of China has not derived any attractiveness from these outdated interpretations or culturally biased images. Professor Cheng continues:

“China itself can no longer be considered as a static object of study, it has become a partner, we should even say an active participant in our debates. The simple reason is that, over the past 30 years or so (approximately one generation), the Chinese have been busy assimilating all the contributions of Western social sciences and, even more recently, re-appropriating their own intellectual and cultural traditions and patrimony, starting from the treasures underground. The archaeological discoveries which paradoxically started at the height of the Cultural Revolution can be compared, as to their impact and repercussions on our perception of Chinese antiquity, to the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls: while confirming the authenticity of a number of traditional sources, they challenge many of our assumptions inherited from long accepted common views.” [...] “Since the beginning of the 21st century, the intellectual world has been agitated by yet another fever, that of the traditional revival, which means that China is by now endeavouring to assert full mastery on the re-appropriation of its own past.”⁹

And, as Professor Cheng introduces his lectures on “Chinese Intellectual History”, she adds:

“[...] The intellectual history of China [...] constitutes par excellence a discipline capable of bringing out the continuities and ruptures between different periods, the crises but also the internal dialogues, the various processes of revival, revisit and successive reconstructions of the past [...] By circulating thus between past and present, we should be first brought to perceive how deeply our reading of the past is conditioned by present presuppositions and how necessary it is to remain immune from the ever powerful temptation of retro-projection, but also to apprehend the importance of past debates for the present time.”¹⁰

Quite a few other passages of this inaugural lecture also show a convergence between Professor Cheng and Professor Barmé’s ways of thinking about Chinese studies as a “conversation” between present and past, Chinese and non-Chinese coming “to realize that, by dint of patiently tracing a tradition in its own terms and reconstituting its own questionings, we may end up observing that some common processes are to be found in the historical trajectories of different cultures”.¹¹ Through such a shared understanding, many new bridges can easily be built.

But in fact old gaps in recent legacy remain to be addressed. It is well-known that, beginning in 2004, “benefiting from the UK, France, Germany and Spain’s experience in promoting their national languages, China began its own exploration through establishing

⁸ Quoted from *La Lettre du Collège de France*, 4/2008-2009, Chair of Chinese Intellectual History, Anne Cheng, p. 17, Extracts from the inaugural lecture, accessed at <http://lettre-cdf.revues.org/734>. A complete Chinese translation of the Inaugural Lecture is posted on www.chinese-thought.org/zwsx/009203.htm or <http://bbs.zhongguosixiang.com/thread-27486-1-1.html>

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

non-profit public institutions which aim to promote Chinese language and culture in foreign countries: these were given the name the Confucius Institute".¹² In the "quest for values" mentioned supra, it is worth noting and analysing a "Confucian renaissance" at home and abroad, in its various dimensions and tenets. Yet such a quest goes beyond the level of means.

This Confucian renaissance has largely been discussed in China during the years of the so-called 'national studies' fever and the establishment of promotion institutes in universities. But at another level of scholarly study, research has been conducted on the origins of Confucian texts, mainly on *The Analects*. The study of the transmission of the text can allow a deeper understanding of its socio-historical background. Leading scholars, Professor 朱維錚 Zhu Weizheng in particular, have contributed to this quest that does not "de-construct" the importance of the Sage in Chinese tradition, but renders the tradition of his teaching closer to reality and therefore closer to the needs of present-day society. Professor Anne Cheng for the first years of her lectures at the Collège de France gave them the title: "Revisiting Confucius: ancient texts, new discourses".¹³ It is perhaps the merit of such a scholarly inquiry which combines scientific exegesis and hermeneutics with erudition that the high value of ancient wisdom can recover some flesh and bone and attractiveness for our contemporaries. China's peaceful rise will not suffer from it.

On the contrary, it is part of a long effort among the Chinese academe to re-appropriate its origins and exorcise itself from the inherited predicament, hastily summarised in one sentence: "以中为体，以西为用".

Overcoming a Predicament on the Road to Modernity

For many decades already, contemporary Chinese academe have had to deal with what might be called an historical predicament, briefly expressed in one sentence: 中学为体，西学为用 *Zhongxue Wei Ti, Xixué Wei Yong*, that is "Chinese learning as substance, Western learning as function" or better "Chinese learning as foundational culture and Western learning as technical utility".¹⁴ Chinese society still tends to reach some symbiosis within this "substance and function" tension, but the time has come to engage in new steps more respectful of Chinese intellectual traditions. In this regard, Philosophy and Classical Studies are here just taken as good instances of what is at stake.

Not long ago, the *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* [International Journal of Philosophy] published a special issue named "The Modern Chinese Philosophy". It was introduced by Professor Anne Cheng in an article under this symptomatic title « The Problem with "Chinese Philosophy" ». In a few short pages, the author shows that universities and academic publications of the West manifest a resistance to integrating Chinese intellectual traditions: "such resistance seems to be paralleled, at the institutional level, by the distribution and organization of the university departments of philosophy where there is a

¹² http://english.hanban.org/node_10971.htm

¹³ Cf. www.college-de-france.fr/site/anne-cheng/ : *Confucius revisité: textes anciens, nouveaux discours*.

¹⁴ Cf. 張之洞 Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909), 劝学篇 *Quàn Xué Piān* (Exhortation to Study, 1898), in which was proposed, under Western pressure, a mildly conservative approach to modernity, summarised in the phrase 中学为体，西学为用, *Zhongxue Wei Ti, Xixué Wei Yong*, "Chinese learning for fundamental principles and Western learning for practical application".

tendency to concentrate on purely Western traditions of thought and to leave the "East" to colleagues in specialist departments of oriental studies".¹⁵

The "problem" is further studied in relation to its origins and in greater detail by Professor 陈来 Chen Lai in the study that follows and deals with the precise questions: "What is the content and scope of an exposition of Chinese philosophy? How is the history of Chinese philosophy similar or not to other scholarly approaches to the study of Chinese thought in general?"¹⁶

To answer these questions, Professor Chen presents first how some authors, at the beginning of the twentieth century, have tried to "reassess the identity of Chinese philosophy and to take up its defence anew". For instance, 蔡元培 Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940) in the preface to 胡適 Hu Shih's "An Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy — Antiquity",¹⁷ wrote:

"There has been no systematic recording of classical Chinese learning. All we have are very pedestrian accounts. If we wish to compose a systemic account of classical learning, the studies of Antiquity are of no help, and we have no other way but follow the criteria of histories of philosophy in the West. In other words, only those who have studied the history of Western philosophy can determine the appropriate form of exposition."¹⁸

But, by "mode of exposition", adds Prof. Chen, "Cai Yuanpei meant much more: decisions regarding content and scope, as well as the way Chinese materials should be sorted out according to the architectonics of Western philosophy".¹⁹

As the details concerning the content, scope and methods of Western or Chinese philosophy are beyond the purpose of this presentation, we can further follow Prof. Chen in his analysis of another author, 馮友蘭 Feng Youlan and note also a similar reference to the history of Western philosophy. Feng Youlan wrote:

"From my own understanding of the content of philosophy [...], it is clear that the subject matter of 'philosophy' in the West has been roughly similar to that of what, in China, was called "learning of the mystery" in the third and fourth centuries, the "learning of the Way" in the 11th-17th centuries and "learning of moral principles" in the 17th-19th centuries. [...] The study of the Way of Heaven was roughly similar to the cosmology of Western philosophy, as was their study of human nature to the philosophy of life in the West. As for the study of methodology found in Western philosophy, it has been pursued during the founding period of Chinese intellectual history, but was abandoned from the 11th century on. Admittedly, we could argue that, then, the study of moral principles had its own methodology (the "method of self-

¹⁵ *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, « La philosophie chinoise moderne » – Bruxelles, 2005, No. 2 (No. 232): Anne Cheng « The Problem with "Chinese Philosophy" », p. 175-180. URL: www.cairn.info/revue-internationale-de-philosophie-2005-2-page-175.htm.

¹⁶ 陈来 Chen Lai, "Studying Chinese Philosophy: Turn-Of-The-Century's Challenges", translated and edited by Michel Masson and Kao Chia Chi, *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, Bruxelles, 2005, n°2, pp.181-198.

¹⁷ 胡適 Hu Shih (1891-1962), *Zhongguo zhexue shi dagang*, Shanghai, 1918,

¹⁸ Hu Shi, "An Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy" (in Chinese), Vol. I, p. 1.

¹⁹ 陈来 Chen Lai, "Studying Chinese Philosophy: Turn-Of-The-Century's Challenges", p. 181...

cultivation"), but actually this methodology was not aimed at acquiring knowledge, but at moral improvement."²⁰

Prof. Chen remarks that Feng Youlan noted also: "... there are other elements in the learning of moral principles that do not correspond to the content of Western "philosophy," and this is particularly true of the "method of self-cultivation" dear to the Chinese tradition."

This discussion deals with "the most fundamental principles of Chinese learning", "中学为体 *Zhong xue wei ti*", as Zhang Zhidong says in his maxim and as "the learning of moral principles" so essential to Chinese culture should be (as philosophy is in the West). As such it escapes the scope of the "Western learning", mainly considered as "technical utility". This aporia manifests the predicament generated since the end of the Qing dynasty by a constant but inadequate reference to the West. How can it be exorcised and overcome?

After summing up the solutions presented by Feng Youlan, which are beyond the scope of this presentation, Prof. Chen notes what he calls the Western "connection" of that time:

[...] "The fact is that modern learning originated in the West, and first of all modern sciences. If among all the disciplines in the history of China and of the West we identify one element as learning of the moral principles, we will find it quite difficult to determine its exact standing and role among the other modern disciplines."²¹

This is exactly what is at stake in the rise of China and its quest for values. But no matter how it is critically evaluated, this 'Western connection' remains for better or worse the present-day background. Professor Chen nevertheless adds some reflections:

"In the modern cultural development of China, the overall trend has been the wholesale adoption of the academic classification from the West; China acquired a modernized academic framework by borrowing these new academic categories: philosophy, literature, history, law, political science, etc."²²

Moreover, with this academic classification, the structure of Western learning can be understood, the educational system of the West adopted, some modern development of Chinese culture fostered and its relation to world culture clarified.

The debate on the specificity of Chinese philosophy continued, particularly under the influence of 张岱年 Zhang Dainian (1909-2004), who in the Preface of his own "An Outline of Chinese Philosophy" makes this important proposition:

"We can take "philosophy" as a generic term, not restricted to Western philosophy. In other words, we could say that it is a category of learning, of which Western philosophy is one specific instance; the generic name of this category of learning is "philosophy." This way, we may call "philosophy" anything bearing resemblance with Western philosophy and that can fit in this category. With this understanding of philosophy, nothing prevents us from calling philosophy the thoughts and theories of the ancient Chinese regarding the world and human life. Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy may not be similar in their basic approaches; yet, regarding topics

²⁰ 馮友蘭 Feng Youlan (1895-1990), "A History of Chinese Philosophy" (in Chinese), Vol. I, p. 7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²² Chen Lai, "Studying Chinese Philosophy: Turn-Of-The-Century's Challenges", p. 181...

and objects of study as well as its standing among the other fields of learning, Chinese philosophy is quite equivalent to Western philosophy.”²³

Professor Chen Lai comments:

“In this way, the Chinese learning of moral principles is Chinese philosophy. Admittedly, its scope and the questions it pursues are somewhat different from those of Western philosophy, but these differences, far from jeopardising its status as Chinese philosophy, do manifest that philosophy is unity of universal and particular.”

But he adds:

“Should tomorrow's understanding of philosophy remain controlled by the European tradition or, even worse, by the "British and North American analytical" tradition, thus making it impossible to express the humanistic wisdom and value orientation of philosophy, then the prospects for mankind in the twenty-first century will not look better than in the twentieth.”²⁴

This is a rather pessimistic note on the future of world philosophy. It shows that “the problem with Chinese philosophy”, presented by Prof. Anne Cheng, or “the challenges of studying Chinese philosophy” analysed by Prof. Chen Lai, are more than academic issues of classification. It concerns the mutual relationship between different traditions in the present world. The debate has recently been re-opened in the field of Classical Studies.

From Classical Western Studies in China to Chinese Classical Studies

In 2008, in anticipation of the anniversary of the 1919 “May Fourth Movement” and the birth of the “New Cultural Movement” that followed, a forum was held at Yunnan University in order to “examine the pros and cons of Western studies entering China in the modern era [...]. The forum’s main topic was “Classical Western Studies in China”. It focused on the renaissance age of “Chinese Civilization” and re-examined the past one hundred years of the Chinese academe’s knowledge of Western tradition and its relationship to higher education”.²⁵

The organisers of the forum and its participants from many universities in China were all aware of what has been called supra the “predicament” affecting Chinese learning and education. In what follows only two main lines of reflection will be presented. They are based on the contributions given by the keynote speakers.

The presenter of the forum and first keynote speaker, 甘阳 Gan Yang (University of Hong Kong, Centre of Asian Studies) situated the gathering in the context of the rise of China:

²³ Zhang Dainian, "An Outline of Chinese Philosophy" (in Chinese), Beijing: China Academy of Social Sciences, 1982, p. 2.

²⁴ Chen Lai, “Studying Chinese Philosophy: Turn-Of-The-Century's Challenges”, p. 181...

²⁵ For more information on the forum, see www.opentimes.cn. The full transcript of the presentations given at the forum can be found for the first part at www.opentimes.cn/bencandy.php?fid=147&aid=900 and for the second part at www.forum1.cn/show.aspx?id=1025&cid=224. — A large selection of the keynote’s speakers communications delivered during the forum has been republished with an English translation in 《神州交流-- Chinese Cross Currents》, Vol. 9, No.3, pp. 98-114. Cf. www.ricciamac.org/ccc/eng/ccc93/thoughtandhumanism/article1.htm.

“Behind the subject of “Classical Western studies in China” is a cultural impulse, behind which remains the question of China’s rise. Today China’s rise is on one level economical, on one level external, and on one level based on international politics, but China’s rise on the cultural level, at best, is just beginning. I especially believe this is a question of readjustment amongst all academic research, re-adjusting self-perspectives, and re-examining previous issues.”

His presentation will detail these issues. First, “in China the era of simplistic Western studies is over”. The main reason is that these classical Western studies in China are rooted in Chinese classical knowledge with Western reference and information. They cannot be part of the West’s classical Western studies, but are part of the Chinese academia.

Why is it important to re-examine the issue of “classical Western studies”? This is part of the predicament already mentioned:

“The Chinese people since the end of the Qing Dynasty has primarily been influenced by the West”, so much so adds Gan Yang that “we Chinese are always saying that China is one thing, while in the background there is the West which is another thing.”

And further:

“In the past one hundred years, Chinese people’s understanding of China, to a considerable extent, is stipulated by their understanding of the West. Every time their understanding of the West changes so too will our understanding of China change.”

But these comparisons are “asymmetrical”: basically they are “being made between the modern West against a traditional China. [...] “In reality we have not truly compared traditional Western society with traditional Chinese society.” So when we reflect about classical Western studies in China, we should also ask: “What is the relationship between the modern and classical Western civilisation? Is there a broken relationship or a continued relationship?”

In consequence of this, classical Western studies in China cannot be the same as those conducted in the West, where the continued or broken relationship between classical and modern civilisation is out of the question. Therefore,

[...] “all need to be thought about again. Thus, although we are in this forum today discussing “classical Western studies in China”, the objective is to encourage the revival and development of research on the Chinese classical studies.”

In particular because “classical Western studies and Chinese classical studies are a part of the revival of Chinese civilisation” in the world. To explain this point, Gan Yang adds:

[...] “There is a disconnection between the current outward rise of Chinese civilisation and the inner mindset of the Chinese people. That is to say, we really do not have cultural self-confidence and are unclear about what stage Chinese civilisation has achieved and the possible influence it will have on world civilisation in the future.”

Many people in the world already “believe that China’s rise has already become the most significant development of the 21st century.” [...] That is why,

“...research on China done in the West is transforming the West’s conscious perspective of the world; it is not simply research on China. Let us think about it, with

the rise of Chinese civilisation, there are already signs of Western research, including historical research, on China and Greek and Pre-Qin research. I believe that comparative research on ancient Greek and ancient Chinese civilisations, in the next ten to twenty years, will become a hot topic in the West.

But Gan Yang added:

“Our sensitivity towards the greatness of this period of change and the academic possibilities that could exist is insufficient.”

The second keynote address, delivered by Professor 刘小枫 Liu Xiaofeng (Sun Yatsen University, Philosophy Department) will lead the debate still further. Without referring to China’s “peaceful rise”, Professor Liu relates the recent “calls for the establishment of “national studies” as a discipline” to their original name of “汉学 *Han xue* Han studies” later changed to “中学 *Zhong xue* Chinese Learning” — an antonym of the ancient late Ming-early Qing times “西学 *Xi xue* Western learning”. But as Han studies encompassed “the totality of traditional Chinese academia”, Western learning at the end of Qing times referred only “to the formation of the modern academic tradition since the Renaissance” times in Europe and did not include classical Western studies. Moreover “Western academia is a separation, a struggle, between modern and ancient times”, a dimension utterly alien to the “unbroken string of tradition that is Chinese academia”. In fact, “the “May Fourth Movement” developed the New Cultural Movement as a crusade for traditional Chinese academia”. This discrepancy between Chinese learning and Western learning implied also the latter to be “equivalent to “modern” academics in the West, where the word modern also signifies “progress”, a constant challenge to defend the legitimacy of Han studies.

In such an academic context, Chinese universities till now are mere transplants of modern Western universities. They mainly form scientists or engineers:

These, in their turn, “have basically determined the qualifications for university presidents – Western ideas have now finally being implemented. Now, where is Chinese civilisation and its heritage of academic traditions? Civilised tradition has literature, language, and classical works as its foundation”.

But this foundation has disappeared in modern education. Why? Simply because “in Chinese universities, the scope of the Chinese language and literature department is far from equalling the size of the Western language department (English department) – if you add on Russian, [...] where are national studies? Where are Western classical academics?”

Still, further damage is done, for “nowadays “national studies” can be seen dispersed between the three disciplines of literature, history, and philosophy, since the division of these three disciplines is originally a product of modern Western academics. The division [...] is tantamount to it being cutting into pieces by the concept of modern Western academics”. Not only that, but “the research and teaching of Chinese literature, Chinese history, and Chinese philosophy are founded on and oriented to various fashionable theories of the modern West. “National studies” holds the greatest share of influence over the disciple of history, but historical studies have been thoroughly baptised by modern Western theory”.

Professor Liu’s critical diagnostic on Chinese universities as having submitted to a Western academic scheme does not stop at that. It touches also the Western influence on “Confucianism in China, it all depends on the various modern discourses of the West” due to the fact that “Chinese are strangers to classical Western studies” not having “established a

classical vision and thus being unclear about the bottom line of the modern Western sciences”. After Western studies entered China, “protectors of Daoism rejected the practicality of science and technology”, and by so doing they exposed the country to foreign powers.

The damage was unavoidable. Prof. Liu underlines that “today, culture and education are led by practical sciences and technology, and the outcome is that we are cut off from our country’s civilized traditions. [...] We have still not specifically researched the discipline of traditional Chinese civilization (heritage)”. So, to exorcise the predicament already alluded to, one must, according to Prof. Liu:

“see the struggle between antiquity and modernity through the struggle of China and the West, and then view the struggle of antiquity and modernity as the critical issue in the system of modern culture and education, “Chinese learning as substance” will ultimately be empty words, practically becoming “Western studies as substance, Western studies as practice”. If modern Western studies are full of problems, then China, along with international standards, must have been inoculated with bacteria.”

So to avoid this contagion, so to say, Prof. Liu suggests that general education (character education) be promoted. As at the time of the Qing dynasty, “today, traditional Chinese culture and education is once again faced with a problem of renaming: we must create Chinese classical studies to replace the popular “national studies” of the “May Fourth Movement”, since “the name “national studies” is actually very difficult to communicate with the outside world. Prof. Liu adds also:

“A number of strong countries representing “technical civilisation” emerged after the rise of the modern Western state. To this day, the classical studies departments from the famous universities of these countries play a linking role to the classical writers of modern countries who received classical training from ancient Greek and Roman civilisations. Moreover, the high standards of strong Western countries, whether intentionally or unintentionally, cause them to proclaim themselves as the leaders of traditional Western civilisation. A country’s political strength and its classical studies go hand in hand.

That being said, we should learn from the West once again and imitate the classical departments of Western universities to create our own classical departments! Is this not true?”

立足本土培养“兼通中西之学，于古今沿革，中外得失，皆了然于胸中”（皮锡瑞语）的新时代栋梁之才。

“A locally cultivated man of tremendous promise in the new era “the intercommunication of Western and Chinese studies”, with the evolution of ancient and modern times, Chinese and foreign gains and losses, everything already known” (words from 皮錫瑞, Pi Xirui).²⁶

²⁶ 皮錫瑞, Pi Xirui (1850-1908) was a Chinese scholar from the late Qing Dynasty and more than a schoolteacher. He was a son and a grandson, a father and a grandfather, a husband, a mentor, a friend, a patriot, a strong believer in reform and an activist, an accomplished poet, and a scholar of the Chinese Classics. *Jingxue lishi* (The History of Classical Scholarship) is a textbook he wrote as a schoolteacher for the purpose of helping his students learn the subject that he taught. In reality, it is more than a textbook - it is a rich repository that contains much valuable information about a very important part of Chinese culture and civilisation, as well as insights into a traditional way of life.

Conclusion

It is a matter of fact: the “rise of China” that the world at large is witnessing has developed not only at a time of global economic and financial crisis but more importantly when, beyond or underneath the crisis, experts have verified that in the global yet limited milieu of Planet Earth there are “*Limits to growth*”, before its collapse.²⁷ Moreover, the collapse process has already crossed beyond a point of no return: urgency is the consensus reached by the global community to control collateral damage in order to protect human and societal development more than economic growth or “rise”. Unheard of before, China’s rise in assertiveness in so short a period of years at a time of global crisis will probably remain unique in world history.

In presenting to the general public the updated report just mentioned, Dennis Meadows used a simple but eloquent metaphor when he mentioned:

“The Japanese have a proverb that says: « If your only tool is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.» If with a problem you go to see a surgeon, he will answer you with “surgery”, a psychiatrist with “psychiatry”, an economist with “growth”. These are the only tools at their disposal. People want to be useful; if they have a tool, they imagine that their tool is useful.”²⁸

So, speaking about the foreseeable collapse of economic global growth, he added elsewhere:

“Technology is a tool. Like all tools, it reflects the values and goals of the person or organisation that develops it. As long as the dominant values and goals are short-term, egoistic, and concentrated on economic indicators, there will not be any way to avoid collapse.”²⁹

Why? In another interview about the model used in the research on the limits to growth and how the model had been tested through various hypothetical changes on the data, he explained:

“What we found was that technological changes alone don’t avert the collapse. It requires cultural and social changes as well. You need to stabilise the population, and you need to shift consumption preferences away from material goods to the non-material part — love, freedom, friendship, self-understanding and things like that.”³⁰

²⁷ Donnella Meadows, Jorgen Randers, and Dennis Meadows, *Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update*, Chelsea Green, 2004, 338 pp. In 1972, three scientists from MIT created a computer model that analysed global resource consumption and production. Their results shocked the world and created stirring conversations about global ‘overshoot’ or resource use beyond the carrying capacity of the planet. Now, preeminent environmental scientists Donnella Meadows, Jorgen Randers and Dennis Meadows have teamed up again to update and expand their original findings in *The Limits to Growth: The 30 Year Global Update*. In many ways, the message contained in *Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update* is a warning. Overshooting cannot be sustained without collapse. But, as the authors are careful to point out, there is reason to believe that humanity can still reverse some of its damage to the Earth if it takes appropriate measures to reduce inefficiency and waste. *Limits to Growth: The 30 Year Update* is a work of stunning intelligence that will expose for humanity the hazy but critical line between human growth and human development (from Amazon.com).

²⁸ Interview, *Le Monde*, www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2012/05/25/la-croissance-mondiale-va-s-arreter_1707352_3244.html

²⁹ Interview, *EuroNatur*, www.euronatur.org/Interview_Dennis_Meadows.dennismeadows_en.o.html

³⁰ Interview, *Smithsonian.com*, March 16, 2012, accessed at www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/Is-it-Too-Late-for-Sustainable-Development.html#

In other words, the economic indicators serving to estimate any growth, or any rise on the international scene, are not enough to ascertain any contributed value: social and human factors are still more important than the general understanding of any civilisation. Hence the question of Professor Shi Yinhong quoted at the beginning of this presentation.

The historical influence of civilisations has always been exerted more through humanities, literature, pictorial arts, architecture, music and thought, and ethical and spiritual traditions, than by economic or military clout because these cultural expressions are independent from the latter. This is why contemporary practitioners of Chinese studies, in and outside China as the scholars mentioned in these pages have shown, have expressed their worries and their hopes.

Professor Shi Yinhong concludes his article quoted at the beginning of these pages:

中国面对的历史性挑战在于：中国能否真正造就出一套具有较大的国际和跨国適切性和创新性的“北京共识”？

“The historical challenge that China faces is: can China create a “Beijing consensus” that is innovative and has much transnational relevance and applicability?”

In this regard, Chinese academe plays an important role in its quest for a New ‘Chinese Learning’ freed from its Western predicament but in a quest for new values.