

## **The Necessity of East-West Educational and Cultural Exchange in an Era of Risk and Challenge<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

In this paper I discuss the necessity for educational and cultural exchanges between China and the West - and especially with the United States. As the title indicates, these exchanges are both risky and challenging, and I will discuss both the risks and the challenges. In Part One I briefly indicate the primary risks facing the international community: war, abject poverty, and planetary collapse. In Part Two I argue that the spirit of cooperation - competition within a larger spirit of cooperation - is needed to manage these risks. In Part Three I consider the challenges involved in preparing leaders and citizens to embrace the spirit of cooperation and the essential role of higher education in disseminating that spirit throughout our societies. In Part Four I focus on China's recent higher education reform. The major challenge is that the traditions of humane learning in both the West and China have been practically abandoned. Working together, and finding inspiration in their joint efforts, educational leaders and scholars from China and the West must now restore and re-vitalize these traditions.

*Keywords:* East-West education, liberal arts, cultural exchange, risks, cooperation

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<sup>1</sup> This invited paper was based on a talk prepared for the 6th China Education Innovation Expo, and it has been revised and expanded for publication.

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## Part One: The Risk

I start by talking about the pressing risk we face—the risk of armed conflict between China and the West. This risk is sometimes called *Thucydides trap*. This term derives from a statement by the historian Thucydides that the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta had been *inevitable*, due to Spartan fears of the growth of Athenian power. The term has been extended to refer to the tendency toward war when any emerging power threatens to displace an existing great power. It is used today specifically to describe the potential of war between the United States and the People’s Republic of China (Allison, 2017).

Now, we know that China’s economy is going to continue to grow relative to the USA. China already challenges the USA on many fronts - technological, economic, military, and cultural - and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future (Elegant, 2021; The World Bank, 2021). So how will the US and China resolve this tension? Will they fall into Thucydides trap?

There have been 16 previous instances of rising powers threatening to take the place of existing superpowers. Twelve led to a shooting war and 2 to Cold War. Only 2 managed to sustain a

negotiated peace (Allison, 2017).

We all know about Cold War. We have seen the image of Nikita Khrushchev banging his shoe on the table at the UN, and thundering “We will bury you!” when addressing Western ambassadors in Moscow in 1956 - leading the ambassadors to storm out of the meeting. After banging his shoe on the table, he said, “that was so much fun.” Khrushchev’s conduct is a dramatic example of Cold War belligerence.

Now, China has vowed to take a very different approach. Chairman Xi Jinping (2014) stated that,

The argument that strong countries are bound to seek hegemony does not apply to China. This is not in the DNA of this country, given our long historical and cultural background. China fully understands that we need a peaceful and stable internal and external environment to develop ourselves. We all need to work together to avoid the Thucydides trap - Our aim is to foster a new model of major country relations. (Valencia, 2014)

And we had better find a new model, because the world’s problems are simply too great for the two great powers to be locked in belligerent conflict. Only by

working together can we manage planetary risk (the risk of air pollution and climate change and pandemic risks), nuclear risk, and poverty risk - having large pockets of abject poverty both in our own countries and throughout the world, destabilizing the world order. Only a cooperative approach can deal with these problems.

So, what's this new model of major country relations that Chairman Xi is talking about? I will now turn to that question.

### **Part Two: The New Model: Major Power Cooperation**

This question suggests a new model of major power relations. Now the term "cooperation" has been widely used in the last two decades in industrial and financial circles to mean the act of cooperation between competing companies. Businesses engage in both competition and cooperation with one another (Hayes, 2021). Here are some examples:

Apple and Samsung are fierce competitors in the cell phone business. But Samsung is also Apple's main supplier, so if Apple fails, Samsung fails. They must work out cooperative relations while they compete.

Or consider the Linux Foundation.

Linux develops free open-source software. Intel, IBM, and Samsung all contribute millions of dollars and dozens of top engineers to Linux each year to develop this software. Why would they do this? The answer is that they are not developing the software as a product for sale, but as the toolkit for their own systems. By cooperating, they build the best software that they can possibly build for their own uses. They all get the best talent from all the companies to build the best possible software and all of them can freely use it.

Can cooperation serve as a model for competitive cooperation among major powers? We know that competition between China and the US is necessary. Like Apple and Samsung, China and the USA compete in world markets, and China is the USA's main supplier. If the US economy fails, China's economy will take a huge hit. The two nations are interdependent; they need each other.

Chairman Xi has stated, moreover, that inhumane, belligerent competition is not in the Chinese cultural DNA. While those in the West are likely to be skeptical, he has a point. In both Confucian and Taoist philosophy, competition is re-interpreted in cooperative terms. Sporting events, for example, were composed of rituals meant to foster individual virtue and social har-

mony. They were not individual competitions in the modern sense of winner-take-all brutal competitions. This provides an important hint. Confucius (n.d./1999) famously said about competition:

Exemplary persons (junzi) are not competitive, except where they have to be in the archery ceremony. Greeting and making way for each other, the archers ascend the hall, and returning they drink a salute. Even in contesting, they are exemplary persons. (p. 83)

We also find a nuanced statement about competition in the Lao-Tze's Tao-Te-Ching (n.d.): "When the sage stands before the people they will not be harmed. The whole world will support him and will not tire of him. Because he does not compete, he does not meet competition" (Verse 66).

China and the United States need a secure planet to carry on their economic competition. Just as the Linux Foundation provides a vehicle for technology firms to cooperate in their common interest, the major powers need international institutions and understandings - including sentiments of affection and respect - to advance their own political, cultural, and economic projects.

### **Part Three: The Challenge: Humane Learning for Coopetition**

So how can we create a global climate for coopetition? To counter the limited nationalisms and cultural limitations of different regions, we will need to establish new forms of humane learning that engender and sustain it. These forms will not be the same everywhere; each region has its own deep cultural traditions that will influence new educational ventures. But each tradition has much to learn from the other, and much can be gained from cooperation among statesmen and educational leaders. For even if national leaders wished to, they could not create a climate of peace - through - coopetition all by themselves. The leaders need support from their advisors, and from influential people throughout society: the industrial leaders, the press, the intelligentsia, professors and teachers and youth leaders. They have to build humane societies. And they can only do this if antagonisms between the powers are greatly reduced; people facing each other across national differences will not relax their defenses and work together for common ends unless they can trust, and even admire, each other.

#### ***Humane Learning and the Multiversity***

Creating the climate for coopeti-

tion is a great educational challenge. It must begin in our universities, where thought-leaders in all areas of social life are educated and mingle with one another and their teachers to form their basic life-attitudes.

But this challenge is especially daunting because humane learning has in our time been replaced in our colleges and universities by narrowly specialist utilitarian learning in both the East and the West. Clark Kerr (1963, as cited in Zhong & Sun, 2018), the Chancellor of the University of California, stated: “The autonomous functions of the university

to preserve and teach classical cultures and to develop individual intelligence and virtue have been replaced by the public functions of labor force training and profitable research” (p. 81).

Young scholars, in other words, no longer spend their formative years acquiring intelligence and wisdom, but instead devote themselves to skill-development for roles in harshly competitive industrial, commercial and military enterprises. Nonetheless, both East and West have deep traditions of education for virtue and social harmony that can be restored. Let’s start with China.

**Figure 1**

*The Humane Arts of China*



In considering the arts of humane learning in China we must start with the classical arts of the Zhou dynasty. Confucius is said to have taught these arts to over 70 disciples.

The first art is the art of rites; we teach this art so that our young scholars learn that everything had its proper place - they learned where they stood in relationship to one another and they learned how to do everything in the proper manner. Observing the rites thus generated psychological security and social harmony.

The art of music - which included dance - taught how the harmony of heaven could be mirrored within our own spirits.

During the early Zhou dynasty, the *shi*, the warrior class to which Confucius's family belonged, engaged in warfare as chariot-riding archers. So of course, young shi scholars had to learn the arts of archery and charioteering. But by the time of Confucius, the *shi* warriors had been replaced by professional soldiers. Archery and charioteering had been transformed into arts of mind-body integration for the perfection of virtue.

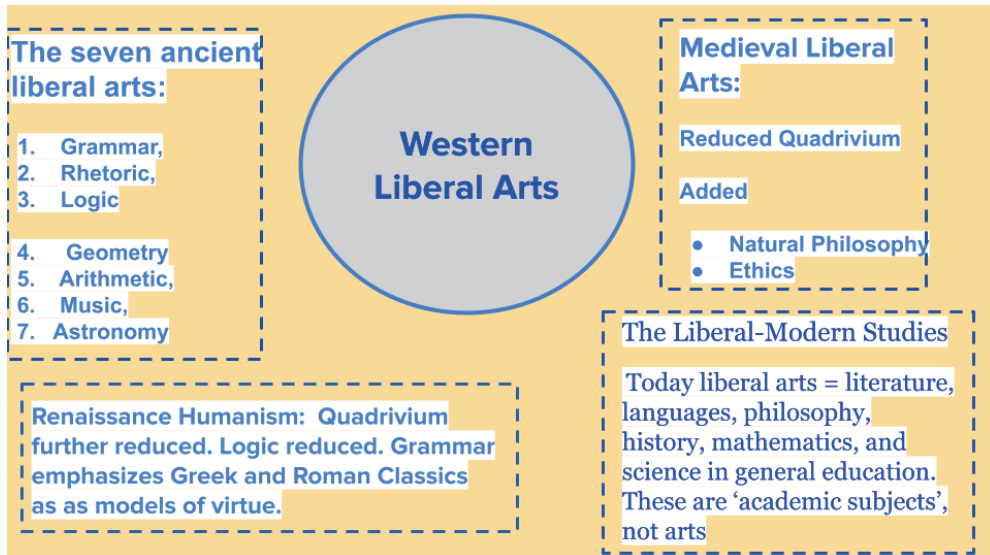
Over time the six Zhou arts were overshadowed by the "four arts" - also known as the four accomplishments. These became predominant among Chinese aristocrats. These were seen as signs

of self-perfection. The cultivated person could display mastery in these arts - by playing the zither, or the game of go, or through elegant calligraphy and painting. It might be argued that there is already a degeneration - an exaggeration of the elegance of classical arts that approaches mannerism.

Turning to literary arts, the Neo-Confucian curriculum consisted of the five books and the four Confucian classics. The five books included books of history and poetry depicting the great thoughts and deeds of Zhou masters. By studying these books young scholars could participate vicariously in their thoughts and achievements. Through reflection and discussion they could soak up the lessons of the masters and project their insights into affairs and problems of their own times. The four classics, including the Analects and Mencius, conveyed traditional Chinese ethical and spiritual values. But the study of the books and classics degenerated from humane learning to book learning in preparation for the Imperial examinations, exhibiting cultural decay.

In the Western tradition there is a parallel story of gradual decline, from the ancient liberal arts to the arts program of the medieval university and Renaissance humanism to today's liberal-modern curriculum.

**Figure 2**  
*Western Liberal Arts Education*



Let's start with the seven ancient liberal arts. These have been distinguished into two groups: the three literary arts comprising what has since the Middle Ages come to be called the "trivium" and the four mathematical arts which have been called the "quadrivium" (Kimball, 1986).

The three literary arts were at first taught as arts by distinct professionals. We must emphasize that, like the ancient Zhou arts, the liberal arts were practicing arts, not merely fields of knowledge. And they were political arts - like the Confucian arts, they were the arts of statesmen, advisors, and influential citizens.

In ancient Athens a small citizen class

governed the city. The "liberals" in liberal arts referred to a group whose members were "free," in the sense of free from the necessity of work to participate in study and politics. The liberal arts, as opposed to the mechanical arts, were the arts of governing. Athenian citizens were members of the democratic legislature and served in law courts as prosecutors and jury members. They were expected to be able to make persuasive arguments to convince their countrymen. Just as the mechanical arts were the occupational arts of mechanics, the arts of free men were also occupational arts - the arts for the occupation of governing the city.

Eventually these three literary arts were combined in an interactive complex which later came to be called the “trivium.” Logic was a tool for discovering and confirming truth. Rhetoric provided tools for convincing listeners of the truth in legal claims and the good in proposed legislation. The Rhetor, by caring for the truth and its dissemination, served the good of the community. Grammar (what we today would call literature - primarily history and poetry) provided literary analogies and lessons about life. These provided Athenian citizens with shared reference points in their consideration of public affairs. Mastery in the art of grammar can be considered a Western analog of mastery of the Confucian classics.

Meanwhile the four mathematical liberal arts - arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music - later known as the “quadrivium,” are similar in content to the Chinese classical art of mathematics, though there is some difference in emphasis. In the West, the mathematical arts were valued in the first instance as arts of contemplation; the scholar, by contemplating the beauty and order of the starry heavens or the realm of pure numbers, could participate in the divine spirit. In the East, the mathematical arts were valued as much for their practical uses as their beauty and order. While ancient

Greek mathematicians sought to deduce mathematical results from axioms, to display their inherent order, ancient Chinese mathematicians sought to find general means for solving problems.

The Western liberal arts - the *trivium* and the *quadrivium* - served both dimensions of elite life in ancient Greece: the political life and the contemplative life.

A curriculum consisting in these arts were adopted and elaborated in the Roman Empire. Roman elites went to Athens to continue the study of these arts. But the arts now served a different purpose. The Roman Empire was not a democratic republic; the literary liberal arts of the trivium no longer served as common civic arts of citizens. Instead, they degenerated into “accomplishments” of educated elites, as exemplified in the eloquence of noted orators.

The Byzantine emperor Justinian I (527 to 565 CE) suspended funding for the Athenian Neo-Platonic Academy in 529 and barred pagans - non-Christians - from teaching throughout the Empire. The 6th century is generally accepted as marking the end of the period of ancient classical learning. From then until the medieval universities, higher education in Europe evolved under Church auspices in Cathedral schools and monasteries. The ancient liberal arts were cut off from their roots in



classical Greece, and degenerated.

The medieval universities were initially founded in the 11th century and greatly expanded in the 14th century (Rashdall, 1895). In the arts course the study of grammar (literature) turned from pagan to Christian classics. Rhetoric was revised to serve the needs of preachers, music to serve the needs of the liturgy. The medieval universities all but neglected the quadrivium, as indeed had the later Athenian schools. The divine mystery associated with God and the trinity replaced mathematical perfection as the object of contemplation.

The Aristotelian corpus was recovered in the West starting in the 12th century, and after initial resistance by Church authorities, Aristotle's works were brought into harmony with Church teachings late in the 13th century and Aristotelian natural and moral philosophy were added as university subjects.

The Renaissance humanists of the 14th and 15th again transformed the liberal arts, though they emphasized the trivium and continued to neglect the mathematical studies of the quadrivium. Their main interests were in ancient Greek and Latin grammar and classical literatures. They viewed the Greek and Latin classics as models of virtue to emulate - in much the same spirit as Confucian scholars viewed

the five books.

The Renaissance ideal of humane learning prevailed in English and European universities until the 19th century (Grafton & Jardine, 1987). It was carried to New England by the Puritans in the 17th century and was embodied in The American liberal arts colleges founded under Church auspices. Seven of the nine early liberal arts colleges, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, University of Pennsylvania, Brown, and Dartmouth, frequently grouped together as the "colonial colleges," now make up seven of the eight prestigious private Ivy League universities (Cornell, founded in 1865, is the eighth). The two other colonial colleges - William and Mary and Rutgers - are now distinguished public universities.

By the 16th and 17th century, however, natural philosophy was being transformed into modern science through the work of Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, and others. The new science rejected qualitative Aristotelian natural philosophy in its entirety, made great strides in mathematics, and rebuilt science on a mathematical basis (Shapin, 1996).

This new natural philosophy - the term remained in use - developed far from the universities - among independent scholars, industrialists, financiers, navigators, and discoverers. In 1598 these groups

were instrumental in the foundation of Gresham College in London, which gathered these diverse groups for free courses of lectures on advances in the sciences.<sup>2</sup>

The end of the sixteenth century also witnessed the “new philosophy” of Francis Bacon. According to Stephen Gaukroger (2001), Bacon is concerned with nothing less than a new era in human existence, the key to which lies ... in a new kind of “natural philosopher”, who would, unlike previous philosophers, not merely contemplate the world but use his knowledge to improve the human condition by providing us with “infinite commodities”. In his *New Atlantis*, Bacon envisions “Solomon’s House,” a society of scientists, meeting together free from government or university constraints, to mobilize the collective efforts of talented investigators in experimental inquiry. For Bacon, the results of scientific work are to be applied to practical problems to increase abundance and “relieve man’s estate.” Bacon famously declared “*Ipsa scientia potestas est.*” Knowledge is power. (p. 71)

Inquirers associated with Gresham College, and inspired by Bacon’s vision

of Solomon’s House, founded an independent “College for the Promoting of Physico-Mathematical Experimental Learning” in 1660 (Hunter, 1984). A royal charter was signed on July 15, 1662, establishing the Royal Society of London, which continued to meet at Gresham College until it moved into its own home in 1710 (Tinniswood, 2019). The Society’s motto, “*Nullius in verba*” - “take nobody’s word for it” - signifies the founders’ rejection of authority and their determination to confirm all assertions through experimental investigation.

This proclamation marked a sharp break from the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian wisdom traditions that dominated early modern universities. We can see the Renaissance humanist scholars of the university, on the one hand, and the scientists of the Royal Society and other scientific societies that flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, on the other, as representing the division of “the two cultures” - humane letters and techno-science. This division has been deplored in our time as a force for moral and cultural decay by the English academician C. P. Snow (Snow, 1959).

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<sup>2</sup> Gresham College still exists, providing more than 140 public lectures each year. Since 2001 the Gresham lectures have been available online.

### ***The Rise of the Research University***

Early Efforts to bring the “new science” back under the university umbrella can be traced to Benjamin Franklin and his *Proposal for Promoting Useful Knowledge among the British Plantations in America* (1743) and his *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania* (1749). Franklin envisioned an “Academy” for disseminating “useful knowledge.” His academy would be free from religious doctrines and would foster religious tolerance. Its curriculum would downplay classical languages and literatures and emphasize modern languages, contemporary literature and the natural sciences. Franklin moved rapidly to establish this academy; by 1751 he had established the academy (now the University of Pennsylvania, a member of the Ivy League). Unlike prior colonial colleges, which had initially been designed primarily to prepare scholars for the Christian ministry, Franklin’s Academy was shaped to train future political and industrial leaders.

Impressed by the educational ideas of Scottish educator William Smith, Franklin invited Smith to serve in the Academy as provost - the equivalent of what would now be called the university’s president - and as professor of natural philosophy and logic. Franklin and Smith soon

clashed about the place of classical languages in the Academy, and Smith - the official leader - prevailed, granting the old learning pride of place, undermining Franklin’s vision, and delaying the birth of a university college for useful knowledge.

Franklin’s vision, however, was substantially realized in the Boston English School in Massachusetts, founded in 1821. Massachusetts in the 1820s was witnessing an explosive period of industrial growth. Boston already had a classical high school - Boston Latin School - to prepare young men for college studies; the new English high school, by contrast, was aimed at working-class boys preparing for careers in business, mechanics, and engineering in the new industrial firms. Its curriculum offered Franklin’s “useful knowledge” - with courses on surveying, navigation, geography, logic, and civics.

Two nineteenth century European universities illustrate the secular trend in higher education. The University of Berlin had been formed in 1810 under the influence of Wilhelm von Humboldt to offer advanced professional training in faculties of law, medicine, theology, and philosophy. This university became a model for later research universities in Europe and North America, but did not immediately

extend its sphere to agriculture and engineering (McClelland, 2016).<sup>3</sup>

University College London was founded as London University in 1826, as a secular option to Oxford and Cambridge. Those universities had limited enrollment, and hence university degrees, to members of the established Church of England.<sup>4</sup> University College was the first English college admitting women and students of all religious or social backgrounds. University College was not initially a teaching college; its job was to administer examinations - a corresponding university body issued degrees to those who passed (Allchin, 1905).

Against this background of university secularization, modernization and professionalization, a committee was formed at Yale College in 1828 to examine whether Yale should add courses in agriculture, commerce, and engineering and professional studies to its undergraduate program. The rapidly growing American agricultural, industrial, and commercial sectors, and the challenge posed to the colleges by the English high schools which were responding to the new educa-

tional needs, imposed additional pressure on the committee.

But Yale resisted the pressure. In its influential report, the committee took up the question why a young scholar should “waste” his time upon studies which have no immediate connection with his future profession? The committee (1828) answered in a way that, in light of our present concern, merits extended quotation:

The great object of a collegiate education, preparatory to the study of a profession, is to give that expansion and balance of the mental powers, those liberal and comprehensive views, and those fine proportions of character, which are not to be found in him whose ideas are always confined to one particular channel. When a man has entered upon the practice of his profession, the energies of his mind must be given, principally, to its appropriate duties. But if his thoughts never range on other subjects, if he never looks abroad on the ample domains of literature and science, there will be a narrowness

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<sup>3</sup> In the United States Cornell (1865) and Johns Hopkins (1878) took their inspiration from Humboldt’s model. For the German university and its influence, see Charles E. McClelland’s work.

<sup>4</sup> University College London. Founding principles - our proud history. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/2034/founding-principles>

in his habits of thinking, a peculiarity of character, which will be sure to mark him as a man of limited views and attainments. Should he be distinguished in his profession, his ignorance on other subjects, and the defects of his education, will be the more exposed to public observation. On the other hand, he who is not only eminent in professional life, but has also a mind richly stored with general knowledge, has an elevation and dignity of character, which gives him a commanding influence in society, and a widely extended sphere of usefulness.

Starting in the late half of the 19th century, however, applied science, agriculture, engineering, and commerce finally secured their place in the higher education mainstream. In the United States the land grant colleges were established by federal law in 1861 to provide higher education in agriculture and the mechanical arts. Some of these universities, including Texas A&M and Florida A&M, still retain the A (for agricultural) and M (for mechanical) in their names. Cornell, founded in 1865, unconventionally included both a private liberal arts college and a public land grant university featuring agriculture and engineering in one comprehensive

institution. Founder Ezra Cornell (1868) stated: “I would find an institution where any person can find instruction in any study” (para. 1).

Cornell replaced the colonial colleges as the paradigm for American higher education and the colleges soon caught up by emulating it; they transformed themselves into the Ivy League universities as we now know them. In these new universities the liberal arts were again transformed, into liberal-modern studies of the research university. By the 1880s and 1890s these prestigious universities had introduced colleges of engineering and commerce as well as professional schools of law and medicine. They now aimed to train the emerging technical-professional class (Bledstein, 1976).

The humanities subjects - philosophy, history, classics, literature- were organized in the new universities as academic departments housed in colleges of arts and sciences, parallel to departments of chemistry, biology, physics, and geology. Despite cohabitation in one college, the division of the two cultures endured. Even small independent liberal arts colleges emulated the new universities, reorganizing their faculties into specialized research-oriented departments (Thelin, 2019).

Higher education leaders rejected the

fixed liberal arts curriculum, so praised in the Yale Report of 1828, and replaced the liberal arts with general education courses in arts and sciences disciplines. The required general education program, featuring a broad distribution or “Chinese Restaurant Menu” style of selections (one item from group A, another from group B, a third from group C), had to be completed before a student was permitted to embark on specialized majors.

A recent study of undergraduate students at a large flagship state university in the United States sought to discover their knowledge of and attitudes about the required general education courses. 80 % were in their first year of university. 89 % of these had already indicated a “major” field of study (Thompson, Eodice, & Tran, 2015). The researchers (2015) found that less than a quarter could correctly state how many courses or fields of knowledge were required (p. 283); only 26 % agreed with the statement “The main purpose of General Education courses is to help students become more well-rounded individuals and responsible citizens” - the express purpose of the general education program in university documents (p. 286); only a third could state that some member of the university faculty or staff had even tried to explain the value of general education (p. 286). Over two-thirds said

“I would prefer to take additional courses related to my major instead of taking an equivalent number of General Education courses (p. 286).” While the term “liberal arts” is still in use to refer to general education requirements, the courses do not provide training in any arts; instead, they serve up discipline-based knowledge - often watered down to ease consumption - in modern sciences and humanities. When faculty members work together on committees to shape general education requirements, they “battle on behalf of their particular field or discipline or specialized knowledge for a piece of the action” (Astin, 1993, pp. 4-5).

Teaching, a mainstay of liberal arts colleges, has generally been devalued in research universities and even in many of the smaller liberal arts colleges that emulate them. The general education courses are usually organized as lectures for a hundred or more students, with little time set aside for reflection and discussion. Many students fail to read even the required texts. The students are often evaluated merely based on exams - at times machine-graded short answer exams.

Humanities professors, unlike their Renaissance counterparts, now conceive of themselves not primarily as teachers but as experts in narrow specialist research fields. In most cases they would

be embarrassed by the idea that their job was, or should be, fostering wisdom or virtues of character. As Clark Kerr indicated, even the humanities have lost the spirit of humane learning.

#### **Part Four: China's Recent Higher Education Reforms**

China is currently attempting to renew undergraduate studies in its universities through the addition of liberal arts or general education. A brief history will explain this effort. The Confucian academies in China and the Confucian cultural area enjoy a rich and varied history (Glomb, Lee, & Gehlmann, 2020). Throughout the 19th century, and especially after the Western powers made incursions on Chinese territory, educational leaders debated how the nation could retain its wisdom tradition as the spirit of advanced learning while acquiring scientific and technical knowledge from the West as 'functional' add-ons (You, Rud, & Hu, 2018).

After the May 4th movement, however, the Chinese classical arts were practically abandoned. New research universities were built on Western research university models. After the Chinese revolution of 1949, however, China abandoned these Western models and adopted the Soviet model - training narrow tech-

nical specialists to serve the needs of its developing economy and military. Students graduating from secondary schools enrolled directly into specialized departments of either general universities or in specialist universities of medicine, law, engineering, military science, mathematics, computer science. The curricula were narrowly technical and professional.

By 1995 Chinese leaders recognized that the corpus of highly trained technical specialists was insufficient for competing against the West. New ideas for business were emerging in science, technology, and commerce through cross-fertilization of academic disciplines - even by those who eschewed formal higher education and built enterprises through their independent creative syntheses.

The Chinese sought to engender their own creative synergies by incorporating liberal or general education in undergraduate curricula. The labels "Tongshi" and "Boya" education - old terms associated with humane learning - have been employed in new ways to refer to such forms of liberal or general education. These efforts have been inspired by both American and Chinese models. They have been fiercely resisted by many academic specialists, and recent research suggests that they are unsuccessful. I now take a quick glance at both Western and Chinese models.

### ***General Education based on American Liberal Studies models***

A 2018 study of general education courses (Gan, 2018) based on American general education models in a prestigious comprehensive Chinese university came to these conclusions: In classrooms in general education, most students did not focus on the lecture but read books for other majors or magazines, chatted, or slept. Students arrived late and left early. Students revealed that their main objective for taking a classics course was to “get some credits.” They did not read a single book. Classes gradually turn into “leisure and entertainment.” So, the students cannot receive training in the humanistic spirit. (pp. 29-38)

### ***General Education Inspired by Chinese Academies***

Since 2005, many prestigious Chinese universities have adopted talent cultivation programs modeled loosely on ancient Confucian models. A recent study (Zhang & Fang, 2018) interviewed both academy students and those seeking admission to academies:

The interviewers asked academy students, “What is the largest difference you feel deep down between the academy and non-academy?” Student C answered, “The bathroom conditions are better.” ... Some students who did not reside in academies

said they hoped to enter one, but upon our further questioning about why they wanted to join an academy, the students’ replies were similar: “the academy has air conditioning.” (pp. 57-67)

### **Conclusion**

Where does this leave us in our desire to establish humane learning to support friendly cooperation among our powerful nations?

Both Chinese and Western culture have deep traditions of humane learning. These have been replaced in contemporary universities, East and West, by “labor force training and profitable research.” Current efforts to restore the spirit of humane learning by injecting liberal or general education into our university curricula are not succeeding.

If we hope to instill the spirit of cooperation throughout our societies, we need a new, more radical approach. We need to recognize that training in wisdom and virtues of character cannot simply be grafted onto university curricula designed to serve different, and even opposing, values. The three-credit course in wisdom, the one-week workshop on wisdom, the special “academy” dormitory, all get us nowhere. We have to create bold, new approaches, much more in keeping with the



spirit of our ancient traditions.

We have a lot of work to do. And facing Thucydides trap, we must do this work together. As leaders in higher education, we have to model the spirit of cooperation - communicating and exchanging ideas and information, learning from one another,

supporting each other across national and cultural borders. We may well meet opposition both in our own countries and abroad. There will be professional risks and setbacks. But we must stay at it. World peace and planetary security hang in the balance.

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