Identity of China's modern academic system: A Chinese–Western interaction perspective

Fengqiao Yan[1] ⓘ

Abstract

The establishment of China's modern academic system was shaped by the interaction of internal (traditional) elements and external (Western) forces. Therefore, China and Western countries display many similarities in their academic systems. As with its Western counterpart, China's modern academic system is characterized by disciplined knowledge, theories, and research methods. However, there are also significant differences between the modern Chinese and Western academic systems. China's academic system has made significant progress in modernization, yet is also distorted in this process. This paper traces the historical evolution of the modern Chinese academic system and the key thoughts of contemporary Chinese scholars to reevaluate China's academic modernization experience.

Keywords Academic system · Identity · Chinese knowledge paradigm · Western knowledge · Interaction perspective

Introduction

The creation of China's modern academic system involved various elements, both internal and external. It represents intentional choices made by Chinese academic institution reformers that result in a complex interaction between China's traditional knowledge paradigms and Western knowledge paradigms, often with unintentional consequences. Given their significant influence on the understanding of Chinese cultural identity, Chinese knowledge paradigms have been extensively studied and researched. In particular, historical studies have deeply explored these paradigms with novel interpretations of historical materials (Chen 1998, 2002; Liu 2007; Shang and Guan 2007; Wang 2011; Ying 2017; Zuo 2004, 2008).

✉ Fengqiao Yan
fqyan@pku.edu.cn

[1] Graduate School of Education, Institute of Economics of Education, Peking University, Beijing, China

Scholars have sought to typologize Chinese academies of higher education, referring to China's modern academic system as the integration between Western theoretical scholarship and Chinese bureaucratic officialdom (Hayhoe et al. 2011; Li 2012, 2016). However, I argue that alternative views can be developed to distinguish from the current integrative view of China's modern academic system, as I will elaborate by applying Lee's (2017) theory of identity grafting in this paper. Fundamental epistemological questions are hidden in the typologization of modern Chinese academies, which requires deeper exploration. I propose a view of the historical evolution of the modern Chinese academic system as the result of active reinterpretation of traditional knowledge paradigms by contemporary Chinese scholars. This view provides a critical understanding of the identity tensions and reconciliations that result from coming to terms with the need to modernize China's academic system.

Modernization of Chinese academic system

The purpose of this paper is to develop a coherent understanding of the current issues affecting the identity of Chinese academies. However, this paper is not historical research that follows previous interpretations, but a study that identifies a diverse range of epistemologies employed to make sense of the evolution of the modern Chinese academic system. With this understanding, I propose an epistemology of the Chinese knowledge paradigm for the future of Chinese academic system. I will perform a review of the historical evolution of Chinese knowledge paradigms as interpreted by contemporary scholars of a renowned Chinese academy of higher education—Peking University.

Some terms should be defined to facilitate this review. The "academic system" refers to the organization of knowledge in institutions of learning. The "modern Chinese academic system" refers to the organization of knowledge in institutions of learning in the context of locales in China, using Peking University as a point of reference in this paper. In this paper, I first provide a brief overview of the historical evolution of the Chinese academic system. "Knowledge paradigm" refers to the underlying epistemology that informs how knowledge is organized within an academic system. Next, I elaborate on Lee's (2017) theory of identity grafting to typologize the underlying epistemologies that characterize Chinese knowledge paradigms—that is, I typologize the way the organization of knowledge in Chinese academic system is made sense in the discourse on the evolution of the Chinese academic system. Here, I will explain the typologies as "ideal types" to understand the development of the modern Chinese academic system. In particular, I devote attention to how this development is framed in terms of the contact between traditional Chinese and modern Western academic systems, and employ the works of contemporary Chinese scholars to facilitate the critique of these strategies in making sense of the modernization of the Chinese academic system. The guiding questions and method of engaging in this investigation will be elaborated before I present the results of the review.

Historical overview of China's academic system

China has evolved its academic system throughout its 5000 years of civilization. Chinese academic systems existed in several configurations and schools, and first emerged during the first three dynasties in China's history—the Xia, Shang, and Zhou Dynasties—including *Rujia* (*儒家*; Confucianism) and *Daojia* (*道家*; Daoism). Most significantly, during the eras of *Chunqiu* (*春秋*; the Spring Autumn Period) and *Zhanguo* (*战国*; the Warring States Period), hundreds of schools came into being (Feng 1934; Yang and Sternberg 1997). Among these, Confucianism has remained one of the most long-lasting and influential schools (Ren 1998).

During the Han Dynasty, Confucianism became recognized as the most privileged and dominant school. During the Han Dynasty, a curriculum for the study of Confucian texts and their implications was developed, such as *Jinwen Jingxue* (*今文经学*; Contemporary Confucianism) and *Guwen Jingxue* (*古文经学*; Classical Confucianism). Although Confucianism gained pre-eminence with the endorsement of the political elites, it is another matter to assert that the Chinese academic system is solely founded on Confucian schools of thought. I counterargue that this belief represents specific knowledge paradigms in making sense of the historical evolution of the modern Chinese academic system, where characteristics of Western knowledge are assumed to be absent from traditional Chinese academies. Other schools of thought existed and competed with Confucianism to influence academic institutions with the change of each dynasty, so Confucianism was not the only school of thought that was endorsed (Wang 2011). During the Wei and Jin Dynasties, Confucianism was displaced by the interest in *Xuanxue* (*玄学*; metaphysics), followed by Buddhism in the Tang Dynasty. The Song Dynasty witnessed a revival of Confucianism, which was eventually displaced by philology in the Qing Dynasty (Wang 2011).

China's modern academic system was established during the late Qing Dynasty and early in the Republic. During this time, China was experiencing great crisis and had to adjust to the new world situation with the Opium War (1839–1860), which triggered deep reflection in Chinese academia and the determination to modernize the academic system. Scholars had to extend beyond a purely academic focus and address challenges that struck deep to the core of the Chinese cultural identity. The modernization of the Chinese academic system included the abolishment of imperial examinations (*科举*; *Keju*)—the symbol of traditional Chinese scholarly excellence. The gentry literati (*士*; *Shi*), top candidates of imperial examinations endowed with officialdom and prestigious positions in society, were replaced by modern intellectuals (Ye 2015). Academic reform manifested in the establishment of modern academic organizations, disciplines, professional qualifications, norms, and behaviors. In place of the *Keju* system, the Imperial Academy of Peking was founded in 1898, as the predecessor of Peking University. The Imperial Academy of Peking was purportedly a modern academic organization, yet it failed to achieve Chinese academic modernization. Its role remained purely symbolic, as the Modernization Reform (*维新变法*; *Weixin Bianfa*; 11 June to 22 September 1898) failed after 103 days of

implementation. As with political modernization, efforts to modernize Chinese education underwent strident political resistance from the gentry literati officials.

Through the relentless efforts of the contemporary Chinese scholars of Peking University, who employed literature and mass media to enable the creation of a public sphere that transcended boundaries of the nation-state, modern universities eventually replaced *Guozijian* (*国子监*; imperial colleges) and *Shuyuan* (*书院*; academies of classical learning)—two traditional symbols of Chinese higher academia. Interim modernization efforts were interpolated by efforts to revive Confucian values under the *Tongcheng* (*桐城*) School, which dominated Peking University before 1914. This was then replaced by the *Zhedong* (*浙东*) School, established by disciples of Taiyan Zhang, which represented a significant turning point in effective Chinese education modernization, emphasizing the inquiry of objectivity and truth as the academic priority. In the late 1920s, overseas scholar returnees from Euro-America, such as Shih Hu and Menglin Jiang, transformed China's traditional knowledge system and created a new one (Chen 2002).

My interest in the overseas scholar returnees from Peking University in the post-1920s era lies in the knowledge paradigms they employed to make sense of the development of the modern Chinese academic system. These scholars were immersed in both Chinese and Western academic systems during their scholarly training. I am interested in typologizing the knowledge paradigms raised for discussion by these critiques in terms of identity grafting to provide an alternative view to paradigms that prevail with the underlying epistemology that the modern Chinese academy is the result of transformation of the traditional Chinese academic system by modern Western academic systems. According to some perspectives, it may appear that Western learning spread to China as an addition to its existing knowledge paradigm. I propose an alternative paradigm in sense-making of the modernization of the traditional Chinese academic system, and will illustrate the diversity of interpretations through Lee's (2017) typologies of identity grafting.

Identity grafting

The theory of identity grafting (Lee 2017) comprises four typologies: repressive, born-again, integration, and situationalist. These typologies describe the underlying assumptions about how Chinese identities arise and are transformed as individuals come into contact with and respond to new and unfamiliar experiences in everyday life. I consider this typology relevant to examining the evolution of the Chinese academic system, as the impetus for change for the Chinese academic system also arises from contact with new and unfamiliar knowledge paradigms. In this paper, I will explore the potential to apply identity grafting at the level of academic systems. As the unit of analysis shifts from an individual to institutional perspective, some adaptation to the terms employed is needed. I will refer to the typologies of identity grafting as different knowledge paradigms that emerged in the sense-making of the modernization of the Chinese academic system, and the underlying epistemologies that characterize these paradigms.

The first two are paradigmatic of subtractive epistemologies, where either old or new identities had to be displaced in the face of the change encounter. Much of the conceptualization of the modern Chinese academic system that draws on these paradigms refers to the Chinese knowledge paradigm with an ancient stock of knowledge that existed in traditional Chinese academic systems prior to the Opium War. Through using repressive and born-again paradigms, the study of Chinese knowledge paradigms tends to result in zero-sum approaches for the future development of academic systems—that is, the displacement of "traditional" Chinese or "modern" Western ways of organizing academic systems. Consequently, these paradigms tend to discourage the potential for global knowledge formation. By contrast, the use of integration and situationalist paradigms leads to very different epistemologies in how knowledge sources from different cultures are acknowledged, as opposed to when repression and born-again approaches are used. Integration approaches are characterized by additive strategies, while situationalist approaches are characterized by compound strategies. Integration and situationalist paradigm approaches tend to encourage change in ways that generates greater potential for the development of global knowledge formation.

Repression refers to displacing self-identity to cope with changes when one encounters the new and unfamiliar. In the comparison of Chinese and Western academic systems, for example, the underlying epistemology of repressive strategies is the inference that differences between the self and other are a result of self-inferiority. Therefore, change strategies often result in the loss and displacement of organic cultural identities. I will survey the following works that critique a repressive approach: Mu Qian's (2001) *On China's Modern Academic Discourse*, Youlan Feng's (1996) *Brief History of Chinese Philosophy*, and Jianshi Shen's (2017) *Selecting Literati and Science: History of China's Examination.* I argue that repressive paradigms that call for the displacement of the traditional with the modern create an identity void, which inevitably results in backlash and the rise of born-again sentiments.

The born-again paradigm underlies the epistemology that the new and unfamiliar threaten to displace traditional identities with irrelevant or even harmful identities. Therefore, the attachment to previously taken-for-granted traditional identities were revived with a born-again zeal, and calls for the restoration of traditional identities to a pristine condition complements the rejection of new identities. I argue that efforts to uncritically preserve academic traditions are problematic, especially when these traditions may be relevant to specific historical epochs, yet are not necessarily sensible for retention in today's modern context. The following works will be reviewed regarding the critique of the born-again paradigm: Xiaotong Fei's (2006) *China's Gentry* and Pingyuan Chen's (1998) *The Creation of China's Modern Academic System: The Works of Zhang Taiyan and Hu Shi*.

The integration paradigm underlies the epistemology of combining old and new knowledge and giving recognition to the source from which knowledge originates to ensure that original knowledge sources are retained, acknowledged, and represented in recognizable forms. Supporters of integration strategies aim to demonstrate, for example, how modern Chinese academies drew from Chinese and Western influences to develop the current knowledge repertoires. In this paper, I will critically

examine prevailing conceptualizations of Chinese knowledge paradigms as integrationist, and will review the following works to explore whether knowledge can be exclusively claimed to represent specific cultural and/or civilizational sources: Ruth Hayhoe et al.'s (2011) *Portraits of 21st Century Chinese Universities: In the Move to Mass Higher Education* and Mingming Wang's (2005) *Historical Dilemma of Western Learning in China.*

The situationalist paradigm calls for an epistemology that focuses on the reconstruction of knowledge that adapts to the context, and in ways that transcends the cultural/civilizational source from which the knowledge is drawn. Therefore, a paradigm of knowledge is referred to as "Chinese" because of the context in which it developed or *to* which it adapted, rather than the knowledge sources *from* which the knowledge was adapted (i.e., integration strategies). I take this line of argument—that situationalist strategies characterized the evolution of Chinese knowledge paradigms—and examine the following work to support my case: Shih Hu's (2012) *Outline of History of Chinese Philosophy.*

Research questions

The review will be performed and guided by the following questions:

Question 1 How did contemporary Chinese scholars make sense of the development of Chinese knowledge paradigms?

Question 2 How can an understanding of the identity-grafting strategies employed by these scholars help us make sense of the implications of the modernization of China's academic system for the Chinese identity?

Method

I have gained great insight from well-known scholars, such as Shih Hu, Mu Qian, Youlan Feng, Yusheng Lin, and Yingshi Yu, who have offered comprehensive and critical comments and judgments in their influential works on the sophistication of the modern Chinese knowledge system. All have a deep understanding of both Chinese and Western knowledge systems, and appreciate both. I then formulated the basic ideas and propositions of this paper. Subsequently, I intensively read several research works on academic history that were based on original historical information and particularly focused on Peking University during the early twentieth century. The researchers included Xinlong Liu, Yiai Chen, Pingyuan Chen, and Fanshen Wang. The latter provided evidence for my arguments. Finally, I compare the constructs of identity grafting to concrete historical data, and re-organized the historical evidence in the literature.

In the early twentieth century, scholars such as Qichao Liang (1920 [2005]) and Taiyan Zhang (1922 [2008]) wrote books on this issue, followed by many other

scholars, such as Juren Cao (1986 [2003]), Yingshi Yu (2003 [2012]), and Weiming Du (1989 [2013]). In the 1910s, 1980s, and 2010s, the topic was popular and many academic pieces were published. Historians repeatedly discussed related issues and shared fresh findings. The works reviewed in this paper were mostly undertaken during the late 1990s and early 2000s; however, the content of their studies mostly focused on Peking University in the 1920s. Pingyuan Chen (1998), Yiai Chen (2002), and Xinlong Liu (2007) are three typical scholars.

The scholars mentioned above devoted significant attention to the topic and wrote many books and papers. In the sense, they are experts in this field. I intentionally selected their typical books for this study. Two of these (Chen 2002; Liu 2007) were dissertations and provided much original historical information. Chinese traditional knowledge focuses intensively on the humanities. Therefore, I selected works in the humanities (philosophy, history, and Chinese language). An overwhelming majority of the works I presented in this paper were in Chinese, because works published in English by these scholars are rare. The consistency and reliability of my review is ensured via cross-validation. I compare literatures written by different authors on the same historical events where possible. For subjective judgment, I devote attention to the authors' wisdoms and insights on one side and the logic of their discourse on the other side.

Identity grafting analyses

Repression

A repressive view of the modernization of Chinese academic institutions states that rapid internal reform was forced by external invasion, rather than internal need. This view is informed by references to the Opium War (1839–1860) and its role in precipitating Chinese awareness of the need to adjust to new world situations. The focus on China's humiliating defeat in the Opium War and lack of scientific and technological progress resulted in a frenzy to imitate and replicate Western practices. This resulted in the neglect to nurture the intangible aspects of modern intellectual scholarship. Repressive identity-grafting strategies characterized reforms in the late Qing Dynasty, which framed China's encounter with the West as a clash between the traditional and the modern (Zhao 1998).

Assumptions were rife among reformers about the inferiority of the Chinese academic system, which resulted in extreme measures to abolish and dismantle symbols of traditional Chinese learning (Zhang 2016). In the uncritical embrace of all things Western as infinitely superior, *identity repression* resulted in efforts to displace traditional Chinese knowledge paradigms in their entirety. Shen (2017) provided a comprehensive assessment of the problem with the repressive strategies adopted in the late Qing period. The abolishment of *Shuyuans* (书院; China's traditional academy of higher education) is a typical case. The loss of *Shuyuans* resulted in the total loss of opportunities to study traditional Chinese knowledge, resulting in the bankruptcy of the intellectual capacity to adapt Western knowledge to the Chinese context. The abolishment of the *Keju* (科举; imperial examinations) in

1905 provides another example of the creation of a violent break between Chinese scholarship and its intellectual foundations that had been carefully nurtured for more than 1300 years, since the Sui (581–619 AD) and Tang (618–907 AD) Dynasties. Although *Keju* had inherent flaws, dismantling the entire system also toppled institutionalized access to social mobility.

In summary, Chinese and Western academic systems developed in different social contexts and gained different features. The repressive identity-grafting strategy that prevailed in the late Qing Dynasty adopted an overly idealistic view of Western academic and cultural ideas. The following comments best summarize the problem with the repressive approach:

> From late *Qing* Dynasty to now, reformers adopted new ideas from the West too superficially. When they saw new movements, new institutions and new ideologies, they wanted to import them into China. They thought that this could make China richer and stronger. Obviously they lacked deep understanding on social changes. Consequently they imitated mechanically and proposed ideas blindly. They struggled with choices among democracy, communist and dictatorship. Old institution was destroyed, but new institution was not ready. New institutions mixed many things. There appeared non-coherent principles. Institutions can be imitated, but the spirit can only be nurtured. (Zhang 2016, p. 70)

A gradual reform approach to adapting Western academic and cultural ideas may have been less damaging than completely dismantling all traditional Chinese academies and academic systems.

Contemporary Chinese scholars have sought to dispel myths about Chinese academic systems that have contributed to perpetrating repressive Chinese identities. In his book *On China's Modern Academic Discourse*, Qian (2001, p. 42) contested beliefs that traditional Chinese scholarship's emphasis on compiling knowledge by general categories (i.e., horizontal integration) is necessarily inferior to traditional Western scholarship's approach to knowledge classification by specializations (i.e., vertical integration). China has a general knowledge system instead of a categorized system. Chinese scholars are assumed to know everything in general, while their Western counterparts are assumed to be experts in specialized fields. Traditional Chinese and Western approaches are indeed different, yet both have positively contributed to knowledge in the world.

Western academic systems have positively contributed to technological advancement with the specialization of knowledge, developing a critical inquiry approach to explore and develop innovative knowledge. However, insufficient attention is devoted to the positive contribution of Chinese academic systems toward humanistic epistemology with the reading and interpretation of traditional Chinese classics. When discussing well-known scholar Zhu Xi (朱熹) from the Song Dynasty, Feng (1996) wrote that Zhu Xi sought to develop a system of knowledge about human ethics from the study of ancient sages. He established a Chinese academic system with four canons of knowledge: *Jing* (经; Confucian classics), *Shi* (史; history), *Zi* (子; philosophy) and *Ji* (集; literature). Traditional Chinese scholars had to study his compilation of classical literature, applying examples from the literature to

illustrate their understanding of ethical practice. However, in 1902, the Qing government mandated the replacement of the traditional Chinese academic system with the *Ren Yin* Schooling System (壬寅学制), which heralded the beginning of specialized schooling knowledge in China (Jin 2000). This put an end to the study of classical Chinese literature, and along with it the value of an education for developing ethical practice. In her book, Hayhoe (1996) pointed out that knowledge became specialized in the sixteenth century in Western countries, yet it was only in the nineteenth century that China started on establishing knowledge specialization in its academic system. Her observation is chronologically correct, but misses the point entirely. The lack of progress in the modern Chinese academic system is not its late entry into knowledge specialization. The failure of modern Chinese education is the failure to reform its system of ethical knowledge development as it seeks to important knowledge specialization into China. Today, Western scholarship has an unprecedented respect for ethical practice, while the rich heritage of ethical knowledge development in Chinese scholarship has been squandered during the repressive era of uncritical imitation of Western knowledge paradigms. It is gratifying to know that scholars today are increasingly acknowledging the contribution of non-Western/Asian/Chinese influences in the emphasis on humanistic values and ethics in Western scholarship (Miller 2019).

I borrow Yingshi Yu's (2006, p. 19) ideas on Qian Mu and China's modern academic system to reach a conclusion about the repressive strategies adopted to make sense of the distinctions between Chinese and Western academic systems. Although comparisons that focus on distinctions between cultures are generally beneficial, identity repression prevents the development of fruitful knowledge exchange, with distorted assumptions about how the process unfolds. As a result of the assumption that knowledge is transferred uni-directionally, rather than exchanged, repressive paradigms necessarily communicate the underlying idea that one set of knowledge is superior to the other, and thus the standards of the superior should be imposed. Yu referred to the distorted judgment of the modernization of China's academic system, and that a repressive view of Chinese academic systems is ineffective.

Born-again Chineseness

Modernization caused fundamental changes in society, transforming China's imperial regime to a nation-state, communities from rural to urban, reliance on astrology to a reliance on science for explanations, trade economy to a market economy, and agriculture to industry. These transformations allowed citizens to escape from traditional restrictions, yet also caused pressure to comply with newly formed restrictions. For example, although people freed themselves from traditional religious restrictions, the pursuit of wealth in a market economy emerged as the new religion. Moreover, as with the unintended consequences that arose during the onset of modernization in Western societies, the internal coherence provided by Chinese traditions weakened dramatically, resulting in social dysfunction. For example, the cultural tradition of the academic literati returning to serve provincial hometowns maintained educational equity between rural and urban regions. This ensured that,

during the Qing Dynasty, almost half of the people who took part in *Keju* (imperial examinations) came from the countryside. However, the modern academic system maintained a high concentration of academia in urban regions, thus widening the gap between urban and rural areas, such as during the Chinese Republic period (Zhu 2018).

As Chinese citizens attack the new shackles imposed by the adoption of external knowledge influences, they often forget the old shackles previously imposed by the traditions of Chinese academic systems, thus misjudging and exaggerating the virtuousness and superiority of traditional Chinese knowledge. I refer to the typology of born-again identity-grafting strategies, and will examine the efforts of contemporary Chinese scholars to warn about the ramifications of born-again Chineseness.

As Chinese citizens seek to counteract the unintended consequences of modernity, retrogressive strategies sometimes emerge in the counterarguments against Chinese modernization. These counterarguments posit that Chinese knowledge is superior to Western knowledge, reversing Eurocentric discourse with Sinocentrism, and often referring to China's four great inventions (paper making, printing, compasses, and powder) as the predecessors of Western technological advancements. Youlan Feng (1996) in *Brief History of Chinese Philosophy* seeks to dispel these beliefs. He highlighted that, although China's four great inventions were indeed excellent technological advancements, the failure to convert practical inventions into theoretical knowledge prevented the further development of these inventions at the grand scale advanced and achieved by Western academic systems. By contrast, Western modern technological progress developed at a grand scale because of the development of their academic systems, which extended beyond superficial practical utility to explore knowledge in the abstract. This led to the development of a competitive advantage in technological advancement, such as the development of nuclear technology.

Integration

A proliferation of research holds the view that modern Chinese academies are the result of an integration of Chinese and Western academic systems (Chen 1998; Hayhoe et al. 2011). In this section, I will present the key thrust of these views and then offer a critical interpretation of integrationist approaches. I argue that prevalent studies of China's modern academic system tend to perpetuate the view that the Chinese knowledge development is static and pristine in its traditional form, until it is subjected to transformation by Western knowledge paradigms. Although an integrative view is more fruitful than repressive and born-again views, it captures an incomplete picture of the development of the modern Chinese academic system. There is room for the development of more persuasive approaches. The epistemological thrust of integrationist approaches is based on the assumption that Chinese and Western academic systems are distinctive mutually exclusive, and an integration of distinctive practices resulted in the evolution of traditional Chinese academies into its modern forms.

Xiaotong Fei's (2006) thoughts inseminated the idea of the importance of deeply examining the distinctions in structural conditions that led to the historical evolution of Chinese and Western paradigms. Fei (2006) explained that Western academic systems are inclined toward theorization and knowledge abstraction because of their economic history of nomadism and place dissociation. Mobility fosters contact and knowledge exchange in abstract forms, which is a strong precedent for the development of technological innovation. Abstract knowledge represents generalizable knowledge that is dissociated with the particular. By contrast, normative knowledge is embedded in particular contexts. Fei (1998) argued that because of China's agrarian economic history, Chinese academic systems lack of incentive for theoretical abstraction. Instead, normative knowledge arose from agrarian cultures of interdependency. Therefore, Chinese academic systems tend to prioritize normative ordering of human relationships and because of the lack of incentive for theoretical abstraction, lagged behind in technological knowledge acquisition.

Qichao Liang observed that, although Chinese and Western scholars both refer history as the study of past events that contributes to an understanding of present-day society, there exists essential differences between Chinese and Western epistemological approaches toward this discipline (Liu 2007). Western history is a specialized knowledge system (e.g., ancient, political, and economic history), while Chinese history subject is a holistic knowledge system. For example, the historical study of *liu jing* (六经; six classics) and *si shu* (四书; four works) provides holistic insights to present-day Chinese society in ways that transcend sorting by specializations. Present-day forms of Chinese history studies are the result of the revisionist efforts of Liang's (1902) *New History Studies*. This book was written in accordance with the guidelines established by the *Zouding Xuetang Zhangcheng* (奏定学堂章程; imperial school constitution) (Zhang et al. 1904 [1970]), which largely borrowed from Western knowledge paradigms, such as concepts of state, society, and citizenry (Wang 2011). These concepts not only broadened the horizons of historical study in China, but also introduced progressive ideas to modern Chinese academic systems, such as the importance of theory building, objectivity (or neutrality), and empirical verification in scholarly inquiry. Most importantly, scholarly inquiry became a collective effort—a stark contrast from the traditional Chinese inquiry characterized by the lone scholar. The Institute of China Studies of Peking University and Institute of History and Language of China Central Academy of Research exemplify this transformation. Therefore, Liu (2007) concluded that the modernization of the history subject in China was achieved by importing Western history epistemology, which resulted in the transformation of traditional Chinese history studies.

In the study of the thoughts and works of Xiaotong Fei and Qichao Liang, we gain insight to the key thrusts of integrationist epistemologies: (1) the distinctiveness and mutual exclusivity of Chinese and Western academic systems and (2) how Chinese academies have advanced from traditional to modern forms via the integration of Western knowledge paradigms. Studies adopting integrationist approaches have contributed to a more convincing understanding than repressive or born-again approaches on China's modern academic system, such as through highlighting that Chinese higher education is not simply the transplantation of a Western system, but an integration of the Western system with Chinese culture (Hayhoe et al. 2011).

However, as I (2013) argued in *The Same Term But Different Connotations*, integrationist epistemologies resulted in the perpetuation of cultural stereotypes and the impression that China was the passive recipient of Western knowledge and practices.

Integrative approaches valorize Chinese uniqueness by focusing on aspects of Chinese knowledge and practices that are distinguished from Western knowledge and practices, such as the lack of distinction between scholars and government officials and a holistic view of knowledge (Hayhoe et al. 2011). Correspondingly, the valorization of Western uniqueness undermines the reality that, over the history of human development, Western academic systems have long been inspired by Eastern knowledge and practices. To name a few milestone developments in Western knowledge and practices, India contributed to the development of mathematics; Arabs played a crucial role in shaping the Greek civilization; and China contributed to Western technological advancement with the "four great inventions" of papermaking, compasses, gunpowder, and printing (Yan 2013). Therefore, integrative views focus on the "origin" of knowledge and practices are contestable. In the next section, I propose a situationalist view that focuses on the "destination" of knowledge transfer—that is, how knowledge adapts and new knowledge is generated from its adaptation to new situations and locales.

Situationalist

I propose that a situationalist view is more fruitful than the aforementioned views in the interrogation of how knowledge paradigms can be more effectively converged and reconciled to produce global knowledge. To make sense of modern Chinese academies with a situationalist view is to recast the analysis of the evolution of modern Chinese higher academies to focus on how new global knowledge is produced as knowledge circulates through Chinese situations and locales. This focus extends beyond the examination of where knowledge sources originate, and instead inquires how knowledge is received, interpreted, and adapted to generate new knowledge.

Classics form the major body of China's traditional knowledge. A repressive approach to the development of the modern Chinese academic system would call for their dissolution and displacement by modern Western knowledge. However, with due credit given to Taiyan Zhang, a situationalist approach to the modernization of Chinese classical epistemologies was adopted to infuse the study of Chinese classics into a disciplined knowledge system. After *Keju* (科举; imperial examinations) were abolished, new schools were established to displace traditional *Shuyuans*. This enabled progress in popularizing education, yet raised new problems. Taiyan Zhang opposed and refused to join the newly established schools, and instead supported the modernization of the *Shuyuan* system. To make education accessible to the masses, the newly established schools adopted instructional practices that Zhang believed would dramatically reduce educational quality in China. The newly established schools used *erxue* (耳学; oral transmission and listening) and called for the abolishment of *yanxue* (眼学; reading) on the basis that the poor could not afford books. Zhang believed that Chinese academic modernization should focus on improving the quality of Chinese knowledge paradigms, rather than abolishing it in its entirety.

He revamped Chinese classical studies and differentiated between *Jingxue* (*经学;* content) and *Zixue* (*子学*; philosophy), and infused critical thinking into the study of classics. Textual criticism was introduced via *Jingxue*, and the development of creative imagination was introduced via *Zixue*.

Shih Hu can be viewed as Taiyuan Zhang's contemporary, as I will outline in the ensuing paragraphs. Hu's situationalist approach called for the development of shared global knowledge that transcends divisions among civilizations. In fact, Hu exemplified this convergence himself, having been under the tutelage of John Dewey, and taking the ideals of pragmatism to a new level in the reform of the Chinese language and script (Qi 2005). While Hu's exposure at Columbia University established the foundation for his scholarship in the formative years, an integrative approach to understanding his works often results in oversight of the underlying epistemological similarities between Taiyan Zhang and Shih Hu's ideas (Lu and Yang 2009). For example, Hu's implementation of the simplification of the Chinese language—symbolized by the development of *Baihua* (*白话*; Chinese vernacular) and *Jiantizi* (*简体字*; simplified script) resonated more with the original ideas of Zhang than with Western philological epistemologies. Therefore, the development of Hu's progressive ways of thinking about culture, language, and identity was situated in his scholarship in Peking University.

In his book *Outline of History of Chinese Philosophy*, Hu (2012) sketched a situationalist approach to analyzing the development of the modern Chinese knowledge paradigm. He argued that focusing on the source origins of knowledge paradigms is unhelpful, illustrating that there is no paradigm devoid of influences from other cultural origins. For example, Chinese knowledge paradigms draw intensively from Indian philosophy, while Western knowledge paradigms are heavily influenced by Jewish philosophy. Hu argued that Chinese and Western academic systems have great potential for mutual adaptation to transcend knowledge boundaries by civilization origins, and his book summarized several convergences in Chinese and Western schools of knowledge. First, the Mohist school (an ancient Chinese philosophy of logic and science) shares common epistemological approaches with the study of natural sciences in the West. Second, Mencius's concept of *minben* (*民本*; humanistic rule) has similarity with Western democracy.

Hu's contribution to Chinese modernization transcends scholarship boundaries. Apart from his influence on modernizing the Chinese language, his influence in going against the grain is also perceptible in university administration, which manifested in his *Proposal for Sorting out Chinese Academic System* at Peking University. In the proposal, he established the use of empirical evidence as a key tenet in philological scholarship, including in the study of *Yinyun* (*音韵*; phonology), *Xungu* (*训诂*; exegesis), and *Xiaokan* (*校勘*; collation) (Chen 1998, 2002). Hu summarized this proposal with a slogan "*dadang jiashe, xiaoxin qiuzheng*" (*大胆假设, 小心求证*; "bold hypothesis and careful verification"). Thus, the identity-grafting strategies that Hu engaged were situationally rooted in the scholarship of advancing the Chinese knowledge paradigm in a Chinese higher academy in ways that transcended the source(s) from which the new knowledge originated.

Through employing Shih Hu's work, I counter-propose that modern Chinese academies draw from world knowledge sources, and the diversity and richness of

knowledge contributing to the evolution of Chinese academic systems illustrates that a situationalist approach is a more effective approach to understanding this evolution than an integrationist approach. Nevertheless, this is not to say that no distinctions exist between Chinese and Western academic systems, and an integrationist approach remains important in understanding these distinctions. However, the problem with the integrationist approach is the tendency to over-attribute Western influence as the inspiration for the change and development of modern Chinese academies. To support this point, I draw further on Hu's works regarding the intrinsically modern elements in the traditional Chinese knowledge system that place pressure on the modernization of Chinese academies of learning.

From this perspective, China's modern academic system was not completely shaped by external forces. The internal transformation of China's academic system was as influential as the external pressures for change (Lin 2011). I posit from this historical overview that contemporary Chinese academies of higher education are not products of the repression of Chinese knowledge paradigms, so that Western identities can be accommodated. Neither are they the outcomes of the integration between Chinese and Western knowledge paradigms. Rather, contemporary Chinese academies of higher education are hybrid paradigms that arise from structural changes in Chinese societies, whereby social situations drive demands for new knowledge paradigms drawn from shared cultural attributes that are essential to both Chinese and Western identities. That is, the evolution of Chinese knowledge paradigms is the result of situational identity-grafting strategies, instead of repression or integration strategies. How did this internal transformation occur? The interaction between Chinese and Western academic systems sheds light on this question.

As aforementioned, Chinese sociologist Xiaotong Fei (2006) theorized about the structural distinctions between Chinese and Western societies that led to the distinctive academic systems toward scholarly inquiry. Thus, how can a situationalist approach enrich scholarly inquiry and support the development of modern Chinese academies? As early as the 1920s, distinctive schools of sociological thought were created by Chinese scholars, whose experience sheddred light on today's Chinese societies, such as undertaking in-depth field work to test the validity of Western sociological theories in Chinese empirical contexts (Yan 2013). These efforts created intriguing concepts and contributed to empirically grounded sociological theory development.

Similar movements toward situationalist paradigms have also emerged among Chinese scholars in anthropology. Wang (2005), an anthropologist, underscored that the social sciences arose as a discipline in the middle of the nineteenth century in Europe. Although social science scholarship can be considered a global discipline today, the center-periphery divide persisted with unequal power to define knowledge in the discipline. While Western-centrism can be somewhat acceptable in disciplines that do require empirical inquiry (e.g., perhaps to some extent in the fields of economics and politics), the persistence of this core-periphery divide is unacceptable in disciplines where empirical validation is a central aspect of scholarship. For example, in the fields of sociology and anthropology, scholarly theorization should be situational—that is, derived from the context in which empirical inquiry occurs.

Wang ([2005](#)) proposed the idea of open anthropology—that is, opening up anthropology as a scholarly discipline of the world, rather than as a form of Western scholarly inquiry on China. Although the development of the anthropology discipline in the Western academic system coincides with the Western imperial history of the colonization and contributes to legitimizing Western colonial ambitions, the transformed anthropology shows greater inclusiveness and sympathy by considering the implications of both tradition and local knowledge in modern society, as well as universal knowledge. As a situationalist knowledge paradigm, anthropology will transform from a scholarship that adopts imperialistic interest to one that originates from local interest. This will improve the access of knowledge developed in non-Western locales in illuminating a global knowledge paradigm, or what used to be known as the Western knowledge paradigm. For example, the notion of Chinese *duoyuan yiti* (多元一体; many systems, one entity) can contribute to traditional Western notions of the nation-state. Chinese conceptualizations of reality that have yet to emerge in Western worldviews, such as the notion of *tianxia* (天下; heaven and earth as one existential plane), can also contribute to Western knowledge and wisdoms. The above arguments represent the cultural awareness and confidence that are becoming increasingly important nowadays.

Lessons from analyzing the modernization of China's academic system as a process of identity grafting

Through using Lee's ([2017](#)) theory of identity grafting to frame this study of the seminal ideas of renowned Peking University scholars of the past, we can develop a more coherent understanding of underlying epistemologies that influence the development of Chinese academic systems and higher academia. Situational identity-grafting approaches can support the development of the "spirit" of modern Chinese academies, rather than the displacement of indigenous knowledge. The future of Chinese knowledge paradigms should be open to learning from other civilizations, and rooted in China's current social situations.

In interrogating the significance of Western academic systems in modern Chinese academies, the repressive paradigm states that traditional Chinese academic systems need to be obliterated to accommodate Western academic systems. Thus, a repressive approach is ineffective because it inhibits the development of new and original knowledge, thereby limiting modern Chinese academies to the imitation and reproduction of Western knowledge. The born-again Chineseness paradigm attributes the flaws of modern Chinese academies to the poor fit of Western academic systems to the Chinese context, thus calling for the restoration of traditional Chinese academic systems. Born-again Chineseness threatens to forestall the development of a globally inclusive knowledge paradigm, despite the usefulness of this epistemological approach in restoring Chinese confidence in its own higher academia.

The integrative paradigm attributes the advancement of modern Chinese academies to their enrichment by Western knowledge paradigms. This focus on the differences between Chinese and Western knowledge systems is fruitful for clarifying aspects of the Western knowledge system that must be integrated to enhance

Chinese higher academic scholarship. However, despite its efficiency in modernizing and improving the Chinese academic scholarship, it results in universities that are modern and efficient, yet lacking in the "spirit" of being culturally rooted in indigenous situational contexts.

With the contact between Chinese and Western knowledge paradigms, opportunities exist for the development of a globally inclusive knowledge paradigm that would arise from their integration. Extending from this development, the situationalist paradigm attributes the development of modern academic systems from the need to address the situations that confront particular social contexts, and thus to focus on contextualized identity-grafting strategies. As with the evolution of Western academic systems, the modernization of the Chinese academic system would create new knowledge as it draws from indigenous, Western, and non-Western perspectives (e.g., Indian and Jewish), usually in forms already hybridized with knowledge from other cultural origins.

While China's modern academic system indeed integrates Western knowledge systems, the adoption of situational identity-grafting strategies is instrumental to developing not only a critical Chinese knowledge paradigm, but also a global knowledge paradigm that devolves from Western-centrism. A situationalist epistemology would focus on developing a Chinese knowledge paradigm not based on the uncritical imitation (repression) and/or rejection (born-again) of Western paradigms, or whether the origins of learning are paradigmatic of Chinese or Western learning (integration). Rather, situationalist identity grafting focuses on transcending Chinese and Western boundaries to develop a knowledge paradigm that not only is relevant to the Chinese locality in which knowledge is applied and learnt, but also advances knowledge that is global in significance.

Conclusion

The modern Chinese academic system was formalized in the early twentieth century via a long and complex process that involved Chinese traditional knowledge and Western knowledge. The new system was achieved through the efforts of many scholars from different backgrounds and paradigms. This paper sought to present evidence from the research literature under the frame of an identity-grafting typology and provide a valid analyses. It is expected to enhance understandings of the Chinese academic system, past and future. In the process, we can witness that Chinese scholars are struggling among paradigms of total Westernization (repressive), total indigenization (born-again), a combination of useful components (integration), and creation based on the Chinese situation (situationalist). Gradually, Chinese scholars have extended beyond the biased and extreme knowledge perspectives and attained consciousness and confidence in academic innovation.

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