

Tsinghua–Academia Europaea Symposium on Humanities and Social Sciences, Globalization and China

Globalization, Humanities and Social Sciences: An Introduction and a Commentary

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As we know, globalization has been one of the most discussed and debated theoretical topics since the beginning of the 1990s, especially among scholars of humanities and social sciences. More and more people have realized that they cannot survive without globalization. For instance, among today's young people in China, the so-called 'cell phone disease' can be observed everywhere: these youngsters would be almost incapable of doing anything should they lose their cell phones. In writing their theses, university students would rather download references from websites than borrow books or academic journals from libraries. Many of them would rather even read online than read hard copies of reference materials. People may well raise the following questions: what is the use of studying the humanities? And will the humanities bring opportunities for job competition? If the answer to these questions is negative, why then should we still keep humanities courses on the university curricula? As compared with the difficult situation of the humanities, social sciences seem much better off, especially economics and business management, as well as international studies. But the above questions apply to us all. As scholars of the humanities and social sciences we cannot but confront them and try to give our answers. To deal with these questions in detail, the International Conference on Humanities, Social Sciences, Globalization, and China was held from 15–17 May 2014 in Beijing. This conference was jointly organized by Academia Europaea (AE), Tsinghua University and Shanghai Jiao Tong University. It was the first time the

Academia Europaea had collaborated with two leading Chinese universities to hold such a high-level conference in China. As a foreign member elected to AE and a faculty member at both Tsinghua and SJTU, I designed the conference programme and chaired the conference in collaboration with my AE colleague Theo D'haen.

The general theme of the conference was 'globalization, humanities, social sciences and China', for we all understand that the advent of globalization has brought tremendous changes in almost every aspect of our social and cultural life as well as in teaching and academic research. Since most of the participants are university professors engaged in teaching and research in the humanities and social sciences, what we are concerned with most are the problems we have encountered in our relevant fields of research and teaching. So under this broad umbrella we settled on six subthemes for our three days of discussion:

- (1) The role of the humanities and social sciences in higher education in Europe/the West and China: their weight and impact;
- (2) Funding research in the humanities and social sciences in Europe/the West and China: players, procedures, scales;
- (3) Mobility of humanities and social science researchers and teachers between Europe/the West and China: numbers, kinds, durability;
- (4) Cross-cultural exchanges between Europe/the West and China: what happens to European/Western humanities and social science paradigms, concepts, and methods when they 'travel' to China, and vice-versa?
- (5) The impact of China's entry into the higher education market on research and teaching in the humanities and social sciences beyond Europe/the West and China;
- (6) Teaching HSS in Europe/the West and China: curricula, methods, emerging models (MOOCS, distance learning, etc).

While the speakers focused on the general theme from their own theoretical or disciplinary perspectives, they also showed a strong interest in the position of the humanities and social sciences in China in the age of globalization. This position was seen to be unique when compared with what is happening to these disciplines in Europe. In this commentary, I will, before commenting on the main ideas of each essay, say a few words about China in the process of globalization and the function of the humanities and social sciences in general.

According to the American Japanese thinker and scholar Francis Fukuyama, who is very influential but also very controversial from a Chinese perspective, China is one of the biggest winners of globalization.¹ When he said this in 2011, Fukuyama was correct even though many people had not yet realized it. Elizabeth J. Perry pointed out that globalization has indeed sped up China's economic development, enabling China, 'one of the globe's poorest countries' before its reform, to 'become a booming economy – second biggest in the world' in the present century.² But I think that the United States is the other biggest winner of globalization, not only economically,

politically but also culturally, with American culture being very popular and influential in almost every corner of the present world. The rise of China, however, is too rapid for people to believe. Thus, Western and international media as well as scholarship have in the past decade paid particular attention to the rapid development of China, its economy, politics, and culture, including its attention to the humanities. Economically speaking, China currently ranks second in the world in GDP, with the United States being number one. Sooner or later though, China will surpass the latter and become the world's largest economic entity. Furthermore, China has quickly changed roles in the process of globalization: from being passively involved in it has increasingly come to assume a leading role. This finds particular embodiment in its recent initiative of setting up the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in Beijing.

Politically speaking, China is now experiencing a sort of de-third-worldization in an attempt to function as a big power in international affairs.³ Undoubtedly, all the above have attracted the attention of various international media, which have constructed different versions of a 'Chinese myth' or 'Chinese fantasy', as if China were really the most prosperous country in the world. They all forget that China is such a vast country that there remain striking differences between the various regions. There is an even more striking gap between the rich and the poor. As for the changing images of China in different periods of history, I have already dealt with this elsewhere.⁴ I here just want to emphasize that, in engaging with globalization, China has followed a 'unique mode of development' that, according to Yu Keping, is 'both different from traditional socialism and from Western developed countries.'¹ Politically, China still firmly adheres to the Four Cardinal Principles formulated by its late leader Deng Xiaoping. That is, adhering to the socialist road, keeping to the people's democratic dictatorship, persisting in the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, and persevering in Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. This constitutes the so-called China Mode, which can never be copied or followed by any other country. Some Western scholars, in associating China with globalization, especially in its economic development and political progress, try to describe how China, over the course of a quarter-century, has shifted from communism to capitalism, and how China has transformed itself from a desperately poor nation into a country possessing one of the fastest-growing and largest economies in the world, which is certainly 'a story of the forces of globalization'.⁵ Few however are really concerned about China's relations with globalization in the humanities and social sciences.

Frankly, in recognizing China's fast growth and prosperity, these Western scholars all tend to overlook that China is a large oriental country with an enduring civilization, a long history, and a splendid heritage in culture and the humanities. As a Chinese scholar in literary and cultural studies, I will briefly offer my view on China in the process of globalization, mainly from a cultural and humanities perspective.

Although to many people China is one of the biggest winners in the process of globalization, from both an economic and cultural perspective, I would rather argue that it is by 'glocalization' that China relocates itself in the broader context of a global

economy and global culture. I would even say that this is especially true of Chinese culture. Roland Robertson pointed out many years ago that

...the notion of glocalisation actually conveys much of what I have in fact been writing in recent years about globalization. From my standpoint the concept of glocalisation has involved the simultaneity and the interpenetration of what are conventionally called the global and the local, or – in more general vein – the universal and the particular. Talking strictly of my own position in the current debate about and the discourse of globalisation, it may even become necessary for me (and others) to substitute occasionally the term ‘glocalisation’ for the contested term ‘globalization,’ in order to make my, or our, argument more precise.⁶

It goes without saying that the publication of Robertson’s book *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* in Chinese in 2000 in Shanghai helped globalization come to China’s academia,⁷ and it is even truer that the publication of the *Encyclopedia of Globalization* in Chinese in 2011 in Nanjing has popularized this critical concept and enabled more people to know about this contemporary phenomenon.⁸ Although Chinese scholarship has welcomed the advent of globalization by quoting Robertson’s description and discussion of globalization, they seem to have neglected that Robertson has also been among the first to conceptualize the term ‘glocalization’ and apply it to describing cultural globalization in the world. The practice of globalization in China, especially in Chinese culture and humanities, has proven that globalization cannot occur in a country such as China, with a long cultural history and a strong feeling of nation, unless it is ‘localized’, and thus effectively constituting an instance of ‘glocalization’. From a cultural and humanities perspective, I would say that China has benefited from globalization/glocalization at least in the following three ways: (1) Chinese modernity is coming to be seen as an alternative modernity; (2) the Chinese language and culture are being disseminated throughout the world; (3) world literature is being remapped from a Chinese perspective. Since I have dealt with all the above elsewhere, I will not repeat myself here.⁹ But one can easily find that all the above are the results of a sort of glocalization in which China’s role has dramatically changed from passively involved to actively leading.

All the articles in the current volume touch upon the issues raised above from their own perspective. Theo D’haen explores the ‘worlding’ of the humanities and social sciences using ‘world literature’ as his example. He points out that under the impact of globalization the study and teaching of the social sciences and humanities is rapidly changing, with a growing transfer of research, knowledge, and methodology from the West to other parts of the world, including China. It is true that Chinese humanities scholars pay particular attention to the most cutting edge theoretical trends in the West and try by every means possible to introduce them to China. However, more recently they have come to realize that, in sharp contrast, their own culture and literature are little known to the outside world. They have therefore shifted their focus from translating Western culture into Chinese to translating Chinese culture into the major Western languages, especially English, the world’s lingua franca. Hence the ‘worlding’ of the humanities and social sciences is a two-way process: from the West to the East and from the East to the West.

For César Domínguez, the European Erasmus student exchange scheme, leading to large contingents of students studying in countries with a language and educational system unfamiliar to them, along with the institutionalization of the European Higher Education Area, have occasioned far-reaching changes in the Spanish university system. Added to this there is the more recent phenomenon of large groups of Chinese students arriving in Spain. As English is the major foreign language taught in China, most Chinese students will opt to study in the United States, and failing this in the UK or other Anglophone countries such as Canada or Australia. Only if all this fails will they choose to study in European countries with another mother tongue. With the increasing number of Chinese students studying abroad, and with Spanish rapidly gaining in importance in the world, Spain has become a popular destination for Chinese students. On the one hand this causes problems of language as well as cultural difference. On the rebound, though, it also offers novel opportunities for a discipline such as Comparative Literature by didactically pairing texts from the Spanish and Chinese literary canons.

As a Chinese scholar of comparative literature and drama studies, Chengzhou He discusses a Chinese–Japanese co-production of the Chinese *kunqu* opera classic *The Peony Pavilion* from an East-Asian perspective on intercultural performance. He argues that the East Asian model of intercultural performance brought into being by this Chinese–Japanese co-production will impact and transform the existing paradigm of intercultural performance studies and teaching. China and Japan share a similar cultural tradition, with Chinese characters used in both countries, especially in ancient times, and comparative studies of their literary and theatrical works and traditions remain significant.

Some papers also express a broad concern for the future of the humanities and the role played by institutions of higher education in general. Lars Engwall discusses the characteristics of higher education and four modes of internationalization: (a) Import of Ideas, (b) Outsourcing, (c) Insourcing, and (d) Foreign Direct Investments. He reaches the tentative conclusion that the most significant mode of internationalization in higher education is constituted by the Import of Ideas to the home institution, especially in our age of knowledge economy. Thus, to him, the striving for reputation on the home market is an important motive behind the other three modes of internationalization. Although Engwall does not discuss the Chinese case in detail, this also holds true for Chinese universities. Chinese universities pay particular attention to their domestic and international reputation and ranking. Every year, university presidents will closely observe how their universities rank domestically and internationally, as a good ranking will not only help them to get funds from various sources but also attract excellent talents and students from various parts of the world. Engwall's paper actually points out a new direction for the future development of the humanities, especially in institutions of high education.

Wilhelm Krull analyses the current state and future perspectives of the humanities mainly from a European point of view, observing how the ways in which the humanities are perceived and valued vary sharply, especially when it comes to sources

of funding. Although it is difficult to draw general or 'global' conclusions, Krull sketches matters of common concern to all humanities scholars.

Zhou Xian deals with the crisis of the humanities from a Chinese perspective. To him, generally speaking, the crisis of the humanities in higher education has been around for some time now. Over the years, concerns regarding this crisis have spread like wildfire. To the optimist, such a crisis presents new opportunities and challenges. For the pessimist old practices die hard. The crisis of the humanities has attracted considerable attention and discussion, especially in Chinese academic circles. The humanities are suffering almost everywhere from the impact of globalization, but in China the humanities profit from the One Belt and One Road policies, i.e. the Chinese government's intentions to build the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, as these include disseminating and popularizing Chinese culture in the world. In fact, for Chinese humanities scholars, the problem is how to effectively put to use the increasing funds in producing high-quality research results of international significance.

Ulrich Teichler explores the discourse on 'knowledge society' and 'knowledge economy', which often suggests that the natural sciences are in the forefront of the development towards worldwide mobility, communication and cooperation in the world of knowledge, while the humanities and social sciences look more frequently at the specifics of certain cultures and countries or lag behind in their intention to internationalize. However, from the actually available information on mobility and migration of scholars in Europe, including those of the humanities and social sciences, it appears that differences between disciplinary groups are unexpectedly small. I think this is not only so in Europe but also elsewhere, including China.

Erik De Corte uses the CLIA-model (Competence, Learning, Intervention, Assessment) as a framework for developing learning environments against the background of the growing knowledge base on self-regulated learning. He specifically discusses a study that was aimed at designing and evaluating a powerful learning environment for fostering self-regulated learning in university freshmen, and thereby improving their learning proficiency. For today's students, training to be global leaders in the future, cultivating advanced learning skills is vital for their further careers.

Christoph Bode notices a shift in narratology from a concern with what he calls 'past narratives' to 'future narratives', in line with changing perceptions of man's position in an ever-evolving universe strongly marked by the twin forces of globalization and digitalization. Whereas past narratives are uni-linear, he claims, because they refer to events that have already happened in the fictional universe in which they feature and therefore are unalterable, future narratives open out from nodal structures that present different possibilities, different possible futures waiting to be realized but not yet solidified into events. In his paper, Bode is specifically interested in how such nodal structures impact on teaching and research in the humanities and social sciences.

Ottmar Ette uses a particular instance of Namban Art, that is to say the *biombos* or decorated screens produced and traded in the South American part of the Spanish empire, to illustrate the routes and itineraries of globalization already well before the

term itself gained currency. To him, beyond the *regards-croisés* theory or the Entangled histories paradigm, *TransArea Studies* provides us with new tools for education, offering new challenges for a new understanding of globalization, bridging the gap between the first and the later periods of accelerated globalization. His paper forcefully advocates reconsidering the role of the humanities and social sciences in higher education, rethinking the epistemic challenges of *TransArea Studies* within the framework of the processes of globalization.

Stig Thøgersen, in his paper, outlines recent trends in international research on Chinese students abroad, especially in Western countries, and discusses how these globally mobile and well-educated young Chinese perceive the world and how they act in it. There are two different types of Chinese students studying abroad. The first type is composed of those students who are clever enough to get full scholarships, especially from a prestigious American university, and who want to attend a world-class university in order to become future leaders in their fields. The second type consists of those that cannot gain admission to a prestigious Chinese university. Supported by their parents they opt to study abroad in order to find a job after graduation since, at the moment, many Chinese institutions or companies still give greater weight to a Western degree. Thøgersen offers a number of case studies of Chinese students in Europe and shows how the students navigate an increasingly competitive local and global environment; how they reflect on their own, their families' and their nation's present and future; how they negotiate the values, social expectations and educational content they are exposed to abroad; and how they integrate their study-abroad experience into their careers and personal biographies.

Wim Blockmans and Hilde De Weerdts conduct a comparative analysis of the legacies that classical empires have left in Europe and China, respectively. While the Han territories were reunified in part and periodically, and were more consistently ruled as unified empires from the thirteenth century onwards, resulting in present-day unified China, in Europe the Carolingian and the Holy Roman empires borrowed only selectively from the Roman repertoire and became dispersed as we near the present. Blockmans and De Weerdts examine how differences in power relationships, fiscal regimes, and territoriality help explain both the peripheral impact of the classical model in the European context and the enhanced prospects for it in Chinese history from the 12th century onwards.

Jesús Mosterín offers a comparative study of China's examination system in the past and now. The Chinese system was unique in ancient times in providing the opportunity for people not born in aristocratic families to become high-ranking officials through hard work. For Mosterín the great contribution of China to politics was the development of a bureaucratic, meritocratic civil service, not dependent on family ties to the ruler, but on mastery of a well-defined canon of scholarship. Under the Han dynasty, Confucianism was already made the official ideology of the State and the basis of the competitive examination system. Mosterín reminds readers that the Chinese encounters with Western intellectuals around the 1920s went beyond their mutual canons of scholarship. Nowadays, however, the traditional humanities of both China and the West have become obsolete. What is needed is a common effort to

develop a new kind of humanities that incorporates the culture of the past but also takes into account the needs of the present globalized world and the knowledge recently acquired. I quite agree with Mosterin's insightful ideas made on the basis of his careful studies of Chinese culture in the past and now. As it happens, in 2015, both domestic Chinese humanities scholars and overseas sinologists enthusiastically commemorated the centenary of the New Culture Movement (Xin Wenhua Yundong) as this movement has indeed played an important role in the history of Chinese modernity and in promoting modern Chinese literature and intellectual thought.

Two Chinese scholars deal separately with the issues that arise in Chinese universities. Zongxin Feng's paper discusses some current issues in China's foreign language/literature sector at the tertiary level as part of the human and social sciences in terms of its localized concept and its relation to diverse fields of study, administrative intervention, institutional organization, professional recognition, academic dilemmas, and problems and prospects of development in view of the international context of sociocultural globalization. Anfeng Sheng's paper tries to examine the concept of intrinsic development and how it has been neglected or even betrayed in reality. Sheng concludes that the core idea of intrinsic concept just lies in improving the academic quality and level of China's higher education instead of blindly worshipping numbers of publications and projects. As professors of foreign languages and literatures in a prestigious Chinese university, Feng and Sheng try to offer some insightful ideas for people to reflect on the intrinsic crisis behind the seemingly prosperous situation of higher education in contemporary China. Their discussions on the humanities with foreign language teaching in China as an example reminds us that in an increasingly globalized era foreign language teaching is increasingly important. Students in this field should not only be trained to introduce foreign advanced science and culture into China, but also to introduce Chinese things abroad so as to realize the dual direction of globalization.

Obviously, there are more issues confronting scholars of the humanities and social sciences than could be covered in the conference, from which this issue of the *European Review* results, and these obviously remain open for future discussion. What the conference, in its face-to-face exchange of views, made clear is that both Europe, according to the Academia Europaea participants, and China, in the guise of the participants from Tsinghua and Jiao Tong universities as well as from other Chinese universities, are facing similar challenges in the field of higher education, and of the humanities and social sciences in particular, in the age of globalization. All the participants also subscribed to the need for further discussions and even debates on issues of common concern. Thinking of this, I, as the general organizer of the conference, should be at ease.

References and Notes

1. Cf. 'A Dialogue between Yu Keping and Fukuyama: The Biggest Challenge Confronting the China Mode of Development,' *Beijing Daily*, 28 March 2011.
2. E. J. Perry (2014) Growing pains: challenges for a rising China. *Daedalus*, **143**(2), p. 5.

3. As for China's de-third-worldizing practice, cf. Ning Wang (2015) Globalisation as glocalisation in China: a new perspective. *Third World Quarterly*, **36**(11), pp. 2059–2074.
4. As for the new images of China in the eye of Western scholarship, cf. the special issue edited by myself with John Aldrich: Rediscovering China: Interdisciplinary Perspectives, in *European Review*, **23**(2) (2015), especially my Introduction, pp. 173–179.
5. Cf. D. Guthrie (2012) *China and Globalization: the Social, Economic, and Political Transformation of Chinese Society*, 3rd edn (New York: Routledge), p. 3.
6. R. Robertson (1994) Globalisation or glocalisation? *Journal of International Communication*, **1**(1), pp. 38–39.
7. It was published as *Quanqiu hua: shehui lilun he quanqiu wenhua*, trans. Liang Guangyan (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2000).
8. It was published as *Quanqiu hua baikequanshu*, trans. Wang Ning et al. (Nanjing: Fenghuang chuban chuanmei jituan, Yilin chubanshe, 2011).
9. As for my discussions on the three topics, cf. Wang Ning (2012) Multiplied modernities and modernisms? *Literature Compass*, **9**(9), pp. 617–622; Wang Ning (2010) Global English(es) and global Chinese(s): toward rewriting a new literary history in Chinese. *Journal of Contemporary China*, **19**(63), pp. 159–174; and Wang Ning (2011) 'Weltliteratur': from a utopian imagination to diversified forms of world literatures. *Neohelicon*, **38**(2), pp. 295–306.

About the Author

Wang Ning is Zhiyuan Chair Professor of Humanities and Dean of the Institute of Arts and Humanities at Shanghai Jiao Tong University and Changjiang Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Tsinghua University in China. Apart from his numerous books in Chinese, he has published two books in English: *Globalization and Cultural Translation* (2004), and *Translated Modernities: Literary and Cultural Perspectives on Globalization and China* (2010). He has also published extensively in English in *European Review*, *New Literary History*, *Modern Language Quarterly*, *Comparative Literature Studies*, *Semiotica*, *Neohelicon*, *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*, *Amerasia Journal*, *ARIEL*, *Narrative*, and *ISLE*. For a number of these journals he has edited special issues. Wang Ning was elected to Academia Europaea in 2013.