

Tsinghua University Institute of Education
Seminar 3 on 27 June 2019

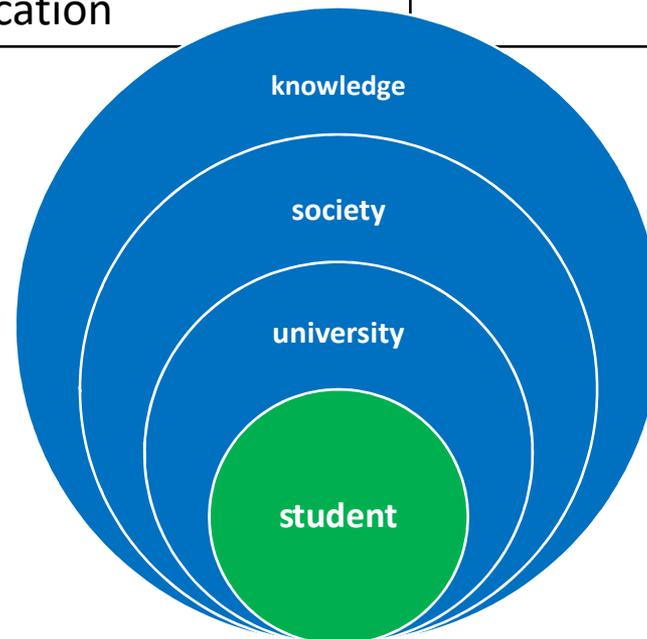
Self-formation, self-cultivation and social formation in higher education

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The Tsinghua IOE seminars June 2019

Date	Title	primary method of presentation	Domain of HE
17 June	1. Higher education and science in a time of global rivalry and global cooperation	investigative political economy/sociology	knowledge
21 June	2. The contributions of higher education to public goods in East and West	investigative political economy/sociology	society
26 June	3. Is there a Chinese 'Idea of a University'?	normative educational philosophy	institution
27 June	4. Self-formation, self-cultivation and social formation in higher education	normative educational philosophy	student

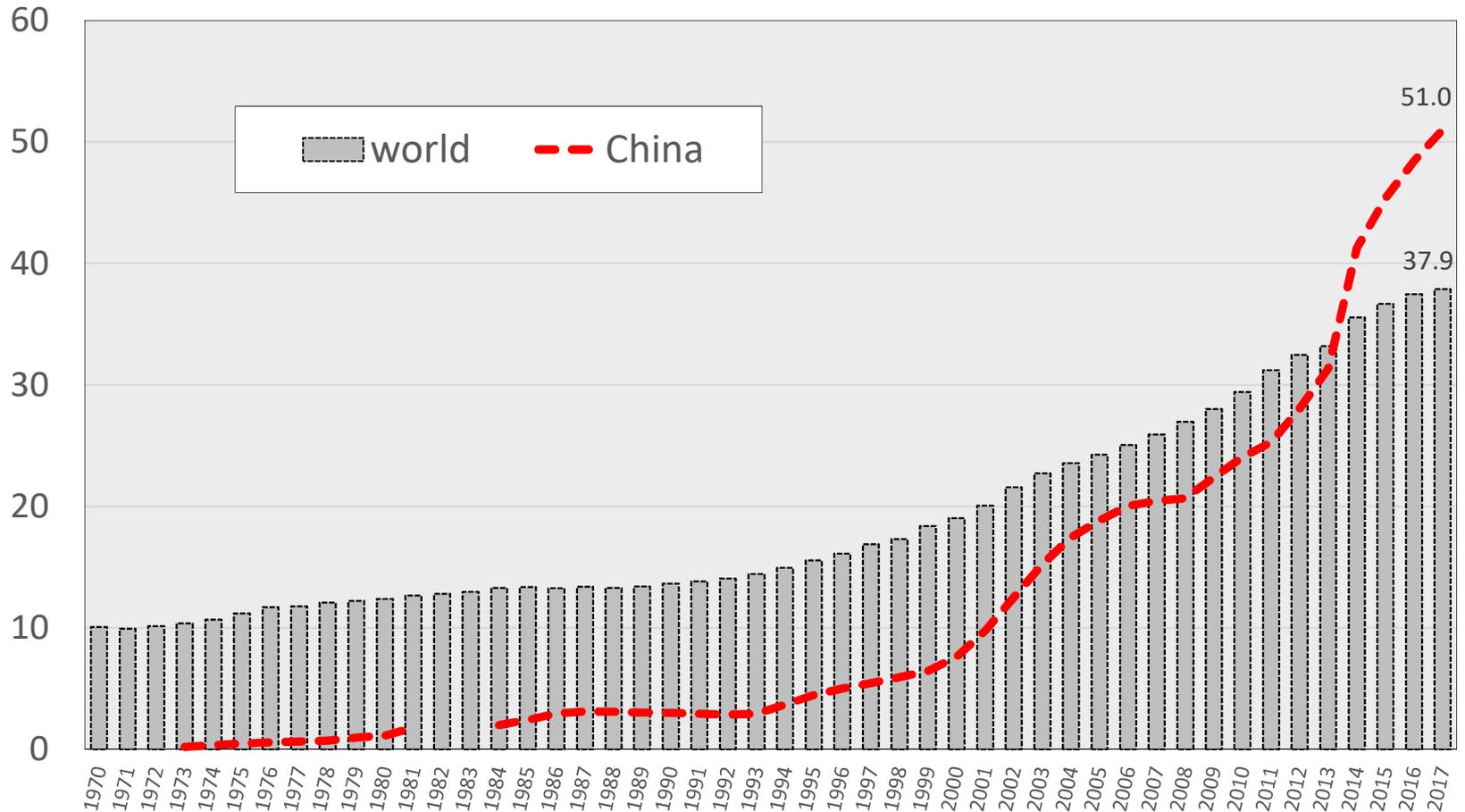


Self-formation, self-cultivation and social formation in higher education

- Self-formation and social formation
- Agency freedom
- Self-cultivation East and West
- Self-formation in higher education
- Concluding remarks

Gross Enrolment Ratio (%): 1970-2017

In 2017 there were 220 million tertiary students



Data: UNESCO

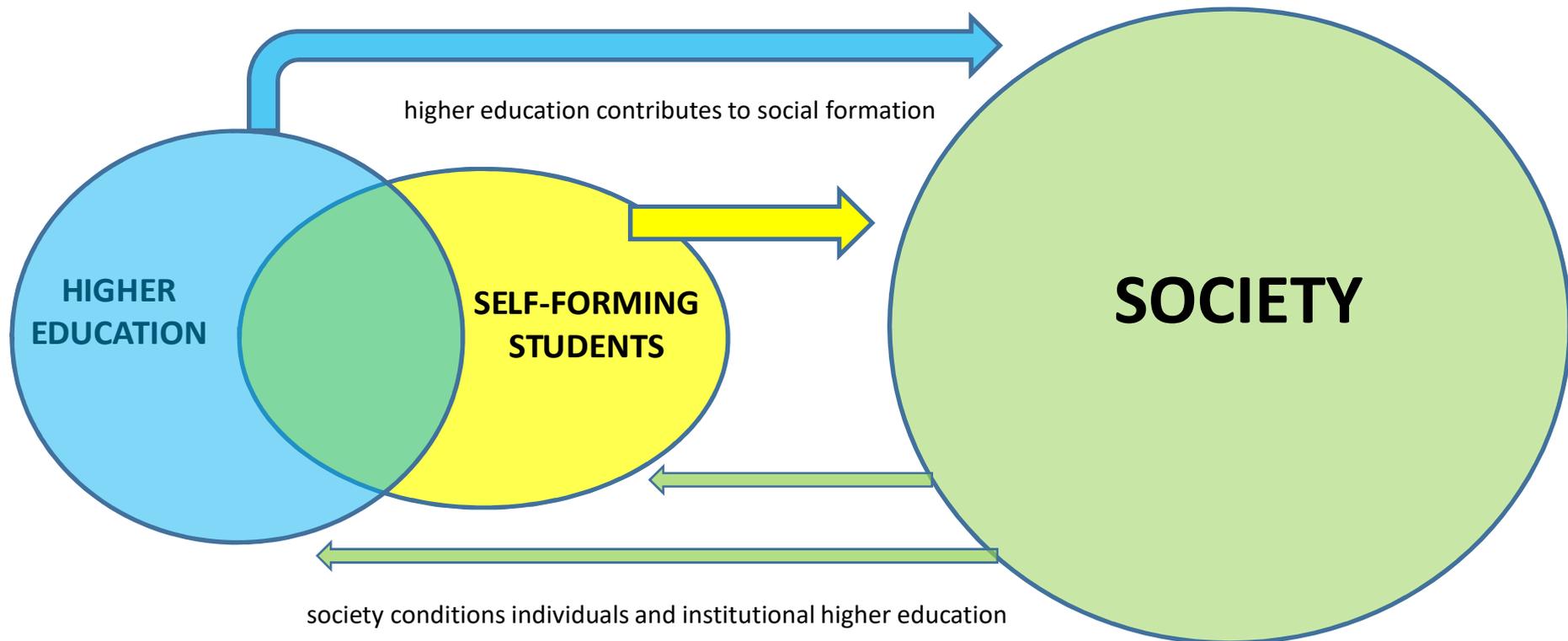
The proposition:

Higher education as self-formation

- Higher education can be understood as self-formation and the expansion of agency freedom.
- It is valued for its contribution to the growth of *self-determining persons in socially relational settings*, via immersion of those persons in *knowledge*.
- Higher education as self-formation rests on the irreducible fact that only the learner does the actual learning.
- The potentials of self-formation are conditioned by social factors, by the learner's background and resources, by the institution, by the curriculum, teaching and other circumstances but not wholly determined by these factors. Agency matters.

Self-formation and social formation

- The formation of persons contributes to social formation. Societies are comprised of persons that live in relation to each other.
- Higher education also contributes in many other ways to the conditions of society ('common goods').



AGENCY FREEDOM

Lev Vygotsky



Vygotsky on social learning and the self-forming individual self

- For Vygotsky self-formation and social-formation are simultaneous – the child’s early relational speech installs reflexivity, a double-coded self that is both socially separated (individualised) *and* socially embedded.
- “The true development of thinking is not from the individual to the social, it is from the social to the individual.”

Lev Vygotsky (1986). *Thought and Language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, p. 36

Amartya Sen



Amartya Sen's three aspects of freedom

Sen, A. (1985). Well-being, agency and freedom: The Dewey Lectures 1984. *The Journal of Philosophy* 82 (4), 169-221

Sen, A. (1992). *Inequality Re-examined*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press

- *Control freedom* (negative freedom): freedom of the individual from external threat, coercion or constraint

Main understanding of freedom in liberal tradition – but if you are poor, you may be free in the sense of control freedom, but be unable to do much with it

- *Effective freedom* (positive freedom): freedom as the capacity of the individual to act

The exercise of effective freedom depends on the person's abilities or capacities, and resources, and on the social arrangements in which they live (individuals are nested in society)

- *Agency freedom* (will-power): freedom as the active human will, the capacity for self-directed conscious action

Arguably this is the key aspect of individual freedom, it is where self-will is centred. It is conditioned by the other aspects of freedom, and also shapes their potential. The three aspects are inter-dependent.

Invictus – William Hanley (1849-1903)

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

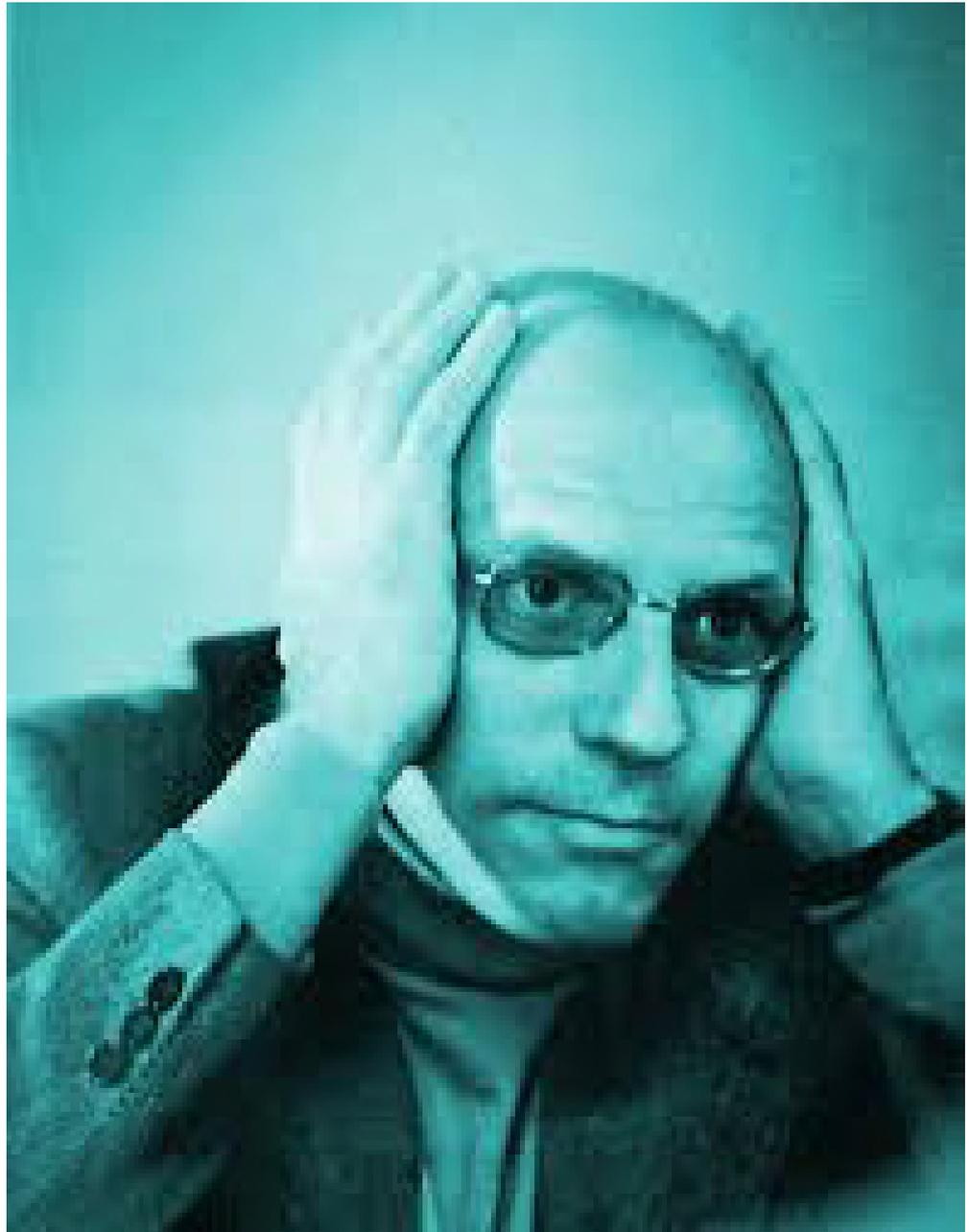


Self-determination in psychology

- “The fullest representations of humanity show people to be curious, vital and self-motivated. At their best they are agentic and inspired, striving to learn; extend themselves; master new skills; and apply their talents ... That most people show considerable effort, agency, and commitment in their lives appears, in fact, to be more normative than exceptional, suggesting some very positive and persisting features in human nature.”

Ryan, R. and Deci, E. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55 (1), p. 68.

Michel Foucault



Michel Foucault: The arduous work of the self on the self

“Freedom is the capacity and the opportunity to participate in one’s own self-formation.”

Stephen Ball, *Foucault as Educator*, 2017. Cham: Springer, p. 69

The self is the only object that one can freely will “without having to take into consideration external determinations.”

Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France 1981-82*, 2005. Transl. Graham Burchell. Houndmills: Palgrave, p. 133

SELF-CULTIVATION EAST AND WEST

Tu Weiming



Confucian self-cultivation

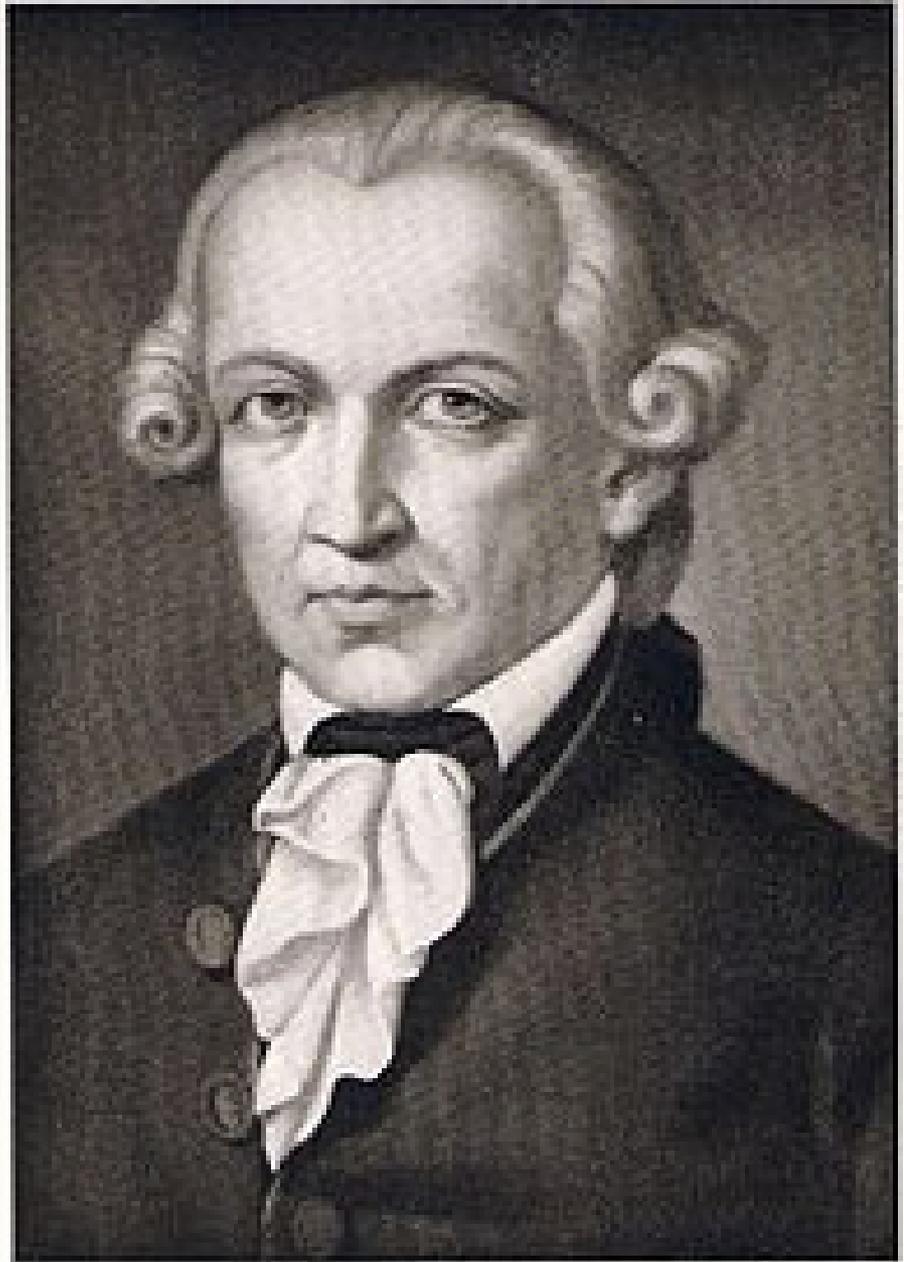
“ The great strength of modern East Asia is its self-definition as a learning civilization.” This may be “the most precious legacy of Confucian humanism.”

Tu Weiming (2013). Confucian humanism in perspective. *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China*, 7 (3), pp. 333-338

“ The Confucian emphasis on sympathy and empathy suggests ... Self-interest, no matter how enlightened, is never adequate as a basic principle for personal growth, let alone a cornerstone of national policy”

Tu Weiming Tu (1996). Beyond the Enlightenment mentality: A Confucian perspective on ethics, migration and global stewardship. *The International Migration Review*, 30 (1), p. 68

Immanuel Kant

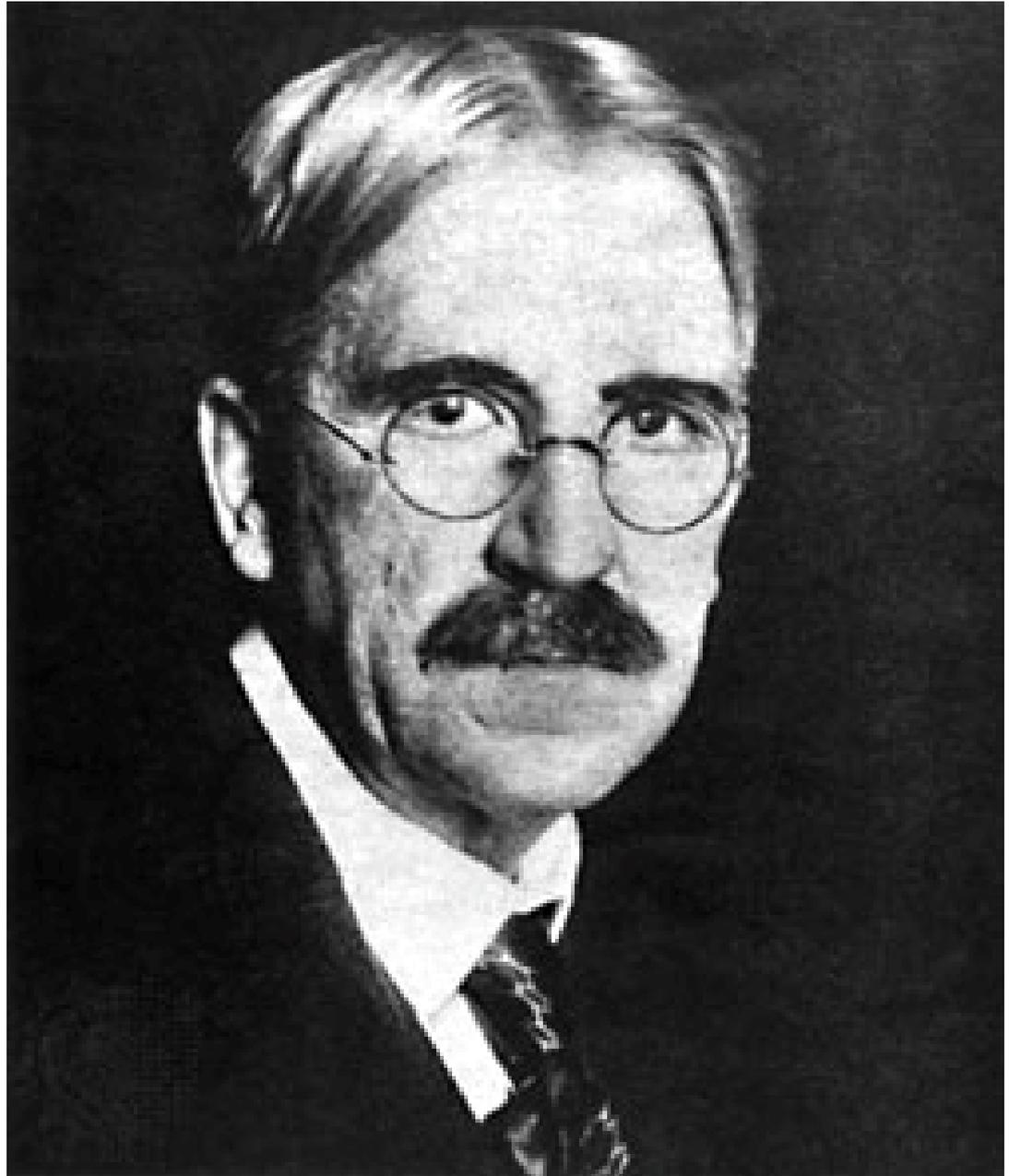


Bildung

- Self-formation in Kant's definition of the Enlightenment meant the release of humans from their "self-incurred tutelage" through the exercise of their "own understanding". Here the role of education is to cultivate the inner self in both intellectual and ethical terms, to form citizens in public rationality who will constitute emerging civil society. Kant emphasised that Bildung would not occur by itself, it required education.
- The aim of education is "the active autonomous person within the framework of social life", a rational subject who uses reason in a public way and "lives in the public sphere among other individual beings."

Kivela, A. (2012). From Immanuel Kant to Johann Gottlieb Fichte – Concept of education and German idealism. In Siljander, P., Kivela, A. and Sutinen, A. (eds.) (2012). *Theories of Bildung and Growth: Connections and controversies between Continental educational thinking and American pragmatism*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, p. 59

John Dewey



Theories related to the self-formation idea

ON AGENCY

- Amartya Sen's three kinds of freedom
- The psychology of individual self-determination

ON SELF-CULTIVATION

- As a philosophy and practice of education, the most important antecedent is Confucian learning as self-cultivation
- The Kantian/von Humboldtian idea of *Bildung*
- Dewey, CP Mead and the American pragmatists, who worked with a variation of *Bildung*

OTHER EXTENSIONS (FORMATIONS) OF THE SELF VIA EDUCATION

- Human capital theory in economics
- Status theory in sociology
- Bourdieu's social and cultural capitals

SELF-FORMATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

What then distinguishes higher education in student self-formation?

1. This is self-formation in formal institutions
2. Higher education is nested in *knowledge sets*, disciplines, enabling students to self-form in chosen different ways
3. The role of *teaching* (learners require mentoring in their immersion in knowledge)
4. The multiple ways that students form themselves, the multiple selves they want to become
5. Sudden changes such as geographical or social mobility that trigger reflexivity and accelerated self-formation

Students form themselves in many ways in higher education. They—

- invest in the self to gain economic benefits such as rates of return, employability (economic capital / human capital)
- enter professions and occupations and make a career
- secure a broader set of opportunities and possibilities
- achieve social status/ prestige/ social respect

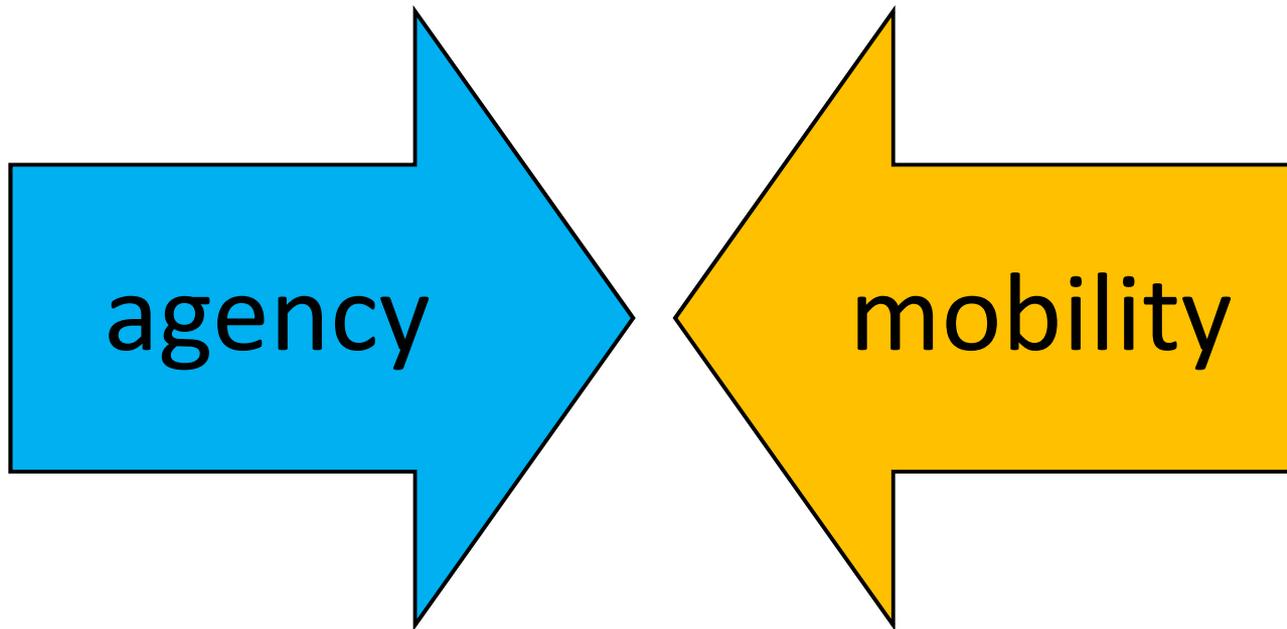
- learn via knowledge in specific disciplines. Varying fields of knowledge and professional training shape different kinds of people—compare engineering students and music students
- achieve continuing self-cultivation through learning

and

..... also

- build in themselves skills and personal attributes (cultural capital)
- make useful contacts and networks (social capital)
- make friends, negotiate marriage partners
- express themselves artistically in beautiful, truthful, useful things
- express themselves politically, work with others to achieve social change and transformation, and work for the global good
- develop themselves through educational mobility
- ‘find themselves’, grow up, shape their futures, take charge of their own lives
- become new persons

Accelerated self-formation through mobility



Marginson, S. (2014). Student self-formation in international education. *J. Studies in International Education*, 18 (1), pp. 6-22

Empirical studies of student self-formation



CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Summing up ...

“Life is a slow road to freedom”

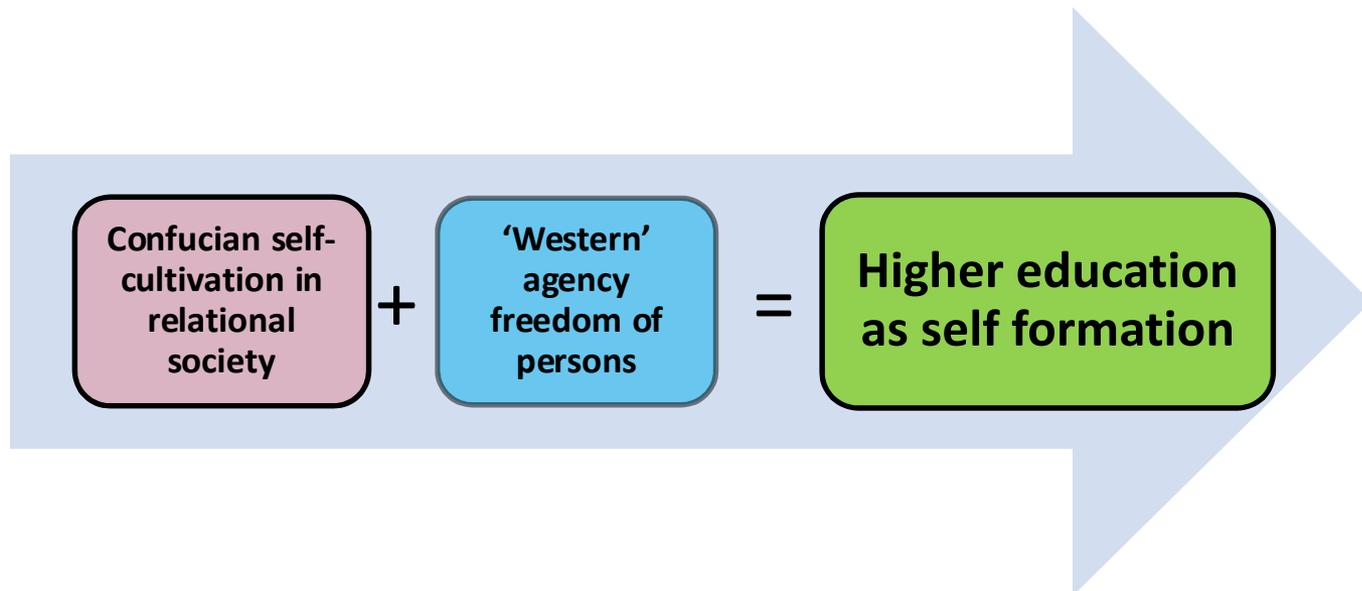
- Higher education as student self-formation encompasses other theories of higher education (e.g. human capital theory, status competition theory, learning theory). It explains higher education more completely than any other single theory.
- It is also less structure-bound than other theories. Mostly we emphasise structure, and structural constraints. It is important to focus also on **agency** and agency freedom, which is the way through structural constraints.
- Higher education can be understood as student self-formation
 - ... by socially-nested persons,
 - ... under conditions that they do not individually control.
- Self-formation in higher education advances social formation.

Higher education as student self-formation

A hybrid of Chinese and Euro-American traditions

- Blending of the 'Eastern' (Confucian) practices of the self-cultivating person in relational context, with the 'Western' self-determining individual, a person with agency freedom.

Creativity is often the blending together of two previously separated and different (heterogeneous) things to produce a third thing that is new



SELF-CULTIVATION + AGENCY FREEDOM
= THE FUTURE

