

Public good(s) in higher education:

**A comparison of Anglo-American and
Sinic approaches**

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Objectives of the study

- To develop a stronger understanding of the contributions of higher education to public good(s) and especially collective or 'jointly consumed' goods
- To explore this in two contrasting cultures – Anglo-American and Sinic (Chinese civilizational) by examining the core scholarship and key ideas in each tradition, including
 - The main features of the political culture such as the role of the state
 - The 'public' and 'common' dimensions of state and society
 - The relationship between higher education, state and society
- To test the possibility of developing a common terminology for the public good role of higher education, one that applies to both cultures

By 'political culture' is meant

- The specific combination of ideas, language, institutions, policies, regulatory structures, resource configurations and subjectivities that constitute the social order as relations of power

Cultural foundations of Europe

Roman Empire, 2nd century CE



After Rome: one Church, many states

A unified state returned in China after the Han dynasty, but after the Western Roman empire ended in the 5th century CE imperial authority divided between church and state



Territorial
state



Universal
church



Between church and state



Territorial
state



The
incorporated
university



Universal
church





1789-94: The new social division of labour

French Revolution defines the 'public' in Western culture



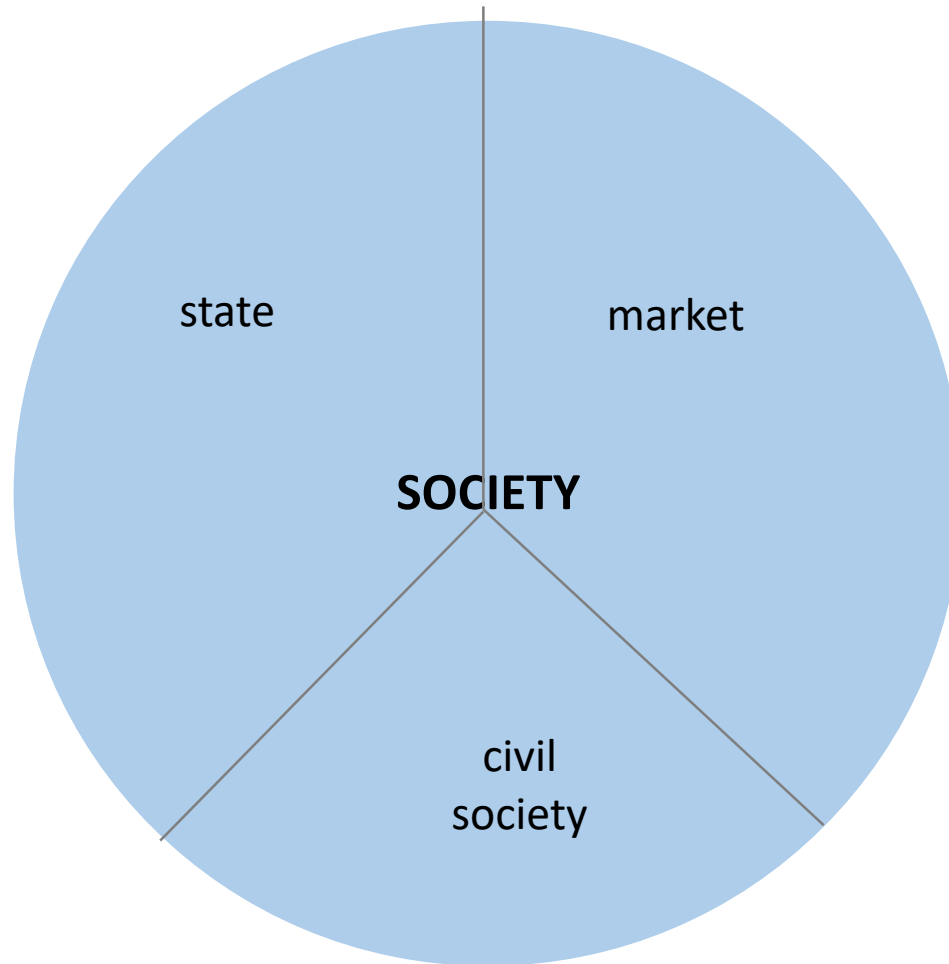
Western political imaginary today



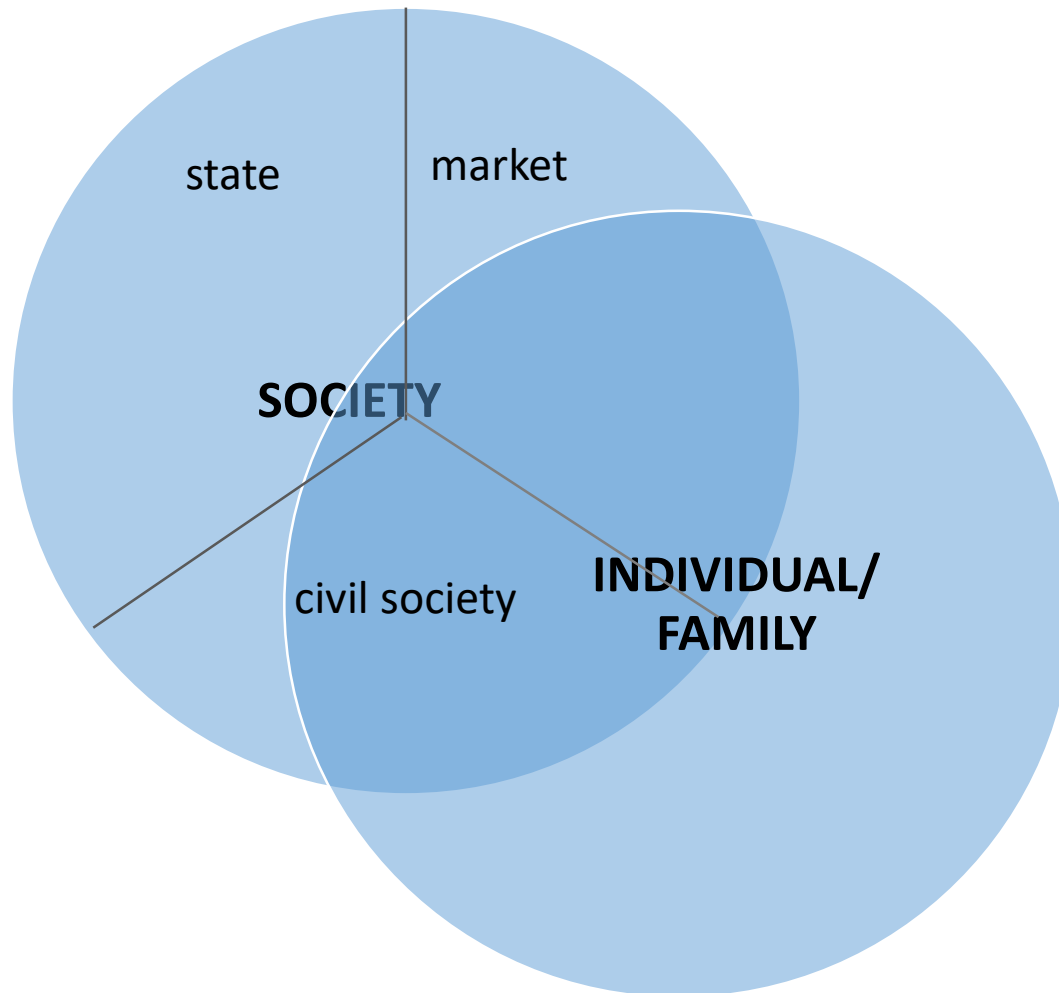
SOCIETY

**INDIVIDUAL/
FAMILY**

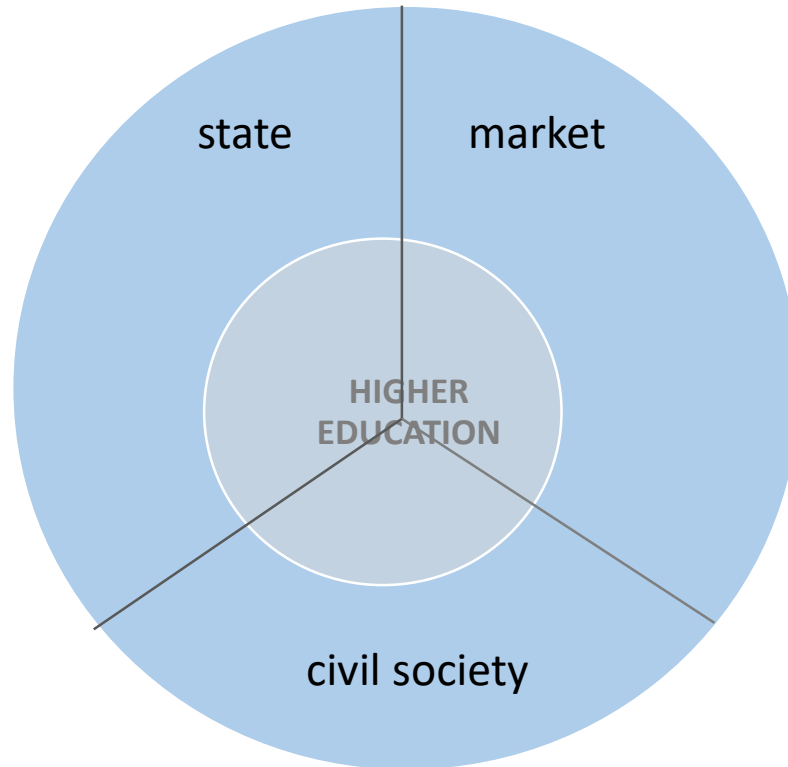
'Society' in the Western political imaginary



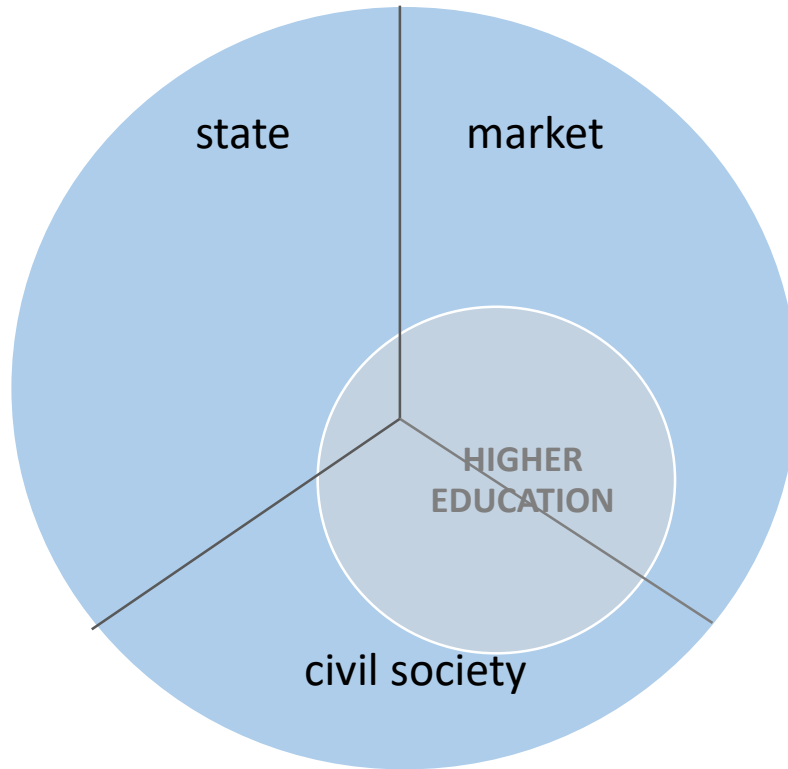
Individuals and the social division of labour



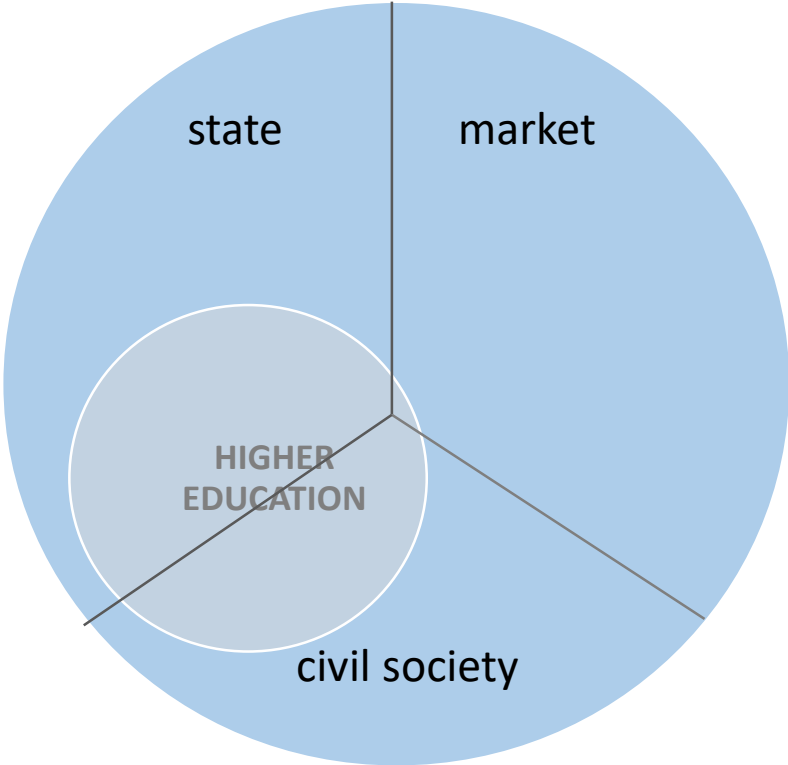
Western political imaginary with higher education added to society



Western political imaginary (USA version) with higher education added



Western political imaginary (Nordic) with higher education added



Meanings of 'public'

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE AS MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE

- 'Public sector' as state or government (contrasts with private sector as individual or market)
- 'Public goods' as non-rivalrous or non-exclusive (contrasts with private goods produced in markets)
public goods production is residual to market, points to limited liberal state

PUBLIC AS CONTAINING PRIVATE

- 'Public' as the broad inclusive sphere of communications, political participation, public opinion (civil society)
- 'Public good' as a shared condition of universal benefit

Methodological individualism

“a doctrine about explanation which asserts that all attempts to explain social (or individual) phenomena are to be rejected ... unless they are couched wholly in terms of facts about individuals” (Lukes, 1973, p. 110)

- Conceals the relational and collective aspects of society, seen as marginalized ‘externalities’ outside of market outcomes
- For example human capital theory in which the relation between higher education and the labour market is understood solely in terms of value carried by individuals
- For example theorisations of ‘internationalisation’ in which cross-border relations are understood in terms of the attributes possessed by just one party in those relations

Exceptions to high individualism?

- Anglo-American governments often place priority on improving social access to higher education ('widening participation') and this can provide a strong basis for policy intervention that transcends the neo-liberal limitation on the social responsibilities of government. Though a social access policy can be rendered consistent with mainstream political culture if access is understood as access to higher education as a private individual good within a highly stratified system
- The notion of the university as a 'public sphere' with incubates social and political criticism and cultural innovation has support. In this role the university joins with an open and democratic civil society (though states are not always comfortable with this role of universities and students)

Higher education as a common good

- ‘Education as a common good’ as developed by UNESCO has connotations related to grass-roots civic democracy, and political participation whereby the community defines what it values and engages in joint production and democratic distribution. Common good production contributes to sociable human agency, shared welfare, solidarity, inclusion, tolerance, universal freedoms, equality, human rights. Common goods are produced by non-government agents as well as by states
- *Global* common goods are goods beyond states ‘that humans share intrinsically in common and that they communicate to each other, such as values, civic virtues and a sense of justice’ (Deneulin and Townsend, 2007, p. 24). Collaborative research to solve global problems is a global common good

The comprehensive Sinic state begins

First effectively centralised Chinese state (Qin), 221-206 BCE



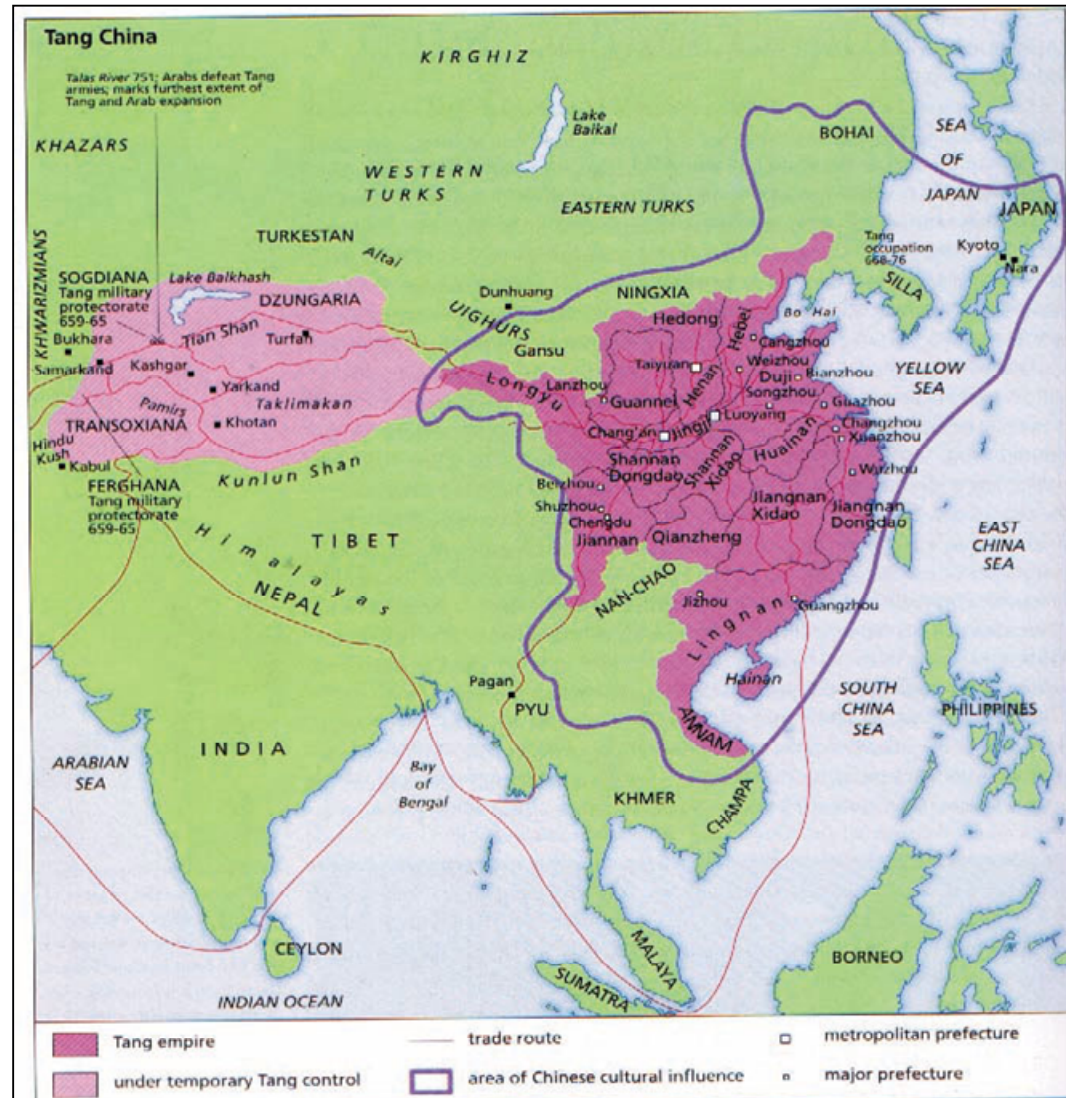
The Sinic state is consolidated

Han dynasty China 206 BCE – 220 CE

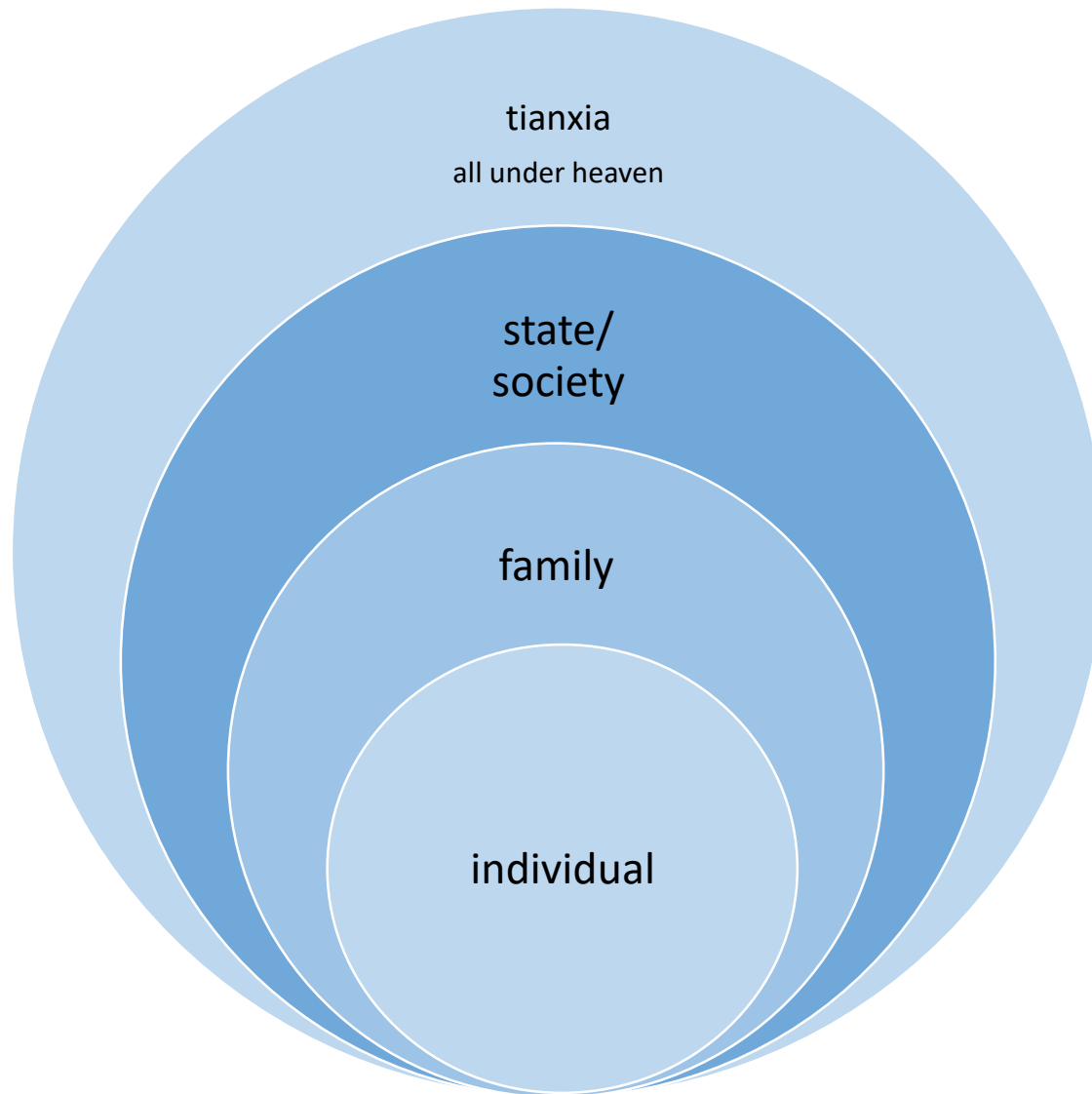


Sinic cultural sphere extends in East Asia

Tang Dynasty 618-907 CE



Confucian political imaginary



Not a limited liberal state

In East Asia, politics is always in command

‘The development of the political sphere in the Chinese world and its pre-eminence over all the other (military, religious, economic) is one of its most characteristic marks ... This is certainly one of the constants and one of the great original aspects of the Chinese world, one that distinguishes it from all others.’

- Jacques Gernet (1982), *A History of Chinese Civilization*, 2nd Edition, Transl. J.R. Foster and Charles Hartman, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 28-29

Joined to educational self-cultivation at home

- “A defining characteristic of East Asian thought is the widely accepted proposition that human beings are perfectible through self-effort in ordinary daily existence’ (Tu 1996)
- “Confucian “individualism” means the fullest development by the individual of his creative potentialities—not, however, merely for the sake of self-expression but because [she] he can thus best fulfil that particular role which is [her] his within the social nexus” (Bodde 1957)
- “One of Chinas most deep-rooted normative values is the belief in higher education and learning as a major instrument for achieving the highest good for both individuals and society” (Li 2003)

Top ten school systems OECD PISA 2018

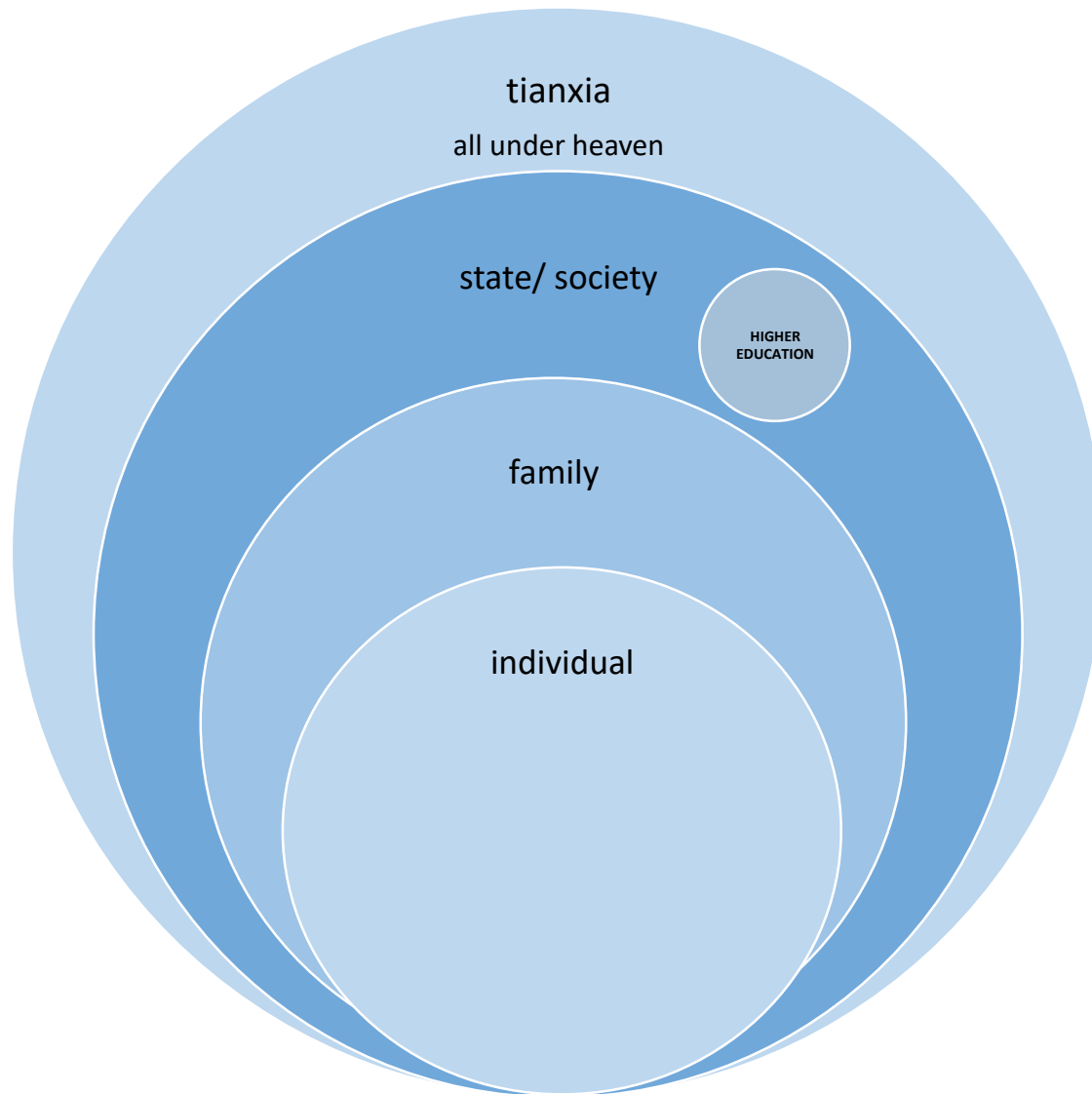
(mean student scores, East Asian education systems in red)

Reading	Mathematics	Science
Four Chinese provinces* 555	Four Chinese provinces 591	Four Chinese provinces 590
Singapore 549	Singapore 569	Singapore 551
Macao SAR 525	Macao SAR 558	Macao SAR 544
Hong Kong SAR 524	Hong Kong SAR 551	Estonia 530
Estonia 523	Taiwan 531	Japan 529
Canada 520	Japan 527	Finland 522
Finland 520	South Korea 526	South Korea 519
Ireland 518	Estonia 523	Canada 518
South Korea 514	Netherlands 519	Hong Kong SAR 517
Poland 512	Poland 516	Taiwan 516
OECD average 487	OECD average 489	OECD average 489
UK 504	UK 502	UK 505
USA 505	USA 478	USA 502

Data source: <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/pisa-2018-results-volume-i-5f07c754-en.ht>

*Four Chinese provinces are Beijing-Shanghai-Jiangsu-Zhejiang

Confucian imaginary with higher education



Higher education and the state

- From the Zhou dynasty onwards higher education was associated with the preparation and certification of scholar-officials for the Imperial order, forming them within a common culture of rule. The scope of the Imperial academies expanded in each successive dynasty
- Successful passage through the Imperial academies became the main means of achieving social mobility in Imperial China, though it required a high level of cultural capital (ultimately the curriculum centered on Confucian classics took at least two decades to master)
- Knowledge was valued not in terms of the status of pure theory or theology as in the West, but for its application to the practical world, especially in governance

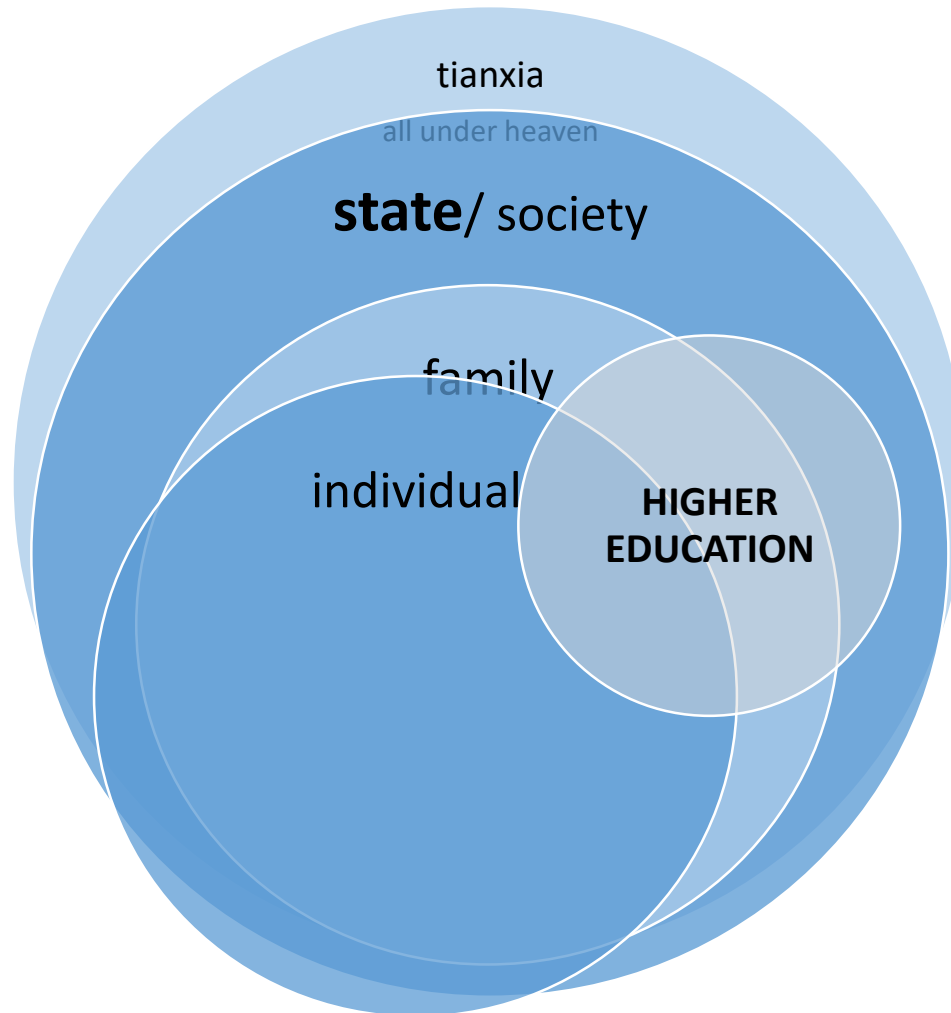
Comparing East and West traditions in political culture and higher education

	China	USA and UK
State	<i>Centralising comprehensive state</i> , with devolution, politics commands army, economy	Episodically centralising but always contested. Division of powers, later evolving into <i>limited liberal state</i>
Other social elements	Subordinated to the state, which intervened at will	Church, nobles, merchants, towns had independent authority
State strategies	Managed decentralisation, meritocratic caste of officials	Manage the aristocracy, negotiate within division of powers
Higher education	Instrumental: state sponsored training of officials in academies	Incorporated universities partially independent of church and state
Knowledge	Partial truths. Practical. From time to time, synthesising	Universalising, specialist. High status theory often separate from practice

Post-1949 changes in China

- Weakening of the role of the family through collectivization and later through internal migration, 'disembedding' individuals from the multi-generational family
- Growing individualism in China, though distinctively Sinic, e.g. focus on the social status and material position more than on personal identity and lifestyle as in the West
- Strengthening of the role of the state, through Leninist centralism, including its capacity to reach downward to the family and individual level
- Great growth of higher education from the late 1990s onwards; American model; autonomous institutions managed by party-state dual authority system. Higher education serves the state as in Imperial times

Post-Confucian political imaginary, including higher education



Gong/si and public/private

- In Confucian thought relations between each pairing of smaller self/larger self (*xiaowo* and *dawo*) – person and family, family and community, community and state, state/society and *tianxia* – are understood also as a pairing of *gong* and *si*. *Gong* and *si* are the closest approximations in Chinese language to pairing of public and private in English
- *Gong* has multiple meanings, like non-individual, public, common, universal, openness, fairness, all people, the state
- *Si* can mean private, personal, selfish, and secret
- Normative primacy of *gong* (public)
- Tensions between *gong* and *si* are insufficiently discussed, arguably, individual is insufficiently nurtured and protected

Public good and public space in China

- Tianxia *weigong* ('all under heaven is for all') carries the connotation of shared and universal welfare or benefit, roughly equivalent to 'the public good' in the Anglo-American lexicon
- The sense of 'public' as a broad communicative space is less developed in China. Media are controlled. There is tradition here. Imperial China's civil society was always state supervised:

“Whereas public display of political power was central to the Roman world and reflected in the spatial configuration of cities, the exclusionary principle dominated in China. Unlike in Roman cities with their assembly places and theaters, in Han cities people gathered in markets, which served as a conduits of state control” (Scheidel, 2015, p. 8)
- Precedents for the role of scholar as constructive critic, though historically, talking truth to power was often dangerous
- There can be more debate inside the party-state than outside

Beyond the Sinic nation-state: *tianxia*

- *Tianxia* as the natural world and human sphere as a whole, with roots in Daoist as well as Confucian thought
- There is no 'other' to *tianxia*
- It is not a single global polity but it transcends racial and geographic boundaries, a ground for negotiation between different territorial states
- Can be understood in terms of harmony and peace, on the basis not of uniformity but respect for diversity
- Can refer to either (1) the whole world, or (2) 'China and beyond', the world as centred on Chinese civilization

Tian and Liu (2019) interview data

- The Western term 'public' is equated with the state in China, state supervision of higher education is unquestioned
- University personnel and state officials agree that higher education institutions are autonomous, with some differences about autonomy of the research mission
- Mixed public/private funding and competition in Chinese higher education leads many to characterize it as a 'quasi-public' good, adapting the Western economic idea of public
- On global public or common good, some interviewees cite the Xi Jinping notion of 'a community of shared future for mankind' (*ren lei ming yun gong tong ti*)

Gong/si, public/private and the world

	China	USA and UK
Essential dualism	<i>Gong/si</i> : smaller more intimate sphere nested inside primary larger sphere. State as kind of super- <i>gong</i>	Public/private: zero-sum idea in economics BUT contrary ideas of public (state, non-market, communications)
The state	Comprehensive, intervenes freely, devolves; uncontestable; mandate to sustain social order/ prosperity	Limited liberal state within division of powers, borders fraught; contestable; mandate to sustain security/ prosperity
Public as social space	State control over broad 'public' space, oscillation between opening and closure, episodic civil society	Open public communicative space takes in all actors including universities, ambiguous relation with state
Global level	<i>Tianxia</i> imagines world beyond nation, also potentially hegemonic	Nation-state world, neo-imperial global practice BUT global common good idea
Tendencies	Growing role of both state (always central) and individual in China, weakening of traditional family	Exclusion of collective goods in society and education, strengthening (and privatisation) of public communications
Higher education	Massified, stratified, corporate. Serves state via economy, science	Massified, stratified, corporate. Serves economy, individuals via state as proxy

Chinese and Anglo-American universities

	China	USA and UK
External governance	Integration of autonomous institutions into state strategies and policies via dual governance system	Similar level of institutional autonomy as in China with a lesser level of integration into the state
Internal governance	Corporate with strong leaders in dual system, internal openness fluctuates, performance management	Corporate and with strong leaders in US/UK (more faculty-based in Europe), performance management
Academic freedom	Emphasis on responsibility of, and respect for, faculty. High anxiety	Emphasis on faculty freedom from external interference. High anxiety
Knowledge	Western not traditional Chinese epistemology, high priority STEM	Western disciplines, more focus on non-STEM disciplines than in China
Curriculum, pedagogy	Western curricula, underpinned by Confucian self-cultivation	Western curricula, weaker learning tradition with less student work
Civil society and HE	State control over broad 'public' space, universities constrained	Open civil society, some instances of critical public sphere in universities
International in WCUs	High internationalisation: English, benchmarking, research, students	Internationalisation neo-imperial and varies: not language, inward students