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The role of higher education in generating 'public' and 'common' goods: A comparison of Sinic and Anglo-American political cultures

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Contents

Abstract 1
Introduction 2
Methodologies of diversity 2
The West/East comparison in higher education 4
Contrasting spheres of social action 7
Evolution of the Sinic state 12
Higher education and the state 17
Individualism and collectivism 20
Primacy of the Anglo-American individual 21
Sinic individual and collective 21
Individual and collective in higher education 27
The ‘public’ and ‘common’ in higher education 32
‘Public/private’ as an analytical device 33
The communicative public 38

Public good and common good..40
Concluding remarks 45
References... 49

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the similarities and differences between Sinic and Anglo-American approaches to the role of higher education in generating public good and public goods and the nearest equivalents in China. The paper compares the two higher education systems in the light of their political and educational cultures (state, society, family, individual) and approaches to collectivism and individualism. The state in China is and always has been a comprehensive state, in contrast to the Anglo-American limited liberal state. In the Anglo-American countries economic policy has constructed a limited role for public goods so as to maximise the scope for the market economy. However, Anglo-American countries also practice a broader notion of 'public' based on communications and democratic inclusion in civil society and higher education is part of the civil order. China's political culture embodies larger potentials for collective ties, shared goods and state intervention in higher education, and a lesser role for higher education in fostering civil society. Since 1949 both party-state power and indigenous individualism have become enhanced in China, while Anglo-American higher education has moved towards a more exclusively individualised approach to outcomes. In part because of Chinese internationalisation strategies, there is closer convergence between China and Anglo-America in universities than in the configuration of society. This suggests a potential for future divergence in higher education.

Introduction

What are the social or 'public' contributions of higher education? Despite an extensive literature, a definition that is comprehensive and precise, takes in both individualised and collective benefits and covers all of local, national, global-regional and global effects, is yet to emerge (Marginson 2016a; 2018a). This is not easily done. It requires theorisation of relations between society, state, persons and higher education. We have some pieces of the puzzle. The pecuniary benefits associated with individual graduates have been extensively researched, especially in human capital economics, though questions remain about the causal role of higher education in earnings, employment and positional status. The larger difficulty lies with those outcomes or benefits of higher education and university research that are experienced collectively rather than individually. As we shall see, these are mostly researched only by reworking social relational functions as characteristics borne by single individuals and the source of private advantage, such as human capital (McMahon, 2009). Such methods are unable to capture social relations in holistic form. Certain collective outcomes can be measured, such as social access to education, or the incidence of and patterns in collaborative international research. Others, such as the contributions of higher education to social order, tolerance or cross-border understanding, are more elusive.

Methodologies of diversity

To complicate matters further, there is more than one answer to questions about the contributions of higher education. Everywhere these contributions are nested in society/state/education relations – and there is more than one society/state/education assemblage across the world (Cantwell, Marginson and Smolentseva, 2018). Consider the different contexts of, say, higher education in egalitarian Nordic welfare democracies, the German social market, Post-Soviet countries poised halfway between the state and robber capitalism, Singapore's managed competition and hyper-production, and the free-for-all entrepreneurship combined with a legacy of civic responsibility that characterises colleges and universities in the United States. Further, if the social realities differ from country to country, so do the languages and ideas that interpret them. More than one set of words has become attached to the combined relations of society/state/education. Across the world, phenomena which in Western Europe and North America are labelled 'public', 'private' or 'common good' are associated with other norms, lexicons, and words concerning society and higher education. The concept of 'public'

is not a universal notion and non-English language parallels to that term are often merely approximations to the English meaning.

Yet the different national political cultures occupy a common global space. Higher education systems are connected across borders. The diversity might be conceptually inconvenient, but it matters, especially when we seek to establish the global public good.

We start from the assumption that in the world setting of higher education, common elements in the society/state/education assemblage are combined with elements that vary in national-cultural contexts. To take a simple example, everywhere the routine operations of universities are financed, and institutional budgets look much the same. In this and in other areas the picture of world-wide organisational isomorphism painted by institutional theory (e.g. Drori, Meyer and Hwang, 2006) has substance. However, institutional theory under-estimates the stubborn irreducibility and organic historical potency of difference. The balance of responsibility for financing – between parents, students, state and philanthropy – is variable and culturally nested and this leads to wide differences in arrangements for government funding, tuition fees and student loans. One of the roles of cross-country comparison is to distinguish the common elements from those that vary case by case.

Here comparison runs up against the problem of the basis of comparison. It should not presume what it sets out to find by imposing commonality a priori in the perspectives and methods that are used. In defining the shared global public good in higher education (or any other sector) it is arbitrary to privilege one political culture over others, seeing everywhere else the same phenomena found at home and blocking from view anything very different. Social scientists mostly do exactly that – privilege one political culture, usually their own. This limits their vision and makes their generalisations vulnerable from other standpoints. However, national myopia does not eliminate either diversity in material practices nor the related diversity in the language that defines the public or social role of higher education.

Though the diversity of perspectives complicates matters, it can be useful, in the sense that triangulation, using more than one mode of research or, more simply, interviewing more than one type of person, provides purchase in qualitative empirical studies. Diverse national-cultural perspectives can see more than a single perspective can see. A multiplication of perspectives is on one hand, an act of power, taking in more of the world; on the other hand, an act of comprehension, enlarging the truth of common phenomena. No single perspective has all the

answers about society, the state and the contributions of higher education. Many have some of the answers. Harmony in diversity, that traditional Chinese norm which also underlies the European Union, requires that both the commonality and the diversity are understood and practised. The question then is how to effectively draw on more than one perspective, and what the similarities and differences can tell us.

The West/East comparison in higher education

This paper compares how Western and particularly Anglo-American political culture constructs the role of higher education in 'public' or 'common' goods, to the corresponding approach in the Sinic (Eastern) world in China. In the comparison it looks at 'public' and 'common' in higher education through both an Anglo-American lens and a Sinic lens. One possible outcome of this kind of comparison is that we may identify authentic commonality – phenomena visible through each lens that look similar in each case. This would move us closer to a generic theorisation of the social contributions of higher education.

Arguably, in understanding and fashioning the 'public' or social role of higher education, Anglo-American and Sinic approaches each have strengths and weaknesses. The dominant Anglo-American framing of the public/private distinction, which draws on ideas that first emerged in the seventeenth onwards but dates primarily from Samuelson (1954), is economistic. It models successfully only the direct individual economic benefits of higher education. It is weaker in explaining the contribution of higher education and research to economic value creation in other sectors, and flounders when required to discuss social and cultural value (Marginson, 2018a). While there is a diffuse discussion of a wide range of elements, and there are multiple and ambiguous meanings of 'public' in the Anglo-American lexicon, the narrow framing has the main authority, especially in policy. The relevant Sinic political cultural tradition, which has a much longer time span, is more open and heterogeneous. This means it is more comfortable with phenomena in education from outside the economy, but the same openness has readily enabled the Westernisation of Chinese thinking and practice (Qin, 1981; Huang, 2000; Xia, 2014). In contemporary Sinic questions about the social contribution of higher education there is no single set of ideas and policy practices equivalent to the Samuelson formula. The Sinic world is pulled between traditional Confucian ideas from different eras, which remain important, plus Marxist-Leninist Westernisation led by the party-state, American Westernisation, and values associated with neo-liberal individualist society. There is a lack of clarity and definition.

Why then pursue a comparison between these two flawed approaches, on this topic, a comparison with no forerunner in the literature? The point has been made about the methodological potentials of diverse perspectives, but why this particular comparison?

First, the social character of higher education matters for many reasons (Calhoun, 2006). Practices of 'public' influence state-university relations: are institutions self-referencing, state referencing or responsible to civil society? (Giroux, 2002; Pusser, 2006). Practices of 'public' influence funding: if graduates benefit financially from higher education, should they pay? These practices affect access to higher education: how broad are its public obligations? They shape popular expectations: what stake do people have in universities? They affect student values: is private benefit seen as uppermost? Are graduates self-interested persons whose objective is to transform their human capital into maximum private earnings? Or are they citizens primarily focused on serving the common good?

Second, and the primary argument for making the specific comparison of Anglo-America and China, there is the intrinsic importance of both sets of universities within world higher education. The Anglo-American research university constitutes the most influential model and is the template for global ranking systems. China has developed a higher education and university research system of exceptional scale in only one generation and at a high level of scientific achievement, especially in the physical sciences (Marginson, 2016b). Higher education and research in China will become still more globally important in the future.

Third, the political cultures are very different in some ways, despite contemporary convergences in the mission and practices of higher education and research, including the research university model. The stretch entailed in West/East comparison makes it more generative of both differences and significant similarities than, say, Argentina and Brazil.

Western-led. Nevertheless, there are limitations to the comparative methodology used here, as an exploration of the potentials of diversity. The comparison is not neutral and symmetrical in relation to the two political cultures. The paper moves primarily in one direction. It takes the Western usage of 'public' in society and higher education and looks for similarities, parallels and differences in the Sinic world. This limits the comparison in two ways. First, the comparison does not start with a generic concept of the social role of higher education. As indicated, there is no theorisation that is universal to all culturally-nested higher education systems, in the manner that,

say, Western mathematics is near universal in quantitative science (though arguably, all bilateral comparisons take a step towards generic notions). Nor does the comparison use another space, a third cultural lens, say Hindi or Russian, to view the Anglo-American and Sinic approaches on common terms. Second, in this paper Western notions have been more determining of problem and method than Sinic notions. ‘Public good’ and ‘common good’ are from the Western lexicon. Hence while the paper devotes more space to the review of Sinic forms than the review of Western forms, the question for investigation has been defined in primarily Western terms.

There is a practical reason for starting from the Western side. The Western formations of state, society, science and higher education are globally dominant and influence modern Sinic political culture much more than vice versa. Discussion about higher education in China is often conducted in primarily Western terms, though with Sinic additions and caveats. Nevertheless, terms such as ‘public good’ or ‘common good’ are not universal but specific to the Hellenic-Judeo-Christian heritage of Europe and the European settler states. Practices of ‘public’ are especially influenced by civic republican ideas from the eighteen century Enlightenment and the French and American Revolutions. There are no exact translations of ‘public’ and ‘private’ in Chinese language, though various Chinese concepts overlap with the Western concepts, as will be discussed. The point, however, is that the paper does not start from the Sinic approach to higher education and society and compare the Western approach to that. If the comparison was Sinic-led the argument would unfold differently, further from Western practices. Some issues central in the Western discussion would be more marginal, for example those pertaining to liberty and to civil society outside the state. Confucian humanism (*ren*), state-centred social order and relations between humanity and nature would become more determining. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the genesis of this inquiry into Western notions of ‘public’ and ‘common goods’, we trust that one outcome of the paper will be to highlight the potential of Sinic explanations of higher education.

Method. What then is being compared? The inquiry focuses on the two political cultures and the scholarly traditions associated with them. Section 2 compares the two political cultural imaginaries: the configurations of society, broadly defined, in each case: state, market, civil society, family and higher education. Section 3 contrasts the approaches to ‘individual’ and ‘collective’ and their manifestations in higher education. Section 4 reviews interpretations of the ‘public’ and social role of higher education, especially differing approaches to ‘public’ and ‘common’ good and goods. Concluding remarks follow.

We understand ‘political culture’ as the combination of ideas, language, institutions, resource configurations and subjectivities that constitute the social order as relations of power. Within the Anglo-American and Sinic political cultures the comparison focuses on what Foucault calls ‘discursive practices’; in particular, discourses of ‘public’ and related matters in society, state and higher education. Discourses are ‘knowledge formations’ that bridge words and material practices (Bacchi and Bonham, 2014). Ideas matter when they are manifest in systems, institutions and behaviours. While this potency of discourse is obvious in government policy it is manifest also in scholarship, which in the long run sets the policy imagination, as Keynes (1937) famously stated.[1] For Foucault (1972, p. 49), discourses are more than groups of signs. They are ‘practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak’. The words/materiality dyad shapes the world in which we live.

When analysing discursive practices, more than one emphasis can be pursued. Like many, our account is biased to the words side of the words/materiality dyad. We draw together scholarly ideas about ‘public’ and ‘common’ goods in higher education in each political culture, and interpretations and historical accounts. We do not match this with a review, in each case, of the material practices associated with ‘public’ or ‘common’ goods, such as policy implementation and resource flows. Such a double comparison of words and material practices, and comparison of the differing relations of words/materiality in the two political cultures, would be a larger study than we have attempted here. The comparison of words is sweeping in compass yet can be expressed more economically than a grounded study of government and institutional practices in past and present. However, from time to time we reference practical elements in society and education as one test of discourse.

Contrasting spheres of social action

We understand ‘political culture’ as the combination of ideas, language, institutions, resource configurations and subjectivities that constitute the social order as relations of power. Within the Anglo-American and Sinic political cultures the comparison

[1] From the closing passage of *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*: ‘… the ideas of economists and philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas.’ (Keynes, 1937, p. 383).

focuses on what Foucault calls ‘discursive practices’; in particular, discourses of ‘public’ and related matters.

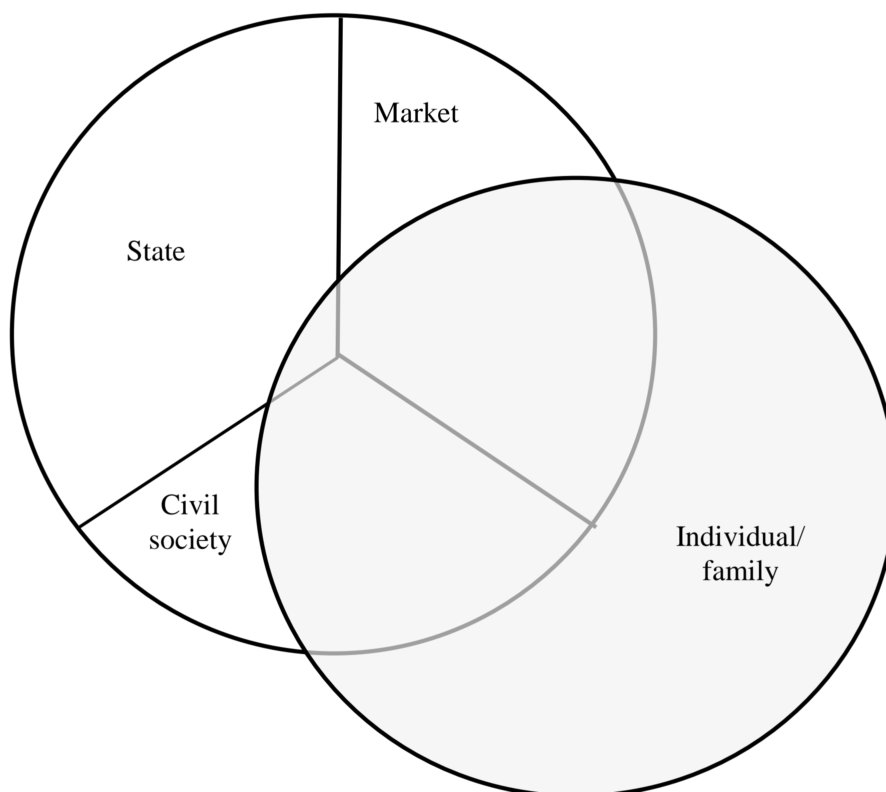
One way to compare two political cultures is to examine their understandings of the spheres of social action where social value is created, their political-cultural imaginaries. Here the Anglo-American and Sinic approaches are different, as summarised in Figures 1 and 2.

The Western imaginary. In Virgil’s *Aeneid*, which was written between 29-19 BCE during Rome’s highpoint under Augustus, Rome was an empire with no ‘limit in time and space … power without boundaries’. After the fall of the Roman empire in Western Europe in the Fifth century CE, the unitary imperial authority became divided between the Catholic church, which continued a universal mission and identity but did not have state power, and the fragmented European territorial states that succeeded Rome. In contrast with dynastic China after the fall of the Han, the unified empire in Europe never revived. In this forking between church and state we see the beginnings of the Western habit of divided powers; in which executive authority, the legal system, the cities, merchants and markets, and civil institutions, all enjoyed a partial separation from each other. The church was always a power and at times, as in medieval Italy, the cities had great weight. However, for the next thousand years European states periodically attempted to rebuild an absolutist monarchy without limit. The real starting points for contemporary Western political cultures, the moment when the limited state was installed at the foundations, were the revolts against absolutist monarchy in mid seventeenth century England and late eighteenth century France, and against English imperialism in the Americas prior to the French revolution. The scholarly transformation of ideas is captured in John Locke (1690/1970) and Adam Smith (1759/2002; 1776/1937). This era reworked the doctrine of divided powers, in two ways.

First, in the social landscape. Rather than being commanded by a comprehensive state, society was divided between the sphere of government-as-state, the sphere of the economic market, the sphere of civil society and the sphere of the individual, whom Locke saw as a property owner but democratic reform was to define as all adults. The key issue for Adam Smith was to constrain the state. In the Anglo-American world, anti-statism became a core theme of critical political discourse and freedom was primarily defined as freedom of the person or organisation from state coercion. The boundary between the state and other spheres became endemically contested, tense and unstable. Smith sought to enlarge the space for both market and civil society but the separation between the two remains unclear and each overlaps with the ‘private’ sphere of household/individual. In Anglo-American

discourse both market and civil society are variously understood as ‘public’ and ‘private’.

Figure 1. Anglo-American spheres of social action



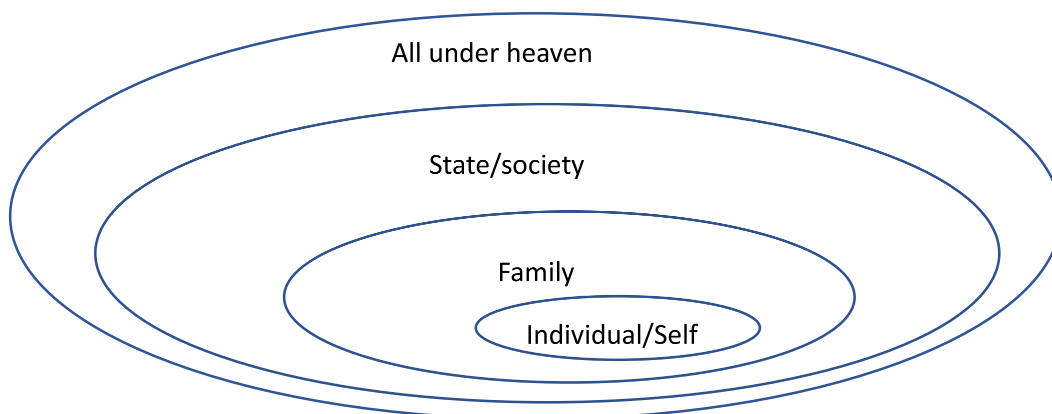
Source: Authors

Second, there was another division of powers, formal and legally constructed, within the state itself. The distinction between executive, legislature and judiciary is closely watched. We could add to this list of powers the research-intensive universities, which are another authority in contested separation with the other public domains, and like an independent legal system, to which universities are occasionally compared (Ignatieff, 2017), must often negotiate the terms of that independence with the political authorities.

The Anglo-American social imaginary is a changing patchwork. There is loose, ill-defined primacy but not supremacy of the individual. The joins between the other spheres of social action are problematised by the (variable) division of the whole

between them. In contrast, the Sinic social imaginary tends to internal coherence, but with varying centripetal force.

Figure 2. Chinese spheres of social action



Source: Authors, following Huang, 2010; Tu, 1985

The Sinic Imaginary. The Sinic imaginary is much older. It derived primarily from the Zhou dynasty (1046-256 BCE) and was codifed in the foundational Confucian-Daoist thought of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (771-221 BCE). It is also more holistic and integrated. It consists of concentric circles ascending from local spheres (smaller selves) to expansive spheres (larger selves), as Figure 2 shows. The socially imaginary successively positions the individual in relation to the family – in Chinese tradition much larger than the nuclear family – the state and society, and *tianxia*, all under heaven (Huang 2000; Tu, 1982).

This continuum parallels the Confucian moral system. That system begins with the aim of maintaining a harmonious family by reconciling relationships between family members, which requires filial piety (*xiao*) and fraternity (*ti*). The system ends by maintaining harmony all under heaven (*tianxia*) by reconciling relations between people and states/societies, and the different states/societies with each other. These outcomes require benevolence or humanity (*ren*), loyalty (*zhong*) and righteousness (*yi*). In the Confucian world individuals are loyal to their country, love other people and strive to maintain the justice of the whole state. Harmony of *tianxia* parallels harmony at home (Hwang, 1999; Li, 2008).

Hence the Sinic sphere differs from the Anglo-American spheres in important ways. First, Chinese tradition includes the notion of *tianxia*, the human and natural sphere taken as a whole. This concept, which anticipates global ecological imagining,

remains significant in China. It has no equivalent Western thought. *Tianxia* has different meanings in Chinese thought. It can refer to the whole world, or to Chinese civilisation or society. The latter meaning creates a centre-periphery framing, in which China is at the centre (the kingdom of heaven) while other regimes are positioned on the periphery of, or outside of, *Tianxia*.[2]

Second, rather than having independent existence, in traditional China the spheres of social action are nested in each other, on the basis of a dyad of smaller self/larger self (*xiaowo* and *dawo*) (Table 1). Third, the Sinic system is explicitly hierarchical in terms of *xiaowo* and *dawo*. In the Anglo-American imaginary, hierarchy is less clearly defined. There is an emphasis on the sphere of the individual, but largely in terms of negative freedom (freedom from interference by external forces) not positive freedom (freedom to determine social relations). Amartya Sen's (1985; 2000) theorisation of agency and capability is a sustained attempt to install an imaginary of positive freedom in Western liberalism, but at this time it is still an outlier. Beyond the individual, in Anglo-American discourse there is no essential primacy of state, market and civil society. All three spheres have their advocates.

Table 1. Smaller self and larger self in Chinese tradition

Smaller self/ *xiaowo/ private*	**Larger self/ *dawo/ public***
Individual in family	Family
Family	State/ society
State/ society	All under heaven/ international society

Source: Authors, after Huang, 2010.

In contrast, in the Sinic imaginary larger spheres have normative primacy over smaller spheres. This privileges social order, and the state as the instrument of order, and means that the individual, and beyond the individual the family, are always relativised by higher obligations. This is the foundation of China's essential collectivism. China's political history has famous examples of independent individuals, but perhaps there are less of them than in the West. Fourth, note the Sinic ambiguity of state and society. It is unclear whether there is space for forms of society outside the state. Is the state wholly comprehensive of society, or lesser? What is the scope for civil society? The historical record shows that self-referencing

[2] Thank you to Xin Xu. This is an important contemporary issue but the comparison of Western and Eastern framing of geo-politics, and the differing implication for ideas of the global public or common good, is not attempted in this paper.

towns, merchants and professions have always been weaker in China than in the West.

Loosely, *xiaowo* and *dawo* are patterned onto notions of private (*si*) and public (*gong*), with each successive 'private' nested in a larger 'public' domain. While in the Western imaginary the public and private domains enjoy equivalent (albeit often contested) status, dividing the social universe between them, in China – at least until recently – the realisation of the private individual always took second place to the public domain of harmony and social order. In the Northern Song dynasty, 'public' referred to righteousness, and 'private' meant private goods and personal desire. Si Maguang (1019-1086) stated that people ought to prioritise public above private (Huang, 2005). During the Southern Song dynasty, 'public' referred to the heavenly principle and 'private' represented people's wills. Zhu Xi (1130-1200) argued that 'public' was legal while 'private' was illegal (Zhu and Lv, 1175/2001). Ideally there was no conflict because the individual internalised the necessary social values (Huang, 2005). Where there was tension between public and private interests in Imperial China, the task was to find a balance to satisfy both. Where there was continuing conflict, *dawo*, the larger social sphere, was supreme (Huff, 2009; Watt, 1972). This intrinsic preference for the public helped cement the foundations of organised collectivism in China. Collectivism was not understood in terms of a dual between individual and collective. Rather, the key was the embeddedness at each level, the ascending scale of collectivism. Remarkably, this was strong enough to hold a vast diverse country together – at least during the stable period of each dynasty – on the basis of shared values and voluntary consent.

Nevertheless, tradition is not the only determining element in modern China and the ascending circles are no longer sufficient to describe the social order. The smallest xiaowo, the individual, seems to have become more autonomous and important (Yan, 2009), a process not yet complete. The large locality-based kinship group has often shrunk to the nuclear family. The state has also strengthened its role. These issues are discussed below.

Evolution of the Sinic state

The feature that has always set the political culture of China apart from others is the dominance of politics and the state over all other domains – the landowning aristocracy, merchants and markets, towns, organised religion and, strikingly, the military (Gernet, 1996). The leading role of the politics and the state dates, in some readings, from the Zhou dynasty and is key to the transformative Qi Dynasty (221-

206 BCE), the archetypal strong state, which suppressed the landed aristocracy, standardised the realm and founded the territorially unified China. Except for the short post-Imperial period between the collapse of the Qing in 1911 and the start of Communist Party rule in 1949, when Western forms were intermittently adopted, there has been no discursive limit to the authority of the state in China. Its role is comprehensive and potentially, it can intervene in any social domain to achieve its primary objectives, which are social order and prosperity. The revolution consummated in 1949 did not lead to new limitations on the state, and larger space for markets and civil society, like the English, French and American revolutions. It led to a more coherent and focused state with wider and deeper reach, ultimately into the household.

The state was not always a micro manager. In the Imperial period the direct writ of the central state stopped above the level of the village. The Imperial state was a 'Civilisational state' (King, 2018). It had a broad prospect and developed tributary relations with China's neighbours; it set rules and standards and regulated property rights; but at the level of the population its rule was largely exercised indirectly, through cultural compliance with the Confucian moral order in the village and the kinship of the extended family which often overlapped with village organisation (Hwang, 1999; Liu, 2011). The family, local communities and *tianxia* had more presence than the Imperial state (Liang, 1990; Xu, 2017).

Some nineteenth century intellectuals argued that the Chinese people had too great a loyalty to family and local communities and lacked a sense of nationalism, weakening the state (Dryburgh, 2011). In the evolution of a more modern nation-state, which began in the late Imperial period, the newly opened higher education institutions were seen as tools of modernisation/Westernisation, means of introducing science and forging a more effective state machine able to respond to Western nations and Japan. State building and selective Westernisation took a marked step forward after 1949. Like the Soviet Communist Party the Marxist-Leninist Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was organised on a Leninist basis, using a form of governance and political organisation derived not from Marx but from the Jacobin Party during the French revolution. Within the structures of democratic centralism, once an issue was resolved the whole Party was committed to its disciplined implementation. This enabled a small group of leaders to exercise tight control over the whole organisation and direct its efforts strategically. The CCP saw itself as embodying both the state and the collective will of the people. Its guiding principle was that 'within China itself the Party ought to be the nervous system of society and should play a commanding role in every sphere of social and cultural

endeavour. The ideal Communist cadre is not only a paragon of selflessness but potentially omnicompetent' (Schwartz, 1965, p. 14). For a time, the rural communes established throughout the country in the 1950s and 1960s broke up the old kinship networks. These were paralleled by work units (*danwei*) in urban settings. These forms of organisation replicated the Leninist structures within wider society. In this manner state and society became more completely conflated in practice (Fewsmith, 1999, p. 70).

The economic liberalisation and opening up under Deng Xiaoping after 1978 created more space for economic rather than political forms of production but the party-state retained control. Often, the first entrepreneurs within the new economic zones were party cadres, cementing the opening up process within the party-state while installing a dynamic of personal enrichment through the exercise of administrative and political mechanisms. At the same time, this period was also associated with a flourishing of new organisations in the growing space between the household and the state, nodes of civil society that emerged in both rural and urban areas. These non-government organisations pursued a wide range of agendas. For example, of the 552 organisations surveyed by Pesqué-Cela (2009), 18 per cent were religious, 17 per cent in cultural, sports and health activity, 14 per cent engaged in civil dispute mediation, and 14 per cent focused on community security or patrols. An ongoing issue for the party-state was how to encourage self-organisation while retaining control.

The Deng Xiaoping turn in policy, with its fostering of private enrichment as both a developmental tool in the economy and science, and a means of sustaining political rule, had antecedents in Lenin's New Economic Policy of 1921 in Russia. Nevertheless, it also demonstrated an indigeneity evident in few Leninist parties across the world. Essentially the party-state synthesised Marxist-Leninism with China's vast history of Imperial governance and statecraft. For example, the installation of managed autonomy and internationalisation in science and higher education in the 1980s, which was to be essential to China's ascent as a higher education power, reproduced the long Imperial tradition of devolution and dual authority systems (Marginson, 2018b). Instead of a division of formal powers along European lines the Sinic state evolved sophisticated forms of devolution for managing the vast and varied country while retaining central control. The Song Dynasty learnt from the problems of the Tang Dynasty when it lost authority over its borderlands. Under the Song, decentralised authority in the provinces had great discretion but continuing central control was maintained through power over appointments and the socialisation of regional leaders as part of a common cadre.

Essentially this approach remains in place under the Leninist party-state. Provincial and university leaders are assigned from the centre and share party schools. Likewise, the use of dual authority systems in the universities and elsewhere, with party-secretaries placed alongside specialist leaders at each level, has Ming antecedents.

One change is that centralisation is now more effective than it was in the Imperial era. In the party-state the separate authorities of throne, court and officials are joined; and though party and state structures are formally separated, they are not independent: no-one doubts that the party is dominant in the Chinese state. This is not a Western-style division of powers. Arguably, one weak spot in the system is that as in the Imperial era, and like all Leninist party-states since the Russian revolution in 1917, today's Sinic polity is vulnerable to what Fukuyama (2011) calls the 'bad emperor problem'. Another Deng modification of Leninism was the installation of the regular leadership transition, based on ten-year cycles. This operated effectively in both reducing the danger of a bad emperor and sustaining the energy of the party-state, but was set aside under Xi Jinping in 2018. More generally, the predominantly top-down approach routinely threatens to reduce effectiveness. Democratic centralism depends on the two-way flow of accurate information, objective judgment and meritocratic decisions on people mobility. However, intensive leadership domination means that cadre with ambitions to advance within the hierarchy may tell the next level only what it wants to hear. The dual authority system in the universities is able to correct this only when the university president, the academic half of the dual leadership, has sufficient authority. The need for objective and accurate surveillance, within the party-state as well as outside it, is one reason for the turn to advanced technological systems of people control.

It is not that the Civilisational state in China (Jacques, 2012) has given way to a more centralised and focused nation-state, as has been argued (e.g. King, 2018). Rather, the two phases have been combined. Today's Chinese state is a hybrid of the Sinic Civilisational state and the nation-state that began in the West and Japan (Zhang, 2012). It retains the wide orbit of the Civilisational state. Like its predecessor it takes conduct and culture seriously and soaks the population in ethical precepts. But it is more effective than was its predecessor at close quarters. On one hand the state reaches outwards across Eurasia and Africa with the Belt and Road programmes. This recalls the Tang and Qing dynasty incursions to the West, Northeast and Southeast and the exploratory voyages of the Ming, though China now moves outwards with trade and infrastructure not armies and navies. On the other hand, while maintaining political supervision of foreign trade, global finance,

burgeoning economic markets and Party entrepreneurs, and limiting the political potentials of non-government organisation, the state is forging unprecedented techniques of surveillance and control at home. These techniques are at testing stage. If implemented the change would be momentous, moving behavioural management from propaganda, admonitions, education and political organisation to a structured system of automatic rewards and punishments, on the basis of comprehensive data collection. Persons committing infringements would be penalised by loss of credit or transport rights. If personal micro-control mechanisms, so alien to Western liberalism, are introduced in China, this can be understood as the state's response to not only the existing limits of democratic centralism but the individualisation of Chinese society (see below) and the potentials of civil society – to both of which the spread of higher education has contributed – the continuing need for political control of the economy, and the fading role of direct political organising via Party-controlled work groups. Personal micro-control would be the conflation of state (party-state) and society by another means, more direct and total. However, continually stepping up personal control would be unlikely to end well, given that the population is more educated, more confidently agential than at any previous stage of China's history. We suspect a new balance between state, civil society, social obligations and persons will have to be found. Top-down centralised states typically oscillate between periods of liberalisation and periods of tighter central control. Arguably, the Party-state could sustain greater internal diversity and a more fecund civil society without destabilising the social order.

The point, however, is that the contemporary state in China retains a comprehensive perspective, and the mandate for arbitrary intervention across its field of observation that has always accompanied that perspective; and it tends to combine those traditional features with extensive and intensive development of its own capabilities and reach. China's Leninist nation-state is stronger than the Imperial state, a more potent Civilisational state. It is also becoming more different to the limited liberal state in the West. Over time this may lead to greater diversification between East and West in the sphere of higher education.

The novelty of the Leninist party-state within China's history should not be overstated. If Greco-Roman forms are foundational in the West they are distant from current practices. There is much greater organic continuity in China. The Greco-Roman city states and empires have vanished. It is the eighteenth-century republic, not Athens or Rome, which commands our attention. In China, in each successive revival of state centralisation including that of Xi Jinping after 2012, features of the Qin and Han return: the reassessment of geo-political position and development of a

new strategy in *tianxia*, consolidation of control across the population and at the border, the standardisation of rules and behaviours. Confucian social spheres and habits of self-cultivation retain much of their relevance. Leading universities still train the top state officials as did the Imperial academies. State centralisation is supported by tools of devolution and dual leadership structures which have long roots.

Higher education and the state

Where does higher education fit in to the state building picture in China and how do the Sinic and Anglo-American higher education spheres compare with each other? These issues emerge further below. Here two preliminary historical points will be made.

Different foundations. First, the Western and Sinic foundations of higher education were very different, especially relations with the state, and the nature of knowledge.

As noted above, the medieval university in Europe, beginning with the University of Bologna in Italy in the eleventh century, emerged as one of the semi-independent social spheres. It was founded in the fault line between church and state. The universities were offshoots of the church but their mission was largely scholarly and secular. Like the church they saw their mission as in some sense universal, but they also protected themselves from absolute clerical domination by attaching themselves to their local territorial states. At the same time, they could protect themselves from undue state intervention and subvention – most of the time – by calling on their links to the church. That crucial sliver of space between the two larger players, church and state, enabled them to develop partial institutional autonomy and a more complete academic freedom. In legal terms the medieval universities were incorporated entities, formalising their independent status.

Higher education took another path in China. It was always closely associated with the Imperial order, though during periods of disorder private academies also developed. Under the Zhou dynasty (1046-256 BCE) five higher education institutes were opened to cultivate the next generation of rulers and officials. One of these institutes, *Piyong,* lasted until the Qing dynasty. Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty established a unified education system including *Taixue*, the public higher learning institute. The role of the *keju,* the examination of candidates for the civil service, became standardised and expanded under subsequent dynasties, with merit-based entry into officialdom finally consolidated in full under the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). This was the main means of achieving social mobility in Imperial China, though it

required a high level of cultural capital: the curriculum became exclusively centred on Confucian classics and the examination took two decades to master. During the Tang dynasty another kind of institution, the *shuyuan,* first emerged. Largely private, though some later received Imperial funding, the *shuyuan* were devoted to literature and learning, but did not prepare students for the civil service examination (Yang, 2017, 8-12).

Corresponding to the dominance of the instrumental role of higher learning in China, knowledge was most highly valued for its application to the practical world, especially to governance. For example, this was demonstrated by the philosophy of learning *Jingshi Zhiyong* (learning for governance and practical uses) that was particularly popular in the Ming and Qing dynasties. In the West, following Plato and reinforced by medieval scholasticism and the leading role of theology, pure theory was separated from practice and lifted above it. In *The Idea of a University* (1852/1979) J.H. Newman argued for teaching immersed in knowledge in which all thoughts of vocational or practical utility, even the development of the university's role in research that was then proceeding in Germany, were set aside. There are further differences. Anglo-American thought tends to universal and total explanations that exclude other explanations. Each discipline and even each theorisation makes its own claim to truth and obviates other disciplines and insights. It is therefore crucial to preserve frameworks in which all schools of thought may contend, to prevent complete capture by a singular set of universalising ideas that blocks out all other possibilities, and hence multi-disciplinary universities are essential to Western academic freedom, though hierarchies of knowledge (for example the near total control of the neo-classical school within political economy) can foster unhealthy monopolies of truth. Classical Chinese thought more readily recognised that more than one school had useful insights, and that all truths were partial truths. From time to time, as in the Jixia Academy in the state of Qi in the Warring States period, which housed contending schools, China fostered both multiple voices and the synthesis of heterogeneous ideas (Hartnett, 2011). Daoism and Confucianism influenced each other. Later Buddhism influenced the indigenous Chinese schools. While at the level of the state plurality of thought was often constrained, for example under the Han dynasty, for which Confucian thought was a primary instrument of governance, this did not prevent other schools from developing or block the influence of different schools on each other. After the fall of the Qing, under the Republic, plurality was often encouraged in the emerging modern universities. After 1949 it was fostered from time to time, for example in the 1980s, when there were instances of open discussion of key issues in the party-state media. Within the universities today the disciplines constitute different voices, though China's universities are not as plural as

those from the West because of the dominance of STEM fields. There is less plurality in public discourse.

The differences in historical origins still matter. In the West it is never wholly clear to the extent to which universities are relatively autonomous parts of the state, or part of civil society. In most of Europe they are seen as state institutions; in the United States they are nested more in civil society. In the UK they lie somewhere between the two, though policy has developed a fiction that they are 'private' market corporations. In the Anglo-American systems questions of university autonomy, which partial and never settled, dominate the politics of higher education because they play out on the sensitive boundary between the state and other domains. Anglo-American higher education, especially in the humanities, is continually challenged in public to demonstrate the practical utility of scholarly pursuits. University autonomy matters also in China but less so. Within the comprehensive Sinic state, questions about university autonomy and academic freedom play out within the boundaries of the state rather than on the boundary between the state and society. A university altogether without the state, or practical utility, is outside the reckoning in China. The practical role of the Confucian classics has been succeeded by focus on engineering and the physical sciences, the disciplines in which Chinese universities perform most strongly.

Apparent convergence. Second, despite these profound differences in origin, in the twentieth century – especially in the last generation – in many respects there has been an apparent convergence between higher education in China and in the Anglo-American world. This shows itself not only academic forms such as the degree, the class, the curriculum, the doctorate, the professoriate and the growing role of corporate forms of organisation; but also in state-university relations, and the balance between pure and applied knowledge, where the two systems have such different roots. However, we say 'apparent' because this may be a case of parallel evolution, rather than genuine sameness, even one based on imitating behaviour. If so the two kinds of higher education system might diverge in future.

In all modernising societies in the twentieth century higher education, and later research, became annexed to the project of nation-building. In China prior to 1949 this was consistent with the historical mission and state-boundedness of the Imperial academies, though the largely Westernised content and the liberal focus on critical thinking were different. After 1949 the commitment to critical thinking fluctuated, being stronger in a small group of liberal institutions such as Peking University than elsewhere, but higher education and science became even more closely tailored to

national needs: first on the basis of the Soviet system of specialised universities and then American organisational models. In the Anglo-American world, annexation of higher education to the nation-building project and later, to engagement with industry as part of that project, was a plausible extension of the practical emphasis typical of the land-grant institutions in the United States and the redbrick and regional British universities (even though it was less consistent with classical personal formation in pure knowledge in the Oxford and Cambridge colleges).

Meanwhile American university research developed on the basis of continuum between basic and applied knowledge. 'Pure' inquiry was the 'seed corn' of military and commercial applications. This approach became hegemonic in the West. Transferred to China, it strengthened support for basic research. Anglo-American universities had moved from pure research towards applications; Chinese universities moved from applications towards pure research: global rankings would suggest the uniformity had been installed, except that the similarities between Sinic and Anglo-American knowledge were greater in the STEM disciplines than elsewhere. In China the humanities and social sciences run up against the problem that the party-state has its own claim to theorise and practice society and culture, and that claim may be valued higher than the potential for new alternatives. Systems of governance are also different. Though both Western and Eastern universities have learned to manage and drive academic performance – the quasi-business forms and incentives inside the universities often seem similar – China's universities are more deeply embedded in the state via the dual leadership system. Hence they are open to increased state politicisation in a setting in which autonomous faculty and students can be seen to embody risk, and state controls are now more vigilant and intensive in all spheres. At this time in the leading Western universities, though not necessarily all, the scope for independent faculty agency seems to be more pronounced than is the case in China.

Individualism and collectivism

As explained, the Sinic and Anglo-American political cultures draw on divergent ideas of individual and collective. Despite partial convergence in the modern period, the differences remain significant, affecting approaches to individualised and collective goods in higher education. However, the differences are not always clear cut because the more open and heterogeneous Chinese political culture has absorbed elements of the Western approach.

Primacy of the Anglo-American individual

Dewey (1916, p. 152) traces the primacy of the individual in Anglo-American culture back Ancient Greece. Anglo-American culture embraces autonomy, privacy and self-developing human agency. Since the Enlightenment the central concern has been to protect individual liberty. This colours understandings of the self, the definition of social relations and the common values pursued in Anglo-American societies. Lukes (1973) describes these:

> … individualism referred… to the actual or imminent realisation of the final stage of human progress in a spontaneously cohesive society of equal individual rights, limited government, laissez-faire, natural justice and equal opportunity, and individual freedom, moral development and dignity. (Lukes, 1973, p. 37)

Taking it further, Anglo-American scholarship and political culture often tends to view the self as 'a free and autonomous individual separated from roles and communities' (Bell, 2017, p. 565). The tendency to apply 'methodological individualism' (Lukes, 1973, pp. 110-122) whenever possible is a reflex deeply built into Anglo-American culture and its social science. 'Methodological individualism is 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' (p. 110). Methodological individualism creates the lacuna on the social side because that becomes hidden from view.

Sinic individual and collective

In the Sinic tradition the absolute self in the Western sense never existed (Cheng and Yang, 2015). In Confucian thought the individual exists but is never separated from her/his social setting. (The differences with the individualist strand in Daoism, in which the individual was positioned outside the ambit of the state, albeit more passive than in Western thought, are not explored here). Confucianism emphasises person's relations with larger entities and fulfilling one's duties (King, 2018). 'Confucian "individualism" means the fullest development by the individual of his creative potentialities—not, however, merely for the sake of self-expression but because he can thus best fulfil that particular role which is his within his social nexus' (Bodde, 1957, p. 66; see also Bell, 2017; Rosemont Jr, 2015). 'Human beings can only be understood relationally, never as isolates, and are thus best accounted for as the sum of the roles they live, with no remainder or consequence' (Rosemont Jr, 2015, p. 4). The relational and role-bearing individual constitutes the core idea of

Confucian individualism, which is enhanced by the expanding circles: the family, the state, *tianxia*. Here the role-bearing Confucian individual is the foundation of social order.

Nevertheless – and this may surprise Western readers – while Confucianism focuses on conformity to social obligations, it also stresses the importance of not only developing the self (Lee, 2000) but cultivating free will (Cheng, 2004). Confucianism distinguishes between the free will, *zhi*, which is seen as the inner self and centred on mortal autonomy, and social action, the outer self. Persons are obliged to restrain from enacting their will if there are negative social consequences. Self-determination is absolute. Self-realisation is not. In the liberal idea in Anglo-American political culture, self-determination centres on individual's independent decision-making and action (Li, 2014, p. 906). Following Kant, it underscores the development of the individual's reasoning, regarded as a condition of the exercise of self-determination (Ryan and Deci, 2000). In contrast, self-determination in Confucian practice does not sanction absolutely independent action. It is mostly an internal process and it is always possible for it to be affected by social relations and roles. *Practising* the free will is not an absolute right but a good thing among other good things (Chan, 2013).

Imperial China took further the process of social referencing. Strictly, individuals were not regarded as independent social agents but defined as members of a larger collective entity, the family or other groups. Individuals' liberties and rights were not discussed in Imperial China. In Modern China, both at home and in institutional life, there is again a strong collective consciousness and awareness of the responsibilities of individuals to larger entities, including the state (Ho, 1979). While liberal ideas have been influential, particularly among intellectuals (Geng, 1994) there has also been resistance to liberal individualism on the grounds that it would free people from their family roles and obligations. Nevertheless, from time to time in Sinic thought, Imperial and modern, there is criticism of the lack of a clear boundary between the individual and the social, that is, between personal will and social obligations, which can generate dilemmas (Huang, 2010; Huang and Jiang, 2005b). For example, when one's father commits a crime, what is primary: the obligation to father, the obligation to society and state, or the obligation to oneself? There are also concerns that within the hierarchical structuring of *dawo* and *xiaowo* the individual is insufficiently protected (Hsu, 1985; Cheng and Yang, 2015; Huang and Jiang, 2005a; Lan, 2005).

Collectivism in China. Marxist-Leninism, a Western doctrine, had a localised popular appeal in China for two reasons. First, it offered a path to modernism and

nation without Westernisation. 'To become a Marxist [was] one way for a Chinese intellectual to reject both the tradition of the Chinese past and Western dominations of the Chinese present' (Meisner, 1977), p. 19). Second, the collective character of the CCP, in which individuals were unquestionably loyal to the larger group, resonated with Chinese tradition (Fu, 1974). However, the forms of collectivism have changed considerably since 1949. The intensive Marxist-Leninist collectivism of rural life and urban work groups between the 1950s and 1970s, in which persons and families were nurtured by collective employment and welfare but could exercise little discretion, and Confucian collectivism was explicitly rejected, gave way after 1978 to the revival of the family, partial endorsement of Confucian values, less intensive exercise of party-state control at grass-roots level, and a new individualism. Despite the return of Confucian values, the old collectivist tendency to subordinate the smaller social spheres (*xiaowo*) to the larger spheres (*dawo*) did not return in full. With the social landscape becoming more complex and unstable, people often prioritised families, closer *guanxi* and individuals, while the party-state emerged as a composite form of *dawo*.

Modern individualism in China. There are many signs of the growing importance of individuals and individualism in China, especially since Deng Xiaoping and colleagues triggered the processes of cultural opening and accelerated economic accumulation. Individuality in China touches both universal and nationally-specific themes. Autonomous agency has been called the key concept of modernity (Kivela, 2012, p. 65). In Anthony Giddens's words, life is a never-ending 'reflexive project of the self' (Giddens, 1991; Zhao and Biesta, 2011). To the extent that a globally open China is culturally accessible to the multiple projects of the self – in work and career, the accumulation of wealth, consumption, the body, and in education, it is implicated in the spread everywhere of that modernist reflexivity. In Confucian self-cultivation it has long had the mental tools of continuous self-improvement. The flipside is the weakening of the social nesting in which the Chinese individual is located, which is more specific to China itself. Those changes include the partial breakdown of the large kinship-based family structures, and disembedding triggered by geographical mobility.

In his history of China from the Qing Dynasty to Xi Jinping, Muhlhahn (2019) finds that the drive to familial enrichment was pervasive in Chinese society, especially urban society, in the late Imperial period. In that sense the shift from Maoist collectivism to accelerated capital accumulation after 1978, which was by historical standards sudden, dramatic and transformative, was a revival rather than an innovation. The widespread adoption of the profit motive in personal behaviour,

associated with the rapid increase in average income and also economic inequality, growing endorsement of the neoliberal policy agenda, and the partial eclipse of other social values, is much discussed (e.g. Vogel, 2011; Zang, 2011b; Zhang, 1996; Nonini, 2008; Zhang and Bray, 2017). Changes associated with mobility were equally dramatic. From the 1980s onwards, urbanisation and the massive growth in factory employment were associate with a long wave of migration to the cities. The 2010 census found that more than 261 million citizens did not live where the household registration system said that they lived: most were rural to urban migrants (Muhlhahn, 2019, p. 580). In moving from the rural areas, migrant workers with their nuclear families further fragmented the traditional families in the countryside, without becoming fully nested in the new localities. Single migrant workers in the cities, mostly male, often had no localised bonds at all. They were freed from their social obligations (Lifton, 2012). King refers to 'a recognised phenomenon that Chinese individuals unabashedly show a kind of egocentric behaviour outside the family, particularly in a non-kin social context' (King, 2018, p. 53). Mobility also posed the question of how to interact with strangers, paving the way for novel forms of association based on economic life and the sharing of practical needs: 'a new kind of sociality that is universal and individualistic at the same time' (Yan, 2009, p. 285).

Mobility has been especially transformative. In all this more than the 'invisible hand' of the market is at work. The grass-roots capitalist dynamic and the accelerating urbanisation has been framed by the 'visible hand' of the party-state, in all domains from state-organised infrastructure, the 1985 decision to mandate personal identity cards (Yan, 2009, p. 279); the fostering of rural-registered migrant workers in the cities as a cheap labour force without claims to secure state enterprise employment or urban-based welfare, to family policy.

The family and the individual. The story of Chinese society is not simply one of social fragmentation and unabashed individualism. New ties and hybrid forms replace old ties. The implications of the post-1978 years, for the family and its relation to the individual, have been both ambiguous and dramatic. Modernisation, and geographical and social mobility, are associated with the partial destabilisation of family structures in the Anglo-American countries but the changes to the family in China have been greater and more rapid.

Though Maoist collectivism in agriculture and the parallel building of *danwei* (collective work units) in urban areas partly deconstructed the family as both a unit of production and a set of social bonds, aspects of traditional life were maintained. Especially in rural areas family loyalty and obligation often survived (Johnson, Davis,

and Harrel, 1993). The post-1978 period saw the family spring back. The state advocated traditional ideas including Confucian filial piety. There was a revival of lineage rituals and sentiments, renovating the ancestral house, and recompiling genealogical records (Liu, 2011; Wang, 1991).Yet average family size shrank because of frequent migration and the one-child policy, which lowered fertility below replacement level (Retherford, Choe, Chen, Xiru, and Hongyan, 2005; Zhenzhen, Cai, Feng, and Baochang, 2009). The large-family unit, in which five generations of family members lived under the same roof with a broad inclusion of cousins, often gave way to the smaller nuclear family with one couple and their children, or to a three-generation family. The key change was not nuclearisation so much as a shift at the centre of the family from the parent-child relation to the conjugal couple (Yan, 2009, pp. 57-84). In the 1980s, the nuclear family constituted two-thirds of urban families, compared with half in 1900 (Zang, 1993). The average number of children dropped from 4.5 in 1982 to 1.7 in 2006 (Zang, 2011a). The decline of large family structures and age-based hierarchies weakened the role of the family system in monitoring values, daily life and career. Despite this, the nuclear parent-child bond remains very strong, for example in parental investment in children's education, including shadow education, and the familial pension system (Chou, 2010; Lee and Xiao, 1998; Wei Zhang and Bray, 2017). Some individuals have no family. Yet despite all the changes the family still towers over all, like the state, its only equal in *tianxia*. The family is still a sphere more essential in Chinese society than in Anglo-American society.

> The individual has gained an opportunity for mobility to physically leave the family … yet, at the same time, the family remains the most important reference point for the individual's self-identity. It is therefore plausible that individualization in China may not necessarily lead to the isolation of the individual (Yan, 2009, p. 289).

Meanwhile, especially in urban areas, new networked bonds based on *guanxi*, operating on the basis of varying degrees of intimacy and loyalty, came to partly replace large kin-based networks as the basis of social organisation and support. The *guanxi* networks, which at first often developed out of *danwei*, were often crucial in economic life. Hence the Chinese individual has become nested in multiple networks, which can be based on kinship, region, schooling, work experience, professional associations, guild-like structures, and transactional relations in the market-place. Some such bonds extend abroad. As in the Confucian universe, the circles that are smaller and closer carry a more compelling power. However, modern China is a more complex setting, with scope for individuals to move between forms

of association while leveraging bonds and mobility for advantage. While the individual has been partly disembedded from social and cultural constraints these continue to serve as resources. However, trust is harder to find. Far from being autarkic agents solely responsible for their own destiny, swinging free in a lonely universe, individuals, while less nested in family and locality, are if anything more dependent on the web of social relations around them – social relations that reach much wider and seem to offer more (much of it illusory) but are less certain and protective than was village life. Autonomous individuals are both newly empowered and more enmeshed, in multiple and unstable ways. Far from making unique identities in a vacuum, individuals mix and match from available selves in the cultural setting, operating often, as in the West, at a high level of conformity. At the same time, their scope for proactive agency and partial self-realisation is sharply stratified: calibrated by inheritance, money and especially, political connections. Inequalities of power, status and economic resources border the individual. Yet the setting is always changing.

Has the balance between individual and collective shifted decisively? Researchers differ in their interpretation of the empirical phenomena. Lu (1998) remarks on the interface between Chinese traditional values embodying a collectivistic orientation (*yi*, righteousness) and those embodying a utilitarian and individualistic orientation (*li*, benefit, utilitarianism). She identifies a strong tendency towards utilitarian individualism. Nevertheless, she also finds that enduring collectivistic values will continue to be influential, within a new balance between individualism and collectivism in China. Zhang and Shavitt (2003) argue that the rising middle class in the X-Generation is the key recipient of individualist values, while the masses continue to embody traditional and collectivist values. This finding is echoed by Koch and Koch (2007) who note that people from inland China demonstrate a stronger collectivistic orientation than those from the more developed coastal area. Li and colleagues (2010) find that adolescents endorse both collectivistic and individualistic cultural values. For example, their interactions with others may exhibit a strong collectivistic orientation, while they may be highly individualistic in terms of academic achievement.

In tracking the individual in China we can only force-freeze a moving target. 'Everything changes and nothing remains still … you cannot step twice into the same stream', was Plato's interpretation of Heraclitus's great aphorism about becoming. The river flows and the waters encircle the world, and yet each specific location has its own currents and shoals. There is no end to the insights about human subjects that we can draw from the vast and diverse cultural resources we can access; no

end to the social evolution and self-evolution of human personality; no end to the reciprocal movement from social to inner self and back again, in which people make their being. The topic of individuality, so important in China as everywhere else (what else is social science but people and their relationships? what else are our empirical observations but tools for self-transformation?) can never be definitive. But in sum what we wish to emphasise is this: the modern Chinese individual has a different lineage to the Anglo-American individual; and while there are convergences between the two associated with modernisation, mobility, economic accumulation and family shrinkage, the Sinic external settings and Sinic inner mental lives continue to be distinctive.

Yan (2009, p. 273) refers to 'the Chinese model of individualisation that excludes cultural democracy, welfare state and individualism' in the Western sense. There is no common compact of individual rights and freedoms. Those ideas have some appeal in China but are officially excluded and have not been institutionalised. Yet the West is part of the picture, along with everything else. The trajectory of the family in China, and the evolving forms of sociability, are each of them hybrids in which universal modernity and Sinic history are combined. In an open global setting Western cultural forms are ever-present, yet indigenous dynamics are profoundly rooted and have great self-reproducing strength. Though self-making is now central in China as it as everywhere else, it plays out less in the domain of lifestyle and life politics as in the West, more in the improvement of social status and material life. Identity matters mostly because it plays into life chances (Yan, 2009, p. 288); for, like the Imperial dynasties that preceded it, the party-state differentiates between social groups according to their rank and station. The state filters the foreign and both undermines and reproduces the Sinic tradition. The state is not all-powerful in shaping subjectivity. As ever in China, the state must be sensitive to and engage with popular feeling to maintain its effectiveness; and in the more educated population encouraged by policy, agential capability has become much widely dispersed. The state must continually expand its own capabilities to stay abreast of the vast process of person-making that it fosters. Still, using a combination of soft and hard controls the state manages person and family to an extent unfamiliar in the Anglo-American West. It structures economic and political rewards to encourage individuals to choose for themselves the preferred paths of self-improvement.

Individual and collective in higher education

We have remarked on the Anglo-American propensity to push as much as possible of the contributions of higher education into the category of individualised goods.

Whenever possible, social relational processes and outcomes are framed as attributes of individuals. For example, political connectedness or tolerance are measured in terms of the attributes of separated individuals as expressed in Likert scales. ‘Internationalisation’ is defined not in terms of the *relations* between countries (‘inter-national’) but as an individualised attribute ‘possessed’ by single educational programmes, or single universities, or countries, that shows in the ‘purpose, functions or delivery’ of education (Knight, 2003). Considerations of reciprocal effects, mutuality or symmetry in international relationships are set aside. With the attention focused on only one subject, relations of power are obscured. This emphasises one end of the cross-border relationship while blanking out the effects at the other end. For example, ‘internationalisation’ that appears benign in Anglo-American countries, enriching their educational and cultural experiences while also enhancing their global reach, can look different in China. At the other end of relations, processes of internationalisation of the English-speaking country’s education become culturally invasive and suborning (Yang, 2014)

Anglo-American human capital. The main expression of methodological individualism in the social science of higher education is human capital theory (Becker, 1964). Human capital economics reads the economic effects of education in the workplace in terms of the wages earned by individual graduates rather than collective productivity. In human capital theory education drives the marginal productivity of labour and marginal productivity determines earnings. Correspondingly, the value of investment in education is defined by the lifetime earnings of educated labour. Education, work, productivity and earnings are seen in linear continuum: when students acquire the embodied productivity (the portable human capital) used by employers, graduate earnings follow. Across the Anglo-American zone and much of the world this has become the dominant narrative about the contribution of higher education, and about individual participation in it. In some countries, data on private rates of return to graduates are used to regulate the private/public split in financing, between tuition fees and government subsidies (Chapman, Higgins, and Stiglitz 2014).

The power of human capital theory derives from its simultaneous mathematisation of both individual investment in education, and the aggregate contribution of education to economic value. Its calibration of value can shape the behaviour of both persons and states. However, although human capital theory was taken up in OECD and national policies soon after it developed (Schultz 1960; Becker, 1964), at its core it obviates the need for government provision or funding. It empties out all forms of collectivity. It requires only atomised individuals with economic incentives, a market

in higher education and a market in labour. The social value of graduates is determined by their exchange value in the labour market, not by what they have learned, or their potential as citizens, and not by themselves, individually or collectively. Human capital theory excludes all but pecuniary motivations for both work and education; and it also excludes those social contributions of education that do not show as individual earnings. In orthodox economics the primary dissent from human capital theory is signalling theory, which assumes that graduates are selected not because of their intrinsic productivity but because their prior selection into universities and their completion of the programme of work has signalled their suitability as employees. This evades the problem of tracing a connection between education and productivity but it leaves higher education wholly individualised. It sets aside the economic market only to replace it with the idea of society as a positional competition between individuals.

Prior to human capital theory the most potent rationale for higher education was the Kantian idea of Bildung (Biesta 2002; Sijander and Sutinen 2012), which was not from the English-speaking world but from Germany. As an educational process Bildung, education for self-formation (Marginson, 2018c), has parallels with Confucian self-cultivation, though its social project is not the harmonious reproduction of social order as in Imperial China but the Enlightenment idea of continuous modernisation. In Bildung the individual is not separated from society. The project is both individual and social. In Bildung, the open-ended formation of individual students, taken together, contributes to the evolution of a rational and active citizenry whose potentials and values are without limit, thereby driving the transformation of society. Hence while Bildung is focused on individual development that development is socially nested. Inescapably, in the transition to human capital theory as the primary rationale for higher education, the individualisation and the exclusion of the social and the public good, together with the narrowing of individual agendas to private earnings, narrowed the purposes of higher education, though Bildung retains some influence.

The Chinese learner. In a comparison of learning in East and West Li (2012, p. 14) summarises the elements of the Sinic tradition of self-cultivation, primarily a Confucian tradition, that continues to be transmitted in the family: learning is the purpose of life; learning is lifelong; learning enables one to become not just more intelligent but a better person; learning is hard work and requires focus and diligence (one must *want* to learn); everyone can learn (it is more a matter of hard work than ability). Li's empirical comparison between Chinese and American learners shows that the Chinese students worked harder. Likewise, in Shostya's (2015) findings

business students in New York and Shanghai finds that outside class the Chinese students spent an average of 10 hours per week in reading and 22 hours in study, compared to Americans 4 hours of reading and 9 hours in study (p. 201).
Li's research also finds differences in the respective beliefs of Chinese and American students about learning. The Americans were more reflexive about learner's mental functioning, and inquiry and imagination, and often referred to external conditions that they said tended to limit learning, such as lack of sufficient resources. The Chinese students focused less on external conditions. They emphasised how learners actively seek learning on their own, underlining intrinsic motivation (Li, 2003, p. 263; Hayhoe, 2017, p. 7). They were also more normative, talking about learning in terms of attitudes and action, and hardship, and virtues such as diligence and steadfastness, terms that never surfaced in the American talk (Li, 2003, pp. 261-262). The Chinese students saw the practical purposes of higher education as important, yet learning and knowledge were also 'indispensable to their personal lives' and the path to becoming a better person (p. 265). It is interesting to find the more collectivist Chinese students primarily focused on the individual as the locus of explanation, and the individualist American students more focused on determination by social conditions. However, while the Chinese students saw self-formation as part of their duty to the social, American students saw the social realm as having a duty to them.

Compared with American learning, Confucian learning also has a stronger focus on social ethics, on learning to be an individual within society. Classical Confucian education did not exclude personal fulfilment or personal gain as motivations for learning but saw the primary purpose of learning as to understand the world and the purpose of the learned person as to make the world a better place (Li, 2012, p. 14 and pp. 46-47). However, when the obligation to the world, or to society, is defined in terms of the closest *dawo* which is the family, the purpose of learning can be understood as advancement of the family through advancement of the individual; and as noted, in Imperial China education was the route to social status and political power. In the modern era this opens the way to the human capital equation, yet not so as to empty out all else: the idea of education that joins individual betterment to social order and social betterment is never entirely extinguished. Like other members of society, the student is both more individualised and remains Sinic. Putting it roughly, the Chinese student exhibits Bildung, or something like it, understood as self-formation in both individual capacity and social virtue, and also exhibits investment in the self as human capital and social position – thereby combining the social (in two senses) with the individual (in another two senses). However, in China Bildung and human capital are combined in an uneasy symbiosis, rather than

pitched against each other as is the case in the Anglo-American West. It seems that in the UK and USA higher education for self-development is increasingly seen as antithetical to higher education for market value.

The Sinic family and higher education. The tight linkage between higher education and the family continues. The habits of family investing in higher education and students paying back to family after doing well in the examination, the *keju* (Wu, 2005), established on a widespread basis in the Ming and Qin dynasties, has expanded to take in most of the population. When families move from low income to middle income status they are much more likely to invest in children's education than housing. Students who succeed are seen to bring glory to the family, advancing its position within Chinese society. Bodycott and Lai (2012) find that in higher education, the Chinese family rather than the individual student is still the critical sphere in decision-making. The impact of the family is evident not only in the initial decision making, but in sustaining students' social and academic well-being within higher education. It is evident in the investment in both local and international education.

There is convergence between the theorised Western notions of higher education as investment in human capital, as a positional good, and as generating social and cultural capital for social reproduction; traditional Confucian values of education as self-cultivation and a duty to the family; and the Imperial idea of higher education as a means of meritocratic advance and geographical mobility (Bodycott and Lai, 2012; Waters, 2005). Arguably, the Chinese family now upholds this mix of values in relation to higher education.

Anglo-American collective goods. Methodological individualism suggests that the collective value of any bordered social relations (society, higher education) is determined by the aggregated individual benefits. There is no jointly consumed or combined benefit separate from the sum of the parts. Hence notions of 'public goods' in economic theory and policy are attenuated, and especially weak in relation to collective benefits. In scholarly and policy discourses there have been two sustained attempts to fill the gap that this leaves: the idea of higher education as a public sphere and the idea of higher education as a common good and producer of common goods. The first has no identifiable equivalent in China, while the second resonates more strongly. These discourses are discussed in the next section.

The ‘public’ and ‘common’ in higher education

In the Anglo-American lexicon the discourses of ‘public’ and of contrasting ‘public/private’, together with the variation to ‘common’, are multiple, diverse, confused and confusing. The many meanings of the term ‘public’ are a sign of the centrality in the political culture of the civic republican tradition and democracy, and of the dynamism of the massification of markets in modern economies – and of the need for a lexical other to the domain of the private and individual which otherwise could capture all attention. Yet because the meaning of the term ‘public’ wavers, its functioning is diffuse both as presence and absence.

The most commonly used meaning of ‘public’ refers to the sphere of government or state, for example as used in the terms ‘public policy’ and ‘public sector’. Another widely used meaning, that overlaps with the first in practice and in ideology but is strictly not the same as the first, is the term ‘public’ as meaning ‘non-market’ in neo-classical economics. This has become the primary meaning of ‘public’ in government economic policy concerning the financing of higher education. Ironically, however, ‘public’ is also used to refer to a form of commercial company that is financed by open trading in the stock market (public company, public equity), so in finance sector circles market-based activity can be described as both ‘private’ and ‘public’. Another widely used connotation of ‘public’ relates to open communications based on full social inclusion (as in ‘making it public’), as mainfest in media and democratic political assemblies. The media service both commercial marketing and political conversation and ‘the public’ can refer to either the aggregate of potential buyers or the political electorate. There is also the universalising and more normative usage in the term ‘public good’, meaning a state of general welfare, benefit or prospect.

These Anglo-American usages of ‘public’ fall into three broad categories. The first category is the pairing of ‘public’ with ‘private’ as an analytical device. Here public and private are two halves of a whole and mutually exclusive. Public and private are opposed to each other and the relation or balance between them is determining. This analytical usage includes public as state-sector education (the opposite of non-state ‘private’ education); and also public as non-market forms of education (the opposite of market-based forms). In these meanings public higher education can differ in important ways from private higher education; for example, when public higher education is non-fee charging and inclusive of all who seek to enter while private higher education is fee-charging and selective.

The second and third categories of ‘public’ are non-analytical in usage. Here ‘public’ functions as a descriptive adjective without necessarily being opposed to ‘private’; in fact, it often contains the private. The second category are uses or ‘public’ that are associated with broad-based open communications, whether cultural, commercial or democratic-political in content – public opinion, public media, public campaign and public sphere. The third category is the use of ‘public’ as a universalising inclusive category, as in the term ‘public good’. The term ‘common good’, which is in growing usage, intersects with this meaning of ‘public good’ but also has more specific connotations related to grass-roots civic democracy and to UNESCO’s discourse about education in development.

Sinic social forms and discourses touch on most of the listed meanings but are rarely an exact replica of Anglo-American practices. As has been discussed, the state has a larger reach in Sinic political culture; while the ‘private’ individual is never autarkic, being always nested in social relations. There is no direct translation of the terms ‘public’ and ‘private’ into Chinese but as mentioned above, the Confucian relationship between the smaller/inner and larger/outer spheres, *xiaowo* and *dawo*, tends to privilege the larger or public sphere.

All of these issues will now be discussed in relation to higher education.

‘Public/private’ as an analytical device

Economics. In the influential Anglo-American economic discourse originating in Paul Samuelson (1954), public goods are goods that cannot be produced profitably in a market because they are non-rivalrous and/or non-excludable. Goods are non-excludable when the benefits cannot be confined to single buyers, such as clean air regulation. Goods are non-rivalrous when consumed by any number of people without being depleted, such as a mathematical theorem, which sustains its value as knowledge indefinitely and on a global basis. Private goods are neither non-rivalrous nor non-excludable and may be produced and sold in markets. Public goods and part-public goods require at least some state funding or philanthropic support. There are also variations on Samuelson’s definition such as club goods, which are excludable but non-rivalrous inside the club; and common pool goods, which are non-excludable but rivalrous because they are subject to congestion.

Samuelson’s public/private distinction is not universal. It assumes and normalizes the limited liberal state, working the framework of division of powers so as to minimise the role of government in a capitalist society. It requires the existence of a

self-propelling market sphere that can fill the space it creates. It cannot be applied to a gift economy (Maus, 1954/1990) or a society grounded in state-owned or administered property where markets have a limited role, such as pre-1980s China. Within the Western capitalist countries, when applied to higher education Samuelson's public/private distinction is a device for limiting what is considered to be legitimately 'public' in a market economy. Discursively, it tends to maximise the terrain on which markets can be created and profits can be made.

Governments often like Samuelson's public/private distinction because it can be used to restrict government expenditure. At the same time, Samuelson's formula determines the minimum necessary government funding to avoid market failure. The assumption that all economic activity should be placed in markets unless there is market failure suggests that students should pay the full cost of tuition unless they are so poor as to be unable to take out tuition loans, at which point there is market failure and government steps in. Following the Samuelson logic, government should pay for basic research, which is a natural economic public good (it is inherently non-rivalrous and non-excludable), but not teaching, which is normally a private good. However, few governments support this position in pure form. One reason is that while Samuelson defines public goods in terms of natural qualities, education is policy determined. It can be non-rivalrous or non-excludable, or the reverse, depending on how it is provided and funded. Higher education can generate public goods, private goods, or a mix of the two. In practice different arrangements apply at different levels of education, and between the different Anglo-American higher education systems. Nevertheless, in all Anglo-American countries higher education is competitive, part selective and fee-charging with fees below full cost, while subject to government control and shaping, including access policy. Nowhere does it operate as a full capitalist market for first-degree education of citizen students, though markets have developed in full-fee international education and some parts of vocational and postgraduate education (Marginson, 2013).

The zero-sum construction of public/private is not always verified empirically. This subverts its analytical function. For example, under some circumstances the expansion of Samuelson private goods in higher education is associated with the growth of public goods, and also vice versa. Increased student access, a collective public good, grows the number of private benefits in graduate labour markets. More graduates receiving private benefits adds to the number of persons with advanced literacy, which also advances collective public goods. These problems suggest that the categorical approach of Anglo-American economics is not sufficiently sensitive. Rather trying to determine that higher education is naturally and universally public or

private, it is better to recognise that its character is at least in part socially constructed and takes multiple and diverse rather than universal forms.

In the manner of policy discourse Samuelson's public/private distinction tends to shape practice, but not completely. Positioning the role of the state in higher education (and society) on the basis of a market/non-market distinction, combined with minimisation of the non-market space, leaves much of the actuality and more of the potential of the social functions of higher education hidden from effective policy and regulation, in fact hidden from view. Ultimately Samuelson's device is unsuccessful. The lacuna still has to be filled.

Juridical-political. In the version of the public/private distinction that opposes state and non-state forms to each other, 'public' production in higher education takes place in institutions owned or controlled by government. This distinction again works the boundary between the sphere of the state and the rest of society, but unlike Samuelson's distinction in economics is does not tend to minimisation of the state, nor does it position the private as primarily a market sector. It is structurally neutral in relation to the public/private balance and open to a range of discourses: on one hand those that would constrain the state, on the other hands those that legitimate and expand the terrain for 'public' in the sense of democratic politics. An example of the latter is Dewey (1927), who finds that when any private transaction affects persons other than those involved in the transaction, it is a public matter and the proper subject of democratic politics and through that, government. Dewey's understanding of public as democratic politics extended beyond that of the machinery of state to include a more diffuse communitarian 'public' in civil society, where it intersects with the Habermasian idea of the public as mediated by inclusive communication.

In sum, in the Anglo-American world there are two contrary ideas of the public/private distinction, based on the state/non-state divide and the non-market/market divide respectively. Both police the boundary between state and society, while the second also privileges the market sphere. Neither public/private distinction taken separately adequately explains social relations and the social contributions of higher education. This lacuna generates opposition to the economic vision and various heterodox notions of public good (see below). Yet on the ground of Anglo-American liberal thought these alternatives lack the analytical bit of the dualistic idea of public/private and often appear as empty generalities.

Alternatively, when the two definitions of public/private are placed together in a matrix framework this creates a heuristic for analysing four different kinds of political

economy in higher education systems (Marginson, 2018a). For example, Nordic systems combine a high level of intervention by government as state with non-market forms of provision and financing. They are 'public' in both senses. Commercial private sector education is 'private' in both senses. In between lie the mixed approaches: non-state production or financing that falls outside economic markets, such as philanthropy and household production; and state controlled production that is either profit-making or takes the form of competitive quasi-markets which have some but not all features of a capitalist market, such as part-cost fees. However, these dynamics are not well understood. Instead, in popular Anglo-American usage the public/private distinction is mostly reworked as a state/market distinction. This conflates the two different distinctions, that between non-market/market, and that between state/non-state (Marginson, 2018a). The state/market dual more sharply regulates the boundary between state and society, in an ideological fashion, but is misleading because it conceals from view phenomena such as philanthropic funding and state-controlled quasi markets. Governed quasi-markets are widely used in higher education systems.

In China. What is the role of such analytical distinctions in China? We have noted how in Confucian discursive practices, *xiaowo* and *dawo*, tend to privilege the larger or public sphere over the smaller sphere, which is the reverse of the normative dynamic of Anglo-American thought that privileges the individual. We also noted that the ordering of the universe on the basis of *xiaowo* and *dawo* has been disrupted by widespread mobility, resulting in the dissembedding of persons from kinship networks and localities, and growing individualism triggered by this and other causes. Contemporary China also intersects more directly with the public/private conceptions used in the West. However, the mix is different. While Samuelson's economic distinction between market and non-market production has some influence, in China the main connection that is made with the heterogeneous Anglo-American meanings of 'public', is with 'public' in the sense of state or government.

Tian and Liu (2019) interviewed government officials, university leaders and academics concerning their perceptions of higher education as a public good or a common good. Interviewees from all three groups not only understood the Anglo-American 'public' primarily in terms of the state, they understood higher education as essentially public in this respect and focused little attention on non-state forms of higher education. (If the interviewees had taken place in the minority but significant private higher education sector, no doubt the conversation would have been different). All of the interviewed university leaders placed higher education in 'the public service sector'. Further, both the government personnel and the university

leaders saw the role of government in higher education in similar terms. They nominated comprehensive responsibility and overview functions in system design, strategic planning, development, and evaluation for quality improvement. Higher education policy was understood as part of the state's overall commitment to modernisation, economic growth and prosperity, and social stability (see also Guo and Guo, 2016). There were also many references to government's role in funding. At the same time, both government and university leaders argued that universities must exercise autonomy when carrying out their responsibilities. For them university autonomy in China meant the freedom of executive leaders to manage the university while following laws, government policies and national or provincial goals. Interviewees saw higher education in terms of a division of labour between state and institution in which university leaders managed human resources and cultivated 'talents', and handled student selection (subject to state ordering of the examination system and student financial support), teaching and curriculum design. While there were mixed views about the desired or actual extent of autonomous university control of research, most of the university personnel strongly supported this.

When it came to discussing funding, China's use of market-like elements including student tuition charges and non-state revenues, and competition between institutions, plus the highly selective nature of some universities, led many interviewees to modify the picture of universal publicness. A Chinese language translation of the term 'quasi-public good', which draws directly on the Anglo-American economic paradigm and suggests higher education has mixed public/private characteristics, is widely used in China. It was echoed by most academics in Tian and Liu (2019); though some interviewees, including those from government, resisted the notion of a zero-sum split between public and private. As in the Anglo-American countries, there is much debate about the implications of marketisation for the nature and purpose of universities, and the ethical formation of graduates. However, the debate is conducted on different terms. For all interviewees in the study by Tian and Liu (2019), if higher education was now a quasi-private good it was one that continued to be orchestrated by the state. As was always the case in China, politics was in command.

In China everything is 'public' in the sense of state-as-government; and because of this, and despite the selective use of market mechanisms, everything is also ultimately non-market in character. In a unitary society with a comprehensive state no market in any social sector can exercise the prerogatives of state or move entirely outside its orbit. The Anglo-American deployment of the public/private analytic to police and limit the role of the state and to enlarge the space for the non-state and

the market is not evident in China to anything like the same degree. Mostly, it is simply assumed that government will always be part of the picture.

The communicative public

The notion of 'public' as a sphere of open communication, an imagined space in which agents express themselves in networked conversation and transparent events, marks a fundamental difference between the Anglo-American and Sinic political cultures. The Western version of public communications is a large inclusive social sphere that takes in all actors: private and public, individual and institutional, state and non-state. In principle it extends across the world. The importance of public communications in the West partly derives from the centrality of liberty and democracy since the French revolution. Openness and universal inclusion, regardless of social background or identity, are key components of this kind of 'public'. As Habermas states (1989, p. 1), 'we call events and occasions "public" when they are open to all, in contrast to closed or exclusive affair, as when we speak of public places.' Here the communicative public in civil society functions as an instrument of the democratic system. While government has only a modest direct role in regulating public communications, open public conversation is the eco-system of electoral democracy and in that respect functions as a necessary and autonomous adjunct of the state-as-politics. In a broad sense it can be seen as part of the division of labour within the state. Castells (2008, p. 78) defines the public sphere as 'the space of communication of ideas and projects that emerge from society and are addressed to the decision makers in the institutions of society.'

Public communications are also more than a political arena: they are also a larger setting where business is done, cultural discourses are circulated, mentalities and tastes are shaped and billions of people relate to each other by spinning a version of self and life. Producers, sellers and buyers have an interest in the broadest possible economic markets; users of dating agencies have an interest in the broadest possible set of choices. The platform capitalists Google and Facebook are private actors, accountable to no one, that constitute this ever-expanding public realm. While in most respects the platform capitalists evade Western state regulation, they respond to large flows and currents of opinion: like classical empires, they are driven by the desire to enhance their role and their reach.

It is different in China. The platform capitalists are there and the Internet is a primary means of doing business but its capacity to sustain controversial talk is more restricted than in the West. In this domain the Sinic state is much more active than

the Anglo-American state. Internet regulation in China absorbs significant resources. Much of the communication and discussion that takes place in the open public realm in the Anglo-American countries in fact occurs inside the party-state in China. Whereas public communications constitute a larger space in the Anglo-American world than in China, the state is larger in China than in Anglo-America. This points to a significant inversion between the two political cultures. The state is the widest reaching collective expression of society in China, while the public in the form of the sphere of open communication is the widest reaching collective expression of society in the West. While the state closely manages open communications in China; the networked system of open communications functions as one factor regulating the state-as-politics in the West.

Habermas's public sphere: In Western Europe ubiquitous public communications have become associated with a discourse about higher education quite different to the limiting notion of 'public' in neo-classical economics. This is the notion of the university as a 'public sphere' (Calhoun, 1992; Pusser, 2006), grounded in the potentials of faculty and students as critics of society and government. The idea was originally sourced in Habermas's (1989) description of seventeenth century London. Habermas's 'public sphere' was the networked discussion in salons and coffee houses and newspapers that sat between civil society and the state. This provided a critical reflexivity for the government of the day. Public authority was rationalised 'under the institutionalised influence of informed discussion and reasoned agreement' (Habermas, 1989, p. xii). Calhoun (1992) finds that universities operating in analogous fashion, as semi-independent adjuncts of government, providing constructive criticism and strategic options, and expert information that helps state and public to reach considered opinions. Building on this, Pusser (2006; 2011) models the university as a zone of reasoned argument and contending values, noting that US higher education has been a medium for successive political and sociocultural transformations, such as the 1960s civil rights movement, feminism and ecology. While not all American or Western universities operate consistently in this manner, the role of public sphere, including scope to foster critical discussion in civil society, is within their reach. Higher education legislation in New Zealand enshrines the idea of the university as 'critic and conscience' of society. Ignatieff (2018) suggests that within a liberal division of powers the university is a potential counter to majoritarian populism in the state, analogous to a free media and independent judiciary.

It is scarcely imaginable the state in China would adopt the New Zealand law. Yet there are Sinic precedents for structuring in criticism as part of governance. The

intellectually cosmopolitan Jixia Academy was expected to provide fearless advice about statecraft to the realm of Qi (Hartnett, 2011). Later, from time to time the Imperial state granted freedom of expression to certain Confucian literati. For example under the Tang dynasty (618-907), officials named Jianguan were routinely expected to make comments and criticisms (Cheng, 2001; Zhao, 2000). To enable the Jianguan to fulfil their duties, emperors granted them freedom of expression and protected them from being punished (Chen, 2001). The reign of Emperor Taizong (598-649) was especially famous for tolerance and freedom of expression. However, in an Imperial system tolerance could always be withdrawn, whether in particular cases or in general, and some reigns were notably illiberal for example the later Qing. Under the Republic Peking University established a special role as a centre of liberal discussion, critical thought and constructive national intervention; and more episodically, this role persisted after 1949. The University was the starting point for most of the twentieth century political movements, from May the Fourth in 1921 to Tiananmen in 1989 (Hayhoe and Zha, 2011). However, the legitimacy of the critical function has never been clearly established under the party-state; and, as happened in 1989, the CCP habitually moves to constrain the larger political potential of the universities when the stability of its rule is in question.

Public good and common good

The generic ‘public good’ is the one idea of ‘public’ in the Anglo-American lexicon that is without specific limit, being neither constrained by a public/private dual nor tied to communications. It is the good of everything taken together; the broad general welfare or condition of virtue of the public or society as a whole (Mansbridge, 1998) – the genesis, evolution and flourishing of individuals, groups, localities, markets and all of social life. The ‘public good’ is sometimes equated with the European feudal metaphor of the commons, a shared resource that all can utilise, not subject to scarcity or contaminated by congestion, such as a river or a pasture where animals are grazed. Used in higher education it is the full summation of the economic, social and cultural values that are formed. The Anglo-American notion of shared ‘and universal public good’ is also the one use of ‘public’ in the Anglo-American lexicon that has a strong Sinic counterpart. That is the idea of ‘all under heaven is for all’ (*tianxia weigong*), with *gong* as the translation of ‘public’. When applied to higher education in China the notion of shared public good would normally include public virtue (*gongde*). The Confucian focus on public virtue and morality is still prevalent. However, there is more than one possible version of an agenda for public virtue in higher education. Confucianism has the five constant virtues (*wuchang*) which are still foundational to Sinic thought: benevolence and humanity (*ren*), righteousness

and rite (*yi*), propriety (*li*), wisdom (*zhi*), and integrity (*xin*). The party-state also has its own evolving practices of public virtue.

As with communications, in the Anglo-American zone the word ‘public’ in ‘public good’ calls up the republican democratic tradition and is associated with popular sovereignty, openness, transparency, social inclusion, and shared benefit. In higher education ‘public good’ readily suggests broad social access and institutions whose mission is to serve society as a whole, rather than being limited to policies and practices for lifting the level of GDP.

Nonetheless, the breadth of ‘public good’ opens it to differing normative interpretations; and in the Anglo-American world (though less so in the Sinic world in relation to *tianxia weigong*) it is vulnerable to reductions to more specific meanings. For example, in Anglo-American government serving the ‘public good’ is often equated simply with policies to achieve economic growth and prosperity. In some policy frameworks a focus on prosperity could be associated with heightened economic competition, inequality and more stratified societies, and hence more stratified and unequal higher education. Strictly speaking, to state a policy contributes to the ‘public good’ says nothing about its content, whether it is broadly distributed, or even whether it augments people’s lives. Despite the benign welfarist connotations often attached to ‘public good’, when a nation conducts an aggressive war against a neighbouring nation, its military effort is technically a public good in both the sense of non-market good and the sense of state controlled good. Some non-market state sector goods become captured by powerful social groups for their advantage. For example, affluent families often dominate selection into elite public universities.

The common good. The concept of ‘common good’ addresses the ambiguity. Its application to education has been popularised by UNESCO (Locatelli, 2018). Here the common good lies in practices that contribute to sociable human agency, shared social welfare and relations of solidarity, inclusion, tolerance, universal freedoms, equality, human rights, individual capability on a democratic basis. Equality of opportunity in education is one example. The Nordic countries, in which equal and solidaristic society is an end in itself, emphasise educational policies designed to secure common goods, including free and universal access to high quality courses. The British National Health Service is another example of common goods provision. It provides universal care free of charge to all, while prioritising people who are in greatest need because of serious illness or accident.

Common goods are collective non-market goods, public goods in Samuelson's sense, but are not always state sector-controlled goods. Because 'common' is defined by the content of activity, both government and non-government organisations, including voluntary local cooperation (Ostrom, 1990), can contribute to such goods. However, 'some kinds of private participation are more defensible than others' (Locatelli, 2018, p. 8); and state funding and regulation may be needed to ensure commonality (p. 13). The idea of common goods as used in contemporary policy discussion also emphasises the political process of participation whereby the community defines what it values and engages in joint production and democratic distribution. In that respect it joins with older communitarian agendas.

Tian and Liu (2019) argue that the Western notion of 'common good' is more appropriate than is 'public good' when discussing higher education in China because of the ambiguity of 'public' (higher education is within the state sector but it is business-like and partly privately financed) and because of the long history of collective forms in the Sinic world. The emphasis on grass roots democracy and self-determining community in the Western discourse of common goods has echoes not only in contemporary work groups in China but in the older pre-1949 tradition of villages managing their own affairs.

Arguably, the Sinic tradition is more comfortable than is the Anglo-American with universal notions in government and higher education. Nevertheless, there is partial agreement between the two political cultures, in their modern form, in relation to the components of the public good and common good in higher education. Both see prosperity, progress and social order as essential. Both, despite the relatively high level of stratification of their systems, agree that higher education should provide for social equity and solidarity. They can diverge on the meanings of social order, equity and solidarity and the obligations of higher education in relation to each. For example, as noted, Chinese higher education gives more explicit attention than does its Anglo-American counterpart to the type of person that is formed in higher education, including ethical and moral aspects.

Equity as a common good. Social equity (fairness) in higher education is a keystone collective benefit that underpins the production and distribution of many other public and private goods. In both the Anglo-American world and China there is more concern about equity issues than about any other non-economic issue. It is true that higher educational equity is often defined narrowly to refer to individual access to private economic benefits. But even inquiry into this issue, taken forward logically, and when notions of fairness are tested and validated in terms of measured

equality, goes to questions of how socially stratified are systems and socially inclusive are institutions, including entry and completion by social group, the extent to which higher education facilitates upward social mobility (Corak, 2012), and the extent to which higher education can reinforce starting social inequalities through a process of 'cumulative advantage' (DiPrete and Eirich, 2006).

The modern understanding of social equity in the Anglo-American world derives from the Enlightenment and the Revolutions, and there is a continuing active conversation in liberal political theory and in higher education policy. The main focal points are in general widening participation, in particular access to elite universities. The discourse in China is much older. Confucius stated that education was the route to self-betterment, and that any person, from any background, was capable of learning to an advanced level, though the opportunity was not extended to women at that time (Xiao, 2016). Education was almost the only route to upward mobility in Imperial China (Cheng and Yang, 2015). The literati caste, which was entered via the Imperial examinations, had the highest social status and in most periods were exempted from military service, labour contributions and taxation. Higher education provided opportunities for upward mobility on a mass scale from the Song dynasty onwards; though it was not until the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 CE) that people from all social groups had the opportunity to become literati. In the period of the Republic Western notions of equity in education, grounded in equal rights and freedoms, became influential in Chinese higher education (Yang, 2011). After 1949 the egalitarian temper of the CCP reinforced the notion that all persons should have equal access to higher education (Ding 2007; Luo, Guo and Shi, 2018). For a time in the Maoist period preferment was given to students from worker or peasant backgrounds but after the national examination was restored in 1978 entry to higher education was again determined by merit.

The result is that the stratified, merit-regulated mass higher education system in China has converged in its social character with the systems of the Anglo-American world. Places that offer significant positional advantage tend to be captured by students from affluent and educated families who are best able to compete. The divergent element in China is that the children of influential CCP cadre have an additional statistical advantage in competition.

Global good and tianxia. The concepts of public goods and common goods have been taken to the global level. There, however, there is no global state. Cross-border market transactions are regulated imperfectly from either national end of the transaction; and global civil society as such is unregulated. In the Anglo-American

world the discussion of global good and goods is marginal. Sinic political culture gives it a little more attention.

The global ecology and climate change foreground issues of global good, though this perspective has yet to enter into mainstream economic and educational policy in the West. The UN Development Programme, using with a Samuelson economic definition of public goods and focused primarily on ecological issues, defines global public goods as ‘goods that have a significant element of non-rivalry and/or non-excludability and are made broadly available across populations on a global scale. They affect more than one group of countries’ (Kaul, Grunberg and Stern, 1999, pp. 2-3). Using this concept, it is apparent that nations differ in the extent to which they contribute to and benefit from global public goods generated in education and research and carried by cross-border flows of knowledge, ideas and people.
For example, the content of global knowledge flows is linguistically and culturally dominated by certain countries, especially the US. The migration of young academic talent from emerging countries to the US or UK is a global public good in the Anglo-American country but can be a global public bad (a negative externality) in the emerging country, unless there is a continuing productive relationship. The nature of global public goods in the Anglo-American sense therefore varies by geo-strategic position.

Global common goods in the Western sense are potentially more mutual in form. Deneulin and Townsend (2007, p. 29) define the ‘global common good’ in terms of the ‘participation of all persons in a diverse and differentiated, yet solidaristic and collaborative, world society.’ International norms such as climate change accords, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Sustainable Development Goals, which include commitments on tertiary education, are global common goods. Potentially, the worldwide system of publicly accessible scientific knowledge is an important global common good, and the incubating chamber of many other common goods, global and national-local, despite its cultural biases and exclusions. Arguably, both cultural diversity and global language are global common goods, even though from time to time they work against each other.

While the Anglo-American countries engage broadly with the world through trade and politics, and Anglo-American research universities are highly engaged in cross-border research collaboration and the education of international students, they are less mutual and reciprocal than universities in China in their international dealings – for example through learning foreign languages and building in-depth knowledge of other cultural spaces, and sending their students abroad at a rate to match the entry

of foreign students into their own systems. All Chinese students have learned English. Only a tiny handful of British and US American students have learned Chinese. More generally, the Anglo-American political culture has yet to develop a discourse about the world as a relational space that goes beyond recognition of universal national sovereignty and the norms of borderless trade in the world market. (The latter principle has been abandoned by the US but not the UK). However, the Anglo-American notion of global common good has a more developed Sinic counterpart. As was the case with the Anglo-American term 'public good', the matching concept for global public good is *tianxia*, the Confucian all under heaven. Arguably*, tianxia* is more appropriate to global public or common good than it is simply to public good.

Nevertheless, *tianxia* is broader in conception than the global common good because *tian* (the world) includes nature as well as society, and it is also seen as continually changing (Hall and Ames, 1998, p. 242). *Tianxia* refers to universal harmony and peace on the basis of respect for diversity, a long-standing principle of Imperial foreign policy. Interestingly, something like this has returned in the language of the party-state. Xi Jinping talks of 'a community of shared future for mankind' (*ren lei ming yun gong tong ti*). In the Belt and Road Initiative China is reaching out further than in the Imperial period, moving from preoccupation with its borders to a forward strategy for engaging with the world as a whole. Whether the Belt and Road strategy practices *tianxia* in the fullest sense of the world as a whole that is grounded in balanced mutuality, or in the narrower sense in which Chinese civilisation is seen as the core of a centre-periphery model, will become apparent in future.

Concluding remarks

The Anglo-American and Sinic political cultures differ profoundly from each other. This affects the respective discourses that bear on the social nature and role of higher education.

Anglo-American discourse privileges the individual, who is often (but not always) seen as disembedded from social relations. In a parallel process the market is both separated from and privileged above the state, which is determinedly limited. The drive to police the boundary between the state and other sectors is almost as strong as the drive to elevate the individual. This creates a lacuna in imagining collective social relations and a tendency to push back against state attempts to structure the social. Many and various attempts are made to bring the social and the state back in

but none are potent enough to overcome the essential liberal settings forged in the eighteenth century (it is a different outcome in Nordic Europe). Sinic discourse moves the opposite way. It nests the individual within larger social circles, so the Sinic individual bolsters Sinic collectivism rather than the two working against each other, but in its modern version it struggles with the fact that the Confucian order, developed under conditions of limited mobility, has partly fragmented. The Individual is breaking out. On the other hand, the state is not becoming a limited liberal state. It is stronger and reaches further than ever and remains supreme vis a vis the market and civil society. Whether it will succeed in stepping up regulation of the individual is still to be seen.

The autonomous Sinic university remains inside the boundaries of the state. The transition to a mixed economy in higher education has not changed that. The autonomous Anglo-American university continues to sit on the boundary between the state, civil society and market, though the state never really lets go. As in the Sinic world, autonomy and academic freedom are in continuous flux. There are substantial overlaps between the two kinds of higher education, more so than in politics and governance as a whole. The shape and organisation of research universities is similar; and while the party secretary system that ties the universities directly to the state has no counterpart in the West, the New Public Management defines both.
In comparison with some other countries, notably in North-Western and Central Europe, each set of institutions is highly stratified in prestige and resources. In both the Anglo-American and Sinic worlds these educational inequalities feed into social reproduction and impair the common good. However, they reach this outcome by different routes. The Anglo-American discourse, notably in policy economics, privileges markets. Markets, which begin with starting inequalities and magnify those inequalities over time, tend to buttress existing privileges and thereby sustain the social hierarchy. The Sinic discourse deploys *dawo* and *xiaowo* to sustain the state and though it, the social hierarchy. The main difference is that in the Sinic world politics offers another way up the social ladder. This is additional to income, property, the market and education which provide attenuated opportunities for upward mobility in both kinds of society.

The similarities between East and West have been secured partly by parallel evolution and intersecting modernities in the twentieth century, which was the Western century. In the future the underlying differences, between the two traditions and their contemporary political cultures, could send the respective high education systems on more different paths.

The observable similarities are not sufficient to secure a convergence on the social mission of the university. Here the underlying political cultural differences tend to assert themselves. The state, and service to nation and province, dominate the potential social mission in China. In the Anglo-American world, the network of organisations and groups in civil society and the public communicative realm, both of which are influenced by the state but less controlled than in China, are also very important. In defining the potential of the state as a producer of social goods, Samuelson's zero-sum public/private formula, which limits government and privileges the market, is a much more important factor in the Anglo-American countries than in China. Possibly this is at least partly because in China funding for higher education continues to increase. It is possible that when the time comes in China to rein in expenditure the Samuelson formula will deployed to limit state spending and legitimate increases in student tuition charges. However, the longer-term point is that in China, the sense that approximates 'public' in the Western world is overwhelmingly tied to the role of the state. A political rather than economic construction is dominant.

In China the discourses that touch on the social role of the university are arguably more open-ended in their potential. That is more a function of tradition and language, of the long flexibility and openness of Sinic thought around its central core, than of contemporary politics. At this time, any major initiative must secure the approval of the party-state. In the Anglo-American countries, in contrast with China, most ideas of the social role of higher education are more limiting. Only the Anglo-American term the 'public good' suggests broad possibilities. The two polities agree on certain broad themes that in Anglo-America would go under the head of public good, including economic prosperity, social order and equity. However, in neither the East nor West has UNESCO's idea of higher education as a common good really taken root – though it is possible that both in their different ways could move in the direction of greater grass-roots participation in the shaping of higher education activity.

Neither the UK and USA, nor China, officially endorse the idea of the university as a participative public sphere in the Habermasian sense. Nevertheless, the kind of university where social criticism and the incubation of new political ideas is practiced on a large scale does appear episodically in the English-speaking world. It has happened at key moments in China also, but there the potential for such a university is more fraught. In China, where universities are part of the government sector and their leaders are part of the organisation of the party-state, there may be greater

potential for practising useful social and policy criticism behind closed doors inside government rather than in open society.

Perhaps China is less open in national civil society but more open in global society, in tianxia, more advanced in the joint production of global public and common goods. Despite the widespread connections of universities in USA and UK, they have not been greatly changed by internationalisation, for example by learning from other cultures. In some respects, higher education in the research-intensive universities China is more internationalised and globalised than is the case in their Anglo-American counterparts.

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