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# What Is the History of Ideas?\*

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Philosophy, aiming at knowing the world and human beings themselves, needs to encompass Kant's idea of "mind's total capabilities", and thus naturally know ideas possessed by us, especially the generation and development of key ideas' in our spiritual progression. In current Chinese-language writings, however, the knowledge realm concerning the history of ideas and sequentially the issue of methods is not clear. Therefore, we should have some discussion on the concept of "the history of ideas".

## I

Generally, writings on the history of ideas can be divided into twotypes. Firstly, in the broad sense is the history of ideas or the intellectual history in English, and secondly in the narrow sense, is the history of categories or history of concepts. Mr. Zhang Dainian's *An Outline of Chinese Philosophy* may be regarded as the first treatise on categories of Chinese philosophy in modern China since it provides analytical research of basic questions discussed in Chinese philosophy. Together with his, *The Origin and Development of Several Basic Concepts in Ancient Chinese Philosophy*, they stand as fine examples published in an earlier time. Works of this nature take some words or terms in Chinese philosophical classics as their objectives and focus on their implications. Gradually these words or terms become core concepts or cardinal ideas to understanding ancient Chinese philosophy. In some of these works ideas are referred to as substances; which is related to people's study on the history of ideas by means of idealism.

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Studies like Mr. Zhang Dainian's writing may be called explanatory histories of ideas, whose feature is a focus on philosophical explanations of ancient ideas and thus a reconstruction of the ancient philosophical system. Recently, another kind of study on the history of ideas has emerged, paying attention to new terms and concepts in modern times. Some lay special emphasis on studying significances of translations of foreign words to these new concepts, and some make use of electronic techniques to sort out key words in historical literature. It may be said that this is a positive history of ideas, stressing history, compared with the explanatory history of ideas stressing philosophy. It is helpful to people's chronological studies on newly-coined ideas since the modern era. However, this paper does not pay special emphasis to such studies on the history of ideas.

Equally studying Chinese people's fresh ideas in the modern era, Mr. Feng Qi follows practical dialectics in writing *The Revolutionary Course of Modern Chinese Philosophy*, a book on the history of ideas. In methodology, it shares commonality with his preceding publication, *The Logical Development of Ancient Chinese Philosophy*, as it consciously enjoins history and logic to study the history of philosophy. Actually, there is a quite big breakthrough of Hegelianism in *The Revolutionary Course of Modern Chinese Philosophy*. No longer does he pay much attention to a philosopher's theoretical system (in fact it is impossible) and various systems of how to construct cognitive "circles", and his writing is no longer in the style of the history of categories or concepts. However, he lays emphasis on observing philosophers and thinkers "advancing what up-to-date ideas to oppose out-of-date ideas, thus pushing forward the revolutionary course of modern Chinese philosophy"<sup>1</sup> under special historical conditions of modern China. Mr. Feng tries to sum up philosophical changes in modern times from the angle of the union of historical outlook and epistemology, and meanwhile recognizes some deficiencies in the revolution of logical science and values. It may be well said the he still confines his descriptions of idea transformations to various branches of philosophy. This spiritual revolution and its achievements may be viewed from a wider angle, including making cross-disciplinary research searching for a set of ideas of modernity finally deposited in revolution. These ideas seem to be a spectrum of the modern mind, constructing public awareness of modern society.

In the West, studies on the history of ideas emerged relatively lately. According to Roger Hausheer, "the history of ideas", coming into being during the last half of the eighteenth century, "is a comparatively late-born and highly sophisticated child of

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1. Feng Qi, *The Revolutionary Course of Modern Chinese Philosophy*, Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 1997: 726.

advanced civilization”, and is an activity of multi-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary research:

“Its central preoccupation consists in a large-scale extension of the ancient injunction ‘know thyself’ to the collective historical whole, the civilization or culture, in which the individual self is embedded, and of which it is in no small measure a product. It is above all else concerned to tell us who and what we are, and by what stages and often tortuous paths we have become what we are. It stresses the continuity of ideas and emotions, of thought and practice, of philosophy, politics, art and literature, rather than artificially pricing them apart, as usually happens with the more specialized branches of the humane studies. The central objects of its inquiry are the all-pervading, ruling, formative concepts and categories peculiar to a culture or period-or indeed a literary school or a political movement, an artistic genius or a seminal thinker, in so far as these have been the first to raise issues and advance ideas which have passed into the common outlook of subsequent generations”.

“The history of ideas . . . attempts (among other things) to trace the birth and development of some of the ruling concepts of a civilization or culture through long periods of mental change, and to reconstruct the image men have of themselves and their activities, in a given age and culture”.<sup>2</sup>

The evaluation of the discipline, “The History of Ideas”, is affirmed by the famous philosopher Isaiah Berlin, with similarities to the orientation of some other historians of ideas, including Arthur Lovejoy and Quentin Skinner, who hold that “the history of ideas” is characterized by cross-disciplinary research. Of course, it is disputable whether the history of ideas is resultant from philosophers’ use of rationality (i. e. an enlightening result, both logical and expansible in theory, from their continuous inferential activities around a certain idea), or if it is shaped by non-rational desire, impulse, passion or interest. It is also disputable whether a “unit idea” can be reduced to an eternal substance transcending time and space. Like other humanities such as history and pure philosophy, the realm of the history of ideas is full of disputes. However, so far as their common interest is concerned, those studies

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2. Hausheer Roger, “Introduction”, In *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, written by Isaiah Berlin, New York: Viking Press, 1979: xxiii – xxiv, xvii.

on the history of ideas have all broken through dominant narrations on the history of philosophy, embracing some hermits and heresies that were unnoticed before or somewhat obscure, into their expounding views. Those ideas, originally perhaps more or less fragmentary or unsystematic, have aroused researchers' resonance and been recognized as forerunners of some "ruling concepts".

## II

At a deeper layer, "the history of ideas" is of course related to an understanding and usage of "idea".

As a frequently used term in modern Chinese language, "*guan nian*" is related to the modern Japanese translation of the English word "idea" which has been expressed by Chinese characters. In Mr. Wang Li's words, it belongs to a category of new words which "came from the West and passed through Japan". In general, this is a correct view. But, the definition of "idea" in philosophical writings is not clear as yet. "*Guan nian*" (idea) in modern Chinese language is a little bit different from "*gai nian*", a Chinese translation of the English word "concept", in its application, though they both represent forms of consciousness. We define concept (*gai nian*) as a form of rational thinking and generally consider it as an object of epistemological and logical research, whereas idea (*guan nian*) has a wider range of use, probably indicating concept, or other complicated implications such as opinion, thought, viewpoint, and outlook in general. Also, the word "*guan*" (outlook, conception) is related to "*guan nian*". Some expressions covering "*guan*" are often used, such as outlook on life, outlook on value, outlook on history and world outlook. It may be referred to a systematically theoretical doctrine, or just to a comparatively fragmentary opinion which may not be considered sufficiently.

As a philosophical concept, "idea" is understood variedly by Western philosophers as well.

Plato's Theory of Ideas lays emphasis on its abstractness, thus being regarded as objective idealism. The idea in his philosophy is a supersensible, permanently fixed, universal and absolute reality. It is truer than an abstract image; it is a true reality and the source of people's knowledge. Its Chinese translations consist of "*guan nian*", "*li nian*", "*gai nian*" and "*li xing*". Mr. Chen Kang, senior specialist of Greek philosophy, insists on including "*xiang*", while contemporary Western scholars prefer to call Plato's doctrine the Theory of Forms rather than the Theory of Ideas. So generally speaking, in its ordinary usage "idea" is not merely

referred to as those purely abstract concepts, though it can often contain them at the same time.

According to Mr. Chen Kang, the English word “idea” was originally a term employed by British empiricist philosophers. For instance, David Hume says:

“Those perceptions, which enter with most force and violence, we may name impressions, and under this name I comprehend all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul. By ideas I mean the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning”.<sup>3</sup>

Modern Chinese philosophers have long been weighing their Chinese translations of the English word “idea”. Mr. Jin Yuelin put Hume’s idea into Chinese “*yi xiang*” since it is approximately specific and Hume does not acknowledge that there are abstract ideas.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, Mr. Feng Qi says as well, “The idea advocated by Hume is chiefly a kind of indistinct impression and in fact a kind of ‘*yi xiang*’ (image) instead of abstract concept”.<sup>5</sup> In accordance with Mr. Jin’s translation, “idea” should be expressed with “*yi nian*” in Chinese.

It is necessary to take some experiences in the history of translation as reference when understanding the word “*guan nian*” in the Chinese history of ideas, but this does not mean that there must necessarily be a direct correspondence between the Chinese word “*guan nian*” and a certain Western-language word. After nearly a century, the Chinese “*guan nian*” has already become a word or concept frequently used in Chinese philosophy, so that its meanings should be confirmed more in accordance with its usage in Chinese language. We may look up several well-known works on the history of Chinese philosophy, observing usages and implications of “idea” (*guan nian*) in Chinese writings.

After his studies on concepts and categories of Chinese philosophy in *An Outline of Chinese Philosophy* in the 1930s, Mr. Zhang Dainian wrote *An Outline of Concepts and Categories in Classical Chinese Philosophy* in the 1980s, covering three branches, namely, philosophy of nature, philosophy of life, and the theory of knowledge, and had discussions on Chinese philosophical concepts and categories. He makes certain definitions of concept and category: “The concept is a thinking

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3. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, London: Oxford University Press, 1739: 1.

4. Jin Yuelin, *The Theory of Knowledge*, Beijing: Commercial Publishing House, 1983: 298.

5. Feng Qi, *Knowing the World and Knowing the Self*, Shanghai: East China Normal University, 1997: 169.

form expressing the kinds of things, and the category is referred to a cardinal and universal-oriented concept, that is, a thinking form expressing the fundamental kinds of things”.<sup>6</sup> However, he has no definition of “idea”. It is meaningful that when concretely unfolding his discussions Mr. Zhang likely calls them ideas, such as *li* (principle), *tai ji* (the great ultimate), *yi* (oneness), *ti yong* (substance and function), etc. It is similar to his *An Outline of Chinese Philosophy*; where there is no strict distinction between “concept” and “idea”.

In Mr. Lao Siguang’s book of *A New Edition of the History of Chinese Philosophy*, the word “*guan nian*” is used most frequently and widely, and there is even a particular section on “important *guan nian* in ancient Chinese thought”, covering ideas of “fate”, “heaven”, “ghost”, “heavenly mandate”, “cosmic order” and so on. Here “*guan nian*” seems to embrace concept, category, viewpoint, thought (systematic or fragmentary), idea (theory-oriented or scattered in many dimensions and non-reflective), attitude and the like.

In his book *A New Writing of the History of Chinese Philosophy*, Mr. Feng Youlan uses the term “*guan nian*” quite rarely, which is comparatively close to the general manner used in 1980s academic circles. In his book of *The New Rational Philosophy* written in the 1930s, however, he takes “*guan nian*” as a more basic philosophical tool or an object of philosophical research. It is generally said that philosophy makes studies on concepts, propositions and inferences, whereas Mr. Feng Youlan argues that philosophy makes studies on *guan nian*, propositions and inferences. Here “*guan nian*” is equal to the generally used concept, but Feng’s usage is significant since there may be a relationship of “destroying the bridge after crossing the river” between philosophy (concept) and experience. “As to the true, philosophy never utilizes them but *guan* (observes) them”.<sup>7</sup> Differing with Mr. Jin Yuelin who discusses the activity of knowledge from the dual function of concept on the given (description and prescription), Mr. Feng insists that a philosopher should adopt an attitude of “watching a fire from the other side of the river”, using pure thinking (rationality) to grasp the physical world. However, his “*guan nian*” is different from our ordinary understanding of it. Indeed, as a common word, “*guan nian*” is a compound word in Chinese. Literally, “*guan*” expresses a careful look, and “*nian*” may express a relatively short or accidental conscious activity but also a more sustained, frequent and concentrative conscious activity. Therefore, there

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6. Zhang Dainian, *An Outline of Concepts and Categories in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1987: 2.

7. Feng Youlan, *The New Rational Philosophy*, Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 1996: 13.

should be both conceptual “thinking” and perceptual “look” in “*guan nian*”; it may be looking at something with “eyes” or even with “mind”, a kind of looking together with “thinking”. This is quite close to Mr. Jin’s explanation of “idea”, though he employs another word “*yi nian*” in his book *The Theory of Knowledge*.

In my opinion, “*guan nian*” is referred to a person’s total sight impression or direct perception at a specific moment, touching upon the “visual area” of the mind. When a certain “*guan nian*” has a definite “visual area”, generally we call it “that *guan*”, expressing a person’s “*yi nian*” (mind) with a relatively concentrative direction and scope, in which there must be applications of conceptual thinking with unnecessarily strict reasoning and arguments (though it may be arguable). Hence, so far as its abstract or rational degree is concerned, “*guan nian*” (idea) is more or less different from “*gai nian*” (concept); as it may contain more sensory elements. The differences of “concept” and “idea” in their expressing content can be shown in their actual applications. As to a certain term, if used in a sense of recognition (especially the theory of knowledge), or used at a time when we merely answer the question about the term’s reference and have a relatively regular form (thought form), it is generally named as a “concept”, for example, “sensation” and “perception”. However, as to those terms embracing people’s subjective attitudes and inclinations or some evaluations, we always call them “ideas”, for example, “equality”, “liberty”, and “democracy”. In other words, when we say a certain person has an “idea of democracy”, we generally not only presuppose the meaning of “democracy” but also confirm a consentient attitude towards democracy. And when we say he knows the “concept of democracy”, we only mean that he understands what democracy is.

Another major difference between idea and concept lies in that there is no contradiction within a concept, so far as a conceptual structure is concerned. However, the “thought” expressed by “ideas” may be contradictory. In fact, those major ideas in our common sense are often full of contradictions; not only does a single idea have contradictions within itself, but also there are often contradictions among several ideas believed and used by us. The mind is certainly not a monotonous deductive system, and our subjective pursuits originate in some dark, unclear desires and wills, which are likely conflicting with each other. Some of a society’s values are made of accepted ideas, but these ideas often conflict with each other. Every day we may come across conflicts, but only when we make reflections on them may we reveal their complexity and causes and clarify them.

Viewed from pure philosophy or the theory of knowledge, philosophy is just a theory of conceptualized arrangements. Thinking needs to arrive at concepts, and

concepts need to be clarified and rid of their contradictions. In this sense the mental state represented by “ideas” is comparatively confused and probably contradictory, which is really a shortcoming. In turn, however, these two points may well be reasons for existence of studies on “the history of ideas” and express its own characteristics. Even Hegel argues that the philosophic characteristic lies just in studying those things seemingly familiar to ordinary people: “What is dealt with or made use of without consideration as an aid to daily life, is certainly the unknown to man unless he be informed in philosophy”.<sup>8</sup> In other words, “the history of ideas” can enlarge the area of studies on the history of philosophy. In fact, the mainstream of Chinese academic circles during the second half of the twentieth century used “idea” generally in a very broad sense. It tended to include 1) representation or impression, 2) what is opposed to the objective world, embracing people’s general views and recognitions of things and matters, and 3) social consciousness. Further, behind a specific idea there may be human feelings, wills, interest pursuits, and some elements involving beliefs or faiths which may not be necessarily analyzed by pure conceptual activities.

Behind the “idea” expressed by a certain word or term there may be above-mentioned diverse contents. There have constantly emerged new species in the human world of ideas since human beings have sustained gradual development of complicated spiritual phenomena throughout a long history and especially as so many academic branches of humanities and social sciences have developed in modern society. These new ideas may not necessarily arrive at the ultimate limit of a thinking course, but they possess vigorous forces pushing the world forward. Their studies should become objects of philosophical concern since they are also part of “knowing the world and knowing the self”.

### III

The task of philosophy is to know the world and the human self. This world includes a human cultural sphere. Accordingly, at least so far as the task of knowing society and human life is concerned, the target of studies on the history of ideas should seek out true ideas. However, this “true idea” is somewhat different from Spinoza’s concept of true idea, which indicates an intellectual intuition of an epistemic object’s essence. In the study of the history of ideas the so-called truth of ideas has three

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8. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Stuttgart: Frommanns Press, 1816:33.

implications.

Firstly, the true as directly opposed to the “false”. According to traditional correspondence theory, if an idea corresponds to its object, we may say it is true or right. Such a dimension of true idea may be called “rightness” since its content has a character of truth. This involves a question of whether there is a “true history of ideas”. As a written history of ideas, it cannot be ensured to be a definitely true history; however, it does not mean that the history of ideas can be willfully written. For instance, if in a certain history of ideas it is said that Confucius has a modern idea of right and equality, such a history of ideas is obviously false. Just as Confucius is blamed owing to his failure to have ideas of right and equality, they both belong to a dislocation of categories, for sages such as Confucius couldn’t have those ideas under the pre-Qin historical condition.

Secondly, the true contrasted with the “pseudo”. So far as a speaker’s or writer’s belief in a certain idea is concerned, the person holding this idea subjectively believes and says that it is true, though whether this idea is really true or not and whether it can be sufficiently verified are not necessarily ensured. As long as what the speaker “thinks” and “says” is identical, he will be acknowledged to be sincere, or otherwise he is hypocritical. Therefore, the true as opposed to the “pseudo” means sincerity. It expresses a correspondence between a certain attitude implied in the idea and the acceptor’s actual faith.

Finally, the true as directly opposed to the “illusive” or “empty”. Logically, there is a so-called false concept or illusive concept, which is referred to as a concept whose denotation is zero. The truth or falsity (emptiness, illusion) of an idea as concerns studies on the history of ideas has a sense of practical philosophy instead of logic. Whether an idea is true or false (empty, illusive) is referred to the idea of whether it is confined to speech and writing or if it can be transformed into action. If a speech or writing is also regarded as an action, then the “action” here is referred to a social practice which goes beyond the individual scope. When an idea is “true”, it must have a certain union with social action.

It has been acknowledged by general scholars of the history of ideas that ideas have an inherent motive-power nature. However, not all ideas can become driving forces. Here are a series of difficult problems in the study of the history of ideas: How are people driven to act by ideas? What kind of idea has a genuine motive power of social action? Is what drives people to act an ideas’ rational strength or irrational appeals behind (within) ideas? All these are real philosophic questions. Anyway, a true idea is one that can guide people to take action and give them motive forces, and

one powerful enough to become a practical strength instead of being confined to writing or speaking. Practical strength is not only individual or moral strength but also has social significance, and the “action” should be more than propaganda and penetrate into the foundation of the existence theory. In short, an idea agent is meanwhile an action agent. An idea, if separating itself from actual human activities, is bound to become scholastic and mysterious.

To an idea agent, a genuinely true idea is generally a sincere idea in that it expresses belief and is a union of recognition and belief. It is one's belief that pushes action, and action and practice make strength from which ideas are fulfilled. The ideas embracing subjective beliefs can prove their truthfulness only in reality. This means their truthfulness not only finds expression in individual activities but also in a society's political and legal systems, customs and habits. In other words, true ideas are bound to go deep into social being and become an inseparable part of social being. They are regarded as truths by that society and as principles normalizing social life.

All these three classifications about the true are relative since they are not absolutely separated. An idea's truthfulness is generally a product of effect history, that is, we trace a certain idea's origin just according to its expansion in historical development and thus reconstructed history. We cannot understand those ideas which we cannot have at all. This sentence seems to be tautological; however, it reminds us that we should avoid the mistake of “categorical dislocation”.

In order to correctly describe the history of ideas and understand ideas and their agents we need to pay attention to their “rightness”, “sincerity” and “truthfulness”. The study on the history of ideas focuses not only on how people should consider but also how they did consider in fact. The mistake of “categorical dislocation” reflects a fact that some scholars of the history of ideas tend to impose those ideas that have not yet come into being in history on history. To overcome those misunderstandings and even misinterpretations, we need to use two indispensable weapons—reflection and criticism, in the study on the history of ideas.

## IV

There are some similarities and differences between studies on the history of ideas and on the history of philosophy or thought, so that their methodologies are the same to a certain degree.

In the beginning of his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel says, the object itself of the history of philosophy contains an inner contradiction. This is

because philosophy aims at knowing Truth, or *Dao* in Chinese philosophy. Truth is unchangeable, eternal, in and for itself. In this sense, truth has no history. Hegel, however, introduces the two notions of “development” and “concrete”, so that philosophy and the history of philosophy can become “systems in development”. Accordingly, the disciplinary meaning of the study of the history of philosophy is inseparable from the consciousness of historicism. Like studies on the history of philosophy or on intellectual history, the history of ideas has to deal with the relationship between “thought” and “history” too. Hence, there are not only a development history of a particular idea (“thought”) but also a relationship history of this idea and man’s general world of ideas, and what’s more, a relation of ideas to the history of society. The former may be considered as a horizontal relationship, while the latter vertical. The former is a relationship between thought and the thought in a specific “history”, while the latter displays the historicized relationship between “thought” and “history”. Through dealing with these two relationships, we may use genealogical method to illustrate some unclear ideas’ occurrences.

Viewing the relationship between “thought” and “history” in the history of ideas according to vertical relation is understanding a specific idea’s generation and evolution based on fundamental social being. The reason why a specific idea can display its history lies in the fact that it is a part of history for itself. Consequently, the history of intellectual ideas, and especially those movements of ideas finding expression in broad social trends of thought, or those idea achievements deposited through broad movements of thought trends, should be studied in the direction of their combinations with the history of society. In this sense, study on the history of ideas can be necessarily reduced to study on the history of society. Many old ideas go through past and current changes. Only due to modern society’s changes can the Chinese world of ideas have a leap. Such a leap is apparent in particular in the world of values. Only owing to such a leap can ancient China become modern China and the modern Chinese world of ideas take place. It is not because ancient sages had no higher wisdom but that ancient social life restricted directions of the light of wisdom.

Stressing ideas’ changes following socio-historical changes is not to deny the strength of ideological tradition, so that it is necessary to dialectically understand continuation and break of history. In other words, we agree that there is both discontinuity and continuity between modern thought and tradition, which is, however, not easy to explain. As an interim historical figure, Liang Qichao, who experienced ideas’ old and new changes in person, once employed the terms of heredity and variation of group consciousness (ethnic or social mentality) to explain

historical evolutions. There was “heredity” since group consciousness was considered as a substance; there was “variation” since an idea itself had an activity and changes of social surroundings would lead to psychological changes. The former can develop into an “internal way” to understand ideas’ evolutionary history, and the latter can connect the line of sociology of knowledge, that is, it can understand thoughts’ and ideas’ rise and development in accordance with specific historical conditions and specific social surroundings and structures. Ideological theories, class consciousness determined by interest conflicts, intellectuals’ role in knowledge production and transmission and so on, all can become analytical instruments in our study on the history of ideas.

No matter how we handle ideas’ “heredity” and “variation”, we can neither follow the path of ideology nor mechanically copy conclusions of knowledge sociology. Marx, Weber, and Mannheim simply give us methodological inspiration to survey ideas’ social rootedness. Accordingly, we first have to start from historical facts to illustrate how and why ideas changed. The positive history of ideas, by data retrieval, may tell us what new terms arose during a certain period, but the question of how the connection between tradition and modern is constructed has to be answered through dialectical thinking.

For a further clarification of the facts in the history of ideas there are three methodologies, namely, “heresies turning to orthodoxies”, “frontier entering into centre”, and “new knowledge attaching itself to old learning”.

The so-called “heresies turning to orthodoxies” refers to the world of ideas in classical times that is not a monotonous reasoning system but is distinguished into orthodox and heretic. So far as the tradition of ancient Chinese society is concerned, generally we may speak of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism together. However, Confucianism was orthodox since it was mainstream in ideological formation, whereas both Buddhism and Taoism were heretical, as were even the Mohist School and Legalist School. And within the Confucian School there were also distinctions between orthodox and heretic.

However, distinguishing heresies from orthodoxies was originally a Confucian narrative tactic aiming at a combination of its cultural and political powers. During the pre-Qin period there emerged various philosophers and a hundred schools of thought contended, which meant that Chinese civilization had reached a high degree of mutual criticism and rational discussion on some essential and universal issues, such as heaven and man, group and individual, righteousness and profitability, and mind and body. From its birthday onward, Chinese philosophy consisted of multi-

traditional sources. Owing to later historical limitations, various schools of thought apart from Confucianism, such as Taoism, Mohism and Legalism, failed to have positive and equal discussions with Confucianism (Buddhism, introduced into China after the Han Dynasty, differed slightly). But they did not disappear in tradition. They, together with rebellious thoughts taking place in the development of Confucianism, all existed in the form of heresy or periphery.

But during the modern social transitional period original orthodox Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism received unprecedented attacks, while those original heresies, for example, Buddhism, Mohism, and Legalism, turned to sources of modern ideas in various ways. Inside the tradition of Confucian rationalism the theories of free will and especially voluntarism, had always been minority heresies, but in modern China they actually controlled the Chinese world of ideas. The phenomenon of “heresies turning to orthodoxies” had a similar side with the change of academic trends caused by dynastic changes in history, that is, a later era tended to open up its own way through criticizing mainstream thoughts in previous times, so that we have to regard a certain era as an antithesis of its preceding times in order to fully understand the era. But they are each fundamentally different from each other, that is, modern ideas take the whole of ancient society and ideas as their antithesis, and hence the value vacuum resultant may become a cause for all previous heresies attempting to turn to orthodoxies.

The so-called “frontier entering into centre” can be considered from two meanings. First, as ancient society’s ideology, Confucianism consisted of a set of classics and their interpretations. From “Five Classics” to “Thirteen Classics” and to official “Four Books”, it was illustrated that classical learning’s centre and periphery was mobile. For instance, *The Destiny of Rites (Li Yun)*, part of *The Book of Rites*, was a frontier resource in learning of classics, but later became a typical ideological centre in modern times owing to its doctrine of “Great Harmony”. Second, as the main body of knowledge production, intellectuals had a distinction between marginal and central in their relations to political power. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century’s, compared with traditional intelligentsia, new-type intellectuals obviously cold-shouldered political power. But tremendous social changes allowed them to acquire political power due to their controlled cultural power and therefore enter the social centre. In other words, the replacement of old values with new values was realized through those intellectuals who transformed themselves from traditional intelligentsia, from which the history of ideas kept historical continuity in its changes.

The so-called “new knowledge attaching itself to old learning” was formerly a way for intellectuals to explain traditional learning, but now it shows how connections

of ideas between modern and traditional were constructed. Those traditional Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist ideas, as intellectual legacies in classical times, were not unchangeable substances handed down to later generations, but were attached with “new knowledge” obtained through other sources by new-type intellectuals, so as to have new implications. In form originally hidden implications were suddenly discovered as if a trunk that had been covered with dust for a long time was opened up to display treasures left by forefathers and in the developmental history of ideas perhaps this meant a start of the hermeneutical “fusion of horizons”.

These three ways truly represent the dialectics of idea changes, both discontinuous and continuous, only in their combinations with the history of society, and a complete solution to the issue of social rootedness needs to go through a process. When a fresh idea has force to change the world, it will not only stay in philosophers’ or thinkers’ books and lectures. It will enter into social customs through social political and legal systems and educational activities, and finally deposit itself as social mind. Only reaching such a state can totality of social life made of political, legal and educational systems, customs and social psyche embody a certain value’s effectiveness. Meanwhile, study on the history of ideas should widen itself to even those seemingly dark and gloomy areas.

## V

The discussion on the relationship between “thought” and “history” from a vertical angle resolves the issue of ideas’ genealogy and social rootedness; from a horizontal angle it answers the question of a specific idea’s place in the contemporaneous world of ideas and connections between the history of ideas and other academic studies.

As an expanding formation of research on the history of philosophy, research on the history of ideas cannot be independent from basic methods of philosophical research, that is, it needs to make necessary logical analyses of those concepts, propositions and inferences contained in the history of ideas, and to discover logical connections or contradictions among ideas. Not only revealing thinkers or philosophers who seem to follow logical laws in succession, but also paying attention to discover disputes among contemporaneous thinkers and philosophers — the logical criterion is still an effective rule to measure them.

However, logical analytical method is not the only method for study on the history of ideas, and sometimes not even the principal method. For studying synchronic relations of ideas, it is actually to research objects in the idea spectrum at a specific time.

Therefore, logic is only auxiliary to genealogical method. There is no necessary connection between the well-conceived degree of demonstration which an idea has obtained in logic and the degree of effect of the same idea on pushing man's action and changing social life. The reason why modern times are different from ancient society lies in that it has a set of beliefs and presuppositions different from ancient societies. As modern ideas, they are fundamentally independent of ancient ideas' logical reasoning to demonstrate them, though they have a certain connection with ancient ideas. The set of presuppositions or beliefs, as a synchronic idea structure, have a certain logical connection between themselves, but this is not an only connection. In other words, we can't treat the world of ideas in an age merely according to a set of requirements of the deductive system. In such a world varied ideas coexist in the same society's historical condition. Through such coexisting relations, the family of ideas or pedigree of ideas is constructed. We can certainly make an independent study on a certain idea's genetic and developmental history, but when separating itself from its pedigree, our study may fall into impractical abstraction.

It is necessary to properly treat the relationship between "academic concept" and "popular concept" (or the ideas of "academic philosophy" and "popular philosophy") when genealogical method is employed to study the history of ideas. In the eyes of academic philosophy those things in a "pre-philosophical" state tend to appear as social trends of thought. Owing to those most important trends' wide coverage — generally they are never confined to a certain discipline, and their influences are not confined to a certain vocational kind of person — some new ideas embraced in the trends of thought have hence become "interesting things to everybody". The "academic philosophy" is excessively immersed in pure scholastic studies so that it fails to make a quick response to changes in the world of ideas and thus has to make way for social sciences, literature and arts. Also, the History of Ideas aiming at studying new ideas' generation and development has to divert its attention to a wider area. We need to survey well-known philosophers' and thinkers' writings, to examine popular articles published in newspapers and periodicals, and even to observe these ideas' expressions in literary and artistic works. This is because the history of ideas, seeking for true ideas, needs to earnestly answer the question of how people "think about" and "make use of" those ideas in reality.

The research method of being rooted in combination with history of sociology and putting specific ideas into their pedigrees, objectively requires a researcher to possess some capacities: "The sharp logical skills of conceptual analysis required in the criticism of ideas, the rich stores of assimilated learning, the vast powers of

sympathetic, reconstructive imagination akin to those of the creative artist — the capacity to ‘enter into’ and understand from ‘inside’ forms of life wholly different from his own — and the almost magical power of intuitive divination”.<sup>9</sup> As a “history”, the history of ideas principally needs to show how people “think” actually as well as how people should “think”. As a “theory”, the history of ideas not only regards history as a part of intellectual history but also knows vast irrational elements behind ideas’ intellectual expressions. We have to acknowledge that this is a very difficult mission. So, we need more tools, learning from sociology, politics, anthropology, psychology and the like.

The ideal requirements determine existence of some difficulties. We are required to break through limitations caused by professional separations and to possess some “insights” that are unlikely to be acquired through simple practice. Meanwhile, “sympathetic understanding” and “objective criticism” are also included in study on the history of ideas.

The study on the history of ideas, questing for our cultural central ideas’ generation and development in long-term spiritual change, has become a way to know society and ourselves owing to its critical discussion activities, and may further become a force to change society.

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9. Isaiah Berlin, *Against the Current*, New York: Viking Press, 1979: xvii.