



A policy trajectory analysis of the internationalisation of Chinese humanities and social sciences research (1978–2020)

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ABSTRACT

Since the Reform and Opening-up in 1978, science and technology research has long been regarded as an engine for China's modernisation. Comparatively, humanities and social sciences (HSS) research has been overlooked in national policy for a long period. Although China's science and technology research has gained global prominence, its HSS research remains less visible in the world. This article reviews the policy trajectory of internationalising Chinese HSS research from 1978 to 2020. It identifies changing and unchanged tensions along the policy trajectory, explores the dynamics between the internationalisation and indigenisation ('Chinalisation') of HSS, and reveals a hybridisation of ideological openness and vigilance in Chinese HSS research. Based on the examination of those tensions, this article discusses the shifted power paradigm in Chinese HSS, the connotation and challenges of 'Chinalisation', and the tensions between national policies, institutional implementation and individual practices.

1. Introduction

Since the Reform and Opening-up in 1978, the past four decades have witnessed a rapid development of China's science and technology field. From 1991 to 2017, the national R&D expenditure in China has increased approximately thirtyfold, from 13 billion US dollars to 445 billion US dollars (OECD, 2020). China has surged to become the second-largest country in terms of R&D expenditure, and it continues to close the gap with the US (US National Science Foundation, 2020). In the past decade, China's science and engineering publications have grown almost twice as fast as the world's annual average; they now rank first in the world for their total number and second in the top 1 per cent of publications (US National Science Foundation, 2020). The flourishing of science and technology was enabled by a global-national synergy (Marginson, 2018). The openness of global research systems, together with the depoliticisation and internationalisation policies of science, have facilitated the accelerated development of China's science and technology field (Marginson, 2018).

In contrast to the globally eminent status of science and technology, China's humanities and social sciences (HSS) research remains largely invisible in the world. Its social sciences publications account for only 1.04 per cent in the world, lagging behind the high-performing sciences disciplines such as engineering (25.47 per cent) or health/biological/biomedical sciences (22.96 per cent) (US National Science Foundation,

2020). Although the Chinese government and universities have attempted to enhance the global status of its HSS research, the internationalisation of HSS presents more ideological, cultural, social, historical and linguistic complexity than that of science and technology (Xu, 2020b). The complexity stems from a series of challenges, such as the language barriers across Chinese and English publications, the heavy Western imprints on contemporary Chinese HSS research, the difficulties in bridging between traditional and modern Chinese HSS, the potential conflicts between critical HSS research and the party-state's ideological control, and the consequent tensions around academic freedom in HSS research (Hayhoe, 1993; Marginson, 2018; X. Wang, 2017; Yang et al., 2019).

Further challenges arise from the differences between HSS and sciences and technology research. Academics reside in different disciplinary tribes, which share and internalise certain collective cultures (Becher, 1989; Clark, 1989). The culture of each discipline implies particular values and behaviours (Austin, 1990). Although some HSS disciplines share characteristics of sciences and technology whereas others represent traditional humanities patterns, differences exist (Nederhof, 2006). HSS research tends to be more rooted in the diversified cultural, linguistic, historical and political contexts than sciences and technology research (Hayhoe, 1993). In the internationalisation process, HSS research demanded more domestic considerations than sciences and technology research (Altbach, 1998). In academic

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publishing, HSS articles are more likely to be written by a single author, whereas team research dominates many fields of sciences and technology (Mustajoki, 2013; Nederhof, 2006). In addition, sciences and technology research is often published in journal articles, but books tend to be more important for scholarly outputs and reference sources in HSS disciplines (Hicks, 1999; Nederhof, 2006). Language-wise, English is not necessarily the 'central medium of communications' in some HSS areas, despite it becoming the global language of science (Altbach, 2006, p. 3). As a result of the differences between HSS and sciences and technology disciplines, the internationalisation of HSS could not merely follow the same path as that of sciences and technology. This uniqueness complicates the governance and internationalisation of HSS research.

In the face of such challenges, how has China attempted to internationalise its HSS research? Previous research has traced the internationalisation of China's HSS through the lens of institutionalisation (Yang et al., 2019) and the bibliometric mapping of HSS publications (J. Li & Li, 2015; W. Liu et al., 2015; P. Zhou et al., 2008). A review of the literature reveals that the historical analysis of national policies about HSS research lacks discussions about the most recent policy developments (Hayhoe, 1993; Zhang & Zhu, 2008). Therefore, the current study aims to explore the internationalisation of Chinese HSS with a broader coverage and scope. On the basis of the historical and documentary analysis of national policies from 1978 to 2020, this article traces the trajectory of national policies to internationalise HSS in China, and examines tensions arising from the internationalisation process.

2. Humanities and social sciences in China

In China, the term 'humanities and social sciences' often includes the humanities disciplines and social sciences disciplines (Zeng, 2001). The joint concept is in contrast to science and technology (D. Liu, 2003). This contrast echoes Snow's (1959) observation of 'two cultures' in two polar groups of scholars: scientists and literary intellectuals (Snow, 1959, p. 2). Although the sharp distinction of disciplines has long been challenged in academia (e.g. Becher, 1989; Kagan, 2009), the Chinese government and universities often follow this dichotomy between HSS and sciences and technology in research policy and management (B. Wang, 2009). In the Chinese context, the term 'philosophy and social sciences' is synonymous to 'humanities and social sciences'. 'Philosophy and social sciences' is often found in policy documents and academic papers, whereas 'humanities and social sciences' is commonly used in scholarly writings (D. Liu, 2003; B. Wang, 2009). Another umbrella term for HSS is *wenke* (文科, meaning 'liberal arts'), which does not distinguish between humanities disciplines and social sciences disciplines at the outset of its institutionalisation (K. Liu, 2018).

The modernisation of Chinese HSS follows a long and winding path, journeying through Chinese traditions and Western influences. The roots of HSS knowledge in China can be traced back to as far as Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BCE, including the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period). Chinese philosophical, political, social and literary traditions originated then, with heavy influences from thinkers such as Confucius, Laozi, Mencius and Mozi (Yang et al., 2019). However, as a consequence of the predominant Western influences, 'the indigenous Chinese traditions have never become a dominant force in modern times, notwithstanding incessant clamours for the indigenisation of the Chinese knowledge system' (K. Liu, 2018, p. 242). Western ideology, cultures and sociopolitical ideas have been introduced to China through translations of foreign works and returnee scholars, powerfully shaping the modern HSS disciplines and research (Yang et al., 2019).

In recent decades, the internationalisation of Chinese higher education continues to internalise and reproduce Western influences in the HSS. Universities across China had been promoting international publications in the HSS through incentive schemes (Xu et al., 2019). The schemes showcase and reinforce the prioritisation of Western standards, such as the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI), in academic publication

and research evaluation (Xu et al., 2019; Xu, 2020b). The Chinese government has been encouraging the development of English-language journals in the HSS (M. Li & Yang, 2019). Although those journals open up 'research imaginaries' in the global HSS sphere with Euro-American hegemony, they remain of limited international impact (M. Li & Yang, 2019). Chinese HSS academics face constant tensions arising from a highly centralised system, a dilemma between national and international interests, and a requirement for ideological correctness (Gao & Zheng, 2018). In areas such as literary theory or modern Chinese poetry, academia faces the predicament of losing their 'own voices' to Western discourses, thus suffering from a collective 'Aphasia' (X. Zhou, 2006, p. 100).

Nonetheless, Chinese HSS research is demonstrating potentials for global prominence and a transformation towards indigenisation. Chinese HSS academics have displayed practices to proactively pluralise the global HSS knowledge, contributing to non-Euro-American discourses in world HSS (Xu, 2020c). The indigenisation and rising global status of certain disciplines, such as Confucian and national studies, has also challenged the prevailing Eurocentrism in the world knowledge system (X. Wang, 2017).

3. Methodology

To unpack the dynamics in the internationalisation of Chinese HSS research, this article draws on a policy trajectory analysis of national policies. The analysis departs from the understanding that policies are not only text, but also discourses, ideologies, processes and 'discursive strategies' (Ball, 1993, p. 308; Gale, 1999). When policies are seen as 'a set of procedures that happen in a process', which 'reflects past, present and future negotiations'; policy documents can be perceived to capture the 'moment in the materialisation of policy process, intended to represent or trigger power and/or change' (Barlete, 2020, p. 47).

China has a long-standing tradition of 'documentary politics', meaning using policy documents to govern national affairs (Wu, 1995). Policy documents such as *decisions*, *instructions*, *opinions*, *regulations*, *notices* and *explanations* issued by the National People's Congress, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the State Council and other state agencies have a law-binding effect (Law, 2002). Those policies could signal the central government's grand policy orientations or act as direct governance tools (Han & Xu, 2019). In addition, the speeches of key leaders of China and the CPC are influential. They are often 'widely promoted in the mass media, taught in classes of political and ideological education, and tested in public examinations' (Law, 2002, p. 596).

Policy documents analysed in this study were collected from the websites or archival databases of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the State Council of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Central People's Government of the PRC, the Ministry of Education (MOE) of the PRC, the National Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the PRC, the Ministry of Science and Technology, and the National Development and Reform Commission of the PRC. These documents are supplemented by high-profile speeches of China's national leaders, documented on governmental websites, in books, or covered by the Xinhua News Agency, the official state-run press agency of the PRC.

Policy documents were collected by using a two-step approach, starting from searching through the websites and databases with keywords like 'humanities/philosophy and social sciences'. The search was supplemented by a review of the literature on the development of Chinese humanities and social science research to identify additional policies not covered in the initial search. Some policies were cited in the literature, but no full-text documents were found. The collected documents were mainly published between the year 1978 and 2020, with a few additional ones published before 1978 but closely related to later policies. All full-text documents were analysed using Nvivo 11. The analysis started from open coding to generate major themes, and to

clustering and categorising. The four major themes that emerged from the coding are presented in the Findings section. Documents are originally in Chinese or English (official English translations). In this study, original Chinese texts were translated by the author. The translation was validated with reference to English-medium government websites, press releases and academic publications. For some key concepts, Chinese pinyin and characters follow the English translation for clarification.

4. Findings: the changing and unchanged tensions

The policy trajectory analysis reveals both changing and persisting tensions in internationalising Chinese HSS research. Changes manifest in two aspects: the rising policy attention on HSS research, and the transformation from a 'catching-up' mindset to a 'going-out' approach. Meanwhile, tensions persist in two forms: the constant negotiation between internationalisation and indigenisation, and the enduring hybridisation of ideological openness and vigilance.

4.1. Rising attention in national policy

At the outset of the Reform and Opening-up, science and technology have been regarded as a pivotal component of the Four Modernisations (meaning the national aspiration to modernise science and technology, industry, agriculture and national defence) and a driving engine for economic development (Deng, 1994c, 1994d). Consequently, science and technology have attracted strong policy attention. In contrast, HSS research was not in the spotlight. The period between 1978 and the early 2000s witnessed growing policy attention to HSS. The policy trajectory demonstrates an increased recognition of the historical value, cultural-ethical contribution and strategic importance of HSS research.

The HSS research in China has been interrupted by a series of political campaigns in the 1960s and 1970s (Yang et al., 2019). After resuming a leading role in the CPC and the central government in the late 1970s, Deng Xiaoping began directing the science and education sectors (Vogel, 2011). In the Science and Education Symposium on August 4, 1977, the first meeting that Deng chaired after his return to leadership, he underlined that science and education are crucial to the modernisation of China (Deng, 1994a). He further remarked: 'science certainly includes social sciences' (Deng, 1994a, p. 48). The symposium initiated the restoration of science and education from the Cultural Revolution. It was at the same symposium that the National College Entrance Exam (*gao kao*, 高考) was resumed (Luo, 2015). In 1980, the National Education Committee (which later became the MOE) published the *Opinions to Strengthen the Social Sciences Research in Higher Education Institutions*. It advocated restoring some social science disciplines that had been disrupted during the Cultural Revolution (such as politics, law, sociology, psychology, arts and economics) and established new disciplines (such as anthropology, demography and ethnology) (Zhang & Zhu, 2008).

In 1994, the National Education Committee published the *Opinions on the Improvement of Humanities and Social Sciences Research in Higher Education Institutions*, a 'milestone' document signalling 'the turning point of China's HSS' (Zhang & Zhu, 2008, p. 132). It acknowledged that the importance of HSS research has long been 'overlooked' in research policy, resulting in a gap between theoretical research in HSS and the practical needs of economic development (National Education Committee, 1994). It highlighted that HSS could promote not only cultural-ethical development, but also economic advancement. It also noted that some 'basic disciplines' (*jī chū xué kē*, 基础学科)—including literature, history and philosophy—may not serve the society directly, but they share a much larger ratio than 'practical disciplines' (*yīng yong xué kē*, 应用学科) in the HSS. The policy thereby advocated for a balance between different HSS disciplines. However, the document articulated that basic disciplines should not be neglected, as they are the 'cornerstones of a civilisation', which 'crystallise the cultural essence accumulated through the long history' (National Education Committee,

1994). The *Opinions* suggested offering financial support to universities and academics to develop HSS research. However, due to insufficient funding, it proposed to allocate funding with an emphasis on select 'key disciplines' (National Education Committee, 1994).

The status of HSS research further improved in the 2000s. On August 7, 2001, then President Jiang Zemin delivered a speech, arguing that improving HSS research is of vital importance for China. He also argued that HSS and sciences and technology are of equal significance with regard to knowing and changing the world, cultivating scientists, improving citizens' scientific literacies and managing personnel (Xinhua News Agency, 2001). In 2002, Jiang delivered another speech, pointing out that HSS research should improve innovations, contribute to the modernisation, adhere to academic integrity, keep guided by Marxism and learn from the world while inheriting and promoting Chinese culture (China Education Daily, 2002). Later that year, Jiang made another speech titled *The Importance of Philosophy and Social Sciences is Irreplaceable*. Jiang posed further requirements for the development of HSS (Xinhua News Agency, 2002).

In February 2003, the MOE published the *Opinions on Further Development of Philosophy and Social Sciences in Higher Education Institutions* as a follow-up to the speeches. The document announced the launch of the 'Programme for Vigorous Development of Philosophy and Social Sciences in Higher Education Institutions', and outlined several programs, such as the Program for Major Issues Research and the Program for Building Key Research Institutes (Ministry of Education, 2003). Subsequent policies further recognised the value, significance and impacts of HSS research, positioning it as 'the manifestation of the thinking ability, mental state, and civilisation of a country and a nation', 'the symbol of the cultural power' and 'a key strategic resource for the country' (Ministry of Education, 2006; National Planning Committee of Philosophy and Social Sciences, 2006). National programmes were initiated to support the development of HSS at 'key institutions', offering them joint-funding from the MOE, administrative offices and universities, to enhance research quality, foster theoretical innovation and improve talent cultivation (Ministry of Education, 2011d, 2012).

4.2. From 'learning from the West' to 'going out'

The improved status of HSS in national policy enabled a shift in its internationalisation approach, from a one-directional 'bringing-in' to a reciprocal 'going-out'. The transition was coupled with a repositioning of China's HSS in the world, from a humble learner to a proactive and responsible contributor. Furthermore, the changing positioning of Chinese HSS research enabled a re-imagining of the global HSS system, moving away from a hegemonic framework to an equal and shared common space.

The internationalisation of contemporary Chinese HSS research started with learning from the West. It was nested in the reality of deficit resources and a 'catching-up' mindset in the late 1970s. As Deng Xiaoping commented in 1977: 'Compared with developed countries, our science, technology, and education are lagging behind them for about twenty years' (Deng, 1994b). In a speech in 1979, Deng urged HSS academics to learn foreign languages if they can (Deng, 1994e). He explained that:

'We have acknowledged that compared with many countries, our sciences are lagging behind. Now we should admit that we also lag behind in our social sciences research, insofar as they are comparable in China and abroad. Our research level is low... Our ideological and theoretical researchers must make up their minds to catch up soon. ... Only by admitting we lag behind, can we no longer lag behind'. (Deng, 1994e, p. 181)

Chinese HSS research was then considered inferior not only to the science and technology research field, but also to the international HSS academia. The *Opinions on the Improvement of Humanities and Social*

Sciences Research in Higher Education Institutions in 1994 encouraged HSS academics to ‘pay attention to, try to understand, and do research about the cutting edge issues and trends in the world’ (National Education Committee, 1994). Academics were also expected to ‘learn from the advanced research in the global academia’ (National Education Committee, 1994).

The ‘learner’s attitude’ started to change in the early 2000s. In January 2004, the Central Committee of the CPC issued the *Opinions on Further Development of Philosophy and Social Sciences*. This document demonstrated the CPC’s determination to further develop the HSS in the following 10 years (The Communist Party of China Central Committee, 2004). Noticeably, it accentuated the importance of opening up HSS research to the world. It suggested that Chinese HSS researchers should broaden their knowledge exchange with international academia by introducing advanced methodologies, administrative experiences and pre-eminent research from the international context to China. Moreover, Chinese HSS researchers should also ‘go out’ (which means to export first-class research to the world) and enhance their influence in the world by translating their first-class works into English (The Communist Party of China Central Committee, 2004).

Several important national policies were then published in 2006, which associated the internationalisation of HSS with enhancing China’s global impact. The *National 11th Five-Year Plan for Philosophy and Social Sciences Research (2006–2010)* and the *Opinions on the Quality Improvement of Philosophy and Social Sciences Research* published in 2006 emphasised the significance of opening up HSS research to the world. They stated that China’s HSS researchers should not only continue knowledge exchanges with international academics, but also ‘go out’ (*zou chu qu*, 走出去) to broaden the international influence of China’s HSS (Ministry of Education, 2006; National Planning Committee of Philosophy and Social Sciences, 2006). The notion of ‘going out’ was reiterated by then President Hu Jintao in his *Report to the Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China*: ‘We will introduce outstanding achievements and distinguished scholars to the world arena’ (Hu, 2007).

The ‘going-out’ strategy continued to be emphasised in several national policies. The *National 12th Five-Year Plan for Philosophy and Social Sciences Research (2011–2016)* suggested to further implement the ‘going-out’ strategy, enhance academic exchange and communication, and increase the global influence of Chinese HSS research (National Planning Committee of Philosophy and Social Sciences, 2011). The *Opinions on Further and Vigorous Development of Philosophy and Social Sciences in Higher Education Institutions* outlined the mission of HSS research for the next ten years: to complete a Philosophy and Social Sciences innovation system which will contribute to the social and economic development. The document, together with a subsequent policy, underlined the ‘going-out’ strategy as an approach to innovation and gaining ‘discourse power’ (*hua yu quan*, 话语权, meaning the right to deliver opinions and the authority of the opinions) in the world (Ministry of Education, 2011b; Ministry of Education, & Ministry of Finance, 2011).

The ‘going-out’ of HSS was crystallised with a policy published by the MOE in 2011: the *‘Going-out’ Strategy for Philosophy and Social Sciences in Higher Education Institutions*. It outlined the missions of the ‘going-out’ strategy, namely, to improve Chinese higher education’s level of internationalisation, enhance China’s capacity of academic communications and increase China’s ‘discourse power’ and scholarly influences in the international academic community (Ministry of Education, 2011a). It proposed that research on global issues should be encouraged, outstanding research should be introduced to international audiences and HSS academics’ international publications should be stimulated. Universities were required to provide full support for this strategy through their procedures for academic evaluations, personnel assessment and resource allocation (Ministry of Education, 2011a). In 2016, President Xi Jinping’s keynote speech at a high-profile symposium on the development of HSS recommended that internationalising HSS

research should be ‘based on Chinese reality, and open to the world’, with aims not only to learn from international academia, but also to promote Chinese discourse internationally and gain global impacts (Xi, 2016).

Those policies voiced a pro-active stance and an intention to achieve global impacts. The ‘going-out’ of HSS was considered an essential way to improve China’s ‘discourse power’ (Ministry of Education, & Ministry of Finance, 2011; The Communist Party of China Central Committee, 2004, 2011). A relevant term deployed in policies was ‘cultural soft power’, which appeared in two policies published in 2011 (National Planning Committee of Philosophy and Social Sciences, 2011; The Communist Party of China Central Committee, 2011). In 2013, Xi explicitly addressed the relationship between ‘soft power’ and ‘discourse power’: ‘to enhance China’s soft power, we should strive to increase our discourse power in the world’, ‘give a good narrative of China’, ‘promote mutual development’ and ‘contribute to humankind’ (Xinhua News Agency, 2013).

Along with the transition of international approaches, the positioning of China’s HSS in human civilisation has shifted from a humble learner to a proactive and responsible contributor. In 1994, HSS academics were recommended to ‘draw upon the fruits of world civilisation’ (National Education Committee, 1994). However, the rhetoric started to change from the 2000s. In addition to learning from other civilisations, policies began to emphasise that Chinese culture ‘has made immortal contributions to the progress of humankind’ and will commit to further contributing to the progress of humankind (China Education Daily, 2002; The Communist Party of China Central Committee, 2011).

A recent policy further underscored the sense of responsibility for humankind, and advocated for developing HSS with ‘the care for humankind’ (*guan huai ren lei*, 关怀人类) (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 2017). This concept is new in the policies for the internationalisation of HSS, corresponding to the notion of ‘harmonious world’ (*he xie shi jie*, 和谐世界) and ‘building a community with a shared future for humankind’ (*gou jian ren lei ming yun gong tong ti*, 人类命运共同体). In 2005, then President Hu Jintao proposed the notion of ‘harmonious world’ in a speech delivered on the 60th Anniversary of the Founding of the United Nations (Hu, 2005). The notion was evolved based on traditional Chinese culture. It called for respecting different civilisations in an equal and open manner, reinforcing communications and dialogues between diversified civilisations, ‘seeking common ground while reserving differences’ (*qiu tong cun yi*, 求同存异), forming more harmonious relationships among humankind and joining hands to build a harmonious world where various civilisations coexist (Hu, 2005). The notion of ‘harmonious world’ was reiterated by Hu, stressing the need to respect each civilisation as independent and equal, and the willingness to foster mutual understandings and cooperation through inter-civilisation dialogues (e.g. Hu, 2007, 2009). The ‘community with a shared future for humankind’ was highlighted in China’s national policy discourses since the late 2000s, such as in *Hu Jintao’s Report to the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China* (Hu, 2007) and in Xi Jinping’s speeches (Xi, 2018). The notion conveys a re-imagining of the world, where the future of every nation and every country is so closely connected, that each should contribute to the global common good. The concept has taken root in the traditional Chinese philosophical belief that ‘all under heaven are of one family’ (*tian xia yi jia*, 天下一家) (Xi, 2018). In 2017 and 2018, it was added to the *Constitution of the Communist Party of China* and to the *Constitution of the People’s Republic of China*, showcasing its legitimate significance in the party-state (National People’s Congress, 2018; The Communist Party of China, 2017).

4.3. Negotiations between ‘Chinalisation’ and international standards

Despite the evolving internationalisation approaches, policies revealed a long-lasting demand on the ‘Chinalisation’ of HSS, coupled with constant attention to Western standards in HSS research evaluation.

A notion of the ‘Chinalisation’ (*Zhong guo hua*, 中国化) of HSS persisted in policy discourses. Although the *Opinions on the improvement of HSS research in higher education institutions* in 1994 encouraged Chinese HSS scholars to learn from the West, it also called for ‘a new HSS system with Chinese characteristics’ (National Education Committee, 1994). The connotation of ‘building a discourse system with Chinese characteristics’ was explained in the *Opinions on accelerating the construction of philosophy and social sciences with Chinese characteristics*:

‘Explain Chinese practice with Chinese theories, sublimate Chinese theory with Chinese practice, innovate the expressions to communicate outwards, and enhance the international discourse power’ (The Communist Party of China Central Committee, 2004).

Furthermore, policies have kept reminding universities and academics the importance of Chinese historical and cultural traditions (National Planning Committee of Philosophy and Social Sciences, 2006, 2011; The Communist Party of China Central Committee, 2004). Throughout the past decades, universities and academics were encouraged to develop the HSS with ‘Chinese characteristics’ (*Zhong guo te se*, 中国特色), ‘the Chinese style’ (*Zhong guo feng ge*, 中国风格) and in ‘an imposing Chinese manner’ (*Zhong guo qi pai*, 中国气派) (Ministry of Education, 2006, 2011b; Ministry of Education, & Ministry of Finance, 2011; The Communist Party of China Central Committee, 2011; Xinhua News Agency, 2002).

The central government has issued a series of policies to advise against the tendency to prioritise international outputs over domestic outputs or to prioritise publications in journals indexed by international citation indices. In the *Opinions on the quality improvement of Philosophy and Social Sciences research in higher education institutions* published in 2006, the MOE suggested to local education divisions and higher education institutions that they should establish quality-oriented systems of HSS research evaluation. Evaluations should respect national and international research, avoid the tendency to emphasise quantity over quality, respect the characteristics of HSS research and the distinct features of each discipline (Ministry of Education, 2006). The *Opinions on Further Improvement of the Evaluations on Philosophy and Social Sciences Research in Higher Education Institutions*, issued in 2011, remarked that citation indexes like SCI (Sciences Citation Index), SSCI (Social Sciences Citation Index), A&HCI (Arts and Humanities Citation Index) and CSSCI (Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index) should be treated rationally and deployed properly in research evaluations. Moreover, the document recommended that the general principle for research assessments was to consider peer review and opinions from society, qualitative assessment and quantitative assessment, process assessment and assessment of research outputs, and current and long-term influence of research. Institutions should avoid making judgments simply on the basis of the name and reputation of publishers or journals, and they should establish a systematic evaluation system that covers different types of achievements, disciplines and research domains (Ministry of Education, 2011c). A policy issued by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council (2018) echoed those suggestions, pointing out that the evaluation of academics should not be based on the number of publications in SCI journals or core journals, the ranking of citations or the ranking of impact factors.

In 2020, the central government issued a series of policies to firmly abolish the ‘supremacy of SCI’ (*SCI zhi shang*, SCI至上), requiring universities not to use SCI/SSCI/CSSCI-related metrics as the direct basis for the evaluation of universities, disciplines and academics (Ministry of Education, 2020; Ministry of Education, & Ministry of Science and Technology, 2020). Policies emphasised the importance of publications in domestic scientific journals and the impacts of research on society, economy and national security (Ministry of Education, 2020; Ministry of Science and Technology, 2020).

4.4. Hybridisation of ideological openness and vigilance

Ideological tensions are evident in the policies to internationalise China’s HSS, echoing the complex situation of academic freedom in Chinese higher education. The policy trajectory does not present a linear track from ideological vigilance to complete openness or the other way around. Rather, a review of the policies reveals a long-lasting hybridisation of and oscillations between ideological openness and vigilance.

Prior to the Reform and Opening-up, HSS research was disrupted with strong political influences, as Deng stated in a meeting with the CPC Central Committee in 1979: ‘There had been too many forbidden zones, too little attention and support’ (Deng, 1994e, p. 181). In the same speech, Deng reasserted the principle of ‘letting a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend’ (*bai hua qi fang, bai jia zheng ming*; 百花齐放, 百家争鸣) (Deng, 1994e, p. 183). This principle was initially proposed by Mao Zedong at an Enlarged Meeting of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee in 1956 (Mao, 1999). Mao drew on the metaphor of blooming flowers in the springtime and the contention of a hundred schools of thought during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods, to advocate for diversity and academic freedom in arts and scientific research. This principle was intended for anti-dogmatism and the depoliticisation of arts and scientific research (Huang, 2019). As Mao stated:

‘Letting a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend is a guiding principle to promote the development of arts and the progress of sciences, and a principle to foster the prosperity of the socialist culture in China. In arts, different forms and styles should develop freely; in sciences, different schools of thought should contend freely. It is harmful to the growth of arts and sciences, if administrative measures are used to impose one particular style or one specific school of thought, and to ban another.’ (Mao, 1977a, p. 388)

This principle was later named as ‘double-hundred guiding principles’ (*shuang bai fang zhen*, 双百方针), with its remit extended from guiding arts and scientific research to guiding ‘everything’ (Mao, 1977b, p. 415). However, the extension of its application has undesirably led to and ended up with the Anti-Right Movement and Cultural Revolution from the late 1950s to 1970s (Lu, 1986).

Only after when Deng reasserted that the ‘double-hundred guiding principles’ was for HSS, did it reassume its guiding position in the arts and sciences. Despite previous disruptions, the principle’s connotation for academic freedom and epistemic diversity is liberating, particularly for HSS research. Since 1979, the principle can be spotted throughout important speeches and national policies for the internationalisation of HSS (Deng, 1994e; Ministry of Education, 2004, 2006; Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, & Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 2019; Ministry of Science and Technology, Ministry of Education, Chinese Academy of Science, Chinese Academy of Engineering, & National Natural Science Foundation of China, 2003; National Education Committee, 1994; National Planning Committee of Philosophy and Social Sciences, 2006, 2011; The Communist Party of China Central Committee, 2004, 2011; Xi, 2016; Xinhua News Agency, 2002).

Deng also made efforts to establish an independent HSS research institution—the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), which acquired its position as an independent ministry directly under the State Council in 1977. The independent administrative status enabled CASS a relatively knowledge-focused and research-concentrated environment, free from pressures to impart governmental propaganda (Vogel, 2011).

Nonetheless, ‘blooming flowers’ do not grow in a vacuum. Powerful ideological guidance has been forming a solid ground underneath and an invisible cordon around the academic space. Many politicians and scholars have reflected upon the ‘double-hundred guiding principle’ and its aftermath in the 1950s and 1960s. Major debates were raised about the relationship between ‘unlimited freedom’ for academic discussions

and the politicisation of such discussions (Xia, 2008). The central government's answer was to supplement the 'double-hundred guiding principle' with an '*er wei*' (二为, 'two for-s') slogan, meaning 'serving for the people and for Socialism' (People's Daily, 1980). Although the '*er wei*' slogan attempted to depoliticise HSS research by replacing the previous slogan of 'arts for politics' (People's Daily, 1980), it once again asserted the ideological boundary around the liberation. In a speech to the CPC Central Committee in 1980, Deng argued that the 'double-hundred guiding principle' was not in conflict with the fundamental pursuit of 'stability and unity' (*an ding tuan jie*, 安定团结). He stressed that the principle would be misinterpreted or misused if it was applied without considering stability and unity (Deng, 1994d).

The examination of policies since 1978 reveals that all documents articulating the 'double-hundred guiding principle' emphasised the guidance of Marxism. As underlined by President Xi: 'Upholding the guidance of Marxism is the fundamental symbol that distinguishes contemporary Chinese HSS from other HSS' (Xi, 2016). As part of the Marxism with Chinese characteristics, the thoughts of national leaders have formed vital components of national policies. For instance, the *Opinions on the improvement of Humanities and Social Sciences research in higher education institutions* published in 1994 highlighted Deng Xiaoping's theory on building Socialism with Chinese characteristics, and subsequently calling for 'a new HSS system with Chinese characteristics' (National Education Committee, 1994). Theories proposed by past and present national and CPC leaders were presented as 'guiding thoughts' in every policy document, such as Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Thought of 'Three Represents' proposed by Jiang Zemin, the Scientific Outlook on Development proposed by Hu Jintao and the Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. In particular, a guidebook on the evaluation of HSS research published by MOE stressed the need to uphold 'the guiding position of Marxism in the research and evaluation of HSS, the correct political directions, and the basic principle to evaluate the quality based on core values of Socialism' (Ministry of Education Science Committee, 2016, p. 11). The *Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of Philosophy and Social Sciences with Chinese Characteristics* published in 2017 further advocated for the adherence to the guiding position of Marxism in HSS, and consolidated Marxism's position as 'the first-level foundational discipline' (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 2017).

The CASS, an independently-run ministry-level HSS research organisation as it is, operates around three orientations (*san da ding wei*, 三大定位): 'strive to become a strong battlefield (*zhen di*, 阵地) of Marxism, strive to become an important think tank and brain trust (*zhi nang tuan*, 智囊团) for the CPC Central Committee and the State Council, and strive to become the highest palace (*dian tang*, 殿堂) of HSS research in China' (Chinese Social Sciences Today, 2017). The 'three orientations' built on previous statements by CPC leaders including then President Jiang in the 1990s and Hu in the 2000s. The exact term and its meanings were articulated in the congratulatory letter from the CPC Central Committee to CASS on its 30th anniversary of establishment in 2007, and were incorporated by CASS in its institutional mission and operation (Chinese Social Sciences Today, 2017). These gestures demonstrate that, in essence, the 'independence' of CASS lies more in its administration but not ideological orientations.

Policies conveyed a cautious tone towards the norms and ideologies of international HSS academia and Chinese academics' engagement with it. The National Education Committee (1994) argued that 'most HSS disciplines fall into the ideological remits and are closely related to politics.' Thereby, HSS academics were advised to 'adhere to the right direction of research' (Ministry of Education, 2006; National Education Committee, 1994). Chinese HSS scholars were also advised against importing knowledge indiscriminately or adapting Western ideologies uncritically to avoid possible 'erosion' (The Communist Party of China Central Committee, 2004). Such warnings echoed President Jiang Zemin and Xi Jinping's speeches, which required Chinese HSS researchers to remain guided by Marxism, draw critically from international theories

and research outputs, and preserve Chinese culture during international knowledge exchange (China Education Daily, 2002; Xi, 2016). In 2020, the Ministry of Education's policy on HSS research evaluation explicitly maintained that Chinese HSS researchers should not 'deliberately dwarf or vilify China' (*keyi aihua chouhua zhongguo*, 刻意矮化丑化中国) or 'damage national sovereignty security and national interests' for the sake of publishing internationally.

5. Discussion and conclusion

By analysing national policies in the past four decades, this study reveals the changing and unchanged tensions in internationalising Chinese HSS research. The positioning of HSS has been evolved and coupled with growing policy attention, and the internationalisation approach has transformed from one-way 'bringing-in' to reciprocal 'going-out'. Nonetheless, tensions persisted, as demonstrated by the constant negotiations between 'Chinese HSS' and international standards, and the long-lasting hybridisation of ideological openness and vigilance. Three discussion points depart from the findings: the shifted power paradigm in global HSS, the wrestling between internationalisation and indigenisation (or more specifically 'Chinalisation'), and the mismatches between policies and its application.

5.1. The shifted power paradigm in global HSS research

Power is an important concept in the internationalisation of HSS. Nye (2004) explained that the concept of 'soft power' arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals and policies. In the context of China, 'discourse power' is considered the ability to deliver opinions with authority and impacts, which is an essential part of the 'soft power' and an important vehicle for promoting the influences of China (C. Zhao & Lv, 2008; Zheng, 2011). In global research, Knight and De Wit (2018) noted the rising concept of 'research as a form of soft power' (p. 3) in the context of new knowledge production and application. The policy discourses about the 'soft power' and 'discourse power' in China demonstrated the growing attention to the knowledge power paradigm. Knight and De Wit (2018) suggested that the notion of knowledge/research as a power was 'characterised by competitiveness, dominance, and self-interest' (p. 3), but policy discourses in China did not mainly address the 'self-interest'. Rather, the framing of 'soft power' in the Chinese context displayed a willingness to contribute to global exchanges and mutual benefits through knowledge production and sharing (Xinhua News Agency, 2013; C. Zhao & Lv, 2008). The internationalisation of Chinese HSS was coupled with a growing commitment to contributing to the 'global common good' (Marginson, 2016).

The 'self-interest-free' power paradigm sits in China's changing self-positioning and self-perceived responsibilities. The inferior 'catching-up' mentality has been replaced by a proactive 'going-out' strategy, and most recently, a reciprocal concept to 'build a community with a shared future for humankind'. The self-positionality of China's HSS has transformed and progressed from being a humble learner to a responsible contributor full of agency. Although when benchmarked against its Western counterparts, Chinese HSS research remains less visible in the world, it is no longer perceived as 'lagging behind' in national policies. Instead, Chinese HSS academics were advised to consider themselves as equal to their international counterparts, actively 'going out' to exchange knowledge and foster meaningful dialogues.

The shifted power paradigm of Chinese HSS has implications for global academia. It provides an example of rejecting the reproduction of global hegemonic power. This is relevant to systems both outside and within the normatively framed global knowledge 'centres' (Alatas, 2003; Altbach, 2009; Galtung, 1971). In China, the policy discourses convey a decreasing dependency on the international realm, which is often dominated by the Anglo-European systems. The decreasing dependency is coupled with increased attention to the value of endogenous knowledge and tradition, and the resistance to translating global

hegemonic powers into national system. The government's recent moving away from emphasising international publications in research evaluation is a telling example (Ministry of Education, 2020; Ministry of Education, & Ministry of Science and Technology, 2020; Ministry of Science and Technology, 2020). Furthermore, China's transformation from a passive learner to an active contributor, along with the proposed 'self-interest-free' power paradigm, suggests possibilities of changes — both for the (self) positioning of national systems, and for global academic community. The democratisation and decolonisation of knowledge have been well articulated in a wealth of literature (e.g. Dawson, 2020; Santos, 2007). This article's investigation on Chinese HSS tests their visibility and viability in policy terms.

5.2. 'Chinalisation' of HSS research

The shifted positioning of Chinese HSS research was enabled by the endeavour for indigenisation, or in the policy discourse, 'Chinalisation' (*zhong guo hua*, 中国化). As this article reveals, Chinese national policies kept reminding higher education institutions and HSS researchers the values of historical and cultural traditions, highlighting the significance of the 'Chinalisation' of HSS, and cautioning against prioritising international standards in research evaluation.

In policy discourses, this article identifies three aspects of 'Chinalisation' or 'Chinese characteristics' in HSS research: epistemically, to respect and inherit historical, cultural and philosophical roots of Chinese traditions; ideologically, to uphold Marxism with Chinese characteristics; and practically, to set agenda on Chinese reality and bring impacts on contemporary China. The three aspects are not separated but closely intertwined. For instance, the 'Marxism with Chinese characteristics' drew much from the philosophical, cultural and historical Chinese traditions, and is shaping the political, educational and research practices in contemporary China. The triple connotation of 'Chinalisation' adds indigenous cultural awareness, political sensitivity and pragmatic orientations to Chinese HSS research. The three dimensions of 'Chinalisation' apply not only to HSS research, but to contemporary Chinese higher education and academic research in general. The multi-layered connotation echoes the interpretation of 'Chinese characteristics' as a loaded term in political, socio-cultural, economic and academic senses (Lo' and Pan, 2020).

One major challenge for the indigenisation of China's HSS resulted from the hybridisation of and oscillation between ideological openness and vigilance. Chinese HSS research carries the baggage of historically being 'the forefront of political, ideological and cultural battlegrounds' (K. Liu, 2018, p. 257). Although the depoliticisation of science and technology has facilitated the booming development of science (Marginson, 2018), Chinese HSS research faced difficulty in decoupling with political influences. The close associations between HSS research and politics in China appear paradoxical. On the one hand, the situation aligns with the historical tradition and aspirations of Chinese intellectuals to serve the state and contribute to the society (Zha & Shen, 2018) with free will, dedication and a sense of social responsibility. On the other hand, the political imprints could pose challenges for HSS academics, such as reported by Gao and Zheng (2018), by creating sensitivity with ideological correctness and complexity within academic freedom. Academic freedom in Chinese HSS research is conditioned. Despite the efforts and commitments to 'letting a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend', certain 'flowers' and 'schools of thought', such as Marxism, are prioritised among all HSS disciplines, whereas some face close scrutiny under ideological lenses.

Another critique about the indigenisation of Chinese HSS is the 'Chinese exceptionalism' (K. Liu, 2018, p. 242), as indigenising one culture comes with a potential danger to 'demonise' 'the others' (X. Zhou, 2006, p. 105). Nonetheless, policies have proposed a potentially inclusive landscape for the indigenisation and internationalisation of Chinese HSS. Policies demonstrated an increasing level of 'cultural self-awareness', when the self-reflection and indigenisation of one's own

culture could build the foundation for multi-cultural dialogues in a world of 'harmony with diversity' (*he er bu tong*, 和而不同) (Fei, 2015, p. 51). Furthermore, the imaginary 'community with a shared future for humankind' went beyond the dichotomy between China and 'the other'. It moved away from a hegemonic framing of the world system and orientations on nation-states. Moreover, it presented the possibility of an all-inclusive and reciprocal world system, such as the *Tianxia* (all-under-heaven, 天下) system, which originated from traditional Chinese practices and cultural imaginary (T. Zhao, 2016).

Discussing the paradoxical picture of 'internationalising (HSS) research with Chinese characteristics' is crucial to understanding Chinese higher education and research in a nuanced manner. Higher education systems differ. When approaching each system, contextualisation is the key to unpacking specific historical, cultural and political baggage.

As this study shows, Chinese HSS constantly sits in an 'in-between' status. It swings between internationalisation and Chinalisation, international reputation and national mission, global knowledge and indigenous traditions, ideological openness and vigilance. Being in-between is not being in limbo. Rather than being 'either-or' or 'neither-nor', the in-betweenness is a 'both-and' position that creates hybridity and possibility — just like Schrödinger's cat that is both alive and dead, and like the 'zhong yong' (中庸, 'the Golden Mean') philosophy in Chinese tradition where being in-between is most desirable. This study shows that for Chinese HSS, it is both international and Chinese, both ideological open and vigilant. The in-betweenness explains the tensions, ambivalence, and often seemingly self-conflicting dilemma, such as why Chinese HSS can appear both 'open' and 'closed' in the ideological sense. The in-betweenness of Chinese HSS research has not been fully examined in scholarships departing from non-Chinese (often Anglo-European) angles. The complexity may be difficult to comprehend when benchmarked against other contexts, or when perceived by those more comfortable with a 'black-or-white' binary mindset. This article thereby joins the body of scholarship to contextualise Chinese higher education and research (e.g. Lo' and Pan, 2020; Mok, 2021; Yang, 2020; Zha & Hayhoe, 2014; Zha & Shen, 2018), with further information, nuanced discussion, and a mindset beyond dichotomic paradigms.

5.3. Mismatches between national policies, institutional implementation, and individual interpretation

Mismatches, discrepancies and delays could arise between governmental policy discourses, institutional administrative practices, and individual interpretation. As this article reveals, governmental policies could demonstrate farsightedness and balance, but universities do not always implement them as intended. For instance, most incentives for HSS international publications in Chinese universities had been prioritising international citation indices, despite the series of policy warnings issued by the MOE in the past decade (e.g. Ministry of Education 2011b; General Office of the CPC Central Committee & General Office of the State Council, 2018; Ministry of Education, & Ministry of Science and Technology, 2020). Such phenomena showcased a mixture of 'going-out' in theory and 'borrowing-from-the-West' in practice at the institutional level (Xu et al., 2019). Individual HSS academics' responses to the policies on HSS evaluation also vary across different institutions, disciplines, career stages, and academic backgrounds (Xu, 2020c; Xu et al., 2021). The mismatches between policies and practices at different levels pose scholarly and practical implications. It is worthwhile to examine the reasons behind the discrepancies, and explore ways to improve the synergies across different actors at the macro, meso, and micro levels.

The year 2020 has witnessed significant national policy changes regarding the internationalisation and indigenisation of research in China (Ministry of Education, 2020; Ministry of Education, & Ministry of Science and Technology, 2020; Ministry of Science and Technology, 2020). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has been reshaping global research (Xu, 2020a). The higher education and research relationships between China and other systems have been transforming under

geopolitical tensions. Against such a backdrop, the landscape of internationalising Chinese HSS research is likely to change. This article explored the internationalisation of HSS in mainland China at the macro policy level and up to year 2020. How national policies will evolve in the post-pandemic era, and how institutions and individuals will interpret and operationalise the policies may be of interest to future studies.

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