High Education as a Common Good in China: A Case Study for Ideas and Practice

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"Education breeds confidence. Confidence breeds hope. Hope breeds peace."
Confucius, Chinese philosopher (551-479 BC)

China began its modern system of higher education with the establishment of the former Peking University in Beijing in 1898. The traditional Confucian philosophy of education has been replaced dramatically by modern western philosophy. However, since the communist party came to power in 1949, the philosophy of higher education has experienced many more dramatic changes. In Mao's time between 1949 and 1976, Maoism philosophy largely displaced Western, so-called capitalistic, philosophy and dominated Chinese higher education for almost 30 years. One consequence was the closing of universities to middle school graduates during the Cultural Revolutionary era. Higher education resumed in 1977, when China began the new era of openness and reform. This essay will explore how Chinese higher education has sought to provide for the common good since that time. I will introduce the meaning of the "common good" in its Chinese cultural context, and then I will describe the dominant ideas of education philosophy and how the idea of the common good encourages an alternative approach for higher education. Finally, I will use my own experiences as a case study to explain how the mechanism of service-learning can help students realize and contribute to the common good.

The significance of the Common Good in the Chinese Context

To help contextualize my essay, I have followed the English- language literature about Chinese philanthropy that uses "common good" to refer to the local concept for "gongyi" (public good), which has historically represented the social act of doing good to others beyond one's immediate family. In the Chinese context gongyi is more inclusive than the concept of charity: "cishan1" (literally compassion and kindness). It may include individual charitable giving to the needy in ordinary life or in emergency, and also civic improvement projects for the collective such as building hospitals, schools or roads and so on (Tsu 1912, Smith 2009). But compared with the Western context, gongyi means less with regard to social justice and freedom, which are central to the definition of the common good in the western context.

The dominant ideology surrounding the common good in Imperial China was the Confucian concept of "ren" as a supreme moral virtue ("de") that is inherent in humanity, yet requiring cultivation throughout one's lifetime (Tsu 1912: 16). Both Confucius and Mencius see ren as "to love all men", which is a distinguishing character of a noble and superior human being (8). While the moral framework for philanthropy changed over time in relation to the moral attribution of poverty (Liang 2005), due to the orthodox status of Confucian teaching, various Confucian concepts provided the primary ideological foundations for philanthropic conduct and organizations in most periods of Imperial China.

It should be noted that such Confucian teaching has been influenced by the Buddhist teaching of "ci" (compassion) since its introduction to China in the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 BCE); ci is seen as the primary means to gain merit that results in good karma (Tsu 1912: 20).

This is in contrast to the Taoist masters Zhuang Zi and Lao Zi's formulation of philanthropic deeds ("xing shan") as a flawed outgrowth of human nature that disturbs human wellbeing (ibid: 18). This is because Taoist teaching regards the primary goal of human beings as following the "tao" (rule of nature), rather than being guided by any cultivated moral sentiments. Because of the deep influence of Confucian philosophy, the concept of the common good has deep connections with education (Tsui 1912). The grassroots philanthropic organizations and schools that flourished in the Late Ming and Qing Dynasty were predominantly managed and founded by Confucian intellectuals and retired politicians to promote the Confucian ideals of "xiu shen" (self-cultivation), "jie" (chastity) and "xiao" (filial piety) (Smith 2009).

All of these promote the ideal of the common good as building a "fellowship of goodness" that embraces both rich and poor through philanthropy without a donor-recipient boundary (Smith 2009: 3). Because of this framing of giving and receiving philanthropy as moral cultivation for both parties, the philanthropists emphasized selecting virtuous people as worthy recipients and discriminated against those who were seen as immoral according to Confucian standards.

Confucian rituals and morals also gave rise to four ideal figures of the worthy recipient: the aged, the orphan, the widow, and the sick. Care for the aged is mainly motivated by the patriarchal respect for the elderly; care for orphans is impelled by ancestral worship; and care for widows is engendered by the Confucian cult for female chastity (Tsu 1912). These four figures correspond to four major institutions of benevolent societies: the foundling homes for abandoned infants, poorhouses for the destitute elderly, public dispensaries for the helpless sick, and widows' homes for chaste widows (Leung 1993: 10). This emphasis on moral values rather than the degree of poverty in determining the "worthiness" of the poor was sustained throughout Qing China (Leung 1993:24). It was only from the Late Qing to the Republican period that organizations for the common good started to target a broader range of beneficiaries regardless of their morality, including the unemployed, young men lacking filial piety, young criminals, and prostitutes (Huang 2011: 3).

Furthermore, the Confucian ideals of female chastity (jie) and patriarchy were used to justify strict gender segregation within the philanthropic organization (Leung 1993, Rogaski 1997, Shue 2006, Chin 2013,). For instance, in a widows' home, the living and working spaces of female and male residents were separated. While the women and female children were taught practical skills such as embroidery or knitting and were not allowed to leave the charity unless accompanied by a male, the male children of the widows and the male orphans would receive basic education in reading and writing in the elementary school ("yixue") affiliated with these charities (Shue 2006: 420).

Ordinary traditional Chinese ethics have been widely held to be particularistic (Yan 2011) and relational (Ames 2011) by philosophers and anthropologists. This is well summarized in Fei Xiaotong's (1992 [1947]) theory of "differential mode of association" ("chaxu geju") – in essence, people develop self-centered relatedness to others with differential moral obligations. However, since 1911, the continuous social changes occurring during the emergence of modern China not only overthrew the dynasty and empire, but also rejected the Confucian ideology. Both the western liberal values and Marxism have fundamentally challenged the Confucius ideology of the common good as described above. Two drastically different ethics were promoted by the state during the Maoist and Post-Mao periods. In Maoist China, the state promoted a collective ethics

of "da gong" (great public good): one shall serve others equally as "a member of a collective self" (Feuchtwang 2009: 8), which shall be derived from an elimination of the "si" (private, self-interest) (ibid: 7).

In contrast, the Post-Mao state promotes an individualistic ethics of "gong" that endorses the public-minded individuals derived from an ethics of the "enterprising-self" (Yan 2009a). Such ideological transformation since the era of Maoist China has left scholars wondering whether both Maoism and capitalism transformed the particularism of Chinese ordinary ethics, and whether "differential mode of association" is still a useful concept to understand contemporary Chinese moral life.

However, the Confucius tradition has never really been demolished. In recent years, even the China Communist Party has encouraged a Confucian renaissance. The Confucian value is embedded into the so-called Socialism Core Values, which are regarded as the official version of understanding of the common good in contemporary China. These values are welcomed widely because they include the core values in global modern ideas, such as liberalism: democracy, freedom, equality, justice, and rule of law, along with Confucian ideals of patriotism, dedication, integrity, friendship, civility and harmony. The politics of virtue in China have always favored this approach because it attempts to absorb all the merit. The problem for higher education is the same as in Deborah Mindry's framing (2001: 1205), "how is virtue deployed as a means of exercising power?"

The Transition of High Education in the PRC and the Emergence of Higher Education as a Common Good

As in other communist countries, the purpose of higher education in the People's Republic of China is always to acculturate the elite to serve the state. In 1952, all universities and colleges were reformed to follow the model of the former Soviet Union. (24) Universities with a religious affiliation or background were closed or transformed, and 65 private universities were nationalized. From that time on, all universities became nearly uniform; industry and technology became the only acceptable areas for majors and degree programs. All humanities and social science programs were cancelled. Before 1977, higher education was just a part of the party-state machine and had nothing to do with the common good.

In 1977, the Cultural Revolution had ended and Chinese universities began to call for students again through the National College Entrance Examination. With the open reform policy, higher education helped many Chinese youth to begin thinking independently and freely about China's anti-poverty development and about how China could involve itself into the world. All of the 1980s were a golden time of higher education's emergence as a common good even if at that time the universities did not intentionally select the common good as their purpose. The times permitted the students to do so.

After 1989, with the restriction of the political environment, education became more strictly controlled than in the1980s. All higher education moved toward market (economic) considerations. Since 1990, about 1,000 separate universities have been incorporated into 412 mega universities. Concurrently, they have been encouraged by the Chinese Department of Education to recruit many more students to the campuses. The focus of higher education was to

fulfill the need of the market economy. Programs such as the MBA and computer engineering were highly welcomed but the humanities and social sciences were seen as superfluous majors. Students began to regarded higher education as the means to gain good-salary jobs and nothing else. Sadly, universities had little energy, encouragement or capability to connect higher education with the common good.

In the most recent ten years, many university leaders and teachers have gradually questioned this trend of higher education marketization. And some universities have initiated experiments encouraging a liberal arts education in the university, thus seeking a solution to the dominance of market and economic interests. Liberal arts education was seen as expanding the students' knowledge and cultivating their sense of virtue, thus connecting their education with the common good. This movement toward accepting the liberal arts allowed some teachers and students to work together to establish an awareness of the role of higher education as a common good and to create a platform for students to reflect on issues such as social justice or the environment. These educational reformers have found that the most popular approach to teaching is developmental education supported by service-learning. It is thus an important case study for understanding the role of higher education in China as contributing to the public good.

The Role of Service−Learning: A Case Study

Most Chinese universities encourage their students to do service at village, factory or even military sites, and they expect the students to express their happiness with socialism and to become the new youth of communism. During the time of Maoist state socialist engineering, all volunteerism was mobilized by the party state, rendering any self-organized act of philanthropy to be capitalistic, morally corrupt, and illegal--as well as being seen as a threat to the state's political authority, which ironically was primarily derived from its promise of equal welfare to all (Rolandsen 2008:125). Such volunteerism was realized through mass mobilization campaigns ("qunzhong yundong") where people were mobilized to transform themselves into selves that were selflessly ("wu si") devoted to the collective ("da gong") as opposed to any private ("si") interest (Feuchtwang 2009:6).

By contrast, since the economic reform towards marketization in the 1980s and the subsequent welfare reform in the 1990s, the state has gradually attempted to redefine and reincorporate voluntarism to help address its deficient welfare services on behalf of the "new" groups of poor (Cho 2013). Accompanying this has been the state's rejection of class-based politics and a redefinition of gong as "public-mindedness based on personal morality" (Feuchtwang 2009:8). This has been followed by growing efforts from philanthropic pioneers to modernize and mobilize more resources for the nonprofit sector. Most Chinese experiments involving service –learning and developmental education are based on this theory. This paper will introduce the pioneering experiment into which I have been involved for eleven years at the Sun Yat-Sen University (SYSU).

At SYSU, service-learning and development education are arranged through the General Education Core Curriculum Program. Starting in 2009, SYSU began implementing a general education core curriculum program distinct from most other Chinese universities. The newly designed "General Education Core Curriculum" consists of four main categories: Chinese civilization; global perspectives, technology; economy and society; and fundamental and classic

humanities readings. Students are required to complete all four categories during their freshman and sophomore years. In 2010, the university began requiring full-time undergraduates in arts, science and engineering majors to finish 16 credits of general education courses during their undergraduate studies (including 12 credits of specified general education core courses and 4 credits of elective general education courses). Specific provisions on credits for students from different majors were also stated.

The course, which I teach, "Civic Society and Development", derives its underlying ideas from the global development education program initiated by British educators and International Oxfam. The purpose of the course is to make the students understand the status of poverty, the environment, health, and other global issues. Students are encouraged to learn to reflect on their current community life and to develop an understanding of how civil society can contribute to addressing these problems.

The concept of "learning-action-sharing," which refers to students taking action during learning and learning by taking action, defines the core of the course. Encouraging students to engage in exchanges, sharing, and learning together ultimately enables them to thrive as citizens and employees. In 2007, Service-learning pedagogy was first introduced to the course, which aimed to enhance students' learning by expanding it from the lectures and classroom discussions to active service and community engagement to supplement the classroom learning.

Before the course even begins, a course curriculum team drafts several topics that can be developed through service-learning and then designs group projects for the upcoming semester. Students from the course may elect the service-learning component based on their personal preference (or not), but if they do then they also pick a specific service-learning group according to their interests.

Service-learning topics for the semester are determined by current social issues then important in society locally; corresponding community organizations with which we are in contact are also identified. Past topics have included cultural preservation, labor issues, public dissemination of information, gender and health, environment, urban-rural interaction, community support for agricultural improvement, public welfare management surveys, philanthropy law and policy, and philanthropy creativity. Hong Kong's Lingnan University collaborated with SYSU by funding the cultural preservation group activities.

In 2012, this course was renamed "Civil Society and Philanthropy" because philanthropy is easier to be understood in the Chinese context, and it shares a similar meaning as "development" in the global development discourse. The concept of service-learning has been closely linked with SYSU's course on Civic Society and Philanthropy. As the planner of the course, I believe that service-learning only truly occurs when there is organic, authentic contact with the community. In addition, these experiences allow students consciously to apply theoretical knowledge in community services and, reciprocally, to bring community service experiences to classroom learning. After many years of implementation, we can now conclude that these practices have allowed us to achieve the following:

Improving Students' Service Skills with both Theory and Knowledge. Based on my research and teaching experiences as a professor of anthropology, I have developed a set of

systematic and logical teaching materials for Civic Society and Philanthropy. The course consists of five sessions, namely: social transformation and civil society; active citizenship and community building; philanthropy organizations and cross-border cooperation; philanthropy policy and advocacy; and philanthropy culture and ecology.

Agency Supervisors as Guest speakers. Agency supervisors providing service-learning opportunities to the students are invited as guest speakers for different lectures, thus bringing information about specific agencies to the whole class. While there, the agency representative not only introduces relevant topics (such as cultural preservation) but also shares information about the agency's development and other personal experiences. There are two reasons for including the guest speakers. First, the experiences of the agency supervisor can serve as a case example for both the course instructor and the students. It enables students to understand the agency's services and to analyze its development using knowledge gained in the classroom. This ultimately enhances the students' comprehension of the current situation regarding civil society in China. The second reason is to increase resource exchange between the university and the community. Through participating in discussions with university professors and students, the agency supervisor may gain insights about this generation of university students' current situation and ways to engage students for the development of the agency's projects after the course has concluded.

Guests Lecturers Deepened Students' Theoretical Understanding. Apart from lectures by the course instructor and the agency supervisor, other guest lecturers were invited to share their practical experiences in the community. Students' understanding of the lecture material was deepened from different perspectives. For example, Prof. Chan Kin-man from the Chinese University of Hong Kong was invited to talk about citizenship and civic quality and to help students understand individual citizen identity and their individual role in the community.

Combination of Course Assessment and Service-Learning. While the service-learning component was not a compulsory requirement in the Civic Society and Philanthropy course, all students were highly encouraged to participate. The overall course assessment was primarily based on the students' individual final reports, which were completed at the end of semester. All students, whether they had participated in service-learning or not, were peer-assessed by their fellow classmates and graded according to the final report. For the students who participated in service-learning, the agency supervisors and tutors were also invited to grade student performance. Grading criteria include attendance in group activities and contribution to group activities. At last, the marks from different stakeholders were summed in order to assign each student a final grade.

Combination of Course and Workshop. In response to students' needs for engaging effectively in service-learning, four workshops were organized. The first two workshops targeted both the agency supervisors and the tutors, while the last two workshops targeted all of the service-learning students. While the workshops covered a wide range of topics, the main purpose was to allow the agency supervisors, the tutors, and the students to gain a better understanding of different service-learning elements through a series of sharing and reflections activities.

Through the four workshops, the course instructor had an opportunity to engage in a dialogue with the students, which increased his understanding of students' needs and allowed

him to develop the process of service-learning. This was an effective way of reflection for both the instructor and the students. These kinds of workshops served as a platform for students to exchange with not only the teachers, but also their peers. The students experienced personal growth, increased their knowledge about fellow group members, and deepened their understanding of the meaning of community service.

Results. In learning through service, students actively explored the resources around them and contemplated the relationship between individuals, the campus, the community and society at large. Under the guidance of the service agency and the tutors, students initiated a wide-range of activities, each of which addressed a different group's topic. The results of these service-learning activities were thus very encouraging.

Service-Learning Assessment and Prospects

In order to conduct student assessments, the service-learning questionnaire developed by Hong Kong's Lingnan University was adopted. The pre-test questionnaire was conducted three weeks before service-learning projects began, and the post-test questionnaire was conducted three weeks after the end of course, both of which were completed online. 138 students answered the pre-test questionnaire while 83 students answered the post-test questionnaire. The students included in our sampling completed both questionnaires. After selection, we retained 160 questionnaires (80 pre-test questionnaires and 80 post-test questionnaires). Detailed analysis is as follows:

Service-Learning Outcomes. Seven aspects, including communication skills, organizational skills, social competence, problem-solving skills, research skills, positive attitude, and overall satisfaction were evaluated through the pre-test and post-test questionnaire (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Service-Learning Outcomes (1=Lowest, 10=Highest)*

Aspects	Pre-test		Post-test		Difference	T-test
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Communication skills	6.93	1.61	6.54	1.79	-0.39	1.32
Organizational skills	7.07	1.37	6.90	1.57	-0.17	0.71
Social competence	7.78	1.02	7.49	1.45	-0.29	1.43
Problem solving ability	7.19	1.34	7.08	1.43	-0.11	0.47
Research skills	5.69	2.04	6.37	1.84	0.68	-2.23**
Positive attitude	8.05	1.32	7.79	1.52	-0.26	1.2
Overall satisfaction	8.89	1.18	8.29	1.76	-0.60	2.7
Note. **p<.01; ***p<.001						

The results were found that students gave themselves lower marks in all aspects except for research skills after participating in service-learning. It is very likely because students nowadays are over-confident in their abilities and general understanding. They thought they had a deep understanding of society, but they learned much more about the society through reading

books and engaging in simple voluntary services. Thus, they graded themselves better in the pre-test questionnaire.

After the field trips to the community, they had a chance to contact community organizations, talk to people in need, and conduct interviews. Students gradually realized their individual relationship with the society was minimal and their involvement in the society was limited. Some of the students began questioning their communication skill, organizational skills, social competence, and problem solving skills. On this aspect, the current SYSU service-learning programs still has room for improvement. First, we have to understand that students will be shocked and may even feel doubtful about themselves when they are initially immersed in a community. Instead of merely "releasing" students from the ivory tower of higher education, service-learning also must guide students to proactively enter the community, to understand the community, and to serve the community. Only when students are seriously serving in the community might they realize the importance of understanding the community needs from the community's own perspective and of appreciating the community members' own sense of how to better improve themselves. Through this kind of experience, students are able to understand the relationship between an individual and the society, as well as the individual's responsibilities for the society. This is what we call cultivation of civic awareness as well as the future direction of improving the practice of service-learning.

Of course, one cannot ignore the fact that the students' self-evaluation of research skills improved after participating in service-learning. After running the t-test [to assess whether the means of two groups are statistically different from each other], it was concluded that service-learning significantly impacted the students' research skills because of their need to search for more information about the community and the service targets. Thus, students' research skills indeed improved through service-learning.

Students' Feedback. At the end of the course, every student handed in their final report. After further examination of these reports, we found that students gained a deeper understanding of service-learning related topics and enhanced their personal understanding and insights after application. The following statements were mentioned in students' reports:

> *The main focus of Enning Road [a historic street in Guangzhou] is to decide whether to demolish it or not. People are not satisfied with the amount of compensation. That is why residents fought against the government.*

> *I thought about the necessity of cultural preservation. In the process of preserving the culture, we do not only have to focus on cultural preservation, but also pay attention to the feelings of the people who live in the community.*

> *Cultural preservation movement was not only about the simple matter of letting the government decide to demolish the buildings or not, but also about practical issues such as city planning, architecture protection, funding and relocation of residents. These problems are closely-related. Pull one single piece of hair and you will move the whole body. If someone wants to protect the culture, we have to answer the questions above. Having the mentality of an antique lover is definitely not enough to solve problems. A comprehensive consideration and professional analysis, appropriate deployment of people, organization and marking techniques are indispensable in cultural preservation*

movement as well. This will be a game between the citizens, the developer and the government. Difficult but exciting.

From these sample statements, we can confirm that practical experiences with the community, classroom learning, and study group discussions have strengthened the students' understanding of and their ability to critically think about cultural preservation.

Along with deepening students' understanding of cultural preservation, the course also improved the students' abilities through the learning and service practicum. In the course feedback, students mentioned the following:

In the process of group learning, my observation and problem solving skills were improved. It allowed me to look at every existing problem from a more professional perspective and find out the solutions through professional learning and reading non-teaching materials.

During the exchanges of cultural preservation groups, I watched many videos of cultural preservation movement in other areas. My horizon was widened, and at the same time it helped me think more about the problems of cultural preservation and of the city and the residents. I haven't come up with any solutions for the time being, but it trained my thinking skills.

The course's service-learning component provided students with opportunities to both physically and personally experience the community they were working with. Through these experiences, the students discovered the relationship between the society and themselves, which cultivated the students' sense of social responsibility. In the feedback, students mentioned:

We have to spread the message to the public in time, to unite different forces, to spread our responsibilities, and to build a more harmonious community.

From knowing nothing about NGO and cultural preservation, to now, involving myself and gradually formed personal views, this is an enlightenment to me. From an outsider to an insider, from the silent majority to an active citizen, it is actually a sublimation of thinking.

Overall, students preferred the service approach to learning. This preference can provisionally be attributed to the fact that service-learning expands students' horizons while also enabling them to further their understanding and gain more experiences. As one student observed,

Joining group activities allows me to gain more than learning in the classroom. There are three main reasons. Firstly, the form of learning is more flexible. Secondly, exploration of the topics through the group activities would be deeper. Lastly, I could meet a lot of people 'with stories'.

From the students' feedback, it can be concluded that students' skills and knowledge were improved after taking a course with service-learning. Involvement in application activities led to a

change in students' attitudes toward the society and to a realization of the link between individuals and the society, both of which are the goals of service-learning. Meanwhile, with the course integrated with service-learning component in the recent semester, the relationship between the service agencies and the university improved and built a partnership mode.

However, the service-learning also confronts some challenges. Under the guidance of the service agencies, students' service-learning was executed in a more professional manner. Contrastingly, feedback from the students revealed that they had some doubts and criticisms. Thus, based on the past experiences, we will continue to improve future service-learning projects offered through the course.

It is necessary to combine professional knowledge with service-learning into the academic course. From the community partners' feedback, it is obvious that service-learning is different from simple voluntary services, such as those similar to community services. The simple voluntary services only require volunteers to complete an assigned community service task, such as traffic control or maintenance of community security. Service-learning, on the other hand, emphasizes the process of combining learning with practice and vice versa. This process ultimately involves the students consciously applying professional knowledge. Therefore, we will continue exploring the ways in which students can utilize their professional knowledge to carry out the service in addition to methods and platforms in which course planners can effectively combine professions and services.

In order to achieve this application of professional knowledge, we will continue to invite the agency supervisors to share their experiences in class. This will allow students to talk to, learn from, and personally connect with people from community partners. In addition, more specific workshops will be developed according to the needs of the students and the community partners. These workshops, which would potentially include public seminars, writing practice, project planning, and proposal development, will aim to improve the students' skills, to enable the application of knowledge and abilities to service, and, ultimately, to encourage the practice of "meaningful service."

Service-learning is a process of giving back to the community. Service-learning is not only a learning process for the students, but it is also a giving-back process for the community. Therefore, in addition to caring about students' gain and growth, how much the community benefits from the students' services is of high concern. In addition to sending students to the community, Service-learning also intends to transfer the resources of higher education institutions to the community in order to connect the academia with the community. During the process, students have to participate in serving the community with a professional perspective. Students who have enrolled the course Civic Society and Philanthropy have to grasp the general theories and knowledge of civil society and philanthropy, at the same time, they also need to understand the specific contents of the related topics through study groups and lectures. Under the guidance of the course instructor, the agency supervisors and the tutor, students have to then apply their knowledge learnt from the classroom through the community-based service practicum.

After the practicum, students are required to write a final report in addition to presenting on their service experiences, findings and feedback at the "Report-back Celebration", which encourages dialogue among teachers, agency supervisors and students. After receiving opinions

and experiences from all stakeholders, we wish that students could apply the learning outcomes of the studies and services into community development.

This case is just one of the many educational experiments in China's universities and colleges. After six years of organizing and directing the practicum, we have accumulated a vast amount of experience, which we have begun to promote among other universities in Guangzhou. Now at least 8 universities in Guangzhou are conducting their own experiments in service learning. In 2015, we established a center on service learning and held the first national conference on service learning and philanthropy education.

At the same time, we also recognize that we can learn from other higher education institutions that are engaged in service-learning in the world because their experiences and programs may differ from ours. Therefore, we have to continue exploring service-learning models that are applicable for our classroom, as well as projects that can be effectively associated with existing courses.

Conclusion

We insist that higher education should pay attention to the common good because China moral life has two seemingly competing narratives: On the one hand, there is a popular discourse of a "moral decline" since the 1980s. Such discourse is often coupled with the perceived proliferation of social apathy towards strangers (Yan 2009b), growing illicit businesses producing fake and toxic food products (Yan 2014) as well as the rise of social distrust among strangers (Yang G 2009), as seen in the case of rejecting help for others in need for fear of being misinterpreted and accused by them. Based on a longitudinal study in a rural village in China, Yan (2003, 2009a, 2011, 2013) argued that the discourse of "moral decline" could be understood as a result of a moral transformation from a collective ethics of "duties" embraced by the older generation to an individualist ethics of "personal success" among the younger generation. Additionally, Yan (2005: 651) maintains that the "socialist engineering" of the Party state during the Maoist era has made the self-motivated commitment to civic duty in the Post-Mao era impossible. On the other hand, however, recent ethnography on youth volunteerism suggests that there is a rise of public-minded individualism among young Chinese (Freiderike 2011, Ning 2014). What this puzzle implies is the potential generational divide of morality where the young would include in their moral community "strangers" whom the older generation would exclude. The popular discourse of a moral crisis may hence be interpreted as the experience of moral divergence among generations and groups (Liu 2000). The duality of the moral life encourages us to involve ourselves in higher education reform and to push forward the positive side of the moral life in China.

Higher education as benefiting the common good is still in an experimental phase reacting to the overly rapid marketization of higher education. Chinese universities' role as a common good is still "grassroots", which refers to the native concept of "minjian" (which literally means "in-between people" in Chinese). Anthropologist Yang Meihui (1994:286-287) defines the sphere of minjian as "a realm of people-to-people relationships which is non-governmental or separate from formal bureaucratic channels" that deals with the "basic social fabric from which social organisations are created" (idid: 287). As Yang's ethnographically grounded discussion on minjian

shows, the sphere of minjian has an affinity with, yet is not equal to, the Western concept of "society" or "civil society".

But precisely because it is in the grassroots and just beginning, it is also energetic and vivid. The reflection on social justice and ecology, the connection between local and global, and the combination of theory and practice all bring the Chinese youth toward a more harmonious, just, and sustainable society. With their growth, we predict that civil society could be incubated from minjian. Until now it is just a dream, but just like Jet Ma, the CEO of Alibaba said," We still need to dream, in case it is realized."

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