# Interview

# "Reciprocal Gaze" in the Age of Globalisation and Digital Humanities: An Interview with Professor Tan Tian Yuan

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**Abstract**

This interview commences with Professor Tan Tian Yuan's recalling his educational path and academic career. Then Professor Tan gives us his own opinions on various topics, including his research approaches of later imperial vernacular literatures, the interactions between so-called Chinese scholarship and overseas Sinology, SOAS and Oxford's contributions to British Sinology and his ongoing TEXTCOURT project. Professor Tan also shares his viewpoints on multiple aspects and characteristics of Chinese literature and culture, "New World Literature," and the relation between traditional Chinese culture and modern Chinese culture.

**Keywords:** later imperial vernacular literatures, TEXTCOURT project, Sinology, Digital Humanities, Chinese literature and culture

**Shi Guang (henceforth SG):** Good morning, Professor Tan. Thank you so much for giving us the opportunity to do this interview with you. At the very beginning, could you share your personal experience of growing up and studying with our readers? We believe that most of our readers would like to know these things. Why did you choose literary research as your lifelong career? Was there an event or a person that has had a significant impact on your choice?

**Tan Tian Yuan (henceforth TTY):** Looking back, I think the right word would be that I had *stumbled* into academia quite fortuitously, rather than having taken a conscious career choice. Hence, instead of a single incident or person, it would be fair to say that a range of experiences shaped my current path in one way or another.

I grew up in Singapore where I received my earlier education and academic training. My parents enrolled me in the only English-stream class of a traditionally Chinese-medium primary school, Shin Min Public School (Thomson), which really gave me the best of both worlds in bilingual education. The library, for a primary school, was also unusually large with an excellent collection of Chinese books, and it was there that I started borrowing books voraciously and happily reading all kinds of genres ranging from historical biographies to folktales and fictions. This early interest in Chinese books, reading freely without any predetermined goals, had a lasting impact on my education. When I later progressed to the Chinese High School and Hwa Chong Junior College, both known for their emphasis on bilingual education and Chinese heritage and culture, I had the opportunity to continue developing my interest in the subject in other ways and through various mediums outside the curriculum. My teacher in secondary school noticed and nurtured my interest in creative writing. I tried my hands at writing modern Chinese poetry for newspapers and literary magazines, and later also composed lyrics for songwriting competitions in my teenage years. Rather unconsciously, I think, this early experience of dabbling in literary writing as a practitioner drew my attention to reading and analysing poetry and also lyrics of Chinese pop songs more closely. I grew interested in exploring the art of using words. Even to this day, I may at times get annoyed by a certain "misplaced" word (in my mind only, of course) in the lyrics that does not rhyme or chime well with the melody, for instance.

All that while, as a science-stream student in secondary and high school, I was pursuing the above as hobbies rather than as my main subject of study. When it came to applying for a place in the university, however, I decided it was time to switch to majoring in Chinese Studies and Chinese Language at the Department of Chinese Studies in the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences of the National Univer-

sity of Singapore (NUS), where I also studied at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology in the same faculty in the first year. NUS laid the academic foundations for me in many ways. In addition to a comprehensive and well-designed curriculum, there were also many opportunities to prepare short research papers and to present in classes, which gave me a first taste of what it might be like to do research and formulate an academic opinion. Outside the standard curriculum, there were also other serendipitous opportunities and encounters that, in hindsight, inspired and shaped my academic interests. In the third year of my undergraduate studies, I was asked by a teacher at NUS, Professor Kow Mei Kao, to assist him in his book project in publishing an annotated bibliography for the collection of Ming–Qing Chinese fiction in the NUS Chinese library and that was the first time I systematically learnt to use bibliographies and related reference works. On another occasion, I was recommended by another NUS teacher to act as a research assistant (RA) for a US professor who was visiting the department and needed someone to comb through some early historical newspaper collections in Malaysia and Singapore for his project. As a rather ignorant young student at that time, it took me quite a while to only realise later what an eminent scholar this professor was (we are speaking of the late China historian Professor Philip A. Kuhn). Looking back now, I realise how valuable this opportunity was (Professor Kuhn was extremely generous and kind in his guidance) and most probably triggered my interest in conducting research. I've grown to love spending hours digging into archives and reading primary sources, which is an essential criterion to be a researcher. And these are just two of the earliest RA experiences. Later, I also acted as a research and teaching assistant in the US, and I learnt a great deal of different skills from all the teachers and scholars who had offered me such opportunities, which provided another dimension of informal training outside the standard university curriculum. But that is a whole new, lengthy topic that is best reserved for another day.

Back to my educational path — at the end of my undergraduate studies I was awarded a two-year master's scholarship from the Chinese department. This allowed me to explore further and take a first step in considering academic research as a potential career path. My MA supervisor, Professor Sun Mei, who completed his own earlier education in prestigious PRC institutions such as Nanjing University and the Chinese National Academy of Arts before obtaining his PhD from the University of Hawai'i, was incredibly supportive of the idea for me to learn in a different academic setting. I contemplated the idea of pursuing a further degree abroad, but at that time it was not really a "career plan." To be honest, my younger self in the 1990s probably did not understand what an academic career entails —

I was simply interested in the possibility for me to continue pursuing my research interests. It was therefore a significant moment when I received notification of a few scholarship offers from US universities because I would not have thought of studying abroad if not given a scholarship. I eventually decided to go to Harvard University, where I had the privilege to learn from the Dutch Sinologist Professor Wilt L. Idema who coincidentally moved from Leiden to Harvard around the same time; I was therefore among the first cohort of his doctoral advisees in the US. Hence, you can see that indeed it was a combination of numerous factors above that led me to this path of becoming a scholar of Chinese literature.

**SG:** We noticed that your research mainly focuses on drama, songs, and other forms of vernacular literature in the later dynasties of China. Why did you choose this research area? What features of the texts from this period appeal to you? Could you use an example to illustrate your basic position or method in analysing these texts?

**TTY:** I feel that each of us has a different kind of academic temperament that makes certain topics or subjects suit one better than the others. For me, later imperial vernacular literatures including fiction, drama, and songs have a certain vibrancy and directness that are appealing. I am also attracted to the ways later literatures often adapt earlier stories and motifs or respond to past writers and works in multiple ways. I am often inclined to trace how texts, concepts, words, or forms developed in Chinese literature, and later vernacular texts are perfect for such modes of research.

Some of these vernacular genres such as drama and *sanqu* 散曲 are also what we call performance texts, not that they all necessarily derived from a script from an actual performance, but that the genres are closely associated with a performative aspect — that gives an additional dimension to reading a verbal text, imagining how it might have been or could have been performed. In this regard, my approach towards these texts may differ from some other researchers of drama and theatre who focus on the actual staging practice or performance contexts. I am interested in those aspects too, which are critical to our understanding of Chinese performance culture, but in my own research I find myself more drawn to the dynamics between verbal and performative, and my aim is also in reading these vernacular forms within the larger Chinese literary tradition.

In other words, I take a more textual approach towards studying these later vernacular forms of literature. Two of my recent articles, one in English on "*Sanqu*, Ming Anthologies, and the Imperial Court" and the other in Chinese on the "Textual Worlds of Court Theater in Late Imperial China" (明清宫廷演劇的文本世界)

are examples of such an approach.[1] When we study a piece of work, we need to go beyond just speaking about a certain title X. Can we probe deeper and ask: Which version or edition of X are we referring to? Because they may not be the same and I am always curious why they might be different. The same work or a part of it can appear under a variant title, or in a different "position" in different editions, and that can tell us something. I like to find "answers" to questions or solve puzzles in literary history, and some colleagues have described my work as a kind of literary detective work. Of course, often in humanities research, there is no single, definite answer to a question, but that does not mean the questions are not worth asking, nor does it make the process less meaningful. In recent years, I have come to learn to enjoy more so the process of pursuing a certain line of inquiry and to accept that in many cases I will not find or have an answer.

Another approach that I consistently apply in my research is to read Chinese literature across cultures, and that is directly linked to my experience in studying and teaching Chinese literature in different countries and cultures. Some of my works such as *1616: Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu's China* are conceptualised with this in mind.

**SG:** In recent years, overseas Sinology has received more and more attention from Chinese scholars. It has often been described as the other mountain's stone (他山之石) and expected to polish the jade (可以攻玉). In other words, overseas Sinology is "the other" for Chinese academia. According to your own experience, is overseas Sinology completely different from the research of Chinese scholars? What are the similarities and differences between them? What changes can overseas Sinology offer to the Chinese academy?

**TTY:** About ten years ago, I said at the Beijing Forum 2014 that the boundary between so-called Chinese scholarship and overseas Sinology is converging, thanks to growing interaction and the globalisation of the academia. Overall, this converging trend still continues, and it is important to maintain such scholarly interactions.

Is overseas Sinology necessarily "the other" for Chinese academia? It remains useful to think of the unique history and developments "national" or "regional" Sinological traditions such as British or French Sinology, or the broader notion of European Sinology, as there are differences in the academic traditions in each coun-

1 See "In Praise of This Prosperous and Harmonious Empire: Sanqu, Ming Anthologies, and the Imperial Court," *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 8.1 (April 2021): 139–62, DOI 10.1215/23290048-8898661; "Ming Qing gongting yanju de wenben shijie" 明清宫廷演劇的文本世界 (Textual Worlds of Court Theater in Late Imperial China), *Zhengda Zhongwen xuebao* 37 (2022): 5–52, DOI: 10.30407/BDCL.202206_(37).0001

try and culture that will manifest in the ways one studies all subjects (not just Sinology). I believe it is important to first acknowledge that every researcher involved in Sinology or Chinese Studies, whether it is someone within "Chinese scholarship" or "overseas Sinology," shares a common interest in knowing more about China. It is upon this common interest and passion that we should build our scholarly communications and collaborations, and from there we can appreciate how each of us may look at the same question using a different method or from another perspective.

The questions we ask are inevitably tied in with our respective academic contexts. "Chinese scholarship" and "overseas Sinology" are different in that they operate in different contexts and engage with different target readers and audience. One way to illustrate this is to look up where the department in relation to Chinese Studies is located within a certain University system and see what that tells us: the set-up and aims of a traditional Chinese department (Zhongwenxi 中文系) in Chinese-speaking academia will be quite different from those of a department of Chinese Studies in Europe or North America within the setting of the Faculty of Asian/East Asian/Foreign or Modern Languages.

In terms of what conversations between different academic traditions can offer to each other, I think the conversation should go beyond the comparison between "Chinese scholarship" and "overseas Sinology," and can be extended to other humanities subjects as well. In other words, the cross-cultural dialogue can be broader and not just limited within the field of Chinese Studies or Sinology. I once used the term "reciprocal gaze" in proposing such a mode of dialogues between Sinology and other fields of research in the humanities. For example, might a reader or scholar of Renaissance rhetoric be interested in Ming rhetoric? And what might be a meaningful way to discuss the concept of rhetoric in Ming China? These are the questions addressed in a chapter I recently wrote for the forthcoming volume on *Rhetoric in the Renaissance c. 1415–1640* under the *Cambridge History of Rhetoric* series. In this case, the "us" and the "other" are not between "Chinese scholarship" and "overseas Sinology," but between "Sinological scholarship" and "Western Renaissance scholarship."

In a way, this goes back to what I said earlier about reading across cultures, the importance of which was first suggested to me by my doctoral adviser. As with many US universities, Harvard requires PhD students to study three fields in preparation for the general examination (before one starts writing the dissertation): a major field related to one's dissertation and two other minor fields: for someone like myself who plans to work on late imperial Chinese literature, the first two fields were obvious — I studied with Professor Idema for the main field in Song to Qing

dynasty literatures and did the second field on early to Tang dynasty literatures with Professor Stephen Owen. For the third field, a more common or natural choice might have been a related field such as Chinese history, but my doctoral adviser Professor Idema suggested otherwise: "Have you considered studying something totally different, from another country or tradition?" I later realised this was not about asking me to do anything overtly comparative, but it was intended purely to open up a different academic world to me. I eventually chose to do a minor field on English Renaissance drama with Professor John Parker who works on Marlowe and the transition from medieval to early Elizabethan theatre, and also had the chance to attend classes by Shakespearean scholars such as Majorie Garber and Stephen J. Greenblatt and that then led me to explore new historicism, etc. Just like learning a new language, studying a different literary tradition broadens one's academic horizon. This is one of the best pieces of advice a doctoral adviser can give to a supervisee, and I must thank Professor Idema for that. I also pass on that same message to my own graduate students too.

**SG & Li Weihua (henceforth LWH):** You were a professor of Chinese Studies at SOAS, University of London. SOAS is a renowned centre of Asian and African studies. Could you briefly introduce the history and features of Sinology at SOAS? You're the Shaw Professor of Chinese at the University of Oxford now. Could you tell us about the current status of Sinology research at this prestigious university? Such as its features, research interests, the scale of enrollment, etc. What do you think are the differences between Oxford Sinology and SOAS Sinology?

**TTY:** I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to teach in these two incredibly special UK institutions. SOAS and Oxford are central to the history of British Sinology, and, in this regard, they share many common traits in having an illustrious line of pioneering and influential Sinologists. These have been well charted in many previous surveys, and there is perhaps no need for me to go into the details here. In tracing Sinological developments, it is also worthwhile to keep in mind that we are speaking about two different kinds of institutions. SOAS and Oxford are unique in their own ways.

I taught at SOAS for thirteen years. SOAS cannot be any more centrally located in Russell Square, with both the British Library and the British Museum just a stone's throw away: a sense of ready accessibility to some of the greatest Chinese collections in London greatly benefits all researchers and students of Sinology. Also, as you've pointed out, SOAS is a highly specialised university and in fact the only higher education institution in the UK specialising in the study of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Because of the compact size of the institution, one advantage

is that Sinologists across different departments can easily work together, and Sinologists at SOAS also find themselves amongst a close-knit community of scholars who are almost all engaging with research on non-Western countries and civilisations in one way or another.

Oxford, on the other hand, is the oldest university in the English-speaking world but also a different kind of institution from SOAS both in size and in structure. Oxford's Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (where most Sinologists are based) is part of a larger Humanities division that includes other faculties such as the Classics, English Language and Literature, and Medieval and Modern Languages. Soon after I joined Oxford in 2019, I was invited to participate in a workshop organised by the Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities (TORCH) on "National Bards in Comparative Perspectives," where the professors of various subjects (Chinese, Classics, French, Persian, Russian, Spanish, etc.) all gathered on the occasion and each represented one's respective field and literary tradition in the dialogue. To some degree, the format of this workshop captures the nature of the Oxford academic network in which Sinological research is situated, as well as the potential ways in which Chinese Studies at Oxford engages externally with other fields and subjects.

If we look inward into the Sinological developments in Oxford, there is a huge legacy that we inherit — the history of Sinology at Oxford extends back to 1876 with the appointment of James Legge as its first Professor of Chinese — and we feel a strong sense of duty in upholding the legacy, while also embracing the new opportunities and challenges presented to us in the rapidly growing field of Chinese Studies today. Previous occupants of the Chair of Chinese at Oxford, from James Legge to David Hawkes, Piet van der Loon, and Glen Dudbridge, to name just a few, all made immense contributions to the understanding of Chinese culture through their translations, bibliographical surveys of Chinese texts, and critical studies on various aspects of traditional China. And while they each have their own distinctive areas of specialities, one may observe that they share a common characteristic that defines one of the key features of the Sinological tradition in Oxford: an uncompromising emphasis on text reading and on understanding premodern China through the mastery of primary source materials. Oxford is one of the very few universities outside Asia that continues to teach its undergraduates both classical and modern Chinese concurrently in their first year. This is essential. We want to train students who will be conversant in both classical and modern Chinese, knowledgeable about both traditional China and contemporary Chinese society, and most importantly, to understand the links between the old and the new.

At the same time, recent developments in humanities research may give us new ideas in exploring potential ways to enhance Oxford's strong text-based research tradition with other complementary approaches. One example is digital humanities, which may sound like a "new" mode of scholarship, but in fact Oxford has long been developing digital tools, methods, and resources for research in the humanities since the 1970s.

**SG:** With the advent of the digital age, the humanities are seriously challenged. In 2019, you launched the TEXTCOURT project, which seems like a response to this trend. What exactly motivated you to start this project? What progress has been made so far? Could you give us an example to show a specific difference between the output of this project and the traditional research?

**TTY:** Indeed, the arrival of the digital age is changing the academic landscape in multiple ways. My current TEXTCOURT project on "Linking the Textual Worlds of Chinese Court Theater, ca. 1600–1800" embodies some of my reflections on ways to incorporate the different modes and methods of research (e.g., textual and digital) that we just talked about.

I do not see myself as a digital humanities scholar — digital humanities is a distinct field. Rather, I think of myself as a humanities researcher who is open to and interested in DH approaches when they are suitable for the type of research questions I wish to ask. And that was how the TEXTCOURT project came about. The decision to take a DH approach was more of a necessity — How do we deal with vast amounts of court drama scripts that are mostly anonymous, often casually titled that makes identifying them challenging, and by their very nature "untidy"? This inherent "untidiness" is part of the reason why such a rich body of performance texts have not yet received the scholarly attention they are due, and why they were often regarded as a closed and isolated world even though clues in these texts suggest a much more interconnected world. The conventional mode of literary studies, with an individual researcher focusing on a small corpus work centred around an author, does not suit the study of court drama on a much larger scale, with its voluminous and mostly anonymous corpus.

Funded by the European Research Council, the project allows me to build a research team in Oxford and, in collaboration with international research partners, we are exploring the potential of digitally assisted close reading in our study of court performance texts. We have launched a beta version of our database of digitised late imperial Chinese court drama scripts and related foreign records on our project website (https://textcourt.ames.ox.ac.uk/database/). To date, we have included more than five hundred scripts belonging to about four hundred plays; it is common

to find a court play in multiple scripts, which illustrates the complex yet exciting textual conditions and calls for closer textual studies. The primary objective of the TEXTCOURT database is to enable researchers to access these texts easily and, by making these texts available on the web in digitised format encoded according to the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) guidelines, the goal is to facilitate the drawing of internal links between these texts within the tangled web of court drama texts, external links to individuals, occasions, and objects, and cross-cultural links to court drama's global context. Such links and connections are often invisible and buried in the sea of voluminous court drama scripts.

For example, I am currently working on a corpus of incomplete and variously titled manuscripts associated with a set of Kangxi-era court plays. On the textual level, my research has uncovered interesting overlaps between two scripts that look distinctly different from each other, not only because they have different titles, but also they are different in length (one has more than a dozen acts and the other only eight). In the TEXTCOURT database, we can take advantage of the digital environment to allocate the same code to link the two scripts together, so that researchers searching for one will be alerted to the other under the same code. This is particularly useful in one case where we can display an untitled and incomplete act of one script alongside the other version that has a title and is complete. Readers who are interested can search for the code Q00533 under "drama scripts" in the database, which will display these two scripts A and B (https://textcourt.ames.ox.ac.uk/database/scripts/?search=q00533). On the page of each script, under the "Related" tab, the database also allows users to explore further, following their own research interests with suggested links to a list of keywords and entities. Take the same example of Q00533, the keywords include "Birthday play," "Kangxi era," "Manuscript," and "With paratext," and clicking on the link to "Birthday play," for instance, will lead one to a list of more than two hundred scripts in the database with a similar theme (https://textcourt.ames.ox.ac.uk/database/scriptkeywords/7/).

**LWH:** From your study experience, academic research and academic activities, we can see that your academic background and academic vision are very broad, involving European countries, the United States, Britain, China, Singapore, and other Eastern and Western countries. What do you think is the current trend of the development of international Sinology? How should Chinese academia respond to this development trend?

**TTY:** I consider myself truly fortunate to have learnt formally and informally from scholars of different countries and academic traditions. These learning experiences are all interweaved. For instance, when I was doing my PhD at Harvard, I re-

ceived grants from the university to go to Asia for summer research, during which I learnt methods of bibliographical research and textual editing from Professor Sun Chongtao in Beijing and was introduced by Professor Kin Bunkyo in Kyoto to Japanese Sinological approaches. A predoctoral fellowship from Academic Sinica also gave me a chance to learn from drama specialists such as Professor Hua Wei and Professor Wang Ayling. I suppose what I am trying to say is that it is sometimes difficult to delineate such educational experiences in a global context. For instance, the memorable experience of participating in the Kyoto study group with scholars who met regularly reading and annotating Yuan prints of Yuan drama in Japanese gave me a new understanding of close reading; at the same time, I also see parallels in some ways between that and my experience attending graduate seminars at Harvard reading closely and translating Chinese literary texts word by word into English.

The academic landscape is increasingly globalised and nowadays students have even more opportunities and exposures to many cross-cultural academic experiences. That is positive for the development of Sinology in an international context. I do hope that all countries (including Chinese academia as you mentioned, but also academia in other countries as well) will continue to encourage more interactions and collaborations across countries and across cultures.

Does that mean that we will be moving towards some kind of singular "international academic trend"? Personally, I hope not. It would be preferable if each country or region could develop its own academic style relevant to its own academic environment and climate because the essence of academic research lies in the possibilities of different approaches and the ability to understand and engage with differences.

Rather, it may be more useful to think about the range and variety of academic skill sets one can get to learn in such a global context. Some skills may be uniquely linked with a distinctive style of academic training in a different culture; others may be associated with the advancement of technology such as digital humanities. For example, I encourage my own graduate students to take up an introductory course on digital humanities even if their dissertation projects do not require them to do so. It is more about learning different skill sets, which will make one a more complete researcher. Even if we do not go on to apply a certain method directly to our own research, it helps us understand and appreciate other studies using such an approach, and it also expands the scope for intellectual communications across different fields.

**LWH:** Your research often involves a refined Chinese aesthetic. You often refer to the concept of "Literary World," pointing out that literary research should

not only study a literary work, but think about the world behind it, the scene at that time, and use the historical documents of that time to approach that historical scene. You think we can approach the literary world. In your opinion, how to present China's literary world more vividly in front of people, so that this exquisite Chinese aesthetic world can move more people?

**TTY:** What intrigues many readers of Chinese literature is the strong and amazing continuity and tradition in Chinese culture, which I guess is what you meant by "a refined Chinese aesthetic." I am often drawn by the ways in which Chinese writers respond and speak to the past (events, works, and authors) in their writing and some of my research attempt to outline how these were done in terms of language, style, and form.[2]

But at the same time, we ought to be cautious not to filter these into a certain kind of *essence* of Chinese culture, because often by doing do, there is a danger of overgeneralising. There are multiple aspects and characteristics of Chinese literature and culture that I hope we as researchers can uncover for the readers. Hence, as you noticed, I often use the term "Literary World," or in fact, more often in English I use the plural "Literary Worlds." These are the larger worlds behind the use of words and the existence of textual forms. I also find it more rewarding to consider a literary work as a piece of writing situated within a larger textual world, inviting readers to piece together all the connections on various levels. And these levels of reading and interpretations are intricately connected. We cannot access the larger literary worlds without giving close attention to linguistic and textual matters.

**LWH:** When we say Literary World, we may think of the concept of New World Literature in current academic circles. How do you think the New World Literature will affect our current Literary World?

**TTY:** I am not by training, nor in practice, a scholar of comparative literature or world literature, which as I understand is a field with stronger emphasis on modern and contemporary literatures; I shall therefore have to defer to specialists in those fields to address more adequately on the concept of "New World Literature". As far as I am aware, there are different opinions in support or in criticism of the concepts of "World Literature" and "New World Literature." While I can't speak on behalf of other colleagues who are devoted to such theoretical matters, I believe that any

2 E.g. "Shared Words and Worlds of Love in *Peony Pavilion*," in Tian Yuan Tan and Paolo Santangelo, eds. *Passion, Romance, and Qing: The World of Emotions and States of Mind in Peony Pavilion (3 vols.)*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2014, 1454–81; "Reworking Songs Past and Present: Literary Forms and Traditions in Chinese Court Drama," Special Issue: "Conceptualising Chinese Court Literary Cultures," *Nanyang Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* (*NJCLC*) 4 (May 2023): 163–78.

discussion that would encourage one to consider more broadly the different connections and relations between texts and their wider worlds is a good thing, as long as we are aware that this is only one of the many ways and approaches to studying literature and every approach has its own way in enriching how we understand a text.

**LWH:** At present, International and Regional Studies has become a new academic research field in China's academic circles. How do you think about this research field? Can there be new breakthroughs in Sinology and China Studies in this research field?

**TTY:** The rise of area studies (e.g. in North America) historically had been more associated with disciplines such as the social sciences with its emphasis on modern China, and some see this as a narrower definition of Chinese Studies in contrast with Sinology (in Europe) exhibiting a stronger philological emphasis on text and language and focusing more on premodern China. But really, as we have discussed, these are complementary approaches that are both necessary and can contribute to our understanding of China as a whole. To a certain extent, we are already seeing this kind of dual emphasis as reflected in the rise of academic centres and institutes on both *guoxue* 国学 and area/regional studies.

Also, with the growing impact of China on the global scene, my personal hope is that leaders and policymakers worldwide will realise that cultural dialogues are just as important as political ones, and therefore the teaching and research conducted in "traditional" Chinese departments are just as significant as discussions on policies taking place in think tanks or other international relations organisations.

With the emergence of international Sinological centres, etc., it also indicates a growing awareness of studying different national literatures or countries (including Sinology/China Studies) within larger contexts, both within China and in other parts of the world. Boundaries are broadened. Increasingly, we find the inclusion of the study of China in different forms of "world" or "global" scholarship in Western academia. For example, I currently serve on the Board of Advisors for the *Renaissance Studies* journal, which is keen on publishing critical discussions and works on the concept of "global Renaissance" including those between China and Europe. This, again, is one of the many other "worlds" or broader contexts with which we may see Sinology or Chinese Studies increasingly being engaged. This is a positive sign that I hope will continue to develop in the coming years.

**LWH:** For a long time, you have been engaged in the study of Chinese literature and culture overseas, which means that you have seen and studied China through the window. But at the same time, you also have profound research and experience of Chinese culture, you are living in the home of Chinese culture. In your

opinion, how can Chinese traditional culture be better transformed into a modern one?

**TTY:** I am just one of many researchers working on Chinese literature and culture in various parts of the world. One may think of different roles of researchers, as you described, either as an insider living "in the home of Chinese culture" or as an outsider looking at China "through the window," depending on who one is, where one lives and works, and the language one speaks or writes. What these different roles and positions also indicate is that the field of Chinese Studies is made up of scholars who will approach the same text or same question from different perspectives in relation to the contexts in which they live and work.

Similar to what we were saying earlier about how "Sinology" is compared with the more modern term "China Studies," I see traditional Chinese culture and modern Chinese culture as two sides of the same entity: traditional Chinese culture will always be an integral part of contemporary China, and that our understanding of modern Chinese culture will be incomplete without adequate knowledge of its past and heritage, and vice versa. It is also about rethinking the place of Chinese literature and culture in the larger worlds (in terms of space) and in relation to readers then and now (in terms of time).

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