

# Reflections on the Ideas, Paradigms, and Methodologies of China Studies: Philip C. C. Huang and *Modern China*\*

Modern China

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## Abstract

Since its inception almost fifty years ago, *Modern China* has kept pace with international scholarly trends and greatly influenced global academia. As the founder and editor of *Modern China*, Philip C. C. Huang's editorial principles, scholarly ideas, and personal theories and methodologies have been prominently embodied in the themes and contents of the journal, which has guided the development, evolution, and changing currents in the field of China studies. Reflecting back on the older methodologies of China studies, Huang abandoned the existing theoretical framework of either/or binaries and, basing himself firmly in empirical practice, pursued a new perspective focusing on the interrelationships and interpenetrations between dualities. Huang's work has laid out the path for the future development of theory and practice in China studies.

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After World War II, China studies flourished in the United States with rapid growth in the number of researchers, institutions, and scholarly platforms, all in response to the political and economic needs of various academic fields. Scholars and specialists in a variety of disciplines started using social science research methods to study the politics, economy, history, culture, and literature of China (Liu and Li, 2018). As area studies became institutionalized in the academy, the establishment of an academic journal became an indicator of the maturation of a field (Li and Tian, 2021; Tian and Li, 2022; Li and Yang, 2022). In this context, and befitting the times, the journal *Modern China* was founded in 1975 and quickly became an authoritative publication serving as an academic signpost in the English-speaking world. Philip C. C. Huang, founder of *Modern China*, graduated from Princeton University and completed his PhD at the University of Washington. Over the next several decades, he served as a professor in the History Department at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and was the founding director of the Center for Chinese Studies (1986-1995). In 1991, he was promoted to “Professor, Above Scale,” a status he held until his retirement in 2004. Since 2001, he has also served as the founding editor-in-chief of the bilingual *Rural China: An International Journal of History and Social Science* (Scopus) and its Chinese edition 中国乡村研究 (CSSCI). From 2005 to 2011, he held an appointment in the School of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development at Renmin University. And, from 2012 to 2021, he was Changjiang Chair Professor and doctoral supervisor in the Law School of Renmin University. Over the last two decades, Huang has shifted from writing mostly in English for an overseas audience to writing in Chinese for domestic readers (though he still writes English versions for a considerable number of his articles). Huang considers this period to be the most enjoyable and productive phase of his academic career.

As an international journal known for publishing history and social science research, *Modern China* is included in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI). It has ranked as high as fourth in the index’s citation rate among the sixty to seventy “area studies” journals around the world. As such, it plays a leading role among area studies journals. From its inception in 1975 to 2022, there have been forty-eight volumes published of *Modern China*,

volumes that contain some 800 articles. For more than four decades, *Modern China* has been an indispensable academic resource for historians and social scientists studying late imperial, twentieth-century, and contemporary China. The journal publishes new interpretations and poses new questions based on new research or provides new answers to old questions. Overall, *Modern China* encourages scholarly research that transcends outmoded “premodern/modern” and “modern/contemporary” boundaries in articles from the social sciences, history, legal studies, literature, economics, and other disciplines. The China specialists who publish in the journal come from Anglophone countries, Europe, mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other Asian countries. The editorial board includes scholars from the United States, Australia, Japan, Germany, China, the United Kingdom, and Canada. *Modern China* has a well-established reputation in international academic circles.

Philip Huang has been the editor of *Modern China* since its founding. He has published countless important articles in the journal and led and organized many influential debates, debates that were later published in the journal and went on to have a far-reaching impact on the international scholarly community. Although the articles published in *Modern China* cover a number of fields, many of the articles focus on history and society, Huang’s main interests. Throughout its history, *Modern China* has kept pace with the times in its selection of articles and topics of inquiry; it is constantly publishing the newest arguments and thoughts, a practice closely tied to Huang’s own research direction and scholarly ideas. By delving deeply into Philip Huang’s own research, and tracing the development and changes in *Modern China*, we can better understand the mutual relationship between the man and the journal. Then, by pulling back to a broader perspective, we can better highlight Huang’s personal influence on, and contributions to, the journal. The purpose of this dual approach is to better grasp the paradigmatic shifts and development of China studies in the United States as a whole. In short, we seek to examine the thoughts and methodologies embedded in China studies in the United States by studying the connection between a scholar, his publications, and his disciplines.

Based on our review of the scholarly literature in China and abroad, there are no articles or monographs on *Modern China* itself. But, according to the CNKI database, Chinese scholars have published more than 160 articles on Huang’s work. Those authors have explored his thoughts on sociology, history, law, and economics and have questioned, analyzed, and debated his ideas, all of which suggests Huang’s wide-ranging influence on the international scholarly community. Huang previously wrote most of his works in English, but many of them have been translated and published in China. Basing our study on Huang’s English and Chinese work, and on important

articles published in *Modern China* between 1975 and 2022, we will examine the connections between Huang's editorial principles, his research paradigms, and his innovative methodologies to analyze his relationship to China studies in the journal.

## The Editorial Principles of *Modern China*

As a product of the rise of area studies in the United States during the Cold War, *Modern China* has been publishing research from a variety of fields and disciplines in China studies since its inception in 1975. The editorial principles of and scholarly content published in *Modern China* are significantly different from *The China Quarterly*, which primarily focuses on political science work on contemporary China. Roderick MacFarquhar founded *The China Quarterly* and published the first issue in March 1960 in London, though the journal was sponsored by the Congress for Cultural Freedom headquartered in Paris. At the time, the Central Intelligence Agency was funding the Congress for Cultural Freedom through the Fairfield Foundation. The establishment of *The China Quarterly* was a Western response to the Chinese Communist Party's tightening grip on power. Not long after, the eruption of the Sino-Soviet conflict, the clashes in the Sino-Indian borderlands, the three years of natural disasters accompanying the Great Leap Forward, and the outbreak of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution all forced the Western world, led by the United States, to recognize the importance of the China question (MacFarquhar, 1995).

The founders of *Modern China* took a different approach and had different editorial principles. They wanted to provide a forum and platform for China studies, a China studies dedicated to interrogating older research, raising important questions, and moving in new directions. In its style sheet, the initial editorial board laid out three practices that departed from tradition:

The journal's style sheet calls for use of the *pinyin* system in transliterating Chinese terms and proper names, except for very well-known persons (Mao Tse-tung, Chou En-lai) and common geographical names (Kwangtung, Peking).

We have also asked our contributors not to use male-oriented language. That is, sexually mixed groups of people are not to be referred to by masculine words such as "man," "men," and "brothers." Similarly, mixed groups should not be personified as male by expressions like "the new socialist man" and "the peasant and his wife."

Finally, the journal will refer to China as “China” or the “People’s Republic of China,” and will ask contributors to avoid expressions such as “Red China,” “Communist China,” or “mainland China.” The journal will not use vague terms such as “the Reds,” “the Communists,” or “the Chinese” when a more specific expression (the Chinese people, the Party, the government, the Central Committee, the China Travel Service) is in order. The term “the Communists” will be applied only to Party members. (Huang, 1975)

The position taken in the style sheet shows how the editorial board of *Modern China* differentiated itself, since the moment of its inception, from traditional China studies in the West, which were ideologically opposed to communism in China or used prejudicial expressions to study the country. Instead, the founding principles of *Modern China* were neutrality and objectivity. This stance allowed *Modern China* to move beyond historical and political prejudices to examine and explore issues in China from new perspectives. In the preface to a symposium on the 1911 Revolution published in the second issue of *Modern China* in 1976, Philip Huang wrote: “One major concern of *Modern China* is to provide a forum for critical reassessments of our field—to urge members of our profession to take stock of what has been done, reexamine past assumptions, and raise new questions” (Huang, 1976a: 139). The main editorial principles of *Modern China* were thus to continuously reflect upon the major weaknesses of older approaches to China studies, weed out incorrect ideas, and begin asking new questions. These principles were embodied in the selection of articles to be published in the journal and the discussion of new questions in those articles. In the preface to the symposium on the 1911 Revolution, Huang wrote: “While I am delighted that *Modern China* is able to present this exciting symposium, I also hope that our future symposiums will be able to be broader still and assess the Anglo-American state-of-the-field in the larger context of the work of Japanese and contemporary Chinese researchers” (Huang, 1976a: 140). As editor-in-chief, Huang was striving to eliminate political influence on academic research by maintaining a relatively objective, neutral, and scholarly atmosphere in the journal and by laying out academic and professional standards.

In the early years of *Modern China*, Huang and the editorial board repeatedly emphasized the need to overcome the prejudices and biases in older China studies and constantly brought up new approaches to the field, which created a broad field of vision for the journal and opened it up as a new kind of intellectual space. They not only discovered new scholarly topics by reflecting on past research in a changed political environment, within a new international framework, or by following different cultural trends, they also introduced new scholarship on China studies from outside American

academia, which further expanded the scope of the journal and allowed them to incorporate new scholarly perspectives.

In an “Editor’s Foreword” in 1977, Huang announced:

Beginning with this issue of *Modern China*, we hope to feature in each issue one or more articles reviewing aspects of Chinese or Japanese scholarship. We hope to contribute in a small way to overcoming the parochialism of our field in the past. Like the article featured here, such articles should inform us of the lively controversies that have occupied Chinese (and Japanese) scholars, and point to areas in which we could learn from their research. At the same time, we will no doubt learn also about the limitations of their research, and the areas in which western scholarship has made distinctive contributions. I would like to take this opportunity to invite such articles from colleagues in the field. (Huang, 1977)

Since that time, *Modern China* has continuously published articles by scholars in China and Japan. Those articles have led Western scholars to reflect on the limitations of their own research about China while also allowing them to exchange ideas with other academic communities and discover what is unique about their own approaches to China.

Western academia influenced the subjective theoretical foundations, and standard viewpoints, of the authors who published in *Modern China*. Their approach was to study China as “the other.” In that sense, China was both their object and target. From their subjective positions, and in the numerous symposia published in the journal, the authors were able to reflect upon themselves and their practices to uncover the problematic issues in past studies of China through various discussions—for example, discussions on the paradigms in China studies, on the nature of the Chinese revolution, and on law, history, and postmodernism in China, as well as a dialogue with Chinese scholars on the nature of the state. At the same time, *Modern China* constantly pushed the boundaries in an effort to overcome the biases in older Western approaches to China and find a better research approach more suitable for, and closer to, the immediate and actual circumstances in Chinese society while still using Western theory. One of the bright spots in the journal in recent years is the emphasis on “transnational” China studies. Today, there are six mainland Chinese scholars on the twenty-seven-person editorial board of the journal, not counting the editor-in-chief, the co-editor, or the associate editor, a number up from zero when the journal was founded. Among the six mainland Chinese board members are two of Huang’s students (Gao Yuan 高原 and Lai Junnan 赖骏楠). Placing mainland Chinese scholars on the editorial board has gradually increased the number of submissions and publications by mainland scholars in the journal.

Although *Modern China* has gone through different periods and survived in different contexts and its editorial practices have always shifted along with changes in research questions, its abiding principles have always been to reflect on China studies in the West and to discover new research questions about China. We can see Philip C. C. Huang discussing and developing new ideas in the forewords of the journal over the years. His thoughts and ideas have always been in sync with the development, evolution, and changing currents in the editorial principles of *Modern China*.

## Reflections on Modern China and Its Paradigms

The editors of *Modern China* select the articles to be published under the guidance of the journal's editorial principles. Since Philip C. C. Huang's two interests are in history and society, many of the articles published in the journal are in those two fields. As such, Huang's personal research areas and value orientation are intimately connected to the direction of the journal. In the selection of content for the journal, he naturally pays great attention to his subjects and fields. Along with changes to the editorial principles in the journal in recognition of new developments and changing circumstances, *Modern China* has guided research questions and academic discussions in the field of China studies by publishing new perspectives, innovative methods, and original thoughts.

*Modern China* is a signpost in international China studies. Surveying article titles and research topics in the journal, we can see that its content is constantly being updated and expanded. In the early years of the journal, many articles concentrated on exploring political topics such as the early years of the revolution in China or the relevant political parties. In that context, there was much discussion of Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought. At the time, Western scholars were following international research trends by studying socialist formations and ideologies as they related to the Cold War, which explains their fascination with China's socialist system. Western scholars did not have a thorough understanding of China. Focusing on its history and society, many studied mainly China's political structures, paths of development, and ideological formations. As the world changed and China underwent its own transformations, Western scholars started abandoning studies of China from a single ideological perspective and newer work emerged that was closer to the actual situation in the country. Western scholars started paying closer attention to changes in China's immediate social development instead of lingering on historical issues of the past. With the advancement of the times, new fields of research started appearing in the journal. From a primary focus on revolution and ideology, the journal started publishing work

in the fields of economics, law, literature, culture, and other topics. The emergence of new social phenomena in China and the appearance of new generations of scholars brought new content and themes to China studies such as urbanization or rural-to-urban migration. At the same time, discussions about older issues entered a new stage and new research topics appeared such as the study of rural women. In the choice of content, the editors of *Modern China* published articles reflecting on older issues and opening up new topics. Over the nearly fifty years of the history of the journal, Huang's own research agenda has changed by expanding from history and society to the study of law, agriculture, and rural life. Accompanying Huang's own shift in research fields, *Modern China* has also branched out into the same areas, which has created concentric circles of scholarship centered on the work of Huang and similar scholars.

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of *The China Quarterly* in 2009, former editor-in-chief (1991-1996) David Shambaugh in his article "The *China Quarterly* and Contemporary China Studies" lamented the lack of collaborative research as one of the noteworthy problems in the field of contemporary China studies. He wrote:

[This problem exists] between foreign and Chinese scholars (the same can be said about the lack of collaborative work among Sinologists outside of China). To be sure, it occurs in some fields—e.g. economics and sociology—but, on the whole, there is a dearth of joint authorship. This is particularly surprising after more than three decades of scholarly exchanges with the Chinese academic and think tank communities. In short, scholarly *exchanges* have not resulted in much scholarly *collaboration*.

Thus, the reality is that the China field around the world is actually not as well linked to our Chinese counterparts as we may think, and thus Chinese scholars are not contributing to the mainstream global scholarly discourse about their own country (they are more comfortable writing in the parallel Chinese publications language internet discourse). The reverse also holds true: foreign scholars do not very often publish in Chinese journals. Moreover, scholars outside of China are equally not well linked to each other. In short, globalization has not really come to Chinese studies. Again, *The China Quarterly* could make a contribution to bridging these collaborative gaps—perhaps by creating a category specifically for collaborative articles. (Shambaugh, 2009: 915-16)

Shambaugh was describing a contemporary phenomenon, but there were also leading scholars with international influence who defied the trend. In the early 1990s, Philip C. C. Huang was not only developing more contacts with Chinese academic circles, he was also starting to publish more articles by

Chinese scholars in *Modern China*, which gave them the opportunity to grasp the rules of international academic discourse and gave Chinese a voice in the English-speaking scholarly world. *Modern China* became a venue where scholarly dialogues and exchanges between the academic communities in China and the West could take place. Compared to Western scholarly portrayals of China as “the other,” the scholarship in *Modern China* moved closer and closer to China’s own context in its selection of topics and methodologies. Huang led a number of academic discussions between Chinese and Western scholars on different research questions, discussions usually published in special issues of *Modern China*. Many of these articles were simultaneously translated and published in academic journals in China. By so doing, those topics were disseminated across and gained acceptance throughout Chinese-language academic circles, which also helped Chinese academia engage with cutting-edge scholarly issues around the world.

Let us turn to a discussion of the articles on research paradigms in China studies published in *Modern China*. Between 1991 and 1998, the journal published five symposia or special issues on research paradigms. As a major academic journal in China studies in the United States, the development of *Modern China* in this period was closely related to emerging trends in China studies in North America. On May 9, 1992, a symposium on “Paradigmatic Issues in China Studies” was held at the University of California, Los Angeles. After the symposium, the papers by the most important scholars were published in *Modern China* and special discussions were organized to engage with disciplinary differences on the stated topics. Beginning with Huang’s “The Paradigmatic Crisis in Chinese Studies: Paradoxes in Social and Economic History” (Huang, 1991), the theme was further addressed in the first and second issues of 1993, the first issue of 1995, and the second issue of 1998. Each of the relevant issues contained research papers on paradigms in different fields of China studies. Together, these five issues constitute a comprehensive discussion of paradigmatic concerns in China studies. These scholarly discussions in the 1990s were part of a larger trend in American China scholarship at the time in which scholars were thoroughly examining the problems in their approaches to China and seeking new research models.

The discussions of paradigms in China studies involved multiple fields and were published as special issues of *Modern China*. The first special issue was “The Paradigmatic Crisis in Chinese Studies: Paradoxes in Social and Economic History” (July 1991); the second special issue was “Symposium: Ideology and Theory in the Study of Modern Chinese Literature: Paradigmatic Issues in Chinese Studies, II” (January 1993) (Link, 1993; Liu, 1993; Duke, 1993; Zhang, 1993; see also Li, 2020); the third special issue was “Symposium:

‘Public Sphere’/ ‘Civil Society’ in China?: Paradigmatic Issues in Chinese Studies, III” (April 1993) (Wakeman, 1993; Rowe, 1993; Rankin, 1993; Madsen, 1993; Chamberlain, 1993; Huang, 1993a); the fourth special issue was “Symposium: Rethinking the Chinese Revolution: Paradigmatic Issues in Chinese Studies, IV” (January 1995) (Huang, 1995a; Selden, 1995; Esherick, 1995; Berenson, 1995; Huang, 1995b); and the fifth special issue was “Symposium: Theory and Practice in Modern Chinese History Research: Paradigmatic Issues in Chinese Studies, V” (April 1998) (Huang, 1998a; Duara, 1998; Woodside, 1998; Esherick, 1998; Wakeman, 1998; Huang, 1998b).

In addition to the five symposia, seven rounds of “Dialogue between Chinese and Western Scholars” on a series of key issues were published simultaneously in *Modern China* and *Open Times* 开放时代 in China. The themes of the seven dialogues were as follows: “The Nature of the Chinese State: Dialogues among Western and Chinese Scholars, I,” 中国国家的性质：中西方学者对话（一）in *Modern China* 34, 1 (January 2008) and *Open Times* (February 2008); “Whither Chinese Reforms? Dialogues among Western and Chinese Scholars, II” 改革往何处去？中西方学者对话（二）in *Modern China* 35, 3 (July 2009) and *Open Times* (July 2009); “Constitutionalism, Reform, and the Nature of the Chinese State: Dialogues among Western and Chinese Scholars, III,” 宪政，改革与中国国家体制：中西方学者对话（三）in *Modern China* 36, 1 (January 2010) and *Open Times* (December 2009); “Chongqing: China’s New Experiment—Dialogues among Western and Chinese Scholars, IV,” 重庆的新实验：中西方学者对话（四）in *Modern China* 37, 6 (November 2011) and *Open Times* (September 2011); “‘State Capitalism’ or ‘Socialist Market Economy’?—Dialogues among Western and Chinese Scholars, V,” 中国式”社会主义市场经济”?: 中西方学者对话（五）in *Modern China* 38, 6 (November 2012) and *Open Times* (September 2012); “Development ‘Planning’ in Present-Day China: System, Process, and Mechanism: Dialogues among Western and Chinese Scholars, VI,” 中国的经济计划体系，过程，机制：中西方学者对话（六）in *Modern China* 39, 6 (November 2013) and *Open Times* (November 2013); and “The Basis for the Legitimacy of the Chinese Political System: Whence and Whither? Dialogues among Western and Chinese Scholars, VII,” 中国政治体系正当性基础的来源与走向：中西方学者对话（七）in *Modern China* 40, 2 (March 2014) and *Open Times* (March 2014). Other special issues included “The Social Science of Practice and China Research” (a conference in honor of Professor Philip C. C. Huang’s 80th Birthday, November 2-3, 2019) in *Modern China* 47, 1 (January 2021) and “China and a New Political Economy of Practice” in *Modern China* 48, 1 (January 2022). In total, *Modern China* has published twenty-four special issues.

Future changes in research paradigms about China must involve a unity of dualities. That is, any new research paradigm must address the relationship between China as subject and China as object. Since the study of China is an investigation and exploration of “the other,” China becomes the object of research studied by researchers deeply influenced by Western theories. But, this produces a quandary—the theoretical models from the West do not accord with conditions in China and are thus inapplicable. After the shift from Western-centric to China-centric theories, American China scholars discovered that traditional research paradigms constructed on Western experience were not entirely applicable to China. At that point, Philip Huang advocated starting from China itself and, through practice or experience, transforming China from the object of research into the subject of research. Huang was emphasizing the need to construct research paradigms based on China’s own particularities rather than relying solely on paradigms derived from Western theory. Whether about overseas or domestic China studies, the point is to engage in dialogue with the world in the process of thoroughly examining issues in China. At present, China studies in the United States remains within the area studies tradition. Even while pursuing research paradigms that embrace the unity of China as both subject and object, Western China scholars remain tied to their reliance on theories and experiences drawn from the West. To transform China into the subject of China studies—allowing research perspectives to be guided by actual conditions in China—it is not enough that Chinese scholars join international discourses on China nor should they have to depend on the dissemination of theories from China studies in the West, but they must strike out and generate their own theories and scholarly traditions in the field of China studies. Of course, it will be necessary for them to critically engage with paradigms and experiences from China studies abroad.

### **Philip Huang’s New Methodology for China Studies**

The editors of *Modern China* have continuously scrutinized past research and raised new questions. This approach, a reflection of their response to theory-based scholarship, has led them to change the content of the journal. Earlier, we mentioned Huang’s impact on the principles behind the journal and his influence on the selection of content to be published. Huang’s reflection on and development of theory for China studies is embodied not only in the content published in the journal but also in the paradigmatic shifts embraced by the scholars published in the journal. In other words, his personal scholarly objectives are consistent with the reflection on and development of theory in the journal. And, because of this, the research direction of the journal

creates an advantageous interaction with the international academic community. This interaction is also embodied in Huang's efforts to transcend the boundaries between overseas and domestic China studies since the beginning of the twenty-first century. In mainland China, his research is closely linked to the well-known academic journal *Open Times*. Since 2005, he has published more than forty articles in *Open Times*. Between 2015 and 2020, Huang produced an average of five articles per year in the journal and two per year between 2020 and 2022. At the same time, Huang also organized a number of special issues for *Open Times*. These efforts have deepened the cooperation between domestic and overseas scholars. The cooperation between *Modern China* and *Open Times*, in the seven dialogues mentioned above, is a demonstration of the rare, but close, interaction between two academic communities straddling the Pacific Ocean. And these dialogues also reflect the joint development of two important academic journals in China and the United States.

### *Theoretical Reflections on China Studies in the Past*

When he first founded *Modern China*, Philip Huang often talked about the goals of the journal in his editor's forewords—reflect on past research, ask new questions, and build a platform for the exchange and discussion of ideas. Early on, many of the articles published in the journal were reflections on past research. In the third issue of *Modern China* in 1976, for example, he published an article by Michael Gotz on “The Development of Modern Chinese Literature Studies in the West: A Critical View,” which was a reflection on how Western scholars approached the study of modern Chinese literature (Gotz, 1976). In describing the article in the editor's foreword, Huang commented: “[it] turns the question of the relationship between art and politics on ourselves: [the author] reviews the political orientation of past scholarship on modern Chinese literature and places the new approaches represented here into the context of the development of that field” (Huang, 1976b: 276). Other review articles, such as “History, Ideology, and Foreign Policy: A Review of Some Recent Western Works on Chinese Relations with Southeast Asia” (Woodside, 1978) published in the second issue of 1978, also reflected and commented on Western scholarship on China. There were a number of similar articles that evaluated and analyzed older studies of China in the West, all of which pointed out the characteristics and existing problems of those approaches or analyzed the state of the field of China studies in the West, especially the United States. Huang himself published many articles of this type in *Modern China*. In the fourth issue of 1979, for example, he

published “Current Research on Ming-Qing and Modern History in China” (Huang, 1979). In that article, he reflected on and analyzed existing problems in Western studies of the Ming-Qing period and modern Chinese history. The series of discussions on paradigmatic issues in China studies that Huang organized in the 1990s had repercussions throughout the community of China scholars and forced them to reflect on the paradigms used to study social and economic history and modern literature in China (Huang, 1991a; Huang, 1993b). Huang was not the only scholar reflecting on these topics, many first-class scholars joined the discussions, discussions that continued to expand and attracted the attention of all of the international communities studying China.

After the success of the symposia, Huang used *Modern China* as a platform on which to advance this kind of reflective scholarly work that critiqued past research. In 1995, the first issue of *Modern China* was dedicated to rethinking the Chinese revolution, which included an introduction by Huang (Huang, 1995a). Afterward, he published numerous reflections on past research, reflections that elevated his work to the height of theoretical construction. In the second issue of *Modern China* in 1998, Huang published the culmination of his reflections on past research in “Theory and the Study of Modern Chinese History: Four Traps and a Question” (Huang, 1998b). Later, Huang expanded into legal studies and once again engaged in a critique of existing problems in past American studies on Chinese law. In more recent years, he has strengthened his dialogues with scholars and academic communities within China, expanded his studies into the Chinese village, and founded and edits *Rural China: An International Journal of History and Social Science* (2001-). Most importantly, he has put forth a research methodology based on actual practice, neither just objective experience nor subjective theory. He has published a series of articles on his method, a series that is a thorough-going empirical summary and methodological reflection on how to study China (e.g., see Huang Zongzhi, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2015a, 2016a, 2016b, 2018, 2020a, forthcoming).

After Huang was appointed as the Changjiang Chair Professor in the Law School of Renmin University, his academic identity became increasingly characterized by the fusion of the Chinese and the Western. After reflecting so much on past research, he started to publish many of his own views about the development of theory for studying China in the future. His views merge the respective theoretical traditions from China and the West. He believes that neoliberalism pervades Chinese academia while neoconservatism and postmodernism pervade American academia. Whether neoconservatism or postmodernism, Huang argues, they both frame China within an either/or binary framework.

The common features of these theories is that they are highly ideological and place little value on empirical evidence. For neoconservatives, because they believe that they have already grasped the ultimate truth, there is simply no distinction to be made between objective and subjective facts. In the epistemology of postmodernists, it goes without saying, there is no truth at all. Everything is merely “discourse” or rhetoric. Therefore, the two are equally inclined towards theory, place little value on experience . . . , and are equally antagonistic towards Marxism. This consensus has facilitated a type of compromise between them, even an alliance. (Huang Zongzhi, 2012: 63)

Since these are the two influential currents in American academia, it tells us that American scholars tend to emphasize theory over empirical evidence. Within such theoretical traditions, older studies of China in the West applied theory and logic produced in the West to interpret and analyze China, which meant they were often misrepresenting China’s realities. Since these theoretical traditions are rooted in a Western culture, they will always scrutinize China through an ideological lens, which easily gives rise to Western-centrism or China-centrism. Because of these flaws in older China studies, Huang argues, scholars need to pay more attention to the actual experience of China and thereby move toward a new theoretical position that transcends either/or binaries. This is exactly the methodological innovation that needs to be used in China studies in the future. Overall, Huang’s shift in research topics, and his ability to integrate Chinese and Western elements in his academic experience, led him to critique past China studies in the West and break away from the either/or binary framework to produce a new approach to China based on its realities. He understood that all realities, in all aspects of Chinese society, including history, politics, and economics, differ from how they appear in the Western imaginary. Instead of an either/or binary, Huang’s approach is to embrace the interpenetration of the Chinese and the Western.

In 2016, Huang published “Our Sense of Problem: Rethinking China Studies in the United States” in *Modern China*. In the article, he provides a systematic and critical analysis of past China studies in the United States in his previous fields of research (Huang, 2016). Even before this article, Huang’s theoretical review and scholarly critique of past China scholarship was prominently discussed in many of the articles he published in *Modern China*, articles that also systematically charted his intellectual course. In this article, Huang begins with an analysis of the most influential work in the past three generations of China studies in the United States. Huang described the problems of US-based China studies:

My review of the past problematics [is] then placed into a larger framework of Western thinking about China. They have been in my view part and parcel of a persistent conceptual frame that sharply juxtaposes the West and China into an either/or binary, such that the dominant themes have been either the superiority of the West, with China as its opposite “other” or, in the most recent generation, the reverse, of a China equivalent to, superior to, or just like the West, still according to the West’s standards and still in an either/or binary framework. Both of those arguments have been born mainly of theoretical influences and problematics that are Western in origin. Both have seriously violated the fundamental reality of modern-contemporary China: namely, the necessary mixing of the past with the present, and the Chinese with the Western. (Huang, 2016: 117)

Huang went on to point out that either/or binary modes of thinking in China studies in the United States originated from Western theory and the problematics coming out of that theory, and are one-sided representations of Chinese realities. He further dissected American studies of China:

We have seen how the problematics of the most influential works in U.S.-based China studies have been conditioned by American problems more than Chinese problems, and shaped by the larger American political-intellectual context in which U.S. China scholars work more than by China the subject itself. And they have told more about political, ideological, and theoretical influences of the United States than about China itself. (Huang, 2016: 148)

Huang went on to argue that the core issues raised in the most influential works in American China studies came more from America’s own theories and problems than from China as the subject of research. By clarifying the existing problems in past studies of China, it is possible to explore the future theoretical direction of research on China. Theoretical guidance alone, however, without a method for better studying China may still lead the United States, and the West in general, right back into their old problems. In recent years, Huang has actively explored and begun using new methods to study China based on his reflections about history and the metaphysical aspects of methodology.

### *Research Based on China’s Practice*

Since American academia often ignores empirical evidence and embraces the highly ideological theoretical traditions of neoconservatism and postmodernism, Huang has sought to break through these limitations. He wrote:

To overcome the major weaknesses of both neoliberalism and postmodernism, one viable method is to seek practical wisdom that is applicable today in the

history of practice. On the one hand, focusing on practice can eliminate the disadvantages of relying exclusively on discourse, which ignores practice and experience. On the other hand, we can define the path of present-day reforms by basing them on existing experience and practical realities so as to avoid unrealistic empty talk. My understanding of “practice” contains three meanings. First, practice as it relates to theory is about focusing on actions. . . . Second, practice as it relates to systems and structures mainly refers to the process of implementation, which (as I teach in my courses) is what the sociological and anthropological theorist Pierre Bourdieu calls the “theory of practice.” . . . Finally, in systems requiring that the individuals concerned file with the court “a pledge of their willingness to end a lawsuit,” though obviously a formal procedure, does reveal in the actual operational procedure the judicial “logic of practice” by county magistrates, which is another concept from Bourdieu. . . . Therefore, I advocate the study of the history of practice. The history of practice is not purely retrospective, but is prospective and contains a concept of value. (Huang Zongzhi, 2012: 72-73)

According to Huang’s view, the best way to solve the intrinsic problem of China studies in the United States is to focus on Chinese practice in order to construct a theory based on actual practice rather than to solely rely on theory to interpret experience. That said, he also indicated that this practice should bring together empirical knowledge with theoretical interpretation to include also prospective vision and subjective values. In other words, there are scholarly principles that will help us extract theory from practice. The articles published in *Modern China* over the last few years show that the topics covered are increasingly embracing Chinese characteristics, moving closer to social realities, and are explorations based on studies of practice.

Huang’s scholarly approaches inform *The Social Sciences of Practice* 实践社会科学 series simultaneously published by Brill and Guangxi Normal University Press, for which he is the series editor. The planned series will contain forty-one books, including twenty-four previously published and seventeen by Huang himself. In the series foreword, Huang explained the genesis and purpose of the series:

The social sciences in China and the U.S. have come to be rather heavily dominated by abstract theorizing divorced from practical realities. What this series proposes to emphasize instead is actual economic and legal, and historical and social practices, and the theoretical logics evidenced therein. The theoretical works included in the series proceed not from theory to practice, but rather from practice to theory; the empirical studies included are ones of important theoretical implications. (<https://www.lishiyushehui.cn/book/category/81>)

From the titles of the three subseries in the Chinese version (Legal History in Practice and Theory; Economic History in Practice and Theory; and Rural China, Past and Present, in Practice and Theory), we can see that Huang's focus on practice is not only an intellectual theory but also a research method. In the series, Huang is trying to correct some chronic abuses in academic circles:

The typical social science study today proceeds from a certain theoretical position, and asks a question derived from that particular perspective, with the intention of proving (or, sometimes, disproving) the posited "hypothesis." This may be done explicitly or implicitly, but always with a host of assumptions, often unspoken, even unconscious. (<https://en.lishiyushahui.cn/book/category/44>)

Huang is arguing that Chinese social science research originates in ideas from the West and is therefore dependent on those epistemological approaches that come with the belief that Western experience is universal. And, therefore, such research becomes a matter of forcing Chinese realities to fit Western theories. The history of the Chinese village and its realities is only the most obvious example of an empirical reality that does not conform to mainstream Western theories.

Our "social sciences of practice," however, calls for inverting that epistemological process, to proceed not from (Western-originated) theory (and hypotheses derived therefrom), but rather from the practical realities of the subject country. . . . We start with practice because, unlike theory, practice is anchored in the subject country's own social-economic and political contexts, perspectives, and discourses. And problems seen through practice rather than theory are far more likely to be of indigenous concern to the subject country itself rather than just theoretical/epistemological concern to the West. . . .

Such practical and theoretical concerns do not mean, however, the simple rejection or disregard of Western social science theory, but rather deliberate dialoguing with existing theory, and also deliberate borrowing from and developing the West's multiple alternative theoretical traditions. (<https://en.lishiyushahui.cn/book/category/44>)

Overall, Huang is arguing that by deriving theory from practice, and by understanding the interpenetrations between seemingly contradictory and mutually exclusive binaries, we can discover a research path that transcends the logic of either/or binaries. Such a social science of practice, he contends, is more suitable for understanding Chinese history and contemporary

realities than mainstream formalist theory. Only through this research method, he argues, can problematics and theoretical conceptions better suited to the study of China be formed. To share his personal insights and introduce his method to Chinese graduate students, he offers seminars on “Society, Economy, and Law: History and Theory” at Renmin University in China. Huang designed the seven-week seminar around the core of the doctoral curriculum he developed over thirty-eight years of teaching at the University of California, Los Angeles, and later honed during twenty years of teaching in China. The first three weeks of the seminar focus on the methods and habits of reading monographs (and thus the writing of monographs) and the final four weeks address understanding and applying theory and the development of ideas from the study of practice. Huang’s overall purpose is to train students to find answers by teaching them the practice of research, a practice based on the relationship between facts and concepts, practice and theory.

## **Transcending the China-versus-West Binary Opposition**

American scholarship on China generally presupposes an either/or oppositional conceptual framework, one based on the assumption of a China-versus-West binary. In recent years, along with his deepening exchanges with academics in China, Huang has tried to transcend either/or binary oppositional frameworks by pursuing an approach that amalgamates and integrates the two. In the process, his desire to deal with Chinese realities became actualized. He wrote:

In the past, I was a China specialist, a member of an academic group on the margins of American academia. For many years, I was accustomed to passively thinking about Chinese realities (to think about them, but not write about them). After returning to China and teaching young scholars concerned with national affairs and writing for a domestic audience, my interests shifted to active engagement with China. This experience has allowed me to develop a prospective vision contained within my own awareness of the problematics in the major theoretical traditions in my scholarship. (Huang Zongzhi, 2012: 61)

Huang finds it impossible to reflectively critique and thoroughly scrutinize China’s contemporary realities through an either/or binary opposition between China and the West. Rather, Chinese realities need to be understood as an interpenetration and interaction of both. Basing himself on an awareness of this central problematic, Huang argued:

“Modern China” is in actual fact almost by definition bicultural, and it is today even not just capitalist or socialist, but both capitalist and socialist. To truly decenter the West and to truly center China, we need to begin not with Western-derived problems, but China-derived problems.

As we saw above, the either/or West-versus-China binary mode of thought has been extended also to a host of other similar dualities, including modern versus traditional, industry versus agriculture, cities versus countryside, market versus population, market versus the state, formal-rational law versus substantive law, the universal versus the particular, and so on. In each, the persistent habit of searching for logical consistency drives theoretical and ideological constructions toward a one-sided emphasis of a single factor to the exclusion of the other side of the binary, often without regard to empirical evidence and practical realities. (Huang, 2016: 148-49)

Huang discovered that these multiple either/or dualistic binaries led China scholars to emphasize either the subjective or the objective side, while excluding the other, with the inevitable result that the unidimensional theory always deviated from dyadic reality. To transcend the framework of these either/or binaries, Huang advocates affirming the interrelationship and interpenetration of these dualities in order to acknowledge Chinese realities and Western theories within the problematic of China studies. Huang’s argument is best represented in his “In Search of a Social Science Anchored in (Chinese) Realities” (Huang, 2019). In the article, he reviews his own research over the past fifty years focusing on the relationship between Western theory and China studies. To truly connect Chinese realities with Western theory, he argues, scholars must grasp the often paradoxical nature of Chinese realities and construct a theoretical system that endows China with subjectivity.

From his many years of experience engaged in empirical research, Huang repeatedly noticed the disjunctions between Western theories and Chinese realities and how Western theory usually ignored the coexistence and interactions of binaries in the real world. In the judicial system in China in the early twentieth century, for example, Huang noticed that national legislators, local judicial practitioners, and even ordinary people engaged in lawsuits intended neither to stick to tradition nor engage in the wholesale use of Western laws. Through legislation and judicial practice, these groups gradually defined a legal “modernity” for China, one that contained both traditional social and economic logics and modern capitalist logic. Chinese law in the Republican period, then, was not only permeated with traditional moral and ethical concerns, but also Western liberal cultural thought. Huang provides many other similar examples in his monographs, including *The Peasant Economy and Social Change in North China* (Huang, 1985) (awarded the Fairbank Prize by

the American Historical Association); *The Peasant Family and Rural Development in the Yangzi Delta, 1350-1988* (Huang, 1990) (awarded the Levenson Prize by the Association for Asian Studies); *Civil Justice in China: Representation and Practice in the Qing* (Huang, 1996); *Code, Custom, and Legal Practice in China: The Qing and the Republic Compared* (Huang, 2001); and *Chinese Civil Justice, Past and Present* (Huang, 2010). On the basis of the research paradigms described above, Huang pointed out:

[M]ore often than not, theoretical formulations are one-sided simplifications of empirical reality, based in their origins on deliberately simplified or one-sided formulations of reality, in order to try to lift out some one aspect or another for elucidation. They should be understood as a method of knowledge, not reality itself. Yet such simplifications are then often idealized, or equated with reality, then absolutized with logic, with the most influential ones being further ideologized by political power and/or by Western-centrism. We should not accept such formulations as reality itself.

We need to see that either/or binaries, so often reflected in such theoretical oversimplifications, are in fact one-sided pictures of the world, in which reality generally involves the continuing interactions of both sides of the binaries, not just one side or the other. That applies to the binary of theory and experience, no less than of subjectivism and objectivism.

It is all the more true of the binary of West versus East. In the “modern” world, the West, as the erstwhile imperialist aggressor, is for the non-Western world at once hated enemy and admired model. The two in fact almost unavoidably coexist to make up the real world of the non-West. Yet Western social science theories, deliberately or not, generally overlook this dual character of the non-West, and insist, by force of deductive logic or more simply just Western-centrism, that the rest of the world must simply follow the Western model. As is typical of most binary oppositions, one side usually excludes the other, or completely absorbs or dominates the other, much as in one or the other binary of subjectivism versus objectivism, universalism versus particularism, and so on. (Huang, 2019: 5)

Condensed in this quote is what Huang learned from an accumulation of experience over a lifetime of research. It is an embodiment of his desire to seek the truth by constantly trying to transcend the limitations of time and experience and explore various theoretical constructs.

## **Toward a Social Science of Practice**

In 2009, David Shambaugh described contemporary China studies as suffering from myopia. He said:

The field is, in my view, far too micro-oriented in its foci and increasingly preoccupied with methodological concerns. China scholars today know “more and more about less and less” and see research methodologies as an end in itself rather than as a means to generate broader observations. Whatever the causes, the result has been an unfortunate losing of the forest for the trees.

Having deconstructed China over the past two decades in such considerable detail, scholars should begin to put the pieces of China back together again and offer generalizations about “China” writ large. There is no better place to do this than in the pages of *The China Quarterly*.

To be certain, establishing *variance* is the essence of social science—but so too should be identifying general patterns. When possible, Sinologists should ask themselves the “so what?” question, and should also engage in public education and policy advice as part of their civic duty as educators. (Shambaugh, 2009: 916)

Shambaugh’s warning is a profound reminder to China scholars. Taking inventory of Philip Huang’s scholarly contributions, he is a leading scholar of China precisely because he has made a breakthrough in the problem described by Shambaugh.

In academic research, the advantages of theoretical analysis by a researcher can be found in the profundity of their viewpoint, uniqueness of their perspective, simplicity and lucidity of their analysis, and fullness and felicity of their insights. But, just as easily, a researcher can mechanically apply a theory and inadvertently obstruct the crux of the issue, produce contradictions between theory and evidence, and run roughshod over the details and particularities of the case. Thus, Huang has written, “[theory’s] use is much like a difficult journey full of exhilarating possibilities and rewards, yet also fraught with traps and dangers” (Huang, 1998b: 184). Huang has outlined four traps in the use of theory in China studies: “uncritical use, ideological use, Western-centrism, and culturalism, including sinocentrism (Huang, 1998b: 184). Although each theory promises certain idealized insights in the future, such forecasting and imagination cannot be divorced from the factual conditions of Chinese history; otherwise the theory becomes nothing more than a fictitious, utopian construct. Combining thoughts and clues from modern and contemporary change in China, Huang has asked the following thought-provoking questions:

If China did indeed have a past that was distinct in its pattern and its dynamic from the West’s, how might that translate into present and future reality? If commercialization without development did no more than give way in the end

to simple capitalist market development, and the rule of law without formalist rationality to mere wholesale transplanting of modern Western law, then we might just as well have simply employed standard Western theoretical categories, of capitalism and “rationalization,” or incipient capitalism and even “incipient democracy.” Why bother with the empirical demonstration and theoretical conceptualization of a different pattern if things were to end no differently from the West?

[Conversely,] an alternative vision would not be such a problem if China itself had given us clear indications of what that might be. But the fact is China today is still engaged painfully in the search for a distinctively Chinese modernity. The ruling ideologies of modern China have so far failed to provide the answer. (Huang, 1998b: 204)

Then, Huang raised what might be called the quintessential “Philip Huang question”:

Today, a century and a half after China’s first forced contact with the West, the big question remains: what does it mean to be modern and still Chinese? What might the substance of Chinese civilization in a modern world be? (Huang, 1998b: 204)

Huang thought most historians had avoided this fundamental question and suggested, “We might look for a coherent picture of the dynamics and patterns of change in Chinese history, one that is at once empirical and theoretical and without the pitfalls outlined above” (Huang, 1998b: 204-05). How might historians attain this scholarly ideal? He proposed:

We might also turn to Chinese thinkers themselves for guidance. There is no shortage of alternative visions in twentieth-century China. Even the ruling parties proffered some far-sighted formulations that were never acted on. Which among those visions accord well with demonstrable historical patterns? We might aim to answer the following question: what, from a historically grounded perspective, might a China that would be at once paradoxical from a Western perspective, yet modern, and at once modern, yet proudly Chinese, look like? Such a question may appear outdated to a Western postmodernist, but it has been and remains centrally important to China. (Huang, 1998b: 205)

This is a proposal that deserves to be solved through continued cooperation among scholars in China studies.

If the question Huang posed hinges on resolving the relationship between theory and history in modern and contemporary China, he proposed to answer the question by developing a social science of practice that eliminates a major

weakness in substantivist theory by adding a prospective vision and putting forth a fundamental solution at a philosophical level. He wrote:

The most influential research approach among social scientists today is to start with a certain supposition derived from theory, then collect empirical evidence that supports that supposition, then return to the original theory. I've been proposing over the last few years that we reverse this approach. That is, begin with empirical evidence and use it to test available theories to determine whether to select or reject them, or revise or reformulate them, then move forward to establish theoretical generalizations that better tally with empirical reality. Then, we can return to experience to verify the theory. (Huang Zongzhi, 2020a: 34-35)

Huang opposes accepting any theory as a given answer and proposes to problematize all theory. He explained his reasoning thusly:

This is because the real world is ever changing and cannot be entirely explained by any one theory. It is also because existing theory mostly originated from one-sided simplifications of Western experience. From the standpoint of theory originating in the West, Chinese realities are filled with paradoxes (for example, the reality is that pairs of things deemed mutually exclusive actually coexist). Even relative to Western realities, because of the hegemony of modern scientism, social science strives to create universal theoretical constructs and therefore leans heavily towards simplistic, one-sided, and logically conforming universal patterns. We need to reverse such epistemological processes and develop research approaches that begin with reality, process it through theory, then return to reality for verification rather than starting from theory and tailoring reality to fit a certain theory.

[This is Huang's persistent view on theory and practice.] The advantage of such a research approach is that it is not easily dictated by any existing theory or ideology, which means it is more closely connected to empirical evidence and more likely to lead to conclusions that are more in accordance with realities, in particular Chinese realities, in the construction of new theories. (Huang Zongzhi, 2020a: 35)

If we think we have reached Huang's final conclusion, we are only seeing a single aspect of his analysis of the problem. He was able to deduce a dialectical proposition through spiraling self-reflection. "An unavoidable weakness of this 'substantivist' research approach is that it lacks the kind of prospective vision embedded in universal theories" (Huang Zongzhi, 2020a: 35). Huang argues that all scholars should have a "prospective" vision. While some scholars believe they are constructing their opinions on certain self-evident

universal “scientific” “axioms” or laws, they are actually setting up certain chosen idealized values and then constructing them into a model impelled by deductive logic. Undoubtedly, this method is not without its flaws, but “it is more easily accepted by the people and propounded by political power until it becomes mainstream” (Huang Zongzhi, 2020a: 35). Combined with his own scholarly path, Huang reflected: When first developed, the research approach of the social science of practice lacked a prospective vision and could be turned into a mere ideology. Based on this conundrum, his idea is to

base our moral and value choices on a deep reverence for the traditions of different civilizations and thus distinguish between “good” and “evil” realities and practices. The goal is not only to more accurately understand reality, but also to put forth moral values that can help us reform the present. Although there is a certain “universalizing” intention in choosing the moral values in our scholarship, it also shows respect for the validity of the moral ideal that there are differences in the traditions of all of the world’s major civilizations. The key is not only to recognize the universal aspect of this approach, but also its particularities in order to build a new-style social science that is open, not exclusionist nor closed. . . .

Simply put, the first step in adding a prospective vision to substantivism is to draw support from two other major theoretical traditions—Marxism and postmodernism—in pointing out the inadequacy of formalist capitalist and liberal models presently occupying the hegemonic position. At the same time, we must recognize the important viewpoints proven by neoliberalism: the formidable power of neoliberalism demonstrated by the success of the market economy, but also the profound and forceful insights from Marxism and postmodernism about the ugliness of capitalism. We must also recognize that substantivist theory lacks a prospective vision and a discursive construct, which are its two major deficiencies. Only in this way will it be possible to build a new world of scholarship that transcends existing theoretical limitations.

[Overall, Huang pointed out,] we must break away from the major weaknesses of scientism and Western-centric epistemology, draw upon an epistemology in the social sciences of practice that accords more with reality to correct any epistemological biases, and uphold the high moral ideals of all major civilizations, thereby endowing our epistemological method with its deserved subjective agency and a plural, inclusive, and prospective moral and discursive system. In this way, we can form a social science in which China maintains its own subjective identity and we can explore its history and future more in accordance with reality. This approach will also help establish a more inclusive, comprehensive, and reality-abiding world of scholarship for the social sciences. . . .

[Moreover,] this scholarly approach should explore issues with the motive of seeking the truth in accordance with moral values rather than be limited to the currently popular, but rather crude instrumentalist/utilitarian approach to “problematics.” This is the substance of a prospective social science of practice. (Huang Zongzhi, 2020a: 35, 46-47)

Huang’s approach is truly original. By targeting the problems in the major theories and practices in China studies, Huang has undertaken groundbreaking analysis, come to a thorough understanding of the problem, and provided a solution, all contained within a logically tight theoretical argument. His approach is a substantial leap forward for academia and, indeed, opens up an entirely new perspective. Huang’s scholarship has an intrinsic and critical connection with existing research, is being recognized within the profession, and, we believe, will be borne out by history.

In a letter to Liu Longjin 刘隆进, editor at Guangxi Normal University Press, Huang described the trajectory of his research over the last two decades. In his *Experience and Theory: A Study of the History of Practice of Chinese Society, Economy, and Law* 经验与理论: 中国社会、经济与法律的实践历史研究, his primary theoretical insight was focused on the deviation of empirical evidence about China from Western theory (“paradoxes”) (Huang Zongzhi, 2007). After a decade of additional scholarly work, Huang’s *Practice and Theory: The Study of Chinese Society, Economy, and Law, Past and Present* 实践与理论: 中国社会、经济与法律的历史与现实研究 addressed how he had shifted from “experience” to “practice” as his guiding concept (Huang Zongzhi, 2015b). The difference between “experience” and “practice” is that the former refers only to general facts while the latter deals with the interaction between “representation”/discourse and actual implementation (and includes the tensions, conflicts, complementarity, and fusion of the two).

In the “practical moralism” of the Chinese “justice system,” the behavior and decisions of legal actors did not conform entirely to the principles of moralism or practicality, but formed a single entity. That amounted to, Huang argued, “what is said is one thing; what is done is another; but together they make up yet another thing.” Morality and practicality were two discernibly different things, but interacted and intermingled in such a manner that they became a new whole. This example of Huang’s form of “practice” is at the center of his thought and the new direction of his scholarship in the decade between 2005 and 2015. It was in this decade that Huang initially formed his ideas about “the social science of practice.” By adding in his more recent concerns with prospective vision and morality, he developed his current methodology, which we might call a “new-style social science of practice and

political economy of practice.” Huang’s focus in the initial stage of the development of his idea was to highlight the reality of “paradoxes” between Chinese experience and Western theory. Later, he made another discovery while studying Chinese legal history, that Chinese judicial “practice” was the result of the interaction and intermingling of “moral” ideas and “practical” considerations. Most recently, he realized that any social science must possess some guiding prospective moral ideals if it is to be a functioning model of a “social science of practice” with long-lasting significance, which includes a “political economy of practice.”

If we only evaluate Philip Huang’s scholarly contributions by summarizing his nine monographs of empirical research, and do not recognize his dyadic thought process about the construction of new theories, we would fail to see and understand the evolutionary process and formulation of his theory and method. Recently, Huang exhorted, “If a young scholar wants to study and understand my research approach and methods, they must understand the three major elements described above. The best way to study my approach is to follow the sequence and master them one by one.” In other words, Huang believes that to grasp the core of his ideas, students and scholars must understand the shift from “experience and theory” to “practice and theory” and then to his “social science of practice,” and then study his ideas about a prospective moral vision. (This last idea is best explained in his recent *The Dualistic Unity of State and Society in China: Historical Retrospect and Prospective Vision* 国家与社会的二元合一：中国历史回顾与前瞻 [Huang Zongzhi, 2022].) Only on the basis of this train of thought can readers grasp the entirety of Huang’s theoretical work and practical methodology and their mutual relationship. His four works on theory and nine monographs of empirical research are also an example of how a scholar engages with interacting binaries; neither is dispensable. If a student or scholar only engages with the importance of Huang’s empirical historical research without taking seriously his practice+prospective theory and method, they cannot truly understand or use the methods he advocates.

## Conclusion

We could not separate the development, evolution, and changing currents in *Modern China* from Philip Huang’s promotion of China studies abroad or his personal intellectual transformation. To study these issues separately would require a special in-depth discussion, something we could not do in this essay. Instead, we have explored the relationship between Huang’s scholarly ideas and practices and his editorship of *Modern China*. We have been particularly interested in how Philip Huang’s own intellectual development has shaped

the ideas and theories published in the journal and how the journal has given Huang a platform for publishing his own scholarly explorations. After World War II, China studies emerged in the United States as a product of area studies and Western scholars collectively approached China as “the other.” In response, Philip Huang has challenged us: Chinese scholars must strike out and generate their own theories and scholarly traditions from within China while also critically engaging with paradigms and experiences from China studies abroad.

In the nearly fifty years since the inception of *Modern China*, the journal has provided a platform for the exchange of ideas from all disciplines in China studies, and constantly served as a source of reflection about the existing problems in the field and promising directions for future research. A careful reading of the scholarship published in *Modern China* over the last forty plus years would not only be beneficial for scholars seeking to understand the evolution and characteristics of the history of China studies in the West, but also help strengthen Chinese and Western scholarly dialogues about viewpoints and methodologies and build bridges of understanding and experience based on scholarly publications.

Having been at the forefront of international scholarship for so long, Philip Huang possesses a broad, open outlook and intellectual sophistication far surpassing the average scholar in his vision, methodologies, and discourses. His broad viewpoint allows him to maintain the values of scholarly exploration while also being adept at developing scholarly breakthroughs from the problems he studies. In him, we can see the perfect combination of three elements: theoretical knowledge, scholarly ability, and a sense of practice. Theoretical knowledge is a prerequisite for original research and the premise on which academic judgments are formed. A rich and acute sense of practice enables him to have the ability to empathize and connect with, and thus resonate with, the times and he thus possesses a sense of the real problems at issue. By cutting across and transcending disciplines, Huang has broken out of disciplinary boundaries and broken free as a scholar.

The three years since 2019 have been perhaps the most productive phase of Philip Huang’s career. Reflecting on this period, and basing his thoughts on the accumulation of his scholarly and theoretical thinking over his long career, and with a more explicit understanding of the importance of morality in scholarship, he has written in his letter to Liu Longjin about his remaining scholarly ideals and ambitions:

My view is that “the fundamental interests of the broadest number of people” should be the purpose of state governance, but also scholarly research. From merely desiring to do my own scholarship, I have come to understand this

loftier purpose and regard it not only as my personal goal, but as the highest objective of scholarship. This explicit goal has become the major impetus behind the completion of a series of new works over these past several years.

“High hills we breasted, long ways we went” says a line in the *Book of Poetry*. These powerful words vividly portray Philip Huang’s lifetime dedication to humanist scholarship. His career should inspire younger generations of scholars to pass on the flames of his passion.

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