

# Divisions of Arts and Sciences in Chinese Society in the Last Thirty Years

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## Abstract:

In China, the perfect distinction between natural science and the humanities has only been around for about 40 years, and it has only been around for 400 years elsewhere in the world. China's inclusive and diverse culture has resulted in a situation in which many different fields of study successfully intersect and flourish. In the nearly thirty years since establishing the liberal arts and science branch to accommodate social production, Chinese society has regarded the liberal arts and science as opposing one another, and heated debates have always continued. This article will investigate how the arts and sciences are comparable to social production, intending to transform views that are in opposition to one another in society into inclusive and dialectical perspectives. Although it is believed that students in the liberal arts who possess strong professional abilities still have difficulty finding suitable jobs due to the major problems they face, they can obtain the positions they desire by working in fields related to their major. Most students enrolled in liberal arts programs in society are not necessarily engaged in their original professional work. If they have a strong ability to work, they are more likely to become employed in middle and senior management positions. On the other hand, students of liberal arts who have an average level of professional ability are at risk of being unemployed and experiencing other potentially hazardous circumstances almost at any time.

**Keywords:** Opposites and Dialectics; Arts and Sciences; Modern University Education; Interdisciplinary Education; Chinese Education Development.

## 1. Introduction

Social science and natural science concepts in the modern sense appear relatively late in human history. However, this set of concepts is still derived from earlier concepts, meaning that this set of young modern definitions has a complete and long history [1, 2]. When mankind developed from primitive to feudal civilization, an early system of knowledge and skills, known as disciplines, emerged in human society. The earliest written classification of disciplines and other skills in China was in the Zhou Dynasty [3]. The schools in the Shang Dynasty continued to develop based on the Xia Dynasty, and more importantly, universities appeared. The Book of Rites recorded, "People who lived in the Shang Dynasty set right learning as a university, left learning as a primary school, and Playing in a place called Guzong". The university and elementary school were all schools of the King of the Shang Dynasty, and Guzong was a school for the children of nobles to learn rituals and music. However, the Shang Dynasty had no written discipline classification [3].

When China developed into the Zhou Dynasty, the ancient

educational system that the Chinese people traced back to was perfected, and the educational system at this time was considered the most perfect in the history of China and has been praised by later generations. Education was generally divided into noble education and mass education, with noble education serving the royal family and mass education serving the people [4]. The whole curriculum of the Zhou Dynasty, according to the records of the Zhou Rites, Land Officials, and Great Stude, includes "six virtues", "six lines", and "six arts" : "The teachers of the royal family used the three standards of character, behavior, and skill to teach their students, and were supported by everyone. The first standard is six kinds of morality: erudite, kindhearted, able to learn the spirit of great men, loyal to the country, and harmonious among people. The second criterion is six behaviors: filial piety toward parents, treating people as friends, harmony in everything you do, starting your own family at the right age, integrity, and understanding others. The third criterion is six skills: etiquette, musicology, archery, equestrian riding, literature, and art, including calligraphy and mathematics."

It can be seen that Chinese education is divided into mor-

al education and knowledge and skills education. These include military and physical education; Etiquette is the key to the cultivation of temperament and the capital of nobles' children to participate in politics; Musicology is combined with liturgy, mainly studying ethics; Literature, art, and mathematics are pure knowledge skills and are regarded as the criteria for career assessment. Therefore, education in the Western Zhou Dynasty and before made no distinction between written culture, physical education, or social sciences and natural sciences. Due to the development of Chinese history and the inclusiveness of culture, ancient China has long blurred the concept of disciplines and viewed all knowledge and skills as a whole. However, it is worth noting that this set of definitions of cultural and physical education had already appeared in writing in the Zhou Dynasty, that is, the level of culture and physical education.

## 2. History of Chinese arts and sciences

During the Eastern Zhou Dynasty, etiquette and ethics fell due to the rise of vassals everywhere. To resist the imperial court and annex other vassal states, local forces began to attach importance to military and force, and each vassal state began to teach Wende and martial arts separately. This is the earliest subject classification in China at the cultural and physical education levels.

Because social science and natural science always complement each other and blend, China still regards social science and natural science as one kind of knowledge. This can be seen in China's official selection system, where most ministers must know the social and natural sciences. For example, Chinese historians must be proficient in politics, literature, arithmetic, economics, management, and astronomy. Civil ministers and military generals need to be proficient in military formations and diplomatic negotiations, as well as social and natural science skills.

Known as the "source of Chinese civilization," The Book of Change (Zhouyi, Lianshan, and Guizang as the representative of the I learning) is also to assist people's survival, production, and life. Chinese Yi-ology includes social sciences such as humanities, social systems, state governance, ideology, philosophy, and natural sciences such as prediction, divination, mathematics, astronomy, geometry, physics, chemistry, and geomancy. It can be seen from this that the source of Chinese culture is not related to literature and science.

The branch system and university education are inseparable; they support and serve each other. The university education before the 19th century was called a "traditional university" by the academic circle; the main reason is that all the higher education before the 19th century in

the world did not carry out unified and perfect discipline education. Internationally, it is believed that the embryonic form of the modern university appeared in medieval Europe. Small groups arise in every city where there are many people in a particular profession. They set up organizations to protect their interests, so there were many teachers' and student guilds in Europe then. These organizations were the prototype of the modern university [4]. People in the same field gathered to discuss their research and ideas and spread their knowledge and technology to the outside world. More and more new people joined the guilds, and there were educators and educated people within the guilds. The earliest universities in Europe, the University of Bologna, the University of Salerno, the University of Paris, the University of Montpellier, and the University of Oxford, were all born in this way.

Over time, organizations in different fields were concentrated in universities, and liberal arts departments were born. From the top down, university education has developed into more stages, such as preparatory, secondary, and primary schools. The more basic the education, the more general the knowledge. At that time, primary and secondary education was mainly for students to get jobs, so they did not strictly distinguish between arts and sciences. Still, university education, as a sophisticated knowledge research organization at that time, has emerged in the modern sense of arts and sciences. The original sciences mainly included computing, geometry, physics, chemistry, biology, and the environment, while the liberal arts were mainly grammar, law, and thought. These basic concepts have been developed until now without much change [5].

## 3. People's early impression of the arts and sciences

In 1909, the classified study of humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences appeared in China. The Qing government approved the department's proposal to divide the middle school curriculum into liberal arts and practical subjects. Still, the proposal was not effectively implemented due to political corruption and economic weakness at that time. It was not until 1977 that liberal arts and science were included in China's college entrance examination for the first time. It was also the first time China officially distinguished humanities and social sciences from natural sciences [6].

Before 1977, there were certain definitions and impressions of humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences in society, most of which are still used today. At that time, people were under the impression that the humanities and social sciences were noble and gentle subjects dedicated to self-cultivation and recreation. Humanities and social sciences are generally defined as subjects favored by the

children of the aristocracy because they do not need to work for useful things. Therefore, humanities and social sciences have become “useless studies” in people’s hearts. Natural science is a “useful study” instead of humanities and social science. Science was defined by the Qing government at the beginning, meaning that it was a subject driven by practical interests, which was not elegant but practical.

Today, China officially defines humanities and social sciences as studying human cultural heritage, social development, social problems, and social laws. Classical liberal arts disciplines officially defined include law, literature, history, philosophy, etc. Natural science is the study of nature and matter, including the laws of matter. The classical science disciplines officially defined are mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, software engineering, etc. However, due to deep-rooted societal stereotypes, humanities and social sciences are often considered practically useless and a waste of money. People who study humanities and social sciences are illogical, irrational, and not smart enough students. On the other hand, the natural sciences are crude and inelegant subjects, but they are found and more firmly believed to have practical outputs, to be productive, and to be practical subjects. On the other hand, those who study natural sciences are less poetic, less refined, more logical, more highly educated, and more thoughtful students.

Since the concept of liberal arts and science officially appeared in China, people have discussed and even torn each other countless times - most people regard natural sciences and humanities and social sciences as two types of things that are difficult to integrate and completely separate, but ignore the fact that less than half a century has passed since the two sets of concepts of “liberal arts” and “science” were formally proposed. Therefore, the author does not fully agree with the above two stereotypes; the author believes that logical thinking, dialectical thinking, and other thinking abilities are one of the common goals of all learning. The so-called poetic, refined, intelligent family economic conditions and other factors are only personal characteristics and have nothing to do with the field of study.

### **4. The main discussion on humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences in Chinese society in the past 30 years**

#### **4.1 Which is more helpful to social development, liberal arts or science?**

According to the public consensus, the important factors to promote social development are people’s literacy, quality of life, national education, national political manage-

ment, industrial level, military strength, and scientific and technological strength.

In public opinion, the humanities mainly determine the social-moral level and the ideological realm of the people, and the greatest help that the liberal arts can bring to society is the politics and management of the country. Natural science is regarded as a discipline that promotes military, industrial, and technological sciences and can greatly help society by increasing production efficiency.

Since China’s reform and opening up to improve the overall strength of the country, more and more attention has been paid to the practical production and industrial level. At the same time, social morality and people’s literacy are often regarded as relative nothingness by the public, and the social status of humanities and social sciences, which promote this purpose, is gradually declining due to the invisibility of actual output.

However, the important role of the humanities and social sciences in the political and social management of the country and the historical record is not ignored, and the public still recognizes this. Still, only a few think the liberal arts can surpass the sciences in this role. The fundamental reason is that politics, history, and management usually concern people in high or specific political positions. It is difficult to feel the true power of the liberal arts in public life, but it is easy to get the benefits of scientific output.

In this regard, people’s different views have their rationality, but the author believes that liberal arts and science have indispensable help to social development; the two views need to be combined.

#### **4.2 Who is more competent, liberal arts or science?**

Through discussing the first topic, the folk gave liberal arts and science students stereotypes and value expectations. The public expects science majors to contribute to industrial production and other aspects, so the public always habitually thinks that science students are logical, thinking, clear, proficient in math, and have spatial imagination.

Liberal arts majors offer two kinds of help. First, those functions which affect the moral and intellectual realms of society, which are ethereal and produce no real results, and for which two kinds of men strive -- first, those who are very learned and highly intellectual thinkers, but who are difficult to distinguish; The second is the incompetent idle who masquerades as the first, or not at all. The second category of roles for liberal arts majors is reserved for those in high political positions and specific professions.

The public thinks that half of the science students are poor or average, so they have to choose science subjects that

are easier to get jobs. Half of them are competent people because people believe that science studies can cultivate their logical thinking ability, and very few of them are scientists with outstanding abilities. Half of the liberal arts students have no practical ability or are even relatively poor people; half of them are knowledgeable people who can serve society, very few of them are philosophers with extremely high ideological realms, and very few of them are senior officials serving in politics and management. Given this problem, the author believes the public has different expectations in different subject fields. Still, the expectations can not be equated with the actual ability of liberal arts students and science students. However, I agree with people's analysis of the composition of liberal arts and science students.

### **4.3 Are liberal arts or science majors more likely to find jobs?**

The mainstream view is that science majors are less fungible due to professional barriers, making science students less likely to lose their jobs. However, it is generally believed that a large number of science students do not have strong professional abilities just because they do not have outstanding advantages, so they choose science with the flow. Therefore, most of these mediocre people find it difficult to find ideal jobs. But equally, they are less likely to lose their jobs.

Liberal arts majors can't prove their abilities straightforwardly, so any layman can freely point at or mock their majors, resulting in a large proportion of liberal arts majors being unemployed or unable to find work. At the same time, a small number of liberal arts students with strong professional abilities can find some jobs across certain fields - the disadvantage of the liberal arts is that it seems to have no professional barriers, and the advantage is also so. Therefore, the public thinks that liberal arts students are more likely to be unemployed than science students, but they can find some jobs that are not completely related to their major.

On this issue, the author agrees with the public's thinking; science and liberal arts both have factors that make it easy to find jobs and difficult to find jobs, but at the same level, science students are more likely to find jobs than liberal arts students, liberal arts students are more likely to be promoted than science students, and liberal arts students are more likely to be unemployed than science students at the same level.

### **4.4 Who has better prospects for liberal arts majors or science majors?**

According to the discussion of the first three questions, students in different fields are divided into those with strong professional ability and those with mediocre professional ability. A few top performers and those with little or no strength are ignored.

Science students with strong professional abilities find it relatively easy to find a job that fits their major. However, due to professional barriers, many science students are unwilling or unable to become managers, so the promotion space is relatively narrow. However, they tend to have greater irreplaceability and faster promotion speed, and their salary level is usually likely to exceed that of the equivalent level of liberal arts students. Science students with general professional ability have more limited promotion space and, most of the time, are in a state of mediocrity, but they are still irreplaceable.

## **5. Conclusion**

It is believed that liberal arts students with strong professional abilities can still not find suitable jobs due to their major problems. Still, they can get their desired positions by working in related fields. Most liberal arts students in society are not necessarily engaged in their original professional work. They are more likely to become middle and senior management if they have good working ability. On the other hand, liberal arts students with average professional ability may be unemployed and in dangerous situations almost at any time. Because they have relatively large substitutability, they are likely to be engaged in jobs with moderate or even low pay.

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