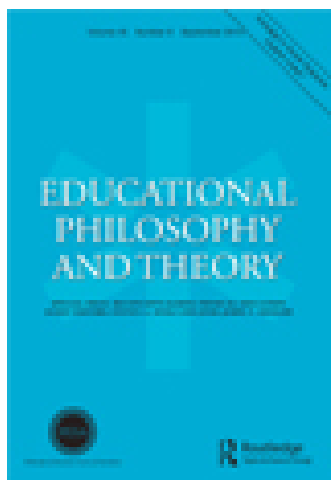


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Publisher: Routledge

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Educational Philosophy and Theory: Incorporating ACCESS

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rept20>

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Published online: 24 Jul 2015.



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To cite this article: Robert Keith Shaw (2015): China Confronts Kant When University Students Experience the Angst of Freedom, Educational Philosophy and Theory: Incorporating ACCESS, DOI: [10.1080/00131857.2015.1058220](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2015.1058220)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2015.1058220>

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China Confronts Kant When University Students Experience the Angst of Freedom

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Abstract

An existential interpretation of student angst in Chinese universities raises issues of autonomy and freedom. The governance arrangements in China create a conflict for Chinese students who in their coursework are urged to become critical-minded and open-minded. In this essay, Kant's moral theory provides access to this phenomenon. His theory of duty–rationality–autonomy–freedom relates the liberty of thought to principled action. Kantian ideals still influence western business and university practice and they become relevant in China as that country modernises. The abilities of graduates which officials say the country needs—insightfulness, creativity, innovation, progressiveness and commitment—are only achievable by professionals who are independent minded, rational and who commit to act on their own conclusions. Such people are Kant's autonomous persons. Chinese students increasingly confront a conflicted educational environment. Universities require students to think, analyse and argue. An outcome of this deliberation is freedom, as construed by Kant as an 'inner' construct. When students are unable to exercise Kantian freedom in matters which concern them they experience the angst of freedom. Students may carry a burden derived from bridles on information and authoritarian restrictions on dialogue.

Keywords: graduate profiles, autonomy, heteronomy, freedom, modernity, Kant, self-actualisation, China, higher education

Introduction

This essay concerns one of many stresses on university students. It provides us with a new way to think about stress, one that draws upon a concept of freedom in Kant's philosophy. The progressive Chinese university itself generates this stress—which is an unease or disquiet perhaps better termed, *angst*—within its students, because the university requires students to acquire two contradictory habits of mind. First, the student is required to gain independence, rationality and creativity. Second, the student must accept limited access to information, curtail discussions about sensitive topics, adhere to the requirements of structured and inflexible workplaces, and endure

a limited capacity to participate in university, local and national governance. This article draws on a reading of Kant's practical (moral) philosophy (Sullivan, 1994, p. 128), which is a 'narrowly rationalist "official" construal ... [that] would place the fact of reason at the front and centre of human moral consciousness' (Brender, 2004, p. 158).

This article is an outcome of a teacher's reflection on experience. What does the future hold for my students and for China if Chinese universities maintain their current aspirations? To address this question, the article attends to the likely potentiality and propensities of a new generation of students, and not to the literature on modernism and development (Pieterse, 1991). Many of the features of western universities have become apparent in Chinese universities (at least superficially), for better or for worse (Yu & Jin, 2014). In many subjects, the curriculum is derived from western textbooks and reflects an international academic literature. The impact of English language textbooks on Chinese students is probably not what the authors' of those books expect. It is the experience of the author that the books in business subjects frequently reinforce the stereotypes and the prejudices which the students hold regarding the west (particularly the United States) and capitalism. Most textbooks lack pedagogical efficacy in cross-cultural classrooms. Chinese leadership, from late 2014, sought to minimise western values promulgated in course materials and teaching. They began a campaign—led by the Minister of Education—to reduce dependence on western textbooks. It is most likely the campaign was more inspired by concerns about politics than pedagogy. Eminent Chinese scholars have questioned the government on what the expression 'western values' means and how China can advance itself if the country is not open to ideas from abroad (Levin, 2015; Officials are trying to stifle independent voices in universities, 2015). Irrespective of politics, there are values and competences inherent in advanced academic work in all disciplines and their exercise might be expected to influence students. What might be the influence of mass university education in China? In contrast with the situation of the past, around 40% of each age cohort will graduate with an undergraduate degree. Kant provides an account of cognition which enables us to explore the qualities of students that we might expect academic work to generate. It is possible to speculate on the effects of these qualities.

The diligent Cantonese students who inspired this article are not partisan and politically active as are some students elsewhere in China (Wasserstrom, 1991; Wasserstrom & Perry, 1994). In southern China, the students' grandparents expelled the Japanese from their villages and their parents had minimal formal education (Mu, Lao, & Chen, 2006). The current cohort of university students is aware that their community and family circumstances have altered for the better and they appreciate China's educational aspirations. They appreciate the magnitude of the challenges which confront Chinese tertiary education (for example, in business and management education, see Limerick, Davis, & Fitzroy, 1993; Southworth, 1999). In discussions, students indicate that they understand China's need to change its school and university policies, but the development of policy is not their concern and they show no interest in assisting the process of change (Kirkpatrick & Zang, 2011). They engage more with the domestic issues of their community and worry about their personal employment prospects. The government was responsible for assigning jobs to students

in colleges and technical schools before the early 1990s, but they abandoned that responsibility and thereby created a competitive job market. The issues which have gained greater prominence since about the mid-1990s are as follows:

(1) workers' welfare and enterprise; (2) peasant burdens and villagers' self-governance; (3) urban affairs management; and (4) land expropriation, house demolition and organised migration. (Chen, 2012, p. 39)

These topics do appear to concern university students in southern China but not to the degree of inciting any form of participation in governance. The denouement of colonialism and poverty is apparent in the attitudes of students when they engage with such topics. Some academics claim that 'Western-style education in China has done little to inculcate revolutionary movements' and contrast this with the alleged more usual correlation between higher education and democracy (Onsman & Cameron, 2014).

Comparisons between western and Chinese universities are problematic. Comparisons which draw upon a monocultural European perspective should concern us, as an historian of Asia declares:

The phenomenon of 'political modernity'—namely, the rule by modern institutions of the state, bureaucracy, and capitalist enterprise—is impossible to think of anywhere in the world without invoking certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even theological traditions of Europe. (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 4)

More specifically, he indicates some concepts which may not apply in Asian societies or hold different flavours to those experienced by western scholars:

Concepts such as citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, human rights, equality before the law, the individual, distinctions between public and private, the idea of the subject, democracy, popular sovereignty, social justice, scientific rationality, and so on all bear the burden of European thought and history. One simply cannot think of political modernity without these and other related concepts that found a climactic form in the course of the European Enlightenment and the nineteenth century. (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 4)

The education system in China is dramatically different from that of western nations. The Chinese education system is not trying to achieve the same goals as the systems of the west. The principles and general objectives of education in the People's Republic are set out in the Education Law of 1995:

... education in the People's Republic of China shall serve the construction of socialist modernisation, be combined with production and labour, and satisfy the needs of training constructors and successors with all round development of morality, intelligence and physique for the socialist cause. (International Bureau of Education, 2000, updated June 2011, p. 1)

The clause ‘combined with production and labour’ is significant. Many universities expect undergraduate and postgraduate students to spend time working in the community (often this means in poorly paid or unpaid work in private businesses, and the students accept this as their duty). This work-experience and contribution to society is consistent with government policy:

The State shall conduct education for promoting among learners patriotism, collectivism and socialism as well as ideals, ethics, discipline, legality, national defence, and ethnic unity. Education shall be carried out in the spirit of inheriting and expanding the fine historical and cultural traditions of the Chinese nation and assimilating all the fine achievements of the civilisation progress of human beings. (International Bureau of Education, 2000, updated June 2011, p. 1)

The law that governs the award of university degrees reflects the high level policy. A degree is not achieved just on the basis of academic work. What the student must learn is more than might be gleaned from the titles of courses.

Here the article is concerned with how Kant’s theory relates to individual people, and not directly to cultures, historical realism or human constructs such as the goals of nations. Kant’s theory of human freedom and cognition enables us to consider the effects of learning without being overly concerned with what the student learns because Kant keeps his focus on grounding ‘structures’ and not on the fluid content of learning.

Student Stress, Anxiety and Angst

The frequently cited reasons for student stress in China—parental pressures, examinations and their prospects for employment or overseas education—do not capture the complexity of the apprehension within provincial university students. Most that succeed in examinations and enter university have their examination technique refined and reliable. For the majority, their relationship with their parents appears satisfactory. Students report more diffuse concerns about their wider situation and a concept of ‘angst’, contrasting with ‘anxiety’, appears to capture one dimension of their life world. The use of the word ‘angst’ is consistent with that in continental philosophy and relates more to ‘dread’ than to ‘anxiety’ (Sheehan, 2001, p. 183).

A 2013 study reports the use of a student perceptions instrument, the Educational Stress Scale for Adolescents, to assess stress levels and risk factors in 1627 secondary school students in Shandong Province. The instrument asked students to assess their stress level with regard to their academic performance, parental relationships and peer relationships (Sun, Dunne, Hou, & Xu, 2011, 2013). A leading finding was ‘Unexpectedly, family and parental factors were found to have little or no association with children’s perceived educational stress’ (Sun et al., 2013, p. 284). These researchers did not report on the ability of political/societal circumstances to generate stress. Nevertheless, the findings for secondary students appear relevant to the university cohort. Kahn (2013) draws attention to the *consequences of consciousness* and how, historically, the emergence of civilisation, which entails the use of reason, can generate angst and illness. The historical ability of political institutions to generate stress is also

in debate (Jackson, 2013). The phenomenon of the Chinese student living within an unprecedented period of economic and cultural change is an example of Kahn's general thesis about change and concurs with Jackson's analysis of the human cognitive requirement for stability. Jackson notes that research shows that happiness does not increase in step with material circumstances and he concludes:

For all the optimism expressed by scientists, politicians, and economists, victory over stress has proved elusive. Attempts to mitigate the effects of stress by promoting individual stability and control have failed to generate greater happiness or to stem the tide of chronic disease. (Jackson, 2013, p. 269)

As teachers in China assist students to mature, students appreciate the power of thought and their intellectual capacity (Johnson, 2014). Whilst this may be liberating and build their confidence, it also has negative consequences, particularly for students become aware of the deficiencies within their environment and their own limited ability to achieve goals and change circumstances. For the neophyte Chinese thinker, the world displays dramatic contrasts and rapid change, but their ability to participate is limited. For some, this has the potential to generate *angst*—a hidden inquietude, perturbation. According to Hong Kong researchers, about one-fifth of Chinese adolescents show symptoms of hopelessness (Shek & Lee, 2005). International comparisons suggest Chinese students stress might be greater than that of students in other countries (Xinhua News Agency, 2010). In positivist cognitive psychology, the theory of cognitive dissonance is an alternative account of a similar phenomenon (Festinger, 1957, 1964). The empirical literature on student stress does not refer to this emerging issue but the inner conflict reveals itself to close observers of students in China and to those who listen to their problems (Robotham & Julian, 2006).

Kant's ethics enables us to reconceive the theory of stress/*angst* and this work draws upon his concept of freedom. This article does not *primarily* concern political freedom, the ability to participate in governance and to influence events. Nor does it engage with the freedom for individuals and groups that digitisation enables and which challenges political and institutional managerial hierarchies (Besley & Peters, 2013, p. 2). In contrast to these, there is a form of freedom that is special to each person and within the human being—this freedom gives you the ability to think and act regardless of the extent of freedoms derived from external circumstances. This construct of freedom is Kant's critical/ethical concept of freedom (Gregor, 1963). Kant refers to the '*human being's emergence from his self-incurred minority*'. *Minority* is inability to make use of one's own understanding without direction from another (Kant, 1784/1996, p. 17).

Many Scholars Apply Kant's Ideas to Current Situations:

Although we may hold that our time presents its own problems to moral philosophy, we may also think that the answers Kant worked out for his problems are useful in coping with ours. (Brender, 2004, p. 155)

Contemporary scholars assert that it is desirable to consider Kant's circumstances when interpreting his theory. Rossi, for example, notes the value of reassessments that

take a ‘fresh look at Kant’s relationship to the larger intellectual and cultural movement known as “the Enlightenment” and its role in shaping so called “modernity”’(Rossi, 2005, p. 1).

Kant’s Theory of Freedom as the Ground for Moral Autonomy

The background to the present argument is Kant’s work on ethics and its relationship to his First Critique. Kant has two leading purposes in his work on ethics. The first is to discover the foundational structures which enable human beings to have the phenomenology of morality (his metaphysics of morals). Kant asserts that the experiences of human beings are of two distinct kinds—the objectification of particulars as facts, and the holistic grasping of situations, which entails making decisions about them. The Kantian concept of freedom comes from this work.

Second, Kant seeks to determine the fundamental practical principle of morality that we should all apply (Kant, 1785/2002). Kant’s search for the basic moral principle which we should apply in all situations (the categorical imperative), confounds many, but it is not directly relevant to the *grounds* of his concept of freedom. Nevertheless, Brender asserts that it is this work which remains the most influential aspect of Kantian ethics:

... if we share his passionate conviction concerning the equal moral capacity of all normal human beings and their equal dignity, we may well think that something like his basic moral principle is more likely to yield an adequate solution to our problems than any other principle yet invented. (Brender, 2004, p. 155)

Kant develops many concepts of freedom (Allison, 1990, pp. 1–3). Consider these two disparate concepts of freedom:

- (1) Political freedom is the ability of people to participate in the governance of civil society. The concept is central to the practice and theory that pertains when states exercise authority over their citizens. This is the concept of freedom that relates to the European Enlightenment as a social, political and institutional initiative. Kant wrote about political freedom, particularly towards the end of his life, and his major work on the topic is the *Doctrine of Right*, which most commentators consider ‘difficult’ (Ripstein, 2009, p. x). Kant argues that there is a right to political freedom (Byrd & Hruschka, 2010, Chapter 3).
- (2) Kant’s distinctive concept of freedom which relates to the individual person and has nothing necessarily to do with others or society. Kantian freedom is that which we encounter within ourselves when we are morally autonomous and make moral decisions. We know about Kantian freedom only because we can hypothesise its presence as an outcome of our insights into the will.

The western notion of independent thought and action—moral autonomy—is essential to discussions about western modernity. There is a claim that personal autonomy is a prerequisite to academic and business success in western cultures because it generates initiative, creativity and self-advancement. The common concept of human

autonomy is largely Kant's achievement. It develops initially in the Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals and entails three notions that relate to how persons make decisions:

- (1) Independence, self-rule, personal-liberty: 'He emphasises the capacity for self-determination or 'autonomy' that is located within the individual human being' (Timmermann, 2009, p. 1).
- (2) The rational determination of a course of action ('goals') and the means to act (Bird, 2006, p. 256). Such reasons will take priority over reasons based on 'desire' (Reath, 2006, p. 275).
- (3) The strength of will, determination, necessary to implement rational decision.

Those who are not autonomous are *heteronomous* (Kant, 1785/2002, p. 51, also see p. 60 on following 'feelings')—they follow the rules of others or their instincts.

To appreciate how Kant involves his concept of freedom (the second concept, above) in his account of human beings, it is necessary to consider his philosophy of *transcendental idealism* (Gregor, 1963; Reath, 2006). This is a theory about how ideas (ideals) cross boundaries (transcend). His argument depends on an insight that we all have into our nature. We can identify two different aspects of our nature, what occurs in our lives.

- (1) We accept that what occurs is subject to the laws of cause and effect, and we naturally look for the antecedent reasons to explain things. Kant says we think about objects as phenomena. For him, we base our understanding of the physical world upon our understanding of space and time—which are our own personal constructs. Viewed in this way, as in modern scientific psychology, environment and temperament cause human behaviour.
- (2) We have the ability to choose our actions independently of our environment and temperament. We can use reason to determine our actions. Our choices—decisions and actions—are independent of the cause effects in the world of phenomena. We have the ability to determine events/actions/movements—by thinking we can cause things to occur. Kant would say we now think about objects as noumena. Phenomena provide facts and knowledge and are allegedly objective (in the sense that we can all agree on them). Noumena are essentially private or subjective. Kant wants to know what the basis of noumena is as follows: How do we make our decisions in this manner, what connects our decisions to a foundation (a foundation of moral law) and what justifies us in saying people are morally responsible for the decisions they make in this way?

The positing of the *noumenon*, essentially a Platonic strategy, aligns with Kant's appreciation that there are things in themselves which are unknowable to human beings who are equipped with a particular, and limiting, apparatus of perception. In his first *Critique*, he draws the fundamental distinction between *phenomena* and *noumena* thus:

Appearances, to the extent that as objects they are thought in accordance with the unity of the categories, are called *phaenomena*. If, however, I

suppose there to be things that are merely objects of the understanding and that, nevertheless, can be given to an intuition, although not to sensible intuition (as *coram intuitu intellectuali*), then such things would be called *noumena (intelligibilia)*. (Kant, 1781–1787/1998, p. 347, A249)

The *noumenon* limits reason although it is not the cause of reason. It is one aspect of the ground of reason. Kant's transcendental structures remain contentious (see for example, de Caro, 1999).

It is necessary that there be a form of freedom available to us to enable us to make decisions under the aspect of noumena. When we exercise our free will to create options and make choices, we deliberate within a sphere of available ideas or 'mental' constructs. The presence of this sphere of ideas is the foundation for our human freedom. By analogy, we might say our thoughts exist within a 'space' or 'sphere' or 'territory'. Kant frequently draws upon spatial, topographic and cartographic metaphor. Freedom, in this concept, is a necessary part of true moral autonomy—the delimited potentiality described metaphorically as a 'space'. A person who cannot exercise autonomy is denied Kantian freedom. They do not have access to noumena and their choices are forced (governed by cause and effect).

Human reason and freedom enable us to break free from the confines of cause and effect that control animals. In a lecture, Kant says:

A human being is on this account still free, for he can choose between sensibility and understanding, but were he to act according to sensibility, then he would become the same as the animals. (Kant, 1782–1783/1997, p. 267)

Sensibility (responding to stimuli as causes that produce effects) is one account of the human being. However, there is more to us than this:

But reason raises him above the animals, and the more he acts according to it, the more moral and at the same time freer he becomes. For morality is the science of that which is good, otherwise the concept of freedom would be superfluous, if there were no morality; and then reason would also be superfluous. For it is there only for the sake of the morality of the laws. (Kant, 1782–1783/1997, p. 267)

This is Kant's definition of morality, which links freedom, rationality and moral laws. He elaborates:

The field of morality is either affected by inclinations or not. In either case there is a power of free choice <*arbitrium liberum*>. For here we also still have the freedom to act according to the understanding. The intellectual power of choice <*arbitrium intellectual*> is when we act independently of inclinations, though we still have them. And now we can consider whether we should follow them or not. We are free only in order to follow the laws of morality. For otherwise we would not need reason. (Kant, 1782–1783/1997, p. 267)

Thus, freedom is a necessary capacity within us. Freedom gives us the ability to be autonomous human beings—to make decisions. However, Kant does not think that our self-directed decisions and actions are beyond description by way of law:

For Kant, our freedom involves a capacity to be not merely an occasional uncaused or self-directed force; above all, it is a power whose action is ever present in an internally generated and law-governed way. The Kantian self is literally ‘auto-nomous’, that is, defined by a self legislation that is carried out on itself as well as by itself. (Ameriks, 2000, p. 4)

This doctrine is at the core of western ideas about the individual and decision-making. It is an inherent foundation of attitudes towards society, including business and government. These attitudes took hold in Europe in the period of the Enlightenment.

Enlightenment and Concepts of Freedom

Contemporary scholars assert that it is desirable to consider Kant’s circumstances when interpreting his theory. Rossi, for example, notes the value of reassessments that take a ‘fresh look at Kant’s relationship to the larger intellectual and cultural movement known as “the Enlightenment” and its role in shaping so called “modernity”’(Rossi, 2005, p. 1).

Kant was born into a Pietist Lutheran family that observed religious practices in all aspects of life, and his early childhood was happy. His family worked in a trade that was organised by the guild system. This involved strict rules for the whole family and constraints on trading practice (Kuehn, 2001, pp. 26–27). His authoritative biographer chronicles the values of Kant’s childhood:

What Kant acquired from his parents were the values of the petit bourgeoisie. He learned the importance of hard work, honesty, cleanliness, and independence. He also acquired an appreciation of the value of money. Indeed, in the only description of his parents that we have in his own words, he specifically points out that his parents left him neither money nor debts, yet prepared him well for the world. (Kuehn, 2001, p. 44)

The family was busy, purposeful and above all principled:

Religious worship was not the only, nor perhaps even the most important, pursuit in that [Kant’s] household. Hard work in serving customers, obtaining the essentials of life without having to compromise oneself, living decently, keeping up appearances appropriate to one’s standing, looking out for one’s family, and not being unduly indebted to, or dependent on, anyone else would have been important concerns. (Kuehn, 2001, p. 44)

His schooling was unhappy, although productive academically. Evocatively, a friend writes to Kant thirty years later and describes their school, *Collegium Fridericianum*, as the ‘time we both groaned under that gloomy, yet useful and not objectionable, discipline of the fanatics’ (Kuehn, 2001, p. 45). The *Collegium* had two goals: to save the students from spiritual corruption and to establish the worldly well-being of the

students (Kuehn, 2001, p. 46). This dualism looks similar to that of the Chinese university, which is also much concerned with moral character and conformity to a set of values.

Kant's academic ability was recognised and he gained a merger income as a tutor until his professorial appointment to the University of Königsberg (*Albertus-Universität Königsberg*). A bureaucratic structure governed his university: Berlin made all the major decisions including particularly those about appointments. Further, Kant knew from direct experience the issues and emotions associated with censorship:

The publication of *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793) offended the then King of Prussia, Frederick William II, who ... did not practice tolerance in religious matters. Frederick William II ordered ... Wöllner to write to Kant to extract a promise that he would not write again on religion. Kant reluctantly agreed with their request, which amounted to a Royal command ...

... Kant was obviously not easy in his mind about this decision. In an unpublished note, he explained his conduct: 'Repudiation and denial of one's inner conviction are evil, but silence in a case like the present one is the duty of a subject; and whilst all that one says must be true, this does not mean that it is one's duty to speak out the whole truth in public.' (Reiss, 1991a, p. 2)

Kant confronts circumstances similar to those that confront some intellectuals in Chinese universities. It is apparent that Kant knew from experience in his school, his family and his university, the difficulties when an authority structure curtails an intelligent person's independence and employment prospects.

The play between the political and Kantian concepts of freedom is apparent in enlightenment discourse. This is seen in Kant but less obvious in discussions of Western and Chinese Enlightenment. On 30 September 1784, Kant wrote in Königsberg a summary of what Enlightenment meant. Williams (1983, pp. 129–131) provides a critique of his negative view of freedom (freedom from) in this context under the appropriate heading 'A Patriotic Freedom'. Kant begins his famous account of Enlightenment quickly focussing on the individual person:

Enlightenment is the human being's emergence from his self-incurred minority. Minority is inability to make use of one's own understanding without direction from another. The minority is self-incurred when its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. (Kant, 1784/1996, p. 17)

He gives us personal advice:

Have courage to make use of your own understanding! is thus the motto of enlightenment. [para.] It is because of laziness and cowardice that so great a part of humankind, after nature has long since emancipated them from other people's direction (*naturaliter maioremnes*), nevertheless gladly remains minors for life, and that it becomes so easy for others to set

themselves up as their guardians. It is so comfortable to be a minor!
(Kant, 1784/1996, p. 17)

He mentions some of the ways that we avoid thinking for ourselves. We accept what is in a textbook, or consult a spiritual advisor, or a medical doctor, or we pay someone to do skilled or thought-requiring work for us:

For the same reasons, it is all too easy for others to set themselves up as their guardians. It is so convenient to be immature! If I have a book to have understanding in place of me, a spiritual adviser to have a conscience for me, a doctor to judge my diet for me, and so on, I need not make any efforts at all. I need not think, so long as I can pay; others will soon enough take the tiresome job over for me. (Kant, 1784/2002, p. 1)

The theme of maturity is relevant in a university setting where the maturation of students and young teachers is always a proper concern. Reiss provides a useful summary of Kant on this theme:

To be willing to accept, and engage in, the public use of reason is a sign of a mature, or rather a maturing, attitude of mind. The term ‘mature’ or ‘maturity’ is another metaphor used by Kant to great purpose (indeed, he uses a whole string of metaphors to describe the transition from immaturity to the maturity necessary to enlightenment).

He then makes maturity a day-by-day, decision-by-decision, matter:

However, maturity is not a definite condition for Kant, but a never-ceasing process of further development. Men become truly enlightened only when I, in the realm of politics, they are able to stand on their own feet and make their own decisions. Now one else, whether it be a parent or any other person, let alone the powers that be, has a right to treat other adults as if they were minors. Everyone is entitled to attain his own independence, i.e. to become an autonomous individual. (Reiss, 1991b, p. 256)

Kant in 1784 addresses the situation where others seek to be our guardians or political masters:

The guardians who have kindly taken upon themselves the work of supervision will soon see to it that by far the largest part of mankind (including the entire fair sex) should consider the step forward to maturity not only as difficult but also as highly dangerous. (Kant, 1784/2002, p. 1)

In this argument, Kant sets out for Europeans his understanding of what it means for an individual person to be mature and morally autonomous. Although Kant is primarily concerned with the individual’s relationship to national governance, the argument applies to work in the professions, institutions and home life.

The Enlightenment is more than an historical occurrence in the west during the seventeenth century—it is *foundational* to the way of thinking that is prevalent in the

west today. As described by a contemporary French philosopher, the European Enlightenment has much that resonates with the transformations in China today:

We must never forget that the Enlightenment is an event, or a set of events and complex historical processes, that is located at a certain point in the development of European societies. As such, it includes elements of social transformation, types of political institution, forms of knowledge, projects of rationalisation of knowledge and practices, technological mutations that are very difficult to sum up in a word, even if many of these phenomena remain important today. (Foucault, 1984, p. 43)

According to Chinese scholars, China displays some of the features of the Western Enlightenment and these are actively encouraged in universities. Rationality and science education are valued, for example. Perhaps Chinese students experience an angst which derives from Enlightenment notions taking hold in China in the absence of Foucault's 'types of political institution, forms of knowledge, [and] projects of rationalisation of knowledge and practices'. In Foucault's words, these are ideas that remain 'important today' in the West (and this includes western models of university education). Ideas which are *characteristic* of the west—such as rationality and Kantian autonomy—are relevant in Chinese university education, particularly in humanities and business education subjects as they are currently taught.

Nevertheless, Chinese Scholars Argue that Chinese Enlightenment Stands in Contrast to the Western Enlightenment:

The Enlightenment of Chinese modernity takes national independence and affluence, not recognition and sublimation of individual values, as its major goal. Therefore, the main current of Chinese modernity is social enlightenment, which distinguishes itself greatly in both content and aims from the rational spirit in Western Enlightenment. Urgent as is the mission of social Enlightenment, the individuality and aesthetic significance of Chinese Enlightenment has long been neglected and forgotten. (Xu, 2004, p. 4)

'National independence and affluence' are political concepts and Xu contrasts them with western political Enlightenment concepts. Then, Xu changes the nature of Enlightenment and asks about something more attuned to Kant's concept of freedom in Enlightenment. Can China attain 'social enlightenment' and not prompt the full range of Enlightenment concepts, including the political concept of freedom? Feminist sociologists have been aware of this question for decades (Cao, Zhong, Liao, & Wang, 2013; Wang, 1999). They give an example of the appropriation of language. One outcome of the May Fourth New Culture movement was that it began a process whereby eventually the 'woman problem' (*funi wenti*) gave way to the Enlightenment concept of 'woman's rights' (*nüquan*) (See also Wang, 1996, p. 170; Wang, 1999, p. 3).

The National Museum of China hosted a German exhibition entitled 'The Art of the Enlightenment' in 2012. This attempted to foster a connection between Germany and China. The Enlightenment ideals embodied in the exhibition constituted a subtle challenge to the Chinese leadership at a time when political freedom was a sensitive topic. A curator, Chen Yu, said, 'the European Enlightenment is still influencing

people everywhere in the world. Chinese people are still enjoying its fruits' (Rothman, 2011, p. 1). However, not everyone thought the fruits were so bountiful. Chinese artist, Ai Weiwei, who was imprisoned as a dissident, 'fumes that Tiananmen Square is the most ironic location in the world for an exhibition about the Enlightenment, because we Chinese are currently living in an era of darkness' (Rothman, 2011, p. 1). Kant would have understood such dynamics and confrontations.

The political concept of freedom is an issue within China. Governmental structures and private initiatives to control ideas and access to information are well documented. The Kantian concept of freedom is not recognised. This hidden and private construction of freedom is an outcome of educational reforms which seek to advance creativity and innovation within the Chinese workforce. As the university curriculum modernises in accordance with economic objectives and pedagogy alters to advance the higher levels of cognition (such as problem solving and creativity), the character of graduates alters. Each new cohort of graduates departs the university with an increased quantum of Kantian freedom. Urbanisation, the media, consumerism and the changed nature of work all alter the character of the Chinese population, but these alterations are more obvious than the quantum of Kantian freedom.

Conclusion

Many nations desire university graduates who are independent minded and creative. The expanding investment of the People's Republic of China in universities targets the modernising of the curriculum and emphasises quality in education. The rapid development of university curricula and the conflicted goals of university education (some of which require autonomy and some of which require heteronomy) precipitate a personal conflict for some individual Chinese students. The students in Chinese universities who are successful with pedagogies that value independent thought and creativity are fundamentally different from previous cohorts of students. Through their coursework they develop Kantian freedom as an inner potential. The potential for moral and intellectual autonomy permeates all aspects of life. It generates a special new form of angst, *the angst of freedom*.

There is a play between the political concept of freedom and the Kantian concept of freedom. We may speculate about the ways that the angst of freedom may become apparent for Chinese students. For example, Kant was disconcerted by actual and potential censorship and wrote privately about the ambiguity this generated within him. We may expect Chinese students to respond to constraints upon political freedom the same way and to furtively communicate with others of a similar disposition. If recent graduates find that they cannot influence governance systems or policies and they have no satisfactory outlet for their thoughts on diverse matters, they may seek to relocate abroad. Loyalty to their country and their family comes increasingly into conflict within them because of the presence of Kantian freedom. Students and graduates find they cannot abrogate the ill-defined potentiality which is the 'inner space' of Kantian freedom.

Western scholars struggle with concepts of rationality and how rationality relates to governmentality. The unique heritage and trajectory of China places it beyond the

western discourse. However, one specific aspect of the debate is Kant's contentious contribution to the theory of human understanding and his associating rationality with a concept of inner freedom. How Kantian freedom might be expressed within China is for Chinese scholars to consider.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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