

The Aesthetic University, the Market University, and the Battle for the Soul of Beida

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Abstract

Beida reformers invoke the legacy of Cai Yuanpei's cosmopolitan vision for making it a world-class university while erecting it on the principles of the "market university," which are contradictory to Cai's aesthetic ideals of universality, transcendence, and freedom of thought. This study compares the conceptual underpinnings of both models and proposes a pathway for resurrecting Cai's foundational idea of the university and preserving the "Beida spirit."

Keywords: aesthetic, market, university, the soul of Beida

Recent reforms at Peking University recall its transformation a century earlier under its legendary leader Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940). Cai "threw the stone of intellectual revolt into that placid water" that made Peking University ripple with internationalism, pluralism, and freedom of thought. At one level, the triad echoes the Chinese Enlightenment spirit of "dare to do" combined with the European Enlightenment motto of "dare to know" (*sapere aude*) (Chiang, 2000, p. 116). At a deeper level, it embodies Cai's syncretic coupling of German aesthetic philosophy with traditional Chinese thought, particularly the pre-Qin "Hundred Contending Schools of Thought" (*baijia zhengming* 百家争鸣). In this interplay, Cai found a unifying idea for the reinvention of Chinese culture that would spark a creative dialogue with the new tide of Western knowledge to form a universal perspective for transforming Beida into a modern university. The Enlightenment model rooted in instrumental rationality with admixtures of progressivism, utilitarianism, and iconoclasm lacked the capacity to integrate Western and Chinese thought consistent with the perennial Chinese ideal of wholeness or "unity of opposites." In the Chinese context, Cai was searching for a unified sensibility from earlier eras to mend what T.S. Eliot called the "dissociation of sensibility" to refer to the separation of intellectual thought from the experience of feeling in Western culture. A coda suggests how the founding idea may be restored following the basic tenets of Cai's vision.

Recent reformers seeking to raise Beida's academic reputation internationally have invoked Cai's cosmopolitan vision as they maintain that the latest wave of Westernization is consistent with his guiding principles. This study examines how congruent their "great leap forward" of transforming Beida into a "first-rate world-class university" by adopting the American "market university" model is with his aesthetic vision of forging a creative synthesis of Western knowledge and traditional Chinese thought that strengthens the capacities of each model.

1. Cai's Aesthetic Idea of the University

Cai's idea of the university was modeled on the University of Berlin (founded in 1810) as "an imperishable monument of the strength and self-reliance which enables the state to rise again," as his mentor Friedrich Paulsen at Leipzig phrased it when Cai studied there from 1907-1911 (Paulsen, 1908, p. 185). Under its founder Wilhelm von Humboldt, Berlin was born to raise humanity to a higher level and regenerate the German nation, an ideal Cai followed in awakening a sluggish Beida based on "reason and immutable ideas" (Paulsen, 1908, pp. 183-184). If Cai did not quite subscribe to the German belief in an omnipotent human will to realize a new civilization and usher in a great human epoch, he did believe in the power of the university to transform society if humanism were guided by the power of reason. Cai considered the situation facing Chinese culture as "unprecedented" (*bianju* 变局) and believed that Beida had an obligation "to save the nation from destruction" (*jiuwang* 救亡).

Initially, Cai was drawn to the scientific worldview as the model to transport Beida from an obsolete *xuetang* (学堂) into a modern university and prepare a new generation of *rencai* 人才 or “men of ability.” Science, or *Wissenschaft* as Cai would have encountered the term at the University of Leipzig, made German higher education a cynosure for Western learning in the nineteenth century. He knew that since its inception “specialized research was the original standard of the university” (*daxue benlai yi zhuanmen yanjiu wei benwei* 大学本来以专门研究为本位), (Cai, 1997, p. 245) and that *Wissenschaft*, which Fichte rendered as the “science of knowing,” had become the defining idea of the Humboldtian university. Science was indispensable to restoring China to its former glory as the cradle of scientific creativity (the home of the compass, printing, gunpowder, etc.), and Cai extolled the scientific method for its capacity to “enrich” (*zhengli* 整理) Chinese learning across the entire spectrum of learning, including aesthetics. Without scientific rationality, China would continue to rely on its traditional (non-empirical) way of thinking and its superstitious habits of mind, unable to improve its standard of living and enter into the ranks of modern societies (Cai, 1997, p. 91).

What was it that kept Cai from making science the unifying vision for the modern Chinese university? From his essay on the comparative merits of aesthetics and science, we can see that he considers science to be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for his transformative idea of the Chinese university. Scientific knowledge is analytical (*fenxi* 分析) and disposed towards a “mechanistic” (*jixie* 机械), “dull” (*wuliao* 无聊), “deterministic” (*qianding* 前定), cause-and-effect view of reality. With its predilection for mechanical repetition, which Cai compares to “drawing a gourd according to the model” (*yi yang hua hulu* 依样画葫芦), the scientific method lacks an appreciation for the “joy of life” (*shengqu* 生趣). It is without the emotional (*ganqing* 感情) power and the “creative spirit” (*chuangzao de jingshen* 创造的精神) necessary to foster a “vivacious” (*huopo* 活泼) person with a “courageous spirit” (*yonggan de jingshen* 勇敢的精神) and a capacity for “creativity” (*chuangzao* 创造) (Cai, 1999, p. 100). Merely knowing the principles of reason, says Schiller, does not mean people will act on them, or enliven and educate their sensibility (Beiser, 2008, p. 128).

Only a “knowledge beyond science” (*zhishi yiwai* 知识以外) could incorporate reason and sensibility and provide a method for absorbing (*xishou* 吸收) Western knowledge while preserving the most advantageous Chinese intellectual culture and using it as a “digestive” (*xiaohua* 消化) mechanism to process Western knowledge (Cai, 1997, p. 376). He sought a system (*tixi* 体系) for “deciding what to adopt and what to discard” (*qushu* 取舍) (Metzger, 2005, pp. 340-341) so as to avoid indiscriminate copying (*shengtun huobo* 生吞活剥) of the West by putting a blind faith in foreign things and the counter tendencies of self-conceit (*zida* 自大) and rigorously enforcing orthodox traditional culture in the face of external penetration, both of which were equally self-defeating.

He made German aesthetic thought the “backbone” (*gugan* 骨干) for his conception of the Chinese university, and more specifically, the Kantian-Schillerian paradigm for bridging (*jinliang* 津梁) the divide between tradition and modernity and the accompanying fissure between reason and emotion at play since the Self-Strengthening movement in the second half of the nineteenth century.

1.1 The House of Beauty

The ideals of “freedom of thought,” (*sixiang ziyou* 思想自由) “broad-minded tolerance (*jianrong bingbao* 兼容并包),” and “education for a world view (*shijie guan jiaoyu* 世界观教育)” that Cai used as the building blocks for modernizing Beida are unimaginable without reference to the Kantian-Schillerian aesthetic principles of universality, transcendence, and freedom, and the contemplation of beauty that gives them an interactive unity. In Schiller, aesthetic education has the power to form a synthesis of the reason and emotion, or the “form drive” (*Formtrieb*) and the “sense drive (*Sinnlichkeitreib*).” Beauty or the “play drive” (*Spieltrieb*) harmonizes reason and emotion to realize a “beautiful soul” (*die schöne Seele*). Beauty constitutes the fullest form of unity and represents the true end of life, beyond moralism and the pursuit of self-interest (Beiser, 2008, p. 141). Only the aesthetic mode of perception, claims Schiller, can make man whole, because it returns him to an original state of harmony between his faculties, and it puts society in harmony by fostering it in the individual.

Cai made a penetrating study of Schiller’s *Asthetische Erziehung* (around 1911) and was deeply interested in his conception of “play,” which he calls *chongdong* 冲动. In his own aesthetic theoretical system, play heals the split between reason and sensibility and restores emotion to its prior role for making human nature moral. He made the cultivation of aesthetic sensibility the centerpiece for fostering wholeness and cultivating a sound (*jianquan* 健全) humanity by linking Schiller’s notion of the “beautiful soul” with the Confucian personality of the *junzi* (*junzi renga* 君子人格) (Cai, 1997, p. 600). As with Schiller, the core problem to be solved by aesthetic education was alienation and fragmentation.

1.1.1 Universality

In a lecture on aesthetics at Beida, Cai said, “In Kant’s definition of aesthetics, universality comes first” (*diyī shì pǔbiān xìng* 第一是普遍性); “transcendence comes second” (*diyī shì chāoyuè xìng* 第二是超越性). As a utopian discourse, aesthetics heralded a new formulation of universality (*pǔbiān* 普遍) that inclined it toward the ideal of the public good, which Cai associated with the Chinese ideal of *tianxia wéi gōng* (天下为公), seeing the “whole world as one community,” and forming the basis for his goal of “education for a world view.” (Duan, 2007, p. 136). Universality promotes an international conception of the Chinese university and a unity of knowledge predicated on the harmonizing power of beauty.

Cai designed the Beida flag (1920) to symbolize this synthesis. On the right side are three horizontal bands of red, blue, and yellow signifying the physical, natural, and “systematic” sciences (such as botany). The tricolor puts Cai in mind as well of the French Revolution’s trinity of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* which he enshrines with Beida’s culture of freedom of thought and its “tolerance” (*kuanrong* 宽容) of all realms of knowledge. On the left side is a vertical band of white representing philosophy, and within it, the two black seal characters 北 (*bei*) and 大 (*da*) (designed by Lu Xun and serving as the university’s emblem ever since). Black represents metaphysics (*xuanxue* 玄学) as it might appear in Schopenhauer’s notion of the will, Spencer’s agnosticism, Taoism’s mystery, and Buddhism’s nirvana (Cai, 2003, p. 39). The pennant portrays Beida’s ambitious embrace of the entire epistemological spectrum, giving the largest space to Western scientific knowledge but using philosophy, in which he incorporated aesthetics, to integrate the sciences, and encircling within it Beida as the conjunction of Western and Chinese “Dark Learning.”

Cai envisions the curriculum as an organic whole in which individual disciplines serve as branches of a single tree, and an interconnectedness and reciprocity between science and the humanities, without privileging either as the model for modernity. He echoes the University of Berlin conviction, as formulated by Fichte, one its founding fathers, that “the real original sin of modern education is the division and isolation of the human powers” (Hofstetter, 2001, p. 51). But in a deeper vein, the unity of knowledge proceeds from Schiller’s ideal of complete humanity based on the aesthetic harmony between reason and sensibility, which Cai renders as *wanquan rengé* 完全人格). The German aspiration for wholeness mirrored China’s perennial quest for a “grand unity” (*da yitong* 大一统), or linkage (*guantong* 贯通) to combine ideas that contradict one another into a single truth.

1.1.2 Transcendence

Aesthetic transcendence (*chāoyuè* 超越) through the contemplation of beauty mitigates the instinct for “advantage” and the preoccupation with transitory ambitions, or what has been referred to since ancient Zhou discourse as the *li-hai* 利害 (gain/loss) nexus. Cai refers to this as the “*ren wo*” (人我) or us/them dichotomy and the preoccupation with “*xing fu*” (幸福) or fortune and misfortune” (Cai, 1997, p. 461). Living a life of virtue means not “seeking survival at the expense of benevolence” (*qiú shēng yì hǎi rén* 求生以害仁). Beauty’s transcendent quality raises people above their animal desires and venal self-interests. A university is meant to infuse a culture of moral obligation centered on self-cultivation. The realization of the immense value of aesthetic experience—its link to virtuous conduct and moral conscience—makes it imperative for society to give people opportunities for aesthetic cultivation in public venues. In such a way, “knowledge and emotion are reconciled” (*zhīshì yǔ gǎnxìng de tiáohé* 知识与感性的调和) (Cai, 1999, p. 227).

In both Schiller and classical Chinese discourse, beauty and goodness are one, which Cai coupled with the Confucian principle that all social reform must begin with “clarification of one’s moral virtue.” Cai calls this *jiànquán rengé* (健全人格) or “healthy personality” and sees it as the basis for the cultivation of the “renewing the people” (*xīnmin* 新民). The goal of aesthetic education, Cai says, is “to cultivate a vivid and penetrating personality. . . and a pure and honest humanity” (*taoyè huòpō mǐnrúì xìnglíng. . . chūnjìe rengé* 陶冶活泼敏锐性灵. . . 纯洁人格) (Cai, 1997, p. 179).

Cai used the notion of aesthetic transcendence as the basis for transforming Beida’s decadent atmosphere, which resembled the atrophied, “medieval” system that Humboldt found when he opened the University of Berlin a century earlier. A Beida student described it as an obsolete *chénjiù dàxué táng* 陈旧大学堂, where students showed little interest in their studies and preferred strolling to the brothel (*guāng jìyuàn* 逛妓院), gambling (*dù* 赌), taking concubines (*qūqīe* 娶妾)—the “three don’ts” (Cai J. (In fact, the atmosphere had changed little since Cai himself taught there in 1906 before embarking to Germany: “They [students] had no interest in scholarship, and cared only about claiming their diplomas at the end of the term.” The professors were equally dilatory, “making copies of their lectures and circulating them among the students only to read them aloud in lecture, boring the students so much that they nodded off or flipped through unrelated books” (Weston, 2004, p. 71).

Cai founded the Beida Society for the Promotion of Morality (*jindehui* 进德会) in 1918 to instill a climate of moral purpose on campus (Weston, 2004, p. 145). Members were required to abstain not only from the “three don’ts,” but also from becoming government functionaries (*guanli* 官吏) or campaigning for parliament, reflecting Cai’s belief that education should be “above politics” and free from political control. Aesthetics was not only a cure for the superstitious, slavish mentality of old China,” and from religious indoctrination, but also served as the foundation for “education for a world view” to displace parochial political interests and government interference in university affairs. This objective coupled the ancient *datong* 大同 ideal of wholeness with the Schillerian principles of transcending particularistic barriers by adopting universal principles while remaining independent from external control.

1.1.3 Freedom of Thought

Cai’s policy of “all-inclusiveness” and openness to all schools of thought follows not only from Kant’s emphasis on aesthetic universality, but also from Schiller’s blazing ideal of freedom. Freedom is the basic idea that informs all of Schiller’s works, said Goethe, and is essential to understanding his aesthetic philosophy. Beauty brings reason and sensibility into concord. When they are out of balance, that is, when sensibility rules over reason or reason destroys feeling (the more likely condition in modern academe), a state of internal conflict ensues (Beiser, 2008, pp. 229-230). The natural human condition is one of aesthetic harmony, and freedom is predicated on living as a complete human being and exercising the full development of one’s rational and emotional powers.

By allowing rival doctrines to contend freely with one another, Cai’s Beida memorialized the interplay among the Hundred Schools of Thought and the practice of “innovation by opposition” in the ancient Jixia Academy (Hartnett, 2011, p. 87). Marxism, Darwinism, and Experimentalism (Dewey’s preferred term for Progressivism) collided with Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. Cai recruited a diversity of thinkers across the cultural spectrum, including the Tongmenghui society, the work-study movement in France, traditional scholars, representatives of the Old Text and New Text schools of philology, revolutionaries studying in Japan, and the New Youth group from which came the future founders of the CCP: Chen Duxiu as dean of humanities and Li Dazhao as the Beida librarian (Lin Chen asserted that the equal treatment of competing schools of thought would not only rejuvenate the humanities, but it would spread across the country, making a Beida a beacon for the New Culture Movement. Chen invited Hu Shi, iconoclastic liberal, chief advocate of the literary revolution, and disciple of John Dewey at Columbia, to teach philosophy and English (Weston, 2004, pp. 125-126). Hu’s blueprint for Beida would become the foundation for the market model or “Americanization” of Beida a century later.

Administratively, Cai interwove freedom of thought with the German concept of “disinterestedness” to defend the university’s independence vis-à-vis outside forces.

Johann Fichte, one of the “founding fathers” of the University of Berlin, insisted that just as one is free only to the extent that one lives as complete human being, so too is a university free only to the extent that it can find its “determination from within” and pursue a course of action consistent with its inner nature. Amidst the currents of cultural upheaval swirling around the school, Cai encouraged the students to stay true to their academic responsibilities: “By studying hard you make your most important contribution to society, nation, and humankind” (*zui zhongyao zhe, duiyu shehui, guojia, renlei you zui you jiazhi de gongxian* 最重要者, 对于社会, 国家, 人类有最有价值的贡献). Although sympathetic to the aims of the New Culture and ultimately to the May Fourth movement, Cai championed the disinterested purpose of education as an end-in-itself and not the means to some other aim.

In this case, university autonomy mirrors the notion of disinterestedness heralded by the *shuyuan* 书院, the “academy” system flowering in the Song dynasty. In its golden age before it succumbed to being a preparation school for the examination system, the *shuyuan* set up an independent arena of operation in which the state was not to interfere (Lee, 1994, p. 117). Cai displayed a similar antipathy toward making the university an instrument of external exploitation. The university is a place of pure (*chuncui* 纯粹) knowledge, not an enterprise for “peddling” (*fanmai* 贩卖) knowledge. In propelling Beida towards an “education for a world view” Cai was asserting that it must achieve more than “the greatest material happiness for the greatest number,” and attend to the broader aim of elevating humanity by attending to its spiritual cultivation and using aesthetic education to foster of love of beauty that would eliminate prejudice, parochialism, avarice, and other impediments to building a harmonious society (Duiker, 1972, p. 395).

Closely linked to Cai’s non-utilitarian conviction was the principle of institutional autonomy associated with what Hayhoe and Zhang call a sense of independence (*zizhuquan* 自主权) as an end in itself and not with

establishing the university as a “legal person” (*faren* 法人) in the eyes of the government, a kind of contractual arrangement in which the institution is expected to offer services to government, industry, and society (Hayhoe & Zha, 2011, pp. 266-267). Instead, by absorbing Schiller’s conception of aesthetic freedom, Cai envisions a type of autonomy that allows the university to be free to set its own course, instinctively seeking long-term results (*yuan xiao* 远效), leaving political authorities to seek short-term effects (*xiu jin gong* 求近功). The university assumes the role of teacher and spiritual guide for state and society.

During his brief leadership at Beida, Cai gave the university an aesthetic framework based on the capacity of beauty to serve as the “digestive mechanism” for absorbing modern knowledge while preserving the best that was thought and said in the Chinese intellectual heritage. Cai approached Beida as a work of art, a new form of university in which reason and sensibility interpenetrate in the remaking of the self (the whole person), and thereby Chinese society, through the agency of beauty. A university built along aesthetic lines promotes a pluralistic atmosphere in which the proponents of modernism and the guardians of tradition are allowed to contend freely. Like Jefferson, he not only gave his university a universal vision for making it a world university, but also served as its “architect.” A veritable “organizing fever” struck Beida with his appointment as he gave concrete embodiment to his aesthetic vision for harmonizing the moral, rational, and emotional drives, assiduously transforming its culture, rearranging its governance structure, attracting the most invigorating minds to its faculty in the spirit of the Hundred Schools era, universalizing the curriculum, and championing both preservation and invention through a creative interpretation of the past. He anticipated that the hegemony of science and instrumental rationality over the humanities would be a recurrent one in the new cosmopolitan culture and that the aesthetic principles of universality, transcendence, and freedom of thought would do for Beida what Schiller had hoped they would for humanity in general.

2. Beida’s Great Leap Forward and the Market University

Beida’s decision to “leap forward in development” (*kuayueshi fazhan* 跨越式发展) to become a “first-class world university” 世界一流大学 was christened at its centennial anniversary when Jiang Zemin announced the “985 Project” to gain world-class status for Beida, Qinghua, and a handful of other top-flight universities (although the list soon expanded to 37 universities). In the first round, Beida received US \$225 million (as did Qinghua), and special importance was given to attracting “grand masters” (*dashi* 大师) or “star” professors in Western parlance. Research productivity as measured by the scholarly publications of a cadre of world-renowned scholars was the sine qua non for becoming a world-class university, while other equally important criteria (and essentially qualitative) criteria were ignored, such as providing excellent education to students and contributing to the cultural, scientific, and civic life of society (Levin, Jeong & Ou, 2006).

To this end, university leaders circulated the “Public Notice on Beida’s Engagement of Professors” on April 6, 2004, which Min Weifang, Party Secretary and Vice President at Beida (and World Bank liaison to the Poor Provinces project decades earlier) hailed as a “great leap forward” (*dayuejin* 大跃进), by which he meant “breaking out of the original paradigm and reaching new and higher levels, which consist not only of investment and hardware constructions, but also includes leaps in terms of school-operation conception, administrative system, and talent recruitment” (Min, 2004a, p. 19). The leap would resurrect Beida’s scholarly reputation which had slipped so precipitously that no more than a third of its faculty could be considered excellent. Only a radical restructuring of its faculty appointment and promotion system would suffice to increase its research productivity, particularly in the “big sciences” and technology fields.

Min linked the plan to Beida’s first “leap” when Cai Yuanpei selected faculty on the basis of formal qualifications, instead of *guanxi* 关系 or political connections, to attract such luminaries as Li Dazhao, Hu Shi, and Ma Yinchu to make Beida a cosmopolitan university (Min, 2004b). In the latest “leap,” Beida would attract professors from inside and outside China to apply for 95 new positions across 28 departments, on a scale worthy of Cai Yuanpei’s recruitment efforts a century earlier (Wang & Zhou, 2005). They would be expected to be able to offer instruction in a foreign language, preferably English.

Consistent with the market principles of efficiency, equity, and transparency, the Beida plan called for replacing the “iron rice bowl” (*tiefanwan* 铁饭碗) syndrome whereby faculty enjoyed de facto lifetime tenure with a new sense of competitiveness (*guli jingzheng* 鼓励竞争) (Min, 2006). Similarly, it aimed at curtailing the practice of filling academic positions with Beida graduates (“inbreeding” or *jinqin fanzhi* 近亲繁殖) and making the entire system more competitive by “selecting and retaining the top talents and giving support to the those in priority positions” (*zeyou fu zhong* 择优扶重), with special emphasis on hiring those who had earned their highest degree abroad. A form of merit pay would be introduced to “reward the productive and punish the indolent” (*jiang qin fa lan* 奖勤罚懒). The American policy of “up or out” by which those who are denied promotion to

the rank of associate professor with tenure are given one year to find a new position was rendered as “the ability to come in and go out” (*nengjin nengchu* 能进能出). Accordingly, new hires would be given a three-year term appointment, which could not be renewed more than three times without applying for promotion. Evaluation for promotion would require peer review by scholars from inside and outside Beida (Min, 2006).

The plan sparked a storm of criticism, particularly from those in the junior ranks at Beida who questioned its legal authority to alter their employment rights as civil servants. In the face of stiffening opposition, the second draft of the plan made significant concessions and deleted the requirement of dismissing one-third of the lecturers and one-fourth of associate professors. It also softened the provision that members of academic committees include at least a third with doctorates from abroad and that newly appointed professors be able to teach in more than one language, and made them simply recommendations. The final draft gave academic departments more flexibility in setting standards for appointments and recognized the rights of the faculty in setting personnel policies.

Although the personnel reforms were greatly compromised, the basic tenets became the basis for its strategic plan of 2010 (Xie, 2012). As an “American tool with Chinese realities,” the plan serves as a “GPS Navigator” for adapting to the external environment, and follows the trajectory of techno-economic American university reforms in place for the last two decades. The plan’s goals are fourfold: to improve faculty quality, reform the governance structure, encourage research excellence, and diversify financial resources. The first goal continues the thrust of the personnel reforms and furthers the government’s *rencai* agenda to enhance the profile of the faculty through study abroad and attractive salary packages (positions for spouses, special schools for children, superior living quarters, and endowed chairs) to entice *liuxue* 留学 to return to campus. As with the goal for research excellence, “quality” is understood in mainly extrinsic terms (prestigious degrees, rankings in the citation index, etc.), and in the case of the second goal, coupling applied research to national priorities. The third and fourth goals treat the university as an “enterprise” to be run along the lines of “American style school management,” in which knowledge becomes a utility for gaining wealth and power.

The campaign for internationalizing Beida also includes a heavy dose of “Hong Kong-ification,” (Gan, 2004, p. 90) because it looks to Hong Kong universities for their absorption of Western cultural values, including the use of English as the language of instruction and of research publications, the training of its faculty in select British and American universities, and the external evaluation of its programs by Western academics. To some extent this resembles China’s dependence at the turn of the twentieth century on Japanese universities as intermediaries with the West because of cultural similarities and geographical proximity to China. Hong Kong would seem to be an ideal choice for internationalizing Beida and its sister institutions, but as with the earlier connection, questions about cultural compatibility arise. Hong Kong, although now part of China was an occupied territory and its academic culture distinctly British. Its higher education institutions are saturated with that influence, and if it is to be serve as the model for absorbing Western modernization, it does not provide a paradigm for reconciling an indigenous heritage with an exogenous system based on Western values of instrumental rationality, a naturalistic epistemic, and an increasingly techno-economic ideology. Just as importantly, the congruence between the current internationalization of Beida and Cai’s efforts to transform it into a cosmopolitan institution is problematical. Together, the personnel reforms, the strategic plan, and the Hong Kong paradigm point to a deeper epistemic that originated with Hu Shi, and one discordant with Cai’s philosophical idea of Beida.

3. Dueling Vision

The Beida project for attaining world-class status reenacts the dominant approach since the New Culture movement of making a sudden leap to follow the West and jettison the cultural heritage in the wake of the market university (MU). The aesthetic university (AU) heralded by Cai Yuanpei seeks to forge a linkage between the two contradictory models of embracing the West while preserving the traditional spirit of Chinese higher learning so as to offset the weaknesses of either model by combining their joint strengths.

The differences between the MU and (AU) can be displayed by these contrasts:

Table 1. Core principles of the market university and the aesthetic university

Epistemic Leaps	MU	AU
1. Affirmation of the ordinary	1. Affirmation of quotidian and anti-elitist leveling of disciplines	1. Affirmation of deep psycho-spiritual Chinese structure
2. Commodification	2. a. External locus of control b. Knowledge for power & wealth c. Seeking advantage d. University as machine	2. a. Inner directed b. Knowledge for the public good c. Transcending self-interest d. University as work of art
3. Naturalism	3. a. "Production & reproduction" b. Humanities superfluous c. Specialization d. Cognitive skills	3 a. Personal enrichment b. Humanities foundational c. Wholeness d. Synthesis of rational and affective

Just as Cai's aesthetic vision has its roots in Confucian thought and German Idealism, so too does the MU paradigm have its origins in an earlier trio of "leaps" or great mutations that coalesced into what Clark Kerr dubbed (not honorifically) the "multiversity": "an inconsistent institution [. . .] not one community but several [. . .]. Its edges are fuzzy [. . .]. It serves society almost slavishly [. . .]" (Kerr, 2001, p. 14). On other occasions, Kerr likened the multiversity to a service station where all of society's needs can be filled. This is basically the framework for Beida's internationalization reforms.

The first mutation began with what Charles Taylor calls the "affirmation of the ordinary" that proceeded from the Protestant Reformation's elevation of the ordinary life above the "good life," inverting the Aristotelian couplet of "life and the good life" (*zen kai euzen*), in which the latter was considered to be the purpose for the former (Taylor, 1989, p. 211). The good life depends on life itself in its lower order functions to flourish, but preoccupation with the quotidian prevents attaining a higher plane of existence. The inversion led to putting a new value on labor and production, "sanctifying" the mundane above *theoria*, rejecting contemplation (as in the monastic orders), and challenging the role of the Church as the exclusive mediator between the divine and the human. In this anti-elitist leap, the good life is no longer outside the ordinary, but part of everyday life. Baconian science completed the transformation by raising knowledge gained through experiment above *theoria*. Experimental science deals with "life" and how things function and makes the purpose of knowledge to benefit the ordinary.

To this was added the second great mutation of commodification in the eighteenth century, which stressed the fruits of production and exchange based on efficiency and standardization to replace the humanist hierarchy. The third mutation of a naturalistic *Weltanschauung* (accelerated by Darwinism) complements the first two leaps by putting all human goals on the same footing, while denying a moral horizon or telos for human existence. In its strict insistence on a fact/value dichotomy, it considers facts as the only valid sources of knowledge. Only the physical world is real, and the sciences based on it are thought to be capable of explaining everything in the cosmos, reducing moral perspectives to idle speculations and desires and emotions to epistemic insignificance. The scientist Ernest Rutherford put it more pungently: "There is only physics, all else is stamp collecting" (Cunningham, 2010, p. 30).

The MU model rests on these epistemic underpinnings, and in its nascent form during the May Fourth Enlightenment, it surfaced as counter narrative to Cai's syncretic approach to fusing Western and Chinese systems of thought (and one that Cai imported to Beida as part of his pluralistic philosophy). Hu Shi and his pragmatist cadre made Western rationality the foundation for university reform. His conversion to Dewey's belief in the indispensability of the scientific method to educational reform inclined him to split the Chinese and Western cultures into polarities, and to rejecting the former. He advocated the "collapse of Chinese civilization as [. . .] exactly the necessary undermining without which there could not have been the rejuvenation of an old civilization . . ." (Hartnett, 1998, p. 91). He favored emancipation from the past. Where Cai made modernity congruent with the indigenous culture, Hu made Chinese culture fit the Western model, so that by adopting the scientific worldview, Beida could lead the reconstruction of society through the principles of instrumental rationality.

In his advocacy for emancipation from the past, Hu saw economic development as prior to spiritual renewal or cultural enlightenment, putting "life" above the "good life." Raising the material level of people would make it

possible for them to have meaningful lives—an anthem repeated in the Deng Xiaoping era and returning with full force in Beida's internationalization reforms. Both Hu and the current reformers at Beida tend to form a monistic conception of Western systems of thought without considering their epistemic foundations and their incompatibility with the Chinese idea of the university as sculpted by Cai.

Hu Shi's idea of the university, which was heavily influenced by John Dewey's philosophy of experimentalism, itself rooted in empiricism and the Baconian scientific method, prefigures the current infatuation with the MU idea. It emerged as the first wave of the scientific management movement was saturating American culture, particularly its elementary and secondary school systems, with business values and practices, leading Thorstein Veblen in 1918 to declare, "business principles" were transforming higher learning into a "merchantable commodity to be produced in a piece rate plan [. . .] measured, counted and reduced to staple equivalence by impersonal, mechanical tests." (Veblen, 1965, p. 163). The scientific management revolution, or "Taylorism" (coined in a nod to its "father" Frederick Winslow Taylor) equated success with material gain as the "captains of industry," such as Andrew Carnegie and J.P. Morgan, were elevated to heroes, not unlike the hagiography of Bill Gates and the late-Steve Jobs in our time.

A resurgent Taylorism forms the dominant narrative for the current reform initiatives at Beida. As with the earlier version, the thrust of the MU is towards efficiency and a results-based philosophy of learning. Beida's official discourse reverberates with scientific reductionism and the cult of efficiency, which are mutually reinforcing and propels the institution away from its aesthetic moorings. The expectation is that the university should pursue only useful things, echoing a declaration by an original devotee of Taylorism that it is better to be "lopsided and useful, than [. . .] symmetrical and useless" (Callahan, 1962, p. 10).

The concatenated framework undergirding the MU is a product of the Western radical Enlightenment and is inherently incompatible with the founding principles of the AU that Cai planted. Nothing less than a battle for the soul of Beida is at stake in the plan to convert Beida into the economic engine for increasing wealth and power under the banner of Cai's ideal of internationalism, while actually subverting his vision for independence, pluralism, and harmony.

4. Reforming Beida on the Basis of Cai's Aesthetic Vision

A university depends for its survival and cohesion on a set of common assumptions about the purpose of higher education and what knowledge is of most worth. When that vision is shattered, its stability is endangered. If a university loses its formative idea, or should its spirit evaporate, it will degenerate into dead matter, a mechanical, soulless entity, or so says Karl Jaspers in his essay on "The Renewal of the University" (Habermas, 1987, p. 3). The idea of the university (originating conceptually with Humboldt) points to an animating spirit or ideal life form shared by its members and expressing a universal principle of science and truth. Although some would deny that a university can maintain "unbroken faithfulness" to a founding idea, the ideal is particularly cogent in the Chinese context, and the "Beida spirit," memorialized as the legacy of President Cai Yuanpei, continues to be invoked as a guiding principle for its current initiatives, even though many of the original policies first enunciated by Cai Yuanpei were interrupted by various convulsions, including massive socio-political upheaval and experimentation with various educational models.

If Beida is to remain a "sacred place of the spirit" (*jingshen shengdi* 精神圣地) and not decline into a "dependent fiefdom" (*fuyong fanshu* 附庸藩属) of Western universities, it must return to its formative principles (Gan, 2004, p. 87). Four components of that vision are essential for not only to promoting its capacity for self-determination, but also to propelling it to becoming a "dialogic university," a center for global convergence that views exogenous and indigenous academic cultures as two banks of the same river.

First, the direction for change should be inner-directed consistent with Cai's collegial governing structure in which the policy-making council harnessed the energies and commitments to excellence of the faculty. Today, the thrust for change emanates from an external locus of control in the form of a state-corporation nexus, not an internal band of scholars or experts. The external consortia shift the focus from a public to a private good to meet the emergent needs of the business-industry complex. The strategic planning objectives illustrate the shift to responding to the external environment as opposed to Cai's principle of "determination from within" consistent with its inner collegial structure in which faculty and senior administrators determined the university's direction. Cai drew a distinct boundary between Beida and outside interests so as to protect its independence, and restoring the other provisions of the AU model depends on redrawing that boundary by rejuvenating its collegial spirit.

Secondly, the MU's proclivities for specialization and the "isolation of the human powers" that the architects of both Berlin and Beida saw as the "the real original sin of modern education" clash with Cai's cardinal principle of wholeness. He might have said it would be better to be "symmetrical and useless than lopsided and useful,"

reversing the scientific management slogan. Such one-sidedness makes Beida “half a university” and its pennant “half a flag.” The pennant depicts a grand linkage (*guantong* 贯通) of Western and Chinese thought with its foundation in aesthetic philosophy, not a one-sided encounter with science that would spark a “clash” (*chongtu* 冲突) between the guest and the host cultures (Cai, 1997, p. 350). Cai warned against blind copying of the Western university and making ephemeral phenomena the university’s *raison d’être*. With his commitment to aesthetic and moral cultivation, Cai saw that science alone could not heal the fissures between reason and emotion, but would actually widen them through specialization, mechanization, and a stolid disposition toward integration of knowledge. Nor could it serve as a standard for deciding what to adopt and what to discard in the headlong rush to “learn from the West.”

Thirdly, concomitant with the quest for wholeness is the pursuit of the “good life” as an integrative principle. Cai’s aesthetic concept on the “good life” is a variation on Schiller’s “beautiful soul,” or what the Confucian way renders as the “personality of the gentleman” (*junzi rege* 君子人格), which is free from inner struggles and selfish interests—a microcosm of the university as a house of beauty that transcends utilitarian interests and the shackles of external control. For Cai, the value of art lies in being an object of pure knowledge detached from any practical relations—a reflection of Zhuangzi’s idea of “usefulness of the useless” (*wuyong zhi yong* 无用之用). It is “useful” because it expresses a disinterestedness that goes beyond the will to live and enters into a state of serene contemplation producing self-enlightenment. By the leveling of academic values and the “sanctification” of the ordinary life, Beida is abandoning the pursuit of the “good life” that Cai made radiate with the splendor of freedom of thought, appreciation for diverse doctrines, and a cosmopolitan perspective. This “Beida spirit” created a vibrant atmosphere and thirst for knowledge unmatched, perhaps, since the so-called Hundred Schools of Thought period. It is also forsaking the ideals of universality, transcendence, and independence that direct Beida toward promoting the public good, not the transient interests of external interest groups.

This was precisely what Cai warned against when he campaigned against making Beida an instrument for material advantage and profit. He confronted a similarly “lopsided” obsession with scientific objectivism that threatened to create deep fissures in the curriculum. Cai would not have found the term “concupiscence” too hyperbolic to describe this longing for material success at the expense of humanistic aims. His vision is congruent with the Western theological belief that the irascible desire for competition and aggressive advantage is contrary to the aesthetic nature of an institution of higher learning to advance moral cultivation and disinterested knowledge.

Fourthly, Cai was as dedicated to internalization and so-called globalization as are the current Beida leaders. He lauded the idea of making Beida an internationally respected university, although he knew it would take a century or more to realize. He was committed to “imitating the practices of the world’s universities” (*fang shijie ming daxue tongli* 仿世界名大学通例), including safeguarding freedom of thought while resurrecting the pre-Qin practice of stimulating lively debate among contending schools of thought (Cai, 1997, p. 271). This is why he conjoined internationalism with freedom of thought and promoting intellectual diversity and stimulating debate among contending schools of thought.

He saw internationalizing Beida as indispensable to “saving the nation,” but not for “wealth and power.” The obsession with *fuguo qiangbing* 富国强兵, a policy of “enriching the state and strengthening” that reaches back to the Legalist Han Feizi, ensnares the university in the business of the state and invites interference with its pursuit of knowledge for the public good. The *fuqiang* impulse (as it is sometimes abbreviated) transforms Beida from a normative university pursuing the ideals of disinterested knowledge and spiritual cultivation to a utilitarian one enmeshed in extrinsic goals. To this is added a virulent naturalism that smothers (*esha* 扼杀) Cai’s belief in making the “good life” the university’s purpose to express the inexhaustible richness of human experience.

Cai’s aesthetic idea may be considered utopian and impractical as a framework for a university wedded to the Anglo-Saxon market ideology with its three nodal points of instrumental rationality, corporate efficiency, and scientific naturalism, which abnegate a moral dimension to higher learning. Yet without Cai’s philosophical idea of the university Beida’s destiny as the center for “national learning” (*guoxue* 国学) and a gateway for connecting modern China to its ancient past remain unfulfilled. His aesthetic framework provides not only a digestive mechanism for absorbing Western thought, and selecting those ideas compatible with Chinese habits of mind and heart, but also a foundation for restoring that sense of harmony among the core academic disciplines. Beida is positioned to cultivate an “education for a world view” so that Eastern and Western academic culture may be able to regain its lost sense of community in the wake of excessive individualism, express its resonance with the cosmic process, nurture self-cultivation, and rejuvenate the “enfleshment” of learning.

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