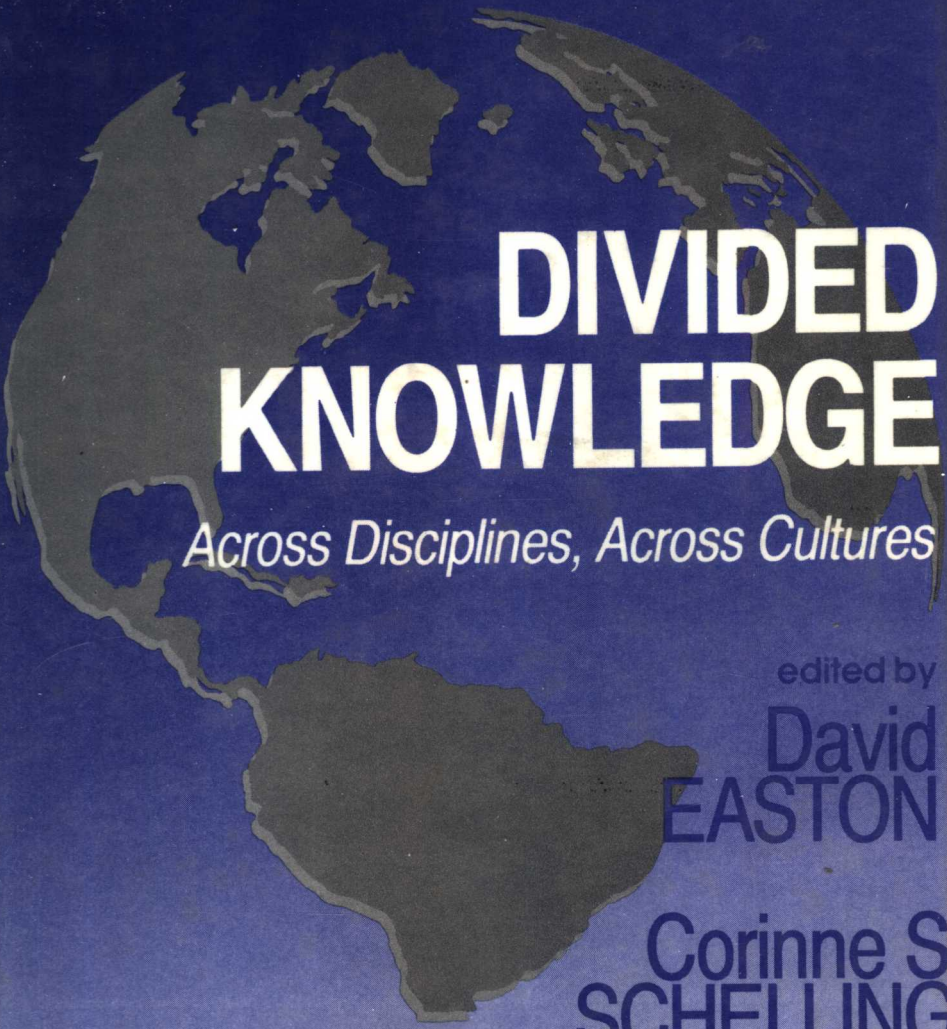

DIVIDED KNOWLEDGE

Across Disciplines, Across Cultures

edited by

David EASTON

Corinne S. SCHELLING

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Our participation in this joint venture—including our role in planning the symposium, travel to and from China, and preparation of the manuscripts of the U.S. scholars for publication in this book—was made possible by grants to the American Academy from the Ford Foundation, the Andrew Mellon Foundation, and the Research and Planning Committee of the American Academy.

Peter Geithner, the Ford Foundation Representative for China, with his knowledge of Chinese scholarly institutions and his contacts in CASS, was helpful to us in many ways while we were in Beijing, as well as before and after our trip. In the early planning phase of this project, Professor Philip Kuhn of Harvard University was an invaluable adviser. He also served as our interpreter, guide, and link to CASS when we visited Beijing in 1984. In 1988, Professor

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Many others in the U.S., who know China well, shared with us their insights on and experience with the contemporary Chinese world of scholarship to prepare our group of non-China-specialists to work effectively with our new Chinese colleagues. We want especially to thank Prudence Humphreys, who worked diligently and creatively to ensure that what contributors wrote was properly translated from their machine's language through our editorial process and on to the printer. This turned out to be a challenge that she met with imagination, as well as hard work.

—David Easton
—Corinne S. Schelling

Preface

In 1983 David Easton, vice-president of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, was invited by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) to lecture to some of its Institutes and to several of the major universities in China. During this visit he spoke with the then-President of CASS, Ma Hong, and others about establishing a continuing scholarly relationship between CASS and the American Academy. The suggestion was warmly received, and in 1984 a planning delegation led by President Herman Feshbach, with Professor Easton, Professor Philip Kuhn of Harvard, and Corinne Schelling, Associate Executive Officer of the American Academy, visited CASS. Our hosts, with whom we worked closely, were Vice-president Ru Xin and then-Deputy Secretary-general, Zhao Fusan. As a result of many working sessions, the two Academies entered into a memorandum of understanding under which mutually agreed-upon programs would be conducted in China and in the United States.

The first of these programs, a survey by leading scholars of recent developments in selected social science and humanistic disciplines in the West, particularly in the United States, took the form of a symposium in Beijing in May 1988. For the Chinese, this theme was of great importance. Especially in the period from the 1950s through

the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976, the country had suffered too much social and political turmoil to rebuild its neglected and often beleaguered ancient scholarly institutions. Indeed for a good part of the twentieth century, ravaged by external wars, the Japanese invasion and occupation, and civil strife, higher education has operated under the most austere and limiting conditions. By the 1970s, however, China was opening its doors to science and technology. Then, in the 1980s, as it began to reconstruct its higher education, China turned to areas that had been recently overlooked and were, in some instances, politically sensitive—the social sciences and the humanities. Knowledge of up-to-date work in these fields, among other things, it was hoped would permit improved understanding of and adjustment to the broad consequences of China's economic reconstruction activities.

As U.S. participants prepared their contributions for the May 1988 Symposium, they were uncertain about the extent to which recent Western developments in the social sciences and humanities had reached their Chinese colleagues. As it turned out, they were pleasantly surprised at how much had got through (despite the doors that had been closed between East and West for so many years and the continuing acute shortage of Western books and periodicals) and at the sophisticated, perceptive critiques of Western scholarship that they heard. At the same time, inevitably there were large gaps in what Chinese scholars had read, and in some cases there was also a philosophical gulf that was often openly discussed.

The May 1988 Symposium consisted of opening and closing plenary sessions with up to 100 participants and informal workshops for each of the selected fields. One U.S. scholar, a major figure who had influenced the field over the past decades, examined each discipline or area of learning. This scholar prepared, for advance distribution, a survey paper, reflecting his own views on developments and future directions of the given field. At the opening plenary session, these papers were presented and responded to by Chinese counterparts (with the help of simultaneous translation). They also were the basis for informal discussion at the disciplinary workshops, which were attended by Chinese scholars, students, and practitioners. In addition, there were many small, informal, and unscheduled discussions among participants from the two countries.

The choice of disciplines or areas of study for the Symposium, as well as of the format of the event, was made through extensive

correspondence and direct discussion between the American and the Chinese Academies' planning committees. As is evident from this book, we agreed on five established disciplines—sociology, political science, philosophy, literary theory, and history. Philosophy, literature, and history are areas of traditional strength in China. Political science and sociology until recently had been forbidden areas for study, and thus were in need of considerable renewal. Three interdisciplinary academic fields—public policy, area studies, and business management—that were created in the West specifically to help apply scholarly knowledge and methods to social problems were also included. These interdisciplinary fields were of importance to current Chinese efforts to modernize their society as well as their institutions of higher education.

In our plans, the Symposium had two overarching themes: (a) the specialization or fragmentation of fields of knowledge in the West and consequent efforts to integrate them for application to social problems, a matter of considerable interest to our Chinese colleagues; and (b) the universality or transferability, between national cultures, of knowledge—its concepts, theories, and applications. Both themes, we felt, had particular relevance in a China that, as it was reconstituting its institutions of higher learning as well as restoring its economy, faced difficult choices about how best to organize its scholarship and research. Could China benefit from hearing about our problems as well as our successes?

Because of the events of June 1989, our original plans to publish Chinese commentary on the symposium with the papers have not materialized, although we have tried, especially in Easton's introductory chapter, to give the flavor of informal Chinese comments at the May 1988 meetings. We do not have precise current information about CASS's arrangements to publish the U.S. papers in Chinese in China, as called for in the agreements between the two Academies, but we assume that they are proceeding.

Plans for a second phase of the joint CASS-American Academy program and other activities anticipated in the initial memorandum of understanding await a clarification of scholarly conditions in China.

—David Easton
—Corinne S. Schelling

1

The Division, Integration, and Transfer of Knowledge

DAVID EASTON

Two thousand years of growth in knowledge have left Western scholarship with a host of intractable problems. Many are specific to individual disciplines; some involve the structure of and relationship among the disciplines; others fall into both categories. Perhaps none of these problems has more salience and urgency, or has created more hurdles, than increasing specialization, which affects both the individual disciplines and their inter-relationships. This problem is now widely perceived in both the social sciences and the humanities, two realms of scholarship that in academia are typically kept quite separate from each other—again evidence of specialization, an element of what we refer to as divided knowledge.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I wish to express my appreciation to the following China-specialist colleagues at the University of California, Irvine, for the careful reading they have been kind enough to give this Chapter: Distinguished Visiting Professor Ping-Ti Ho, Department of History and Social Sciences; and Professors Dorothy Solinger, Department of Politics and Society, and Bin Wong, Department of History. Mr. San-yuan Li at the University of Chicago kept me alert to nuances of meanings so important in intercultural exchanges. Of course, the usual disclaimer applies; they bear no responsibility for the views presented here.

This volume describes and then examines the implications of specialization. Circumstances provided a unique opportunity to consider at the same time recent developments in selected social science *and* humanistic disciplines, as well as the emergence of three fields of learning that were designed specifically to overcome the deficiencies caused by specialization.

How did this unusual opportunity arise? As the preface explains, the essays in this book were commissioned for a joint symposium between the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing in May 1988. Moreover, the binational context raised a second major problem long recognized in Western scholarship, that is, the transferability of knowledge from one culture to another—yet another manifestation of divided knowledge. Thus, as it turned out, when a group of scholars from the United States collaborated with a group in the People's Republic of China to design a program reviewing recent developments in selected social science and humanistic disciplines, they created an occasion to consider two major dimensions of the division of knowledge at one time.

As we know from experience, a comparative view may shed new light on a given problem. From the chapters in this volume, we are able to compare disciplines; as a result of the Symposium discussions with our Chinese colleagues, referred to in this essay, we are also able to compare scholarship in national cultures based on different assumptions and perspectives. Thus the project described in the preface has led to a more comprehensive understanding than is usually possible of serious problems in the way we in the West organize knowledge, as well as how others see us. This project has been an example of learning more about oneself by seeing oneself—whether discipline or nation—through the eyes of another.

To our group, three things seemed to distinguish the present effort from other reviews of disciplines. In the first place, it turned out that as planners we crafted better than we knew. Unexpectedly we found that we were creating a setting for a dialogue between social scientists and humanists, an unusual event in the West. What we had only vaguely anticipated at first, but which became apparent as the Beijing symposium progressed, was that the very juxtaposition in one program of the social sciences and humanities that the Chinese simply took for granted, created an unusual opportunity for interdisciplinary exchanges among Western scholars. Despite its name,

the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) includes all these disciplines that we in the West normally consider to be part of the humanities—history, philosophy, literature, and the like. In the French idiom, CASS might well have been called the Academy of the Humane Sciences. Thus, it was natural for the Chinese to wish to include, in any exchange, disciplines from both the social sciences and the humanities.

What seemed totally ordinary from the history and traditions of the production of knowledge in China was, of course, highly unusual for us. Only as we began to assemble the American group for the symposium did it become apparent that we were inadvertently also creating the setting for a dialogue between the social sciences and the humanities in the West. Aside from any other considerations, Western participants found the symposium an unexpectedly rewarding opportunity to enter into a discourse with each other around common themes, an opportunity, we later agreed, that occurs only too rarely in the West between social scientists and humanists.

In the second place, most reviews of disciplines have been developed largely for American, or, more likely, Western consumption. Certain assumptions could be taken for granted about the intellectual background of the reader, the reservoir of understandings that could be brought to bear on interpreting an analysis, and the accumulated perceptions that could fill any gaps.

Discussions around reviews prepared for non-Western readers could take much less for granted. They would encourage the American participants to return to fundamentals and perhaps open up issues that otherwise would have remained unspoken or unrecognized. Thus we Westerners might come to know our own disciplines better for the very reason that we were seeking to present them to scholars immersed in a radically different culture and tradition. If nothing else, a dialogue with non-Western scholars might appropriately raise a question of paramount importance: To what extent are Western conceptions of science and knowledge culture-bound, products of specific cultural and historical experiences that have only limited relevance for scholars from other cultures and traditions?

In the third place, the time of the symposium, May 1988, was an unusually open moment in the history of education in China. Immediately after the end of the Cultural Revolution, Chinese scholars

appeared to be willing to plunge enthusiastically into the task of rebuilding their own social sciences and humanities. Even though they had five thousand years of tradition on which to lean, they were beginning to explore ways in which they might best take advantage of developments in Western culture. Our planned reassessment of Western disciplines could not have occurred at a more favorable moment.

At the time of the symposium, there appeared to be an opportunity for a relatively free exchange of ideas and for the development of educational policies in China to take advantage of such ideas for reconstruction purposes. Since then, of course, circumstances have changed radically in China. The suppression of the democracy movement at Tiananmen Square in June 1989 abruptly shut the window on the new intellectual breezes that were beginning to stir. Whether Tiananmen Square heralds a long intellectual winter no one knows at this moment. We may at least hold out the hope that a country one billion strong, intent on moving into the twenty-first century, is unlikely to be able to isolate itself, intellectually or economically, for long, especially in a world that is already seeing extraordinarily deep and rapid changes in other hitherto nondemocratic countries. Even if the more favorable political climate in which our symposium was held no longer prevails, there is good reason to believe that, if and when that climate returns, the issues raised in the symposium for scholarship will not have disappeared. Indeed, because of the additional delay in addressing them, they may well become more urgent than ever before.

Specialization and Integration

In the West the history of the social sciences and humanities, indeed of all knowledge, with its dedicated search for understanding, is one of increasing specialization and fragmentation. At one time all knowledge about human, social, and physical nature was viewed as one. Scholars continue to refer to such encompassing thinking by Plato and Aristotle as philosophy, as though it were an indivisible unity. Over time, however, this single skein of knowledge divided into two basic strands, initially called natural and moral philosophy. By the seventeenth century the growth in the authority of the physical sciences was such that natural philosophy

was transformed into natural science. By the end of the eighteenth century moral philosophy, that is, that branch of knowledge dealing with human relationships, also in hot pursuit of the prestige of science, relabeled itself as moral science. Thus the *The Wealth of Nations* has always been recognized as being as much a dissertation on morality as on the economy, even though in it Adam Smith (1937) began the decisive separation of the study of economics from the main body of moral science.

Shakespeare to the contrary, it is clear that there *is* something in a name. These shifts in identifying labels—from philosophy to natural versus moral philosophy and then to natural versus moral sciences—reflect underlying transformations in the self-image of areas of knowledge, as well as in their methods and perspectives. By the mid-19th century, under the inspiration of Auguste Comte, the founder of sociology, the moral sciences began to assume their modern name as the social sciences. Anthropology and economics had already begun to hive off from the main body of philosophy and moral (that is, social) sciences. Psychology, sociology, and history were not far behind, with political science bringing up the rear. The remainder, philosophy, was left to sort out its own identity, although, as Tilly (this book, Chapter 4) reminds us, history may still be struggling with the same problem.

With increasing acceleration in the 20th century, the social sciences and the humanities began to specialize with a vengeance so that today the basic disciplines have not only clearly identified themselves, but have subdivided internally into many subfields; and often, even within these, specialization continues apace. In proverbial terms, as one of our Chinese scholars phrased it, we seem to be "looking at the sky from the bottom of the well," and historically the wells have been increasing in number and decreasing in diameter.

It is commonplace to observe that the intensity of specialization is so rapid that scholars have difficulty keeping up with the significant literature in their own small niches, let alone with research in even closely adjacent substantive areas within a discipline. And what is true of the social sciences applies with equal validity to other fields of scholarship such as the humanities. Even in area studies, which combines the social and humanistic disciplines and in which we might have expected that explicit efforts to overcome specialization might win out, Lambert (this book, Chapter 7) tells us there has

been less success than might have been expected. Area studies, he points out, is just "transdisciplinary," not interdisciplinary. Specialization in the form of factual areal knowledge, linguistic skills, and particular disciplines continues to leave its specific divisive imprints in the field.

In short, true to the Cartesian revolution, with its emphasis on analytic reasoning,[1] we have managed to decompose the world of understanding into a virtually limitless number of fragments. Faithful descendants of Adam Smith as well, we scarcely need to be reminded of the identifiable virtues of specialization. As Max Weber (1946, p. 134-35) once put it, "only by strict specialization can the scientific worker become fully conscious, for once and perhaps never again in his lifetime, that he has achieved something that will endure." The search for understanding seems to have driven Western scholarship into decomposing nature, whether physical or social, into smaller and smaller units on the assumption that when we have understood the smallest unit—the elusive quark of the physical world—we will then be able to reassemble our knowledge for a comprehensive understanding of the whole.

We do not need to address here the issue of whether the Cartesian impulse to analytic decomposition can ever provide satisfactory understanding of the whole or whether in the search for knowledge we may need to begin with the whole entity before we even begin to seek understanding of its parts. Whatever the reader's opinions on that score, the fact is that society confronts us with problems that are, for example, definable as neither political, philosophical, linguistic, economic, nor cultural alone. They may be all of these and more. They are indeed whole multi-faceted problems for which society seeks some kind of resolution or understanding. Poverty, we recognize, is not exclusively an economic problem; there is a culture of poverty, a social structure of poverty, a politics of poverty, and so on. This means that addressing the issue of poverty, however much it may indeed depend on jobs and adequate income, it would be hazardous to seek a solution that takes into account the wisdom derived from any one of these disciplines alone, or even largely, and that ignores understanding that derives from other areas of inquiry.

Herein lies one of the major crises of modern knowledge. It is what I have called the Humpty Dumpty problem. To understand the world it has seemed necessary to analyze it by breaking it into many pieces—the disciplines and their own divisions—in much the