

Humanities and Science in the AI Era: Essence, Separation and Synthesis

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In the challenging AI era, surviving and finding employment, a balanced education in both humanities and science has become a consensus among many experts and students. Why? What is the essence of the humanities and science? Are they really that different? In fact, the division between humanities and science was originally intended to quickly cultivate specialized talents, and it has a history of less than two hundred years. Its drawbacks were already noticed a hundred years ago by Cai Yuan-Pei, who proposed at Peking University a remedy of “integrating humanities and science,” marking the beginning of general-education courses in universities worldwide. However, general-education courses address only the symptoms, not the root cause. The true solution is to return to the ancient tradition, as in Mozi and Aristotle’s time, where humanities and science were not separated. The method is the integration of humanities and science proposed by Cai Yuan-Pei. This is precisely the approach advocated by Scimat: treat equally humanities and science, and practice humanities-science synthesis. This paper will discuss all these issues and introduce the past and future of The Scimat Program, an international program to advance Scimat.

1 Introduction

There is much discussion on the nature of the humanities and science (see, e.g., [Bod & Kursell 2015; Skorton & Bear 2018] and references therein). Yet, no one has delved to the root of the problem, except one [Lam 2008a, 2014, 2024a, 2024b].

Here, in Sec. 2, the importance of both the humanities and science is discussed in the context of the age of AI (Artificial Intelligence). How the separation of the humanities and science with common origins from the

ancient Greek philosophy is outlined in Sec. 3. The historical calls for recombining the humanities and science (commonly known as “arts and sciences”) are presented in Sec. 4. The way to recombination through humanities-science (H-S) synthesis is discussed in Sec. 5, with four examples given in Sec. 6.

To promote the idea and practice of H-S synthesis, *The Wenliren Program*—a part of the international Scimat Program, is presented in Sec. 7. In fact, *The Scimat Program* was earlier established in 2007, the past and future of which is detailed in Sec. 8. Finally, Sec. 9 concludes this paper.

Remark. The word **Wenliren** (文理人) below, when referring to a person, has two meanings: (A) those excelling in the *research* of both the humanities and science (aka Renaissance Man); (B) those agreeing that humanities and science are both important. (See Secs. 5.3 and 7 for elaborations.) Meaning A is only used in Sec. 5.3; meaning B, the rest of the article.

2 The AI Era: Emphasizing Both Humanities and Science

2.1 Three experts’ insights

In this challenging AI era, the importance of *both* the humanities and science has been emphasized by three prominent persons, among others.

1. Henry Kissinger

The first one is Henry Kissinger (1923-2023, Fig. 1), a political scholar at Harvard University, who won the Nobel Prize for peace in 1973 and was the secretary of state of the United States for four years (1973-1977).

His last book *Genesis: Artificial Intelligence, Hope, and the Human Spirit* (2024), is coauthored with Google’s Eric Schmidt and Microsoft’s Craig Mundie. According to a book review [Dash 2026], the book:

- Presents AI as the harbinger of a “third age of discovery” (that will reshape knowledge, politics, security, economy, science, and the human condition itself).

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- Defends **human dignity** (rooted in vulnerability, mortality, and moral choice) as the non-negotiable foundation for any future partnership with intelligent machines.
- Warns of risks to free will, identity, and social cohesion.
- Advocates “sober optimism,” policy proposals (such as AI wealth taxation, *universal income*, and value alignment), and deliberate coexistence over co-evolution.
- Requires not only moral aspiration but also enforceable global governance (mandatory bias audits, data-sovereignty laws, and democratic oversight).

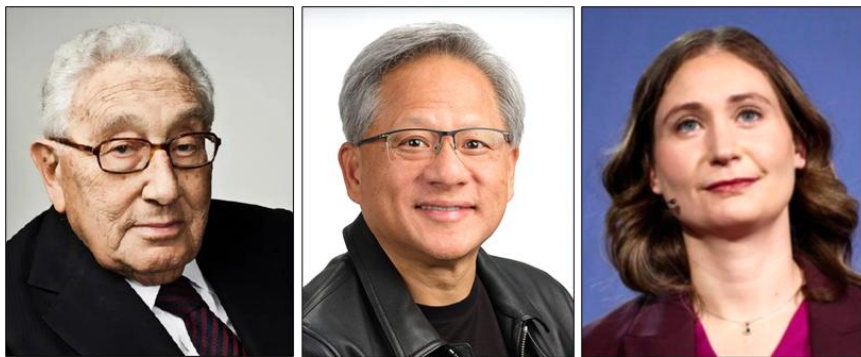


Fig. 1. Three AI experts: Henry Kissinger (left), Jensen Huang (middle), and Daniela Amodei (right).

2. Jensen Huang

Jensen Huang is the founder and CEO of NVIDIA, the world leader in AI computing (Fig. 1). He was from Taiwan; obtained his Bachelor’s degree from Oregon State University (1983), Master’s degree in Electrical Engineering from Stanford University (1990); named Time Magazine’s Person of the Year 2025, and ranked 7th richest person in the world with \$158 billion in 2026.

As recalled by the Copilot AI [Copilot 2026], in various interviews given by Huang, he says:

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- The *intersection* of technology and humanities is where the most meaningful innovation happens.
- To create technology that truly serves society, we must understand the *values, ethics, and culture* at its core.
- Artificial intelligence is not just a technical challenge—it’s a **human** one. We need both *scientific* expertise and *humanistic* insight.
- I encourage students and professionals to break down silos and cultivate skills from *both* science and the humanities.
- The future belongs to those who blend analytical power with *empathy* and ethical reasoning.

3. Daniela Amodei

Daniela Amodei (Fig. 1) is a cofounder and president of Anthropic, an AI safety and research company worthing \$380 billion. In a recent speech [Zhang 2026], she says:

- As AI expands in work and daily life, the humanities will become “even more important.”
- While engineering remains central, design choices, social impacts, and policy issues make **human judgment** crucial. For example:
 - Safety and red-teaming depend on ethical review and social insight.
 - Policy and compliance work requires clear writing and legal awareness.
 - User research benefits from cultural knowledge and empathy.
- The progress of AI is not only technical; it is also social, legal, and cultural.

She is talking about humanities scholars or graduates who understand AI.

2.2 New courses from prestigious schools

In the current era of rapid AI advancement, certain specialized jobs (such as computer programming and clerical work) are being quickly lost. What society needs are many generalists who can guide/operate AI or at least converse with AI—in other words, a **Wenlire**n (a “humanities-science generalist” here; i.e., meaning B, see Sec. 1).

Consequently, hybrid training is required; e.g., humanities students gain data literacy; engineering students learn ethics, law, and communication. To this end, since 2025, many new, innovative and interdisciplinary undergraduate courses are launched suddenly and rapidly in prestigious schools such as Harvard, Stanford and the University of Chicago, and beyond.^[1] Although these programs carry the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) label, their core deeply integrates liberal arts and social science thinking, focusing on the two major issues of our time: the climate crisis and AI. Harvard’s “Energy, Climate, and Environment” program is taught collaboratively by *physicists*, *historians*, and *sociologists*; the University of Chicago emphasizes interdisciplinary integration of climate issues and includes global field studies; Stanford has introduced a sub-track combining data science and humanities analysis, allowing liberal arts students to use computational tools to amplify their research capabilities.

Schools like Penn State and Bowling Green go even further by directly incorporating ethics and critique. The latter even offers an “AI + X” course where X could be computer science, history, journalism, mathematics, physics, or public relations.

3 The Separation of Humanities and Science

The separation of humanities and science occurred less than two hundred years ago, first in Germany, after the graduate school was established in the University of Berlin (Fig. 2) [Lam 2024a: 58, 2025a: 33-35].

3.1 H-S separation in Germany

From 1348 to the first half of the 19th century, German universities were divided into four faculties, ranked from most to least prestigious: theology,

law, medicine, and philosophy (including humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences) [Vogt 2020]. The Industrial Revolution (1760-1820/1840) began in Britain, swept across Europe, spanned the 18th and 19th centuries, promoted economic development, gave rise to the middle class, and flourished education.

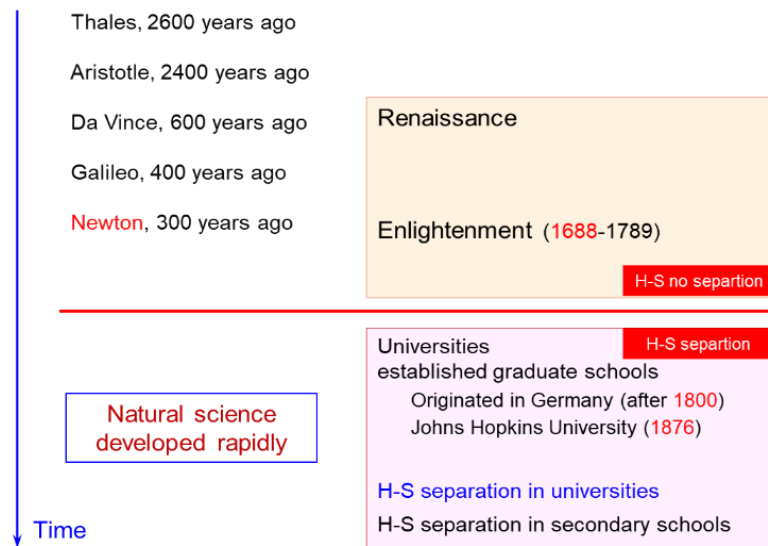


Fig. 2. Major events in the humanities-science separation .

Entering the 19th century, Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), the Prussian Minister of Education, founded the research-oriented University of Berlin in 1810 (Fig. 3, middle; renamed Humboldt University in 1949); the innovation lay in promoting both teaching and research for professors, and having students learn through research. Afterwards, the University of Berlin invented the graduate system (then called *Seminar*, not the discussion class or workshop as it is now), providing systematic training for graduate students (this system was introduced to the United States in 1876 when Johns Hopkins University opened). Importantly, in the second half of the 19th century, the philosophy faculty of the University of Berlin was divided into humanities and science. And the H-S separation system spread from graduate schools to undergraduate and secondary education.



Fig. 3. Left: C. P. Snow's *The Two Cultures*. Middle: University of Berlin (1855). Right: Yuan Shi-Kai.

3.2 H-S separation in China

In China, the H-S separation was officially and continuously endorsed since 1909 in the Qing dynasty, running up to today. In details:

- In 1909, the first year of the Xuantong (宣统) era of the Qing dynasty, the Ministry of Education suggested H-S separation in secondary schools.
- In 1912, Cai Yuan-Pei (蔡元培, 1868-1940), Minister of Education of the Republic of China, advocated *no* H-S separation (see Sec. 5.1)
- In 1915, Yuan Shi-Kai (袁世凯, 1859-1916; Fig. 3, right) came to power and said he would “follow the German system”, supporting the H-S separation.
- In 1949, the founding of New China urgently needed specialists; following the Soviet Union model, schools were reorganized into liberal arts, sciences, engineering, etc.
- In 1957, mainland China's college entrance examination began H-S separation, followed by high schools.
- In 1977, after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976 [Dikötte 2016]), the college entrance examination was resumed, continuing the practice of H-S separation.

3.3 H-S separation in United Kingdom

In 1959, C. P. Snow (1905-1980; Fig. 3, left) gave a lecture at Cambridge University titled “The two cultures and the scientific revolution” [Snow 1998]. The lecture covered three topics:

- The differences and lack of communication between Western scientific culture and humanistic culture.
- The importance of the scientific revolution.
- The urgency of wealthy countries aiding poorer countries.

The lecture generated significant interest and discussion worldwide, helping Snow receive 20 honorary degrees (mostly from outside the UK).

Although the latter two topics were also worth discussing, it was the theme of “the two cultures” that sparked the most controversy and debate.

Snow was addressing the serious divide between the humanities and science in Britain from secondary school to university at the time. However, he did not provide the historical causes of the two cultures (which is given in [Lam 2008a]). His prescription: Humanities people should learn some physics, science people should read some literary works. Of course, this was of no help in resolving the so-called two-culture problem (the solution of which, again, is provided in [Lam 2008a]; see Sec. 5).

4 The Recombination of Humanities and Science

4.1 Origins of disciplines

To understand why the humanities and science could and should be recombined to be a whole, one has to understand their common roots, and historically, how these two major branches of knowledge got their names and came about [Lam 2024a: 24-26]. This is illustrated in Fig. 4.

Essentially, in the 14th century, the ancient Greek Philosophy, invented by Thales (c624-c546 BC), was divided into three parts: ‘Philosophy’ (single quotes), Natural Philosophy, and Theology. ‘Philosophy’ is the study of the human system; Natural philosophy is the study of nonhuman systems;

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Theology is the study of everything related to God under the premise of God’s (then supernatural) existence. The content of ‘Philosophy’ and Natural Philosophy contains two parts: “no God” and “invoke God.”

Subsequently, the no-God part of ‘philosophy’ was divided into the **humanities** and social science, and the no-God part of natural philosophy (also known as “natural science”) was formally defined as “Science” in 1867—known as the *second* definition of Science [Lam 2024a: 172]. The *third* definition of **Science**, defined in 2007, is the one currently adopted by scientists in their practices (see Sec. 5).

Note that in the Chinese language, the two terms, *Wenke* (文科, humanities plus social science) and *Li’ke* (理科, ‘Natural Science’ plus Mathematics), have no counterparts in the English language. And, H-S synthesis is often referred to as “wen-li blending” (see Sec. 5.1).

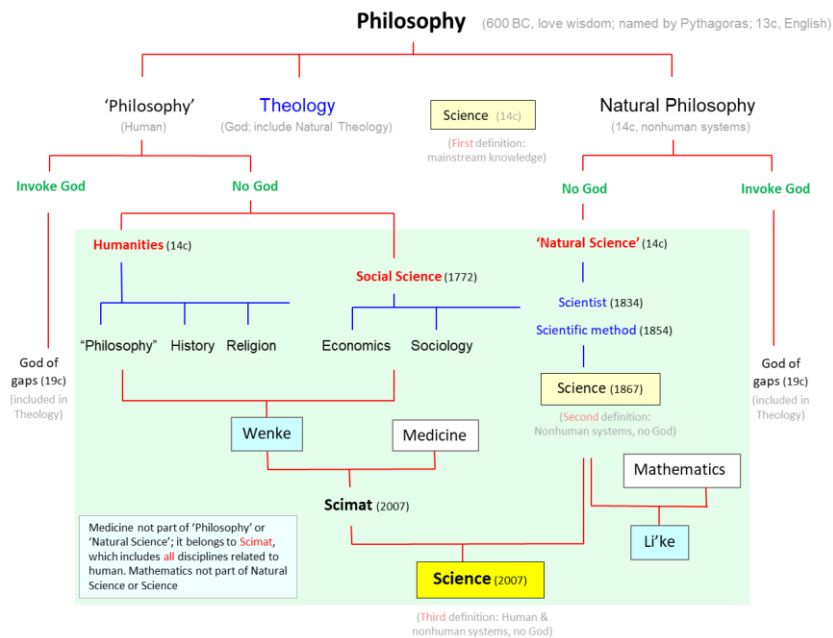


Fig. 4. A brief history of academic terms and disciplines, from the ancient Greek Philosophy to “Science” and to Scimat [Lam 2024a: 24].

4.2 Simple systems and complex systems

The object of scientific research is all things in nature. According to the two properties of simple/complex, deterministic/probabilistic, they can be divided into four classes [Lam 2024a: 33-35]. As shown in Table 1, “natural science” (li’ke) shows up in all the four categories of A, B, C and D, and the human-system studies (liberal arts or wenke) belong to class D—probabilistic complex systems.

The ancient Greeks (such as Aristotle) did not distinguish between these four categories and treated them equally. Note that the beginning of modern science 400 years ago came from Galileo’s breakthrough in the study of class A. For beginners in complex systems, we recommend the popsci book *Complexity* by Mitchell Waldrop (Fig. 5)

Generally speaking, simple systems are easier to study than complex systems and thus are higher in their *scientificity* (level of scientific development). The historical development of both the simple and complex systems are sketched in Fig. 6.

Table 1. The four categories of disciplines classified according to whether they are simple or complex systems as well as deterministic or probabilistic systems, with selected examples.

	Simple	Complex
Deterministic	A Free fall, projectile path	C Chaos (three-body problem), Fractal
Probabilistic	B Random walk (Brownian motion), elementary particle (probabilistic because of quantum mechanics)	D Part of “Natural Science” (meteorology, climate change, nonhuman biological systems) Liberal Arts (Humanities, Social Science)

4.3 Marx: science as a whole

Karl Marx (1818-1883, Fig. 7) is a philosopher, economist, historian, journalist, and revolutionary whose works inspired the foundation of a few communist regimes, including the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1917) and the People’s Republic of China (1949) [Wolff & Leopold

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2025]. He spent a year at University of Bonn before obtaining a doctoral degree in law and philosophy from the University of Berlin (1841).

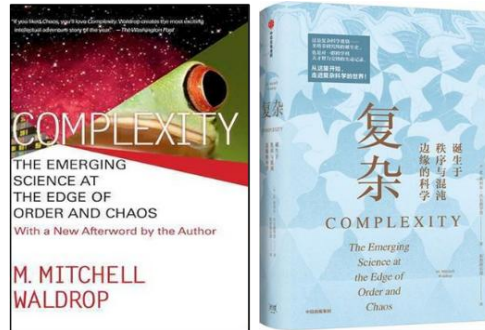


Fig. 5. Left: Mitchell Waldrop's popsci book *Complexity*, first published in 1992. Right: The Chinese translation.

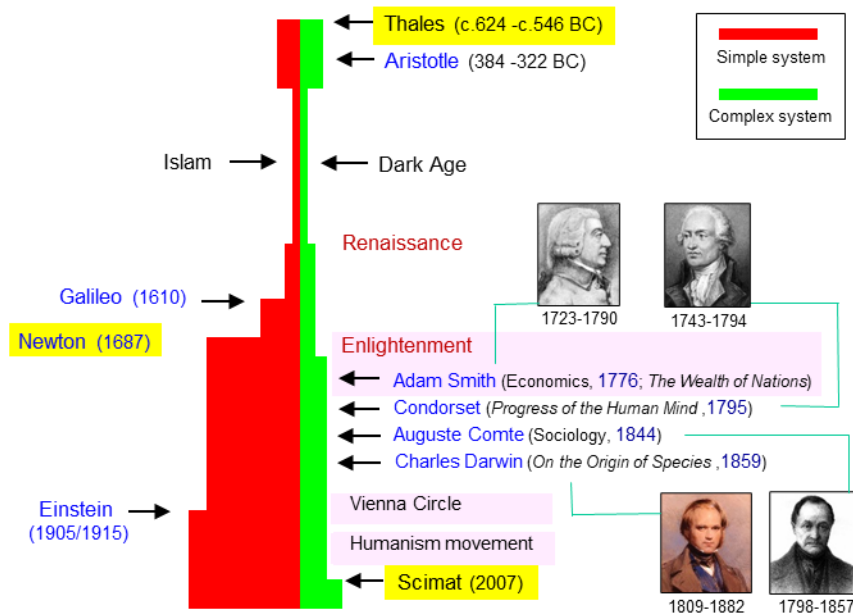


Fig. 6. A brief history of scientific developments of simple and complex systems in the last 2,600 years since Thales. The left (right) column corresponds to simple (complex) systems; the column width represents roughly how much the development activity was during different time periods.

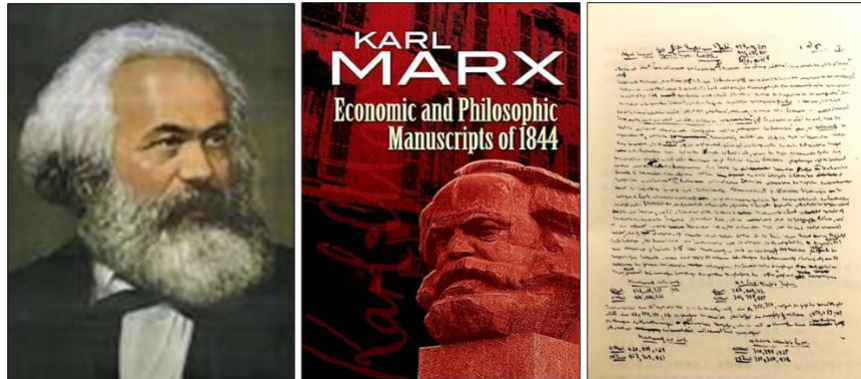


Fig. 7. Left: Karl Marx. Middle: *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Right: Karl Marx's hand-written manuscript.

Between April and August 1844 when Marx was 26 years old, in Paris, he wrote down a series of (unfinished) notes which combine elements of psychology, sociology, and anthropology—a profound examination of the human condition rooted in a philosophy of economics.^[2] They are influential because they show the humanist background to Marx's later historical and economic theories [McLellan & Feuer 2026].

These notes were first compiled and published posthumously as the book *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in German by the Soviet Union's Marx–Engels–Lenin Institute in 1932; English translation, in 1956 [Marx (1932) 2007]. In these notes, Marx remarked that human science and natural science would merge into a *whole* science. The remaining question is: What to do? That is, How can one make this happen?

Unfortunately, Marx's wish seems to have been forgotten, at least not taken seriously by anybody. The answer to this important question has to wait 163 years. In 2007, the new multidiscipline *Scimat* that works precisely towards Marx's goal of a whole science emerged, which provides the way to achieve this merging: humanities-science synthesis (see Sec. 5.4).

5 Humanities-Science Synthesis

5.1 Cai Yuan-Pei: wen-li blending

Cai Yuan-Pei (蔡元培, 1868-1940, Fig. 8), born in the Qing dynasty, is a modern revolutionist, educator, and politician. After the failure of the 1898 reform movement, in the autumn of same year, he left the Imperial Academy and went south to devote himself to education. In 1905, he joined the Alliance (同盟会) established by Sun Yat-Sen (孙中山) and was appointed the head of the Shanghai Branch of the league. He headed a terrorist group of a few people (the famous member is Qiu Jin, 秋瑾), made bombs, and tried to kill the Empress Dowager Cixi but failed.



Fig. 8. Cai Yuan-Pei (*left*) and his tomb (*right*, Aberdeen Chinese Permanent Cemetery, Hong Kong).

In 1907, at the age of 39, he was forced to flee and thus became a foreign student in Germany. After one year studying German in Berlin, he studied philosophy, aesthetics, psychology, and ethnology at the University of Leipzig for three years (Table 2).

As a foreign student in Germany for four years, Cai saw the short comings of humanities-science separation firsthand. Accordingly, in 1918, as president of Peking University, he advocated “blending wenli” (融通文理, i.e., humanities-science synthesis, 文理交融), believing that wen and li cannot be separated from each other because there is wen in li and vice versa. He said: “Philosophy in li’ke must be based on natural science, and the final assumptions of wenke scholars often involve philosophy. In the

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past, psychology was attached to philosophy, but now experimental method is used, and psychology should be included in li'ke" [Lam 2024a: 60]. In 1918, he also pioneered general education in a university (Peking University)—twenty eight years ahead of Harvard University's 1946 [Sun 2003; Lam 2025b: 179-182].

Table 2. Major events in Cai Yuan-Pei's studying abroad and career.

Year	Age	Event
1907	39	Study German in Berlin, Germany for one year
1908-1911	40-43	Studied at the University of Leipzig, researching philosophy, aesthetics, psychology, and ethnology for three years
1912	44	Served as the first Minister of Education of the Republic of China; resigned after 6 months (because he refused to work with Yuan Shi-Kai)
1913-1916	45-48	Studied in France for 3 years; established a work-study program for Chinese students
1916-1927	48-59	President of Peking University (May Fourth Movement in 1919; investigative visits in Europe from 1923 to 1926)
1928	60	Founded the Academia Sinica (predecessor of the Chinese Academy of Sciences), served as president for 13 years; founded the National Academy of Art (predecessor of China Academy of Art)

5.2 The importance of humanities-science synthesis

In the West, the importance of humanities-science synthesis was recognized early on [Lam 2008a] and has been practiced by the humanists in their research (see Sec. 6.5) as well as by scholars in the study of complex systems [Lam 2025c]. In China, unfortunately, the H-S synthesis proposed by Cai Yuan-Pei ahead of everybody else was long forgotten; its importance is officially recognized only in recent years.

In 2018, China's Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education declared that innovation in higher education is imperative, and it is necessary to comprehensively promote the construction of "New Engineering, New Medicine, New Agriculture, *New Humanities*," etc. According to the Guangming Daily (July 24, 2019), on July 23, 2019, a symposium with a group of Chinese university presidents and party secretaries put out the following:

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- Proposal: Universities should develop new humanities and practice *H-S synthesis*.
- Purpose: To enable liberal arts graduates to better serve society.
- Method: Universities should remove certain administrative barriers and allow liberal arts students to learn some new technologies.
- Goal: To bring a “learning revolution” to university students.

Soon after, on October 28, 2019, University of Science and Technology of China held a workshop on the construction of New Humanities.

The question is: How to do humanities-science synthesis? The answer is given in Sec. 6.

5.3 Treat equally humanities and science: Mozi and Aristotle

A comparison of the classical period of philosophers in China and Europe is given in Fig. 9 [Lam 2024a: 97]. There are a few interesting points to be noted:

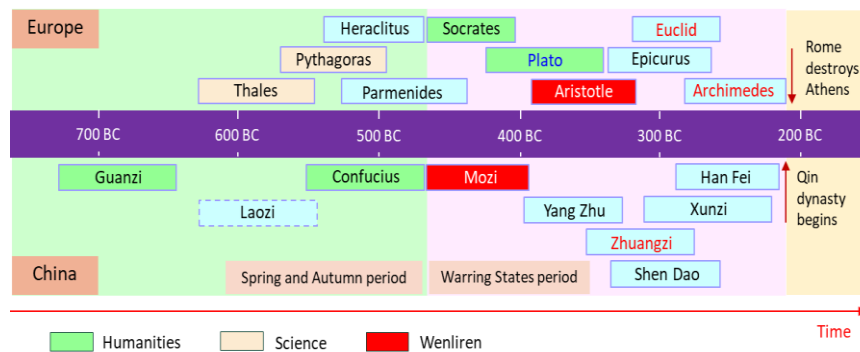


Fig. 9. A comparison of the classical periods of philosophers in China and Europe.

1. The *first* philosopher in the world is Guanzi (c723-645 BC) from China, not Thales (c624-c546 BC) from Europe, as commonly referred to.
2. In fact, Guanzi’s proposal that “all things originate from water” precedes Thales’ “all things are water” by roughly 100 years [Lam

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2024a: 189, 2025b: 182-187]. Both proposals try to explain things without invoking supernatural, a criterion of scientific investigations [Lam 2014, 2024a: 170-179; Hayek 1952; Willams 1983]. Thus, Guanzi is the one who invented *science*, ahead of Thales.

3. European philosophy started with the study of (nonhuman) physical systems (by Thales and Pythagoras, say)—what people called “science” while Chinese philosophy started with the human system—the humanities (by Guanzi and Confucius, etc.). Afterward, European philosophy was followed by focus on the humanities (by Socrates and Plato, for example) before Aristotle (384-322 BC) appeared, who treated equally the humanities and science, and became the first **wenliren** in the *West*.^[3] Yet, before Aristotle, there was the Chinese philosopher, Mozi (墨子, c476-c390 BC), who excelled in both political philosophy and science, and is thus the first wenliren in the *world* [Liang et al. 2025].

Apart from Aristotle, the most well-known wenliren in the West is probably Leonardo de Vince (1452-1519). And the most important one in China, after Mozi, is the Ming-dynasty prince, Zhu Zai-Yu (朱载堉, 1536-1611), who was the first one in the world to invent the “twelve-tone equal temperament” [Lam 2025a: 142; Liang & Lam 2026]—a tuning system used in more than 95% of musical instruments today [Devreese & Berghe 2008].

5.4 Wenliren: the way to go

Wenliren (文理人) the word: A Chinese term coined by the author in 2021, which appears as the title of an electronic book, done during the Covid-19 years [Lam 2021]. Four years later, the book was expanded; the printed version was published in Hong Kong [Lam 2025a]. The word consists of three Chinese characters: wen (文), li (理), and ren (人); i.e., wenliren = wen + li + ren, or, wenliren = humanities + science + human.

Wenliren the book: The book (2021/2025) provides the basic knowledge everyone living in the **AI** era should possess. It does not dwell on the details of the humanities and science but instead concentrates on the

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essence, relationships, and boundaries of these two broad parts of human knowledge, including a short piece on the pros and cons of AI. The third part of the book, “On Human”, talks about humans, including being a person and handling matters, going with or against the flow, love and marriage, life and death, worldview, human value, and discussions on the meaning of life.

Wenliren the motto: Treat equally the humanities and science, and practice **humanities-science synthesis** (文理并重，文理交融).

Wenliren the approach: Return to the ancient tradition of Mozi and Aristotle (not separating the humanities and science), use the method proposed by Cai Yuan-Pei (humanities-science synthesis), and realize Marx’s 1844 prophecy and vision (science as a whole). How this is done is illustrated by four examples in the next section.

6 Four Examples in History, Philosophy, and Art

6.1 Histophysics: the fate of Chinese dynasties

History is the study of what has happened in this many-body system of human beings—a material (biological) system. History is part of science since science concerns itself with *all* material systems in the universe (without invoking supernatural) [Lam 2024a: 170]. The question whether historical laws exist or not can only be settled *after* the laws are found, and they have indeed be found [Lam 2024a: 80-84]. Here is an example from *Histophysics* (physics of history), a new discipline proposed by the author in 2002 (Fig. 10) [Lam 2002].

There are three research levels in the study of *any* discipline: empirical, phenomenological, and bottom-up [Lam 2024a]. Histophysics uses all of them (Table 3). In particular, the Zipf-plot result of Chinese dynasty lifespans is shown in Fig. 11, which shows a *quantitative* law and a *quantitative prediction*.

6.2 DNA study of historical figures: the ancestry of Cao Cao

Cao Cao (曹操, 155-220) was a prominent Chinese warlord, military strategist, and statesman who founded the state of Wei during the late

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Eastern Han dynasty. He was also a noted poet, calligrapher, and literary scholar.

Table 3. The three research levels and their use in Histophysics [Lam 2008b].

Level	Method	Example
Empirical	Collect and analyze data → Empirical laws Statistical analysis, Zipf plot	Distribution of war deaths, distribution of Chinese dynasty lifespans
Phenomenological	Computer modeling, active walk	Economic history, human evolution history, social evolution
Bottom up	Computer simulation	Simulation of evolution history of extinct villages

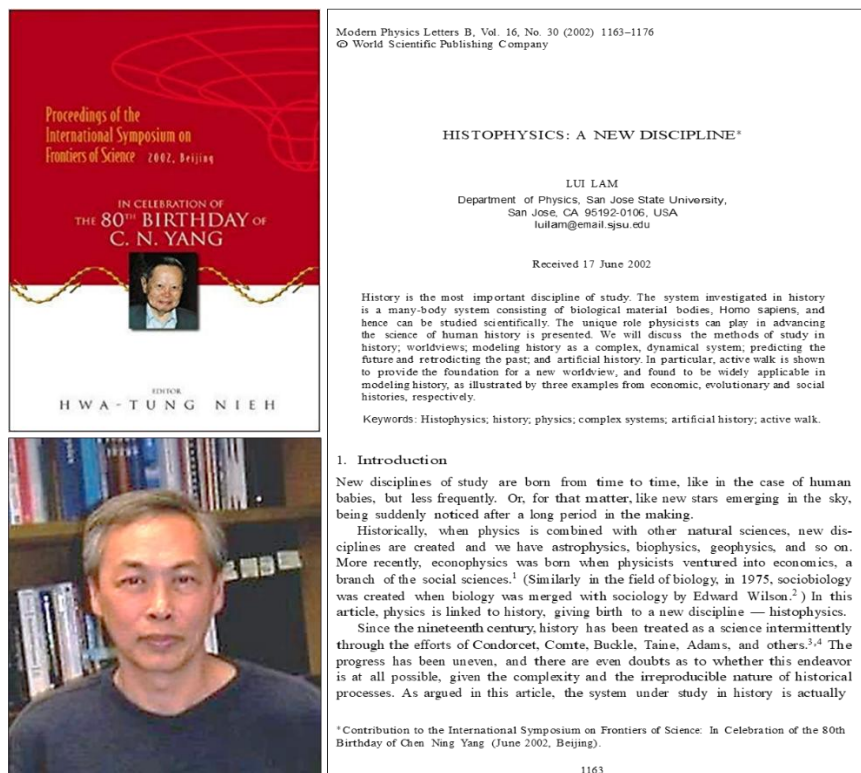


Fig. 10. The first paper of *Histophysics* (right), a new discipline proposed by the author (bottom left) in 2002 at the International Symposium on Frontiers of Science in celebration of the 80th birthday of C. N. Yang (top left).

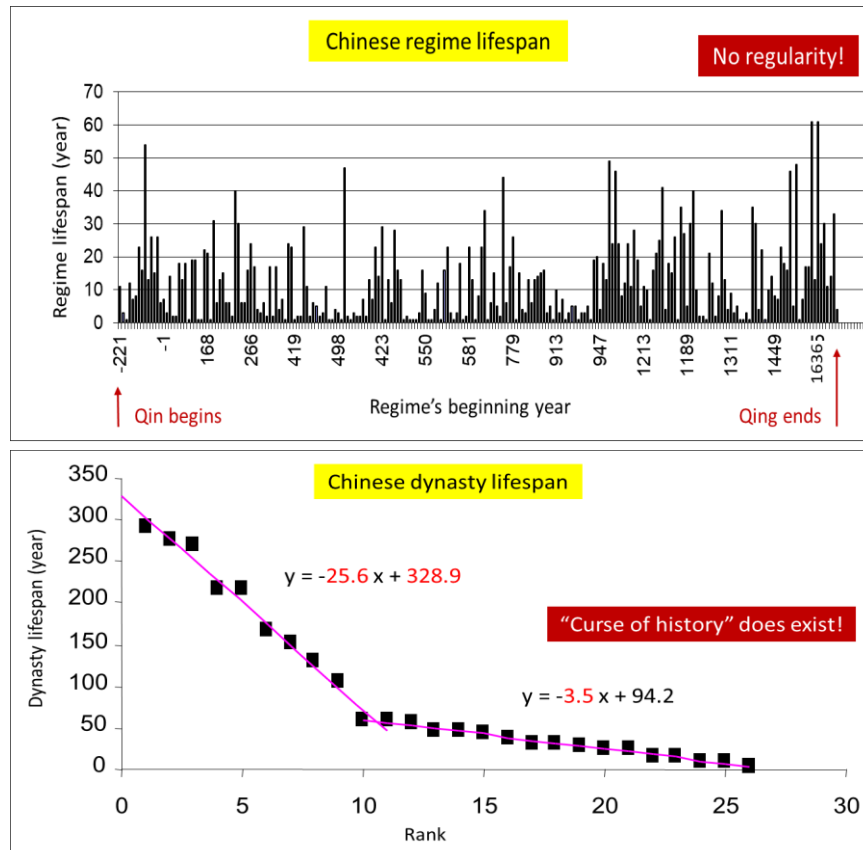


Fig. 11. *Top*: Chinese regime lifespans (number of years each emperor governs) in chronological order, from Qin to Qing dynasty, showing no regularity. Yet, Chinese dynasty lifespans are different. *Bottom*: Chinese dynasty lifespans, in Zipf plot (i.e., arranging the data from high to low, from left to right). It shows two intersecting straight lines (the *Bilinear Effect* [Lam et al. 2010]), and a *quantitative* law that the distribution of lifespans is discrete, and a *quantitative* prediction that if there is a new dynasty after the Qing dynasty, it will end in one of two possible ways: (1) It has a lifespan of 290 years exactly or less (and obeys the discrete rule), or, (2) if it exceeds 290 years it will end definitely in its 329th year [Lam 2008b, 2024a].

Cao's ancestry was a topic under study by historians for over a thousand years but no consensus was reached. In 2012, a collaboration between two professors from Fudan University, China (Shen Han from the history department and Hui Li from the modern anthropology lab.) was published

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in the Journal of Human Genetics (Fig. 12). For the first time, the DNA of descendants of Cao was collected and studied systematically; the nearly 100% certain conclusions are:

- Cao Cao is not a descendant of Cao Can (曹参), the chancellor of the Han dynasty;
- Also not adopted from the Xiahou clan (夏侯氏);
- Nor did he change his surname to Cao to avoid disaster, as rumored among the people.

With these results, history textbooks may need to be rewritten.



Fig. 12. The paper on DNA study of Emperor Cao Cao's ancestry, from Fudan University, China.

6.3 Neurophilosophy

According to Britannica: ^[4]

The mind-body problem in philosophy is the problem of explaining how mental events arise from or interact with physical events. There are three different assertions: (1) *Mind-body dualism*, in its original form, suggests the mind and body are fundamentally distinct substances, opposing theories that equate the mind with the brain. (2) *Materialism*, a monistic view, posits the world is entirely material, rejecting dualism by denying immaterial substances or

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non-physical properties. (3) *Idealism* contrasts by explaining matter through mind, not reducing mind to matter.

In modern times, materialism gains ground among more and more people but the issue is unsettled. In 1989, the book *Neurophilosophy* by Patricia Churchland was published by the MIT Press (Fig. 13), which tries to combine philosophy with neuroscience, ushering in the field of what we called *Neurohumanities* (such as Neuroarthistory, Neurocinematics, and Neuroaesthetics; see Sec. 6.4 and Fig. 14) [Lam 2014, 2024b].

Neurophilosophy is an interdisciplinary field that combines neuroscience and philosophy to explore questions about the mind, consciousness, and the nature of mental processes. It seeks to understand how insights from brain science can inform and potentially reshape traditional philosophical debates about the mind-body problem, free will, perception, and personal identity.

Neurophilosophy has significantly influenced both fields. In philosophy, it has challenged traditional dualistic views that separate the mind from the body and has encouraged more naturalistic approaches to understanding mental phenomena. In neuroscience, philosophical analysis helps clarify conceptual issues, such as the definition of consciousness or the interpretation of neural data.

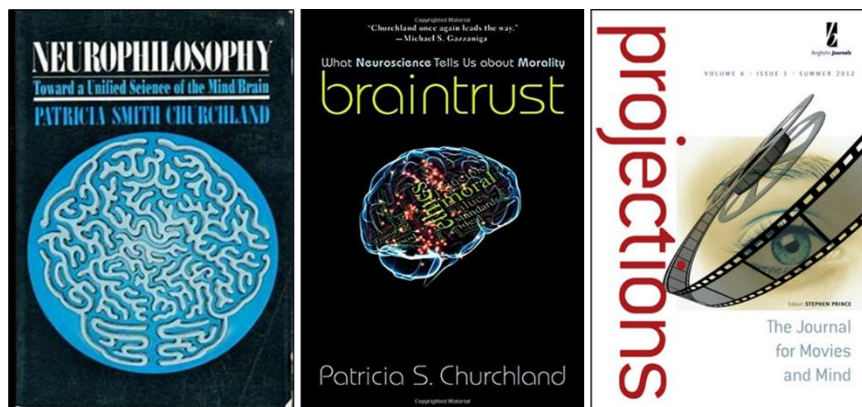


Fig. 13. *Left to middle*: Two books on Neurophilosophy, published respectively in 1989 and 2012. *Right*: The journal *Projections*, in which the 2008 paper by Uri Haas et al., “Neurocinematics: The neuroscience of film,” was published.

6.4 Neurocinematics

Neurocinematics is an interdisciplinary field that studies how the human brain responds to movies and other visual storytelling media. The term combines “neuro” (relating to the brain) and “cinematics” (the art and science of motion pictures). Researchers in this area use techniques from neuroscience—such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), electroencephalography (EEG), and eye tracking—to analyze viewers’ brain activity while they watch films.

The concept of Neurocinematics was first introduced in the early 2000s by neuroscientists interested in understanding the cognitive and emotional processes triggered by cinema. In 2008, a paper by Uri Hasson et al. of the Princeton University’s philosophy department was published in the journal *Projections* (Fig. 13, right), titled “Neurocinematics: The neuroscience of film” (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3167/proj.2008.020102>). Since then, the field has grown, involving collaboration between neuroscientists, psychologists, film theorists, and filmmakers.

Neurocinematics has applications in film making, advertising, and therapeutics. Note that the world’s marketers spent close to US\$1.1 trillion on ads in 2024, and in 2026, a 30-second Super Bowl ad alone costs US\$8 million. Advertising is a big business, and for this reason alone, Neurocinematics is not purely an academic matter.

6.5 Books published by humanists

Figure 14 shows selected books since 1989 published by *humanists* using the humanities-science synthesis approach. Note that the editors of *Science Matters* (2008) and the author, the Nobel laureate Eric Kandel, of the two books on art and science (2012 and 2018) do have scientific backgrounds.

7 The Wenliren Program

The ultimate aim of Wenliren (WLR) is to better humanity by bettering the humanities. The reason is that the humanities teach critical thinking and decision-making, while leaders’ bad decision-making is the major cause of large-scale human tragedies, orders of magnitude higher in terms human deaths over natural disasters [Lam 2024a: 508, 2024b: 76].

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Fig. 14. Selected books published by humanists using the humanities-science approach.

To this end, to expound the idea and ideal of WLR, *The Wenliren Program* was initiated by the author in 2021. The Program is designed to match the recognition that there are two types of Wenliren people:

Wenliren the people, type A: those significantly contributed to the research in both the humanities and science (H&S); type B: those recognizing that H&S are both important. Type B can further be classified into three categories: (1) those has written on both H&S, though not significantly in *both* of them; (2) those knowledgeable in both H&S (by taking courses in college or self-study); (2) those who are fond of both H&S.

Of course, type A is rare (see Sec. 5.3); type B3, the most numerous. Accordingly, the Program consists of four steps, aiming at different types.

Step 1: Publish English and Chinese books on Wenliren

From 2021 to 2022, eight electronic Chinese books on WLR by the author (with one coauthored by Jian Xiao-Qing) were published by Yingshi Workshop in San Jose. After that, they were consolidated into two English books and three Chinese books; the printed versions were published in 2024 and 2025, respectively. The English books, *Humanities, Science,*

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Scimat: From Two Cultures to Bettering Humanity and *Scimat Anthology: Histophysics, Art, Philosophy, Science*, were published by World Scientific in Singapore (Fig. 15). The Chinese books, *Wenliren*, *Lam Lectures*, and *China Complex*, were published by Wenliren Ltd. in Hong Kong—a company established by Jian Xiao-Qing (Fig. 16).

Additionally, children books conveying the brief history of human, starting from the big bang (see Step 2 below), is being planned.



Fig. 15. Two English books published by World Scientific in 2024.

Step 2: Put three basic pieces of information on human history into elementary education

There are three reasons to include three basic scientific messages about human history in the elementary-school curriculum [Lam 2024b: 84-86]:

1. To help future generations to establish their worldview based on proper scientific information.
2. To make everybody humble when they know the insignificant origins of human beings and what a brief time the human history has compared to that of the history of the universe.

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3. Since we don't know who the future world leaders are we better educate everyone to be humble when they are young going through elementary schools, the period when children will remember what they learn lifetime long.



Fig. 16. Three Chinese books published by Wenliren Ltd. in 2004 (*middle*) and 2005 (*left and right*), respectively.

Message 1: It all started with the big bang

Human's history recorded in writing is about 5,000 years, which is a very brief moment in the 13.7-billion-year span of the universe (Fig. 17). *Humanity must be humble.*

Message 2: We are one family—descendants of fish

Fossil records and DNA research show that around 375 million years ago, some now-extinct fish used their primitive limbs to drag themselves out of water and onto land, gulping atmospheric oxygen as they went, and became our common ancestor [Newton 2025]. Thus, *we are one family* because humans (dead or alive) are all fish descendants (Fig. 18, left).

The evidence is reinforced in 2004 when Neil Shubin, professor of Organic Biology and Anatomy at the University of Chicago, discovered the fossil of *Tiktaalik* in arctic Canada, which is 2.5m-long, half-fish, half-tetrapod, with two fleshy but robust pectoral fins (Fig. 18). Furthermore, Shubin shows convincingly that our arms, legs, necks, and lungs were

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bequeathed to us by a fish; the genetic legacy of this creature can be seen in our own DNA, including the genes used to build our hands and limbs (Fig. 19, left). The results are confirmed in 2022 by scientists from the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology, Chinese Academy of Sciences (Fig. 19, top right). But what came before fish? The answer is provided in Fig. 20.

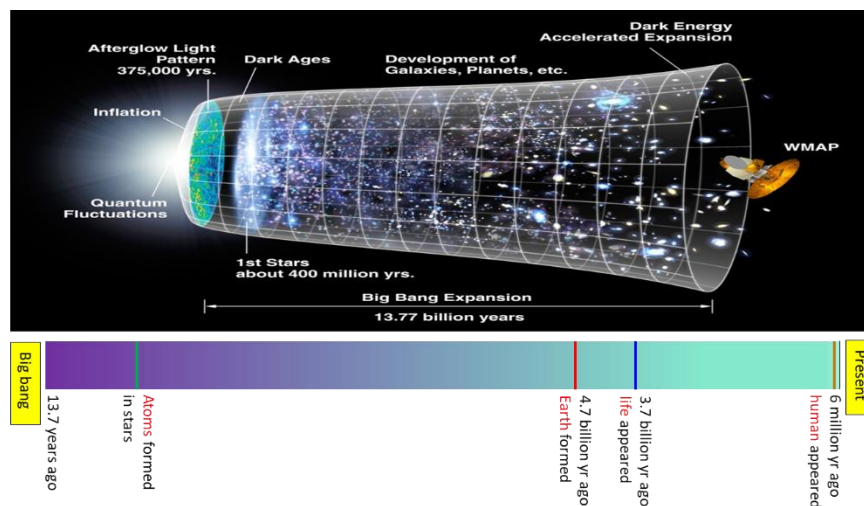


Fig. 17. *Top*: Time development of the universe. *Bottom*: Major events related to human history.

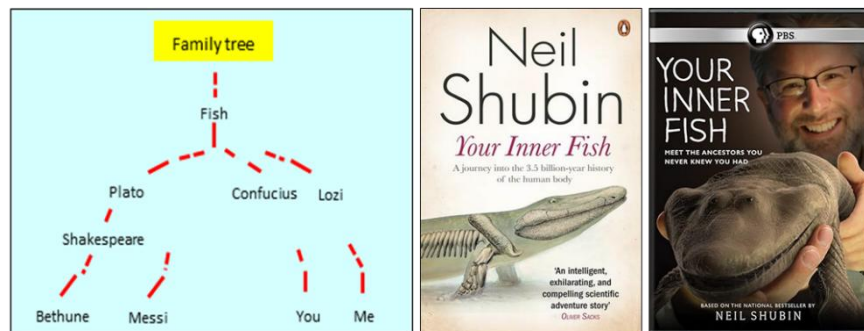


Fig. 18. *Left*: The family tree of all humans, dead or alive. *Middle*: *Your Inner Fish* (2008), the popsci book by Neil Shubin. *Right*: The PBS video *Your Inner Fish* (2014).

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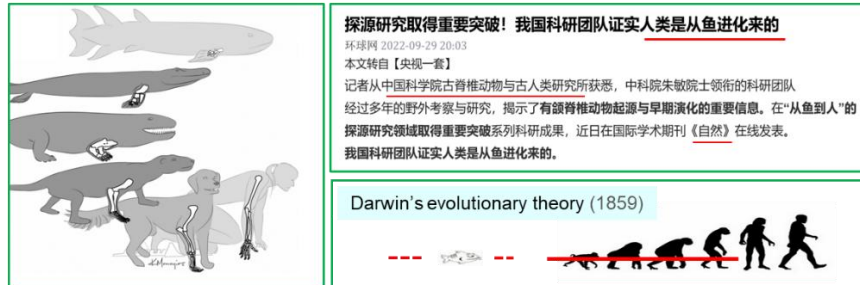


Fig. 19. *Left*: Sketch showing how human's arm evolved from the fin of fish. *Top right*: China's CCTV report in 2022 that scientists from the Chinese Academy of Sciences confirmed humans are indeed descendants of fish. *Bottom right*: The popular evolutionary picture on the right that humans are descendants of monkey is *wrong*. Actually, the human and chimpanzee lineages split 6 million ago [Lam 2024a: 21].

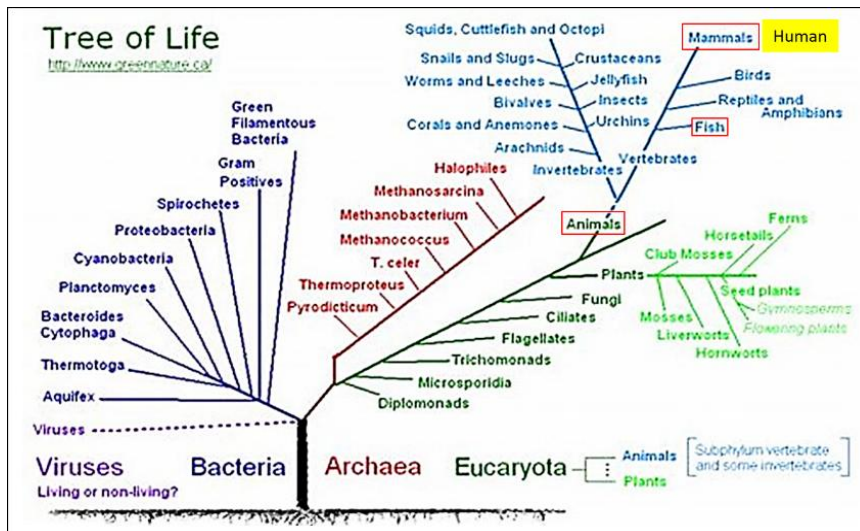


Fig. 20. The tree of life.

In short, the common evolutionary picture of humans evolved from monkey is *wrong* (Fig. 19, bottom right). In fact, we humans are descents of fish. All people in the world, past and present, from all countries, are one family, either distant relatives or close kin, sharing the same family tree, with a common ancestor being fish. Blood is thicker than water, so *we should treat everyone in the world kindly*.

Finally, a poem written by the famous poet Yu Guang-Zhong (余光中, 1928-2917) recognizing that humans are descendants of fish is shown in Fig. 21.

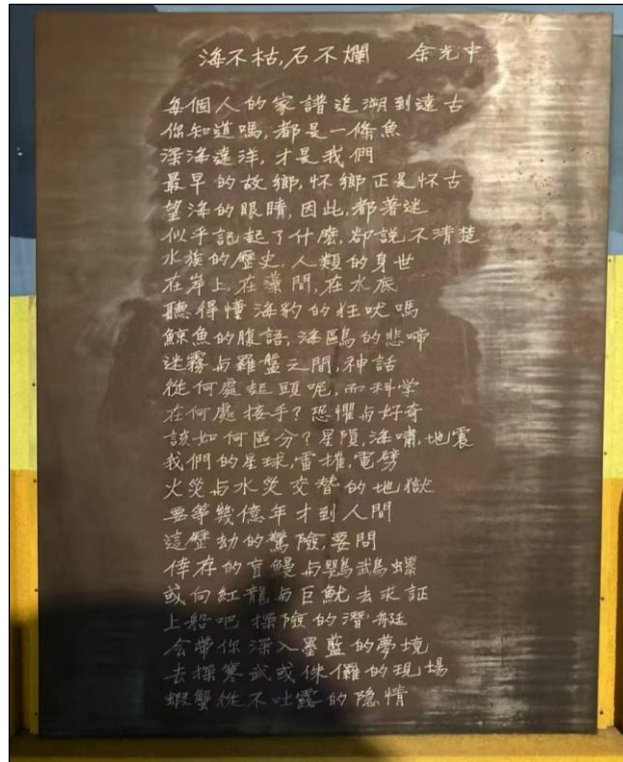


Fig. 21. The Chinese poem “海不枯, 石不爛” (The sea will not dry up, nor the stones decay) by Yu Guang-Zhong, exhibited at the Kenting Marine Biology Museum, Kenting (墾丁). The first two lines say: “每個人的家譜遠溯到遠古/你知道嗎, 都是一條魚” (Everyone’s genealogy traces back to ancient times / did you know, it’s all a fish). [Photo/ Lui Lam (Dec. 18, 2024)]

Message 3: Our bodies are recycled stardust

Everything on Earth, including humans, is made up of atoms. All atoms come from stars (except for light atoms like hydrogen, helium, and lithium, which formed shortly after the big bang, and silver and gold, which are produced during neutron star mergers). We are all *stardust* (Fig. 22).

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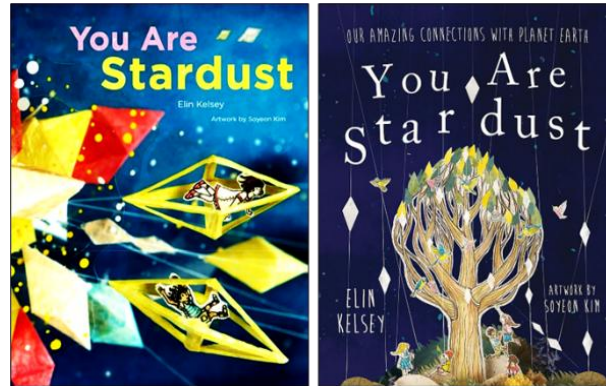


Fig. 22. The book, *You Are Stardust*, by the same authors, published respectively in 2012 and 2013 (left to right).

Since no new atoms are created on Earth (except few created in the lab, by design), the atoms on Earth are recycled, and our bodies are made of *recycled* stardust. These recycled atoms may come from the bodies of others, whether dead or alive. So, any two persons may have parts of each other within themselves. *Treating others well is treating yourself well; everyone should live in harmony.*

Summary: A brief history of human. Three basic scientific understandings related to human: (1) Historical: big bang; (2) Biological: descendants of fish; (3) Physical: recycled stardust. *Lessons:* (1) Recorded human history is only a few thousand years long, which, in the context of a universe over ten billion years old, is not even a fleeting moment. (2) All matters, whether personal or national, should be considered from this perspective. (3) We should live in peace with others who share this Earth, being tolerant and humble.

Step 3: Promote globally a new general-education course on humanities and science

General education (GE), proposed first by Cai Yuan-Pei, is a patch-up remedy for a balanced education of undergraduates *after* the humanities-science separation (see Sec. 5.1). The GE courses offered so far are mostly one of two types: those existing departmental courses suitable for non-majors (e.g., astronomy for art students), or those designed explicitly for

them (e.g., physics for philosophers). None of these are so broad that they give an overview and necessary ingredients of the humanities and science as demanded in the AI era, with one exception [Lam 2024b: 90].

The exception is the GE course “Humanities, Science, Scimat”, designed and taught twice (2015 and 2016) by the author, at the International Summer School of the Renmin University of China (RUC, Fig. 23). (For *Scimat*, see Sec. 8.) The course teaches undergrads of any major and any level the proper definition of science and the relationships between the humanities and “science” from the perspective of Scimat as well as recent developments in philosophy, arts, and history. Students’ reception to this experience is very enthusiastic [Luo 2024]. The conclusion is that this course can be taught by any instructor in any university in the world.

We are updating this GE course to include the new understanding and usage of AI and call it “Humanities and Science in the AI Era,” say, and want to encourage every university to adopt it.

Step 4: Establish 100 international wenliren centers worldwide

There are two types of centers: research-oriented and platform-oriented (i.e., not necessarily conducting research themselves). The wenliren center belongs to the latter. The latter type includes the Kavli Institute of Theoretical Physics at the University of California, Santa Barbara (very successful, with branches in Europe and Asia—chain-like).

The 100 wenliren centers would be independent from but collaborate and reinforce each other. The function of the Center is:

1. To do fundraising to support the Center financially.
2. To organize international workshops/conferences and summer/winter schools.
3. To communicate the Wenliren idea and goal to the public.
4. To give out a Wenliren Award every two years (in the donor’s name perhaps) for an individual who contributes significantly in the advancement of wenliren.

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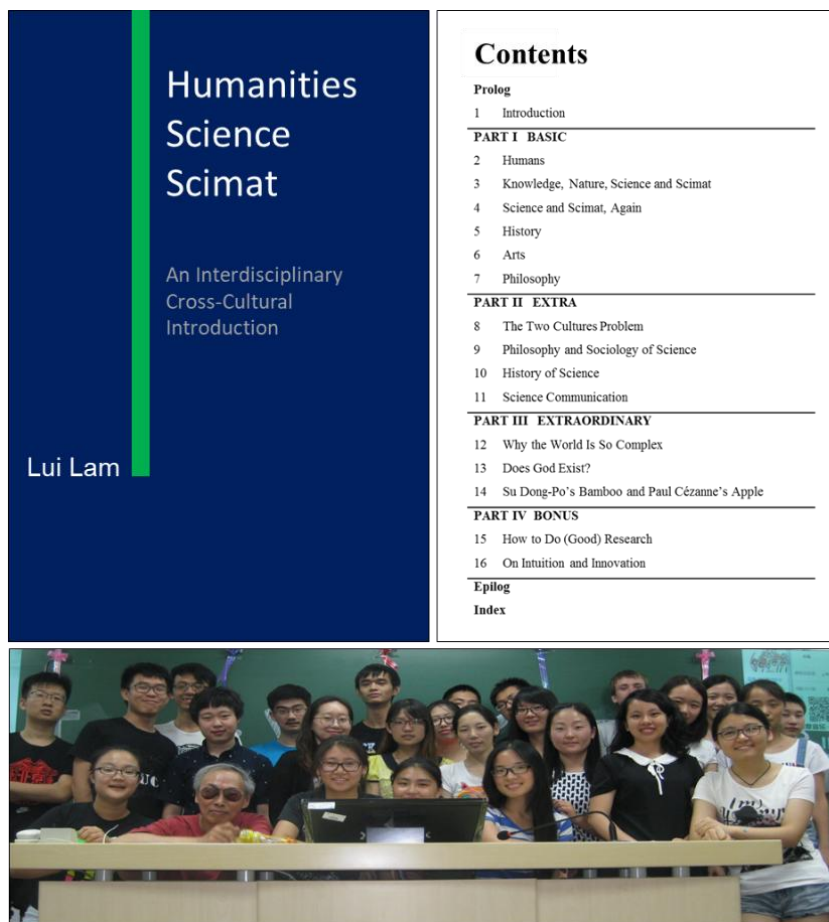


Fig. 23. *Top*: The RUC 2015 International Summer School course (number: SH1518) “Humanities, Science, Scimat: A Trans-Disciplinary and Cross-Cultural Experience”. *Bottom*: Class portrait (photo/Liu Jin-Yang).

5. To host short-term visiting scholars who would give lectures/short courses, and perhaps could also collaborate with existing faculty members and students of any discipline, especially from the humanities.
6. To help match faculty members from the humanities and science departments, and give them release time to create new interdisciplinary courses (e.g., Histophysics: Physics of History).

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7. To help promoting the new general-education course “Humanities and Science in the AI Era” for undergrads of all majors worldwide.

Note that the Center will *not* do research within itself, and so the maintenance fee is very minimal. With enough (outside) money, it could advance wenliren by funding interdisciplinary research within a university. The center will then be in a leading position academically in the most important multidiscipline of the 21st century. The reasons we want 100 centers are: (1) There are nearly 200 countries in the world. (2) Like the McDonald or Starbuck chain, some may collapse over time and there are still enough number of them to carry on the mission.

Remarks: The Wenliren Program. Step 1 aims at all types of wenliren people, from type A to type B (see beginning of Sec. 7). Step 2 aims to enlarge the base of type B3; Step 3, B3 and B2, and potentially B1. Step 4 tries to enhance all types, but especially type A and type B1.

8 The Scimat Program

As a discipline, the academic term for Wenliren is **Scimat** (formerly called Science Matters), a multidiscipline founded by the author in 2007 [Lam 2024a: 419]. Scimat is about the scientific study of human, and can be understood as the “science of human”—the goal that the Enlightenment (1688-1789) wanted to do but did not achieve. In terms of content, scimat is a collective term for the humanities, social science, and medical science (Fig. 24). Scimat advocates a rational discussion of any question about human—all questions, big or small—from a scientific point of view that is based on scientific knowledge about humans. It aims to raise the scientific level of the humanities and broaden the field of study of “natural science” by encouraging collaboration between scholars from the two sides.

The definition of Science in Fig. 24 comes from the 2007 definition (the *third* definition): ^[5]

Science consists of the process and results of human’s effort to understand *all* things in nature without introducing any supernatural considerations.

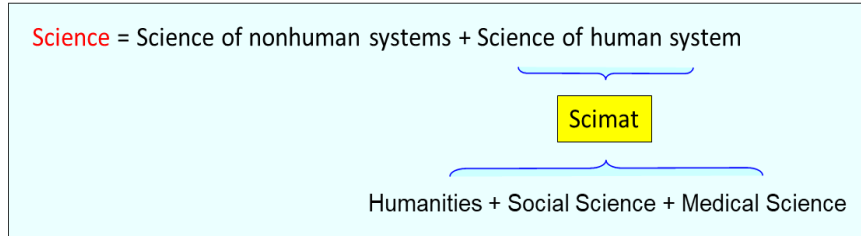


Fig. 24. The relationship between Science and Scimat (a word coined by the author in 2007), and other disciplines. The word Science here means the study of *all* things in nature without introducing any supernatural (see text).

In 2007, a biennial series of international conferences was set up by the author (together with Maria Burguete) in Portugal. The first International Conference on Science Matters was held in Ericeira, Portugal, titled “Science Matters: A unified perspective,” meaning “everything in nature is part of science.” In particular, matters related to humans (humanities and social science) should and can be studied scientifically.

It is during this conference that *The Scimat Program* was established. It consists of six steps: (1) Launch of the biennial, international scimat conference series. (2) An International Scimat Committee was set up (Fig. 25). (3) Publish scimat books. (4) Set up Scimat Centers (100 eventually) around the world. (5) Establish an international scimat society. (6) Publish an international scimat journal.

From 2007 to 2017, six conferences were held (Fig. 26),^[6] and the first three steps of the Program are accomplished.^[7] In particular, three scimat book series were created and scimat books were indeed published (Figs. 27 and 28). Additionally, one book is translated into two other languages (Fig. 29). And, *The Wenliren Program*, while aimed at the Chinese-speaking populations, is a continuation and part of The Scimat Program.

9 Conclusion

9.1 Education and research in the AI era

The foundation of humanities-science synthesis lies in the fact that both study material systems composed of atoms (the former focuses on human, the latter on both human and nonhuman). In ancient China, there were the

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Six Arts (ritual, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, mathematics), and in Europe, the Seven Liberal Arts (grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy)—both sets of courses cultivating both arts and sciences.

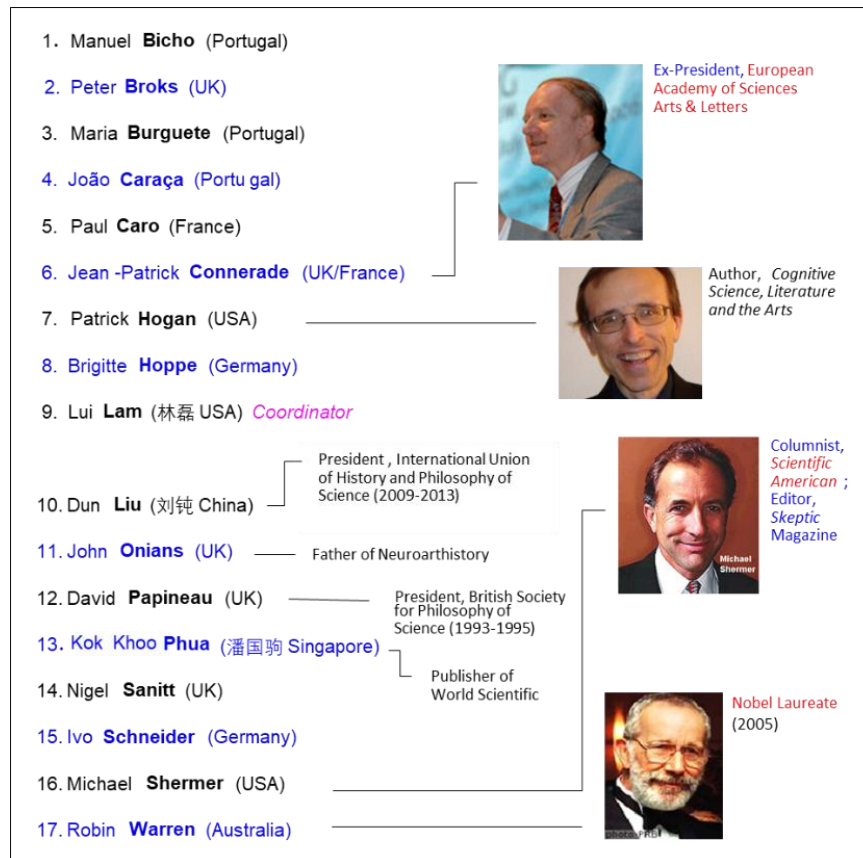


Fig. 25. The International Science Matters Committee (ISMC, formed on May 30, 2007 and expanded afterward). Lui Lam is the coordinator of this ISMC; Robin Warren is a Nobel laureate (2005).

Applied to the present day:

- In terms of education, it should be an integrated study of humanities and science (not just general education).

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- In terms of research, it should be humanities-science synthesis (complex systems science precisely adopts this approach, advances, and made discoveries [Lam 2025c]).

“Humanities-science integrated study” is not just about preparing for jobs in the AI era, but about returning to the ancient ideal of a “whole person” in life and society, becoming a “human” distinct from machines, capable of: discerning truth from falsehood, understanding right from wrong, and distinguishing loyalty from treachery! (判真假、明是非、斷忠奸!)



Fig. 26. Posters of the six biennial international scimat conferences (from 2007 to 2017, left to right, top to bottom).

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Fig. 27. The Science Matters Series created and edited by the author, published by World Scientific, Singapore. The series includes five books so far (see Fig. 28 top and Fig. 15).

9.2 Humanities and science

In fact, the story of the humanities and science is not complicated:

1. Both originate from ancient Greek philosophy (Sec. 4.1).
2. The humanities study complex systems, while science mainly study simple systems, which are relatively easier, so science has a higher degree of scientific rigor than the humanities (Sec. 4.2).
3. Their research methods are the same and shared, but the humanities mainly operate on the empirical level, whereas science uses all three levels early on (Sec. 6.1).
4. In the era of AI, the way forward for both lies in humanities-science synthesis (Sec. 5.4), rather than in general-education courses (see Step 3 in Sec. 7).

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5. The Wenliren/Scimat paradigm or approach is the best path toward the future in the AI era (Fig. 30).

We can't do it alone. Please join us to make the world better, for ourselves and for our children!



Fig. 28. Six English scimat books published. Publication year/publisher: 2008, 2011, 2014/World Scientific, Singapore (*top, left to right*); 2016/Pantaneto Press, UK (*bottom left*); 2017, 2018/Science Matters Press, Portugal (*bottom, middle to right*).

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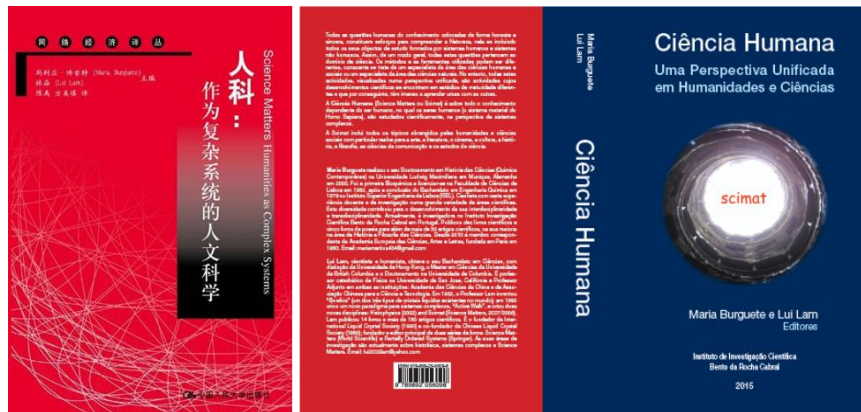


Fig. 29. Two scimat books translated from the English book, *Science Matters* (World Scientific, 2008). *Left: 人科* (Renke, China Renmin University Press, 2013). *Right: Ciência Humana* (Human Science, Bento da Rocha Cabral, 2015).

Acknowledgment

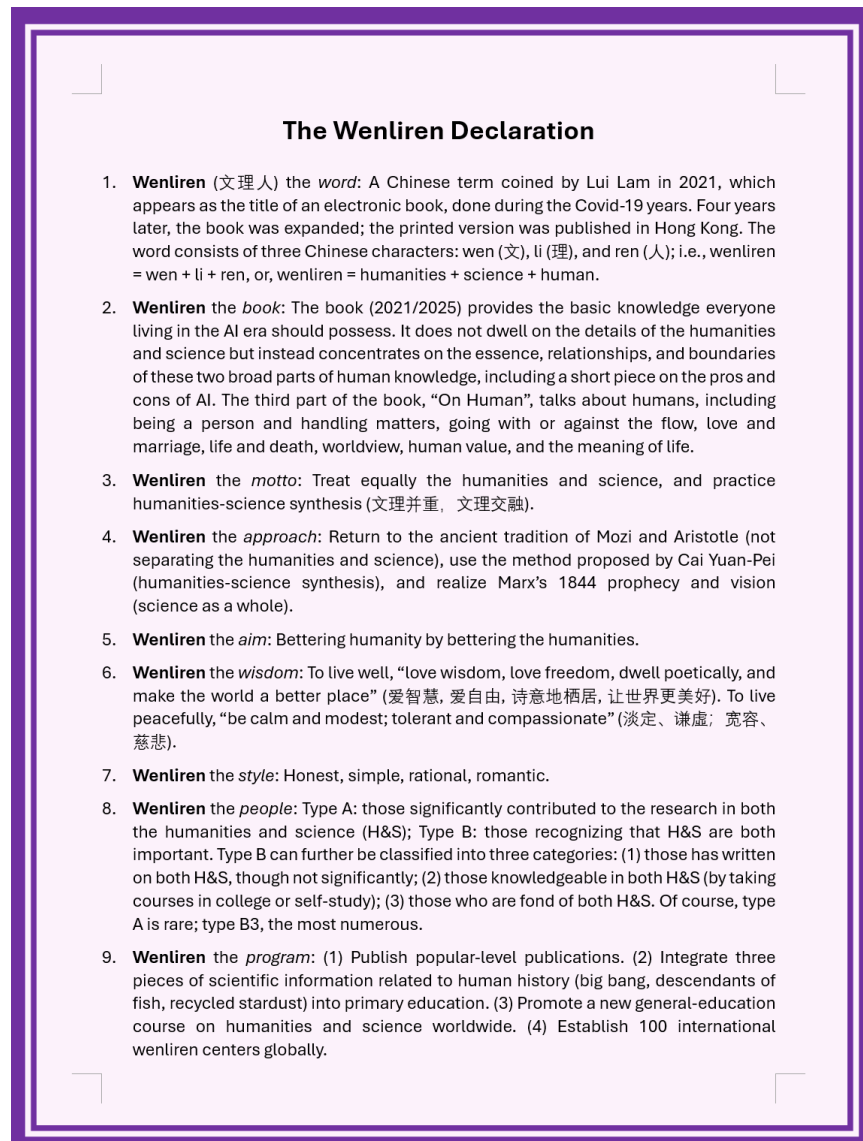
This article is based on my talk given in Shijiazhuang (石家庄), Hebei Province, on March 29, 2026. I thank Du Jian-Ming (杜建明) for the invitation and hospitality.

Notes

1. <https://www.mbachina.com/html/xw/202603/643691.html> (Mar. 28, 2026).
2. <https://www.amazon.com/Economic-Philosophic-Manuscripts-Western-Philosophy/dp/0486455610> (Apr. 21, 2026).
3. In Sec. 5.3, meaning B of the word Wenliren is used (see Sec. 1).
4. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/mind-body-problem> (May 9, 2026).
5. Note that Science as defined by the British in 1867 (the 2nd definition)—the study of nonhuman systems in nature without introducing God—is outdated.
6. As the scimat conference series is concerned, except for the 1st one at which the ISMC was formed, the next five were planned and approved by the ISMC. The so-called 7th international science matters conference (held in Carcavelos, Portugal, Oct. 28-29, 2019) actually is the 1st European science matters conference, not because all the organizers and speakers are from Europe, but because it was neither planned nor approved by the ISMC.
7. There is a Science Matters Centre Report 2018 (Rocha Cabral Institute, 30 January 2019) claiming that a science matters center was created in 2018, in Portugal, as a private company, but no further news about it can be found beyond

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2019. For the report, see: R E L A T Ó R I O FINAL SCIMAT ASSOCIATION 2018.pdf (2336943). For more, see: <https://scimat-2015.webnode.pt/>.



The Wenliren Declaration

1. **Wenliren** (文理人) the *word*: A Chinese term coined by Lui Lam in 2021, which appears as the title of an electronic book, done during the Covid-19 years. Four years later, the book was expanded; the printed version was published in Hong Kong. The word consists of three Chinese characters: wen (文), li (理), and ren (人); i.e., wenliren = wen + li + ren, or, wenliren = humanities + science + human.
2. **Wenliren** the *book*: The book (2021/2025) provides the basic knowledge everyone living in the AI era should possess. It does not dwell on the details of the humanities and science but instead concentrates on the essence, relationships, and boundaries of these two broad parts of human knowledge, including a short piece on the pros and cons of AI. The third part of the book, "On Human", talks about humans, including being a person and handling matters, going with or against the flow, love and marriage, life and death, worldview, human value, and the meaning of life.
3. **Wenliren** the *motto*: Treat equally the humanities and science, and practice humanities-science synthesis (文理并重, 文理交融).
4. **Wenliren** the *approach*: Return to the ancient tradition of Mozi and Aristotle (not separating the humanities and science), use the method proposed by Cai Yuan-Pei (humanities-science synthesis), and realize Marx's 1844 prophecy and vision (science as a whole).
5. **Wenliren** the *aim*: Bettering humanity by bettering the humanities.
6. **Wenliren** the *wisdom*: To live well, "love wisdom, love freedom, dwell poetically, and make the world a better place" (爱智慧, 爱自由, 诗意地栖居, 让世界更美好). To live peacefully, "be calm and modest; tolerant and compassionate" (淡定、谦虚; 宽容、慈悲).
7. **Wenliren** the *style*: Honest, simple, rational, romantic.
8. **Wenliren** the *people*: Type A: those significantly contributed to the research in both the humanities and science (H&S); Type B: those recognizing that H&S are both important. Type B can further be classified into three categories: (1) those has written on both H&S, though not significantly; (2) those knowledgeable in both H&S (by taking courses in college or self-study); (3) those who are fond of both H&S. Of course, type A is rare; type B3, the most numerous.
9. **Wenliren** the *program*: (1) Publish popular-level publications. (2) Integrate three pieces of scientific information related to human history (big bang, descendants of fish, recycled stardust) into primary education. (3) Promote a new general-education course on humanities and science worldwide. (4) Establish 100 international wenliren centers globally.

Fig. 30. The Wenliren Declaration.

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Lui Lam's many articles, presentation ppt's, and Chinese books are download-free in ResearchGate.

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