

Liberal Arts and the Classification of Knowledge

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Though the idea of *artes liberales* comes from the middle ages, it is nevertheless rooted in ancient Greece, where Plato and Aristotle understand the meaning of education as the liberation of the mind from ignorance to freedom, hence liberal education. Liberal arts and the humanities have been conceived as ways or methods of educating the whole person. As such they embrace both knowledge of arts and sciences. However, modern antagonism between the so-called three cultures (the humanities, social and natural sciences), which has created hostility between disciplines is a result of compartmentalization and specialization in the last century.

The purpose of this essay is to re-examine the relationship between the humanities, social and natural sciences. Tang Chun-i's idea of the centrality of human existence in the pursuit of knowledge is the starting point, which serves as the philosophical foundation for the new curriculum of the University General Education at the Chinese University. Classification of knowledge should be viewed as different perspectives of the human endeavour. It is hope that the ideal of *artes liberales* and *humanitas* of the West, as well as the Chinese humanistic tradition can be embodied in the four intellectual domains of the new programme.