



Taiwan Lectures on
Chinese Studies

臺灣漢學講座

The Dawn of Western Science as Cultural Authority in China: Tianyanlun (On Heavenly Evolution) in the Post-1895 Debate over Preserving China's Dogma

12. 22. 2020 | 12:00 PM (Israel) / 18:00 PM (Taiwan)

Online Lecture: <https://reurl.cc/Gr1gzx>

There is an intriguing puzzle to be found in the historiography of Western science in modern China: While Yan Fu's *Tianyanlun* 天演論 (*On Heavenly Evolution*), which was published in 1896 as the Chinese translation of Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* (1898), is universally celebrated as the most influential book in modern Chinese intellectual history, it receives little – if any – credit in the history of science.

Challenging the conventional understanding of *On Heavenly Evolution* in terms of Social Darwinism, this article proposes to understand it in terms of “Western *gezhi*” 西學格致 (Western-Style “Investigation of Things to Acquire Knowledge”) – the term Yan Fu 嚴復 (1854-1921) coined to render “Western science” into Chinese so as to fashion *On Heavenly Evolution* as a representative text of “Western science.” By foregrounding Yan Fu's concept of “Western *gezhi*,” this article re-contextualizes this crucial text of modern Chinese thought as a pivotal moment in a three-century-long struggle to fashion Western science as Neo-Confucian *gezhi* so as to win cultural authority for it in China.

About the Speaker:

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