

**“Distance to Bacon: The Search for the Culture of Growth in Historical China”**

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**Abstract**

We examine the extent to which the cultural bases for European Industrial Enlightenment were present among contemporaneous Chinese intellectuals. We conduct semantic analyses of the writings of 861 influential Chinese intellectuals to assess their ideological proximity to European Enlightenment ideals centered on the Baconian philosophy of progress. The results show that Chinese intellectuals generally fell short of Enlightenment ideals, especially in appreciating progress, pluralism, and the experimental method, between the mid-sixteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. However, their thought rapidly converged toward Enlightenment standards after China's opening up in 1842. We further find that intellectuals became more Baconian once they gained access to modern learning or cultivated broader intellectual horizons through extensive sojourns.