

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

A FRESH LOOK
AT ANCIENT
CULTURES

From exploration of Dunhuang manuscripts, to studies on Tibetan culture and regional economic development, humanities and social science programmes at Lanzhou University (LZU) have made the most of the institution's unique setting.

DUNHUANG REVELATIONS

The discovery of ancient manuscripts in Dunhuang caves in the early 20th century thrust a small town in northwest China's Gansu province into the global spotlight, and opened a new field of research. Situated in the same province, LZU has developed great strength in Dunhuang studies.

In 1979, LZU established a research team dedicated to Dunhuang studies, which evolved into an institute renowned in the field. Led by Zheng Binglin, the team has collated secular Dunhuang documents housed in Russia, the UK, France and other countries. Their deep investigation into the historic, geographic, socioeconomic documents and Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian classics uncovered in Dunhuang will be published in a multi-volume book.

Apart from studying manuscripts, the LZU team has also conducted archaeological research in the Dunhuang caves, dating their relics and artworks. "Dunhuang murals, statues, and the architectural space are interconnected," says Zheng. "They should be studied as a whole." So far, the LZU team has explored nearly 10 of the caves.

Working with international scholars, Zheng is also leading a study of Dunhuang manuscripts written in tribal languages. "We want to extend our study to explore ancient central Asian culture," says Zheng. "A pearl on the ancient Silk Road, Dunhuang links the East and West."

ETHNOLOGICAL STUDIES

Ethnological studies at LZU started from research on ethnic languages, leading to a department established in 1946. LZU was then the only Chinese university to offer programmes in Tibetan, Mongolian and Uyghur languages, and attracted renowned scholars. With a strong tradition in ethnic languages, the department has shaped

many graduates now dedicated to their translation and history. Tibetan studies are also a specialty. In their study of Bon, the indigenous religion of Tibet, researchers have travelled across the region to collect scattered classics, and published many volumes of folk Bon literature.

The team led by Yang Jianxin, the founder of LZU's ethnological studies, has compiled a 13-volume collection on the complete general history of China's northwestern ethnic groups, spanning more than 2,000 years. It is an all-encompassing masterpiece, and a source of detailed information on the region's ethnic groups over two millennia.

LZU regional
economic research

LZU is a national pioneer in regional economic studies, having established China's first major in regional economy. The major now focuses on six research directions: China's regional economic relations, such as the gaps between the east and west, and the south and north regions, and cooperation along the 'Belt and Road'; regional economy and sustainable development, particularly in underdeveloped parts of the country; regional economic development strategies; factors contributing to regional economic growth; regional ecology and economy; and industrial economy in ethnic regions.

The major has gathered a strong team of 54 teachers, including 15 professors and 15 associate professors, leading to 134 papers, and four books in 2018 alone. The major houses 5 research demonstration bases, which are playing a significant role in regional sustainable development.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

A pioneer in government performance management research, the LZU Chinese Government Performance Evaluation Center introduced third-party evaluation in 2004, and was the architect of China's first provincial government evaluation.

Since then, the centre has established China's first doctoral programme in Government Performance Management, compiled the Chinese Performance Management yearbook, initiated and sponsored a biennial international conference on the topic, and completed dozens of research projects funded by the national foundation, local government, and the World Bank.

"The essence of government performance management is the pursuit of public value," said Bao Guoxian, the centre's director and the founder of the public value-based government performance governance theory. "We expect to innovate relevant theories, promoting scientific management of government performance in China." ■