Pride and Loathing in History

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The National Character Discourse
And
The Chinese Search For A Cultural Identity

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Chapter 1. Introduction

China strives to present a positive national image, with increasing stress on the peaceful and harmonious nature of its culture. However, when the efforts to build such an image meet with critical international response, nationalistic sentiments rise to the surface as "Chinese people's feelings are hurt". Such an expression, often voiced by the country's diplomats, spokespersons and mainstream media, represents more than an official rhetoric; behind it lies a sense of wounded pride that can only be understood in a wider context. In fact, wounded pride is a recurring theme in Chinese popular culture, as well as a common topic in Chinese cultural and historical critiques of Western cultural hegemony.

Many China-watchers in recent years have observed an increasingly assertive Chinese emphasis on the nation's particular history and culture, both at home and abroad. Consequently, outside the country, the fear of the awakening of a global power has raised concerns over a rising nationalism of an agressive, even revengeful, nature. With its negative connotation of being dangerous and irrational, the wounded pride as manifested in Chinese nationalism has been the subject of growing international speculation. While nationalism as a worldwide phenomenon has also been recognized as "a profound and natural need" for the humiliated, the oppressed, and the newly "decolonized" to respond to their collective injustice, representing "the straightening of bent backs",[1] in the case of Chinese nationalism, a linkage to memories of collective humiliation in modern history makes it seem more threatening than nationalism elsewhere.[2]

In the meantime, the wounded pride has become entangled with, as Geremie Barmé put it, a widespread and powerful "modern tradition of self-loathing" in Chinese

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1 Isaiah Berlin, "The Bent Twig: A Note on Nationalism," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (1972), pp. 11-30: 30.

2 See, for example, James Townsend, "Chinese Nationalism," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 27 (1992), pp. 97-130. Peter Hays Gries, *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy* (California: The University of California Press, 2004). Rana Mitter, "Old Ghosts, New Memories: China's Changing War History in the Era of Post-Mao Politics," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 38 (1) (2003), pp. 117-131. Rana Mitter, "Modernity, Internationalization, and War in the History of Modern China," *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 48, 2 (2005), pp. 523-543.

nationalism.[3] The 1980s saw an outright attack on traditional culture, for example, in the television series *River Elegy* (*He Shang*), which attributed the country's late-developing status to the agrarian culture and the very nature of its people. Such self-criticism, and even self-negation, was supported by a simplified image of stronger and better Western cultures coupled with a much-desired Western-style modernization.

In the 1990s and beyond, continuous economic growth has been accompanied by revived interests and confidence in traditional culture. The re-emergence of National Learning (*guo xue*) at research and educational institutions has signified a Confucian revival, which has been boosted by increased attention from the country's mass media and popular discourse. Yet such a return to tradition has also seen, in its opposite, the tendency of self-loathing coming into play in Chinese self-perceptions: the turn of the 21st century has witnessed the interesting phenomenon of a Confucian revival running parallel to the critiques of national character that attribute the nation's many problems to its cultural characteristics and eventually to Confucianism.

More intriguingly, in the years between 1991 and 2010, an English language book, *Chinese Characteristics*,[4] was translated and reprinted in fourteen different editions in mainland China.[5] It was originally published in 1894 by the American missionary Arthur Smith, in which he described and criticized many aspects of Chinese culture. A century later, despite its 19th century racial and religious antagonisms, the book has curiously joined many other publications that constitute a Chinese cultural critique and has become part of the nation's self-loathing undercurrent.

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3 Geremie Barmé, "To Screw Foreigners Is Patriotic: China's Avant-Garde Nationalists," *The China Journal*, No. 34 (1995), p. 222.

4 Arthur H. Smith, *Chinese Characteristics* (New York: Revell, 1894). Smith first published a series of articles in *Zilin XiBao* 字林西报, which were later compiled and published as a book.

5 These fourteen editions in Chinese include: 1). 吴湘川、王清淮译，《中国人的性格》，延吉：延边大学出版社，1991 年。2). 张梦阳、王丽娟译，《中国人气质》，甘肃敦煌文艺出版社，1995 年。3). 乐爱国，张华玉译，《中国人的性格》，北京：学苑出版社，1998 年。4). 匡雁鹏译，《中国人的特性》，北京：光明日报出版社，1998 年。5). 秦悦译，《中国人的素质》，上海：学林出版社，2001 年。6). 林欣译，《中国人的素质》，京华出版社，2002 年。7). 舒扬、舒宁、穆秭译，《典型的中国人--文明与陋习》，书海出版社，2004 年。8). 《中国人德行》，北京：新世界出版社，2005 年。9). 佚名译，黄兴涛校注，《中国人的气质》，北京：中华书局，2006 年 8 月。10). 姚锦镕译，《中国人的人性》，北京：中国和平出版社，2006 年 10 月。11). 刘文飞、刘晓旸译，《中国人的气质》，上海三联书店，2007 年 11 月。12). 陈新峰译，《中国人的德行》，北京：金城出版社，2008 年 10 月。13). 王续然译，《中国人的性情》，北京：长征出版社，2009 年。14). 李明良译，《中国人的性格》，西安：陕西师范大学出版社，2010 年 3 月。

The twists and turns in attitude towards Chinese culture and tradition suggest an entanglement of pride and loathing in self-perceptions, which is critical to the understanding of contemporary China. In his book *China: the Pessoptimist Nation*, William Callahan argues that the country's "national aesthetic" entailed the combination of "a superiority complex" and "an inferiority complex".[6] Jing Wang also contends that the superiority and inferiority complex is a lasting mentality in intellectual reflections of the nation's place in history and in the world.[7] Such a "bi-polar personality" is often manifested in Chinese image presentation towards the outside world; and the emotional dynamics reflect deeply-felt uncertainties in the contemporary search for a cultural identity.

Whether a particular cultural identity can be found, or constructed, is an important question that requires theoretical studies beyond the scope of the present research. However, there is no doubt that, in the wake of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), as the revolutionary ideology fades away, an identity crisis has begun to re-surface. The state and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) are confronted with the fact that political communications have become increasingly irrelevant,[8] and market forces and popular culture have started to compete with the formerly tightly controled propaganda mechanisms in the formation of perceptions of the nation and its place in the world. Against this background, it is not surprising that the question of a new cultural identity resorts to the historical and cultural distinctiveness perceived as embodied in the country's many traditions, among which Confucianism is the most remarkable.

Therefore, the return of Confucianism to the spotlight should be understood in relation with efforts to forge a truly authentic, distinctive and modern (inter)national image in order to deal with the identity crisis and the quest for a stronger cultural presence globally.[9] Yet these efforts seem to have been stretched towards the two extremes of

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6 William Callahan, *China: the Pessoptimist Nation* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 9.

7 Jing Wang, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng's China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 134-136.

8 Stefan Landsberger, "Propaganda Posters in the Reform Era: Promoting Patriotism or Providing Public Information? " in Columbus, F. (ed.), *Asian Economic and Political Issues,* Volume 10 (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2004), pp. 27-57: 27.

9 See, for example, Lowell Dittmer and Samuel Kim (ed.), *China's Quest for National Identity* (Ithaca, NY [etc.]: Cornell University Press, 1993). Yingjie Guo, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary China: the Search for National Identity Under Reform* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004).

either a quintessential outlook or cultural xenophilia.

Indeed, the sense of confidence and pride is expressed in the pursuit of, for example, a "China model" that challenges the universality of a Western neo-liberal-democratic model; and it seems to have been verified by the speculation within Western discourse of a "Beijing consensus" to replace the "Washington consensus".[10] However, it is open to question whether a model of economic development, even if it proves to be successful, is able to satisfy the pride seen as being wounded during "the century of humiliation". Similarly, the reappearance of critiques of the national character poses a question as to whether revived interests in Confucianism and cultural tradition in general are able to overcome the self-loathing of a late-developing nation.

Taking into account the country's growing economic and political might, the more puzzling question is why contemporary Chinese self-perceptions seem to be swaying between the two ends of pride and loathing. In order to answer the "why" question, one has to first ask the "what" and "how" question: what has caused the cultural tradition to be perceived as so loathsome that it has given rise to the "modern tradition" of self-loathing? And what are the responses towards such a tendency in self-perceptions and the search for a cultural identity? Furthermore, how does the tension among various self-perceptions interact with Western perceptions of China?

These are undoutedly intricate questions that invite answers from many different perspectives, and each question requests careful studies that take into account its social, political, economic and cultural dimensions. To shed light on these questions, the present research will focus on one crucial element in contemporary Chinese cultural critiques, that is, the discourse of the Chinese national character, and use it as an entry point to the understanding of Chinese self-perceptions.

1.1. "Whither China?": A Cultural Question and the Intellectual Answers

Contemporary Chinese self-perceptions in this research refer to perceptions in the reform era, covering the period since the late 1970s until the present. However, as with all contemporary issues, self-perceptions of today have to be understood in their historical context. The cultural movements of the 1980s, generally seen by their participants and observers as "the second enlightenment", point to the May Fourth

[10] Joshua Cooper Ramo, *The Beijing Consensus* (London: The Foreign Policy Centre, 2004).

Movement in early 20th century as "the first enlightenment". Contemporary critiques of the national character almost always refer back to the national character reforms proposed by Liang Qichao and Lu Xun in the late Qing (1644-1911) and early Republican (1912-1949) periods, directing us back to the cultural debates of a century ago. Therefore, a historical dimension has to be introduced to the study of the contemporary discourse.

Among contending visions across a wide cultural spectrum, the perceptions of intellectuals (*zhishi fenzi*), as this study argues, play a critical role in the formation of cultural identities. The intelligentsia as a social group actively engages in cultural dialogues by means of informing, and at the same time responding to, both the state and the general public. This role, though not unusual for intellectuals elsewhere, is particularly prominent for Chinese intellectuals. As John Fairbank puts it, it is "a highly strategic group" with the whole Chinese world providing the context of its thought,[11] which in return bridges official rhetoric with popular discourse.

Such a strategic role of intellectuals is characterised by a strong sense of responsibility, even moral obligation, towards society, which is inherited from the traditional Confucian scholar-official. Intellectuals of today certainly differ in many ways from the imperial scholar-official, for example, in their relations with the state,[12] yet, to borrow Tu Weiming's description, they are very much present in cultural spheres for being at least "politically concerned, socially engaged, and culturally sensitive"[13]. They were the leading figures in the "high culture fever" in the 1980s, introducing and assimilating Western thought to a society newly-opened to Euro-American influence;[14] they initiated the debate on "the humanistic spirit" (*renwen jingshen*) in the 1990s, drawing attention to the far-reaching consequences of commercialization and globalization.

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11 John K. Fairbank, *Chinese Thought and Institutions* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 29.

12 See Jerome B. Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China: A Narrative History* (New York: Free Press, 1981).

13 Tu Weiming, "Beyond the Enlightenment Mentality: The Humanistic Spirit in the 21st Century," Keynote speech on May 29, 2007 at the APRU (Association of Pacific Rim Universities) Forum, Zhejiang University.

14 Fong-ching Chen, "The Popular Culture Movement of the 1980s," in Gloria Davies (ed.), *Voicing Concerns: Contemporary Chinese Critical Inquiry* (Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), pp. 71-86. Zha Jianying 查建英, *Bashi Niandai Fangtan Lu* 八十年代访谈录 (Beijing: Shenghuo Dushu Xinzhi Sanlian Shudian, 2006).

All these features have placed intellectuals at the forefront of Chinese-Western cultural exchanges, and compelled them to revaluate the nation's past and present in relation to other nations while asking the question of "Where is China going?" that raises deep concerns. Thus, it is justified to say that their roles in the search for a cultural identity, endowed both by themselves and by society at large, are as critical as can be. However, their perceptions of Chinese culture and its place in the world remain neglected in the English language world, and their voices have "rarely reached the West without much reduction or mediation".[15]

To probe into this rather important yet unknown field, this study examines contemporary scholarly opinions about the concept of national character to reveal their perceptions of traditional culture, and their visions for a new cultural identity. To be more specific, through the discourse of national character, this study explores how its meaning is borrowed by cultural critics to promote their visions of a truly modern China, and more importantly, how such attempts are rejected by many others who perceive the national character as well as the nation's future outside such a framework.

This study relies on texts of intellectuals—monographs and academic articles—that touch upon the question of cultural identity, with a particular focus on their views of the national character. This leads us to intellectuals in the humanities, especially in the field of history and philosophy, based at universities or research institutes. Obviously, a much wider cultural circle outside these institutions is also involved in the discourse of national character. Therefore, important literature from cultural critics outside intellectual institutions are studied as well.

Because the concept of national character does not fall into a specific academic discipline or research category per se, the texts on the national character are scattered, and as such, selected from a wide range of publications. To support the textual analysis, in-depth interviews have been conducted wherever necessary and possible in order to bring these material into focus and provide up-to-date scholarly opinions on the subject.

[15] Wang Chaohua, "Introduction: Minds of the Nineties," in idem. (ed.), *One China, Many Paths* (London [etc.]: Verso, 2003), pp. 9-45: 10.

1.2. The National Character Discourse

The concept of national character is employed by its observers and critics to refer to certain distinctive features of a national culture. These features are often personified, simplified and generalized to capture the behavioral and thought patterns as well as preferences perceived as almost racially inherent. It indicates an enduring essence that has evolved through a long and shared national history, which not only influences but also transcends political, economic, and social developments. In many cases, it is believed to be at the very root of a nation's cultural and political life, closely linked to its tradition and psychological make-up.

At the same time, the concept of national character entails a certain distinctiveness to a nation and/or a culture, as it is comprised of particular characteristics shared by people within a nation, and distinguishes them from other nations and peoples.[16] It is in this sense that the question of national character is closely linked to nationalism; in fact, it is viewed as part of the historical and cultural foundation of nationalism.[17] Based on such an understanding, one might discover that the discourse of national character, though not necessarily articulated with the same terminology or clarity, plays a crucial role in the perceptions and imaginations of a nation that is viewed as one particular socio-cultural entity among many different others.[18] In short, this discourse is very much present in the formation and development of a national and/or cultural identity.

It has to be noted that the concept of national character is never innocent or value-free. On the contrary, it can often be normative and even judgemental. Historically, the study of national character came into being as anthropological and sociological researches of the "native" or the colonized people. Viewed in the light of Western imperialist expansion around the globe, the subject of such studies—in this case a nation or a

[16] For a typical example, see Cumberland Clark, *Shakespeare and National Character: A Study of Shakespeare's Knowledge and Dramatic Literary Use of the Distinctive Racial Characteristics of the Different Peoples of the World* (New York and London, 1932).

[17] Berlin, "The Bent Twig", p. 22.

[18] For example, see Margaret Sleeboom, *Academic Nations in China and Japan: Framed by Concepts of Nature, Culture and the Universal* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004). See also: Margaret Mead, *And Keep Your Powder Dry: An Anthropologist Looks at America* (New York: W. Morrow and Co., 1942); and works of Geoffrey Gorer on national characters, such as: Geoffrey Gorer, *Exploring English Character: A Study of the Morals and Behaviour of the English People* (New York: Criterion Books, 1955).

people—was characterized, categorized, and represented in order for the observer to understand foreign cultures, and in many cases, to advise on colonial administration. This has resulted in perceptions of the inferiority of the people being studied, usually in their lack of progress, rationality, religious enlightenment, or even morality.[19]

The study of national character has therefore been colored by an almost inevitable sense of superiority and moral righteousness on the part of the researcher, whose objectivity and sympathetic understanding, if more than often present, could not extend beyond the social-political context of his/her study. Such self-righteousness can be detected not only in studies of cultural characteristics of other nations, but also in critical examinations of the researcher's own nation and natioinal culture.

Another important point in understanding the national character discourse is its connection with wartime research. Though not the main concern of this study, it has to be mentioned due to its significance in shaping the meaning of the term "national character". During the Second World War, both Japanese and German national characters were studied for the purpose of understanding and predicting their wartime behavior.[20] During the Cold War, research were conducted to investigate Russian and Soviet characters.[21] The influence of such studies has expanded beyond the War. For instance, Benedict's anthropological work on Japanese culture, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, has played a crucial role in social discourse on postwar Japan.[22] It has not only impacted foreign conceptions of Japanese culture, but also significantly influenced postwar Japanese cultural identity and self-perception.[23]

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19 Stuart Hall, "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power", in Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben (eds.), *Formations of Modernity* (Polity Press, 1992), pp. 185-227. See especially the parts about "discourse and power" and "representing the Other", pp. 203-215.

20 For example, Robert Harry Lowie, *The German People: A Social Portrait to 1914* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1945). John F. Embree, *The Japanese Nation: A Social Survey* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1945). Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946).

21 Geoffrey Gorer, *The People of Great Russia: A Psychological Study* (London: Cresset Press, 1949). Margaret Mead, *Soviet Attitudes Toward Authority: An Interdisciplinary Approach To Problems Of Soviet Character* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1951).

22 Sonya Ryang, "Chrysanthemum's Strange Life: Ruth Benedict in Postwar Japan," *Asian Anthropology* 1(2002), pp. 87-116: 87.

23 See John W. Bennett and Nagai Michio, "The Japanese critique of Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*," *American Anthropologist* 55 (1953), pp. 401-411. Pauline Kent, "Japanese Perceptions of *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*," *Dialectical Anthropology* 24.2 (1999), p. 181. Sonya Ryang, "Chrysanthemum's Strange Life", pp. 87-116.

The Chinese National Character

The origin of Chinese discourse of national character should be traced to Western conceptions of China at least to the publication of *Chinese Characteristics* by Arthur Smith, if not further back. Soon after the book was published, it was translated into Japanese.[24] The 1895 Sino-Japanese war further helped to popularize the discussions on cultural and national traits of China, both in Japan and in China itself.

The national character became a subject of intensive cultural studies and wartime research in Japan in the following decades, up to the Second World War.[25] The Chinese equivalent of "national character"—the term *guomin xing*—found its way to China through translation of English and Japanese publications, and became an integral part of cultural reform movements since the late Qing period.

In the context of Western and Japanese critiques, the Chinese national character was often related to its inferiority *vis-a-vis* cultural characteristics of other nations, to such an extent that it became the synonym for national defect—the deeply-rooted inferior character of the nation (*minzu liegen xing*). Such a view of the Chinese national character was integrated into the broader discussion over the country's defeats and backwardness, and together with many other important socio-political and cultural conceptions imported from abroad in similar ways, informed the self-reflective intelligentsia as well as the general public who were driven by a sense of urgency to make sense of the national and international crisis of their time.

To rescue the nation from such a deep crisis, advocates of cultural reforms, despite their divergent political viewpoints, tended to compare the Chinese national character with those of the Western nations, using the latter as a frame of reference. Considering the prominence, if not preeminence, of the quest to change the status quo, it is not

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[24] Shiba Tamotsu, *Chūgokujin kishitsu* (Tokyo: Hakubunkan, 1896).

[25] See, for example, Kuwabara Jitsuzo, "Shinajin' no bunjaku to hoshu," in Kyoiku gakujutsu kenkyukai (ed.), *Shina Kenkyu* (Tokoy: Dobunkan, Zasshibu, 1916), pp. 65-93. Hidekata Watanabe, *Shina kokuminseiron* (Tokyo: Osakayagoshoten, 1922). Yasuoka Hideo, *Shosetsu kara mita Shina no minzokusei* (Tokyo: Shuhokaku shuppan, 1926). Sōbē Hara, *Shina shinri no kaibo* (Tokyo: Tokyo Shobo, 1932). Kanzō Uchiyama, *Keru Shina no sugata: uchishan manbun* (Tokyo: Gakugeishoin, 1935). Kotaro Otani, *Gendai Shinajin seishin kozo no kenkyu* (Shanghai: Toa dobun shoin, Shina kenkyubu, 1935). Toranosuke Kato, *Shina no minzokusei* (Tokyo: Kokumin Seishin Bunka Kenkyujo, 1937). Sugiyama Heisuke, *Shina to Shinajin to Nihon* (Tokyo: Kaizosha, 1938). Momoji Yamazaki, *Kore ga Shina da: Shina minzokusei no kagakuteki kaiseki* (Tokyo: Kurita Shoten, 1941). Kōtarō Ōtani, *Shina kokuminsei to keizai seishin* (Tokyo: Ganshodo Shoten, 1943).

suprising that their underlying assumption was one in which the seemingly eternal national character was the ultimate cultural cause of the crisis.

Such perceptions could be found in the critiques of two leading protagonists of the national character reforms, in the 1899-1903 texts of Liang Qichao[26] and the many literary critiques of Lu Xun,[27] as well as many intellectuals of the May Fourth Movement, such as Hu Shi, Chen Duxiu, and Li Dazhao.[28] Of course, this does not suggest that their cultural viewpoints were identical; on the contrary, as we will analyze later, a common call to reform the national character did not in any way homogenize their perceptions and attitudes towards the nation's cultural tradition, or their contending visions for a cultural China, not to mention their divergent political convictions.

At the same time, these critiques of the national character in the late Qing and early Republican periods formed an interesting contrast with scholarly pleas to preserve "the national essence" (*guo cui*)[29] or "the national spirit" (*minzu jingshen*)[30]. Both concepts,

[26] For the most recent collection and study of Liang's national character critique, see Liang Qichao 梁启超, *Taiyang de langzhao: Liang Qichao guominxing yanjiu wenxuan* 太阳的朗照：梁启超国民性研究文选 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2011).

[27] For recent scholarly studies on Lu Xun's national character critique, see works of Wang Hui, Qian Liqun, and Lin Xianzhi. Also see: Zhang Mengyang 张梦阳, *Wuxing yu nuxing: Lu Xun yu zhongguo zhishifenzi de "guominxing"* 悟性与奴性：鲁迅与中国知识分子的"国民性" (Zhenzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1997). Bao Jing 鲍晶 (ed.), *Lu Xun guominxing gaizao taolunji* 鲁迅国民性改造讨论集 (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1982). For a recent collection of Lu Xun's critique on national character, see Lu Xun 鲁迅, *Yueliang de Hanguang: Lu Xun guominxing pipan wenxuan* 月亮的寒光：鲁迅国民性批判文选 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2011).

[28] See, for example, Chen Duxiu 陈独秀, "Dongxi minzu genben sixiang zhi chayi" 东西民族根本思想之差异, in Chen Song 陈菘 (ed.), *Wusi qianhou dongxi wenhua wenti lunzhan wenxuan* 五四前后东西文化问题论战文选 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1985), pp. 12-16. Li Dazhao 李大钊, *Yi jing wei benwei de zhongguoren* 以静为本位的中国人, in Lin Yutang etc. 林语堂等 *Xianshuo zhongguoren* 闲说中国人 (Ha'erbing: Beifang wenyi chubanshe, 2006), pp. 63-66.

[29] For analysis on "national essence", see Laurence A. Schneider, "National Essence and the New Intelligentsia," in Charlotte Furth (ed.), *The Limits of Change: Essays on Conservative Alternatives in Republican China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 57-89. Tze-ki Hon, "National Essence, National Learning, and Culture: Historical Writings in *Guocui xuebao, Xueheng*, and *Guoxue jikan*," *Historiography East and West*, Volume 1, Number 2 (2003), pp. 242-286.

[30] For analysis on "national spirit", see, for example, Axel Schneider, "Between Dao and History: Two Chinese Historians in Search of a Modern Identity for China," *History and Theory*, Vol. 35, No. 4, Theme Issue 35 (1996): Chinese Historiography in Comparative

similar to the national character (*guomin xing*), were employed to grasp the enduring and distinctive features of a culture.

If the national character is the personified depiction of shared racial-cultural characteristics of a people, the national essence or spirit denotes a cosmological philosophy that manifests itself in the core values of a nation as its historical legacy. While the national character is often associated with backwardness by its critics, the national essence and the national spirit both stress the culture's particularity and continuity without placing it in a negative light.

Another difference between the concept of national character and national essence/national spirit lies in their perceived bearers. The nation and the people in the concept of national character tend to be viewed as "ordinary people", the average Chinese with an abstract personality; but the national essence and the national spirit are usually embodied in the intelligentsia—learned Confucian scholar-officials, though a minority of the population—who are seen as the purveyors and the medium of traditional scholarship. Thus, when proponents of cultural preservation maintain that the national essense or spirit should not be jeopardized by either socio-political changes or foreign intrusion, they are themselves, often as part of the cultural elite, taking the responsibility of a guardian of the national soul—the very last thing to lose before the nation, the culture, and the civilization extinguish.

Turning to the reform era, from the nation-wide debate in the 1980s around *River Elegy* to the 2004 publishing sensation of *Wolf Totem*, critiques of the national character re-surfaced in popular culture.[31] The former called upon a transformation from Chinese agrarian culture to Western-style modernization—from the yellow earth to the blue ocean; and the latter described the Han Chinese people as a loose herd of sheep in comparison with the Mongolian nomadic people with a semi-religious, enduring wolf spirit.[32] In the first decade of the 21st century, a large amount of reprints

Perspective, pp. 54-73. Axel Schneider, "History and Ethics: the choices of post-imperial historiography," unpublished paper for the conference on "The Writing of History in 20th century East Asia: Between Linear Time and the Reproduction of National Consciousness" at Leiden University, 2007.

31 Jiang Rong 姜戎, *Lang Tuteng* 狼图腾 (Wuchang, Hubei: Changjiang Arts Publishing House, 2004). For its English translation, see Jiang Rong, translated by Howard Goldblatt, *Wolf Totem* (Penguin, 2008).

32 For texts of *River Elegy*, see Su Xiaokang 苏晓康 (ed.), *Cong wusi dao heshang* 从五四到河觞 (Taibei: Fengyun shidai chuban youxian gongsi, 1992). Appendix 2, *He Shang* 河觞.

of works on national character, including the many editions of Arthur Smith's *Chinese Characteristics*, have shown a growing interest in this topic.[33]

Aside from the popular culture, continous scholarly attention has been drawn to the question of national character. Recent studies have brought back the issue of national character reforms.[34] Many have dealt with the cultural reforms initiated by Lu Xun and Liang Qichao as unfinished projects with contemporary significance. To many who look for solutions to contemporary social and cultural problems, the question of national character remains a meaningful interpretation of an unsatisfactory reality, and the reforms of the culture and the people are deemed as the ultimate means to better the country.

Yet such a cultural interpretation has also evoked scepticism and criticism especially from post-colonial and post-modernist perspectives, both highlighting the context of imperialism and colonialism in which the concept of national character was produced.

[33] See Sun Longji 孙隆基, *Zhongguo wenhua de shenceng jiegou* 中国文化的深层结构 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2004). Bo Yang 柏杨, *Choulou de Zhongguoren* 丑陋的中国人 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2008). Lin Yutang, *Xianshuo Zhongguoren*. Kanzō Uchiyama 内山完造, Hidekata Watanabe 渡边秀方 & Sōbē Hara 原惣兵卫, translated by You Bingqi 尤炳圻, Gao Ming 高明 & Wu Zaoxi 吴藻溪, *Zhongguo ren de lie gen he you gen: Riben ren yan zhong de jin dai Zhongguo* 中国人的劣根和优根：日本人眼中的近代中国 (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 2009).

[34] See Zhen Xinmiao 郑欣淼, *Wenhua pipan yu guominxing gaizao* 文化批判与国民性改造 (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1986). Wen Yuankai 温元凯 & Ni Duan 倪端, *Zhongguo guominxing gaizao* 中国国民性改造 (Hong Kong: Shuguang Tushu, 1988). Ren Jiantao 任剑涛, *Cong zizai dao zijue: Zhongguo guominxing tantao* 从自在到自觉：中国国民性探讨 (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1992). Yu Zuhua 俞祖华, *Shenchen de minzu fanxing: Zhongguo jindai gaizao guominxing sichao yanjiu* 深沉的民族反省：中国近代改造国民性思潮研究 (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanhse, 1996). Yuan Hongliang 袁洪亮, *Ren de xiandaihua: Zhongguo jindai guominxing gaizao sixiang yanjiu* 人的现代化：中国近代国民性改造思想研究 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe,2005). Jiao Junzhang 教军章, *Zhongguo jindai guominxing wenti yanjiu de lilun shiyu jiqi jiazhi* 中国近代国民性问题研究的理论视阈及其价值 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2009). Lin Xianzhi 林贤治, *Zhishang de shenyin* 纸上的声音 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2010). Zhou Jianchao 周建超, *Jindai Zhongguo "ren de xiandaihua sixiang" yanjiu* 近代中国"人的现代化思想"研究 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2010). Mo Luo 摩罗, *Zhongguo de tengtong—guominxing pipan yu wenhua zhengzhixue kunjing* 中国的疼痛——国民性批判与文化政治学困境 (Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 2011). Mo Luo 摩罗 and Yang Fan 杨帆 (eds.), *Renxing de fusu: "guominxing" pipan de qiyuan yu fansi* 人性的复苏："国民性批判"的起源与反思 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2011).

Critical studies of the national character discourse, while acknowledging the benign intentions of the cultural modernizers, have nonetheless questioned the theoretical ground and empirical validity of national character reforms.

1.3. Nationalism and Cultural Identity

The study of self-perception is essentially a study of the awareness of one's own social, political and cultural identity. In the case of this research, the examination of intellectual self-perceptions of "their" own nation means to probe into their understanding and imagination of a national identity, however broadly or narrowly defined. This, then, naturally leads to the equally complex and contested question of nationalism.

Fully aware of the intimate relations between these two concepts and the subject of this study, I will explore the theoretical implications of both to the study of perceptions, and in the meanwhile bring them into the focus of the realms of culture and cultural exchange that are most relevant to this research. In other words, this research highlights the intellectual and cultural aspects and leaves other related aspects of nationalism and national identity to be explored elsewhere, while bearing in mind the many inter-connected dimensions of the question of national identity—political, ethnic, religious—and the many approaches to unravel the question of nationalism, such as the state, the civic, the popular, and so on.

Nationalism: Perception and its Cultural Foundation

In his *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson defines nation as an imagined political community, with finite boundaries and sovereign within the territorial stretch. [35] He regards nationalism and nation-ness as a particular kind of cultural artefacts which command profound emotional legitimacy and arouse deep attachment.

The consciousness of nation and nationalism, in Anderson's conception, has been historically formed out of, and against, preceding cultural systems—religious communities and dynastic realms. When certainties of such cultural systems were lost, the search began for new ways to apprehend the world and to link time, space, and

[35] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London [etc.]: Verso, 2006).

power meaningfully together. With the development and spread of print-capitalism, nationalism as a newly emerged consciousness has become the most universally legitimate value in political life.[36] It has become a widely accepted notion that, in the modern nation-state system, nationalism is a fundamental parameter for identity. The state represents all citizens in its territory, regardless of ethnicity, race, gender or religion. To legitimize its political power, the state heavily relies on nationalism as the predominant ideology and the source of sovereignty.

Yet Anderson's conception of nation and nationalism has been subject to criticism in many ways. Prasenjit Duara, for one, has questioned the way Anderson described the formation of nationalism. He believes that such concepts as nation, nation-state, and national identity did not, at one point of time in history, evolve as self-same consciousness subjects against other entities like empires. In addition, he argues that the line drawn between one nation, nationalism, national identity and the other is subject to negotiation and manipulation from both within and outside.[37]

As Duara rightly points out, the "territorial model of civic nationalism" was never fully adequate for the nation-state. Its boundaries have been constantly tested in many multi-ethnic states and states with large overseas populations, especially when it comes to spiritual and transcendent matters.[38] With the "territorial mode of civic nationalism" being challenged, nationalism as political ideology in the age of globalization becomes a double-edged sword for the modern state. Thus, the authenticity and distinctiveness of the nation is increasingly stressed by claiming a common national history with enduring continuity embodied in cultural traditions.[39] It seems that the ideology of nationalism has turned into "cultural-ethnic models".

The importance of cultural and ethnic elements in nationalism has been further stressed by scholars like Anthony Smith. In Smith's definition, nationalism is "an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity, and identity on behalf of a population, some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential

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36 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 3, 7, 12, 36.

37 Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History From the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago [etc.]: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 3-16. Prasenjit Duara, "De-Constructing the Chinese Nation," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 30 (1993), pp. 1-26.

38 Prasenjit Duara, "Nationalism and transnationalism in the globalisation of China," *China Report* 39: 1 (2003), pp. 1-19: 10.

39 Duara, "Nationalism and transnationalism", p. 14.

'nation'."[40] If the term "nation" is to describe a historical type of human community, characterized by a cultural and/or political identity, and "imagined, willed, and felt" by its members,[41] nationalism, then, as an ideologoical movement, draws heavily from the nation's cultural tradition as sacred resource for a collective identiy.

In this light, Smith contends that the pervasive power of ethno-cultural elements in nationalism has been understated due to the theoretical limits of an "arbitrary and unnecessarily restrictive" modernist perspective,[42] a perspective from which Anderson and alike view both nationalisms and nations as recent productions of modernization and modernity, however they are defined.

Smith's argument echoes with Duara's observation that the civic-territorial model is heavily constrained by the historical phenomenon of Western European nationalism as well as the theoretical framework that is drawn of such phenomenon. It is to suggest that, just because nationalisms as understood in the Western European context happen to be of a civic-territorial model, it does not mean that ethno-cultural nationalisms elsewhere should be seen as exceptions or abnormalities. This then goes on to suggest that, in the social and symbolic processes of national emergence and persistence, cultural resources, by maintaining a sense of national identity, have become regarded as sacred foundations of the nation.

Nationalism as an Emotionally Charged Ideology

According to Smith, the cultural-ethnic aspects of nationalism, not very obviously present in the paradigm of modernism, are much more visible if a perennial or primordial perspective is introduced in the study of nationalism. Yet it has to be pointed out that Anderson's assumption does not deny the elements of cultural and ethnic ties within a nation or nationalism. For instance, he acknowledges that these elements carry a natural, deep, horizontal comradeship with fellow-members, which assumes historical destinies manifested in attachment to kinship, home, mother-language, and inspires "self-sacrificing love".[43] Of course, primordial ties such as kinship and territory are helpful in understanding why nations and cultures have later

[40] Anthony Smith, *The Cultural Foundations of Nations: Hierarchy, Covenant, and Republic* (Malden, MA [etc.]: Blackwell, 2008), p. 15.
[41] Smith, *The Cultural Foundations of Nations*, p. 23.
[42] Smith, *The Cultural Foundations of Nations*, pp. 15 & 18.
[43] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 141 & 143.

developed into such pervasive identities that they sometimes evoke unconditional passion and commitment.

The intensity of the emotional dynamics that nationalism often envokes, such as the entanglement of pride and loathing being discussed here, is better explained with the sociological concept of ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is based on a fundamental differentiation between ethnic in-group (we-group) and out-group (others-group). It defines in-group relations as comradeship and peace; and the relations with the out-group as of a hostile and war-like nature. Accompanying the different views of the in-group and the out-group relations are different sentiments: attachment, loyalty, and pride towards the in-group; and hatred, contempt, distrust, and fear towards out-groups.[44]

An ethnocentric attitude or outlook tends to apply values derived from one's own cultural background to other cultural contexts—one's own standards of values are perceived as universal and intrinsically true. Therefore, the in-group is perceived as strong, virtuous, superior, claiming attachment, loyalty or even sacrifice; in contrast, out-groups are perceived as weak, immoral, inferior, inducing hatred, contempt, or fear. [45] In the social sciences, nationalism is often categorized as an advanced form of ethnocentrism, with loyalty to "a politically distinct entity" or "state leadership", as well as "a formalised ideology".[46] From this perspective, nationalism is placed in a wide spectrum between patriotism and xenophobia, between love and devotion to the nation at one end, and unreasonable dislike of outsiders and contempt for their ways of life at the other end.[47]

Having said that, just as the notion of enthnocentrism has been associated with negative connotations, emotional attachment to the nation and nationalism are quite often viewed in a less favorable light than what is seen as rational, civic nationalism. From the perspective of modernism, the dichotomy of Western and non-Western nationalisms tends to suggest a rationalist, enlightened, liberal modern nationalism in

[44] Robert A. LeVine and Donald T. Campbell, *Ethnocentrism: Theories of Conflict, Ethnic Attitudes and Group Behaviour* (New York [etc.]: Wiley, 1972), pp. 1-9.

[45] See William Graham Sumner, *Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores and Morals* (Boston [etc.]: Ginn and Company, 1906).

[46] Vernon Reynolds, Vincent Falger and Ian Vine (ed.), *The Socio-biology of Ethnocentrism: Evolutionary Dimensions of Xenophobia, Discrimination, Racism and Nationalism* (London [etc.]: Croom Helm, 1987), pp. 8-9.

[47] H. D. Forbes, *Nationalism, Ethnocentrism and Personality: Social Science and Critical Theory* (Chicago [etc.]: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 63.

contrast to their non-Western counterparts that are often organic, shrill, authoritarian and mystical. Ironically, this modernist perspective has, as Smith puts it, its own "inherent ethnocentrism"[48]. Using the yardstick of a liberal, civic conception of nation, loyalty to the ethnic national in-group is more often described as "narrow" and "aggressive".[49] Studies of the psychology of nationalism have depicted the typical personality of a nationalist in the light of social discrimination, and argued that such a personality tends to be irrational, aggressive, weak, anti-democratic, often subject to ethnic prejudice.[50]

From another perspective, within the context of colonial history, nationalism is viewed as a world-wide phenomenon brought about by anti-colonial movements. It reflects a natural tendency to resist undesired foreign rule, a claim of sovereignty and independence, and, to use Berlin's description, the "straightening of bent backs" of the oppressed. This metaphor is very useful in explaining Chinese nationalism as a highly emotionally charged ideology. The intensified emotions have been the characteristic feature of Chinese nationalism, and not exclusively of the radical nationalists. For example, cultural nationalism has been associated with Chinese conservatism. Benjamin Schwartz wrote of a sense of profound pride and frustration—often not inherited in conservatism in general—as a dominant element in modern Chinese conservatism.[51]

The nationalistic sentiments demonstrated in Chinese revolutions since the late Qing did not fade away, even after sovereignty and national independence were no longer an issue at hand. In fact, Western imperialist expansion and national humiliation in modern history have remained the recurring themes in collective memories.[52] The wounded pride, as a legacy of the anti-imperialist, nationalistic movements a century ago, repeatedly manifests itself in both official and popular rhetoric, both in everyday

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48 Smith, *The Cultural Foundations of Nations*, p. 16.

49 Forbes, *Nationalism, Ethnocentrism and Personality*, p. 33.

50 See Theodor Adorno [et al.], *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950).

51 Benjamin Schwartz, "Notes on Conservatism in General and China in Particular," in Charlotte Furth (ed.), *The Limits of Change*, pp. 3-21: 16.

52 See, for example, Paul A. Cohen, "Remembering and Forgetting: National Humiliation in Twentieth-Century China," *Twentieth-Century China*, Vol.27, No.2 (2002), pp. 1-39. William Callahan, "National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism," *Alternatives* 29 (2004), pp. 199-218. Peter Hays Gries, *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy* (California: The University of California Press, 2004). Callahan, *China: the Pessoptimist Nation*.

life and in intellectual discourse.

It has to be said that the purpose of exploring the emotional dimension of nationalism is not to justify the intensified passion, nor to denounce it, but to recognize its impact on the emergence and persistence of nationalism, and in doing so, to better understand its implications to Chinese self-perceptions and the search for a cultural identity.

Cultural Identity: the Universal Search for Particularity

There should be no question that the concepts of nation, nationalism, and national identity are not stable entities; that they are fluid concepts to be understood in the relationships between the Self and the Other. Yet, acknowledging the flexible boundaries of nation and national identity does not mean that the line drawn between the Self and the Other is no longer prominent. On the contrary, nationalism remains the most important regulator of international relations, which is supported by both political institutional structures and cultural forces. In fact, it remains prominent in almost every sphere of global life. For example, national and regional approaches to historical writing continue to be meaningful in many ways, despite the epistemological critique of history from schools of thought such as postmodernism. Furthermore, postmodernism itself, as a global school of thought, is used in various parts of the world as "a tool to fortify boundaries, rather than to tear them down".[53]

Globalization might have blurred many boundaries across national borders, yet it has also brought nations into a global competition for distinctiveness and uniqueness—a universal search for particularity. It is almost as if a certain fixed cultural identity can be constructed, and has to be constructed. The nation and the individual are both confronted with the idea that a sense of belonging can only be found by stressing the common historical and cultural experiences among the we-group—the Self, while at the same time differentiating it with many others-groups—the Other—in one's claim of a particular history and a distinctive culture with unique characteristics.

While international communications brought together a global community at an unprecedented speed and scale; the urge to define the Self in relation to the Others has become even stronger. In the face of cultural globalization, there are urgent needs felt

[53] Axel Schneider and Daniel Woolf (vol. eds.), *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, Volume 5, *Historical Writing Since 1945* (Oxford [etc.]: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 2.

to guard local cultures from the invasion of global consumption culture. All these perceptions of lines drawn between the Self and the Other, either as Anderson's "imagined communities", or Smith's "felt history", are themselves constructions based on factual cultural or historical communities, yet they have become autonomous notions that are powerful enough to shape, and even to challenge, existing communities.

The search for a particular cultural and historical identity is especially problematic and urgent in post-colonial societies. As newly born nations, their encounters with the modern West have put them in situations with two seemingly irreconcilable Others—the past and the West—both very much present.[54] Therefore, the search for national particularity that transcends both Others becomes the only imaginable answer to the question of cultural identity.

The PRC period under Mao saw very limited cultural contacts with Europe and America. The nation's distinctiveness was identified through perceived images of a contrasting non-Chinese Other. The construction of such images was carefully crafted, and determined by what was believed to be the proper place for the young nation in the world and its relations with friends and foes in the international community.[55] In the Cultural Revolution, a myth was created that China occupied the center place of world revolution as "the leader of all victimized peoples in their historical struggle against white capitalism"[56].

Yet this myth was soon broken by the reforms and opening-up at the end of the 1970s. The influx of foreign philosophy and literature swayed the cultural realm of the 1980s. Meanwhile, increasing interaction with the outside world brought constant adjustment of self-perception. The consequent forces of globalization are two-fold: increasing contacts with the outside world request the nation to be global—to accept certain rules and values in the existing international system, and at the same time to be authentically Chinese—to claim and interpret its particularity as well as its standpoint towards the rest of the world.

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[54] Arif Dirlik, "Culture Against History? The Politics of East Asian Identity," *Development and Society*, volume 28, number 2 (1999), pp. 167-90: 167.

[55] See Stefan Landsberger, "Encountering the European and Western Other in Chinese Propaganda Posters," in Wintle, M. (ed.), *Imagining Europe - Europe and European Civilisation as Seen from its Margins and by the Rest of the World, in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang S.A., 2008), pp. 147-175: 148.

[56] Landsberger, "Encountering the European and Western Other", p. 151.

Hence, the reform era has seen a rising economic and political power that is compelled to look for a compatible cultural presence in its "linking up with the international community".[57] Official ideology promotes the country's "peaceful development" as a response to speculations of a "China threat" or "China collapse". The hosting of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing and the Expo 2010 in Shanghai are but two examples of large-scale public relations events. In the meantime, various communication channels have been established under the supervision of the State Council Information Office. As a part of the pro-active strategy to become "a strong cultural power", efforts are made to build a favorable national image abroad and to strengthen the nation's soft power through cultural exchange projects such as the Confucius Institutes. Under the umbrella of "Socialism with Chinese Characteritics", the particular Chinese characteristics are being explored not only in economic and political senses, but also in the cultural realm.

Continuous efforts of the state and the official rhetoric accompanying them are often merged with popular discourse. Since the 1990s, there has been increasing interest in traditional culture from different social and cultural groups. Most notably, a resurgence of traditional scholarship as National Learning (*guo xue*) has not only promoted the study of Confucian classics, but also the values embodied in the scholarly tradition.[58] As Dirlik phrased it, "traditions once condemned to the past have made a comeback with a vengeance".[59]

Before we look further into the search for a cultural identity, we first have to examine it in the light of the interaction between Chinese and Western perceptions, for cultural identities are formed and developed through the encounters of different worldviews from within and without. In the present research, the discourse of national character is examined as a recurring theme in the Chinese cultural debate and Chinese-Western communications, notably during the two periods when such interactions of perceptions are most dynamic—firstly in the late Qing and early Republican periods, and secondly in the reform era.

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[57] See Wang Hongying, "'Linking Up with the International Track': What's in a Slogan?" *The China Quarterly*, 189 (March 2007), pp. 1-23.

[58] See Axel Schneider, "Bridging the Gap: Attempts at Constructing a 'New' Historical-Cultural Identity in the PRC", *East Asia History* 22 (December 2001), pp. 129-144. Arif Dirlik, "Guoxue/National Learning in the Age of Global Modernity," *China Perspectives*, No. 2011/1. pp. 4-13.

[59] Dirlik, "Culture Against History?", p. 171.

1.4. Self in the Other: the International Dimension

The notion of national and cultural identity as fluid concepts denoting the relationship between the Self and the Other informs us that, empirically, the collective self-awareness of a nation, though based on common historical and cultural experiences shared by its people, is developed through its interactions with the outside world. The study of the intellectual perceptions of the nation is obviously an examination of the intellectual imagination of the nation's relations with others, and its relative place in comparison with them.

In this light, since the late Qing period, intellectual and cultural exchanges with the West have greatly shaped, if not directly induced, the process of Chinese identity formation. Various forms of encounters with the modern West have raised the awareness of self-reflective Chinese intellectuals that a weak national Self is facing a strong and inevitable Other. Such encounters and such awareness directed different Chinese schools of thoughts towards rather divergent perceptions of the nation's past, present and future, leading to cultural proposals ranging from wholesale Westernization to selective adoption of Western knowledge.

At the same time, the movement to learn from the West, largely prompted by an urge to improve the national Self and to escape the fate of falling into disgrace, has also invoked as its counter-current a fear of cultural metamophorsis, for it is perceived by many as a fatal process with the risk of losing the cultural essence and eventually the national Self.

As such, the Other is simultaneously a subject of learning and a hegemony to be overcome in order for the Self to survive. It is precisely the negotiation between these two paradoxical aspects of the Other that has divided Chinese intellectuals into different schools covering a wide spectrum, some labelled as cultural radicals, others cultural conservatives. And in the same vein, the national Self is perceived in contradictory lights: while some criticize the weak national character, others strive to safeguard the national essence and national spirit.

This is a dilemma not particular to China, but common to post-colonial societies whose encounters with the modern West placed them in between the opposition of the past and the West, as I noted earlier. Despite numerous efforts to overcome these two

oppositions, and many cultural creations to appropriate the presence of both the past and the West, the negotiation of their relationship has never been fully satisfactory.

This has to do with the fact that, to various degrees, the importation of Western knowledge has brought along with it a process of internalization and naturalization of Western perceptions. In the case of China, it suggests the internalization of Western perceptions of the world as well as of China's place within such a world order. Placed in the context of global colonial history, such internalized perceptions are better understood by employing the concept of Orientalism.[60]

Western Worldviews and Orientalism

Western perceptions of China, or of any other non-Western nation, are constituents of Western views of the world order in general and the place of "the West" within that order in particular. They are essentially reflections of a self-image affiliated with the concept of "the West". The geo-political term of "the West", with its origin in Western Europe, now includes developed and industrialized countries in Europe, America, and even in the Asia-Pacific region. Similarly, the cultural notion of "the West" was initially formed around a European continental awareness.

Though the European cultural landscape has always been as diverse as it can be, collective cultural awareness nevertheless emerged, centering on a shared Christendom and what is called "rational restlessness"—as some argue, the psychological make-up of Europe.[61] It stood in sharp contrast with perceptions of many other cultures and societies that are non-Christian, non-rational, and non-European. Western worldviews, having evolved in a Eurocentric fashion, confirmed the uniqueness of the European identity in the process of imperialist expansions.

Following European dominance, the United States in the 20th century have played a critical role in the development of Western worldviews. The two World Wars witnessed stronger American military, religious, financial, political, and cultural presence around the globe, which eventually led to its superpower status at the end of the Cold War. Increasing global influence of the U.S. has helped to promote a belief that it is the Manifest Destiny of America to spread not only Christian ideas, but also its liberal

[60] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 9th edition, 2003).
[61] Hall, "The West and the Rest", pp. 197-201.

economic system and political democracy to the rest of the world. This optimism in Western values and their universality is clearly demonstrated in the "end of History" thesis.[62]

A growing affirmation of alternative worldviews in East Asia and the Middle East in the last decades has raised Western concerns over the growing impact of other cultures. Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis argues that culture and religion have replaced political ideas as the major forces to divide the West and the rest of the world.[63] The Western civilization and its modern form of Western modernization, as Huntington maintained, are challenged by several other distinctive civilizations including the Sinic, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Latin American, and "possibly African" cultures.[64] This "clash" discourse emphasizes the threat of Islamic and East Asian cultures to Western civilization, and warns against the rise of anti-Western nationalisms.

Huntington's thesis has been widely criticized for having failed to escape the antagonistic logic of "us" versus "them".[65] Such a framework places opposite of "the West" any other cultures that represent values different from prevailing Western values. Following this logic, the rest of the world, especially "the Orient", is perceived with confined understanding and reduced to a simplistic image, either favorably as a fantacized Eastern wonderland, or a demonized region of terrorism, or anything in between that is nevertheless subject to Western influence.

Undoubtedly, there have been scholarly attempts from within the West to view East Asian and Chinese history from alternative perspectives,[66] but antagonistic perceptions of other cultures remain an important, if not dominant, part of the Western worldview. Its critiques, such as the widely influential theory of Orientalism, demonstrate its very presence and prevelance up to the present.

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62 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 2006 reprint).

63 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

64 Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, pp. 45-46.

65 See, for example, Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *A Metahistory of the Clash of Civilisations: Us and Them Beyond Orientalism* (London: Hurst, 2011).

66 For example, see: Paul Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984). Warren I. Cohen, *East Asia at the Center: Four Thousand Years of Engagement with the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

Orientalism, in Edward Said's view, points to a way of thinking imbedded in the European and American cultural traditions, which holds simplistic and reductive views of Islam and the Arabs as the Others—essentially "not like us" and "not appreciating our values".[67] It describes a tendency to forge a collective Western identity through self-affirmation, while at the same time understanding the rest of the world in a highly polemical and antagonistic fashion.

The theory of Orientalism criticizes reductionist perceptions of the invented Other, as well as the lack of intention to understand the visions of "Oriental" people as to what they are and what they want to be. Said identified two layers of Orientalism in Western understanding: the almost unconscious (and certainly untouchable) positivity as "latent Orientalism"; and the various stated views about Oriental societies, languages, literatures, history, sociology, etc., as "manifest Orientalism".[68]

In the colonial context, the Orientalist worldview has come into being as an imperialist tradition, an accomplice to empire, with the intention to civilize, to enlighten, and to bring order. It is a discourse produced in an uneven exchange of political, intellectual, cultural, and moral power. As a result, Orientalism is fundamentally "a political doctrine willed over the Orient".[69]

Moreover, the will to understand, to control, and even to manipulate, has manifested itself in distorted knowledge of the Orient. Consequently, Orientalism, being an influential academic tradition, has not only affected Western production of knowledge, as its critics argue, but also, being a cultural hegemony, greatly influenced the knowledge production in the Orient, about the Orient itself.[70]

Orientalism and Internalized Orientalism in the Chinese Context

Although Said's Orientalism mainly deals with Western perceptions of Islamic and Arabic cultures, the concept has also been widely employed in the studies of Asia and East Asia, including China. Western knowledge of the country and its people has accumulated over centuries, dating back to the stories of Marco Polo and Matteo Ricci, which were later enriched by many other missionaries, intellectuals, diplomats,

[67] Said, *Orientalism*, p. xx.
[68] Said, *Orientalism*, p. 206.
[69] Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 12 & 204.
[70] Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

merchants, and travellers who followed in their footsteps.

These interesting encounters, as seen from Western perspective, have been the topic of diligent research due to their historical and cultural significance.[71] Because the country has long been a subject of Western study and exploration, most research has treated their encounters as a crucial factor in the history of Western dealings with China, as well as an important part of Western views of itself and the world.

However, the other side of the story—Chinese responses towards Western perceptions—has to a large extent remained an uncharted territory. Surely, as a mirror concept of Orientalism, studies of occidentalism have subsequently drawn attention to the increasing awareness of Western dominance and the consequent responses from the rest of the world, especially "the East".[72] However, occidentalism in most cases refers simply to a sort of counterpart of Orientalism, or reversed Orientalism; few have explored the complexity, not to mention the far-reaching socio-cultural implications, of Chinese reactions towards the Orientalist discourse.

Both Orientalism and occidentalism have been developed into highly contested

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[71] See Mary Gertrude Mason, *Western Concepts of China and the Chinese, 1840-1876* (New York: Seeman Printery, 1939). Raymond Dawson, *The Chinese Chameleon: An Analysis of European Conceptions of Chinese Civilization* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967). Harold R. Isaacs, *Images of Asia: American Views of China and India* (New York and London: Harper and Row, 1972). John K. Fairbank, *China Perceived: Images and Policies in Chinese-American Relations* (New York: Knopf, 1974). Zhang Longxi, "The Myth of the Other: China in the Eyes of the West," *Critical Inquiry*, 15:1 (1988), pp. 108-131. Colin Mackerras, *Western Images of China* (Hong Kong [etc.]: Oxford University Press, 1989). Jonathan Goldstein, Jerry Israel, and Hilary Conroy (eds.), *America Views China: American Images of China Then and Now* (Lehigh University Press, 1991). Steven W. Mosher, *China Misperceived: American Illusions and Chinese Reality* (New York: Basic Books, 1992). T. Christopher Jespersen, *American Images of China 1931-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996). Jonathan D. Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds* (New York [etc.]: Norton, 1998). Zhijian Tao, *Drawing the Dragon: Western European Reinvention of China* (Bern, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009).

[72] See, for example, James G. Carrier (ed.), *Occidentalism: Images of the West* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). Chen Xiaomei, *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Couze Venn, *Occidentalism: Modernity and Subjectivity* (London [etc.]: Sage, 2000). Michael Hill, "*Asian Values*" *as Reverse Orientalism: the Case of Singapore* (Singapore: Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore, 2000). Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: the West in the Eyes of Its Enemies* (New York [etc.]: The Penguin Press, 2004). Azizan Baharuddin and Faridah Noor Mohd Noor (eds.), *Occidentalism and Orientalism: Reflections of the East and the Perceptions of the West* (Kuala Lumpur: Centre for Civilisational Dialogue, 2008).

notions, and have raised more questions than they have answered. Said's conception of Orientalism has received critiques and responses from different perspectives, which has linked the study of Orientalism to the concept of, for example, post-colonialism.[73] But what concerns this research most is how Chinese intellectuals incorporated Orientalist discourses, in one way or another, into their own perceptions and imaginations of Chinese culture. In this respect, it is especially noteworthy to look into Arif Dirlik's characterization of "self-orientalization"[74] and Daniel Vukovich's description of "internalized Orientalism"[75].

Whereas Said points out that Orientalism represents a reductionist cultural construction that ignores local differences and suppresses local autonomy, Dirlik goes further to say that it has become more than just an intellectual instrument of imperialism, rather a way of re-ordering the world and a form of "intellectual imperialism" by itself.[76] The pervasiveness of Orientalism, in his opinion, owes partly to the active participation of "the Orientals" and, to be more specific, to their tendencies of self-orientalization. Dirlik uses the concept of "contact zone" to describe the colonial encounters where unequal exchanges were made and "the Orientals" actively absorbed, selected, invented, and used Western knowledge.[77] He argues that, despite their intention to overcome the oppositions of the past and the West and to create a new culture, their efforts could hardly escape the Orientalist perceptions being internalized.

According to such an interpretation, self-orientalization has become an integral part of the history of Orientalism. The West has been internalized in Asian consciousness; and Orientalist readings of Asia and East Asia have been reproduced by "the Orientals" themselves. Thus, Euro-American images of Asia may have been incorporated into the self-images of Asians, to such an extent that they bring the Asian "traditions" into question whether they were "invented" under the influence of Orientalist perceptions

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73 See, for example, Sucheta Mazumdar, Kaiwar Vasant and Thierry Labica (eds.), *From Orientalism to Postcolonialism: Asia, Europe and the Lineages of Difference* (London: Routledge, 2009).

74 Arif Dirlik, "Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism", *History and Theory*, Theme Issue 35: Chinese Historiography in Comparative Perspective, Vol. 35, No. 4 (1996), pp. 96-118: 104.

75 Daniel F. Vukovich, *China and Orientalism: Western Knowledge Production and the P.R.C* (London [etc.]: Routledge, 2011), p. 17.

76 Dirlik, "Chinese History and Orientalism", p. 98.

77 Dirlik, "Chinese History and Orientalism", p. 112.

of Asia.[78] To this end, Orientalist conceptions as a hegemonic power had no distinct geographical origin, not particularly or easily identifiable as Western, or Eastern.[79]

Similarly, Vukovich brings to light the internalization of Orientalist knowledge and perceptions by some Chinese people, in particular the "ethnically Chinese or main-land born Chinese" in the field of Sinology or China Studies who act as "the purveyors of Sinological Orientalism"[80]. He argues that the presumption of a Chinese cultural backwardness, the discourse of lack, and the perception of modern Chinese history as a tortuous path to normalcy, have all been produced not only by Orientalists, but also by Chinese themselves in an Orientalist fashion. This, he argues, is essentially the result of the global uneven production of knowledge.[81]

Vukovich also observes that this internalized Orientalism has a distinctive anti-official feature. To be more specific, many in China have incorporated Western criticism, or sometimes even Orientalist argumentation, into their own criticism of various sorts against the party-state. But on the other hand, what Vukovich did not point out is that Orientalist knowledge, images, and perceptions that cast an enchanting light on China have also been incorporated in Chinese self-perceptions, which are often in line with the official rhetoric. Therefore, internalized Orientalism as part of the profound influence of Western knowledge and conceptions does not necessarily lead to one specific school of thought or another: it is a phenomenon that can be observed in many different even contending visions of the country.

Knowledge and Perceptions: the Dilemma of Learning from the West

If we speak of an internalized Orientalism or a tendency of self-orientalization, how, and how much, has it influenced Chinese self-perceptions? Undoubtedly, since China encountered the modern West, almost all Western social and political theories, among others Social-Darwinism, nationalism, liberalism, and Marxism, have found reception in respective schools of thought in China. Chinese intellectuals, by using the lens of the Westerners, began to examine the relationship between the past and the present from a perspective that was radically different from the imperial outlook.

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78 Dirlik, "Chinese History and Orientalism", p. 104.
79 Dirlik, "Chinese History and Orientalism", p. 108.
80 Vukovich, *China and Orientalism*, p. 18.
81 Vukovich, *China and Orientalism*, pp. 17-21.

In terms of the relationship between Chinese and Western cultures, the late Qing and early Republican periods witnessed the rise and fall of a wide variety of schools of thought. From Zhang Zhidong's thesis of "Chinese learning as substance, Western learning as function", to Hu Shi's call for a "wholesale Westernization", intellectuals actively selected and absorbed from a pool of different Western theories and thought to adjust their image of the national Self–the nation's own past and tradition—and to promote their version of the future for Chinese culture.

Compared to a progressive and strong West, China was oftentimes placed at a relatively inferior position in the world of nations by advocates of Westernization. To them, the country's salvation lay in modernization, and Western knowledge was the only road to modernizing China into a strong nation. Social-Darwinism provided a ready tool to interpret the country's past critically, even to the extent to negate it. In the country's deep political and socio-cultural crisis, such a modernist framework, with its Orientalist epistemology and its implication of Western universalism, formed a discourse that few Chinese intellectuals could resist.

Thus, the movement of learning from the West has never been able to escape the intellectual and cultural dilemma of a late-comer to modernity. As previously noted, the outlook of ethnocentrism and nationalism usually perceives the in-group as superior, moral and strong; whereas in the case of Chinese encounters with the modern West, cultural reformers, however unwillingly, were forced to perceive the out-groups as superior and strong, with true and universal values, and at the same time viewing their own culture as inferior.

One way of making sense of this dilemma is Joseph Levenson's thesis of "history" and "value". According to Levenson, Chinese imperial worldviews maintained a harmony between history and value—the loyalty and emotional attachment to tradition on the one hand, and intellectual commitment to cultural tradition on the other. Yet Western intrusion created tension between these two, for the attachment to one's tradition, i.e. history, was confronted by intellectual alienation from it, as one began to see value elsewhere.[82] Therefore, to emotionally justify the departure from tradition, the nationalist replaced "culture" with "nation" as the proper unit of comparison, still with the hope to establish the cultural equivalence of China with the West.

[82] Joseph Levenson, "'History' and 'Value': The Tensions of Intellectual Choice in Modern China," in Arthur Wright (ed.), *Studies in Chinese Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 150.

An extreme form of alienation from one's own culture is cultural iconoclasm, which in this case was directed towards Confucian cultural tradition. In the eyes of many May Fourth "Westernized" intellectuals, Confucianism had nurtured a national character "detrimental to modernization".[83] In the same vein, "the second enlightenment" of the 1980s saw tendencies of Orientalist epistemology in *River Elegy*, which renders backward not just a reified native tradition, but its carriers—the people[84]. The metonymic reductionism in Orientalist perceptions has been apparent in the identification of China with Confucianism, despotism, bureaucratism, familism, or even with particular racial charactersitics, all of them traceable to Orientalist representations.[85]

Needless to say, perceptions of an inferior and backward national Self were formed in specific social settings, and ironically, often out of nationalistic urges to change the status-quo. Moreover, the authenticity of such self-perceptions should be called into question if one takes into account the cultural reformer's political ambition and subsequent strategy of social mobilization. However, it does not mean that their cultural and intellectual implications can be invalidated. As this research observes, Euro-American Orientalist perceptions and analytical frameworks remain a visible component in the formulation of the Chinese self-image and Chinese perceptions of the past.[86]

Yet again, however influential the tendency of self-orientalization might have been, it has to be pointed out that it is only one of the many parameters of the formation of self-perceptions. Aspiration for progress has given cultural modernization a high profile, with references to the West, and has for a long time rendered other cultural convictions into a more or less negative "conservatism"—a refusal towards changes. In this research, these cultural convictions will be discussed in more detail not only as different approaches to Western knowledge and perceptions, but also as different understandings of the meaning of the past.

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83 Tu Wei-ming, "Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center," in idem. (ed.), *The Living Tree: the Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 1-34: 27.

84 Dirlik, "Chinese History and Orientalism", p. 115.

85 Dirlik, "Chinese History and Orientalism", p. 107.

86 Dirlik, "Chinese History and Orientalism", p. 106.

1.5. The Presence of the Past: the Historical Dimension

The process of placing the Self in relation to the Other, is at the same time an appropriation of the nation's place in history, in its relations with the past. To put it in another way, the past can be seen as a second reference to compare the national Self with. In this process, the significance of the past is two-fold. Firstly, the past persists in the present as historical legacy in various forms, among which cultural tradition is undoubtedly one variety. It is the point of departure, if one believes in any form of historical continuity, from which the present sets its course, and upon which a sense of identity is based. Therefore, one can never speak of the understanding of the present without having a frame of reference set to the past.

Secondly, contemporary perceptions of the Self, if not an extension or revision of precedent identities, are at least heavily influenced by the undercurrent that has shaped them. In the case of Chinese perceptions, the ongoing debate around cultural identity not only constantly refers to historical events as having defined Chinese culture, but also makes use of history as a source of legitimacy.

Therefore, the significance of the past directs the study of self-perceptions and cultural identity back to the Qing Empire's early encounters with the modern West, when reflections on the imperial past began. This study argues that, since then, the past has been constantly revised and appropriated into perceptions of the present and imaginations for the future, notably with the West being incorporated into such self-perceptions; and previous revisions and appropriations of the past have also been continuously adjusted or even overthrown, which eventually leads to a diversified landscape of contemporary Chinese self-perceptions.

Culturalism to Nationalism: A Cultural Metamorphosis?

Imperial Chinese worldviews were characterized by the notion of *Tianxia* (all under Heaven) as the world, with the Chinese civilization at the center. The Middle Kingdom, perceived as the universal empire, was surrounded by babaric regions; the emperor was the embodiment of universal moral power claimed from Heaven. The empire was connected to other parts of the world through the tribute system, which suggested a formal, hierarchical inequality between the civilized and the barbaric.

Such a worldview, either called "synarchy under the treaties",[87] or a universal "culturalism",[88] or "hierarchical universality",[89] suggested a moral universalism of Chinese origin. The ideal Confucian world order was a manifestation of cosmological harmony; *Tianxia* was the regime of traditional culture, morality, and universal values.[90] In short, Chinese culturalism defined itself as the alternative to foreign babarism.[91]

The historical consciousness of China as a member of the family of nations was brought about by military and cultural challenges in the late Qing dynasty. Perceptions of China from within—one with China as the center of civilization—encountered Western perceptions of China as a stagnant Eastern empire in comparison with the modern West; and this encounter resulted in an unprecedented challenge towards the *Tianxia* worldview and the centrality of Confucianism as the universal moral value.

The adjustment of self-perceptions came hand in hand with an increasing awareness of the power and righteousness of other civilizations. The making of the nation was closely linked to the understanding of its place in relation with other powers, in the meantime informed by how it was perceived by other nations. With the imperial worldview severely challenged, as Levenson put it, "nationalism invades the Chinese scene as culturalism hopelessly gives way".[92] The "culturalism to nationalism" thesis described the traumatic transition from an imperial worldview to a modern nation-state identity. Social-Darwinist theory proclaimed the nation as the highest unit in the struggle for existence, and the loss of faith in the cultural tradition should not be lamented. Therefore, nationalism evolved as the competitor of culturalism, and eventually leading to the denial of culturalism.[93]

It is against such a background that Arthur Smith's *Chinese Characteristics* and the

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87 John Fairbank, "Synarchy Under the Treaties," in idem. (ed.) *Chinese Thoughts and Institutions* (Chicago and London: the University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 204-231.

88 Joseph Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate, Vol. 1: The Problem of Intellectual Continuity* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958).

89 Duara, "Nationalism and transnationalism", p. 7.

90 Levenson, *The Problem of Intellectual Continuity*, pp. 98-104. John Fairbank (ed.), *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968). C.P. Fitzgerald, *The Chinese View of Their Place in the World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

91 Joseph Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate, Vol. 2: The Problem of Monarchical Decay* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 170.

92 Levenson, *The Problem of Intellectual Continuity*, p. 104.

93 Levenson, "History and Value", pp. 150-152 & 170-173.

question of national character caught the attention of Chinese cultural reformers. The defeat in the 1895 Sino-Japanese War led to a negative interpretation of the nation's past, causing rather painful self-reflections. Nationalistic aspirations propelled intellectuals to opt for reforms not only in the military or industrial sense, but more fundamentally in the nation's political and cultural realms. The sceptical attitude towards the nation's cultural traditions was clearly demonstrated in the critiques of national character and the consequent calls to reform the nation's psychological make-up.

Whereas the usefulness of cultural tradition, in particular Confucianism, was questioned, the movement of learning from the West also invoked its countercurrent to seek other ways to deal with what Levenson calls the tension between history and value, or what Dirlik describes as the oppositions between the past and the West. Such a countercurrent, manifested as an intellectual urge to safeguard tradition, is interpreted by Levenson as being prompted by an emotional and nationalistic attachment to history while assuming a compelling and rational scepticism towards the value of tradition.

This interpretation is limited in a way that it does not represent cultural pluralism, for the cultural pluralist's plea for preservation of a national essence or spirit is not just nationalistic, but rather based on his belief in the value of tradition and the co-existence of different cultures.[94] In the eyes of these cultural pluralists, the past should never be arbitrarily negated, with or without its supposed opposition—the West.

Admittedly, as Tu Weiming rightly pointed out, Levenson's analysis was not intended to exclude the possibility that "an original thinker in modern China might still find meaning in the Confucian tradition not only for emotional gratification but also for intellectual identification."[95] Yet, the concept of "culturalism" has been questioned for its incapability to distinguish itself as a form of identification different from ethnic or national ones.[96] James Townsend also pointed out that the thesis might have over-stated the dominance of culturalism in imperial times, and overlooked the crisis of political authority in the modern era.[97]

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[94] Axel Schneider, "Reconciling History with the Nation? Historicity, National Particularity, and the Question of Universals," *Historiography East and West*, Vol.1 (2003), pp. 117-136.

[95] See Tu Wei-Ming, "Hsiung Shih-li's Quest for Authentic Existence," in Charlotte Furth (ed.), *The Limits of Change*, pp. 242-275: 245.

[96] Duara, "De-Constructing the Chinese Nation", p. 2.

[97] Townsend, "Chinese Nationalism", pp. 123-124.

In what has been described as a paradigm shift from culturalism to nationalism, it remains to be debated whether the crisis of cultural identity has led to such a fundamental challenge towards the belief in tradition that a cultural metamorphosis has been triggered. However, the rise of Chinese nationalism since the late Qing period was a significant phenomenon without question. It is also a widely noted phenomenon that this nationalism was characteristically accompanied by a cultural iconoclasm and anti-traditionalism (*fan chuantong zhuyi*) such as demonstrated in the 1919 May Fourth Movement.[98]

Appropriation of the Past: Anti-traditionalism and Its Counter-current

In the negotiation of the relationship between the past and the West, many May Fourth intellectuals, in order to rescue the nation from foreign instrusion, opted for "useful" Western knowledge rather than traditional wisdom that was deemed no longer able to help them realize their nationalistic dreams. Between the two Others, the search of the Self resulted in an apparent preference for the Western Other in the cultural imagination for the nation's future. It seemed that the past as the sacred tradition was not only debunked, but also had to be negated in order for the new Self to be born.

A negative attitude towards the past, or anti-traditionalism, has never been a particular Chinese phenomenon. In fact, it was an integral part of the European Enlightenment. Anti-traditionalism, together with its dialectic reactions of various sorts, have been described by Benjamin Schwartz as a spectrum of "the triad of conservatism/liberalism/radicalism" in European cultural scenes.[99] This contested description has found its way in the understanding of Chinese intellectual thoughts. Intellectual attitudes towards the past—cultural tradition in general and Confucianism in particular—have been employed as a key criteria to identify different schools of thought and to place them within the same spectrum of conservatism/liberalism/radicalism.

At one end of this spectrum, anti-traditionalism was a cultural standpoint taken by most May Fourth nationalists. Such an attitude was closely linked to the movement of learning from the West in two ways. While in the Chinese cultural and intellectual

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[98] See Lin Yusheng, *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditionalism in the May Fourth Era* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979).

[99] Schwartz, "Notes on Conservatism", p. 5.

traditions, the precedent had always enjoyed a respectful status as the model for the present; in the May Fourth era, it was replaced by the West as an exemplar for the present Self. The past, then, was viewed with a sense of disappointment and even resentment. Secondly, among all schools of Western thought available to Chinese intellectuals, the Englightenment mentality, with its inherent negative attitude towards the past, was the major part of what they selected and absorbed.

Against this background, the critical examination of tradition gave rise to the question of national character. In the eyes of cultural reformers, the people are bearers of national characteristics; and for the sake of national survival, they should be called upon to renew themselves and to reform the national character completely. Studies have shown such a point of view in the cultural proposals of, for example, Chen Duxiu, one of the leading May Fourth intellectuals.[100]

At the other end of the spectrum, for those held on to historical continuity of one way or another, it was nothing but a suicidal act to condemn the national character, the national essence, or the national spirit—if all the past had been meaningless, the national life and existence itself became meaningless as well. In terms of the question of national character, the refusal of these intellectuals to attribute social and political problems to cultural tradition is expressed through their pleas to preserve the national essence, or the national spirit.

Chinese intellectuals with a conservative attitude towards the past have been placed on the cultural spectrum as conservatives. However, although they share many characteristics with Western conservatives, to whom the triad spectrum had been applied originally, it is questionable whether the label of conservatism is able to capture their differences with their Western counterparts. For instance, although they were generally specific about which cultural elements are to be preserved, unlike Western conservatives who usually approve of the prevailing sociopolitical status quo, as Schwartz noted, they often become vague or highly selective in approving of the current sociopolitical order as a whole.[101] In this sense, it can be said that modern Chinese conservatism is largely cultural and not sociopolitical conservatism. Moreover, modern Chinese conservatism is associated with a nationalism that is much more dominant than the nationalism usually implied in Western conservatism: it is

[100] See Lin Yusheng, *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness*.
[101] Schwartz, "Notes on Conservatism", p. 16.

accompanied by intensive emotions such as pride and frustration.[102]

Yet the most fundamental problematic of the term conservatism in describing intellectual perceptions against anti-traditionalism is that, for many labelled under the rubric of conservatism, their belief in cultural tradition and historical continuity has been more existential than nationalistic. So-called conservative intellectuals, such as Xiong Shili (1885-1968) and Liang Shuming (1893-1988), were primarily concerned with issues of human existence as modern individuals.[103] This applies to intellectuals associated with the Guocui school,[104] for instance, Zhang Taiyan (1868-1936)[105], as well as the Xueheng school,[106] such as historian Liu Yizheng (1880-1956).[107]

Therefore, it has to be noted that their conservative approaches do not necessarily indicate a reject of change, but rather a "conservative approach to cultural continuity".[108] Chen Yinke, for one, firmly believed in a "continuity by change".[109] Such a way of interpreting the past, consciously or not, should be read as attempts to open up possibilities of imagining alternative modernities beyond the Western model.

Thus, the counter-current of anti-traditionalism should not simply be dealt with as a form of conservatism. Taking into account the international dimension and the historical dimension, it would be more precise to study the rejection of anti-traditionalism in the light of cultural nationalism.

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[102] Schwartz, "Notes on Conservatism", p. 16.

[103] See Tu Wei-Ming, "Hsiung Shih-li's Quest", p. 249. Guy Alitto, *The Last Confucian: Liang Shuming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity* (Berkeley [etc.]; London: University of California Press, 1979).

[104] See Tze-Ki Hon, *Revolution as Restoration:* Guocui xuebao *and Chinese Nationalist Modernity* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011).

[105] See Viren Murthy, "Equalization as Difference: Zhang Taiyan's Buddhist-Daoist Response to Modern Politics," *IIAS Newsletter*, June 2007, pp. 24-25. Viren Murthy, "The Politics of Fengjian in Late Qing and Early Republican China," in Kai-wing Chow, Tze-ki Hon and Hung-yok Ip (eds.), *Modernities as Local Practices, Nationalism, and Cultural Production: Deconstructing the May-Fourth Paradigm on Modern China* (Lexington Books, 2008). Viren Murthy, *The Political Philosophy of Zhang Taiyan: the Resistance of Consciousness* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

[106] See Tze-Ki Hon, "From Babbitt to 'Bai Bide': Interpretations of New Humanism in *Xueheng*," in Tze-Ki Hon (co-edited with Kai-wing Chow, Hung-yok Ip, and Don C. Price), *Beyond the May Fourth Paradigm: In Search of Chinese Modernity* (Lexington Books, 2008).

[107] See Schneider, "History and Ethics", pp. 12-19.

[108] Laurence Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang and China's New History* (Berkeley, CA [etc.]: University of California Press, 1971), p. 33.

[109] Schneider, "Between Dao and History", p. 70.

The Meaning of the Confucian Revival

Returning to the reform era, the search for a cultural identity has gone through dramatic changes in terms of the attitude towards the past. Critical examinations of traditional culture in the 1980s were reflected in the discourse of national character, which questioned the usefulness of the past. And the 1990s witnessed an intellectual and cultural twist that has given rise to a counter-current of anti-traditionalism.

Many have attempted to interpret this recent return of Confucianism and cultural tradition in China. One of the most important intellectuals involved in the "Confucian revival", Tu Weiming, contends that it is to be explained in the relationship between the center and periphery of a cultural China. His notion of "cultural China" is comprised of three symbolic universes: the first includes cultural and ethnic Chinese in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, the second includes the Chinese diaspora around the world, i.e. overseas Chinese (*hua qiao*), and the third consists of foreigners who understand China intellectually and have shaped the international discourse on cultural China.

Tu Weiming argues that within these three symbolic universes of cultural China, the center is weakened. That is, the historical and cultural center—so-called "China proper"—of mainland China has become less legitimate and increasingly incapable of representing Chinese culture, due to its political nationalism and cultural iconoclasm. The other sense of the weakened center is that intellectuals in "China proper" have lost their bearings as cultural transmitters, and have been marginalized from the center of the political arena.[110] At the same time, the periphery—intellectuals outside "China proper"—have shaped the changing landscape of cultural China and even taken the leading role in the intellectual discourse. However, owing to cultural root-seeking and de-politicized debate on a global scale, as he believes, there has been fruitful interaction between Confucian humanism and democratic liberalism in cultural China.

Based on this thesis, Tu observes the return of interests in tradition and Confucianism with a sense of optimism. He sees the question of cultural identity, or the meaning of being Chinese, as "a human concern pregnant with ethical-religious implications".[111] This ethical-religious humanism embodied in Confucianism might challenge the

[110] Tu, "Cultural China", p. 6.
[111] Tu, "Cultural China", p. 34.

Enlightenment mentality of the modern West, and its religiousness and transcendence to challenge instrumental rationality.

Tu's concept of cultural China was questioned by Arif Dirlik who suspects that it reduces diversity and differences within local cultures. What is more, Dirlik believes Tu's efforts to transplant an alien culture elsewhere resemble the "missionary" ambition with a risk of overthrowing one cultural hegemony while substituting it with another.[112] The thesis of cultural center and periphery seems also problematic to Dirlik, for, if one looks at the global picture, Tu's cultural periphery is very much empowered by the global cultural center—the West.[113]

While Dirlik seems to suggest that Confucian revival could be seen as native culture against cultural hegemony with its indigenous subjectivity, yet the self-assertiveness of "the Orientals" against Western domination might also consolidate Western ideological hegemony by internalizing the historical assumptions of Orientalism, discussed earlier as self-orientalization. As Dirlik contends, Orientalism persists even within its rejection as long as the assertiveness of autonomous values are still confined by the temporalities and spatialities of a Eurocentric conceptualization of the world.[114] Alternatively, Dirlik proposes to "restore full historicity" to the understanding of the past and the present, historicity that is "informed by the complexity of everyday life which accounts for diversity in space and time".[115] To him, alternative modernities have to take as the point of departure a present of concrete everyday cultural practices.

Undoubtedly, the implications of the Confucian revival are to be explored not simply in the cultural realm, but by taking into consideration its social and political context. Yet if we focus on the question of cultural identity, the Confucian revival can certainly be described as a counter-discourse of national character.

While the national character discourse helds cultural tradition responsible for the country's lack of development, Confucianism has returned to the spotlight with a much more optimistic color—it has been seen as the most remarkable source to the search of a cultural identity. If the national character discourse has set its reference to the West, arguing along a universalist line, Confucian revival emphasizes the significance of tradition in its own right, which coincides with the global search for particularity.

[112] Dirlik, "Chinese History and Orientalism", p. 109.
[113] Dirlik, "Chinese History and Orientalism", pp. 115-116.
[114] Dirlik, "Culture Against History?", pp. 184-185.
[115] Dirlik, "Chinese History and Orientalism", p. 118.

Consequently, whereas critiques of national character have been accompanied by a sense of self-loathing, tradition seems to have come back with resumed glory and pride.

The meaning of Confucian revival will be studied in this research with the assistance of theoretical assumptions, such as the ones of Tu and Dirlik, and more importantly, within "China proper" and by restoring its "full historicity". This is because the voices from the alledgedly Chinese cultural center are almost absent from the global center of intellectual discourse, and studies of such voices are rarely seen in English language researches on Chinese cultural identity.

Using the discourse of national character as its entry point, this research aims to fill in this gap by exploring the dynamics of Chinese self-perceptions through the cultural imaginations of representative intellectuals, thereby shedding light on the complexity of cultural forces behind the seemingly paradoxical search for a Chinese identity.

1.6. Dissertation Structure

Chapter One introduces the central question and the key concepts around the question, such as national character, nationalism and national identity. It explains how I define them in the present research, as well as my approach to answer the question(s), by outlining the main theoretical and empirical resources.

By taking *Chinese Characteristics* as the point of departure, Chapter Two offers a close examination of the national character discourse at the end of the 19th and early 20th century. Through the analysis of Smith's critiques, this chapter introduces the most important features of Western perceptions of Chinese culture. It then traces the development of such a discourse within the Chinese context by studying the ideal personality as imagined by Liang Qichao, one of the two most important advocates of national character reforms of Smith's time. Liang's cultural proposal provides an ideal case to study the multifold rationales and dynamics of intellectual visions, both of his own and those of his successors, for the nation and its place in the world.

The next three chapters deal with Chinese self-perceptions in the reform era by studying three different attitudes towards national character, cultural tradition and Confucianism. Chapter Three discusses the critiques of national character by placing

them in their historical and international contexts. Chapter Four and Five turn to the cultural standpoints opposing the discourse of national character, and examine two forms of rejection to anti-traditionalism and the self-negation mentality as represented by two mainland scholars respectively.

Chapter Three analyzes how perceptions of the national Self were influenced by imginations of the Western Other through two cases: *Wolf Totem* and the thoughts of the popular cultural critic Wang Xiaofeng. To provide a historical context to the contemporary discourse of national character, it goes on to study the anti-traditional critical inquiries of the 1980s, such as *River Elegy*, and link them to those of the May Fourth Movement. Furthermore, this chapter also explores the relationship between the negation of tradition and the belief in the universality of Western cultural values, and in doing so, offers an international dimension to the understanding of Chinese discourse of national character.

The first form of rejection to the discourse of national character is analyzed by studying the cultural viewpoints of philosopher Chen Lai, a scholar of Confucian philosophy and thought. In Chapter Four, his perception of Chinese culture is unfolded in his defence of Confucianism as a way of holding up to a sort of cultural and historical continuity. Chen Lai points to the theoretical flaws in the concept of national character and offers his own interpretation of the cultural phenomenom targeted by cultural critics. He also promotes a "cultural subjectivity" (*wenhua de zhutixing*) to counter the "inferiority complex" that he detects from Chinese cultural critiques analyzed earlier in this research.

Similarly, historian Qin Hui also rejects the national character discourse and views Confucianism as a positive cultural legacy. Yet he does so from a perspective that is rather different from that of Chen Lai's. Regarded by himself and many others as a firm believer of liberalism, Qin refutes the employment of the national character concept in socio-historical and cultural studies, for he sees it as a sort of "cultural determinism". Chapter Five analyzes how he, from the standpoint of a liberal cultural pluralist, argues against a liberal universalist view of Chinese culture and how he tries to combine liberalism and Confucianism in his vision of Chinese culture.

Finally, Chapter Six concludes with the findings from previous chapters and further demonstrates that various attitudes towards the discourse of national character reflect contending visions of the country's cultural present and future. The tension among

such different perceptions suggests that the century-old quest for a cultural identity remains an ongoing process influenced by both historical and international factors.

Chapter 2. *Chinese Characteristics* and the National Character Discourse

Because of its long-lasting influence, American missionary Arthur Smith's 1894 book *Chinese Characteristics*[116] deserves particular attention in the analysis of the discourse of national character. Among numerous English-language publications on China, it was seen as the most systematic monograph ever written on the Chinese national character. Until the 1920s, it was still one of the five most read books among foreigners in China, [117] enjoying a wide circulation in China-related communities in the U.S and other countries.

More importantly, its influence has extended beyond the English-speaking world. After the initial publication in 1894, it was soon translated into many other languages. The Japanese translation appeared as early as in 1896,[118] which coincided with Japanese discussions on Chinese national character around the 1895 Sino-Japanese war. In the two decades after the war, Japan had become the principal source of inspiration for new Chinese ideas,[119] with a large number of overseas Chinese students and political exiles there who later became leading intellectuals in cultural and political movements. Among them were the two most prominent advocates of national character reforms, Liang Qichao (1873-1929) and Lu Xun (1881-1936).

Lu Xun's critiques of the Chinese national character and national defects (*liegen xing*), first appearing in his *A Madman's Diary* (1918), were most notably represented in his fiction *The True Story of Ah Q* (1921-22),[120] in which he, "with unprecedented harshness",[121] depicted the Chinese national character through the image of a peasant

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[116] Arthur Smith, *Chinese Characteristics* (New York: Revell, 1894).

[117] See Huang Xingtao 黄兴涛, "Meiguo chuanjiaoshi Ming'Enpu jiqi zhongguoren de qizhi" 美国传教士明恩溥及其中国人的气质 in *Zhongguoren de qizhi* 中国人的气质 (Beijing: zhonghua shuju, 2006), p. 23. Original citation: *Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal*, 1925, Vol.56, pp. 299-305.

[118] See footnote 24.

[119] Philip C. Huang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Modern Chinese Liberalism* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1972), p. 44.

[120] For the most recent version of these two stories, see Lu Xun, translated by Julia Lovell, *The Real Story of Ah-Q and Other Tales of China: The Complete Fiction of Lu Xun* (London: Penguin, 2009).

[121] Gloria Davies, "The Problematic Modernity of Ah Q", *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, Vol.13 (1991), pp.57-76: 58.

protagonist. Many studies have analyzed his thought on, and critiques of, the national character,[122] and most recently a collection of his works was published on this specific subject.[123]

Research shows that Lu read the Japanese translation of *Chinese Characteristics* in 1903,[124] and suggests a rather considerable influence of Smith's book on Lu's critiques.[125] As Lu Xun believed that a nation indulging in complacency was bound to be caught in crisis, he had taken Smith's criticism as a mirror to reflect on the pitfalls in traditional culture. It was with this belief that he wrote in 1936:

> *Until today I have been hoping that someone would translate Shi Misi (Smith)'s* Chinese Characteristics. *To read these (criticism), and to do introspection, to analyze, to know which points where right, to reform, to struggle, to do our own homework..., then to prove what on earth are Chinese.*[126]

Lu Xun has played many important roles in modern Chinese cultural and intellectual history, and being a representative critic of the national character is unmistakenably one of them. In comparison, whereas Lu Xun has been recognized as a leading figure in promoting national character reforms, Liang Qichao has not been studied as much of

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[122] See Bao Jing 鲍晶 (ed.) *Lu Xun guominxing sixiang taolunji* 鲁迅国民性思想讨论集 (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1982). Zheng Xinmiao 郑欣淼, *Wenhua pipan yu guominxing gaizao* 文化批判与国民性改造 (Xi'an: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1988). Zhang Mengyang 张梦阳, *Wuxing yu nuxing: Lu Xun yu zhongguo zhishifenzi de guominxing* 悟性与奴性:鲁迅与中国知识分子的"国民性" (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1997). Lydia Liu, "Translating National Character: Lu Xun and Arthur Smith," in idem. *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995). pp. 45-76. Leo Ou-Fan Lee, "Literature on the Eve of Revolution: Reflections on Lu Xun's Leftist Years, 1927-1936," *Modern China* (1976), pp. 277-326.

[123] Lu Xun 鲁迅, edited by Mo Luo 摩罗 and Yang Fan 杨帆, *Yueliang de hanguang—Lu Xun guominxing pipan wenxuan* 月亮的寒光——鲁迅国民性批判文选 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2011).

[124] Zhang Mengyang 张梦阳, "Zaiban houji" 再版后记, in Smith, Zhongguoren dexing 中国人德行 (Beijing: xin shijie chubanshe, 2005), p. 247.

[125] See Lydia Liu, "Translating National Character". Also see articles on this subject: Tang Tao 唐弢, "Jiujing zenyang de shi Zhongguoren?" 究竟怎样的是中国人 in Smith, *Zhongguoren dexing*, pp. 1-4. Huang Xingtao, "Meiguo chuanjiaoshi", pp. 24-26. Mo Luo, *Zhongguo de tengtong*, pp. 145-212.

[126] Lu Xun 鲁迅, "Qiejieting zawen mobian lici cunzhao 3" 且介亭杂文末编"立此存照"(三), in *Lu Xun quanji* 鲁迅全集 (Beijing: renmin wenxue cubanshe, 1981), p. 426.

a critic of national character but as a prominent historican, journalist and political reformer in Chinese intellectual history. In fact, except for a recent collection of Liang's work on the matter, there is no academic research available on his ideas of the national character.[127]

This chapter will examine Liang's conception of Chinese national character as revealed in his thesis of "new people" (*xin min*), and explore the relations between what he imagined as the ideal personality for a new nation and Smith's understanding of the Chinese national character. As Liang's "new people" thesis later became one of the sources of inspiration for the May Fourth cultural critics and their contemporary followers, it has its unique significance in the study of Chinese self-perceptions.

Departing from *Chinese Characteristics* as a part of 19th century missionary view of China, the following questions will be answered: what made Smith's account of the Chinese national character so popular among foreigners in China at the time, and how did Chinese intellectuals, such as Liang Qichao, perceive and act upon such foreign perceptions?

This discussion provides the context of an interesting phenomenon a century later, when, despite the obviously politically incorrect racial and religious antagonism when viewed from today, *Chinese Characteristics* once again drew wide attention in and outside of China. It was reprinted in the U.S. in 2003[128] and in U.K. in 2011.[129] More intriguingly, as mentioned in the introduction, fourteen different editions were published in China in the years between 1991 and 2010. What are the implications of its return—why has it re-appeared in the 21st century China? By introducing the historical dimension, this chapter is in a way also probing into the question as to why the discourse of national character and the issues around cultural reforms, having evolved since the time of Smith, Liang and Lu, remain relevant to contemporary Chinese self-perceptions and the search for a cultural identity.

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[127] Liang Qichao 梁启超, edited by Mo Luo 摩罗 and Yang Fan 杨帆, *Taiyang de langzhao—Liang Qichao guominxing yanjiu wenxuan* 太阳的朗照——梁启超国民性研究文选 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2011).

[128] Published by White Plains, New York: East Bridge, 2003.

[129] Published by British Library, Historical Print Editions, 2011.

2.1. *Chinese Characteristics* and Its Critique on Chinese National Character

Arthur Smith arrived in China in 1872 and spent over five decades in a village in Shandong Province. Among his many publications on Chinese language and culture, *Chinese Characteristics* was the most influential book that made him one of the most well-known China missionaries of his time. This book described 26 characteristics of the Chinese people, including their obsession with "face", the "absence of nerves", the lack of public spirit, conservatism, and so on.[130] Full of interesting observations, witty comments, and exotic anecdotes of the author's experience of Chinese village life, the book is an enjoyable literary read.

With respect to Chinese social life, Smith noticed a number of pleasant characteristics of the people around him, such as their "content and cheerfulness", "benevolence", and "mutual responsibility"; at the same time, he also described many other less appealing traits, including their "disregard of time" or "accuracy", their "talent for indirection", and "indifference to comfort and convenience". Some of these characteristics appeared rather contradictory to Smith. For instance, he discovered that the Chinese share a feature of "flexible inflexibility", and many of them demonstrated a curious combination of benevolence and the "absence of sympathy".[131]

Thus, many of those puzzling traits, seen by Smith as traits of the Chinese nation and as clearly distinct from those of the Anglo-Saxon people, made the Chinese people "a bundle of contradictions who cannot be understood at all".[132] As a 19th century missionary stationed in the East, Smith could not help but conclude that, despite all the "content and cheerfulness", eventually "Chinese happiness is all on the outside" and "there are no homes in Asia".[133]

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[130] A complete list of all 26 characteristics contains: (1) Face, (2) Economy, (3) Industry, (4) Politeness, (5) Disregard of Time, (6) Disregard of Accuracy, (7) Talent for Misunderstanding, (8) Talent for Indirection, (9) Flexible Inflexibility, (10) Intellectual Turbidity, (11) Absence of Nerves, (12) Contempt for Foreigners, (13) Absence of Public Spirit, (14) Conservatism, (15) Indifference to Comfort and Convenience, (16) Physical Vitality, (17) Patience and Perseverance, (18) Content and Cheerfulness, (19) Filial Piety, (20) Benevolence, (21) Absence of Sympathy, (22) Social Typhoons, (23) Mutual Responsibility and Respect for Law, (24) Mutual Suspicion, (25) Absence of Sincerity, (26) Polytheism, Pantheism, Atheism.

[131] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, chapter 9, 20, and 21.

[132] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, pp. 10-11.

[133] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, p. 318.

Aside from the Chinese life he witnessed and experienced, when it came to the more sophisticated socio-psychological mindset behind it, Smith drew a few conclusions from his almost anthropoligical observations. In a chapter called "Conservatism", he described a lack of motivation for progress in Chinese society. As he wrote, "the unquestioned superiority of the ancients rests upon the firm basis of the recognised inferiority of those who come after them".[134] It is believed that a "conservative instinct" had led the Chinese to "attach undue importance to precedent" and to "depreciate the present time".[135]

It was such a conservative nature, this unwillingness to change, even for what is apparently to Smith the better, that caused the impossibility to improve the way of governance:

> *The Chinese government is by no means incapable of being blown over, but it is a cube, and when it capsizes, it simply falls upon some other face, and to external appearance, as well as to interior substance, is the same that it has always been...To suggest improvements would be the rankest heresy.*[136]

As such, Chinese conservatism did not only hinder the country from progressing, it had also negatively affected the Chinese interactions with the outside world. As Smith noted, "the present attitude of China towards the lands of the West is an attitude of procrastination".[137] While making diligent efforts to understand the nation, Smith noted a total lack of interest in Western culture from Chinese people. Though being sure of the superiority of his own civilization, he was often frustrated when such a sense of superiority was met with Chinese indifference, or even disrespect. In the chapter "Contempt for foreigners", Smith commented on the Chinese unwillingness to acknowledge the superiority of Western Christian civilization:

> *The normal attitude of the Chinese mind...towards foreigners, is not one of respect...The particulars in which we consider ourselves to be unquestionably superior to the Chinese do not make upon them the impression which we should expect, and which we could desire* [...]. *The Chinese do not wish (though they be forced to take) foreign*

[134] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, p. 117.
[135] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, p. 123.
[136] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, p. 117.
[137] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, p. 122.

> *models for anything whatever. They care nothing for sanitation, for ventilation, nor for physiology* [...]. *Western nations, taken as a whole, do not impress educated Chinese with a sense of the superiority of such nations to China* [...].[138]

While Smith agreed with the English scholar James Legge that "the moral condition of England is higher than that of China", he discovered that the Chinese were utterly surprised by such an opinion. Thus, he concluded, the typical Chinese scholarly feeling towards foreigners, especially Westerners, was "jealous contempt" and "condescension".[139]

The Chinese indifference to things new and foreign, together with their inscrutability, made it very difficult for any form of foreign interaction. This situation, as Smith believed, was further worsened by the Chinese "talent for misunderstanding":

> *All Chinese are gifted with an instinct for taking advantage of misunderstanding ...Foreign intercourse with China...was one long illustration of the Chinese talent...The history of foreign diplomacy with China is largely a history of attempted explanations of matters which have been deliberately misunderstood*.[140]

Bearing in mind the religious and socio-cultural background of Smith's account, which I will discuss in detail below, it is not surprising that *Chinese Characteristics* was comprised of comparisons between the Chinese and the Anglo-Saxons, the Orientals and the Occidentals, Confucianism and Christianity, which without exception concluded with the superiority of "us"—not just the Anglo-Saxons, but also the Europeans, the West, which are, despite all their differences, gathered together at the side of Christendom. On the other side, the murky image of Chinese people was comprised of physical and mental torpidity, indifference and disinterest, an almost lifeless nation that was trapped in its own past:

> *The face of every Western land is towards the dawning morning of the future, while the face of China is always and everywhere towards the darkness of the remote past*.[141]

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[138] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, pp. 99 &103-105.
[139] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, pp. 105-106.
[140] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, p. 61.
[141] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, p. 320.

Smith's image of Chinese people was confirmed and rationalized by his thesis on human character. He believed that the real character of any human being could be discovered by looking at his three relations: to himself, to his fellow-men, and to the object of his worship. In the case of China, Smith's answers to these three questions were, respectively: an absence of sincerity, an absence of altruism, and a polytheist, a pantheist, and an agnostic.[142] Thus came the logical conclusion of his thesis:

> *What the Chinese lack is not intellectual ability. It is not patience, practicality, nor cheerfulness, for in all these qualities they greatly excel. What they do lack is Character and Conscience...The needs of China...are few. They are only Character and Conscience. Nay, they are but one, for Conscience is Character.*[143]

To answer the question as to why Chinese people lack character and conscience, Smith then looked to Confucianism for explanation:

> *The forces of Confucianism have had an abundant time in which to work out their ultimate results. And after a patient survey of all that China has to offer, the most friendly critic is compelled, reluctantly and sadly, to coincide in the verdict, "The answer to Confucianism is China."*[144]

And that answer—the state of being of the Chinese nation as a result of the working of Confucianism—was apparently not satisfactory to Smith. Therefore, as indigenous Confucianism had failed to produce a better nation, and the conservative forces were so strong, it seemed to be necessary to have "some force from without" to reform China.[145] He went on to argue, "If China is to be reformed, it will not be done by diplomacy".[146] Instead, the answer to China's problems is apparently also Christianity, for "character and conscience in the Anglo-Saxon race came with Christianity, grew with Christianity"[147]:

> *The fairest fruit of Christian civilisation is in the beautiful lives which it produces. They are not rare* […]*.We have no wish to be unduly*

[142] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, p. 316.
[143] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, p. 320.
[144] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, p. 321.
[145] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, p. 324.
[146] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, p. 325.
[147] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, p. 329.

> *sceptical, but after repeated and prolonged consideration of the subject, it is our deliberate conviction that if the forces which make the lives of the Chinese what they are were to produce one such character* [...]*, that would be a moral miracle greater than any or all that are recorded in the books of Taoist fables* […].[148]

With the "weak points in the national character"[149] being identified, the Chinese nation, if were to develop character and conscience, had to learn her morals from Christianity, as Smith concluded. Therefore, on the one hand, he urged the Chinese to take lessons of those "who are more concerned in exploiting China than teaching her morals";[150] on the other hand, he warned his fellow Christian Anglo-Saxons: "In the rivalry which will then ensue, Christian civilization will have to win its way among a sceptical and ingenious people, by making it manifest that a faith which reaches to heaven furnishes better guarantees for public and private morality than one which does not rise above the earth."[151]

Smith's observation of Chinese society and culture, though with a considerable anthropological twist, should be read as a typical account from a 19th century missionary. Although he claimed that his book was "of purpose not intended to represent the point of view of a missionary, but that of an observer not consciously prejudiced"[152], he was not able to perceive China beyond the missionary perspective but saw it as a subject of Christian enlightenment. For instance, while Smith contended that "it is not assumed that the Chinese need Christianity at all", he nevertheless stated that "if it appears that there are grave defects in their character, it is a fair question how those defects may be remedied."[153]

Contrary to his own disclaimer, his narratives of China were not of an observer without prejudice, but of a superior Anglo-Saxon, Westerner, Christian, curiously facing a people in need of Christian enlightenment. As he admitted, "anyone who wishes well to mankind" would be of interest to know "how so vast a part of the human race may be improved".[154] Such missionary approach towards a foreign culture reveals a

[148] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, pp. 320-321.
[149] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, p. 317.
[150] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, p. 325.
[151] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, pp. 14-15.
[152] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, p. 14.
[153] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, p. 14-15.
[154] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, p. 15.

tendency to ignore "what they are" or "what they want to be", and to place an overwhelming emphasis on "what we want them to be". Within a racial, moral and religious antagonistic framework, once such an endeavor as to "improve them" was proven to be difficult, Smith's sense of superiority became substituted by a sense of fear. His fear of the "yellow race" was quite visible in the book, when he asked the following rhetorical question:

> *Which is the best adapted to survive in the struggles of the twentieth century, the "nervous" European, or the tireless, all-pervading, and phlegmatic Chinese?*[155]

Though Smith's book was later viewed as the "most distorted description of Chinese life and culture ever to appear in the United States",[156] the racial and religious superiority demonstrated in it was not a novelty in his time, nor was his contempt for the local culture, or his paternalistic feeling towards the people. His "missionary mind"—a combination of arrogance and fear, contempt and paternalism—had in its bearings in the long history of European and American Christian missions in China, and it kept playing an important role in American dealings with China in the century that followed, which will be discussed later. But before we turn to that subject, we shall place Smith's narratives in their historical and global context, in the light of Orientalism and Western perceptions of China.

2.2. Context of *Chinese Characteristics*: Western Perceptions of China

Smith's perception of the Chinese national character was only one example of the many layers of Western perceptions accumulated up to his time. Dating back to Marco Polo's time, missionaries and a few travelers were the main source of information when it came to knowledge of foreign lands. In the case of China, their publications and correspondence with intellectuals back in Europe greatly influenced European perceptions of the vast and unknown empire.

The intellectual concepts, having formed through such channels, then founded the theoretical framework for scholarly knowledge of the nation in the following centuries, until later when diplomats and intellectuals joined missionaries in setting feet in the

[155] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, pp. 96-97.

[156] Robert McClellan, *The Heathen Chinee: A Study of American Attitudes toward China, 1890-1905* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971), p. 7.

East and becoming key opinion- makers of related matters. Following that, with the increasing influence of print media on popular culture, literature and news reports became the major producers of perceptions of China and the Chinese people in the 19th century.

Studies have shown many aspects of European and American perceptions of China around Smith's time.[157] This research does not aim to provide yet another comprehensive analysis of perceptions of China, nor does it assume that such analysis is to be conducted without considerable generalization and simplification. Yet for the purpose of presenting the historical and cultural context of Smith's text as part of the discourse of Chinese national character, a few distinguishable features of Western perceptions of China are to be identified.

By looking into the writings of important opinion-makers, in particular intellectuals, this research will first highlight some phases in Western perceptions. They are in no way the only conceptions in a certain period, but instead represent the prevailing attitudes towards China and Chinese people of the time. None of these notions and images can replace another; they might have prevailed at one time, and at other times, faded into the background for a new dominant image.

1) From the Mighty Kingdom to a Stagnant Empire

European Jesuits and merchants painted the first strokes of the image of China for their readers back home. They traveled to the unknown empire to propagate Christian ideas, or to discover a new world with exotic products. Through constant correspondences with intellectuals back in Europe, they greatly contributed to increasing knowledge about China. The Jesuits, in an effort to justify missionary causes in the East,

[157] See, for example, Mary Gertrude Mason, *Western Concepts of China and the Chinese, 1840-1876* (New York: Seeman Printery, 1939). Raymond Dawson, *The Chinese Chameleon: An Analysis of European Conceptions of Chinese Civilization* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967). Colin Mackerras, *Western Images of China* (Hong Kong [etc.]: Oxford University Press, 1989). Jonathan Goldstein, Jerry Israel, and Hilary Conroy (eds.), *America Views China: American Images of China Then and Now* (Lehigh University Press, 1991). Zhou Ning 周宁, *Long de huanxiang—Zhongguo xingxiang: xifang de xueshuo yu chuanshuo* 龙的幻象——中国形象：西方的学说与传说 (Beijing: xueyuan chubanshe, 2004). Yang Ruisong 杨瑞松, *Bingfu, huanghuo yu shuishi: xifang shiye de Zhongguo xingxiang yu jindai zhongguo guozu lunshu xiangxiang* 病夫、黄祸与睡狮：“西方”视野的中国形象与近代中国国族论述想象 (Taibei: zhengda chubanshe, 2010).

"popularized the Orient to such an extent in the West that in 1769 it was somewhat extravagantly stated that 'China is better known than some provinces of Europe itself'".[158] It is justified to say that their narratives influenced the prevailing intellectual temper, and represented authoritative European perceptions for centuries.

The stories of Marco Polo's travels to Yuan Dynasty China (1271-1368) marked the first recorded European discovery of China. Although many historical facts of his stories remain questioned,[159] the tales of his travels are widely known. Marco Polo's description of a prosperous and orderly empire was proven by his followers in the 14th and 15th centuries, and his legendary journey inspired European expansion towards the East in the centuries that followed.

In 1585, based on the journals of a traveler to Ming China (1368-1644), Juan Gonzalez de Mendoza compiled a book on China in which he described a kingdom as "the most biggest and populous that is mentioned in all the world (*sic*)".[160] With admiration, Mendoza compared it with European countries: "They without all doubt seeme to exceede the Greekes, Carthagenians, and Romanes, of whom the old ancient histories haue signified to vs, and also of those later times *(sic)*[…]".[161]

After Mendoza, Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) was a milestone figure in presenting China to Europe. In order to establish Jesuit missions in China, he studied Chinese language and culture, and eventually became a learned Chinese scholar recognized by Ming literati. The image of China in Ricci's writings was considerably favorable.[162] He complimented the Chinese people on their progress in "moral philosophy" and sciences such as astronomy and mathematics.[163] While noting the Chinese sense of superiority and its consequent isolation from and ignorance of the outside world, he was impressed by the peaceful national character, which he

[158] Mason, *Western Concepts of China and the Chinese*, p. 3. Original citation: Reichwein, op. cit., p. 78; *Oeuvres completes de Voltaire* (Paris, 1829), XXIX, 344.

[159] See for example, Frances Wood, *Did Marco Polo Go to China?* (Westview Press, 1998).

[160] Juan Gonzalez de Mendoza, translated from the 1585 Spanish publication by Robert Parke, Sir George T. Staunton (ed.), *The History of the Great and Mighty Kingdom of China and the Situation Thereof* (London, 1853), p. 20.

[161] Mendoza, *The History of the Kingdom of China*, p. 93.

[162] In 1615, his manuscript was completed, translated and published in Latin as *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas* [On the propagation of Christianity among the Chinese]. Excerpts and an early English translation appeared in 1625. For later example, see: Matthew Ricci & Nicolas Trigault, translated from Latin by Louis J. Gallagher, *China in the Sixteenth Century: the Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583-1610* (New York: Random House, 1953).

[163] Ricci & Trigault, *The Journals of Matthew Ricci*, p. 30.

considered as the reason for benign relations between the Ming Empire and its neighbors.[164]

Ricci's well-documented activities added to the authenticity of his account, which "probably had more effect on the literary and scientific, the philosophical and the religious, phases of life in Europe than any other historical volume of the seventeenth century".[165] For example, it was Ricci who "enthroned Confucius for Europe".[166] He saw Confucian moral discipline as proper preparation for Chinese acceptance of Christian principles, and he associated Confucius—a symbol of Chinese civilization in his eyes—with peaceful and stable government as well as superior morality. Furthermore, Ricci's positive attitude towards Chinese ancient teachings and cultural practices and his efforts to incorporate the Chinese into the Christian faith, known as the "accommodationist" approach, had great impact on later European thinking of China.

German philosopher Leibniz was one of the intellectuals who admired, defended and advanced his views on China.[167] Though possibly for very different reasons, he spoke highly of Chinese practical philosophy:

> [...] *if we are their equals in the industrial arts, and ahead of them in contemplative sciences, certainly they surpass us (though it is almost shameful to confess this) in practical philosophy, that is, in the precepts of ethics and politics adapted to the present life and use of mortals...Indeed, it is difficult to describe how beautifully all the laws of the Chinese, in contrast to those of other peoples, are directed to the achievement of public tranquility and the establishment of social order, so that men shall be disrupted in their relations as little as possible.*[168]

Furthering Ricci's view, Leibniz considered Chinese and Christian civilization to be

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[164] Ricci & Trigault, *The Journals of Matthew Ricci*, pp. 21-23 & 160-166.
[165] Ricci & Trigault, *The Journals of Matthew Ricci*, translator's preface, p. xix.
[166] Dawson, *The Chinese Chameleon*, p. 45.
[167] For more information on this subject, see: Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, 1716 book translated by Henry Rosemont, Jr. and Daniel J. Cook, *Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese* (University Press of Hawaii, 1977), p. 8. Ricci was listed as one of the "five men most responsible for Leibniz's views on China".
[168] Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Preface to Novissima Sinica* or *Writings on China* (1697/1699), available at: http://east_west_dialogue.tripod.com/id12.html

different yet compatible, even mutually helpful: "We need missionaries from the Chinese who might teach us the use and practice of natural religion, just as we have sent them teachers of revealed theology".[169] Ricci's accomodationist approach might not have prevailed in Rome, but he, Leibniz, and the like represented an important school of early European attitudes towards China: an attitude of admiration, an approach of adaptation and the will to learn.

After them, Jean-Baptiste Du Halde summed up popular knowledge of China.[170] His book became an authoritative work in the 19th century, to such an extent that there was "scarcely a work of any significance [...] whose author did not use this work either directly or indirectly".[171] The popularity of Du Halde's book was another example of the Jesuits' influence on the European perception of China, despite their strong missionary motives and the consequent distortion of descriptions often being criticized today.

In the mid-18th century, however, the bright images presented by the Jesuits began to fade, and many in Europe began to view China as stagnant and backward. Even French thinker Voltaire, an admirer of Chinese culture who used it to criticize European society and Christian culture, started to talk about its lack of progress:

> *It seems as if nature had given to this species of men... organs formed for discovering all at once whatever was necessary for them, and incapable of going any further. We on the contrary have made our discoveries very late; but we have been quick in bringing things to perfection* […].[172]

In his famous *The Spirit of the Laws*, another French thinker Montesquieu called China "a despotic state, whose principle is fear". He described the Chinese way of governing as "a settled plan of tyranny", with "barbarities committed…in cold blood".[173] German philosopher Herder, in a similar vein, claimed that Chinese political and cultural

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169 Leibniz, *Preface to Novissima Sinica.*

170 English version see: Jean-Baptiste Du Halde, *The General History of China* (London: printed for J. Watts: and sold by B. Dod, 1736).

171 Mason, *Western Concepts of China and the Chinese*, pp. 9-11.

172 M. de Voltaire, translated by Mr. Nugent, *An Essay on Universal History, the manners, and spirit of nations, from the reign of Charlemagne to the age of Lewis XIV* (London: printed for J. Nourse, 1759), pp. 19-20.

173 Charles de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Book VII, "21. Of the Empire of China" (1750). Online resource see link: http://www.constitution.org/cm/sol_08.htm#021

institutions were childish duplications of ancient systems; and "the empire is an embalmed mummy, wrapped in silk, and painted with hieroglyphics: its internal circulation is that of a dormouse in its winter's sleep."[174] Another French philosopher, Condorcet, took China as an example of stagnation: "[...] even the invention of printing has remained an instrument totally useless in advancing the progress of the human kind".[175]

From these examples we can glimpse changes in the prevailing attitude of European intellectuals. At the time of Ricci and Leibniz, China was seen in a favourable light, and Christian superiority was expressed in a moderate fashion. When Montesquieu argued for his principles of the three governments in 1748, he had to question the established notion of an admirable autocracy. By the end of the 18th century, Herder and Condorcet already argued against undesirable Chinese institutions as a matter of fact. While Voltaire compared China to European nations, he was surprised by its stagnation; decades later, Herder and Condorcet criticized the empire's religion, politics, and culture with unquestioning contempt.

The emergence of a gloomy picture of China served as a foil to the rise of Europe in Enlightenment and progress: history might have started in the East, but the future of the human race lies in the West. It was in this spirit that Hegel articulated the challenge to Confucian culture by Christianity. In *The Philosophy of History*,[176] he contended that the absence of true religious spirit, added by the incapability of Confucianism, had led to a dangerous situation in China.

Hegel regarded Christian religion superior to what he deemed as Chinese pseudo-religion. As he argued, what "we" call religion is an individual connection to an inner spirit; and what "they" practiced—Chinese religion—had no connection with the Highest being, and was basically a state religion subject to the emperor's will. Without the guidance of "true" religion—Christian belief—to free them from secular power, these people became immoral, deceiving, extremely sensitive to injuries, and of a vindictive nature:

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[174] Johann Gottfried von Herder, translated by T. Churchill, *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* (London: printed for J. Johnson, by Luke Hansard, 1800), p. 296.

[175] Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat Condorcet, *Outlines of A Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind* (London: printed for J. Johnson, 1795), pp. 65-66.

[176] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956).

> *The character of the Chinese people.. its distinguishing feature is, that everything which belongs to Spirit—unconstrained morality, in practice and theory, Heart, inward Religion, Science and Art properly so-called—is alien.*[177]

According to Hegel, such a character eventually made the Chinese "a people in a condition of nonage", only to be ruled by "the patriarchal principle".[178] When Ricci introduced Confucius to the Europeans as the "great and learned" man, he was "forced to admit" that Confucius was "the equal of the pagan philosophers and superior to most of them".[179] In the eyes of Hegel, Confucianism was not able to rise above mediocrity. As Hegel argued, paternal authority deprived people from their individual freedom, and consequently suffocated Reason and Imagination. Therefore, Chinese society was not able to advance:

> *The Chinese regard themselves as belonging to their family, and at the same time as children of the State. In the Family itself they are not personalities, for the consolidated unity in which they exist as members of it is consanguinity and natural obligation. In the State they have as little independent personality; for there the patriarchal relation is predominant, and the government is based on the paternal management of the Emperor, who keeps all departments of the State in order.*[180]

> [...] *they hold little respect in themselves individually and humanity in general... though there is no distinction conferred by birth, and everyone can attain the highest dignity, this very equality testifies to no triumphant assertion of the worth of the inner man, but a servile consciousness—one which has not yet matured itself so far as to recognize distinctions.*[181]

Hegel's understanding of Chinese culture, thus, is characterized by the Chinese inability to liberate themselves from paternal authority and state power, which resulted in the lack of personality or independence. This "servile consciousness" was exactly

[177] Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, pp. 129 & 131-138.
[178] Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 139.
[179] Ricci & Trigault, *The Journals of Matthew Ricci*, p. 30.
[180] Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 121.
[181] Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 138.

what the Englightenment movement stood against. As Immanuel Kant once famously defined, "Englightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it..."[182] To this point, with European minds immersed in Enlightenment, paternal authority and its embodiment—Confucianism—seemed to Hegel nothing but shackles of Chinese thinking, and from which one should be liberated.

2) Perceptions of China and Orientalism

The changing Western perceptions of China towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, among which Smith's book was but one example, have to be understood in the context of global colonial history, more specifically, as a part of Western imperial expansion and the consequent development of Western worldviews. It has to be noted that perceptions of China developed in the relationship between China and the West—they are cultural constructions rather than accounts of Chinese reality; they reflect as much the European and American Self as the Chinese Other in Western perceptions of the world order.

For a long time since the late 16th century, the peace and prosperity of the Chinese empire had deeply impressed the Europeans embroiled in wars. As we have seen earlier, favorable descriptions of Chinese governance and culture found reception among mid-17th century philosophers, who had a very critical attitude towards European institutions. In the transition from the mighty kingdom to a stagnant empire, China had also been playing an important part as inspiration for the Enlightenment.[183] Its role in the development of a European identity—as the Oriental Other against European Self—was by no means only negative. Up till the 18th century, China had been associated with an elegant way of life and raised European fantasies in the

[182] Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment?"*(1784). see online resource http://www.public.asu.edu/~jacquies/kant.pdf

[183] See, for example, Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe* (Chicago [etc.]: University of Chicago Press, Vol. I: The Century of Discovery, 1965, Vol. II: A Century of Wonder, 1970-1977, Vol. III: A century of Advance, 1993). Zhaoming Qian, *Orientalism and modernism: the Legacy of China in Pound and Williams* (Durham [etc.]: Duke University Press, 1995). J. J. Clark, *Oriental Enlightenment: the Encounter between Asian and Western Thought* (London [etc.]: Routledge, 1997).

"chinoserie".[184] However, at the end of 18th century, by the time of Lord McCartney's embassy (1793-94) to the Qing Empire, China had become the embodiment of what European Enlightenment stood against: retrogression and stagnation.

The purpose of McCartney's embassy was to negotiate a British consulate in Beijing to deal with the increasing demand in trade, as well as to demonstrate British might and advanced technology to the Chinese Court. The Qianlong emperor (r. 1736-1795) sent them back with an edict to the English King George III (r. 1760-1801) explaining why the request was rejected: "we have never valued ingenious articles, nor do we have the slightest need of your country's manufactures".[185]

In many aspects, the embassy was a failure for the British. McCartney was not able to persuade the Emperor to grant permission for a consulate in Beijing; neither did the embassy impress the Chinese with their advanced technology. Yet his embassy provides us with important signals of a different direction in viewing China. Although McCartney admitted that "nothing could be more fallacious than to judge of China by any European standard", in his eyes, "a nation that does not advance must retrograde, and finally fall back to barbarism and misery"[186]—and such was China as compared with Europe. What once had been Chinese prosperity and stability versus European lack of it, now became Christianity versus Chinese lack of religion, progress versus stagnation, and good governance versus tyranny.

To judge China by European standards is to judge Europe's place in the world through its relations with many others including China. Changing perceptions of China reflected changing perceptions of Europe itself: along with the shift of the balance of power, passing through Ricci's accomodationist approach, Leibniz's mutual beneficial relations, it was, at the time of McCartney and later Hegel, finally the moment for European victory in contrast to Chinese stagnation and retrogression.

The perceptions of Europe that were used respectively by Lord McCartney and by Hegel to compare China with had been very different from each other; yet there is no doubt that a sense of continental identity had been gradually formed among the minds

[184] For a more detailed analysis, see: William W. Appleton, *A Cycle of Cathay: the Chinese Vogue in England During the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), pp. 37-52.

[185] Granmer-Byng, selected by Patrick Tuck, *An Embassy to China: Lord Macartney's Journal, 1793-1794* (London [etc.]: Routledge, 2000). Appendix C, *An Edict from the Emperor Ch'ien-Lung to King George the Third of England*, p. 340.

[186] Cranmer-Byng, *Lord Macartney's Journal,* p. 226.

in Europe, when great economic and social-political changes were brought about by the Enlightenment movement and the Industrial Revolution. Centered on Christendom and what is called "rational restlessness", the psychological make-up of Europe[187] formed the idea of "the West"—the concept essential to the Enlightenment. At the same time, the very concept of "the West" was established in the global context along with the imperialist expansions. That is to say, the sense of European Self and its uniqueness lies in the perceptions of many Others— cultures and societies that are non-Christian.

It is exactly the shared identity of Christendom and "psychological make-up" of "the West" that connected American missionary Smith's view of China with those of earlier Europeans. When it came to China, McCartney used a European standard instead of an English one; Hegel saw the future of human race lay in the West, not in Prussia or the German Empire; Smith had not just perceived himself as an "American" but more as an "Anglo-Saxon", a Westerner, and a Christian. By the time of the publication of *Chinese Characteristics*, the notion of the West as the Christian civilization was so dominant that even English scholar James Legge, who studied and translated Chinese classics, saw Christian victory over Confucianism and Chinese religion:

> […] *China was sure to go to pieces when it came into collision with a Christianly-civilized power. Its sage had left it no preservative or restorative elements against such a case.…and yet there is hope for the people…if they will look away from all their ancient sages, and turn to Him, who sends them, along with the dissolution of their ancient state, the knowledge of Himself, the only living and true God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent* (sic).[188]

Smith's view, based on the prevailing intellectual temper in the West, was widely shared by his contemporaries, which we can find in English language writings from intellectuals, diplomats, merchants, travellers, and the like. In fact, even decades before the first Opium War, "American traders, diplomats, and Protestant missionaries had developed and spread conceptions of Chinese deceit, cunning, idolatry, despotism, xenophobia, cruelty, infanticide, and intellectual and sexual perversity".[189] Most books

[187] Hall, "The West and the Rest", pp. 198-199.
[188] James Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (Oxford, 1893), Vol. I. pp. 106-108.
[189] Stuart Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), p. 201.

in Smith's time did not offer narratives of China that deviated much from observations of Smith's, but in many aspects supplemented his view. For instance, in *China, the long-lived Empire*, American writer and photographer Eliza Scidmore wrote:

> *No Occidental ever saw within or understood the working of the yellow brain, which starts from and arrives at a different point by reverse and inverse processes we can neither follow nor comprehend. No one knows or ever will know the Chinese—the heart and soul and springs of thought of the most incomprehensible, unfathomable, inscrutable, contradictory, logical, and illogical people on earth.*
>
> *Of all Orientals, no race is so alien. Not a memory nor a custom, not a tradition nor an idea, not a root-word nor a symbol of any kind associates our past with their past. There is little sympathy, no kinship nor common feeling, and never affection possible between the Anglo-Saxon and the Chinese. Nothing in Chinese character or traits appeals warmly to our hearts or imagination, nothing touches; and of all the people of earth they most entirely lack "soul", charm, magnetism, attractiveness. We may yield them an intellectual admiration on some grounds, but no warmer pulse beats for them. There are chiefly points of contradiction between them and ourselves...It is a land of contradictions, puzzles, mysteries, enigmas. Chinese character is only the more complex, intricate, baffling, inscrutable, and exasperating each time and the longer it confronts one.*[190]

While Smith observed that many Chinese characteristics are merely "Oriental traits",[191] here the Chinese were described, even among all Orientals, as ultimately alien to the Anglo-Saxon, and no common feeling or affection seemed possible between "them" and "us". Although exaggerated in this book, the frustration of not being able to understand the Chinese was shared in many English language writings at the time, which often concluded with contempt towards the Chinese: "then nothing Chinese seems worth seeing; one has only a frantic, irrational desire to get away from it, to escape it, to return to civilization, decency, cleanliness, quiet, and order".[192]

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[190] Eliza Ruhamah Scidmore, *China, the Long-Lived Empire* (New York: Century, 1900), pp. 4-6 & 9.
[191] Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, p. 14.
[192] Scidmore, *The Long-Lived Empire*, p. 9.

In short, there is no question that *Chinese Characteristics* represented the dominant intellectual conceptions and popular sentiments of its time. Having been informed by Said's concept of Orientalism as well as the critiques of this concept, the examination of Smith's text and those of his contemporaries has led to the conclusion that, if *Chinese Characteristics* is a typical example of "manifest Orientalism", then the religious and racial superiority as demonstrated in such texts can be called "latent Orientalism". It is also justified to say that these texts represent the dominant Orientalist perceptions at the turn of 20th century—polemic and reductionist, with a will not just to understand but more to enlighten.

Using the yardstick of Western political and cultural values, such Orientalist perceptions often associated the Chinese empire with despotism and stagnation, Confucianism with servility and conservatism, and Chinese life with a lack of faith and happiness. In the same vein, the inscrutable Chinese were conceived as the opposite of the aspired human character, with their lack of conscience, independence, or even soul. These features, identified through anthropological and sociological observations as essentially not like "us" and not conforming to "our values", were established in Western minds as the innate characteristics of the entire race, which, as we will analyze later, were to be personified in popular culture in the West.

Having said that, Orientalist perceptions of China and the Chinese people, however dominant at the end of the 19th century, were also to various degrees challenged even within the West itself. American diplomat Chester Holcombe, for one, criticized the narrow-mindedness in dominant Western judgments of Chinese people:

> […] *we are inclined to measure all people by a yardstick of our own construction, the model for which is found in ourselves. Others are right or wrong, wise or unwise, according as they copy or depart from the fashion which we have arbitrarily set up, the ideal formed within the essentially narrow limits of our personal surroundings...It is far easier to criticise the Chinese than to understand them.*
>
> *This habit of repression and misrepresentation of feeling has given the outside world the idea that, as a nation, the Chinese are stolid, indifferent, and lacking in nerves. Such is not the case. They are keenly sensitive, proud, and passionate. As might be expected, when, under a provocation too great for endurance, they give way to their feelings,*

> *the result, whether it be grief or anger, is as extreme and unreasonable, from our standpoint, as their ordinary suppression of emotion is absurd and unnecessary. It is difficult, perhaps unfair, to judge them in this regard, since their standard is absolutely different from ours*.[193]

Holcombe's understanding of "the real Chinaman", published one year after Smith's *Chinese Characteristics*, was clearly an attempt to point out the constraints of Western cultural constructions based on a sense of self-righteousness and the often misleading imagination of the Other, though not articulated as an account against the intellectual tradition of Orientalism. Echoing Holcombe's viewpoint, American sociologist Edward Alsworth Ross also argued against racial antagonism in dominant Western perceptions of China, and called to "allow for differences":

> *The fact is, to the traveller who appreciates how different is the mental horizon that goes with another stage of culture or another type of social organization than his own, the Chinese do not seem very puzzling...The theory, dear to literary interpreters of the Orient, that owing to diversity in mental constitution the yellow man and white man can never comprehend or sympathize with one another, will apeal little to those who from their comprarative study of societies have gleaned some notion of what naturally follows from isolation, the acute struggle for existence, ancestor worship, patriarchal authority, the subjection of women, the decline of militancy, and the ascendancy of scholars.*[194]

By placing the Chinese way of life and mode of thinking in their socio-cultural context, Ross offered a perspective that was considerably different from that of Smith's. He proposed to understand Chinese people on their own terms, rather than judging from the one and only standard that belongs to the observer. Such reflections were best summarized in Russel's analysis of Chinese-Western communications of their time:

> *It is interesting to contrast what the Chinese have sought in the West with what the West has sought in China. The Chinese in the West seek*

[193] Chester Holcombe, *The Real Chinaman* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1895), pp. vii-viii & 277.

[194] Edward Alsworth Ross, *The Changing Chinese: the Conflict of Oriental and Western Cultures in China* (London, 1911), Preface.

> *knowledge, in the hope—which I fear is usually vain—that knowledge may prove a gateway to wisdom. White men have gone to China with three motives: to fight, to make money, and to convert the Chinese to our religion…We are firmly persuaded that our civilization and our way of life are immeasurably better than any other, so that when we come across a nation like the Chinese, we are convinced that the kindest thing we can do to them is to make them like ourselves. I believe this to be a profound mistake.*[195]

The reflections of Holcombe, Ross and Russel and the like were, in a striking manner, reminiscent of Said's critique of Orientalism. In a way, the discrepancies between the Orientalist texts analyzed so far and their critiques reveal the discrepancies not just in perceptions of China, but more in perceptions of the world. Orientalist worldviews entail a monistic view of culture, whereas its critiques stand for cultural pluralism that argues to view the world outside of a Western universalist framework. Yet such cultural pluralist arguments as quoted above, voiced respectively in 1895, 1911 and 1922, even against the background of European reflections on Western civilization after WWI, did not prevent Orientalist images of China and the Chinese people from being consolidated and personified in the West.

3) Orientalism personified: the "Heathen Chinee" and the "Yellow Peril"

Western perceptions as analyzed so far, with their differents phases, twists and limitations, are to be understood by taking into account the new developments in foreign interaction with China since the two Opium Wars. First of all, European expansions in the country were followed by increasing American missionary, cultural, and political presence, altogether making for a larger number of foreign soldiers, traders, missionaries, and diplomats in the country—Arthur Smith was but one of the many missionaries stationed in China at the time. Secondly, with the Qing Empire caught in deep political and social crisis, a sizable group of Chinese laborers first set foot in America, and the number of Chinese immigrants to California and other coastal areas grew sharply.

These developments consequently influenced the scale and forms of the construction of

[195] Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1922), pp.196-198.

China's image in the West. Increasing interaction with the Chinese people, both at home and abroad, turned the vague image of a vast empire into a somewhat more explicit picture of the individual Chinese. These changes coincided with the large-scale development in print media; the literary world and mass media joined missionaries, merchants, and diplomats in raising Western awareness of the presence of China and its people.

In the case of the U.S., China had become a part of national politics and culture. Antagonism towards the Chinese had existed long before the tide of immigration. An unfavorable image had landed in America before the Chinese immigrants, and the negativity ascribed to the Chinese was reflected in popular culture. American poet Bret Harte published a narrative poem in 1870 to satirize anti-Chinese sentiments. Despite his intentions, the term "the heathen Chinee" from the poem became widely used to indicate Chinese people by those who were against Chinese immigration. Beside "the heathen Chinee", the word "Chinaman" carried the meaning of "one of them," or someone from "that place", and indicated inferiority, foreign origin, and a kind of subservient anonymity—a "Chinaman's chance" meant no chance at all.[196] The racial slur "Chink" for Asians was also originally used for people of Chinese ethnicity.

The increasing presence of Chinese immigrants stimulated growing concern among non-Chinese workers who felt threatened by the influx of cheaper laborers. Soon the development of anti-Chinese sentiments in California became a nation-wide issue. In 1882, the U.S. Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, specifically prohibiting the entrance of Chinese laborers on the premise that free immigration from China led to the creation of a racial problem. It was followed by subsequent legislation during the next several decades.[197] Studies showed that the anti-Chinese attitude around that time had multiple rationales and dimensions, such as the labor force[198], national political

[196] McClellan, *The Heathen Chinee*, p. 43.

[197] Isaacs, *Images of Asia*, p. 113. Rose Hum Lee, *The Chinese in the United States of America* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, London: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp.12-13. For a detailed anlysis, see: Adam M. McKeown, "Ritualization of Regulation: Enforcing Chinese Exclusion, 1898-1924." *American Historical Review* 108 (2003): pp. 377-403.

[198] Discussion on the influence of labor force see: Mary Roberts Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (Taipei: Cheng-Wen Publishing Co, 1968), pp. 488-489. Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 7-10 & 258. Gunther Barth, *Bitter Strength*: *A History of the Chinese in the United States 1850-1870* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 212-213.

situation[199], newspaper reportage, cultural differences, and racial prejudice.[200]

The Chinese Exclusion Act deserves special attention here not because of its particularity as "organized racism"[201] in American international relations, but because it reflected a well-established American perception of China, which was later captured in the term of the "yellow peril" (*huang huo*). It was only a small step to picture "the heathen Chinee" into "the yellow peril", to add fear to contempt. The fear of the yellow race, already visible in Smith's book, was captured by the German Kaiser Wilhelm II (r. 1918-1941) who first introduced the phrase *Die Gelbe Gefahr* in 1895 by titling a portrait that depicts the dangers arising from the nations of the East against the West. As one book described in 1911:

> *Since that time the phrase has become a very common one, and well understood as applying to the yellow races of the East. The nations thus spoken of are termed, in the Bible, the "kings of the East", which would be China, India, Japan and Korea. The yellow peril is becoming more apparent every year. It needs no argument to the ordinary reader, to convince him that this is a question to be settled in the near future.*[202]

Later, the term became widely used to indicate Chinese people as well as people from other Asian countries.[203] This term was later embodied in the evil genius of Dr. Fu Manchu, the protagonist in a series of novels and films.[204] Fu Manchu was originally created in Sax Rohmer's 1913 fiction *The Insidious Dr. Fu Manchu,* followed soon by *The Return of Dr. Fu Manchu* (1916) and *The Hand of Fu Manchu* (1917). The success of this supervillain led to a dozen or so novels from the 1930s to 1950s, and movies

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[199] Politics see: McClellan, *The Heathen Chinee*, p. 17. Elmer Clarence Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), p. 111.

[200] Race see: Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant*, p. 6. Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California*, pp.109-110; Jules Becker, *The Course of Exclusion, 1882-1924: San Francisco Newspaper Coverage of the Chinese and Japanese in the United States* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1991), pp.197 & 199.

[201] Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California*, p. 3.

[202] Greenberry G. Rupert, *The Yellow Peril, or, the Orient vs. The Occident As Viewed by Modern Statesmen and Ancient Prophets* (Union Publishing Co., 1911), p. 9.

[203] See, for example, Chas. N. Robinson (ed.), *China of Today or the Yellow Peril* (London: Navy & Army Illustrated, 1900).

[204] For more research on this topic see, for example, William F. Wu, *The Yellow Peril: Chinese Americans in American Fiction, 1850-1940* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1982). Jenny Clegg, *Fu Manchu and the Yellow Peril: The Making of a Racist Myth* (Staffordshire: Tentham books, 1994).

featuring the devilish figure could be seen from the 1920s up till the 1980s. Although Fu Manchu was an invented fictional figure, the success of the evil character proved the wide acceptance of this invention—the ultimate villain from the East. A description of this character appeared in the first novel:

> *Invest him with all the cruel cunning of an entire Eastern race...Imagine that awful being, and you have a mental picture of Dr. Fu-Manchu, the yellow peril incarnate in one man.*[205]

Rohmer later explained the success of his novels: "I made my name on Fu Manchu because I know nothing about the Chinese".[206] However, this imaginary association between the evil and his race was accepted by the audience, and even became a shared notion in popular culture. In a way, Fu Manchu was indeed "the embodiment of a white racist's nightmare",[207] although the nightmare was as imaginary as Fu Manchu himself. Such imagination seemed to be verified by the Boxer Uprising and mysterious stories from Chinatowns in London and San Francisco. As Rohmer admitted, in 1912, the timing was perfect for creating a Chinese villain.

In this light, the appearance and popularity of *Chinese Characteristic* was the result of a well established perception of China as the temporal and spatial Other. It witnessed, at the turn of the 20th century, the consolidation of an Orientalist cultural construction, both intellectual and popular; and at the same time it reflected the transition within such construction—from an abstract and murky image to a personified character with detailed descriptions, from the inscrutable heathen to the awful being of Dr. Fu Manchu.

Having arrived at such a conclusion, I will now turn to the question as to how, along with intensified intellectual exchanges between China and the West, such perceptions took their own course in China and became a distinctive part of Chinese discourse of national character.

2.3. Chinese Discourse of National Character: the Case of Liang Qichao

[205] Sax Rohmer, *The Return of Fu Manchu* (London: Methuen, 1913), p. 17.
[206] Cay Van Ash & Elizabeth Sax Rohmer, *Master of Villainy: A Biography of Sax Rohmer* (London: Tom Stacey, 1972), p. 72.
[207] Sandra M. Hawley, "The Importance of Being Charlie Chan," in Jonathan Goldstein, Jerry Israel, and Hilary Conroy (eds.), *America Views China: American Images of China Then and Now* (Lehigh University Press, 1991), p. 135.

As discussed earlier, *Chinese Characteristics* reached the Chinese audience through its Japanese translation. After the Hundred Day Reforms failed in 1898, Liang Qichao was one of the Chinese intellectuals in exile in Japan. In the following years, he became the most vocal and popular writer of his time, notably through publications such as the two he established in his exile: *Journal of Disinterested Criticism* (*Qingyi Bao*) and *New People Periodical* (*Xinmin Congbao*).[208] The popularity of these journals made him the leading voice among Chinese intelligentsia during the early 1900's.[209]

There is a large body of literature on Liang's role in political movements during the late Qing and early Republican periods, and of his ideas on nationalism, Chinese historiography, and intellectual thought.[210] This study focuses on his evolving ideas on the national character from 1898 on, and until the early 1900s, not only because the question of national character is a less examined aspect of his thoughts, but also because his ideas and writings related to this issue have, in the century that followed, exerted significant influence on critics of the national character and advocates of national character reforms who have been continuously drawing from his theory. As one scholar argued, "Liang's writings from 1898 to 1903 defined some of the fundamental assumptions of much of twentieth-century Chinese thought".[211] This is the case for his thoughts on historiography, journalism and nationalism, and as this research will demonstrate, it is also the case for his thoughts on the national character.

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[208] Here I translate the term *xinmin* 新民 as "new people", hence *Xinmin Congbao* as *New People Periodical* and *Xinmin Shuo* as *Discourse on the New People.* The term *xinmin* is translated elsewhere as "new citizen", for example, by Hao Chang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition in China, 1890-1907* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971); Xiaobing Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: the Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1996).

[209] Chang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition*, p. 133.

[210] See, for example, Joseph Levenson, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and the Mind of Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953); Chang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition*; Huang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Modern Chinese Liberalism*; and Tang, *Global Space*.

[211] Huang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Modern Chinese Liberalism*, p. 8.

1) Liang Qichao's Ideal of "New People"

Though a scholar with an academic training in Confucian tradition, by the time of Liang's exile, he was already in contact with Western knowledge. As early as 1890, during his stay in Shanghai, he became acquainted with the world outside China through Chinese translations of foreign publications.[212] In 1896, through Yan Fu and his translation of Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics*, Liang was introduced to Social Darwinism which later played a role in his own thinking.[213] Liang's *Bibliography on Western Learning* showed that much of his knowledge about the West was gained through missionary publications.[214]

Liang's reflections on the Chinese national character began with what he regarded as Western (and Japanese) perceptions of China. Also in 1896, the newspaper *Chinese Progress* (*Shiwu Bao*), with Liang as the chief editor, translated the term "the sick man of the East" from an English newspaper into Chinese (*dongya Bingfu*), with deeply rooted national defects.[215] In 1900, Liang's article "On Young China" began with an introduction of Japanese perceptions of China as "the old empire", and pointed out that such a view originated from Western conceptions.[216] Later, in his "On the Characteristics of Chinese People" (1903), he again noted that "white people" spoke of China as "the old empire", and perceived the Chinese people as "barbaric and half-civilized", "sick man of the East",[217] and the "yellow peril" (*huang huo*).[218]

Because of Liang's work at the *New People Periodical*, he had become aware of Smith's criticism through articles published about *Chinese Characteristics*. A recent

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212 Chang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition*, p. 59.

213 Chang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition*, p. 64.

214 Chang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition*, p. 72. For more detailed research see: Chen Qi-yun, "Liang Chí-Cháo's 'Missionary Education': A Case Study of Missionary Influence on the Reformers", *Papers on China*, 16 (1962), pp. 111-113.

215 Original English text see *North China Daily News*, October 17, 1896. Translation see "Zhongguo Shiqing" 中国实情 in *Shiwu Bao* 时务报 November 5, 1896 (光绪 22 年 10 月 1 日).

216 Liang Qichao 梁启超, "Shaonian Zhongguo shuo," 少年中国说 (1900) in Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi wenji* No. 5 饮冰室文集之五 (Shanghai: zhonghua shuju, 1941), p. 7. Originally published on *Qingyi Bao* 清议报 Volume 35, February 10th, 1900.

217 For a study of this topic, see Yang Ruisong, *Bingfu, huanghuo yu shuishi*.

218 Liang Qichao 梁启超, "Lun Zhongguo guomin zhi pingge" 论中国国民之品格 in *Xinmin* 新民, No. 27, March 12, 1903.

Chinese study suggests that Liang's thoughts on the national character were inspired by ideas in Smith's book, if not direct responses to it.[219]

Liang Qichao dealt with what he regarded as Western perceptions of China in many of his articles during this period. For example, in *Journey to the New Continent*, he admitted that "it is not really an insult to call the people who show symptoms of an ill nature 'sick man of the East'".[220] And in his "On the Characteristics of Chinese People", he acknowledged that there was a lack of "patriotism, independence, public spirit, and the skills to efficient governance" in Chinese characteristics.[221]

However, whereas he acknowledged many of the negative aspects in Chinese culture as depicted in the West, his responses towards Western critiques were multifold. Among the many texts he wrote on the matter, *Discourse on the New People* (*Xinmin Shuo*) is probably the best example to analyze his responses.[222] First appearing as a series of articles in *New People Periodical*, later compiled as a book, it is an articulation of Liang's thought of the ideal Chinese personality as well as his aspirations for a new and stronger nation.

Using a Social-Darwinist yardstick, he compared various nations in the world and concluded that the most powerful nations are from the white race; and among them, the Anglo-Saxon people is the best nation, stronger than other Western nations.[223] He attributed the power of Western countries to their racial characteristics—being energetic, competitive, and aggressive (progressive) as compared to the quiet, amicable, conservative characters of other races.[224] And it is exactly the "superior national character" of the Anglo-Saxons that has made their nation the most powerful of all white nations in the 19th century, as Liang went on to analyze, for they are

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219 Huang Xingtao 黄兴涛, "Ming enpu yu qingmo minguo shiqi de minzuxing gaizao huayu" 明恩溥与清末民国时期的"民族性改造"话语 in Smith, *Zhongguoren de qizhi* 中国人的气质 (Beijing: zhonghua shuju, 2006), pp. 24-45.

220 Liang Qichao 梁启超, "Xin dalu youji" 新大陆游记 (1903), in Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi wenji zhuanji No. 22* 饮冰室文集专集之二十二 (Shanghai: zhonghua shuju, 1941).

221 Liang Qichao 梁启超, "Lun Zhongguo guomin zhi pingge" 论中国国民之品格 (1903).

222 Liang Qichao 梁启超, *Xinmin shuo* 新民说, originaly a series of articles published at *Xinmin congbao* 新民丛报 between 1902 and 1906 (Shanghai: zhonghua shuju, 1936). This research uses the 1994 version: Liang Qichao, *Xinmin Shuo* (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1994).

223 Liang, *Xinmin Shuo*, pp. 10-12.

224 Liang, *Xinmin Shuo*, p. 13.

independent, disciplined, and fully aware of their own rights.[225]

Liang compared the Chinese character with that of the Anglo-Saxon people, as Smith did in his book. Then he proposed a national remaking project, based on the Anglo-Saxon model, by outlining what he considered the most important 16 characteristics of a strong nation, among which many were described by Smith as being absent in China, such as public morality, national consciousness, individual liberty, progress, self-respect, and so on.[226]

In terms of the question of public morality, Liang discovered a striking contrast between Chinese and Western moral values.[227] Though very much aware of the development of moral thought in Chinese cultural tradition, he realized that this development was confined to the field of private morality and family ethics, and found little development of public morality in social and state ethics in Chinese tradition. This discovery inspired him to conceive the idea of developing a new moral system, and in doing so, to point out civic virtues and to formulate a new personality ideal for Chinese people to follow.[228]

When it came to the value of progress, Liang believed that the persevering effort to conquer and accomplish, something he described as everywhere to be seen in Western cultures, was lacking in the Chinese national character.[229] Inspired by the idea of social progress from the Social-Darwinist thinker Benjamin Kidd[230], he proposed to cultivate such a courageous and adventurous spirit in Chinese culture, as it is "particularly wanting in the Chinese national character",[231] if the dream of establishing a strong nation is to be realized.

Yet the most fatal defect in the Chinese national character, as Liang had observed from

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225 Liang, *Xinmin Shuo*, p. 15.

226 The 16 characteristics include: public morality (*gongde*), national consciousness (*guojia sixiang*), progressive and adventurous spirit (*jinqu maoxian*), idea of rights (*quanli sixiang*), liberty (*ziyou*), autonomy (*zizhi*), progress (*jinbu*), self-respect (*zizun*), gregariousness (*hequn*), benifit-sharing (*shengli fenli*), perserverance (*yili*), sense of obligation (*yiwu sixiang*), valiance (*shangwu*), private morality (*side*), popular morale (*minqi*), political capability (*zhengzhi nengli*).

227 Liang, *Xinmin Shuo*, pp. 16-22.

228 Chang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition*, pp. 152-154.

229 Liang, *Xinmin Shuo*, p. 40.

230 Chang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition*, p. 172.

231 Chang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition*, pp. 184-185.

the failure of the 1898 reform movement, was the servility of the people.[232] And this, according to Liang, was essentially a spirit of resignation and submissiveness that could be traced back to the meek philosophy of life in Chinese cultural tradition, especially Daoism and Confucianism.[233] To cure the fatal illness in the national character, Liang turned to Rousseau's ideas on liberty as the best antidote to the Chinese "slavish mentality",[234] to liberate oneself from being the slave of one's own historical and social shackles.[235]

These three examples demonstrate that, while Liang formed his own thesis about how to cultivate an ideal Chinese personality, he held a rather eclectic approach to Western thought—he took freely from whatever was available to him then and there, and incorporated them into his own imagination of a stronger and better nation. And his project of national character remaking was propelled by the strong urge to rescue China from its inferior international position and to establish a powerful Chinese nation, guided by a Social-Darwinist worldview.

At a first glance, Liang's perception of the negative aspects of the Chinese nation were, in its form and content, similar to those of Smith's. Like Smith, he saw weakness in the Chinese national character, such as a servile nature, the lack of progress, and of public morality. He also deemed reforms as imperative, and believed that the reform of the culture, or the making of new people, was the foremost urgent matter.[236]

Although Liang and Smith both took the negative national character as their point of departure, they offered fundamentally different solutions to the perceived problems. The reforms proposed by Liang were nothing similar to Smith's proposal of Christian salvation. Smith believed that the weak character of the Chinese people, especially their "lack of conscience", could only be reformed by the teachings of Christian morality. Moreover, as the conservative force was so strong, the Christian civilization as an outer force had to fight its way into the minds of the Chinese. Liang, with a spirit of self-reflection, argued that the Chinese people, after comparing themselves with Western nations and identifying their own shortcomings, should make efforts "to reflect, to change, and to mend".[237]

[232] Liang, *Xinmin Shuo*, pp. 63-64.
[233] Chang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition*, pp. 195-196.
[234] Chang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition*, p. 192.
[235] Liang, *Xinmin Shuo*, pp. 63-69.
[236] Liang, *Xinmin Shuo*, p. 2.
[237] Liang, *Xinmin Shuo*, p. 13.

What Liang firmly believed in was not Christian salvation, rather the power of self-renovation. To deal with what he regarded as shortcomings in the Chinese national character, Liang proposed to reform the people both at the individual level and the national level—if self-reform is achieved at the individual level, he argued, the remaking of the nation could be achieved at the national level.[238] In fact, Liang himself was a passionate practitioner of self-renovation. He regarded introspection as a way of self-cultivation, eventually leading to self-perfection. As he phrased it himself, "I care not if I challenge myself of yesterday with myself of today".[239]

This spirit of introspection and self-renovation was precisely drawn from Confucian intellectual tradition. The term "new people" (*xinmin*) drew the teaching of "daily reform of oneself" from the Confucian classic *Great Learning* (*Da Xue*). It was also with the attitude of a Confucian scholar that Liang promoted his thesis of "new people". Unlike Smith who claimed that the only salvation lay in Christian enlightenment, or James Legge who believed that Confucianism will "go to pieces" in its encounter with Christianity, Liang did not lose faith in Confucianism, neither did he equate Confucianism with the weakness in the national character.

As clearly stated in his *Discourse on the New People*, the reform he advocated was a combination of "reviving the existing cultural essence" and "importing the absent", both equally important for the making of "new people".[240] Present day commentators have associated Liang's thesis with the New Culture Movement, in the sense that they were both enlightenment movements aimed at using Western learning against Chinese learning, and they both attempted to reform the national character and to break from cultural tradition.[241] Such an association has rightly pointed out the similarities, but misinterpreted Liang's approach by playing down his emphasis on "reviving the existing cultural essence". Such an emphasis, already present in his "new people" thesis, later manifested itself in his intellectual life after the May Fourth Movement.

Another distinctive feature of Liang's proposition is that his critiques of the national character had always been outshone by his optimism, even right after the Hundred Day

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238 Liang, *Xinmin Shuo*, pp. 4-5.

239 Liang Qichao 梁启超, *Qingdai xueshu gailun* 清代学术概论 in Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi zhuanji No. 34* 饮冰室专集之三十四 (Shanghai: zhonghua shuju, 1941), p. 63.

240 Liang, *Xinmin Shuo*, pp. 7-9.

241 Li Zehou 李泽厚, *Zhongguo xiandai sixiang shilun* 中国现代思想史论 (Taibei: sanmin shuju, 1996), pp. 4 & 7.

Reforms failed. In 1899, Liang envisioned a bright future for the Chinese race in the 20th century in his *The Future of the Chinese Race*. He identified four national characteristics that would make the Chinese the most powerful race in the world—the ability of autonomy, adventurous nature, highly developed thought, and rich human and natural resources for business development.[242]

Such optimism was originated from Liang's romantic image of a young China as opposed to the Western conception of the old empire. Whereas Smith believed that the Chinese nation "faces the darkness of the remote past"[243], Liang claimed that "there is a young China in my heart", which was "splendid, strong and rich, elegant and graceful".[244] Such a romantic image was rationalized by his understanding of the modern nation-state system, where European countries were already members of and China was only on its way to. He personified the young nation as a rich and strong young man, "independent, free, progressive, better than Europe—the best in the world".[245] For this reason, since the article "On Young China", many of Liang's writings were published under the name of "a young man of young China".[246]

In the bright future he envisioned, the Chinese personality, through self-renovation, will turn from meek to assertive, from lethargic to vigorous, from slavish to liberated and independent; and the nation will eventually turn from weak to strong, from stagnant to progressive, from pre-modern to modern, from the "sick man of the East" to the splendid, independent, strong and graceful young man in his heart.

This vision, with China reclaiming its rightful place in the world, was described by Liang in a political fiction. There he imagined a peace conference in the Chinese capital Nanjing, joined by all friendly nations including England, Japan, and Russia. Again in his romantic image, a learned scholar and historian, Mr. Kong (Confucius), lectured on Chinese history of the most recent 60 years. During that time, as the story

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242 Liang Qichao 梁启超, "Lun Zhongguo renzhong zhi jianglai" 论中国人种之将来 (1899), in *Yinbingshi wenji No.3* 饮冰室文集之三 (Shanghai: zhonghua shuju, 1941), pp. 48-54: 49.

243 Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, p. 320.

244 Liang, "Shaonian Zhongguo shuo", in *Yinbingshi wenji No.5*, pp. 7 & 11. For more discussion on this article, see Mei Jialing 梅家玲, "Faxian shaonian, xiangxiang zhongguo —Liang Qichao Shaonian Zhongguo shuo de xiandaixing, qimeng xushu yu guozu xiangxiang" 发现少年，想象中国----梁启超〈少年中国说〉的现代性、启蒙叙述与国族想象, *Hanxue Yanjiu* 汉学研究 (Taibei: June 2001), pp. 249-276.

245 Liang, "Shaonian Zhongguo shuo", p. 12.

246 Liang, "Shaonian Zhongguo shuo", p. 12.

told, the reforms had brought such rapid progress in China that Europeans and Americans sent their students to China, and they all understood the Chinese language, making such a magnificant scene possible.[247]

Both Lu Xun and Liang Qichao were very clear about their intention in comparing Chinese national character with that of the West. For Lu Xun, it was a means of self-inspection, to reform for the better, and to eventually "prove what on earth are Chinese".[248] And for Liang Qichao, Western perceptions could serve as a frame of reference for Chinese people "to reflect, to change, and to mend".[249] Although Lu Xun did not articulate what he views as real Chinese, what he intended to prove was obviously a nation better than the one described by Arthur Smith. And Liang, fascinated by the possibility of creating a young, energetic, graceful and powerful new nation, had drawn a much clearer picture through his "new people" thesis and other articles.

It is therefore not surprising that, even at the most critical period of Liang Qichao's intellectual journey, he did not lose his faith in Chinese culture and Confucianism. His "new people" thesis and many other writings of that time have demonstrated that what he attempted to create was "a complete new culture, instead of a completely new culture".[250] This "endeavour to create a syncretic new culture"[251] became much clearer in his later cultural propositions in the 1920s.

At this point, it is abundantly clear that Liang's advocacy of national character reform was a means to realize his cultural imagination. The conception of national character that he incorporated from Western (and Japanese) perceptions was chosen for the purpose of evoking nationalistic aspirations against such negative perceptions. His eclectic approach to Western perceptions and knowledge, especially to Western criticism, was meant to stimulate and inspire his fellow countrymen to look at the past and the present critically, and to work towards a better future.

Moreover, Liang's evaluation of the national character and the values he promoted—progress, enlightenment, and nationalism (*minzu zhuyi*)—have revealed that his

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[247] Liang Qichao 梁启超, *Xin Zhongguo Weilai Ji* 新中国未来记 (1902) (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2008).
[248] Lu, "Qiejieting zawen mobian lici cunzhao 3", p. 426.
[249] Liang, *Xinmin Shuo*, p. 13.
[250] Tang, *Global Space*, p. 225.
[251] Tang, *Global Space*, p. 5.

cultural imagination was to a large extent constructed within a modernist framework. He embraced what he deemed as essential to the modern West, and strived to use the national character reforms to aid the birth of a brand new modern nation out of the ruins of an old empire.

Yet, at the same time, it is noteworthy that Confucianism was not the central target of his critique of the national character. The reforms were not as radical as they sounded to be: even the most progressive measures—the remaking of the people—were not intended to overthrow the regime of Confucian morality and aesthetics. On the contrary, they should be understood as part of the strategy to the revitalization of Confucianism and Chinese culture, and to eventually restore an equal if not superior position of theirs as compared to that of Western cultures.

2) The West in Chinese Intellectual Search for "New People"

As Liang's *New People Periodical* had a wide circulation, his "new people" thesis, most notably articulated in the essays from his "golden age",[252] had inspired many Chinese intellectuals of his time. Leading intellectuals in the May Fourth Movement regarded him as a spiritual mentor; and the ideal personality, later emerging in the minds of the May Fourth as essential constituents of the aspired nation, was to a large extent grounded on Liang's thesis. In fact, the new personality in Liang's imagination had become an important and enduring part of the value system of 20th century China among the intelligentsia of various ideological persuasions.[253]

It is indeed justified to say that Liang's writings between 1899 and 1903 provided a common intellectual foundation that "cut across the later divisions between liberals and Marxists".[254] Hu Shi, seen as a leading liberal scholar of the May Fourth era and a representative of Chinese Enlightenment, wrote that Liang "pointed out an unknown world, and summoned us to make our own explorations...All sections of the *Discourse on the New People* opened up a new world for me..."[255] When Mao Zedong organized the "New People Society" in 1918, he was clearly inspired by Liang's call to remake the nation. As a dedication to Liang's *On Young China,* the biggest student association during the May Fourth Movement was named the "Young China Society".

[252] Levenson, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and the Mind of Modern China*, p. 82.
[253] Chang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition*, pp. 304-307.
[254] Huang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Modern Chinese Liberalism*, p. 8.
[255] Hu Shi 胡适, *Sishi zixu* 四十自叙 (Shanghai: Yadong tushuguan, 1933), pp.100 & 105.

Yet it must be pointed out that Liang's ideas on the national character and his "new people" thesis have been subject to rather different and sometimes even conflicting interpretations. When Liang called upon the Chinese to reflect on the national character with reference to the Anglo-Saxon model, he was following his nationalistic logic: only such self-renovation could lead to a China that is at least as strong as England. However, in Hu Shi's reading of *Discourse on the New People*, what Liang pointed out to him was that "there were peoples and cultures of a very high order".[256]

The "new people" thesis identified many shortcomings of the Chinese nation, yet Liang did not lose his belief in Chinese culture or Confucianism. This sense of optimism was later re-affirmed by his trip to post-WWI Europe. In an essay written in 1919, Liang called on the Chinese youth to "Attention! March! Billions of people on the other side of the ocean, at the bankrupcy of material civilization, are calling sadly for your help to elevate them...our ancestors in heaven, the Three Sages, and previous generations are looking to you to finish their cause!"[257]

It is abundantly clear that Hu did not share Liang's optimism of Chinese culture or his romantic image of a young China. In the eyes of Hu Shi, the Chinese nation was "stupid and lazy", "not progressive", "inferior", which explained why other cultures were needed to revive the weak nation and rejuvenate the half-dead culture.[258] For example, Hu wrote in 1930 that the only way for the nation to survive was to admit its inferiority:

> *We have to acknowledge that we are... inferior not only in a material and technical sense, but also in political system, morality, knowledge, literature, music, arts and physical strength…only if we admit, can we learn from others wholeheartedly […]. No matter what culture it is, as long as it revitalize us, we should take and absorb it to the utmost. To save and build our nation is like building a house, as long as we can use the material, we don't care where it is from.*[259]

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256 Hu Shi, *Sishi zixu,* p. 105.

257 Liang Qichao 梁启超, "Ouyou xinyinglu jielu" 欧游心影录节录 (1919), in Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi heji No. 23* 饮冰室合集之二十三 (Beijing: zhonghua shuju, 1989), p. 35.

258 Hu Shi 胡适, "Jieshao wo ziji de sixiang—Hu Shi wenxuan zixu" 介绍我自己的思想——胡适文选自序 (1930) in *Hu Shi zhexue sixiang ziliao xuan* 胡适哲学思想资料选 (Shanghai: huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1981), p. 344.

259 Hu, "Jieshao wo ziji de sixiang", pp. 344-345.

Hu's disappointment with the nation's inertia and Liang's optimistic view of the Chinese civilization were expressed almost at the same time, when Hu returned in 1918 from his study in the U.S., and Liang in 1919 from his trip to Europe. The two contradictory images they had reflected two types of viewpoints about China in the West: one that was heavily influenced by American liberal ideas and the other by European self-reflection of industrialization after WWI and their illusions of a utopian Orient.

Therefore, while Liang tried to use self-renovation to refute the perceptions of China as described by Arthur Smith, Hu had taken the perspective of Arthur Smith to look at China critically:

> *A foreign missionary is like an overseas student returning, he always carries a new perspective and a critical spirit. Such perspective and spirit are lacking in a nation that grows used to the existing order and becomes ignorant of it, and they are needed for any reform movement.* [260]

And, being the overseas student returning, Hu himself shared Smith's "new perspective" and "critical spirit":

> *Most worrying of China* […] *is that, everywhere, all kinds of sinful characteristics have been kept, too many, too deep* [...] *from the old countryside, to brand-new political organizations, where doesn't it have "Chinese characteristics"?*[261]

Liang emphasized the West as an inspiration to Chinese reforms, while Hu attached much greater importance to Western culture as one "of a very high order". In his "The Culture Conflict in China", he called for "wholesale Westernization" (*quanpan xihua*) and "wholehearted modernization", which he later revised to "full internationalization" (*chongfen shijiehua*). He explained that the Westernization he advocated was not, and could not be one hundred percent, but should be "sufficient enough" (*chongfen*)—quantitatively to the utmost and mentally with wholehearted dedication.[262] It seems

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[260] Luo Zhitian 罗志田, *Zaizao wenming de changshi: Hu Shi zhuan 1891-1929* 再造文明的尝试：胡适传 (Beijing: zhonghua shuju, 2006), p. 321.

[261] Hu Shi 胡适, *Hu Shi lunxue jinzhu* 胡适论学近著 (Shanghai: shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), pp. 552 & 556.

[262] Hu Shi 胡适, Chongfen shijiehua yu quanpan xihua 充分世界化与全盘西化, originally

that, for Hu, the West was not only a frame of reference for the making of the "new people", but also an indispensable outside force in the replacement of the old culture.

Liang Qichao, by the time of the New Culture Movement, had different intellectual concerns. Writing in 1915, and taking the examples of Korea and Thailand, Liang argued that it was disastrous for a nation to break with its past.[263] The national character manifested in cultural tradition should be safeguarded, for a nation dies when its national character is obliterated.

Hu on the contrary was not concerned that the loss of national character would jeopardize the Chinese nation. Instead, he was disappointed at his country because "the inertia was so strong that three steps forward was followed by two steps backwards, so it is still the same".[264] It was this inertia that he meant to fight against by promoting his "full internationalization", for, in his perception, there was no reason to be afraid of losing Chinese culture because the inertia of most people will be sufficient to keep the old culture.

Their different approaches in the search of a new people and a new culture represented two of the many contending propositions made out of different intellectual self-perceptions of the nation. It is clear that, within a wide cultural spectrum, there were other cultural proposals occupying the more polemic positions at both ends. For instance, as a direct rejection of Smith's criticism, Gu Hongming published *The Spirit of the Chinese People*[265] in 1915. While Smith mocked many Chinese cultural characteristics, Gu Hongming, in return, mocked the popularity of Smith's book:

> *John Smith in China wants very much to be a superior person to the Chinaman and Rev. Arthur Smith writes a book to prove conclusively that he, John Smith, is a very much superior person to the Chinaman. Therefore, the Rev. Arthur Smith is a person very dear to John Smith,*

published at *Da Gong Bao* 大公报, June 21, 1935, see Jiang Yihua 姜义华 (ed.), *Hu Shi xueshu wenji* 胡适学术文集 (zhonghua shuju: 2001), p. 308.

263 Joseph Levenson, "History and Value", p. 172. Cited from Liang Qichao 梁启超, "Da zhonghua fakan ci" 大中华发刊词 (1915) in Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi heji No. 12* 饮冰室合集十二 (Shanghai: zhonghua shuju, 1941), pp. 33 & 83-84.

264 Hu Shi 胡适, "Guiguo zagan" 归国杂感, originally published at *Xin Qingnian* 新青年 Vol. 4, No.1. See also in *Hu Shi wencui* (Beijing: zuojia chubanshe, 1991), pp. 558-559.

265 Gu Hongmin 辜鸿铭, originally published as *Chunqiu Dayi* 春秋大义 (Beijing: Beijing meiri xinwenshe, 1915). Here I use the most recent version: Gu Hongmin, *The Spirit of the Chinese People* (Beijing: Foreign language teaching and research press, 2009).

and the "Chinese Characteristics" become a Bible to John Smith.[266]

To refute Arthur Smith's account of Western superiority, Gu described the Chinese spirit as "a state of mind", "a temper of the soul", "a serene and blessed mood".[267] Against the background of WWI, he regarded Chinese culture as the remedy for Western civilization, and "the (unspoilt) real Chinaman with his Religion of good citizenship and his experience of 2,500 years how to live in peace without priest and without soldier" would be the only solution to the wounded spirits after the war.[268] If we describe Liang's "new people" thesis and Hu Shi's proposal of internationalization as having shared the characteristics of a cultural syncretism, Gu apparently did not join these two in their pursuit of such "new people" and new culture.

3) Did Culturalism Ever Give Way to Nationalism?

As I briefly touched upon in the introduction chapter, Chinese self-perceptions at the time of Liang's "new people" thesis went through a dramatic transition. The discourse of national character as discussed so far can be read as a part of that historical transition from the Celestial Empire to a nation-state.

It is a widely accepted notion that the political culture of imperial China stressed a principle of ruling by culture more than nationality. John Fairbank described it as the "synarchy" with "a well-developed institution of foreign participation in its government".[269] A sense of cultural superiority was affirmed by the tribute system that demonstrated the empire's power and pride to neighboring countries. Therefore, an imperial Chinese outlook of the world was firmly established: "all under heaven" (*Tianxia*) is their civilized world, plus barbarian areas that were of little relevance.

Until the Shenzong Emperor's rule (r. 1067-1085) in the Northern Song Dynasty, imperial world maps still drew a wide Chinese area with very small surrounding seas, and the neighboring countries in unclear positions.[270] The world maps during the Ming

[266] Gu, *The Spirit of the Chinese People*, p. 95.
[267] Gu, *The Spirit of the Chinese People*, p. 63.
[268] Gu, *The Spirit of the Chinese People*, p. 8.
[269] John Fairbank, "Synarchy under the treaties," in idem. (ed.), *Chinese Thoughts and Institutions* (Chicago and London: the University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 204-231: 205.
[270] Zou Zhenhuan 邹振环, "Li Madou shijie ditu de kanke yu mingqing shiren de shijie yishi" 利玛窦世界地图的刊刻与明清士人的世界意识 in *Jindai Zhongguo de guojia xingxiang yu guojia rentong* 近代中国的国家形象与国家认同 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe,

Dynasty (1368-1644), as Matteo Ricci commented, were "said to show the whole world but their world was only limited to their fifteen provinces."[271] Ricci's description suggests that, from the perspective of an outsider, the concept of *Tianxia* was an inflated self-image as the result of ignorance of the outside world. It appeared to many in the West that, up to the end of the 18th century, the Chinese world still "stood intact, aloof, and uninterested in the West".[272] Such was also the conclusion of Macartney's embassy. When the Qianlong emperor rejected the British request to establish a consulate in Beijing, he deemed such a request inappropriate and unreasonable, for there were no precedents of such interactions and trade relations with other countries in the history of the Celestial Empire, nor did the Empire need to develop such relations:

> *As to your request* [...] *to be allowed to send one of your subjects to reside in the Celestial Empire to look after your country's trade, this does not conform to the Celestial Empire's ceremonial system, and definitely cannot be done* [...] *How can we go as far as to change the regulations of the Celestial Empire, which are over a hundred years old, because of the request of one man—of you, O King?* [...] *Why, then, do foreign countries need to send someone to remain at the capital? This is a request for which there is no precedent and it definitely cannot be granted.*[273]

It was after the first Opium War (1839-1842) that Matteo Ricci's Chinese language world maps were first introduced in Wei Yuan's book *Illustrated Annals of Overseas Countries (Hai Guo Tu Zhi)*, about 250 years after they were made. The defeat in the two Opium Wars stimulated many among the ruling elite to propagate modern technology to "enrich the country and strengthen the army". Their Self-Strengthening Movement (1860-1895) proposed the "Chinese learning for substance, Western learning for application" (*Zhongxue wei ti, Xixue wei yong*) solution and imported Western ideas in education, industrial manufacture, military training, and so on. Foreign encounters had impressed the ruling elite with advanced military technology, as the Mongolian horsemen had done before; but the movement did not change the

2003), pp.23-72: 49.

[271] Matthew Ricci 利玛窦 & Nicolas Trigault 金尼阁, translated by He Gaoji 何高济, *Li Madou Zhongguo zhaji* 利玛窦中国札记 (Beijing: zhonghua shuju, 1983), pp. 179 &181.

[272] C.P. Fitzgerald, *The Chinese View of Their Place in the World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 32.

[273] Cranmer-Byng, *Lord Macartney's Journal*, Appendix C, pp. 338-339.

ambivalent attitude towards Western culture,[274] and the sense of cultural superiority had not yet been put under scrutiny.

Defeat in the 1895 war with Japan declared the Self-Strengthening Movement a failure. The Qing Court did not learn from the movement how to deal with the West— the official Ministry of Foreign Affairs was only set up in 1901, almost 60 years after the first Opium War. Many subsequent attempts to confront Western challenges did not prevent it from collapsing. The following constitutional monarchy proposed by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao in the Hundred Day Reforms (1898) failed prematurely; soon after that, the late Qing New Policy reforms (1901-1911) were brought to an end by the 1911 revolution, which eventually overthrew the Qing Court.

The dramatic political transition shook the very ground on which the ruling elite based their perception of world and their nation's position within that order: the superior Celestial Empire had turned into a member among equal nation-states; even worse, it was defeated and humiliated by foreign intrusion. As such, the *Tianxia* worldview ran into unprecedented challenges. The term used by the Qing Court to indicate itself in diplomatic documents and international treaties reflected this changing process: during the rule of the Jiaqing Emperor (r. 1796-1820), the Court referred to itself as "the Celestial Empire" (*Tianchao*); starting from Daoguang (r. 1821-1850), terms such as "the Empire of the Great Qing" (*Daqingguo*) and "the Middle Kingdom/China" (*Zhongguo*) appeared more often; till Guangxu (r. 1875-1909), *Tianchao* disappeared and *Zhongguo* became the synonym for the state.[275]

Changes in the worldview and consequently in Chinese self-perceptions went hand in hand with the emergence and acceptance of modern concepts such as nation-state and nationalism. Terms such as "nation" (*minzu*) and "nation-state" (*minzu guojia*) were translated from the Japanese and introduced in China, then later became part of the political pursuit of the revolutionaries for a sovereign state.[276] Yan Fu's translation of *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays* spread wide among intellectuals and students,

[274] Xiao Gongqin 萧功秦, *Rujia wenhua de kunjing: jindai shidafu yu zhongxi wenhua pengzhuang* 儒家文化的困境：近代士大夫与中西文化碰撞 (Guilin: guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2006), p. 99.

[275] Kawashima Shin 川岛真, translated by Shen Zhongqi 沈中琦, "Cong tianchao dao guojia" 从天朝到国家 in *Jindai Zhongguo de guojia xingxiang yu guojia rentong* 近代中国的国家形象与国家认同 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2003), pp. 265-281.

[276] Wang Ke 王柯, "'Minzu': yige laizi reben de wuhui" "民族": 一个来自日本的误会 in *Twenty First Century*, June 2003, pp. 73-83.

and inspired people to view China's defeat in a Social-Darwinist perspective. Notably, such imported concepts, such as nation-state, have in the Chinese context always been closely associated with resistance against foreign intrusion, in most cases Western intrusion. Regardless of the different political solutions and convictions, at this point, the worldviews of Chinese intellectuals had gone far beyond the "*Tianxia* versus barbarian" outlook.

The rise of the historical consciousness of a Chinese nation witnessed a no less traumatic and dramatic paradigm shift in the cultural realm. Running parallel to the movements of "learning from the West", traditional institutions and thoughts gave way to modern ones modelled after the West. Confucianism, once linked to the glory of Chinese civilization, seemed now unable to offer a solution to confront Western power in modern history. The incapability put Confucianism in an unprecedented crisis: not only was its past glory gone, even its own survival was at stake—its value was continuously questioned.

In "Chinese substance, Western application" (*zhong ti xi yong*), Chinese learning remained the substance. Reforms in the late Qing challenged the imperial political system together with its ruling ideology; and in 1905 when the imperial examination system was abolished, Confucianism lost its grip on the educational and hierarchical system. While the sense of cultural superiority had lost its material, institutional and political foundation, the national Self and cultural tradition that once represented its superiority became perceived of in a negative light. During the May Fourth Movement, Confucianism was at the center of criticism, held accountable for the fallen empire's corrupted system and the backwardness of the nation. By then, Confucian thought had followed the Qing empire's collapse, been driven to a peripheral position.

Inspired by Western thought, and often looking through Western lenses, Chinese intellectuals of different schools searched for ways of creating a new Chinese culture. In this process, new cultural conceptions began to emerge to make sense of the status quo in its historical and international context. The national character discourse was one of the conceptions in such cultural creations, and national character reforms became one of the most fundamental reforms to rebuild the national Self.

Along with it, we have seen many other conceptions and perceptions of China, originally from the West, being incorporated in Chinese cultural and political discourses, such as the image of the "sick man of the East" and the metaphor of China

as the "sleeping lion".[277] Research has shown that such images were selected, translated and internalized to interpret and eventually overcome the nation's now perceived inferior cultural status.

The incorporation of Western perceptions of China was at the same time a part of a larger shift in intellectual perceptions, that is, the acceptance of Western worldview and epistemological system within which China was framed and understood. This shift was clearly demonstrated in the internalization of conceptions such as nation-state, Social-Darwinism, and others that were believed to be of an universal nature.

For instance, the concept of "civilization" (*wenming*) during the late Qing and early Republican period was perceived as a universal standard to evaluate social morality, although it was somehow created and discovered in the West. Therefore, in the name of such a universal value, many in China were ready to use the yardstick of Western cultural preferences to evaulate Chinese behavior and attitude, which naturally turned into the criticism of a "lack of civilization".[278]

Levenson described such a shift as a defeat of culturalism against nationalism,[279] in which the usefulness of Chinese thought was questioned against its Western rival, resulting in the demise of culturalism. Yet, after a careful examination of Liang Qichao's "new people" thesis and his conceptions of the national character, one is led to ask whether culturalism indeed hopelessly gave way to nationalism.

As a scholar deeply grounded in a cultural tradition with a *Tianxia* worldview, Liang surely encountered the problem of cultural identity when he became profoundly affected by Western political thinking and moral outlook.[280] He admitted that the Anglo-Saxon people was the best and strongest in the world due to their superior national character—their independent, energetic, competitive and progressive nature. And he even concluded that it was not really an insult to call some Chinese "sick man of the East".

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277 Rudolf G. Wagner, "China 'Asleep' and 'Awakening': A Study in Conceptualizing Asymmetry and Coping with It," *Transcultural Studies* (2011.1), pp. 4-139: 118.

278 Luo Jianqiu 罗检秋, "Qingmo minchu zhishijie guanyu 'wenming' de renzhi yu sibian" 清末民初知识界关于"文明"的认知与思辨 in Zheng Dahua 郑大华, Huang Guangtao 黄光涛 and Zou Xiaozhan 邹小站 (eds.), *Wuxu bianfa yu wanqing sixiang wenhua zhuanxing* 戊戌变法与晚清思想文化转型 (Beijing: shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2010), p. 423.

279 Levenson, *The Problem of Monarchical Decay*, pp. 150-152.

280 Chang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition*, pp. 113-4.

Yet he took the inferiority as a point of departure for his national character remaking project and for eventually realizing his romantic image of a strong and charismatic nation. Therefore, once the West was viewed in a less positive light, such as after the First World War, the sense of inferiority became replaced with self-confidence. It is then not so difficult to understand Liang's call in 1919 to help elevate "the people across the ocean" from "the bankruptcy of material civilization", and to accomplish the honorable mission of "ancestors in heaven" and "the Three Sages".[281]

Even for more radical critics and reformers of the national character, and more ardent advocates of Westernization, the intellectual introspection, under the surface of self-negation and even self-loathing, can be seen as driven by a profound sense of pride. Although Hu Shi claimed that the only way to save the nation was to admit its inferiority, he also expressed, in other occasions, the wounded pride he felt for his nation well before he started to advocate liberal ideas in China:

> *(China) as a thousand-year old ancient country, the leader of East-Asian civilization, suddenly turned north and called itself a pupil. Is there bigger shame than this in the world?*[282]

Even though Hu Shi complained that Chinese are "stupid and lazy", "not progressive", "inferior", the shame he felt was entangled with the patriotism he once expressed:

> *No one with some level of knowledge does not love his country. So my definition of world view is: cosmopolitanism is patriotism combined with humanitarianism. A short while ago I read the poem Hands All Round from Tennyson, which says:*
>
> *That man's the best cosmopolite*
> *Who loves his native country best*
>
> *I am delighted that his opinion coincided with mine.*[283]

The image of a strong Other, coupled with the nation's lost glory and recent humiliation, eventually led to a sense of inferiority. For Hu, the perception of an inferior Chinese culture was mixed with his patriotism, and brought about the feeling

[281] Liang, "Ouyou xinyinglu jielu", p. 35.

[282] Hu Shi 胡适, "Fei liuxue pian" 非留学篇, *Liumei Xuesheng Jibao* 留美学生季报 No. 3, January 1914. Chinese emperors face south in the court and their officials face north. "To turn north" means to admit one's inferior position in the hierarchy.

[283] Hu Shi 胡适, "Hu Shi liuxue riji," 胡适留学日记 in Hu Shi, *Hu Shi zuopin ji* 胡适作品集 (Taibei: yuanliu chuban shiye gufen youxian gongsi, 1986), p. 127.

of shame. The more glorious the past was, the more painful and shameful the loss of glory became. Thus, radical anti-traditionalism and "full internationalization" might have been Hu's bitter medicine to treat the national illness and to cleanse the shame of the lost glory.

Therefore, during the process of dramatic political and social changes, the demise of culturalism remains a question that invites different interpretations. And as this research suggests, the process of learning from the Other, or even partly becoming the Other, should be better read as the means to overcome the Other in a self-initiated cultural nirvana.

2.4. Concluding Remarks: "New" Culture for A "New" Nation?

In this chapter, I have analyzed that Western perceptions of China have been cultural by-products of European and American efforts to position themselves in the world. Yet, along with the increasing expansion of Western political and cultural influence, these Western perceptions have been internalized to various degrees by Chinese efforts to create a new cultural identity and to establish a new cultural balance between China and the West.

The analysis of the discourse of national character has demonstrated a fluid and complex interaction between Western perceptions of China and Chinese self-perceptions. I have studied the critiques of Chinese national character by American missionary Arthur Smith, and argued that his views of the nation and its cultural tradition are typical of an Orientalist interpretation of a foreign culture mixed with a "missionary mind". His account, read from its intellectual and religious context, represented the prevailing Western perceptions of China at the end of the 19th century, and witnessed the transition of such perceptions from a vaguely negative image of an empire towards a personified picture of the yellow race.

While some rejected Smith's account as groudless arrogance and racial antagonism, others perceived it as having provided a valuable new perspective for self-reflection. Despite varied intellectual responses, Smith's criticism of the Chinese national character became one discourse among many others that were employed by cultural reformers. It was identified as views of the stronger Other, and consequently used to critically evaluate the past and the national Self. The past was not lamented because its

heirs, through self-negation, were trying to create a new and better Self and to eventually glorify the national past.

The discourse of national character serves as an example of the profound influences of Western knowledge and perceptions on Chinese self-perceptions. When it came to the problem of Chinese and Western cultures, various forms of Chinese syncretisms appeared, and the major issue was how and how much to learn from the West. And in many cases, this issue, interpreted from another perspective, became a question of how and how much to criticize and discard cultural tradition, in particular Confucianism.

Thus, an interesting process of "self-orientalization", to borrow Dirlik's concept as introduced in the introduction chapter, can be observed within the historical transition from an empire to a nation-state. However, it is important to note that this process of internalization does not necessarily suggest that intellectual self-perceptions place Chinese culture in an inferior position, as was the case in the perceptions of many radical cultural critics.

In the case of Liang Qichao, his analysis of Chinese culture incorporated many negative aspects of Chinese characteristics as pointed out by Smith, yet his selection and adaptation of Western conceptions, as examined in his "new people" thesis, should be studied together with his optimistic cultural imagination for the national future, as an integral part of his efforts to create a new culture for a young and stronger Chinese nation. Liang had an eclectic approach towards both Chinese cultural tradition and Western thoughts, and to "import the absent" from the West was only one part of his cultural syncretic solution.

I have demonstrated that Liang's thesis formed a dialogue with Smith's perceptions; and furthermore, due to the influence of his conception of the ideal Chinese, this dialogue later became a part of the wider New Culture Movement and the May Fourth Movement,[284] in which various schools of Chinese thought engaged in cultural and political debates with foreign perceptions, especially Western criticism.

During this dialogue, Liang Qichao, as well as many others, then faced a dilemma of "history" and "value": he was, in Levenson's opinion, intellectually alienated from his Chinese tradition but still emotionally attached to it. If we subscribe to Levenson's

[284] As the New Culture Movement is intimately linked to the 1919 May Fourth Movement, it is often indicated as "the May Fourth" Movement in historical and cultural studies. This research also uses the term "the May Fourth" to name the New Culture Movement.

assertion of a dilemma of "history" and "value", and so acknowledge both were at play in intellectual perceptions of cultural tradition and visions of a future nation, it is still open to question whether there is such a clear-cut division between the two.

The attachment and loyalty to "history" is not adequate enough to capture Liang's optimism of Chinese culture. This chapter has shown that, though his "new people" personality was modelled after the Anglo-Saxon character, he nevertheless stressed that the new personality should be created on the foundation of both Western and Chinese culture.

And, as many have noted, learning from the West does not mean a complete intellectual alienation from tradition, nor does it mean that the "value" of tradition was intellectually and rationally disregarded. In fact, it was not the case for so-called cultural conservatives, neither was it the case for the cultural reformer Liang. Hao Chang argues that Liang was still intellectually commited in considerable measure to the Chinese cultural heritage with regard to both moral values and socio-political thought.[285]

According to Levenson's dichotomy, Liang remained loyal to tradition because he was emotionally attached to it. To turn it the other way around, his emotional attachment had caused his loyalty to tradition, i.e. history. However, as this chapter has shown, such attachment or loyalty do not necessarily lead to culturally conservative views. They can also give rise to radical cultural proposals and even cultural iconoclastic tendencies, for, in the logic of a cultural reformer, to criticize and even negate tradition can be the best way to inherit tradition. Thus, anti-traditional tendencies might not be a result of intellectual alienation, they could at the same time be caused by emotional attachment as well.

In fact, a paradoxical mixture of pride and loathing towards "history" is shared by most of the intellectuals. Cultural reformers, in their efforts to create a new culture in order to overcome the opposition between the past and the Other, could not escape the inferiority-superiority complex that came along the pursuit of a Western modernization. It has to be added that, for the self-reflective intellectuals, such strong emotions as pride, loathing, and shame were brought about by an intimate connection between the national, cultural Self and the individual, personal Self. The fate and dignity of national culture was partly perceived as the fate and dignity of the intellectual himself; Chinese

[285] Chang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition*, p. 118.

culture became his "tenderest concern",[286] and to search for a cultural identity then became a moral obligation.

This explains why, when Liang Qichao heard a philosopher in Paris complimenting Chinese civilization, he "suddenly felt several hundred pounds upon the shoulders". To him, the honor of Chinese civilization placed at stake every member of the nation's "own sense of confidence and dignity", and Liang regarded himself as "a bearer of a unique set of cultural values and beliefs".[287]

This intimate relations between the personal Self and the national Self were apparent in this "new people" thesis, which was based on the belief that to reform the individual is to reform the nation. In Liang's vision, once, and only if, the individual is liberated from the servile nature, the whole nation will become liberated and revitalized. It was in the same belief that he penned many of his articles to argue for a young and energetic nation under the name of "a young man of young China". And this perceived intimate relationship between the personal and the national, apparently, is nothing new to Chinese culture.

[286] Levenson, *Liang Qichao and the Mind of Modern China*, p. 108.
[287] Chang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition*, p. 117.

Chapter 3. The National Character Question in post-Mao Cultural Critique

The reform era has seen a profound socio-political and cultural transformation no less dramatic or problematic than the transition in late Qing. New national consciousness has been informed by the ever fast-changing domestic and international environment, resulting in divergent views of the nation's place in history and in the world. The question of the national character has been raised in both intellectual discourse and popular culture.

In the first decade of the 21st century, many existing publications dealing with this subject were reprinted in mainland China. Next to the most recent editions of Smith's *Chinese Characteristics*, books originally published in the 1980s to criticize Chinese culture, such as Sun Longji's *The Deep Structure of Chinese Culture* (1983)[288] and Bo Yang's *The Ugly Chinaman* (1985)[289], appeared again in the 2000s to join critiques of the national character.

In 2004, *Wolf Totem*[290], a novel with the ambition to carry forward Lu Xun's national character reform project, became a publishing sensation that "sold in the millions"[291] with its circulation alledgedly second only to Mao's little red book.[292] It once again drew wide attention to the ills of the national character by directing the social-political problems of today towards the nation's cultural tradition and psychological make-up that had been discussed by Smith, Liang and Lu.

If a century ago, advocates of the national character reforms, despite their widely different political and cultural views, shared the same aspiration of a stronger and better nation against foreign invasion and internal disorder, in 21st century China, when

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288 Sun Longji 孙隆基, *Zhongguo wenhua de shenceng jiegou* 中国文化的深层结构 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2004).

289 Bo Yang 柏杨, *Choulou de Zhongguoren* 丑陋的中国人 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2008).

290 Jiang Rong 姜戎, *Lang Tuteng* 狼图腾 (Wuchang, Hubei: Changjiang Arts Publishing House, 2004). English translation see Jiang Rong, translated by Howard Goldblatt, *Wolf Totem: a Novel* (New York: Penguin, 2008).

291 Howard Goldblatt, translator's note in Jiang, *Wolf Totem*, p. vi.

292 Pankaj Mishra, "Call for the Wild", published at *New York Times*, May 4, 2008. For more analysis, see: Uradyn E. Bulag, *Collaborative Nationalism: The Politics of Friendship on China's Mongolian Frontier* (Lanham, Md: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010).

national sovereignty is no longer at stake, and continuous economic growth has boosted the country's power in the world, why does the national character remain an important discourse in cultural critique? What is the relationship between the contemporary discourse of national character and that of the time of Liang and Lu?

These questions lead to the formation of new self-perceptions and the problem of cultural identity in contemporary China. Self-image and national identity, evolving through dramatic changes and uncertainties both home and abroad, have been stretched between the extremes of either profound pride or utter self-loathing. On the one hand, new anti-foreign rhetoric has emerged in popular discourse, together with the patriotic mobilization of the state, in defending national dignity and wounded pride whenever such dignity and pride have been perceived as under jeopardy; on the other hand, others have argued against what is deemed as irrational and chauvinistic nationalism, and called for a "rational" evaluation of China's true Self and its place in the world.

When it comes to the realm of culture, the latter tends to call for embracement of universal values embodied in Western cultures and societies, and to criticize the stress of historical and cultural particularity as a form of cultural nationalism (*wenhua minzu zhuyi*). Such a tendency deserves a closer examination, which this chapter will proceed to offer through the analysis of the national character discourse in the reform era.

Cultural critiques in the 1980s, particularly vibrant in the "culture fever" era[293], were highlighted by television documentary series *River Elegy* (1988). It invoked a heated nation-wide debate over the national character, and, as I will argue in this chapter, its impact on the national psyche remains significant till today. The 1990s saw a shift in both intellectual and popular discourse towards a more prudent outlook,[294] with resumed interests and confidence in traditional culture. This shift has coincided with passionate calls for a more assertive voice of China in the 21st century, for example, in the highly nationalistic *China Can Say No* (1996).[295] Such popular nationalistic rhetoric

[293] Jing Wang, *High Culture Fever.*

[294] For an overview of the intellectual landscape in the 1990s, see Wang Chaohua, "Introduction: Minds of the Nineties". See also Els van Dongen, *Goodbye Radicalism! Conceptions of Conservatism among Chinese Intellectuals During the Early 1990s*. Unpublished 2009 PhD dissertation, available at: https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/13949/fulltext.pdf?sequence=3

[295] See Zhang Zangzang 张藏藏 and Qiao Bian 乔边 [etc.], *Zhongguo keyi shuo bu: lengzhan hou shidai de zhengzhi yu qinggan jueze* 中国可以说不：冷战后时代的政治与情感抉择 (Beijing: Zhonghua gongshang lianhe chubanshe, 1996).

has found its theoretical footing in the formulation of a "China model"[296], arguing along a similar line but with a more nuanced tone and less strident language. These changes notwithstanding, as previously noted, publications such as *Wolf Totem* are still able to invoke the nation's century-old quest to solve the national character problem.

Against this background, the discourse of national character has formed an interesting anti-thesis of what has been widely observed as China's rising nationalism. In the new domestic and international context, critics of the national character often argue for a critical revaluation of Chinese culture for it to return to a sort of normality, that is, a state of being more in accordance with the internationally accepted, universal standards. Hence they are vigilant towards what they see as irrational nationalistic sentiments. Yet, such critiques, often characterized by a strong sense of self-loathing, are just as emotionally charged as the anti-foreign nationalistic yearnings they so strongly argue against.

The recurring theme of self-loathing in the discourse of national character, and its tension with the increasing assertiveness in expressions of Chinese cultural value and pride, both official and popular, have been studied as part of the superiority-inferiority complex. For example, Jing Wang argues that the superiority-inferiority complex is behind the intellectual and cultural scenes of the 1980s and beyond.[297]

As for the inferiority complex, Geremie Barmé observes that, in popular and intellectual circles, many have vigorously denounced China and the Chinese people as being impotent, and they are proud of being "the harshest and most perceptive critics of themselves".[298] Barmé argues that this self-hate or self-loathing has existed since the mid-19th century; and it has also been seen in continuous efforts from the 1980s on, for instance, in *River Elegy*, to overcome the negative legacies of both the imperial and

[296] See, for example, Yu keping 俞可平 [etc.] (ed.), *Zhongguo moshi yu Beijing gongshi: chaoyue huashengdun gongshi* 中国模式与北京共识:超越华盛顿共识 (Beijing: shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2006). Liu Jianwu 刘建武, *Zhongguo tese yu zhongguo moshi: Deng Xiaoping shehui zhuyi teseguan yanjiu* 中国特色与中国模式: 邓小平社会主义特色观研究 (Beijing: renmin chubanshe, 2006). Zheng Yongnian 郑永年, *Zhongguo moshi: jingyan yu kunju* 中国模式：经验与困局 (Hangzhou: zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 2009). Pan Wei 潘维 (ed.), *Zhongguo moshi: jiedu renmin gongheguo de 60 nian* 中国模式:解读人民共和国的 60 年 (Beijing: zhongyang bianyi chubanshe, 2009). Ding Xueliang 丁学良, *Bianlun Zhongguo moshi* 辩论"中国模式" (Beijing: shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2011).

[297] Wang, *High Culture Fever*, pp. 118-136.

[298] Barmé, "To Screw Foreigners Is Patriotic", p. 219.

socialist past. And in the 1990s, he contends, this self-loathing has taken a new twist with consumerism playing a redemptive role as the ultimate revolutionary action of remaking oneself.[299]

From a slightly different perspective, William Callahan points to the relation between self-loathing and the intertwined sentiments of pride and humiliation—what he calls China's "pessoptimism"—in contemporary self-perceptions. While the feeling of humiliation has a post-colonial, anti-imperial edge against Europe, Japan and the U.S., it can also take an introspective turn and direct criticism towards the Chinese national character for being so weak as to allow such humiliation to take place. Callahan makes an interesting comparison with the mindset in modern Scottish culture as reflected in the literary work *Trainspotting*,[300] in which one character said, "Ah don't hate the English. They're just wankers. We are colonized by wankers…We're ruled by effete arseholes. What does that make us? The lowest of the fuckin low, the scum of the earth."[301] Callahan suggests that it is the same sense of humiliation and despair in the otherwise rather different Chinese and Scottish nationalisms that are behind such fierce self-criticism.

In this light, this chapter will study the resurgence of Chinese critiques of the national character as a manifestation of intellectual concerns with the nation's present and future—what Gloria Davies calls "the patriotic worrying" (*youhuan*).[302] It will do so by analyzing two cases of contemporary national character critiques and by placing them in their historical and international contexts.

3.1. Discourse of National Character in Contemporary Cultural Critique

The landscape of contemporary Chinese cultural critique appears to be as diverse as that observed of the West. Critical discourse, similar to that of the West, touches upon issues ranging from globalization and modernity to social equality, with viewpoints across the cultural spectrum; whereas traditionally it has been created in cultural

[299] Barmé, "To Screw Foreigners Is Patriotic", pp. 209-234. The part on self-loathing, see "self-hate and self-approbation", pp. 219-228.
[300] Irvin Welsh, *Trainspotting* (London: Minerva, 1996).
[301] Willem Callahan, *China: the Pessoptimist Nation* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 26-27.
[302] Gloria Davies, *Worrying About China: the Language of Chinese Critical Inquiry* (Cambridge, Mass., [etc.]: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 1.

spheres of publishing, television, and film production, it is now also diverted to the most recently developed and rather active social media platforms. Furthermore, in China, as anywhere else, cultural critique is inseparable from political issues.

However, it has to be pointed out that Chinese cultural critique is particularly subject to political interpretations. Writers have always been socially and politically engaged, literature being endowed with a didactic function, willingly or not, and even the most apolitical genre has its hidden political significance.[303] Therefore, Chinese cultural critique, including the criticism of national character, should be understood within a socio-political context that is significantly different from that of the West.

The most significant difference is the speed and magnitude of changes in almost every sphere of national life. Following the dramatic transformations since the reforms and opening-up, problems of social stratification among urban and rural population, the stark contrast between the rich and the poor, and the nostaglic feeling towards a society largely free from the negative impact of commercialization, have drawn intellectual debates over state power, market regulation, social welfare, equality and justice, the loss of morality, and so on. Such debates have divided socially concerned critical intellectuals into camps with highly reductive labels such as the liberals, the New lefts (*xin zuopai*), the post-modernist, and the Third Way, although their cultural viewpoints might be very different from those of their counterparts elsewhere.

Another noteworthy feature of Chinese critical discourse lies in its ambiguous boundaries created by the intricate relations between its cultural and political implications. Critical opinions that have been perceived as potentially threatening to the party-state are rarely able to reach the general public through state-controlled media. Other critical inquiries that have found their ways to appear, regardless of their original intentions, are most likely to be incorporated by different factions of the state in the official rhetoric. Therefore, critical discourse as implied in this research, to be more specific, only refers to the texts that are available to the general public in mainland China, and does not include the no less important critiques that have been filtered by self or state imposed censorship, many of which are to be found in unofficial publications or various underground channels.

Within the same context, but on a different note, cultural critiques might be approached

[303] Geremie Barmé and John Minford (ed.), *Seeds of Fire: Chinese Voices of Conscience* (Hong Kong: Far Eastern Economic Review Ltd., 1986), p. xiv.

as an alternative and oblique way of expressing concerns over social policies and political status quo in general, for voices of political concern are less likely to be expressed openly and straightforward under media censorship. Therefore, whereas this chapter only analyze cultural critiques that point directly to Chinese culture, especially cultural tradition and Confucianism, it does not suggest that their political implications should be overlooked.

Bearing in mind the intimate relationship between culture and politics, cultural critics analyzed in this study—whose criticism of traditional culture and the national character is tolerated by the state—might have chosen to invest their political quest of various convictions in often deliberately radical cultural statements to convey their messages to well-informed readers. In their efforts to steer the nation's modernization process to the direction they deem as proper, many of them are prepared to place national culture in an inferior position as compared to those in the West, even at the risk of being identified by their opponents as xenophiles.

To put it shortly, although cultural critiques in post-Mao China seem to be, like cultural critiques elsewhere, varied and autonomous reflections towards socio-political problems captured by self-reflective intellectuals, their relations with the socio-political status quo are not merely the ones between the inspired and the inspiration. Critical discourse that has emerged in the realm of culture should be studied simultaneously as a discourse filtered by state censorship and as an alternative to politically critical inquries.

These confinements notwithstanding, contemporary cultural critiques are significant to the study of self-perceptions and cultural identity. In fact, the intimate relations between cultural critiques and their political aspirations make it even more interesting to ask the question as to how the troubled self-images came into being, and how the pursuit of a Chinese modernity or a better national future has caught, and will continue to catch, the cultural imaginations of many critical minds.

1) When the Sheep Meets the Wolf: the National Character Question in *Wolf Totem*

Wolf Totem was introduced in 2004 as a criticism of the weak national character that "originated from the agricultural civilization" and "has become a heavy shackle to

China's social transition".[304] Its author, with the pseudonym Jiang Rong (b. 1946), is a retired political scientist formerly attached to Beijing University.[305] Jiang spent ten years in the remote grasslands of inner Mongolia during the Cultural Revolution before he returned to Beijing to study at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

The quasi-autobiographical novel touches upon many important issues in the modernization process, such as environmental deterioration and ethnic conflicts. But the national character is undoubtedly the central theme, gradually unfolding in the stories of life struggles of the nomadic tribe, wolves, and nature, as witnessed by the protagonist Chen Zhen.

As the author argues through Chen, the "competition of world civilizations" is fundamentally a competition of the national character.[306] In Chen's interpretation, Chinese national character is responsible for the country's tragedies in its encounters with foreign nations:

> *Over the past hundred years, domesticated Chinese have been bullied by the brutish West. It's not surprising that for thousands of years the Chinese colossus has been spectacularly pummeled by tiny nomadic peoples…Temperament not only determines the fate of a man but also determines the fate of an entire race. Farming people are domesticated, and faintheartedness has sealed their fate*.[307]

This weak agrarian character, depicted as cowardly and vulnerable as that of domesticated animals, is believed to be the most fatal defect of the Chinese nation as well as the root of China's ills.[308] In one of the scenes of nomadic life struggles Chen Zhen witnessed, he found a shocking similarity between the behavior of sheep and that of the Chinese people as described by Lu Xun:

> *When the wolf knocked the unfortunate sheep to the ground, the other sheep scattered in fright. But the entire flock soon calmed down, and there were even a few animals that timidly drew closer to watch the*

[304] Jiang, *Lang Tuteng*, preface. References in this study are made to the 2008 English version of *Wolf Totem*, but as it ommited some parts of the 2004 Chinese publication, certain sections from the 2004 Chinese version are also quoted and translated by this author whenever necessary.
[305] Howard Goldblatt, "Translator's Note," in Jiang, *Wolf Totem*, p. VII.
[306] Jiang, *Lang Tuteng*, p. 396.
[307] Jiang, *Wolf Totem*, pp. 173-174.
[308] Jiang, *Lang Tuteng*, pp. 364 & 375.

> *wolf eat a member of their flock... They pushed and shoved and craned their necks to get a better look. Their expressions seemed to say, "Well, the wolf is eating you and not me!" Either that or, "You're dying so I can live." Their fear was measured by a sense of gloating. None made a move to stop the wolf.*
>
> *Startled by the scene, Chen was reminded of the writer Lu Xun, who had written about a crowd of dull-witted Chinese looking on as a Japanese swordman was about to lop off the head of a Chinese prisoner. What was the difference between that and this? No wonder the nomads see the Han Chinese as sheep. A wolf eating a sheep may be abhorrent, but far more loathsome were cowardly people who acted like sheep*.[309]

While the Chinese nation has developed over the centuries into a non-barbaric agrarian civlization—the nation of "civilized sheep", as Chen Zhen claims, Western civilizations, having evolved in a half-barbaric fashion, have inherited many characteristics from ancient nomadic people and become nations of "civilized wolf":[310]

> *For the most part, Westerners are descendents of barbarian, nomadic tribes such as the Teutons and the Anglo-Saxons. They burst out of the primeval forest like wild animals…which is how they've retained more primitive wildness than the traditional farming races*.[311]
>
> *The most advanced people today are descendants of nomadic races...not only did they inherit their courage, their militancy, their tenacity, and their need to forge ahead from their nomadic forebears, but they continue to improve on those characteristics....In the West, primitive nomadic life was their childhood, and if we look at primitive nomads now, we are given access to Westerners at three and at seven, their childhood, and if we take this furthur, we get a clear understanding of why they occupy a high position*.[312]

Jiang's novel interprets the character of the "civilized wolf" as intimately connected to

[309] Jiang, *Wolf Totem*, p. 319.
[310] Jiang, *Lang Tuteng*, p. 366.
[311] Jiang, *Wolf Totem*, p. 173.
[312] Jiang, *Wolf Totem*, p. 303.

the higher postion of the West and its more advanced civlization characterized by values of liberty, democracy and equality.[313] Based on such an assumption, Jiang then turns to the inspiration of his thesis—the virile spirit that runs through nomadic blood and manifests itself in the nomadic character. As the book continues to argue, the nomadic spirit, with the wolf totem as its essence, is not confined to the grassland, for it can also be applied to explore the ocean and the space.[314] And it has not only influenced nomadic people, but also influenced the world.[315] In particular, Jiang's book portrays the nomadic spirit as "the secret of Western rise":

> *But we're lucky, we've been given the opportunity to witness the last stages of nomadic existence on the Mongolian grassland, and, who knows, we might even discover the secret that has led to the rise in prominence of Western races.*[316]

If the nomadic spirit has created the "civilized wolf" and become the secret of the Western rise, in comparison, in the case of China, it is Confucianism with "autocratic repression"[317] that has resulted in the loathsome, cowardly people of "civilized sheep" as well as the most loathsome aspect of the national character—servility:

> *Our Confucian guiding principle is emperor to minister, father to son, a top-down philosophy, stressing seniority, unconditional obedience, eradicating competition through autocratic power, all in the name of preserving imperial authority and peaceful agriculture. In both an existential and an awareness sense, China's small scale peasant economy and Confucian culture have weakened the people's nature, and even though the Chinese created a brilliant ancient civlization, it came about at the cost of the race's character and has led to the sacrifice of our ability to develop. When world history moved beyond the rudimentary stage of agrarian civlization, China was fated to fall behind.*[318]

Yet, despite its weakness and ills, the nation has survived thousands of years. To

[313] Jiang, *Lang Tuteng*, p. 197.
[314] Jiang, *Lang Tuteng*, p. 364.
[315] Jiang, *Lang Tuteng*, p. 377.
[316] Jiang, *Wolf Totem*, p. 304.
[317] Jiang, *Lang Tuteng*, p. 110.
[318] Jiang, *Wolf Totem*, p. 304.

explain such endurance, and to justify his national character remaking project, Jiang Rong finally takes the daring step of reframing the nomadic spirit as part of China's historical legacy.[319] As the protagonist Chen Zhen argued, it is exactly the nomadic invasion of central China, and the consequent transfusion of nomadic blood and character into the weak agrarian nation, that has assisted China to escape its doomed fate of extinction.[320]

Chen Zhen claims that Chinese civilization has been developed through the unique combination of "most aggressive and strong grassland" and "the biggest rural area of weak agrarian culture".[321] In fact, the original Chinese version of *Wolf Totem* includes a whole section of "theoretical exploration", in which Chen Zhen presents his narrative of Chinese history by identifying the several periods of the transfusion of nomadic blood into Han people, which Chen sees as the most glorious times of Chinese history.

While Confucian thought has obliterated the contribution of nomadic spirit and culture, [322] as Jiang Rong goes on to contend through Chen Zhen, it is now time to finally face the roots of the nation's problems, to end the century-old debate on national character, and once again to inject the progressive spirit of the wolf:

> *Learning their progressive skills isn't hard. China launched its own satellite, didn't it? What's hard to learn are the militancy and aggressiveness, the courage and willingness to take risks that flow in nomadic veins*.[323]

Therefore, only if the spirit of the wolf totem—the "most valuable local spiritual source"[324] in Chinese civilization—is injected, can the nation learn the most important secret of survival and success from the nomadic people and their Western successors. As such, the "civilized sheep" will finally turn into "civilized wolf", and "the sleeping lion of the East" and "the dragon" will be truly revitalized.[325]

Narrating through the intriguing and exotic experiences of the nomadic life so intimately related to wolves, Jiang Rong does not conceal his ambition of transforming

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[319] Jiang, *Lang Tuteng*, p. 377.
[320] Jiang, *Wolf Totem*, p. 174.
[321] Jiang, *Lang Tuteng*, p. 370.
[322] Jiang, *Lang Tuteng*, p. 397.
[323] Jiang, *Wolf Totem*, p. 303.
[324] Jiang, *Lang Tuteng*, p. 377.
[325] Jiang, *Lang Tuteng*, pp. 377 & 408.

the Chinese national character for the eventual revitalization of the civilization. In a rather simplistic and polemic fashion, his thesis employs the cultural symbols old and new—the dragon, the sleeping lion, the wolf and the sheep—to lament the nation's past defeats and to search for a more desired national future.

The national past and present in Jiang's thesis is viewed in a rather negative and even desperate light in the irreversible process of modernization. The image of the Chinese people as conveyed through Chen Zhen's reflection is one of a weak, secular, and ignorant nation. In comparison, the nomadic spirit of Inner Mongolian tribes, and the aggressive and strong West that inherited such a spirit, are subjects of admiration and inspiration.

The sense of self-loathing is particularly strong in Jiang's condemnation of the weak national character, for to him, "a wolf eating a sheep may be abhorrent, but far more loathsome were cowardly people who acted like sheep."[326] Yet this self-loathing is also entangled with a sense of pride, as later Jiang framed the invaluable spirit of wolf totem as part of the nation's "great and rich" spiritual legacy.[327] In such a way, once the national character reform is accomplished, in Jiang's imagination, the sheep will turn into the lion and the dragon, marking the grand revival of Chinese civilization.

Such an entanglement of pride and loathing is accompanied by a self-imposed sense of urgency and anxiety to solve the country's problems—to work on national imperfection towards national perfection.[328] It is this drive of "the patriotic worrying" that propells Jiang Rong to identify shortcomings and offer solutions. And opposite to it, the sentiments towards the perceived stronger West are equally ambivalent: the West as the nation's Other is to be learned from, and at the same time, to be resisted and overcome.

2) Wang Xiaofeng's Problem with Chinese Characteristics

The question of national character as raised in *Wolf Totem* has touched almost every sphere of cultural critique. Criticism of social and cultural problems often lead to fierce accusations of the low "quality" (*suzhi*) of Chinese people[329], which is a phenomenon

[326] Jiang, *Lang Tuteng*, p. 319.
[327] Jiang, *Lang Tuteng*, p. 377.
[328] Davies, *Worrying About China*, pp. 18-31.
[329] For research on the discourse of "quality" see, for example, Ann Anagnost, "The Corporeal Politics of Quality (*Suzhi*)," *Public Culture*, Volume 16, Number 2 (2004), pp. 189-208.

especially to be observed in the country's increasingly active online space. In addition to netizens from all walks of life, cultural critics associated with traditional media or academic institutions also voice their critiques of the national character in new ways such as blogs and microblogs. One case in point is the popular blog of a Beijing-based journalist Wang Xiaofeng (b. 1967).

As the chief cultural editor and writer of the periodical *Sanlian Life Weekly*, Wang vigorously criticizes Chinese culture through his journal articles, books, and personal blog. His critiques, especially on his blog www.wangxiaofeng.net, being widely noted by domestic and international media,[330] have made him one of the most important opinion makers of Chinese online space.[331] And his prominence in the online writings has been aided by his writing style with "zest and flavor" in his critical inquiry.[332]

Wang's cultural critique begins with his criticism of the popular music industry. He points out the lack of creativity in Chinese popular music, and holds responsible almost all parts of the industry: severe ideological control over cultural products, the malfunctioning commercial sector, the ignorance of intellectual property rights by consumers and the general public, and the low morale accompanying the pursuit of fame and wealth. The problem in the music industry is not a single issue that stands out in China's cultural realm, argues Wang, a similar case can be made for the movie industry, sports, publishing, as well as internet development.

The lack of creativity and originality in contemporary Chinese culture, according to Wang, is closely linked to the political culture of "rule of the ruling elite" as compared to the Western style "rule of law". Such a culture, after being institutionalized, has led to a closed circle of cultural production. As Wang describes, on the one hand, the ruling elite endeavors to build a so-called harmonious society by means of "ideological repression", creating "devastating conflict" in Chinese thinking;[333] on the other hand,

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Andrew Kipnis, "*Suzhi*: A keyword approach," *The China Quarterly*, vol. 186 (2006), pp. 295-313. Andrew Kipnis, "Neoliberalism reified: Suzhi discourse and tropes of neoliberalism in the People's Republic of China," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 13 (2007), pp. 383-400.

330 See, for example, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1570727,00.html

331 See Hu Han 胡涵, *Hulianwang xin zhengzhi yu tidaixing minzhu—cong hou jiegouzhuyi lingjing kan Wang Xiaofeng boke de shengchan yiyi* 互联网新政治与替代性民主——后结构主义棱镜看王小峰博客的生产意义. Unpublished 2011 master thesis at Fudan University, pp. 20-21.

332 Davies, *Worrying About China*, p. 219.

333 Interview with Wang Xiaofeng in February, 2011.

"the ruled", instead of relying on "a scientific and rational social regulating system", tend to "expect a wise ruler" to resolve cultural and social conflicts.[334] It is such a lack of subjectivity in Chinese consciousness that undermines the application of the rule of law. Wang calls such a lack of subjectivity "the servile nature of the people", and believes that it is a weak national character in itself, as well as the origin of many other ills in contemporary Chinese society.

Wang further argues that "the servile nature", deeply rooted in Chinese national character, can be traced back to Song and Ming Dynasty:

> *This is manifested in [the novel]* Three Kingdoms*, the essence of dross (*zaopo*) in Chinese tradition* [...]. *Once there's no interests in such a story, in such a mindset, then the national character is really changed* [...]. *Many ills cannot be treated because Chinese thought from the Ming Dynasty is still very much present in contemporary China* [...].[335]

He attributes that durability of the servile nature to the inertia of the cultural tradition. Eventually, he looks to Confucianism and its lack of religious spirit as the ultimate cause of Chinese culture's inferior position in relation to Western cultures:

> *Confucianism has always been manipulated by the ruling class* [...] *and people are very receptive to such a ruling ideology* [...]. *Confucianism differs in nature from religion* [...] *while religion creates a sense of fear (*jingwei*); (such fear) is lacking in Confucianism. Instead, Confucianism remains functioning at a sheer moral level, and lacks the foundation of spiritual belief.*[336]

Wang's criticism of contemporary Chinese culture is based on a comparison with Western culture. He acknowledges the role of Western popular music in his personal development. Born in the late 1960s, he has been drawn towards European and American popular music that began to appear in China during his youth, especially in his college years as a law student. It was during that period that capitalism started to develop, and the state-planned economy gave way to marketization and privatization. The reforms and opening-up, in Wang's opinion, have been a process in which Chinese people got in touch with "a more advanced culture" in human development, resulting

[334] Interview with Wang Xiaofeng.
[335] Interview with Wang Xiaofeng.
[336] Interview with Wang Xiaofeng.

in a conflict between two cultures.[337] As he describes, with the impact of Western culture, "we began to think about what was wrong with our own culture."[338]

Nevertheless, after 30 years, Wang is disappointed to see that few Chinese have gained a genuine understanding of "the advanced form of human civilization"—Western civilization. To him, Chinese understandings of capitalism, of the free market, as well as of Western culture, remain "extremely shallow":[339]

> *The capitalist system that has developed over the last 300 years is well-organized, comprehensive, scientific, and sound, with a strong foundation.* […] *Yet everything we have today, we have taken through a tremendous shortcut, directly (importing) the outcome of such a system, while ignoring all the experiences accumulated through their failures along the way* [...]. *We always copy their facade without constructing our own building, and then call it our culture, our entertainment, our art* […].[340]

Wang Xiaofeng chooses to analyze the cultural problems and vent his dissatisfaction with the social and cultural status quo through his vigorous criticism of the *suzhi* of the Chinese people. As he puts it, "Chinese thought from the Ming Dynasty is still very much present". Therefore, he frames Confucian tradition as having nurtured the national character of servility, and its social and cultural mechanisms as having consolidated such a character that it has never been replaced by a sense of subjectivity.

He acknowledges Bo Yang's influence on his rethinking of tradition and his critique of the weakness and flaws of the national character.[341] It is with the same spirit of self-criticism that he looks at contemporary cultural phenomena, which explains why he looks back at the 1980s with a sense of nostalgia:

> *I think that is the second enlightenment after the May Fourth Movement—the second time when we encountered Western culture... And the most representative case was* River Elegy, [which] *reflected on the limitations of Chinese civilization from an intellectual*

[337] Interview with Wang Xiaofeng.
[338] Interview with Wang Xiaofeng.
[339] Interview with Wang Xiaofeng.
[340] Interview with Wang Xiaofeng.
[341] Wang Xiaofeng 王小峰, *Buxu Lianxiang* 不许联想 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2006), p.146.

perspective.[342]

What he and many others regard as the second enlightenment, was the time of increasing individual freedom and loosening ideological control. The enlightenment spirit of that time apparently remains a source of inspiration for Wang's critique. Wang shares with *River Elegy* an aspiration for individual liberty and equality, and the same resentment of servility as being observed from socio-cultural reality.

At the same time, it is also abundantly clear that Wang couples the values of enlightenment with the superiority of Western culture. For cultural critics like Wang, China will not be able to catch up with the West unless some of the fundamental values of Western modernization, applicable to any modern society in his eyes, are accepted and internalized. Yet, despite numerous efforts of generations, as Wang Xiaofeng regretfully notes, these universal values have not found their way into Chinese minds, which in his rationale is the result of strong resistance from conservative forces.

It has to be noted that his opinions draw support from scholarly calls to pursue Western-style modernization, for instance, from the Guangzhou-based scholar Yuan Weishi (b. 1931), a retired Professor of Philosophy.[343] As a dedicated advocate of liberal values and their application in China, Yuan classifies Chinese traditional culture into institutional culture (*zhidu wenhua*) and moral values (*jiazhi guannian*). According to him, traditional Chinese institutional culture severely hinders the process of modernization; many moral values, especially the emphasis on collective interest and family values, have also become the main obstacle to China's acceptance of universal values and its transition towards a modern society, after being institutionalized into "Confucian hierarchical values" of "the three cardinal guides and five ethical codes" (*sangang wuchang*).[344]

In comparison, as Yuan argues, modern liberal ideals represent universal values, for they have been developed in societies with academic and ideological freedom.[345] Therefore, the acceptance of such values is the only way to rescue a possible Chinese modernity from the powerful force of conservative culture. That is why he believes the

[342] Interview with Wang Xiaofeng.
[343] Interview with Wang Xiaofeng.
[344] Yuan Weishi 袁伟时, *Daguo Zhi Dao* 大国之道 (Zhenzhou: zhenzhou daxue chubanshe, 2006), p. 49.
[345] Yuan Weishi 袁伟时, *Jindai Zhongguo lunheng* 近代中国论衡 (Hong Kong: Roundtable enterprise limited, 2006), p. 262.

harsh self-criticism in the discourse of national character, such as the introspection of Bo Yang, is valuable, for "it showed our weakness that we should be courageous to face".[346] In fact, Yuan takes a step further to view contemporary critiques of the national character as a continuation of the unfinished projects of Liang Qichao, Lu Xun and Hu Shi, whom he refers to as his liberal spiritual mentor:

> *The historical task of reforming the national character and discarding the servile logic, started by the pioneers at the New Culture Movement, has not been accomplished yet.*[347]

> *Liang Qichao and Lu Xun advocated national character reforms* [...] *To reform national character is no more than to promote changes in thought and culture, to get rid of the deeply rooted servility* [...]. *Hu Shi also said, to become a modern citizen, one has to salvage oneself...and to walk out of his/her own servility.*[348]

It is in this vein that Wang Xiaofeng's problem with Chinese national character is comparable to the cultural critiques of the 1980s, which, as I will analyze later, were also drawn from a firm belief in Western liberal values in the Chinese context. But before that, it is important to note that the popularity of Wang's cultural critiques,[349] both online and in print, suggests that he has not only drawn from Chinese liberalism but also captured a sentiment shared by a much bigger audience, just as *Wolf Totem* has struck a chord with its allegedly million of readers.

3) Modernity Imagined and Past Revisited

The two examples of national character criticism—*Wolf Totem* and Wang Xiaofeng's cultural critiques—reflect the making of a troubled self-image in the pursuit of modernity in 21st century China. They are similar in the sense that they both attribute the nation's unsatisfactory status quo to Confucianism, therefore representing a tendency of anti-traditionalism. And this tendency is also, in both cases, accompanied by a strong sense of self-loathing mixed with *youhuan*, despite Wang's effort to express it with his satire and cynicism.

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346 Yuan Weishi, *Daguo Zhi Dao*, p. 12.

347 Yuan Weishi 袁伟时, *Zhongguo xiandai sixiang sanlun* 中国现代思想散论 (Guangzhou: Guangdong jiaoyu chubanshe, 1998), p. 365.

348 Yuan Weishi, *Daguo Zhi Dao*, pp. 6 & 8.

349 Hu Han, *Hulianwang xin zhengzhi yu tidaixing minzhu*, pp. 20-21.

They demonstrate that the search of a cultural identity is still caught in a predicament between the past and the West. Economic development has not eliminated the century-old problem of the national character; even worse, in the pursuit of wealth and vanity, the modernization project has been seen as pursued at the cost of ecological balance and the humanistic spirit, causing the ills in the national character to manifest in new ways.

Many of the pitfalls in Chinese national character identified by Jiang Rong and Wang Xiaofeng—the servile nature, the conservatism in traditional culture, and the lack of religious spirit—were the main constituents of the national character discourse a century ago, as we have discussed through the texts of Smith and his contemporaries. And on top of that, Confucianism, seen as representing traditional culture, remains to be associated with conservatism, servility, and the resistance of religious spirit in China.

The problem of Chinese national character, for Arthur Smith, was that its intellectual foundation of Confucianism was so profoundly rooted in the national psyche that it hindered China from being salvaged by Christian Enlightenment, that is to say, in the eyes of a missionary, it hindered the moral improvement of a large part of the human race. For a late Qing reformer such as Liang Qichao, at least during the years of he worked on his "new people" thesis, the essential problematic of Chinese cultural characteristics lay in their incompatibility with the nation's modernization process—its transformation from an old and weak empire to a young and strong nation.

To contemporary cultural critic Wang Xiaofeng, the national character represents the worst part of Chinese culture—"the essence of dross"—being consolidated in the national psychological make-up. It then becomes the ultimate reason for the problems in the cultural realm as well as other aspects of national life; and it is a severe obstacle for the Chinese people to learn from the most advanced culture in the modern era, therefore an obstacle to China's cultural modernization.

In such a framework, the past, with the long-lost glory and the "feudalistic" Confucian cultural legacies, shadows over the road to a better nation. As long as Confucian culture remains an important element of the Chinese character, the imagined modernity, inspired by its manifestation in Western societies, is nowhere to be seen in the near future. Wang's urge to distance himself and to break away from tradition, as we will analyze later, resembles the mindset of many liberal intellectuals in the 1980s.

However, Jiang Rong has chosen to deal with the identity problem with a very different approach. He integrated the aspired wolf spirit into the past as something originally present in Chinese culture yet later being opressed and lost. Such a reinterpretation of cultural history thus defines the national character reform as a project of rediscovering the hidden essencein Chinese culture, rather than negating cultural tradition as a whole.

In the contemporary discourse of national character, as was the case for Liang Qichao's "new people" thesis, the concept of "the West" is very much present. Both Jiang and Wang promote values such as individual liberty and equality as the foundations of a better nation, envisioning a future for China in a Western-style modernization.

Wang Xiaofeng rejects to view modern history in the light of either ancient glory or recent humiliation, both prominent in contemporary interpretations of Chinese history, especially modern war history.[350] Instead, he advocates a spirit of rationality as perceived in a universal liberalism (*ziyou zhuyi*), an approach described by Yuan Weishi as to "internalize rationality and tolerance as part of Chinese national character".[351] By positioning himself from a universalist perspective, Wang tries to go beyond a superiority-inferiority complex that he perceives as inherited in irrational nationalism.

Whereas Wang believes that Western culture represents the most advanced human civilization in modern times, for Jiang Rong, the meaning of the West and its power is different. They are to learn from, and at the same time to overcome. Thus, the meaning of the national character critique is also different. Jiang's self-criticism and introspection are colored by a strong sense of humiliation and even despair, which is more in accordance with what Callahan describes in Scottish nationalism. Jiang criticizes the torpidity of the loathsome sheep facing attacks of the wolf, just as the Scotts in *Trainspotting* resent the losers being colonized by wankers. In terms of China-West relations, a Social-Darwinist view is still present in *Wolf Totem* and its imagination of modernity.

3.2. Historical Legacies of the 1980s and the May Fourth Movement

As I have briefly touched upon, there is an intimate connection between contemporary

[350] Mitter, "Old Ghosts, New Memories", p. 122.

[351] Yuan Weishi 袁伟时, "Xiandaihua yu lishi jiaokeshu" 现代化与历史教科书, *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao* 中国青年报 Jan 11, 2006.

cultural critiques and the cultural fever in the 1980s. Such a connection is also self-evident when it comes to critiques of the national character. Contemporary critics look back at the 1980s for inspiration, and perceive their pursuit of cultural reforms as a continuation of the unfinished projects of Liang Qichao and Lu Xun. Therefore, in order to explore the historical dimensions of the discourse of national character, we should first return to the most recent past and examine the contemporary discourse as a legacy of "the second enlightenment" in the 1980s.

At the end of the Cultural Revolution, the country embarked on a modernization process that deviated from the Maoist approach; and along with the reforms and opening-up, came a tide of ideological liberalization (*sixiang jiefang*). At the beginning of the 1980s, intellectuals had not yet encountered the multifold challenges posed by commercialization and marketization, which were to be a major concern of critical thinking later in the 1990s; instead, they found themselves in the post-Mao cultural realm provided with a historical opportunity to be liberated from the legacies of the Cultural Revolution, and to take the responsibility of reconstructing national culture within the new domestic and international settings.

Although grounded in the socialist system, the intellectuals were aware of the material and social achievements of the capitalist West, and most enchanting to their minds was the intellectual enlightenment of Western thought, particularly scientific rationality, which became the major inspiration of their own ideological liberation.

1) Cultural Fever and the National Character Discourse in the 1980s

It was within such a context that the *Series towards the Future* (*Zouxiang Weilai Congshu*) was published between 1984 and 1988, which included 74 volumes of translation work and Chinese research covering subjects ranging from natural and social sciences to humanities. It chief editor, Jin Guantao, had a strong preference for scientific rationality in his interpretation of social development. Drawing methodologies from natural and information sciences, Jin and his co-author, Liu Qingfeng, developed their "ultra-stability hypothesis" by applying theories of systems, control and information to the fields of history and sociology.[352]

[352] Jin Guantao 金观涛 and Liu Qingfeng 刘青峰, *Xingsheng yu weiji: lun Zhongguo shehui chao wending jiegou* 兴盛与危机:论中国社会超稳定结构 (Changsha: Renmin chubanshe, 1985).

Another influential yet distinctively different series was *Culture: China and the World* (*Wenhua: Zhongguo Yu Shijie*), with an emphasis on introducing Western scholarship to Chinese literary studies and philosophy. Their translations included, for example, Heidegger's *Being and Time* and Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness.* Many members of the editorial board, such as researchers of Western philosophy Gan Yang and Liu Xiaofeng, literary scholar Qian Liqun and Chen Pingyuan, and philosopher Chen Lai, became leading figures in their respective fields since the 1990s. While their scholarly interests and convictions are rather divergent, the chief editor of the series, Gan Yang, focused on applying Western hermeneutics to interpret social and cultural issues of modern China. Toning down the coherence of tradition in modern times, his use of hermeneutics was more tuned to the critique of traditional culture and the learning of Western culture, for the eventual goal of developing traditional culture through challenging it.

These two series marked the peak of the so-called "high culture fever" at around 1985. Newly translated and introduced theories in Western philosophy and culture appeared not just as knowledge of a different nature, but also as theoretical tools of self-reflection and introspection—to criticize the old cult. These loosely categorized two schools of critical thinking in many ways intertwined with each other, and more interestingly, were also connected to intellectuals whose approaches to traditional culture were of a more positive nature.

As many have noted, just like the editorial board of *Culture: China and the World*, the Academy of Chinese Culture (*zhongguo wenhua shuyuan*), with Tang Yijie as one of its leading figures, was a "conscious participant" and even "one of the driving forces" of the cultural debate.[353] Yet unlike cultural critics that argued against Confucianism, the Academy played an important role in advocating the values and concepts of traditional Chinese thought as "the moral foundation of contemporary Chinese culture".[354] It was also associated with a "revival of neo-Confucianism" in mainland China amidst the high culture fever, which was aided by overseas neo-Confucian scholars such as Tu Weiming and Yu Yingshi.[355]

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[353] See Chen Lai 陈来, "Sixiang chulu de san dongxiang" 思想出路的三动向, originally published at *Dangdai* 当代, Jan 1988, in Gan Yang 甘阳 (ed.), *Zhongguo Dangdai Wenhua Yishi* 中国当代文化意识 (Taibei: Fengyun shidai chuban gongsi, 1989), pp. 371-379: 375.

[354] Davies, *Worrying About China*, p. 132.

[355] Wang, *High Culture Fever*, pp. 64-78.

Obviously, many important figures of the cultural fever, such as philosophor Li Zehou, cannot be simply categorized into camps of one or another described above. And very often, their viewpoints were not mutually exclusive. For example, Tang Yijie warned against the celebrations of "Chinese cultural quintessence" of being vulnerable to the tendency of extreme nationalism and authoritarian rule in the name of such uniqueness, [356] which shared the same critical spirit with those advocated anti-traditionalism.

It is justified to say that, during the cultural fever, the landscape was shaped by a methodological eclecticism and a sentimental enthusiasm as reflected in the titles of the series—marching towards "the world" and "the future". Looking back at the 1980s, the critical inquiries remain the most remarkable phenomenon memorized by its participants and later commentators, and criticism of traditional Chinese culture and the national character formed the major theme of the cultural fever.[357]

Equally important, the critical inquires were characterized by a crisis mentality similar to that of intellectuals around the time of Liang Qichao and Lu Xun. Many intellectuals began to view China's position in history and in the world from a new perspective, and in the 1980s their reflections led to the conclusion that the country was lagging behind in the modernization process. Once again, they felt the country's development had been hindered by tradition, and once again, they were propelled by a sense of responsibility to lift the heavy burden of the past. Affected by the "social psychology of a people dreaming of an attainable utopian future",[358] while busily involved in their projects of thought enlightenment, they also had to respond to their crisis consciousness.

It was against such a background that the issue of Chinese national character was brought up again, first from overseas. Sun Longji published his "fresh and provocative"[359] monograph *The Deep Structure of Chinese Culture* in the U.S. in 1983, in which he expressed his alienation from his native culture. As he later commented, "the antipathy" towards his own culture was "so strong that the cultural critique even went far beyond the national character critique in a general sense".[360]

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356 Davies, *Worrying About China*, p. 144.

357 Merle Goldman, Perry Link, and Su Wei, "China's Intellectuals in the Deng Era: Loss of Identity with the State," in Lowell Dittmer and Samuel Kim (ed.), *China's Quest for National Identity* (Ithaca, NY [etc.]: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 125-153: 143.

358 Wang, *High Culture Fever*, p. 37.

359 Barmé and Minford, *Seeds of Fire*, p. xvi.

360 Sun Longji, *Zhongguo wenhua de shenceng jiegou*, p. 4.

In Taiwan, Bo Yang published *The Ugly Chinaman* in 1985, and depicted Chinese society as "a sauce vat" (*jiang gang*) and the Chinese people living in such a vat as ill. Obviously, the patients need to be treated by doctors—cultural critics and reformers like himself. To reform the sauce vat culture, he contended, one has to realize that Confucianism is "conservative" and "stands against progress".[361]

Publications such as *The Ugly Chinaman* had significant influence on the national character discussion in mainland China. Intended to invoke the ambition of Lu Xun, they represented a state of mind that was "both Chinese and cosmopolitan" and continuous efforts "to confront the dilemma of being Chinese in the twentieth century".[362] Undoubtedly, their ultimate concern was the fate of the Chinese nation, yet what has made them distinctive was the expression of anxiety over crisis, sometimes even the mood of "doom and fatalism" reflected in the "impassioned attack on the weakness of the national character,[363] as Geremie Barmé read in works such as *Winds on the Plain* (*huangyuan feng*).[364]

The critiques of the national character by Sun Longji and Bo Yang soon resonated in mainland China, capturing the conflicting sentiments and crisis consciousness of that time. In the "cultural fever", critical intellectuals made various efforts to explain the nation's troubles with its history and cultural tradition. The 1988 television documentary series *River Elegy* criticized the agrarian servility that it claimed to be deeply rooted in the national psyche, and marked the culmination as well as the end of the cultural fever.

2) *River Elegy* and the Anti-traditionalism of the 1980s

River Elegy was a declaration of social and cultural crisis, and, as a response to such crisis, a passionate call to discard the yellow inland civilization—the old agrarian culture—in order to embrace the blue, oceanic civilization represented by the West. The dualism in such cultural critique was repeatedly demonstrated: the Yellow River, the Great Wall, and the dragon symbolize the backward, conservative and impotent

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361 Bo Yang, *Choulou de Zhongguoren*, p. 54.

362 Barmé and Minford (1986), *Seeds of Fire*, p. xvi.

363 Geremie Barmé, *In the Red: on contemporary Chinese culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 138. For a more detailed analysis of Yuan's book see Barmé, "To Screw Foreigners Is Patriotic", pp. 228-231.

364 Yuan Hongbing 袁红冰, *Huangyuan Feng* 荒原风, (Beijing: xiandai chubanshe, 1990).

Chinese civilization; and the blue ocean is a metaphor for the progressive, aggressive and powerful Western civilization. The cultural symbols were used to interpret the irreconcilable tensions between Chinese and Western civilizations, in the form of tradition versus modernity, Confucian servility versus Enlightenment, and despotism versus democracy.

The scriptwriters, with highly emotionally charged vocabulary and rhetoric, attempted to analyze China's problems through these cultural symbols and to provide, once and for all, their ultimate solutions to these problems that had been haunting the nation for centuries. In a way, *River Elegy* held a "national referendum on the symbol system of Chinese identity",[365] and with "a stridently didactic tone", by "equating Maoist-Stalinist orthodoxy with state Confucianism and traditional culture",[366] it denounced cultural tradition as a disastrous legacy from the ancient agrarian society, only creating people of a servile nature in despotism. In the perceptions of the scriptwriters, Confucian culture was unable of conceiving science and democracy, nor was it able to create a spirit of progress for the nation. Yet its forces were still strong enough to strike back and strangle hopes for a modern China.

As Jing Wang put it, *River Elegy* is an interesting discourse "in its own right".[367] It reflected the conflicting moods of optimism and pessimism of its time, and revealed the ideological ambivalance of the enlightened minds that are, ironically, "no less nostalgic for power symbolism than their historical Confucian counterparts whom they roundly condemn".[368] More importantly, it represented a mode of thinking in the Chinese liberalism of the 1980s that argues "along universalist lines for the forward-development of China".[369]

The influences of critical intellectual thinking of the 1980s was quite obvious in *River Elegy*. It drew theories of critical inquiries, for instance, most notably from Jin Guantao and Liu Qingfeng's thesis of "ultra-stable structure" to demonstrate the working of conservative forces in Chinese society. Its cry to break away from tradition and the

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365 Samuel S. Kim and Lowell Dittmer, "Whither China's Quest for National Identity?" in Lowell Dittmer and Samuel Kim (ed.), *China's Quest for National Identity* (Ithaca, NY [etc.]: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 237-290: 265.

366 Geremie Barmé and Linda Jaivin (ed.), *New Ghosts, Old Dreams: Chinese Rebel Voices* (New York: Time Books, 1992), p. 140.

367 Wang, *High Culture Fever*, p. 120.

368 Wang, *High Culture Fever*, pp. 120-121.

369 Vukovich, *China and Orientalism*, p. 18.

sense of responsibility—almost a moral imperative—as reflected in such a cry, resembled very much the passionate call from Gan Yang's 1985 article *On Several Issues in the 1980s' Cultural Debate.*[370]

In this article, Gan Yang envisioned the future of Chinese culture with a few assumptions. First of all, Gan believed that modern China's backwardness has to be explained through its culture, just as the success and prosperity of the West in modern times lay in Western culture.[371] As modernization in its roots was the modernization of culture, to strengthen the country then required a total reform of the culture.[372] Such an assumption, attributing socio-political problems to the nation's cultural tradition, is reminiscent of what was later called by its critics as "cultural determinism".

Secondly, Gan contended that traditional culture was in conflict with modernization, and such a historical conflict was inevitable.[373] This was based on his understanding of modernization as a process featured by its thoroughness, totality, and comprehensiveness of changes.[374] Gan believed that discontinuity with the past was a problem that every nation would face once they entered the process of modernization, and China was no exception. Therefore, he proposed to break traditional cultural-psychological structure and to reconstruct the social, cultural, and psychological form of the nation.

Its underlying view of history was one with tradition being placed at the very opposite of modernity. In fact, Gan perceived anti-traditionalism as the best way to create tradition: "we should create what the Chinese in the past did not have—new and modern national cultural psychological structure".[375] On this note, Gan argued that to reform the overall system and structure of Chinese culture was in line with Lu Xun's calls to reform the national character,[376] because both aimed to liberate Chinese people from the heavy shackles of the past. As he contended, the inability to overcome the heavy cultural burden came from the anxiety to hold on to the uniqueness of Chinese culture, and the fear of being changed into a nation other than the Chinese nation.

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[370] Gan Yang 甘阳, "Bashi niandai wenhua taohun de jige wenti" 八十年代文化讨论的几个问题 (1985) in idem. (ed.), *Zhongguo Dangdai Wenhua Yishi* ,pp. 9-49.
[371] Gan, "Bashi niandai", p. 17.
[372] Gan, "Bashi niandai", p. 14.
[373] Gan, "Bashi niandai", p. 13.
[374] Gan, "Bashi niandai", p. 34.
[375] Gan, "Bashi niandai", p. 33.
[376] Gan, "Bashi niandai", p. 45.

To overcome such anxiety and fear, Gan proposed to transform the spatial issue of "China-West" to the temporal problematic of "tradition-modernity", a point he elaborated later.[377] From this perspective, the crisis of Chinese culture was seen as essentially a result of the tension between pre-modern and modern societies—between the traditional culture and a modern culture that was yet to be constructed.

These aspects of Gan's theory—the cultural deterministic view, the urge to break away from tradition to achieve modernity, and the belief in the thorough reform of traditional culture and national character—were clearly reflected in *River Elegy.* It has to be noted that, Gan was very critical of the latter for simplifying the problematic to propagate its message.[378] Yet, Gan's criticism of *River Elegy* notwithstanding, they both represented a mode of critical thinking that was prevalent during high cultural fever, a mode of thinking that provided the context for the discourse of national character.

3) Revisiting the May Fourth: Another Battle between the Old and the New

In the reflections of the scriptwriters and later commentators, the *River Elegy* mentality and the radical proposal for cultural reforms were intimately related to the May Fourth Movement. Chinese intellectuals in the reform era, waking up from Mao's myth with China at the center of world revolution, discovered that what was deemed by socialist ideology as "a brand new China" was not that different from "the fuedalistic society" that it initially stood against. The introspection of the Cultural Revolution thus traced back, once again, to Confucianism, which at the time was labelled as representative of feudalistic culture. Therefore, the sense of anxiety in the 1980s made it very receptive to the way of thinking that had once characterized cultural critiques of the May Fourth Movement, which requires an "overall solution to China's problems".[379]

The reflections of the most recent past and the imperial "feudalist" past drew critical minds to wage a battle against these two "old" traditions with the weapon of the "new" tradition as created by the May Fourth Movement. In the 1980s, the predominant interpretation of the May Fourth Movement stresses its anti-traditional nature, taking it

[377] Gan Yang 甘阳, *Wenhua: Zhongguo yu shijie* 文化：中国与世界 (Beijing: sanlian shudian, 1987). For details see: Gan Yang 甘阳, *Gujin zhongxi zhi zheng* 古今中西之争 (Beijing: sanlian shudian, 2006), p. 29.
[378] Gan, *Gujin zhongxi*, p. 11.
[379] Su Xiaokang, *Seminar on Chinese Storm*, pp. 21 & 22.

as the best way to develop tradition and Chinese culture. The May Fourth Movement was perceived as having created, in its embryonic form, a new Chinese cultural tradition. It was now, in the 1980s, the time for Chinese intellectuals to continue their great cause. In the spirit of this new tradition, a battle began to fight against the old Confucian tradition, "to try and expand the differences, divergence and antagonism, even willing to stand at the exact opposite of the past so that the present is not to be engulfed by the past".[380]

One of the most significant features of this new tradition was self-criticism. Introspection took the form of radical self-negation: the total abandonment of traditional culture, and a thorough reform of the national character. As one author of *River Elegy* wrote, "the *River Elegy* team was connected by one common belief, which...was rigorous self-criticism".[381] In fact, in the most important texts of the 1980s, the spirit of self-criticism is everywhere to be seen. Only now intellectuals walked through the decades around May Fourth within a few years. As one of the chief authors of *River Elegy,* Su Xiaokang, later summarized in his reflection:

> *The loss of faith in Communism, mixed with the inferiority complex caused by a loss of faith in traditional culture, led to a sense of eschatology in society...which had obvious impact on the intelligentsia...To deal with the urgent questions in Chinese reality, we always wanted to seek an answer from culture and history, to locate its origin from tradition, which was a vogue probably caused by (the anti-tradition) tradition since the May Fourth Movement.*[382]

As demonstrated in the case of *River Elegy*, self-criticism and even self-loathing went hand in hand with the tendency to render perplexing socio-political problems into an over-simplified cultural rhetoric, and to seek an interpretation of contemporary issues from cultural tradition and the national character. In this sense, it also bore great similarities with the cultural movements around the time of Liang's "new people" thesis, created by Liang in his spirit of "challenging myself of yesterday with myself of today". Such a mentality, as I have analyzed in Chapter Two, has led to a superiority-inferiority complex in Chinese search for a cultural identity in the years that followed.

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[380] Gan, "Bashi niandai", p. 37.

[381] Yuan Zhiming 远志明, "Heshang chuanzuoqun de linian," 河觞创作群的理念 in *Seminar on Chinese Storm*, pp. 205-209.

[382] Su, *Seminar on Chinese Storm*, p. 21.

This complex is described very clearly in Jing Wang's analysis of *River Elegy* and the culture fever:

> *Su Xiaokang and his generation of intellectuals inherited not only the iconoclastic tradition of their predecessors, but also the superiority-inferiority complex that characterizes the May Fourth generation's reflection of China's past....it seems inevitable that in the context of enlightenment as such, any introspective look into China's historical past engenders an ambivalent attitude that makes Chinese intellectuals at once proud of and hostile towards their own cultural and national heritage, while defiant toward and subservient to the imported Western culture at the same time.*[383]

However, while *River Elegy* was marking the last milestone of the high culture fever, revaluation of the critical attitude towards tradition was already under way. It took only a few years before the vigorous anti-traditionalism itself was under criticism, and ironically, from the so-called cultural radicals themselves.

In their reflections, many who had in the mid-1980s criticized traditional culture began to question the modernist framework such as been identified in texts like *River Elegy*. As one commentator remarked, to use modernist ideology to argue against socialist ideology, it was "a profound irony of new enlightenment".[384] Three years after his famous manifesto of radicalism, Gan Yang was already "very dissatisfied with it",[385] for the reflection on tradition was no longer able to cover the problem of the perceived modernization:

> *To say "the best way to develop tradition is exactly to fight against tradition"* [...] *doesn't mean that we require a total abandonment of traditional culture, not to mention a denial of our affection towards traditional culture* [...]. *On the one hand, we tend to negate and criticize traditional culture; on the other hand, we are also positive/affirmative about it, therefore unwilling to part with it. We look forward to (build) a modern society, yet at the same time we*

[383] Wang, *High Culture Fever*, p. 124.

[384] Li Tuo 李陀, "Li Tuo fangtanlu," 李陀访谈录 in Zha Jianying, *Bashi niandai fangtanlu*, p. 272.

[385] Gan, *Zhongguo dangdai wenhua yishi* (Fanpan pian), p. 46.

> *remain deeply skeptical and uncertain* […]. *This complicated and often paradoxical feeling will puzzle us for a long time, and force intellectuals of our generation to fight at two frontiers: not only with a critical attitude towards traditional culture, but at the same time remaining cautious and critical towards the modern society.*[386]

Therefore, soon in 1988, he turned into his "cultural conservatism" (*wenhua baoshou zhuyi*) with "critical spirit"[387], to safeguard cultural tradition as embodied in Confucianism.[388] He then no longer saw Confucianism as incompatible with the modern world; rather, he acknowledged it as value rationality that should not be judged by its usefulness, or be relegated into the instrumental tool to modernity. Once the motto of fighting against tradition was abandoned, Gan made his new proposal by quoting Edmund Burke, "we compare, we reconcile, (and) we balance." As such, he seemed to have found the new meaning of Confucianism in the modern world.[389]

That is why, although contemporary cultural critiques often link the 1980s together with the May Fourth Movement, looking back at both with a sense of nostalgia, they also stress the fact that the 1980s was not only a mere copy of the May Fourth Movement, it had also critical reflections of the May Fourth. Such is the opinion of literary scholar Chen Pingyuan, one of the active participants of the 1980s cultural fever:

> *But (in the 1980s) they did more than just follow; they started reflections, rethinking, and went beyond...there were reflections on the Cultural Revolution, the history of the PRC, and even the May Fourth.*[390]

Similarly, what we have observed is that contemporary cultural critiques are making conscious efforts to follow, and at the same time to critically reflect on, cultural propositions of the 1980s, the May Fourth and beyond. They have made use of such historical legacies as a frame of reference and incorporated previous critiques in their reinterpretation of tradition. While doing so, they also share many characteristics with

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386 Gan, *Zhongguo dangdai wenhua yishi* (Xunlu pian), p. 3 & 4.
387 Gan, *Gujin zhongxi*, p. 119.
388 Gan, *Gujin zhongxi*, p. 10.
389 Gan, *Gujin zhongxi*, pp. 113 & 123.
390 Chen Pingyuan 陈平原, "Chen Pingyuan fangtan" 陈平原访谈, in Zha Jianying, *Bashi niandai fangtanlu*, p. 144.

previous critiques, such as voicing their social and political discontent through cultural critiques, and expressing their concerns with contemporary issues by reinterpreting history and tradition.

3.3. Liberal Optimism and Its China Complex

Anti-traditionalism and iconoclasm in the reform era, as I suggested earlier, is better understood against the global background of increasing cultural exchange between China and the outside world. *River Elegy*'s quest to reform the dying culture is the quest to embrace Enlightenment and the West where it originated: the Yellow River should conquer the fear of change, accept "the invitation from the sea", and, "after thousands of years of a lonely journey", eventually "return to the blue ocean where the origin of life is".[391] Both Jiang Rong and Wang Xiaofeng, in their vigorous criticism of Chinese national character, perceive the West as either a "stronger" or a "more advanced" civilization from which the Chinese nation has to learn if its fatal defects are to be uprooted.

Similar to the "new people" thesis of Liang Qichao, in the reform era, the discourse of national character is characterized by the strong presence of the West. The significance of the West is two-fold. It is a frame of reference within which the Chinese nation is evaluated—the Other to compare the national Self with; simultaneously, Western perceptions of China as a part of imported Western knowledge and worldviews have directly influenced Chinese self-perceptions.

For example, *River Elegy* drew the image of China as a stagnated culture from Adam Smith: "In 1776 Adam Smith published the famous *The Wealth of Nations* declaring that Chinese history and culture had come to a standstill. He maintained that the ignorance of foreign trade leads to stagnation, and closing the door is suicidal. Unfortunately, no Chinese heard these words in time".[392] Indeed, such an interpretation of history was also in accordance with Hegel's theory: history began in Asia, but Asia has fallen behind. The agrarian civilization is constrained by the land; if people are limited by their dependence on the land, they are unable to transcend the earthly thoughts and behavior.

[391] Su Xiaokang 苏晓康 (ed.), "He Shang" 河觞 in *Cong Wusi dao Heshang* 从五四到河觞, appendix 2, pp. 382 & 423.
[392] Su, "He Shang", pp. 416-417.

It is not surprising to note that, when Su Xiaokang recalled the time he was working on the documentary, he remembered to have Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, Toynbee's *A Study of History*, and H. G. Wells's *The Outline of History* on his desk.[393] Cultural debates in the 1980s consciously incorporated theories, languages, and opinions from Euro-American scholarship. Cultural rethinking was also characteristically accompanied by embracing Western thoughts of almost all schools. The West as a subject of learning has become the stronger Other to learn from.

The "invitation" from the sea indicated not only Chinese aspirations for Western thought, but also the international context of such aspirations. Anti-traditionalism in the 1980s was supported by a sense of liberal optimism about China's future not only at home but also from abroad. A China that is engaged in a modernization process, and the consequent vision of a liberal country in East-Asia, were welcomed by "the free world". Changes brought about by the reforms and opening-up were seen as the second revolution, and, until the time of *River Elegy*, Deng Xiaoping appeared in the West as a decisive reformer that was leading the country towards a free market and even a liberal society. These Western perceptions were echoed by the same optimism in liberal thoughts among Chinese intellectuals.

1) The Rise and Fall of "America's China"

Western perceptions of China have gone through drastic transitions since the time of Arthur Smith. The "missionary mind" of Smith's time has within a century evolved into a combination of racial prejudice, paternalistic sentiments and the belief in an "America's China". As time changed, the focus of the relationship shifted from one part of the mixture to another, and a certain perception became dominant. As James Reed argued, as early as in 1906, when the Chinese abolished the traditional Confucian examination system, the mission boards saw a chance of Christianity in China, and China missions grew rapidly.[394] Between 1911 and 1915, China was already "a particular national incarnation of the universal vision"[395] of America's "Manifest Destiny"—that America is responsible to propagate its values and beliefs around the globe. This, he explained, is the cause of American sentiments towards China:

[393] Su, *Cong Wusi dao Heshang*, p. 26.
[394] James Reed, *The Missionary Mind and American East Asia Policy, 1911-1915* (Cambridge, Mass: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1983), p. 18.
[395] Reed, *The Missionary Mind*, p. 8.

> *The fact seems to be that, during the years 1911 to 1915 at least, Christian prayer was the principal American activity regarding East Asia. Understanding this, the historian can begin to appreciate why Americans characteristically responded to problems in East Asia policy with "expressions of feeling rather than contributions to the discussion".*[396]

These sentiments were directed by many historical and cultural developments to the acceptance of a favorable image by the American public after the 1920s. Despite the Boxer Uprising, American religious and educational institutions in China had successfully gained influence. Strategically, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor turned China into America's ally. Under these circumstances, many saw a country that was fighting against a common enemy and a people that shared American values and looked upon America with gratitude.

Thus, it seemed that a combination of sympathy and paternalism had won over racial antagonism; and the inscrutable heathen seemed more familiar than ever. Possibilities for a better China emerged—for missionaries, a country led by Christians like Chiang Kai-Shek; for businessmen, a huge market; and for politicians, a democratic government in the future of East Asia—and hopes for a Christian China and an Americanized China were high. Behind such rationale was the firmly established belief that, despite all the differences, the Chinese could be like Americans, they wanted to be like Americans, and they would eventually become Americans.

From the 1930s, missionaries played a vital role in building the image of China as an ally and even a hero. Among those categorized as "the sinophiles",[397] Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth* and other publications contributed to a humane image of the Chinese through its peasant protagonist Wang Long; Henry Luce's *Time* magazine continuously depicted a positive image of the Chiang government—both Buck and Luce were missionary children, both born in China. Pearl Buck later invited Lin Yutang to write a book about China, his *My Country and My People* enjoyed its own popularity, though much smaller when compared to *The Good Earth*.[398] Apparently, at this time, the reading public was more ready to appreciate the charm of Chinese wisdom.

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396 Reed, *The Missionary Mind*, p. 39.

397 Harold R. Isaacs, *Images of Asia: American Views of China and India*, published originally as *Scratches on Our Minds* (New York: Capricorn books, 1958), pp.148-154.

398 Isaacs, *Images of Asia*, p. 156.

This could explain the success of Madame Chiang's lobby in the U.S. before and after the Second World War. As one journalist later commented, her efforts to create and reinforce the image of Chinese people as sympathetic Christian wards turned out to be a huge success:

> *As a fluent English speaker, as a Christian, as a model of what many Americans hoped China to become, Madame Chiang struck a chord with American audiences as she traveled across the country, starting in the 1930's, raising money and lobbying for support of her husband's government. She seemed to many Americans to be the very symbol of the modern, educated, pro-American China they yearned to see emerge -- even as many Chinese dismissed her as a corrupt, power-hungry symbol of the past they wanted to escape.*[399]

It is around the same time that another image-forming book, Edgar Snow's *Red Star over China,*[400] also appeared. Its publication, some years after *The Good Earth*, "was well and widely received" and "made its deepest impression on increasingly worried and world-conscious liberal intellectuals".[401] It created the impression of the Chinese Communists as dedicated warriors fighting against Japanese invasion under extremely difficult situations. Though caused much controversy later, it eventually became a classic in the study of the War and Communist China. But few could anticipate that it was the beginning of the "loss" of China. After the war, when the Communist Party came to power, the Americans had to come to terms with these emotions—mostly the loss of a dream that almost came true in China.

For the missionary minds, the victory of the Communist Party and the establishment of its regime in 1949 was especially difficult to accept. Once active in lobbying for the Nationalist government, they usually became hostile to the Communist regime. For example, medical missionary Walter Judd "promoted the containment of Communism policy that dominated the 1950s".[402] Henry Luce, for many years after the war, had his

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399 Seth Faison, "Madame Chiang Kai-shek, a Power in Husband's China and Abroad, Dies at 105," *New York Times*, Oct. 25, 2003. http://www.nytimes.com/2003/10/25/world/madame-chiang-kai-shek-a-power-in-husband-s-china-and-abroad-dies-at-105.html?pagewanted=all (accessed December 21, 2012).

400 Edgar Snow, *Red Star over China* (London: Left Book Club, Victor Gollancz, 1937).

401 Isaacs, *Images of Asia*, p. 163.

402 Patricia Neils, *United States Attitudes and Policies toward China: the Impact of American Missionaries* (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), p. 18.

magazines paint the horrible Red China for the American public.

During the Cold War, a new picture of China emerged. With few exceptions, the People's Republic of China was replaced with "Red China" or "Communist China". High school history textbooks pictured an ancient China that once had a chance to modernize, but was interrupted in this process by the development of Communism. The internal conflict between the Nationalists and the Communists was described in terms of the international conflict between the free world and the totalitarian Soviet power.[403] Western reports on China consisted of the Communist Party as the red brigand and the common people as blue ants; the Korean War and the bitter experience of people; Red Guards, big character posters during the Cultural Revolution. All these seemed to prove China as a country of terror and mystery, isolated and alienated from the Western world. Consequently, China, once potentially one of "us"—Christian, modernized, and liberal, now alienated itself into one of "them"—a Communist enemy. "Our China", which had shared American values and beliefs, became "their Communist China", now under the influence of an ideology which threatened America: Pearl Buck's Wang Long had turned back to Fu Manchu.

2) Winds of Change for "the Grey China"

Chinese encounters with the outside world began to take a groundbreaking shift when U.S. President Nixon visited China in 1972. It was followed by a positive turn in Western perceptions of China. By the time of China's reforms and opening up, a more favorable image was created in Western media. Deng Xiaoping was chosen as Man of the Year (1985) by *Time Magazine* for having "reshaped China by embracing free-market reforms".[404] New cultural constructions about China had begun, and it was now pictured as a country undergoing a great experiment.

Although China as a perceived reality or a cultural construction was never at the center of American imagination, the "liberal myth" created in the following years has placed China as a "secondary reference point" in American cultural debate that has centered

[403] Leigh and Richard Kagan, "Oh Say, Can You See? American Cultural Blinders on China," in Edward Friedman & Mark Selden (ed.), *America's China: Dissenting Essays on Asian-American Relations* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), pp. 3-39.

[404] George J. Church, "China: Old Wounds Deng Xiaoping," *Time,* January 06, 1986, text available at: http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1074879,00.html (accessed December 21, 2012).

on the meaning of ideas such as freedom and democracy.[405] As Richard Madsen argues, the cultural myth about China in the 1980s helped sustain "an American sense of hopefulness about its own democratic identity".[406]

Although the tragedy of Tian'anmen in 1989 contradicted this common interpretation of "the American Dream",[407] the belief in the impact of free market on social democracy was strong enough to face the challenge towards American liberal optimism. For example, the "end of history" thesis[408] claimed the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government, which marked the end point of mankind's ideological evolution. Though later widely criticized and argued against, it demonstrated the magnitude and depth of American liberal optimism.

During the cold war, the U.S. strategy was to "find a way to go through the Iron Curtain and launch a peaceful competition between the two systems… [and to] deconstruct the Communist system from within".[409] At that time, the Chinese were warned that Western countries were raging a third world war through a peaceful evolution (*heping yanbian*) within socialist countries. However, pragmatism eventually overcame ideological differences. Decades later, as China becomes an indispensable part of globalization, the term "peaceful evolution" is rarely heard any more. The commercialized and capitalized Chinese society is a reality in the name of "socialism with Chinese characteristics". These changes seem to be a "diplomatic victory of the U.S.":

> *From the beginning of the Cold War, it has been the central tenet of U.S. foreign policy that, if we could engage as much of the world as possible in successful economic growth, through domestic reform and what came later to be called globalization, we could stabilize Europe and Asia, win the Cold War, and create a stable global order. ....This strategy has proved to be one of the most successful geopolitical strategies in human history, so much so that it has entangled our former enemies as well as our allies in the web we wove. What we never expected from our strategy was that it would entice our former*

[405] Richard Madsen, *China and the American Dream: A Moral Inquiry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 210-211.
[406] Madsen, *China and the American Dream*, p. xvii.
[407] Madsen, *China and the American Dream*, p. xvi.
[408] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Free Press, 1992).
[409] Richard Nixon, *Real Peace: A Strategy for the West* (Privately published, New York, 1984).

> *adversaries, including China, into our web of economic institutions and our commitment to geopolitical stability.*[410]

Therefore, with regard to issues in China, the liberal optimism in turning the country into one of "us" was comparable with the "missionary mind" at the turn of the century —both assuming that it is America's "manifest destiny" to convert the world into an American world. Their differences lie in that, this time the winds of change were brought by the power of free market rather than gospels.

Admittedly, such optimism has been confronted with observations of the Chinese "reality".[411] As one media study suggests, if one roughly describes American perceptions of the People's Republic of China as having evolved through the phases of "the red China" (1949-1979), "the green China" (1979-1989), and "the dark China" (1989-1992), then, after 1992 the image is one of "the grey China".[412] Although increasing ties between the two countries has resulted in an increasing number of media coverage, the overall image of China has been "consistently negative" since 1992.[413] Similarly, a research on congressional debates on China-related issues in 1999-2000 also suggests that, although congressional views are "widely disparate", in general "strongly negative views" are fostered by "unconstructive moralizing" and "demonizing".[414]

These prevalent media and political attitudes towards China reveal that a strong tendency has been dominating perceptions of China with which Chinese culture has been interpreted according to "American standards of evolutionary progression"[415], to a certain extent that such perceptions could even be seen as "tainted with an ethnocentric

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[410] William H. Overholt, "China and Globalization", Hearing before the U.S.-China Economic and security review commission 109th Congress, May 19, 2005 (Rand corperation), p. 4. http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/2005/RAND_CT244.pdf (accessed December 21, 2012).

[411] Steven W. Mosher, *China Misperceived: American Illusions and Chinese Reality* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

[412] Zengjun Peng, "Representation of China: An Across Time Analysis of Coverage in the New York Times and Los Angeles Times," *Asian Journal of Communication*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (March 2004), pp. 53-67: 56-57.

[413] Peng, "Representation of China", p. 64.

[414] Stanley Lubman, "The Dragon as Demon: Images of China on Capitol Hill," *Journal of Contemporary China*, 2004, 13 (40), pp. 541-565: 554 & 541.

[415] Thomas Laszlo Dorogi, *Tainted Perceptions: Liberal-Democracy and American Popular Images of China* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001), p. 79.

negativity"[416]. Most of the criticism includes issues such as human rights, freedom of speech, religious freedom, lack of transparency, and so on, casting a rather suspicious light on China's economic development and rising international power.

It is exactly the "grey China" with its unsatisfactory "reality" that invites the winds of change envisioned with a sense of liberal optimism. For those both in China and outside who believe in liberal values and their Chinese adaptation, it is this liberal optimism that offers them a common ground to base their understanding of Chinese reality and their wish for forces from outside to reform the country for the better.

A century ago, Arthur Smith wished for Christianity to play such a role as the force from outside; Liang Qichao drew from Western liberal thought for Chinese cultural tradition "to reflect, to change, and to mend";[417] Lu Xun cherished the foreign perspective as an outside force for Chinese people to "do self-inspection, to analyze, to reform, to struggle, then to prove what on earth are Chinese".[418] In the reform era, such outside forces are to be found in perceived universal values, for example, individual liberty, rule of law, freedom of speech, and last but not the least, rationality, as reflected in the free market system and political democracy.

3) The West as the Other

As I have analyzed in Chapter Two, the discourse of national character in the time of Liang Qichao was a part of intellectual responses to modern Western conceptions and perceptions of China during its historical transition from an empire to a nation-state. In this chapter, the analysis of the discourse of national character has also demonstrated that, in the reform era, the West remains the major frame of reference for cultural reformers whose vision of enlightenment and modernity have been inspired by core values of Western liberal thought, however such values might be interpreted differently in one context from another.

It is in this light that Dirlik's concept of "self-orientalization" and Vukovich's description of "internalized Orientalism" provide us insight in understanding such a phenomenon of vigorous self-criticism. In a way, Chinese critics of the national character have internalized the liberal optimism in the universality of its core values, as

[416] Dorogi, *Tainted Perceptions*, p. 79.
[417] Liang, *Xinmin Shuo*, p. 15.
[418] Lu, "Qiejieting zawen mobian", p. 426.

well as the perception of the "Grey China" that is in urgent need of such values to achieve its second transition—a transition from the pre-modern mentality to a modern national psychological make-up.

Their incorporation of Western perceptions are different in many ways from that of Liang Qichao's. Liang's "new people" thesis was charged with a strong and romanticized nationalism, and his incorporation of Western perceptions can be read as a means to aid the birth of a new Chinese nation. Contemporary critiques of the national character, inspired by liberal universalism (*pushi zhuyi*) that is vigilant towards nationalism, do not inherit the aspiration for a sovereign state, as it is apparently no longer necessary, or not even a stronger national power; instead they request a state of being of the national culture that is, in their eyes, genuinely modern.

As the discourse of national character from the time of Liang Qichao until today has been under the influence of Western knowledge production and importation, they have also argued, to various extents, along a modernist line and within a modernist framework. The influence has been visible not only in their imagination of modernity, but also their transformed perceptions of the world as well as the position of China within such a world. Therefore, another form of the presence of the West has been the consequent Chinese self-perceptions shadowed by the hegemonic power of Western culture.

As I have introduced previously, Gloria Davies describes Chinese critical inquiries as characterized by "patriotic worrying" (*youhuan*), a mentality of critical intellectuals to worry about the nation's imprefection and an urge to work towards national perfection. Even in the reform era, when national sovereignty is no longer at stake, sharp contrasts between China and the West as observed by critical intellectuals have resulted in an inferiority complex, and forced some intellectuals to place Chinese culture in an inferior position as compared to Western culture. From such a perspective, Chinese culture is not just imperfect, it is at the edge of becoming extinct due to the powerful existance of Western culture. This crisis consciousness does not urge intellectuals to worry about national perfection, it pushes them to worry about national survival.

The crisis mentality of such a nature is reflected in the discourse of national character. Jiang Rong in his *Wolf Totem* worries that, such magnificent agrarian culture as the Chinese civilization, once invaded by a strong force from the outside, might be driven

into museums or historical ruins if it does not change its obedient nature.[419] And only by uprooting the sheep-like national character, can the nation survive fierce global competition.[420] Similarly, *River Elegy* articulated an intellectual fear that the nation was to be "expelled from the global community".[421] It declared that the crisis of national survival and the crisis of civilization broke out simultaneously, as Western civilization is a new civilization that the ancient agricultural civilization can no longer assimilate.[422]

And such crisis mentality is a common feature shared not only by mainland Chinese intellectuals. Bo Yang in his *Ugly Chinaman* expressed similar concerns over the survival of Chinese culture. As he described, the ruins of American Indians had caused him "excruciating pain" for he could not help but wonder whether one day the Chinese nation would end up like them.[423] It is precisely this crisis consciousness that drove him to diagnose the "sickness" of his own culture and to practice what Berme phrased as "literary acupuncture".[424]

Even at the heyday of China's economic miracle, the crisis consciousness of Bo Yang resonated in mainland China. In 2007, one intellectual, in his analysis of Chinese and Western modern encounters, in the same vein lamented the decadency of American Indian culture as he asked, "The few decedents of the Indians could probably sit in a Lincoln or Cadillac car, in a Boeing 747 or even Concorde plane. However, does it help to (prevent) the tragic extinction of the whole nation?"[425] It seems that the economic growth and the consequent rising power of China have not eliminated the feeling of cultural inferiority in the perceived competition with a stronger West.

Wittingly or not, the critics of the national character have been looking at their own culture with the lense of the Other, assuming the inferiority of the Self and imagining its change towards "the better", of which the Western Other is the exemplary. It is through such a lense that the national character is perceived as so loathsome and so not modern. It is also because of such a "Westernized" perspective that the critics

[419] Jiang, *Lang Tuteng*, p. 110.
[420] Jiang, *Lang Tuteng*, p. 283.
[421] Su, *Cong Wusi dao Heshang*, p. 399.
[422] Su, *Cong Wusi dao Heshang*, p. 382.
[423] Bo, *Choulou de Zhongguoren*, p. 44.
[424] Barmé, *Seeds of Fire*, p. xviii.
[425] He Zhaowu 何兆武, *Zhongxi wenhua jiaoliu shilun* 中西文化交流史论 (Wuhan: hubei renmin chubanshe, 2007), p. 5.

themselves have been criticized, which will be discussed later.

3.4. Concluding Remarks: Self-criticism as Moral Obligation

This chapter has shown that, for critics of the national character, their self-perceptions and approaches towards a cultural identity have been influenced by their predecessors in the late Qing and early Republican periods as well as contemporary Western liberal understandings of China that have been prominent on a global scale. Their imaginations of a future Chinese nation and national culture are supported by a belief in the values embedded in Western-style modern societies. With the presumption of the universality of Western values, they hold fast to a sense of liberal optimism that they share with those in the West who imagine a similar cultural change in China, an idea that can be traced back to the "missionary mind" of Arthur Smith's times.

While placing contemporary discourse of national character in its historical and international contexts has shed light on why and how it has come into being, this chapter also suggests that a crisis mentality has been particularly important in the quest for a new cultural identity. I have argued that the self-consiousness of a late-comer to modernity has prompted critical intellectuals to pursue an envisioned cultural integrity and identity with a sense of unprecedented urgency and historical responsibility.

Contemporary advocates of national character reforms share this mentality with their predecessors of a century ago, taking it as their responsibility and even moral obligation to change the national culture into a better one. As was the case with Liang Qichao, the individual and the national Self in contemporary intellectual perceptions are closely related. Therefore, the "patriotic worrying" becomes almost a moral imperative to fix the problem of the nation. And for critical intellectuals, it manifests itself in their identification of national shortcomings and their attempts to improve the nation through fierce self-criticism, even at the risk of being called "shameless and depraved"[426].

In a way, critical intellectuals are conscious of their mission to enlighten the nation and steer the country in the right direction, a mission both self-imposed and assigned by the general public. For example, *River Elegy* identifies the intellectuals as "a special group" created by history "for the Chinese". And their moral obligation is not only

[426] Barmé and Jaivin, *New Ghosts, Old Dreams*, p. 143.

towards the Chinese present, but also towards the Chinese future: "Let our generation bear the heavy burden with our shoulders so that our next generations will never have to suffer."[427] One of its scriptwriters, in his reflection, described the almost sacred mission he felt obliged to honor: "our generation is destined to bear the heartfelt pain, and because of this, we might become great".[428]

The reading of contemporary critiques of the national character has concluded that it bears extraordinary similarities with those around the time of Liang Qichao and Hu Shi. If it is a moral obligation to modernize the nation through self-criticism, then to negate history becomes a means to eventually glorify history. History as the national past invokes both loathing and pride. It is precisely the past glory that made its loss unbearably humiliating, thus the statement in *River Elegy*: "our pride and our sadness are often the same thing".[429]

In a way, the lost glory and recent humiliation are two indispensable parts of the nation's uniqueness. The haunting memory of humiliation can also be seen as an attempt to hold on to Chinese uniqueness: no other nation ever suffered from such an unprecedented downfall. Just as Hu Shi asked, "Is there a bigger shame than this in the world?" [430] In the case of Jiang Rong, the feeling of shame was so strong that it almost turned into resentment. As he wrote through his protagonist, the aggressive wolf might be abhorrent, but cowardly people who act like sheep were far more loathsome. Such painful reflections are also seen in Bo Yang, Sun Longji, the texts of *River Elegy*, contemporary cultural critiques of Wang Xiaofeng and alike, expressing their self-loathing through vigorous criticism of Confucianism and Chinese culture. As Barmé put it, it "satisfies a need to explain China's woeful modern history while at the same time reaffirming a prevalent sense of national uniqueness".[431]

Thus, interestingly, these cultural critics, radical or not, have demonstrated a crisis consciousness that they share with the guardians of cultural tradition and Confucianism. But while the latter perceives cultural tradition as a source of pride and glory, something to be preserved and rescued; cultural critics direct their "hoary

[427] Su, *Cong Wusi dao Heshang*, p. 414.
[428] Yuan, "Heshang chuangzuoqun de linian", p. 209.
[429] Text from *River Elegy* Episode I: Searching for the dream.
[430] Hu Shi 胡适, "Fei liuxue pian," 非留学篇 *Liumei xuesheng jibao*, 留美学生季报 No. 3, January 1914.
[431] Barmé, "To Screw Foreigners Is Patriotic", p. 222.

anxiety of cultural and national self-reflection"[432] towards the side of self-criticism and anti-traditionalism. From this perspective, the entanglement of self-loathing and profound pride becomes even rather logical. To use Bo Yang's own confession as a doctor to the sick nation: "I criticize to remind you (your sickness) and hope you will recover, just because I love you."[433]

[432] Davies, *Worrying About China*, p. 1.
[433] Bo, *Choulou de Zhongguoren*, p. 5.

Chapter 4. Chen Lai's "Cultural Subjectivity"

As has been discussed so far, the criticism of Chinese national character has been closely linked to the negation of cultural tradition, especially Confucian thought and values. Such critiques attribute the nation's many negative characteristics to Confucianism and the socio-cultural structure of a Confucian society, perceiving them as the ultimate obstacle towards the country's modernization. Following such a line of thinking, many hold firmly to the belief that, only by breaking away from Confucian tradition, can the nation be improved. What is more, such improvement has been predominantly oriented towards a path leading to a universal modernity, which, for the time being, is only manifested in the modern West.

Such an analytical framework and such a view of Chinese culture and tradition has been described by many of its critics as radical. In a spectrum of "the triad of conservatism, liberalism and radicalism"[434], if we temporarily set aside all the limitations of such a triadic concept for the sake of clarification, the discourse of national character as analyzed in the previous chapter can be said to represent a cultural position of radicalism, in the sense that it argues to break away from tradition and to replace it with something drastically different, not to mention that it indicates a revolutionary change in the thoughts, behavior, and the very personality of a vast nation.

Because of its implication of historical discontinuity, this cultural radicalism has evoked rejections of various degrees. For example, in his defense of Confucianism, Tu Weiming argues that tradition has "shaped Chineseness throughout history".[435] He refutes the idea that Confucianism has "nurtured a national character detrimental to China's modernization", and describes those who make such an accusation as "Westernized intellectuals".[436] Tu is not alone in this regard. Many have rejected the discourse of national character as radical anti-traditionalism and/or total Westernization by disassociating Confucian thought with China's traumatic process of modernization.

This research will now turn to the perspective of those at the other side of the cultural

[434] Schwartz, "Notes on Conservatism", p. 16.
[435] Tu, "Cultural China", p. 27.
[436] Tu, "Cultural China", p. 27.

spectrum. Their voices of the so-called cultural conservatives may not have been the most prominent, especially in the May Fourth period and during the culture fever of the 1980s; however, their perceptions of tradition and its role in modern society have drawn growing attention in recent years. Overseas intellectuals of the new-Confucian school (*haiwai xin rujia*), such as Tu Weiming, have aided the efforts made by mainland New Confucians with whom they share a common cultural viewpoint against anti-traditionalism.[437] Though the advocates of cultural tradition, such as scholars associated with the Academy of Chinese Culture, had already voiced their concerns with radicalism (*jijin zhuyi*) in the late 1980s,[438] it was in the 1990s that the landscape of mainland cultural realm took a conservative shift. It is noted that the talk of "ugly national character" had then shifted towards a reconstruction of national culture and rediscovery of the national spirit.[439]

An important feature of this shift is that these so-called cultural conservatives are joined by intellectuals of various political and economic schools in their rejection of cultural radicalism. Among them are intellectuals loosely labeled as, for example, Marxist historians, post-modernists, so-called New-Left intellectuals, and Chinese liberals. Admittedly, all of these terms are problematic, some are overlapping, and each deserves further clarification and explanation. Yet in the eyes of the advocates of national character reform, they seem to have converged culturally into a united front, despite their possibly rather divergent intentions and perspectives.

With the complexity and subtlety of this shift in mind, this chapter will focus on the cultural propositions of the mainland philosopher Chen Lai (b. 1952), a scholar who specializes in Confucian philosophy and thought. Chen Lai has actively participated in cultural debates around the role of Confucianism in modern society since the 1980s. He was involved in the culture fever both as one of the editors of *Culture: China and the World* and as a scholar closely related to the Academy of Chinese Culture; and since the 1990s, he has become the most vocal and representative voice of Confucian philosophy in mainland China. Last but not least, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, his cultural viewpoints have also been influenced by overseas intellectuals of the new-Confucian school such as Tu Weiming. Therefore, a close examination of his

[437] Van Dongen, *Goodbye Radicalism!*, p. 241.
[438] Davies, *Worrying About China*, pp. 128-129.
[439] Yingjie Guo, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary China: the Search for National Identity under Reform* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), p. xi.

perception of Chinese culture will best serve the purpose of understanding the rejection of the discourse of national character as a whole as well as its multifold rationales.

Chen studies Confucian thought from the perspective of cultural philosophy as well as intellectual and cultural history. His research covers the history of Confucian thought ranging from antiquity to the Song and Ming dynasties, till the movement of new-Confucianism (*xin rujia*) of the present day. He has published extensively on various issues regarding Confucian philosophy, its history and modern impact, many of which extend far beyond the scope and focus of this study. Here I only examine the texts that are crucial to the understanding of his cultural viewpoints with regard to the discourse of national character and Chinese self-perceptions.

Research material for this chapter is mainly comprised of two parts: a personal interview with Chen Lai in Beijing on February 25th, 2011, and important texts directly related to the discourse of national character and the problem of Chinese-Western cultural exchanges. For example, his 2006 book *Tradition and Modernity*, which was later translated into English, includes a selection of his essays written in the years from 1987 to1999, dealing mainly with Chinese and Western cultures, as well as the role of Confucianism as a humanistic value system in a modern society.[440] His other monographs and essays are also included, wherever they contribute to the reading of Chen's ideas on the national character and the position of Confucianism vis-à-vis Western cultures.

4.1. National Character or National Spirit

Before we begin to study Chen Lai's ideas on the national character discourse, it is important to take a brief look at his academic background. Chen Lai received his doctoral degree at Peking University (1985), where he worked for almost three decades at the Department of Philosophy. As Professor of Chinese Philosophy at Peking University (1990-2009) and Tsinghua University (since 2009), he has held key positions as Director of the Research Centre for Confucianism, Peking University; and then as Dean of Tsinghua Academy of Chinese Learning (*qinghua guoxue yuan*), Tsinghua University. He also worked as a visiting scholar at many universities in the

[440] Chen Lai, transl. [from the Chinese] by Edmund Ryden, *Tradition and Modernity: A Humanistic View* (Leiden [etc.]: Brill, 2009).

U.S., Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Reading through Chen's texts, it is not difficult to encounter ideas and methodologies drawn from, to various extents, neo-rational Confucian philosophy of the Song and Ming dynasties, the more recent new-Confucianism of the 20th century, Marxist philosophy, as well as theories of, for example, German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920). In fact, many of his ideas are established and unfolded through engaging in continuous dialogues with cultural philosophers, sociologists and anthropologists both in China and the West.

Among the many scholars whose ideas have had an impact on Chen's philosophy, Feng Youlan (1895-1990) has been referred to by Chen Lai as his teacher. Chen regards Feng as one of the most outstanding contemporary Chinese philosophers,[441] to whom one of his monographs was dedicated.[442] Feng, himself a student of John Dewey, was best known for his work *A History of Chinese Philosophy*[443]. Feng developed his new rational philosophy, or "new philosophy of principle" (*xin lixue*), from the study of "neo-Confucian" philosophers of Song and Ming dynasties, while at the same time drawing from Western philosophical traditions. It is from Feng's metaphysical and cultural writings that Chen Lai draws discussions of the relation between "the universal" and "the particular" to defend historical continuity and past wisdom.[444]

Another important scholar who inspired Chen Lai's understanding of the contemporary movement of New Confucianism is Tu Weiming, retired Harvard-Yenching Professor of Chinese History and Philosophy and of Confucian Studies. Tu's theory of the "third epoch of Confucianism" has been seen as representative of the most recent Confucian revival and an inspiration to contemporary Confucian scholars like Chen.[445] As Chen noted himself, during his stay as a visiting scholar at Harvard University from 1986 to 1988, he has been especially influenced by Tu's ideas on the modern transformation of

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441 Chen, "Chapter One: Retrospect and Prospect for Contemporary Chinese Thought." in idem, *Tradition and Modernity*. pp. 17-40: p. 30.

442 Chen Lai 陈来, *Youwu Zhi Jing—Wang Yangming zhexue de jingshen* 有无之境——王阳明哲学的精神 (Beijing: renmin chubanshe, 1991).

443 Feng Youlan, translated from the 1934 publication by Derk Bodde, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983). For a simplified version see: Feng Youlan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (Collier-Macmillan, 1948; Reprinted by Free Press, 1997).

444 Van Dongen, *Goodbye Radicalism!*, pp. 221-224.

445 Chen, "Chapter One: Retrospect and Prospect", pp. 20-21.

tradition.[446]

Taking into account Chen's intellectual background, it is no wonder that he takes a clear and firm stance in the defense of Confucian thought and values. Such a cultural position is very clearly stated in his rejection of the discourse of national character. Like with many other of his thoughts, Chen Lai's critiques of the anti-traditional discourse of national character are also best examined through his dialogue with the thoughts of Chinese and Western intellectuals.

1) The National Character: the Limits of *Guomin Xing*

In Chen Lai's understanding, the discourse of national character (*guomin xing*), such as in Arthur Smith's *Chinese Characteristics*, the peasant personality in Lu Xun's stories, and "the ugly Chinaman" in Bo Yang's book, refers only to certain temporary traits of people as a result of their often difficult political, economic and educational situations. It means that once the condition changes, many of the negative characteristics under critique will change as well.[447] Therefore, according to Chen, the concept of *guomin xing*, as conceived in the minds of its critics, is highly limited: it is drawn from observations, though not necessarily false, often made in a temporary setting and a polemic fashion. Therefore, its underlying assumptions run the risk of being hasty and judgmental.

Chen perceives Arthur Smith as more of an anthropologist rather than a missionary, and his observations as essentially anthropological descriptions. Thus, Smith's critiques should be viewed as part of Western anthropological studies around the world. However, by placing Smith's texts in the context of Western global expansion, Chen reminds us of the imperial and colonial background against which *Chinese Characteristics* was produced. Whereas many of these anthropological conclusions are grounded on detailed observations, Chen further elaborates, they are often reductive and one-sided—they stress certain aspects while neglecting others.[448]

For the same reason, Chen contends that Lu Xun's criticism of the national character needs to be critically revaluated. In fact, Chen believes that the influence of such foreign anthropological observations as those of Smith's, added to Lu's crisis

[446] Chen, *Youwu Zhi Jing*, afterword.
[447] Interview with Chen Lai on February 25th, 2011.
[448] Interview with Chen Lai.

consciousness (*wenti yishi*), makes Lu's critiques of the national character problematic:

> *Lu Xun should not have viewed Chinese culture from a foreign perspective, especially anthropological perspective. By only focusing on the manifested outer layer (*biaoceng*) in a temporary social culture, one cannot grasp the meaning of Chinese national personality. Lu's national character critique is an expression of his dissatisfaction with social reality around his time... Though to hold on to the negative aspects might stimulate people to work on the problems, it should not be understood as an overall description of a nation.*[449]

The typical example of the reductionist image depicted in Lu Xun's work, as Chen sees it, is the peasant figure Ah Q, which is far from adequate to grasp the characteristics of the Chinese peasantry during the 20th century. To Chen, Lu Xun might have truthfully depicted certain negative aspects, but at the same time neglected other positive characteristics such as sincerity, generosity, and benevolence (*kuanhou*). More importantly, taking into account that Lu Xun might have based these descriptions on his personal experiences, the image of Ah Q, often seen as representative of a large group of peasants, can in the eyes of Chen Lai never represent the peasants "who fought through the anti-Japanese war, and who have supported the whole process of China's revolution and development".[450]

Chen Lai's reading of the image of Ah Q suggests that he finds two tendencies problematic in the discourse of national character: one is the impact of foreign perspective that might have affected the Chinese observer's standpoint; the other is the elitist view that reduces the positive aspect of the masses in the nation's development. Instead of taking these characteristics out of their national and historical contexts, Chen is in favor of placing the issue of national character within its social settings, and in doing so, looking for an interpretation from a Chinese perspective.

Compared to what Chen regards as one-sided anthropological descriptions of the national characteristics, which are confined within a certain time and under certain conditions, Chen's own perception of the Chinese nation and its innate character is better understood in his analysis of the cultural philosophical approach of Liang Shuming (1893-1988) and the sociological approach of Max Weber.

[449] Interview with Chen Lai.
[450] Interview with Chen Lai.

The cultural philosopher Liang Shuming was best known for his *Eastern and Western Cultures and their Philosophies.*[451] But Chen examines Liang's view on the national character by reading his *The Essentials of Chinese Culture*, a monograph on the structure of the ancient society and its value system.[452] In this book, Liang summarized from previous descriptions what he regarded as an accurate portrait of the Chinese people, and listed the following ten points of the national character:

1. Selfish and self-profiting,

2. Parsimonious,

3. Liking to talk with deference,

4. Peaceful and mild,

5. Knowing how to be satisfied when one has enough,

6. Maintaining tradition,

7. Muddled,

8. Steadfast and ruthless,

9. Tenacious and flexible,

10. Skillful and conscientious.[453]

Chen categorizes these ten points, together with other characteristics discussed in Liang's book, into three groups. The first group describes what Chen calls "the external characteristics", such as large landmass and population, a long history, a stable social structure, and so on. The other two groups are more intrinsic to Chinese culture: the second group concerns the clan system and the moral atmosphere, among others, which are perceived from a positive angle; and the third group lists certain features from a negative angle, such as the lack of scientific spirit, of democracy, of liberty or equality, of religious view of human life, and of a nation-state.

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[451] Liang Shuming 梁漱溟, *Dongxi wenhua jiqi zhexue* 东西文化及其哲学 (Beijing: caizhengbu yinshuju, 1921).

[452] Chen Lai, "Chapter Thirteen: Liang Shuming and Max Weber on Chinese Culture." in idem., *Tradition and Modernity* pp. 285-314: p. 285. Liang's book see Liang Shuming 梁漱溟, *Zhongguo Wenhua Yaoyi* 中国文化要义 (Chengdu: luming shudian, 1949).

[453] This is the English translation of Liang's ten points by Edmund Ryden, see Chen, *Tradition and Modernity*, p. 310.

While studying these descriptions, Chen is very much aware that these items, especially the ones defined as lacking in Chinese culture, are "clearly dependent on a comparison with Western culture".[454] Chen does not reject such a comparison, but he shares Liang's reasoning that their absences are mostly determined by the Chinese social structure. What Chen is mostly interested in is Liang's explanation as to why such a difference exists. The conclusion of Liang's study suggested that the differences between Chinese and Western cultures is due to the differences in the structures of traditional societies, which in itself is a result of different religious development.

Chen then goes on to compare Liang's analysis with that of German sociologist Max Weber's. The latter discussed various aspects of the Chinese national character as "a life orientation".[455] Chen gathers the scattered descriptions from Weber's book and lists the following 13 points:

1. Confucian Chinese maintain a this-worldly spiritual tendency and emphasize blessings, gains and long life in this world.
2. Chinese people have a strong desire for profit and this has been developed to a peak since ancient times.
3. Good book-keeping, self-contended and reducing desires.
4. Chinese people's parsimony and work ability have constantly been seen as unrivaled.
5. An extraordinary virtue of temperance.
6. Alert self-regulation, self-reflection and prudence. Enthusiasm and zeal are suppressed.
7. Concerned with outward appearance and formal respect; care about face.
8. Keep to traditional observances.
9. A pacifist nature.
10. Pragmatist.
11. Very dishonest, but big business puts a special value on trust.
12. Lack sympathy.
13. No mutual trust.[456]

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[454] Chen, "Chapter Thirteen: Liang and Weber", p. 287.

[455] See Max Weber, translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1951). For the part on "Life Orientation" see "Chapter VI. The Confucian Life Orientation", pp. 142-170.

[456] This is the English translation of Chen's list by Ryden, see Chen, "Chapter Thirteen: Liang and Weber", pp. 311-2.

As Weber himself noted, his analysis, like those of many other sociologists of his time, drew heavily on the accounts of missionaries. Therefore, Chen does not hesitate to state that, in comparison, Liang's view and understanding of Chinese culture is "much deeper" and "more accurate" than Weber's.[457] Chen continues to argue that Liang's description of Chinese society is more complete and more to the point:

> *Liang's vision is much broader, because the question he addresses is how Chinese culture as a whole responded to modernity and that of the status of Chinese culture within the cultural history of the world.*[458]

Liang's vision and the question he addressed are apparently much closer to Chen Lai's intellectual concern. In fact, Chen has been inspired by many cultural conceptions from the works of Liang.[459] However, Chen Lai finds it problematic that Liang used the term "national character" (*guomin xing*) as an expression of the structure of Chinese society and its cultural tendencies.[460] To Chen, Weber's "life orientation" is a better term than Liang's "national character", for it expressed nothing more than the mentality that emerges under the constraints of a given cultural atmosphere.

Having said that, while agreeing with much of the analysis of Liang and Weber more than the anthropological descriptions from Arthur Smith and Lu Xun, Chen finally pointed out that neither Weber or Liang distinguished between what was rooted in tradition and belonged to the cultural matrix (the eternal), and what was merely related to a given society and a given cultural environment (the temporal).

Therefore, to further articulate his understanding of the limited conception of *guomin xing*, Chen employed Feng Youlan's distinction between "custom" (*xi*) and "essential characteristics" (*xing*). The "custom" points to the changeable characteristics associated with specific social systems and cultural environments. As Chen explains, the terminology *guomin xing* can only be accepted when it is to describe *xi*—if it refers to the temporary behavior and psychological tendency of people of certain historical conditions, in a specific space and time.[461] Otherwise, *guomin xing* or the term "national character" is inadequate to describe the "essential characteristics" or *xing*,

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457 Chen, "Chapter Thirteen: Liang and Weber", p. 286.
458 Chen, "Chapter Thirteen: Liang and Weber", p. 308.
459 For example, see Chen Lai 陈来, *Gudai sixiang wenhua de shijie—chunqiu shidai de zongjiao, lunli yu shehui sixiang* 古代思想文化的世界——春秋时代的宗教、伦理与社会思想 (Taibei: yunchen wenhua, 2006), p. 10.
460 Chen, "Chapter Thirteen: Liang and Weber", p. 312.
461 Chen, "Chapter Thirteen: Liang and Weber", pp. 311-312.

that is, the enduring and stable part of a culture and tradition.

Chen believes it is highly problematic that many critics of the national character (*guomin xing*) often fail to make the distinction between *xi* and *xing*; instead, they confuse the temporary manifestation of certain cultural traits with the innate spirit of a nation. Therefore, the criticism on *guomin xing* in the sense of Feng's "custom" often inappropriately leads to the negation of the nation's tradition and the eternal "essential characteristics".

The rationale behind Chen Lai's rejection of such criticism will be further discussed below. Before that, we will first look into Chen's own perception of Chinese culture and its essential characteristics, that is, the *xing* he intends to rescue from the critiques of *xi*—the national character.

2) The True National Spirit: *Minzu Xing*

It is against what Chen Lai calls the "shallow" concept of *guomin xing* that he interprets his own understanding of the true national spirit—*minzu xing*. Chen believes that the spirit of a nation does not change easily with time and social conditions. On the contrary, the national spirit, having formed from antiquity to the present day, transcends political and economic situations and represents the eternal personality inherent in a nation.

As Chen clarifies himself, his conception of *minzu xing* resembles what Ruth Benedict, author of *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, called "ethos". It entails the main theme of a culture, or in other words, the national spirit in a cultural sense (*wenhua de minzu jingshen*).[462] From this perspective, the cultural anthropological term of "ethos" is better translated into Chinese as spiritual temperament (*jingshen qizhi*), national spirit (*minzu jingshen*), or cultural spirit (*wenhua jingshen*), rather than national character (*guomin xing*).

The most important distinction between national character (*guomin xing*) and national spirit (*minzu xing*), in Chen's understanding, lies in the endurance and transcendence of the latter. While critics of the national character resent it as a chronic illness of the nation, Chen views these often negative personalities and traits as having temporarily

[462] See Chen Lai 陈来, "Rujia sixiang de genyuan" 儒家思想的根源, in idem., *Chen Lai zixuan ji* 陈来自选集 (Guilin: guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 1997), pp. 33-46. The section on national spirit see pp. 36-39.

emerged from social and historical confinements; in his conception, the values and moral preferences that have survived—the national spirit—should be seen as positive historical legacies.

Yet there is one thing that critics of the national character and Chen Lai share, that is, they both refer to Confucianism. Critics attribute the ills in national character to Confucianism, and Chen searches for the national spirit in Confucianism. Critics accuse Confucianism of hindering the country's road towards modernization, while Chen contends that Confucianism and modernity are not mutually exclusive. In fact, in Chen's defense of Confucianism and its values, the key to his argument is the compatibility of Confucian thought (or tradition) with modernity. Vice versa, when Chen argues that Confucianism is not at odds with modernity, he naturally holds on to the idea that Confucian values are at least part of the transcendent national spirit, if not more.

Chen Lai traces the origin of the Chinese spiritual temperament (*qizhi*) back to Western Zhou culture, before the time of Confucius. Following that, in the time of what Karl Jaspers calls "the Axial Age",[463] which Chen uses to describe the global context of Confucianism in its making, this spiritual temperament developed further. Chen argues that such quality or charisma gradually formed the fundamental personality (*jiben renge*) of Chinese culture. Based on his understanding of Western Zhou culture and Confucian thought, Chen contends that it is this spiritual temperament or "ethos" that became the origin and foundation of Confucian thought.

To be more specific, Chen identifies four important constituents of the national spirit and the fundamental personality that have manifested themselves in Confucian values: emphasis on filial piety, intimate human relations, the value of people and respect for morality (*zhongxiao, qinren, guimin, chongde*).[464] If the many points listed by Liang Shuming and Max Weber fall into the category of the conditional and historical *guomin xing*, these four Confucian values in Chen's eyes represent the essential characteristics of Chinese culture, the true national spirit as *minzu xing*.

Thus, to grasp Chen's conception of *minzu xing*, it is necessary to further explore his understanding of Confucian thought as a set of humanistic values that do not act as obstacles to modernity or the process of modernization. To prove the transcendence of

[463] See Karl Jaspers, translated by Michael Bullock, *The Origin and Goal of History* (London: Routledge, 2010).

[464] Chen, "Rujia sixiang de genyuan", p. 38.

Confucian values and of the national spirit, Chen takes a few steps to argue against what critics of Confucianism call its incompatibility with modernity.

First of all, Chen believes that there is a natural connection between tradition and modernity. The development of modern civilization is the unification (*tongyi*) of continuity and change, and not the break between tradition and modernity.[465] This point of view is expressed through his critical evaluation of Weber's theory. As Chen points out, the discussion of Confucian culture and modernity since the 1960s has been held within the framework of Weber's "Protestant ethic thesis".[466] Weber attributed the development of capitalism in the West to the Protestant work ethic. His thesis argues that, while the Protestants' hard work is prompted by inner anxiety and tension, which is caused by the urge to be salvaged by God; such anxiety and tension do not exist in Confucian culture. This is the fundamental reason why traditional Chinese society was not able to develop into a modern industrial civilization. Following this Weberian logic, Chen concludes, Confucian values would be perceived as incompatible with modernity.[467]

Chen Lai challenges such a conclusion by arguing that Confucian tradition, as proven by the recent development of industrial East Asia, at least does not stand against economic development, though Chen does not attempt to establish a positive link between the two either. He quotes Tu Wei-ming in suggesting that, although distinctively different from Western cultural values, Confucian ethics in a free and open environment are just as able to act as a positive and creative spirit as other value systems. Consequently, Confucian tradition and modernity are not necessarily mutually exclusive.[468]

Secondly, Chen admits that the inner problematic of Confucianism, as of any other ethic-religious system, lies in its incapability to act as an instrumental force to social development. However, if one looks beyond the Weberian rationale concerning the relationship between traditional culture and economic development, Chen contends,

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[465] Chen Lai, "Chapter Two: Resolving the Tension between Tradition and Modernity: Reflections on the May Fourth Cultural Tide." in idem., *Tradition and Modernity*, pp. 41-78: p. 42.

[466] Max Weber, transl. [from German] by Talcott Parsons, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribner, 1958).

[467] Chen Lai, "Chapter Eight: A Reflection on the New School of Principle and Thoughts on Modernity." in idem., *Tradition and Modernity*, pp. 203-220: p. 190.

[468] Chen Lai, "Chapter Ten: Confucian Ethics and China's Modernization." in idem., *Tradition and Modernity*, pp. 233-254: p. 244.

Confucianism as a humanistic value should not be evaluated according to its functionality in political economy. Instead, Confucianism should be perceived as an autonomous cultural force free from any instrumental standard.

In arguing for such cultural autonomy, he borrows Weber's own terms to differentiate two sets of standards in evaluating cultural values: the standard of "value rationality" (*jiazhi lixing*) and that of "instrumental rationality" (*gongju lixing*). The existence of Confucianism as "value rationality" should be independent from its impact, either negative or positive, on the development of capitalism. That is to say, even if it does not contribute to economic development, it should not be labeled as the opposite of modernity, for modernization should not only be seen as economic function alone and "modern culture is not only a culture of 'instrumental rationality'".[469]

Thirdly, among all existing traditions, Chen regards Confucianism as the most apt to be transformed within a modern society, for it is essentially a worldly and humanistic tradition. As this humanistic perspective is not founded on the doctrine of God, the development of science does not severely challenge or jeopardize Confucianism in the way it has challenged other religious traditions.[470] On the contrary, the worldly concern of Confucianism as a religio-moral philosophy is very much in line with modern humanistic movements, holding the harmony of human relations as its ultimate value.

Furthermore, Confucianism has, in Chen's words, a human-relations orientation, which values responsibility over liberty and rights, and the community over the individual. This does not mean that Confucianism opposes the interests of the individual; rather, it places individual rights within their context of a larger community. This orientation, and its stress on community, as Chen suggests, has its significance in overcoming the negative aspects of modernization—extreme rationalization and the consequent alienation of the modern individual.

Based on the above arguments, it is clear that, though Chen Lai admits that Confucianism alone does not represent modern Chinese culture,[471] he holds firmly to the belief that Confucian values are the essential part of the transcendent national spirit —the *minzu xing* of the Chinese nation. Therefore, it can be said that he is of the

[469] Chen Lai, "Chapter Three: The May Fourth Tide and Modernity." in idem., *Tradition and Modernity*, pp. 79-88: p. 87. Some key terms are directly translated by this author from the 2006 Chinese version of this book.
[470] Interview with Chen Lai.
[471] Interview with Chen Lai.

opinion that nothing but Confucianism is able to represent the national spirit, and no figure other than Confucius can represent the fundamental Chinese personality.[472]

Out of the same belief, when a statue of Confucius was placed in front of the National Museum near the Tian'anmen Square in 2011, and much controversy arose, Chen wrote to defend the act. He asserted that Confucius had become a cultural symbol and an irreplaceable representative of the national spirit.[473] To Chen, the significance of placing this statue at the heart of the nation's political and culture center is obvious: it is an expression of a cultural identity formed around Confucianism, as well as an affirmation of the revival of traditional culture, of which mainland China is the main driving force.[474]

Chen Lai's perception of *minzu xing* is to a certain extent a development of Feng Youlan's theory of a Chinese spiritual tradition.[475] At the same time, it is also reminiscent of the "spirit of Chinese culture" from Tang Junyi (1909-1978), another representative scholar of the New-Confucian school. Tang also advocated the construction of a "self-dictated cultural spirit" (*zizuo zhuzai zhi jingshen qigai*),[476] and criticized that the lack of cultural confidence in intellectuals such as Hu Shi and Lu Xun would lead to ignorance of their own culture, despite their intention to stimulate changes.[477] This is where the viewpoint of Chen Lai differs from the cultural critics analyzed in the previous chapter. Though both acknowledge a long-standing influence of Confucianism on cultural tradition, critics relate it to a negative national character, whereas Chen associates it with the national spirit in a positive light.

With this understanding, we will further explore Chen's rejection of the national character discourse, not just because the term is understood by Chen as based on limited anthropological observations, but also because it is an important part of the criticism of Confucianism and Chinese national spirit—Chen's *minzu xing*. Chen Lai's rescue of *minzu xing* is to be studied from his arguments against the critiques of

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472 Interview with Chen Lai.
473 Interview with Chen Lai.
474 Chen Lai, "Guojia bowuguan qian li kongzi xang henyou yiyi" 国家博物馆前立孔子塑像很有意义, speech on January 27, 2011, see http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4a03de990100pb86.html (accessed December 21, 2012).
475 Chen, "Chapter One: Retrospect and Prospect", p. 30.
476 Tang Junyi 唐君毅, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian* 人文精神之重建 (Guilin: guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2005), p. 221.
477 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 257.

national character both during the May Fourth period and in the 1980s.

4.2. National Character: A Question of Tradition and Modernity

As I have discussed previously, Chen Lai revokes Feng Youlan's theoretical classification of cultural behaviors and attitudes as the temporary custom (*xi*) and the essential characteristics (*xing*). Chen Lai argues that the critics of the national character have established a polemical and reductionist view of a people, despite their intentions to improve the nation's status quo; when they criticize the cultural manifestations of temporary social problems, they mistakenly target the intrinsic national spirit and point towards cultural tradition and Confucianism.

The discourse of national character, seen from the perspective of Chen Lai, then, should be placed into its wider context of cultural radicalism and anti-traditionalism as seen in 20th century China. This mode of thinking, in Chen Lai's analysis, has two features: one is its tendency to evaluate ethical and moral values by the yardstick of utility, that is, to judge Confucianism with a utilitarian standard; the other is the crisis consciousness that has manifested itself in such a tendency. Both features are identified by Chen Lai as prominent in the anti-traditional movements of 20th century China, notably seen in the May Fourth Movement and in the 1980s.

1) On the National Character Critique during the May Fourth Movement

The May Fourth Movement in this research refers to, in a broad sense, the New Culture Movement that started in 1915 and was then highlighted during the days around May Fourth, 1919. As Li Zehou puts it, the New Culture Movement is characterized by its objective "to reconstruct the national character and to destroy the old tradition".[478] In Li's opinion, the idea behind the New Culture Movement was not fundamentally different from what Liang Qichao advocated in his "new people" thesis, in fact, they are both quite similar, even in their forms.[479] Similarly, Chen Lai speaks of the New Culture Movement as an anti-traditional movement with the ambition to completely reform Chinese culture. Although Chen recognizes the significance in its appeal for enlightenment, he criticizes its tendency to place the national character reform, or the

[478] Li, *Zhongguo xiandai sixiang shilun*, p. 7.
[479] Li, *Zhongguo xiandai sixiang shilun*, p. 4.

modernization of the people, as the premise of social modernization. This mentality, in his words, is no other than Hegel's "outdated historical idealism".[480]

Among the many who advocated the national character reform during the May Fourth Movement, Chen Duxiu was the one that Chen Lai responded to most explicitly. Chen Duxiu, seen as one of "three of China's most prominent May Fourth figures" together with Lu Xun and Hu Shi,[481] held a radical cultural position of "unbending Westernism": to eliminate the traditional Chinese pattern of life and thought and to substitute a modern, Western pattern of life and thought.[482] For this reason, Chen Duxiu has been seen as the representative of "anti-traditionalism and iconoclastic totalism"[483] around the May Fourth Movement.

Chen Duxiu believed that there is a fundamental difference in the thought of Eastern and Western nations, which made them incompatible like water and fire.[484] The difference lies in the fact that Western culture is founded on the concepts of liberty, equality and independence; while Chinese culture is based on the three principles of Confucian values, namely "the three bonds"—the relations between ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife. This difference, according to Chen Duxiu, is the reason for China's crisis in its encounter with Western countries. Therefore, the ultimate solution to China's problems is to awaken the people, and to Chen Duxiu, "the last awakening is the awakening of ethics",[485] that means, to completely break away from Confucian ethics as the nation's guiding moral principle.

Chen Lai contends that Chen Duxiu used the instrumental standard to analyse the difference between Eastern and Western nations, and in doing so, he "completely fell into the utilitarianism", which led to "an unavoidable bias" in his theory.[486] One of the differences Chen Duxiu identified was that "Western nations take war as the base; Oriental nations take tranquillity as the root". And as Chen Lai puts it, Chen Duxiu

480 Chen, "Chapter Two: Resolving the Tension", pp. 69-70.
481 Benjamin Schwartz, "Foreword," in Lin, *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness*, p. xii.
482 Benjamin Schwartz, "Ch'en Tu-hsiu and the Acceptance of the Modern West," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XII, No. 1 (Jan. 1951), pp. 61-72: 63& 72.
483 Lin, *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness*, pp. 56-81.
484 Chen Duxiu 陈独秀, "The Fundamental Differences in Thought of Eastern and Western Nations", 东西民族根本思想之差异, published at *Xin Qingnian* Vol. 1, No. 4, Dec. 15, 1915. See Lin Yutang, *Xianshuo Zhongguoren*, pp. 210-212.
485 Chen Duxiu 陈独秀, "Wuren zuihou zhi juewu" 吾人最后之觉悟, published at *Qingnian* 青年, Vol. 1, No. 6, 1916.
486 Chen, "Chapter Two: Resolving the Tension", p. 47.

dealt with this difference by "totally uncritically praising the West":

> *...he strenuously slanders Eastern culture for its paying attention to peace, forgiveness and cultural upbringing, treating a love of peace as the "root of shameless servile inferiority" of Oriental nations. Hence his ridiculous suggestion that "Oriental nations have the inferior vices of loving peace, appreciating repose and embracing culture". Chen Duxiu virtually becomes an adorer of war and bloodshed.*[487]

While Chen Lai strongly disagrees with Chen Duxiu's evaluation of the Chinese national character, especially the latter's condemnation of "love of peace" as "inferior", he further analyses it as a good example of cultural radicalism. To answer the question as to why "since May Fourth in the blood of young Chinese intellectuals there has always been a strong sense of an urge to oppose tradition", Chen Lai points out two major reasons: one is "these young people's special radical character and immaturity of cultural experience";[488] the other lies in the sentiment of pain, impatience and powerlessness created by a crisis of the Chinese nation since the Opium Wars. As he explains:

> *...from the end of nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century, after having enjoyed the feeling of superiority of the civilization of "the Middle Kingdom" for over a thousand years, Chinese civilization suddenly came up against the shock of modern Western culture in the form of invasion by imperialism and was reduced to a life and death struggle for survival....The failure of reform at several times in modern history resulted in the feelings of impatience and powerlessness among the few intellectuals,...(and) also a desire to find the* necessary *[sic] causes of these failures in culture…which led to a narrow utilitarianism in cultural matters...*[489]

In this light, Chen Duxiu's interpretation of peace-loving as a cultural defect was brought about by his consciousness of national crisis and his urge to save the dying nation, which "suppressed his ability to make value judgements" and resulted in his biased cultural view.[490] With the loss of humanist standard for values and ideals, in the

[487] Chen, "Chapter Two: Resolving the Tension", pp. 47-8.
[488] Chen, "Chapter Two: Resolving the Tension", p. 44.
[489] Chen, "Chapter Two: Resolving the Tension", p. 43.
[490] Chen, "Chapter Two: Resolving the Tension", pp. 47-48.

case of Chen Duxiu, "even the way of imperialism and militarism is also acceptable".[491]

To put Chen Duxiu's cultural viewpoints in its historical context, Chen Lai points out that during the May Fourth Movement, a crisis mentality and an urgency to save the nation were the overriding concerns of most intellectuals. To them, strengthening the state and the race became an absolute purpose. This explains the popularity of Social Darwinism at the time, which in turn led to utilitarianism even in the cultural realm —"all humanist values not related to enriching and strengthening are to be rejected".[492]

In arguing against Chen Duxiu's radical cultural stance, Chen Lai again borrows Weber's term of "value rationality" and "instrumental rationality". According to him, the humanist values of the ideal of peace and cultural awareness, the value rationality, may certainly not be judged according to an external utilitarian standard, i.e. the instrumental rationality.[493] As a recent study points out, the two types of rationalities identified here by Chen are somewhat different from Max Weber's original conception, and the sharp distinction between the two was also not so visible in Weber.[494] However, what is important to this research is that Chen employs such a dualist framework to rescue the humanist, religio-spiritual value of Confucianism that he is deeply concerned with, for, as he sees it, what manifested in the critiques of the national character is the loss of cultural autonomy to political pursuits.

2) Anti-traditionalism and criticism towards Confucianism in the 1980s

In a similar vein, Chen Lai stands firmly against what he sees as anti-traditionalism and cultural utilitarianism in the 1980s, for he regards the cultural discussion in the 1980s as the "logical historical continuity" of the May Fourth Movement.[495] In the reform era, as he puts it, "culturally we seem to have returned to the starting point of May Fourth".[496] The call for modernization showed that the anxiety or crisis mentality that had been overriding during May Fourth was still lingering in the 1980s, when the stark contrast between the world in and outside resembled much of that at the beginning of the 20th

[491] Chen, "Chapter Two: Resolving the Tension", p. 48.
[492] Chen, "Chapter Two: Resolving the Tension", p. 48.
[493] Chen, "Chapter Two: Resolving the Tension", p. 49.
[494] Van Dongen, *Goodbye Radicalism!*, pp. 201 & 205.
[495] Chen, "Chapter Two: Resolving the Tension", p. 44.
[496] Chen, "Chapter Two: Resolving the Tension", p. 44.

century.

In fact, Chen Lai contends that the May Fourth Movement, the Cultural Revolution and the culture discussions in the 1980s share a mode of thinking that is characteristically radical. To put is simply, these three periods demonstrated a preference of "the new" to "the old" and a resolution of "breaking the old to achieve the new". In the post-Cultural Revolution era, the loss of confidence in Confucianism, in Chen Lai's opinion, has been added by the internalization of Weberian theories with regard to the incapability of Confucianism to promote economic growth and to help realize modernization. It was under such circumstances that a comparison of Eastern and Western cultures led to "a severe attitude towards Confucian culture":

> *Intellectuals of the 1980s asked scornfully: Can Confucian Learning really bring about China's modernization?...this question not only revealed the fundamental reason why Confucian Learning was in an embarrassing predicament since the Opium Wars, it was also the only real challenge that it had faced in the past forty years.*[497]

With the prevalence of modernization, understood generally as rationalization and progress, the question is brought about as to "why do we still need Confucianism if it is useless?", or put it the other way around, "why should we not abandon Confucianism if, and because, it stands in the way of modernization?" This is a question largely propelled by a wide-spread crisis consciousness, and put forward under the presumption that cultural tradition and moral values have a causal relationship with the socio-political development of a nation.

Chen Lai recognizes the motifs of such a question. He describes that many intellectuals, driven by the feeling of anxiety and a sense of unprecedented urgency, "too easily went the way of a complete denial of the cultural tradition" to avoid being in the state of humiliation.[498] He summarizes this tendency as cultural radicalism led by utilitarianism, which was clearly demonstrated in what he calls "the third peak of cultural radicalism of the century" as represented by *River Elegy*:[499]

> *The classic form (of cultural radicalism).....is to take Confucianism as*

[497] Chen Lai, "Chapter Four: Radicalism in the Cultural Movement of the Twentieth-Century." in idem, *Tradition and Modernity*, pp. 89-108: 102-103.
[498] Chen, "Chapter Four: Radicalism", p. 105.
[499] Chen, "Chapter Four: Radicalism", p. 103.

> *the ideology of an authoritarian system and to imagine that totally destroying the value system of Confucianism is the premise for realizing modernization, seeing Confucian Learning as the root cause of the failure to resolve all practical issues and so criticize it. Their fault is the same as that of the May Fourth critics…The theories of radicalism ascribed all China's problems to Confucius, Confucianism or the vast land of China, making practical (*xianshi*) issues into those of tradition, structural (*zhidu*) issues into cultural ones.*[500]

Similarly, while commenting on Gan Yang's anti-traditional views around 1985, he framed them as "young intellectuals' anti-traditional sentiments" driven by their aspiration for modernization.[501] His understanding of such motifs notwithstanding, Chen Lai stands firmly against what he sees as cultural radicalism, and perceives it as a form of xenophilia (*chongyang meiwai*)[502]. In his eyes, to deny traditional culture will consequently jeopardize a nation's confidence and solidarity, resulting in a loss of culture, values and spirit, which might deepen the political and economic crisis even further.

Chen Lai's cultural standpoint against anti-traditionalism makes him "one of the rare mainland intellectuals" with "genuine concern with tradition and morality".[503] Indeed, during the heydays of the cultural fever of 1980s, he was already confident that the anti-traditional tendency would "gradually weaken".[504] And at the end of the 20th century, looking back at the movements of cultural radicalism, he concludes that "the sense of cultural inferiority and national inferiority that has been around since May Fourth has been proven to be totally wrong".[505]

Chen Lai's concern with tradition and his belief in historical continuity have placed him beyond the crisis consciousness and the utilitarian standards that he observes in anti-traditionalism. He argues for the autonomy of culture, and opposes the rationale of reducing socio-political problems into matters of culture. He guards tradition against the accusation of its anti-modern nature, and instead perceives cultural tradition as embodiment of a transcendent spirit that should be viewed outside the modernist

[500] Chen, "Chapter Four: Radicalism", pp. 107-8.
[501] Chen Lai, "Sixiang chulu de san dongxiang", pp. 374-376.
[502] Interview with Chen Lai.
[503] Van Dongen, *Goodbye Radicalism!*, p. 243.
[504] Chen, "Sixiang chulu de san dongxiang", p. 378.
[505] Chen, "Chapter Two: Resolving the Tension", p. 77.

framework.

Yet Chen's criticism of anti-traditionalism during the May Fourth Movement and the 1980s is at the same time also open to critique. In his understanding, anti-traditionalism can be seen as a form of xenophilia. But, as we analyzed in the previous chapter, xenophilia is not adequate to describe the complex intellectual and emotional factors at play in the critiques of the national character. Whereas Chen Lai rightly points to the inferiority complex of anti-traditionalism, he ignores the fact that, in many cases, such inferiority is mixed with a sense of cultural superiority and a strong urge to reclaim such superiority.

Furthermore, although utilitarianism is one of the major reasons behind the pursuit of modernization and the consequent cultural radicalism, it does not mean that anti-traditionalism should be simplified as merely utilitarian. Indeed, Chen Duxiu's iconoclasm might have been induced by the urgent need felt to strengthen the nation, even at the risk of developing towards imperialism and militarism; and Liang Qichao's "new people" thesis was also partly founded on the assumption that if the Chinese nation is to survive the fierce competition of the Darwinist world, Chinese people have to learn from the Anglo-Saxons to be strong and vigorous.

However, Chen Lai fails to recognize another aspect of what he fights against as cultural radicalism, that is, it might also originate from a genuine belief in the "intrinsic value"[506] of Western culture. Such a belief is seen in the texts of Hu Shi, as well as in the contemporary cultural critiques of, for example, Wang Xiaofeng. In such cases, utilitarianism might have been one of the driving forces of cultural anti-traditionalism, but certainly not the only motif that Chen employs to criticize radicalism.

3) Cultural Conservatism: A Concept Misunderstood?

Chen Lai's argumentation about radicalism should be read in the context of the debate on radicalism (*jijin zhuyi*) and conservatism (*baoshou zhuyi*) since the 1990s. The debate has evolved around the basic opposition of anti-traditionalism (*fan chuantong zhuyi*) and what Chen Lai calls anti-anti-traditionalism, which places the question of Confucian thoughts and values at the center of modern Chinese intellectual history as well as contemporary Chinese culture.

[506] Van Dongen, *Goodbye Radicalism!*, p. 205.

In resolving the tension of this opposition, as I mentioned earlier, the debates in the 1990s have resulted in a shift towards a more positive and confident perception of Confucianism. The revival of Confucianism in mainland China has been aided by overseas cultural propositions, notably those of Tu Weiming and Yu Yingshi, to combat anti-traditionalism.[507] It is also noted that the cultural viewpoints of mainland new Confucians have many similarities with those of, for example, Yu Yingshi and Lin Yusheng.[508]

Therefore, the shift in perceptions of Confucianism in the 1990s is generally regarded as a conservative turn in the intellectual landscape. As Chen Lai puts it, in answering the question as to "how pre-modern Chinese culture was able to give a creative response to modernized Western culture",[509] a cultural conservatism was derived from a tenacious cultural identity rooted in a deep spiritual-cultural tradition.[510] And it is abundantly clear that Chen Lai is committed to a cultural position that "wholly affirms Confucian thought and values, which is clearly a stance of anti-anti-traditionalism".[511]

Although Chen Lai states that cultural conservatism is "basically a thesis about culture that is at odds with anti-tradition thought",[512] therefore equating his anti-anti-traditionalism with cultural conservatism, he seems reluctant to be labeled as a cultural conservative: "There is no doubt that I have great sympathy and understanding for the cultural viewpoint of the so-called 'cultural conservatives', but this does not mean that I agree to being labeled in this way."[513] This leads to the question of Chen Lai's cultural viewpoint with regard to how he relates to the concept of cultural conservatism.

Conservatism as an intellectual movement has been regarded as a counter current against enlightenment[514] to defend the value of organic forms of social life.[515] Whereas

[507] Wang, *High Culture Fever*, p. 66.
[508] Van Dongen, *Goodbye Radicalism!*, p. 241.
[509] Chen, "Chapter One: Retrospect and Prospect", p. 17.
[510] Chen, "Chapter One: Retrospect and Prospect", p. 17.
[511] Chen Lai, "Postface to the Revised Edition." in idem., *Tradition and Modernity*, pp. 361-368: p. 361.
[512] Chen Lai, "Introduction: The Humanist View." in idem., *Tradition and Modernity*, pp. 1-16: p. 4.
[513] Chen, "Introduction: The Humanist View", p. 7.
[514] Isaiah Berlin, "The Counter-Enlightenment," in idem., *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giraux, 1998), pp. 243-268.
[515] Isaiah Berlin, "The Counter-Enlightenment," in Philip P. Wiener (ed.), *Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973-1974), p. 106.

the notion of conservatism is often related to an attitude against change, many scholars have criticized such an understanding and stressed instead the "presumptions of continuity"[516] in conservatism. In the case of Chinese conservatism, both Charlotte Furth and Schwartz have emphasized that it is essentially culture. That means, as compared to a definite cultural standpoint,[517] conservatives in China usually take a vague or ambivalent sociopolitical position, not necessarily supporting the political status quo.

In this regard, these descriptions are in line with Chen Lai's understanding of Chinese cultural conservatism. Chen argues that the thoughts of many so-called cultural conservatives have centered on the topic of civil morality and ethical order in modern society, and the question of the ideals of human life. Their cultural conservatism was "certainly not political conservatism, nor a cling to the last dregs of culture without knowing anything about Western culture."[518]

To take the examples of cultural conservatives around the May Fourth Movement, Chen Lai contends that, though they might not have sufficiently emphasized the need to learn from Western schools of thought with regard to democracy and liberty, their thoughts cannot be construed as mere sentimental yearning for tradition. Instead, their cultural stances represented "a conviction of the universal nature of traditional morality" and its role as "a safeguard against the assaults on morality in the experience of modernization".[519] It should not be mistaken as a position against change. In fact, many held rather progressive, even radical political views. In the eyes of Chen Lai, Liang Shuming, for one, proved that "political democratization, military nationalization and complete absorption of Western culture" was not against his "cultural judgment" of tradition.[520]

In Chen Lai's interpretation, so-called cultural conservatism is not only a cultural reflection of the transformations of contemporary society; it is also a cultural appeal to the ills of contemporary industrial and commercial society:

> *Cultural conservatism is a positive force for the upholding of culture and values in a society of extreme commercialization. It is a restraint*

[516] Charlotte Furth, "Culture and Politicis", in idem. (ed.), *The Limits of Change*, p. 50.
[517] Schwartz, "Notes on Conservatism", p. 16.
[518] Chen, "Chapter Two: Resolving the Tension", p. 49.
[519] Chen, "Introduction: The Humanist View", p. 12.
[520] Chen, "Chapter Two: Resolving the Tension", p. 50.

> *on commercialism itself and on bourgeois utilitarian culture, a force of balance and criticism; and (it) points directly at the disappearance of meaning and values brought about by commercialization.*[521]

To demonstrate the critical attitude of cultural conservatism towards commercialization, he takes Daniel Bell (1919-2011) as an example. The thoughts of Bell, seen as "an important force for criticism from within capitalism"[522] since the 1960s, according to Chen, represent "a widespread mindset of a return to tradition and a seeking for stability of values" as well as "the demands for a restoration of moral constraints and cultural order".[523] Chen Lai holds high regard to Bell's "profound and calm cultural conservatism": the critical revaluation of popular culture and mass movement, the reflections on liberal philosophy, the attentiveness towards belief and authority, his upholding of the continuity of civilization, and the profound religious concern in the revealing of contradictions of capitalism.[524]

Furthermore, Chen Lai attaches great importance to the belief of Bell that the structure of human values may be multifarious and overlapping. As Bell described himself, he was "a socialist in economic affairs, a liberal in politics and a conservative in cultural matters, these three are all integrated into one".[525] According to Chen, Bell's example demonstrates that cultural conservatism may become the value system of someone who holds economic socialism and political liberalism. As someone who was also "proficient in Marx",[526] Bell provides, in Chen's opinion, a meaningful point of reference for the construction of a suitable humanist environment in China: his thoughts "support the confidence of scholars who had hesitated between the two extremes of criticism of or upholding tradition".[527]

Bearing in mind the multi-fold intellectual orientations of so-called cultural conservatives such as Liang Shuming and Daniel Bell, Chen Lai finds the terminology of cultural conservatism problematic. By stressing the aspect of being conservative, it

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[521] Chen, "Introduction: The Humanist View", p. 6.
[522] See Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976). Other works of Bell see Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: on the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (Glencoe, IL: The Free press, 1960). Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
[523] Chen, "Introduction: The Humanist View", p. 5.
[524] Chen, "Chapter Four: Radicalism", pp. 107-108.
[525] Chen, "Introduction: The Humanist View", p. 5.
[526] Chen, "Introduction: The Humanist View", p. 4.
[527] Chen, "Chapter Four: Radicalism", pp. 107-108.

conceals the open and critical attitude of those being labeled as cultural conservatives. At the same time, it cannot describe their efforts to absorb foreign culture whilst advocating the preservation of tradition. As he puts it, "for some scholars (including myself), the idea of 'conservatism in the area of culture' is manifestly not a full expression of their entire view of culture".[528]

If the example of Daniel Bell, as a source of inspiration to Chen Lai, demonstrates the possibilities in the concept of cultural conservatism, Chinese cultural and political realities in the past and present have shown that these possibilities have been far from realized. In the cultural realm of contemporary China, this term has many limitations—it has been too often associated with political conservatism; and it is not able to include "the critical awareness and constructive work of those scholars who are grouped under this rubric".[529] That is why he repeatedly stresses the possibilities of a cultural conservatism combined with various forms of economic and political viewpoints.

4.3. Cultural Subjectivity: China and the West

In the previous chapter I have analyzed the tendency to attribute the country's problems to its cultural tradition and psychological make-up. In this chapter, the examination of Chen Lai's rejection of such a tendency has presented a drastically different perception of the nation's tradition. These different perceptions of tradition as reflected in the debate of the national character have provided us insight in Chinese dealings with the relationship between the present and the past; yet perceptions of the past or cultural tradition alone do not suffice for the quest of a cultural identity, for aside from the historical dimension, the positioning of Chinese culture has also to be understood with an international dimension, as the cultural position of the Chinese Self vis-à-vis the foreign Other.

This brings us to the issue of the relationship between Chinese and Western culture. If Chen Lai's perception of Chinese cultural tradition is clearly demonstrated in his anti-anti-traditionalism; his understanding of the position of Chinese culture in the world is characterized by the concept of "cultural subjectivity".

The term "subjectivity" has been a concept closely related to Western philosophy and

[528] Chen, "Introduction: The Humanist View", p. 9.
[529] Chen, "Chapter Four: Radicalism", p. 108.

theology. The works of St. Augustine (354-430) suggest that subjectivity can be thought of as "possessing an awareness of content independently of how things happen in the world, and as secure in a rich self-presence, because of its relation…to a divine reality."[530] In his 1994 book, Frank B. Farrell talks of a "disenchantment of subjectivity": the loss of enchanted status of the subject and "the removal from our conceptions of thinking and experiencing of the residual influence of theological and religious models".[531] The modern philosophical concept of subjectivity deals with the relations between the mind and its understanding of the outside world.[532] It usually stresses the significance of the point of view of the subject, or the observer, as well as his or her own perceptions and perspectives.

In a more general sense, the concept of subjectivity points at, and tends to validate, the subject's own understandings, feelings and beliefs derived from one's own unique experiences and self-consciousness as opposed to the assumed universal objectivity. Thus, the subject is entitled an independent and autonomous status of the Self from the reality comprised of many of the Others.

In terms of Chinese culture vis-à-vis Western cultures, Chen Lai's conception of a "cultural subjectivity" similarly requests the former's independence and autonomy. This concept entails a sense of subjectivity at two levels: the right of a culture to be independent and different from other cultures; and the right of the people to understand their own culture based on their own experiences instead of being evaluated and judged by the standards of others.

Therefore, "cultural subjectivity" in Chen Lai's understanding validates the particularity of Chinese culture derived from its historical and unique experiences, and at the same time stresses the self-consciousness of Chinese people in their own perceptions of the culture's past, present and future. It argues more specifically against the tendency of "thorough Westernization"—to judge or evaluate Chinese culture

[530] Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 9.

[531] Frank B. Farrell, *Subjectivity, Realism, and Postmodernism: The Recovery of the World in Recent Philosophy* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 4.

[532] On the modern philosophical concept of "subject" and "subjectivity", see John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994). John McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998). Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Harvard University Press, 1989). Karl E. Smith, *Meaning, Subjectivity and Society: Making Sense of Modernity* (Leiden [etc.]: Brill, 2010).

solely by Western standards.

1) The Particular and the Universal

Chen Lai defines cultural subjectivity as a concept that "expresses the importance of a nation's own experiences and unique path in its development".[533] His perception of modern Chinese history differentiates the country's political, social and cultural experiences from those of Western societies, therefore rejects any attempt to evaluate Chinese culture outside of its own social and historical contexts and solely with theories and values drawn from Western experiences. To him, the acknowledgment of the universality of certain values does not necessarily mean that such particular Western experiences should be applied for the pursuit of the same value in China. In other words, the values might be universal; the experiences can very well be particular.

This approach to universality and particularity is demonstrated in his understanding of "value rationality". To him, the acknowledgment of "value rationality" does not mean that it has to be established exclusively through the same transcendent monotheism as in the West. Chen maintains that the rationalization of Chinese culture is linked to the gradual decline (*danhua*) of worship of god and the increasing concern of secular culture and values.[534] In the same vein, as he introduces the Weberian concept of modern "philosophical breakthrough" developed by Talcott Parson (1902-1979), he emphasizes that, while in Europe the development of thought took a transcendent breakthrough, in China, Confucianism took a different turn towards humanism.[535]

Therefore, while Chen employs Weber's "value rationality" to understand the meaning of Confucianism in modern times, he nevertheless points out that Weber's rationality framework is "not sufficient enough to grasp the particularity—the humanistic and secular aspects of Chinese cultural development".[536] In his perception, the universal "value rationality" has manifested itself in the particular developmental process of Confucianism.

However, regretfully in his eyes, this particularity was to a large extent ignored during the 20th century, when "Westernization dominated the cultural scene, either in the form

[533] Interview with Chen Lai.
[534] Chen, "Rujia sixiang de genyuan", p. 43.
[535] Chen, *Gudai sixiang wenhua de shijie*, p. 25.
[536] Chen, "Rujia sixiang de genyuan", p. 42.

of radical totalism or a specific theory".[537] From this perspective, cultural radicalism is resulted from a belief in universality of Western values and the ignorance of Chinese particularity. Consequently, it led to a tendency to embrace Western culture unconditionally, even in aesthetics and ethics, which Chen believes was the case for both the advocates of enlightenment and the believers of Communism.[538] The logic of cultural radicalism was such that if Western values are to be pursued, their forms have to be followed as well. Chen criticizes such a logic as having dominated the Chinese cultural realm for a century and severely jeopardized cultural subjectivity.

Chen goes on to explain explicitly that the stress of "cultural subjectivity"—the particularity of Chinese culture and its development—is not a concept against values such as liberty or democracy. Chen Lai perceives the development of liberty and democracy in Western societies as having taken its own particular course, connecting closely to their historical and cultural experiences, political background and international conditions.[539] During this particular process, modern Western values have been established in the development of secular humanism without the elimination of cultural-spiritual ethics of Christian religion.

Based on such a historical interpretation of the development of values such as liberty and democracy in the West, Chen begins to explore the possibility of a particular Chinese process of developing the same values. If modern universal values could be developed on basis of the Western cultural tradition, asks Chen, why couldn't they be combined with the Chinese cultural tradition, or, Confucianism? This question, given the ample theoretical space he has argued for a Chinese cultural subjectivity, is an inquiry into the possibility of a particular Chinese course of cultural development, or a particular modern Chinese culture.

Looking at the historical experiences of the last century, Chen believes such an inquiry is not far-fetched. After all, despite the three phases of cultural radicalism he identifies, the cultural-spiritual continuity has impacted modern Chinese history, making the influence of tradition rather visible in socio-cultural development. Chen contends that Confucianism surely does not represent modern China, just as Christianity does not represent the modern West. But even if Confucianism is considered as only one part of

[537] Interview with Chen Lai.
[538] Interview with Chen Lai.
[539] Interview with Chen Lai.

modern culture, "it has something that does not change".[540] And this stable part of Chinese culture is precisely the national spirit we discussed earlier.

Furthermore, the fact that contemporary China has risen in an economic and political sense offers a historical opportunity to realize such a possibility. To use Chen Lai's words, "with many experiences accumulated in economic and social development", there are new answers to the century-old question as to "how to understand and evaluate one's own culture, at the same time re-evaluate one's own cultural standpoint".[541] It is in this context that Chen Lai brings about his understanding of cultural subjectivity.

It has to be noted that Chen Lai's proposition of a cultural subjectivity does not refute foreign influence per se, but rather implies a vision that places Chinese culture in a global context. When speaking of traditional Chinese academic culture (*Zhongguo chuantong xueshu wenhua*), he maintains that "National Studies" means the research conducted by Chinese researchers on their own history and culture, which naturally needs to stress the subjectivity of Chinese culture. However, to sustain (*ting li*) the subjectivity "does not mean to be closed off or talking to oneself, but to establish one's own position in world culture and the international field of Chinese cultural studies".[542]

In this sense, cultural subjectivity, a rejection of "embracing Western culture unconditionally" and "evaluating Chinese reality with Western experiences",[543] is essentially a rejection of Orientalist perceptions of Chinese culture. Orientalism and Orientalist views here not only refer to Western cultural hegemony, but more importantly, in this case, point at Chinese self-orientalization—the tendency to evaluate Chinese culture and Confucianism through the lens of an Orientalist. As Dirlik points out, Orientalist conceptions no longer have distinct geographical origins, neither particularly from the West nor the East. What Chen Lai proposes in his cultural subjectivity is meant to be an antidote against such globalized Orientalism, and especially its internalization by the Chinese cultural radicals whose anti-traditionalism he stands so firmly against.

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[540] Interview with Chen Lai.
[541] Interview with Chen Lai.
[542] See Chen Lai 陈来, "Foreword" 总序, in Chen Lai (ed.), *Qinghua Guoxue congshu* 清华国学丛书 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2011).
[543] Interview with Chen Lai.

2) Revisiting the *Ti-Yong* Concept: Chinese Learning as Substance?

When Chen Lai argues for a cultural subjectivity, he strives to disconnect his defense of the particularity of Chinese culture from the defense of any particular political value. In his words, his cultural subjectivity "has little to do with politics"—it does not argue for "the values represented by the current political system in mainland China".[544] Yet it does not necessarily argue against the political status quo either. This disconnection is in line with Chen Lai's perception of the relations between Confucianism as a humanist value and the political forms in Confucian societies. As Chen argues,

> *The characteristics (of Confucian culture) might not take a decisive role in a political form, which means, they do not mechanically determine the political form of a society. Its influence on the political form is not necessarily directed towards one or the other mode...East Asian societies, for example, Korea, Japan and China, have various political forms. Some are authoritarian, some can be called democratic; and those democratic systems are also different from each other. Yet they all share a Confucian tradition...Though Confucian tradition does not independently determine modern political forms... it could still function as the main cultural value of a society. The fundamental values of societies in Korea, Taiwan, Japan and mainland China are still distinct from those of Western societies. That is to say, Confucian tradition could still influence the direction of cultural values.*[545]

As we can see from his analysis of East Asian societies, he aims to decouple the association between the authoritarian state with Confucianism that most critics of the national character point to. To avoid falling into the dichotomy of Chinese culture as authoritarian and Western culture as democratic, he argues that the Confucian tradition does not necessarily determine the form of a society towards either authoritarianism or Western-style democracy, although it is functioning as the main cultural value of Confucian societies.

On this note, it is important to examine his understanding of the formulation of *Ti-Yong*

[544] Interview with Chen Lai.
[545] Interview with Chen Lai.

— "Chinese learning as substance, Western learning as application" (*Zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong*) of late Qing, which is known from the 1898 essay *Exhortation to Learning* (*Quanxue pian*) by Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909), one of the representatives of the late Qing Self-Strengthening Movement. Zhang argued that both Chinese (old) and Western (new) learning should be sought; however, they should be studied under the premise that the former is essential, and the latter represents useful techniques (*jiuxue wei ti, xinxue wei yong*) to be used merely for its instrumental value. Liang Qichao also used the formulation while speaking of knowledge and education: Chinese learning is the essence and Western learning is the application (*Zhongxue, ti ye, xixue, yong ye*).[546]

The concept of *Ti-Yong*, according to Joseph Levenson, is a result of an intellectual and psychological crisis brought about by the Chinese encounter with the modern West. Levenson believed that Zhang Zhidong's *Ti-Yong* concept is intellectually bankrupt as it "betrays a traditionalist's contribution to the wearing away of tradition".[547] Yet recent studies argue that Levenson's interpretation of *Ti-Yong* was too narrow.[548] Re-visiting the *Ti-Yong* concept, many discover that it "contains many intellectual possibilities", which enable intellectuals to avoid the charge of being disloyal to Chinese civilization in their interest in things foreign.[549]

Comparing it with "cultural subjectivity", Chen Lai argues that, the term of "Chinese substance" (*zhongxue wei ti*) of Zhang Zhidong or the Self-Strengthening Movement pointed not only at preserving Chinese culture and ethics, but more importantly, at maintaining the imperial political system and its values. The major limits of the "Chinese substance" lie in its loyalty to the monarchy, and its attitude against Western learning beyond military and technological knowledge.[550] To Chen, those are the main

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[546] Liang Qichao 梁启超, "Zongli yamen zou jingshi daxuetang zhangchen" 总理衙门奏京师大学堂章程, in *Beijing daxue shiliao* 北京大学史料 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1992), p. 82.

[547] Levenson, *The Problem of Intellectual Continuity*, p. 69. For Levenson's analysis of the *Ti-Yong* concept, see "Chapter IV: Ti and Yung—Substance and Function", pp. 59-78.

[548] For example, see Luke S. K. Kwong, "The Ti-Yung Dichotomy and the Search for Talent in Late-Ch'ing China," *Modern Asian Studies* 27, No. 2 (1993): pp. 253-279.

[549] See Timothy P. Weston, "The Founding of the Imperial University and the Emergence of Chinese Modernity," in Rebecca E. Karl and Peter Zarrow (ed.), *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2002), pp. 99-123: 105. For another article on this topic in this book, see Tze-ki Hon, "Zhang Zhidong's Proposal for Reform: A New Reading of the *Quanxue pian*", pp. 77-98.

[550] Interview with Chen Lai.

differences between the *Ti-Yong* concept and his notion of cultural subjectivity, which does not relate to the values represented in mainland China's political system.[551]

His criticism notwithstanding, Chen Lai does not refuse to re-visit the *Ti-Yong* concept. He believes that the thoughts of Zhang Zhidong, as well as those of many neo-Confucian scholars, represent "a conviction of the universal nature of traditional morality" and its role as "a safeguard against the assaults on morality in the experience of modernization".[552] Although Chinese learning might be particular, its existence as a traditional value feeds into the universal quest for morality which goes beyond the modernist framework.

In fact, the "Chinese substance" was also used in the 1930s by Feng Youlan. Indicating a distinctly different understanding of "substance" from that advocated in the Self-Strengthening Movement, Feng insisted on preserving the national spirit in Chinese morality and ethics in its pursuit of modernization.[553] In a sense, Chen Lai's perception of the national spirit, or his cultural subjectivity, can be read as a development of Feng Youlan's call for preservation of an eternal and universal morality.

The stress on Chinese culture as substance, if deprived of its political implications, could be read as another formulation of Chen Lai's cultural subjectivity. Both imply that the national spirit, or in particular Confucian morality, is autonomous from either modernization or Western culture. Having said that, it is obvious that such a cultural conviction remains politically ambivalent. In the case of Chen Lai, he does not explicitly argue for, or against, authoritarianism, even though he repeatedly emphasizes the "critical awareness"[554] or "critical attitude"[555] that he believes as concealed by the label of cultural conservatism. Compared to his firm and clear cultural viewpoint, Chen Lai's political viewpoint has not been articulated.

3) Cultural Subjectivity and Cultural Nationalism

While arguing for a cultural subjectivity, Chen Lai criticizes the tendency of total Westernization as a form of cultural radicalism. His criticism of xenophilia is mainly pointing at the anti-traditional aspect of such radicalism rather than the general idea of

[551] Interview with Chen Lai.
[552] Chen, "Introduction: The Humanist View", p. 12.
[553] Interview with Chen Lai.
[554] Chen, "Chapter Four: Radicalism", p. 108.
[555] Chen, "Introduction: The Humanist View", p. 9.

learning from the West. To him, the problem lies not in the study of Western thought, but in the uncritical application of Western thought to the study of Chinese culture, which he believes to have led to the complete abandonment of one's own cultural tradition.

This is also the reason why he refuses to be labeled as a cultural conservative, for the term "cultural conservatism" in his opinion does not describe his efforts to absorb foreign culture whilst advocating the preservation of tradition. Indeed, many of his theories are unfolded in his dialogues with Western philosophers and sociologists.

For example, Chen Lai recognizes the great influence of Weber's theory of religious sociology: "the 1960s discussion of Confucian culture and modernization was basically undertaken under the umbrella of Weberian theory". In applying Weber's differentiation of "value rationality" and "instrumental rationality", he admits that "through Weber we now understand better how to look at the negative side of tradition from the angle of function".[556] Yet at the same time he points out that Weber's rationality framework is not sufficient to grasp the particularity of Chinese culture.[557] Therefore, he also emphasizes that "through Gadamer we understand better how to affirm the positive aspects of traditions from humanistic values".[558]

Similarly, Chen Lai has incorporated the concept of "the Axial Age" of Karl Jaspers, as well as the thought of Daniel Bell in his understanding of cultural conservatism. On one occasion, Chen identified himself as a Marxist:

> *The cultural topic of contemporary intellectuals should no longer be an emotional impulsive total denial of tradition but a resolution of the tension between tradition and modernity that has developed since May Fourth, a rational critique of tradition, inheriting and creatively developing it. This is not only a consensus of neo-traditionalism (modern Confucianism) and neo-liberals (such as Lin Yusheng); it should also be the attitude of us Marxists who have inherited the dialectical method of Hegel and Marx.*[559]

Nevertheless, his attitude towards Marxism is influenced by his cultural subjectivity. In his interpretation, the fact that "Marxism was unbeknownst sinicized" is consistent

[556] Chen, "Chapter Two: Resolving the Tension", p. 44.
[557] Chen, *Chen Lai Zixuan Ji*, pp. 42. & 234-235.
[558] Chen, "Chapter Two: Resolving the Tension", p. 44.
[559] Chen, "Chapter Two: Resolving the Tension", p. 77.

with "the tendency towards subjectivity" in the development of modern Chinese culture.[560] In the same vein, though he acknowledges the importance of the dialectical method of both Marx and Hegel, he contends that "Hegel never concealed his Eurocentric standpoint".[561] Consequently, when speaking of the national character reforms, he argues that its logic puts the modernization of people's thought as the foundation of economic and political modernization, which is no other than Hegel's outdated "historical idealism".[562]

Studying the cultural viewpoints and the methodologies in Chen Lai's arguments, it seems that, while he stands grounded in the Chinese cultural tradition, he tries to keep an intellectual outlook that is open to the influence of Western thought in order to critically revaluate the very tradition he guards against. However, to sustain a balanced attitude of cultural subjectivity is a tricky business, for it has been proven that, in modern Chinese intellectual history, the relation between cultural conservatism and cultural nationalism is a rather delicate issue.

Cultural nationalism, as John Hutchinson defines it, refers to "ideological movements at times of social crisis in order to transform the belief-systems of communities and provide models for cultural and political development that guide their modernizing strategies".[563] Based on such a definition, Guo Yingjie, in his study of Chinese cultural nationalism, contends that the Confucian "renaissance" on the mainland is "evidently a strong current of cultural nationalism".[564] Whereas political nationalism can be combined with cultural iconoclasm, cultural nationalism is generally seen as the identification with the national spirit or national essence.[565] From a different perspective, Guy Alitto has also suggested that, because modernization is often seen as a Western product, Chinese cultural conservatism as part of a global reaction against modernization naturally has its nationalistic implications.[566]

In analyzing conservatism as an opposition to Enlightenment, Axel Schneider categorizes two types of conservatism: a "classicist conservative" believes in "a set of timeless and universal moral standards that cannot be altered and adjusted to human

[560] Chen, "Chapter One: Retrospect and Prospect", p. 22.
[561] Chen, "Rujia sixiang de genyuan", p. 33.
[562] Chen, "Chapter Two: Resolving the Tension", p. 70.
[563] John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism* (Allen and Unwin, 1987), p. 4.
[564] Guo, *Cultural Nationalism*, p. 72.
[565] Guo, *Cultural Nationalism*, p. 17.
[566] Alitto, *The Last Confucian*.

needs or desires"; and "a historicist conservative" emphasizes "particular, historically grown traditions".[567] He argues that, whereas the former holds the "universal ethical standards" and the latter attempts to "carefully inherit and build on the wisdom of tradition", both types of conservatism "doubt the nationalist efforts to modernize, to build a nation-state or a new collective national identity".[568] In his interpretation, cultural conservatism might very well be suspicious of not only political nationalism but also cultural nationalism.

I have analyzed how Chen Lai relates to cultural conservatism. The question now is, how does Chen perceive cultural nationalism when he proposes a cultural subjectivity? In many cases, Chen chooses to transform the issue of Chinese and Western culture into one of tradition and modernity. In this light, to protect Chinese cultural tradition and morality becomes a particular form of the universal responses towards the perceived loss of humanistic spirit in the process of modernization.

In his opinion, modernization in the age of globalization has invoked the awareness of the nation as a historical subject, thereby leading to two seemingly paradoxical cultural responses: a sense of global awareness and the trend of root-seeking.[569] And this cultural trend of root-seeking, as a part of the nostalgic sentiments towards tradition ancient and recent as well as the intellectual and popular revival of tradition, is intimately related to cultural nationalism.

In this light, cultural nationalism is not a particular Chinese phenomenon. In the global context, Chen Lai argues that a long term oppression of local cultures by Western cultural hegemony has stimulated a continuous response against it from all over the world. The relief of such oppression will understandably bring about a rising awareness of national and local cultures. Therefore, while the process of globalization has had great impact on local cultures everywhere, it has also resulted in pleas to protect cultural pluralism and concerns for cultural subjectivity.[570] Chen Lai uses

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[567] Axel Schneider, "The One and the Many: A Classicist Reading of China's tradition and Its Role in the Modern World—An Attempt on Modern Chinese Conservatism", *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 2, no. 5 (2010), pp. 7218-7243: 7220.

[568] Schneider, "The One and the Many", p. 7221.

[569] Chen Lai 陈来, "Lishi zijue he wenhua zhuti—*Chuishaji* duhou" 历史自觉和文化主体——<吹沙集>读后, online essay posted on February 23, 2009. Available at: http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4a03de990100c322.html and http://www.chinavalue.net/General/Article/2009-2-23/161073.html

[570] Interview with Chen Lai.

Berlin's metaphor to describe this phenomenon as "a bent twig"—an understandable and natural response towards cultural hegemony and Western universalism: "no matter what –ism you use to call it, it is a natural response in its own right".[571]

It is without doubt that Chen Lai attempts to propagate a sense of national confidence through his cultural subjectivity, and the national historical self-consciousness is an important part of his intellectual concern[572]. Whereas he observes a sense of "humiliation and resentment"[573] caused by the Western imperialist invasion and oppression since the late Qing, he especially holds a critical attitude towards xenophilia and an uncritical acceptance of Western culture that is often mixed with the sense of cultural and national humiliation.[574] Therefore, cultural nationalism seems to have become an aid to cultural subjectivity in its guarding of tradition and its battle against xenophilia:

> *The interactions in the pre-modern time between China and the West have proven that ...because of the depth of its tradition and its glorious development, Chinese culture has given rise to a well-established cultural nationalism and this has determined that in the real absorption of foreign culture it requires a longer time, and that it cannot easily give up its cultural subjectivity.*[575]

Thus, it can be said that cultural nationalism to Chen Lai is a cultural standpoint against self-loathing and xenophilia by shifting the focus from modeling after the "universal" West to the re-building of the national spirit. It means to take pride in tradition as the nation's historical legacy, and to safeguard its autonomy against Orientalist cultural views of China, whether such Orientalist views are from the West, or internalized by Chinese themselves:

> *The future revitalization of Asia will eradicate Euro-centrism and Western cultural hegemony. The main concern will shift from the application of Western culture to the development of its own cultural tradition. Such development in the non-Western world will demonstrate its great vitality. In China, once the West is no longer*

[571] Interview with Chen Lai.
[572] Chen, "Lishi zijue he wenhua zhuti".
[573] Interview with Chen Lai.
[574] Interview with Chen Lai.
[575] Chen, "Chapter One: Retrospect and Prospect", p. 19.

> *seen as the universal model, the debate on tradition and modernity since the early 1980s will no longer be of relevance. The reconstruction of the national spirit and the system of values will be the great theme of the time.*[576]

In conclusion, Chen Lai's notion of cultural subjectivity stresses the importance of reading Chinese culture in a Chinese context, thereby justifying its particularity while acknowledging the universal values drawn from modern Western culture. It is a response to a perceived Western cultural hegemony, a form of rejection to an Orientalist or Eurocentric framework. His belief in the national spirit is one important answer, among many others, to the question of cultural identity—one Chinese response of the universal quest for particularity.

4.4. Concluding Remarks: Confucian Revival and Modernization

The Chinese discourse of national character as studied so far has demonstrated that contemporary Chinese self-perceptions have been formed around the central question of Confucian culture and values. In answering the question as to how Chinese culture should be placed in history and in the world, both guardians and critics of Confucianism generally describe it as the backbone and the central pillar of Chinese culture, differing mainly in their judgments as to whether it has played a positive or negative role in shaping China and its national character.[577]

The cultural standpoint of Chen Lai, as examined in this chapter, is undoubtedly one of a Confucian guardian. Chen rejects the discourse of national character as a part of the prevailing radical intellectual movement in the 20th century, which he strongly opposes. To him, cultural radicalism and anti-traditionalism seen in both the May Fourth Movement and in the 1980s have been driven by the instrumental urge to modernize the country. And he believes that such a cultural approach has led to xenophilia and an inferiority complex that, in the process of sabotaging tradition, have been counterproductive to the nationalistic goals of the cultural radicals, for the loss of cultural identity will eventually undermine the modern transformation of traditional cultures and societies.

In Chen Lai's reflection of modern intellectual history, he has criticized the utilitarian

[576] Chen, *Gudai sixiang wenhua de shijie*, p. 280.
[577] Guo, *Cultural Nationalism*, p. 72.

tendency in anti-traditionalism. As he phrased it, during the 20th century, as the result of the spread of modernity and the influx of Western culture, Confucian thought was left "battered and bruised" and "pushed from the centre to the margins", which was a "conscious" and "deliberate" choice of Chinese intellectuals.[578] And such a choice, seen by Chen from the perspective of a Confucian scholar in the 21st century, has been proven totally wrong.

What he then proposes, when facing the question of Confucianism in modern China, is a cultural outlook that entails historical continuity and cultural subjectivity. He believes in a national spirit that transcends socio-political forms, which, as the nation's cultural and historical legacy, should be preserved. And at the same time, he holds on to the view that Chinese culture is entitled to an autonomous status not only free from political ambitions for modernization but also free from modernity itself. In the age of globalization, this means that it should maintain a state of subjectivity from any hegemonic intrusion, regardless of its geographical origin.

In defending such a cultural standpoint, Chen Lai is very much aware of the fact that, in mainland China, the study of Confucian thought has been considered suspicious from two ends: from the liberal point of view, it might seem to be a feudalistic legacy against the Enlightenment mentality that is characteristically vigilant and critical towards tradition; and from the Marxist point of view, it could be considered as tending towards an ideology that challenges the guiding status of Marxism.[579] Moreover, in the reform era, the marginalized Confucianism as Chen describes it has been pushed further in such a predicament by the recent wave of commercialism: it is now subject to criticism from radical anti-traditionalism, political misinterpretation and commercialization from the aspects of, respectively, cultural enlightenment, political democracy and economic utility.

Yet, Chen is optimistic about the future of Confucianism. As he puts it, Confucianism has gone through its severest test in over 2000 years, and it has not died.[580] Chen argues that the strong humanistic value rationality of Confucianism has shaped the spiritual essence (*jingshen qizhi*) of Chinese culture, which will not be wiped out by critics:

> *Looking to the fate of Confucian culture in the future, there is no*

[578] Chen, "Postface", p. 362.
[579] Chen Lai, "Chapter Fifteen: The Difficulty of Undertaking National Studies Research in the Nineties." in idem., *Tradition and Modernity*, p. 344.
[580] Chen, "Chapter One: Retrospect and Prospect", p. 30.

> *reason to lose hope or be sorrowful. On the contrary, I firmly believe that after the challenges and attacks of the last hundred years—especially the most recent decades—Confucianism has already undergone its most difficult moment. It has already stepped out of the trough.*[581]

It is with this belief in mind that Chen Lai wrote at the end of 20th century: "If the twentieth century was one of 'criticism and enlightenment' for Chinese culture, the twenty-first century will be one of 'creation and revitalization', and the turn of the century is precisely a turning point for the life of the whole nation (*zhenxia qiyuan*)."[582] And this optimistic vision for the development of Confucianism is supported from another perspective by a comparison with modern Western culture:

> *Looking at the many problems of post-industrial society in the West, such as extreme individualism, worship of money and the distancing in human relationships which this brings, the loneliness and fears of the individual, it might be thought that once China has realized modernization, the time for a new development of the Confucian tradition will have come. At that time, anti-traditionalism on the surface will have disappeared, and what will replace it is necessarily a cultural renaissance rooted in a deep national tradition. In this sense, the chief condition for revival of traditional thought is modernization.*
> [583]

As such, Chen establishes his argument that Confucianism is not the obstacle of modernization; on the contrary, the realization of modernization would serve as the foundation for the revival of Confucianism. This conclusion is based on Chen's understanding of modernization, which is signified by economic development. As Chen argues, "China in the first decade of the 21st century has entered modernization, though in its primary stage".[584] Now that China no longer lags behind the West in an economic sense as much as around the May Fourth Movement or in the 1980s, the context for the development of Confucianism is quite different.

In this way, Chen suggests that modernization has been achieved; the chief condition

[581] Chen, "Postface", pp. 362-363.
[582] Chen, "Chapter Fifteen: National Studies Research", p. 347.
[583] Chen, "Chapter One: Retrospect and Prospect", p. 31.
[584] Interview with Chen Lai.

for the revival of traditional thought has been satisfied. If the previous cultural movements were prompted by a sense of frustration in the troubled path towards modernization, the contemporary cultural realm is dominated by a different state of mind. Consequently, in Chen's opinion, the state of economic modernization will lead to a revaluation of national history and culture. In terms of the relations between Chinese and Western cultures, radicalism will not be predominant as was the case during the May Fourth and the 1980s.[585] The prevailing sentiment will no longer be self-negation or self-loathing, but a strong sense of cultural pride.

However, the question as to whether China has entered modernization remains open to debate. In the previous chapters, the examination of the discourse of national character has demonstrated that anti-traditionalism has not disappeared from the contemporary cultural scene, and cultural critiques still aim at Confucianism, not just accusing its incapability to aid economic modernization, but also questioning its values in comparison with democracy, individual liberty, equality, and so on. In the eyes of these cultural critics, modernization is far from achieved. Wang Xiaofeng, for one, contends that the mindset of Chinese people is still trapped in the imperial worldview.

Furthermore, putting aside the question of Chinese modernization, Chen Lai's defense of Confucianism at different frontiers has its own limitations. He holds to the idea that the national spirit, manifested in Confucian humanistic philosophy, will not only survive, but revitalize in the 21st century as an ethic-spiritual value that challenges Western cultural hegemony. However, considering the importance he attaches to cultural continuity and the value of tradition in modern societies, his reduction of Confucianism to a mere moral guidance makes his argument less convincing. While he rightfully disconnects the concept of cultural subjectivity with political conservatism, he nonetheless does not touch upon the inevitable influence of political system, thought and value on the development of culture. In order to argue for the autonomy of Confucianism, Chen has to limit Confucian thought as somewhat quarantined from the political status quo and its prominent political values without recognizing either its impact on political thoughts or the possibility of it being exploited by the existing political and institutional structure.

It seems to suggest that, in defending Confucianism, Chen Lai is forced to stand clear of its political implications and emphasize the separation of scholarship, culture and

[585] Interview with Chen Lai.

politics. To the Confucian scholar and a guardian of cultural values, "any engagement in politics was to be avoided, because it would endanger the autonomy of the cultural and value spheres".[586] It is also on such a ground that he rejects cultural radicalism for its political agenda as well as for its reduction of political and social problems into cultural critiques. Yet to what extent can such realms be separated is another question. The Confucian revival has been closely watched exactly because of its political implications. As Jing Wang puts it, whether Confucians admit it or not, "tradition is by no means immune to the regimen of instrumental reason whenever it plays into the hands of political authorities".[587]

Even Chen Lai himself admits that, although intellectuals do not necessarily have to support the political status quo, it is also not necessary to keep an intentional distance from the political structure.[588] When he speaks of the spirit of public intellectuals, he notes that "the responsibility of bearing the burden of the empire or the nation has exercised a palpable spiritual influence on the work of modern Chinese intellectuals", which makes it very difficult for them to "neglect their concern for public matters or to regard the embodiment of this spirit as confined solely to intellectuals within the academic world".[589] As Chen observes from ancient scholar-officials as well as contemporary intellectuals, their intellectual concerns are connected with political concern, social participation and cultural emphasis—all originating from a sense of moral obligation towards *Tianxia*.

Therefore, it is abundantly clear that the political implications of Confucianism cannot be ignored, and, that Confucianists are not free from political ambitions. The tension between culture and politics has in this case manifested itself within the Confucian scholar: on the one hand, in order to defend Confucian thought and values from various political and cultural misinterpretations, Chen tries to extract Confucianism from its socio-political context and define it as a religio-ethical philosophy with a humanistic orientation; on the other hand, as he remains committed to the Confucian intellectual tradition that places himself and his fellow Confucianists as practitioners and exemplars, he is not able to escape his sense of moral obligation towards the society

586 Van Dongen, *Goodbye Radicalism!*, p. 213.
587 Jing Wang, *High Culture Fever*, p. 70.
588 Chen Lai 陈来, "Rujia sixiang chuantong yu gongong zhishifenzi," 儒家思想传统与公共知识分子 in Xu Jilin 许纪霖 (ed.), *Gonggongxing yu gonggong zhishifenzi* 公共性与公共知识分子 (Nanjing: jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2003), pp. 8-27.
589 Chen, "Rujia sixiang chuantong", p. 17.

and the nation.

Chapter 5. Qin Hui: A Proposal of Western-Confucian Convergence

The stress of historical continuity and cultural subjectivity as analyzed in the previous chapter is a cultural stance that forms a stark contrast with the mode of thinking of critics of the national character. In the intellectual trend against anti-Confucianism and anti-traditionalism since the 1990s, if Chen Lai's rejection of the discourse of national character is representative of self-perceptions of the New-Confucian school, there are many other schools that demonstrate different intellectual and cultural orientations. That is to say, although they also defend Confucianism and disconnect it with social and cultural problems, they do so from different perspectives.

This indicates one significant feature of the most recent intellectual return to tradition: the so-called cultural conservatives, including the New-Confucians, are joined by schools of thought across a wide spectrum—ranging from Marxism to post-modernism to the New-Left—in their positive perceptions of Confucian culture and values.

Among them, the defense of Confucianism by some liberal intellectuals offers an interesting case to this study because, despite a shared socio-political belief in free market, democracy, human rights, and rule of law, these liberal intellectuals represent a cultural standpoint that is at odds with that of cultural critics who are usually also labeled as liberals.

This chapter will analyze the perceptions of historian Qin Hui (b. 1953), who, identified as a "firm advocate of liberal principles"[590], rejects the criticism of national character and envisions a positive role of Confucianism in the future of Chinese culture. By studying his opinion of the discourse of national character, I will examine how his defense of Confucianism and his vision of Chinese culture differ from those of Chen Lai's.

Before we look into Qin Hui's cultural viewpoints, it is necessary to briefly outline his academic background and intellectual concerns in order to better understand his opinions. Qin studied history at Lanzhou University (M.A., 1981) after spending nine years (1969-78) in a remote village of Guangxi Province during the Cultural Revolution. He has been teaching at Shaanxi Normal University and Qinghua

[590] Davies, *Worrying About China*, p. 60.

University where he currently works as Professor of History.

Qin's early research interests were in the field of agrarian history, and what he calls "the peasant question" is the point of departure for many different issues he became concerned with since the 1990s. Qin regards "the peasant question" as "essentially a problem of China's modernization",[591] and, vice versa, the central question in his concern with regard to China's modernization is a question as to "where should a peasant China go?"[592]

As I will demonstrate in this chapter, it is also from the perspective of the peasant mentality that Qin Hui approaches the question of national character. He combines historical studies with research on the peasant society, and, to borrow Wang Chaohua's description, as "a staunch foe of peasant exploitation",[593] he has published extensively on issues related to social justice, political democracy, free market, and rule of law, and outspokenly criticized the lack of freedom and order in the marketization.[594] It is for this reason that he is seen as one of China's most prominent advocates of liberalism.

At the same time, his political-economic liberalism is combined with the ideology of "social democracy",[595] in which he argues that the power of the state should be balanced with its responsibility to provide social welfare. He perceives social justice and equality as the paramount issues in social development, and vigorously criticizes the phenomenon of "enriching the state and weakening the people" (*guojin mintui*). Such a phenomenon, in his opinion, is closely related to the unregulated market in which the privileged groups seek power and resources from the underprivileged, especially the large peasant population.

In his own words, Qin Hui stands "to critique both oligarchy from a liberal standpoint and populism from a social democratic standpoint".[596] This position, according to

[591] Qin Hui, "Dividing the Big Family Assets: on Liberty and Justice," in Wang Chaohua (ed.), *One China, Many Paths*, pp. 128-159: 139.

[592] Qin, "Dividing the Big Family Assets", p. 140.

[593] Wang Chaohua, "Introduction: Minds of the Nineties", p. 24.

[594] For example, see Qin Hui 秦晖, *Wenti yu zhuyi: Qin Hui wenxuan* 问题与主义: 秦晖文选 (Changchun: Changchun chubanshe, 1999). Qin Hui 秦晖, *Shijian ziyou* 实践自由 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 2004). Qin Hui 秦晖, *Biange zhi dao* 变革之道 (Zhenzhou: Zhenzhou daxue chubanshe, 2007).

[595] See Qin Hui, translated by David Kelly, "The Common Baseline of Modern Thought," *The Mystery of the Chinese Economy,* special issue of *The Chinese Economy*, vol. 38, no. 4 (2005), pp. 12-22: 19.

[596] Qin, "The Common Baseline", p. 19.

Gloria Davies, represents a "third way" that "straddles both the 'new left' emphasis on collective wellbeing and the 'liberal' emphasis on individual and property rights".[597] As Qin Hui contends, the only solution to China's many problems is to pursue more freedom and more equality at the same time.[598] And such an approach is described by Qin himself as reaching towards a "common baseline" (*gongtong de dixian*) of a modern society:

> *Against the background of China's present "issues", what I support are the values upheld by both liberalism and social democracy, and what I oppose are the values that both of these oppose....Is my position that of the "Third Path"? Perhaps so, but it would be more accurate to call it a "superimposition" of the first and second paths (and not a path intermediate between them or beyond them). In any event, given that China's problem at present is not one of "freedom at the expense of equality" or vice versa, we should only have a Third Path that pursues more freedom and also more equality.*[599]

Qin Hui's outspoken political ideology seems to place him on the same side as many of the politically liberal, culturally critical intellectuals. Indeed, the critics of the national character analyzed in Chapter Three do hold a liberal political view similar to that of Qin's. However, in the cultural sphere, Qin Hui's liberalism and social democracy is combined with his commitment to what he regards as a lingering legacy of Confucian spirit.

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[597] Gloria Davies, "China's Reformists: From Liberalism to the 'Third Way'", *Global Dialogue*, Volume 9, Number 1-2 (2007): The Rise of China. Text available at: http://www.worlddialogue.org/content.php?id=398

[598] See Qin Hui's articles: Bian Wu 卞悟, "Gongzheng zhishang lun"公正至上论, in *Dong Fang* 东方 *Orient*, No. 6 (1994), pp. 4-9. Bian Wu 卞悟, "Zai lun gongzheng zhishang—qidian pingdeng ruhe keneng" 再论公正至上——起点平等如何可能 in *Dong Fang*, No. 2 (1995), pp. 18-23. Bian Wu 卞悟, "Gongzheng, jiazhi lixing yu fanfuban—san lun gongzheng zhishang"公正、价值理性与反腐败——三论公正至上 in *Dong Fang*, No. 6 (1995), pp. 4-7. Qin Hui 秦晖, "Shehui gongzheng yu Zhongguo gaige de jingyan yu jiaoxun"社会公正与中国改革的经验与教训 in *Gaige* 改革 *Reform*, No. 5 (1998). Qin Hui 秦晖, "Yu pingdeng yu ziyou zhizhong" 寓平等于自由之中 in *Zhongguo shuping* 中国书评 No. 2 (1998). Qin Hui 秦晖, *Tianping ji* 天平集 (Beijing: xinhua chubanshe, 1997). Qin Hui 秦晖, "Zhongguo gaige: lishi yu jingji de pingjia" 中国改革: 历史与经济的评价, in *Zhanlue yu guanli* 战略与管理 No. 2 (2000).

[599] Qin, "The Common Baseline", pp. 19-20.

To further study Qin's perceptions of Chinese culture, the following questions will be asked: how does he perceive the critiques of national character? On what theoretical and empirical grounds does he reject the causal link between China's many issues and the national character, or, Confucianism? On top of that, what are his perceptions of Confucianism in a cultural China and its future in the world? Research materials for this chapter include Qin's monographs and academic articles related to Chinese culture since the 1990s, as well as a personal interview with Qin Hui in Beijing on February 23, 2011.

5.1. National Character and Culture

One important characteristic of Qin Hui's view on the discourse of national character is that, although he is well informed of its connection with Western perceptions of China, he chooses to deal with these two issues separately. His critiques of the discourse of national character are based on his analysis of Chinese debates on the matter, and do not relate to how it has been influenced by Western discourses.

In fact, he quotes the study of M. G. Mason[600] and categorizes two types of perceptions that run parallel to each other in the history of Chinese images in the West: "the missionary perspective" that demonstrates intellectual interests in Chinese religion and philosophy through the study of the classics; and "the merchant perspective" that is more concerned with the folk customs that appear on "the surface layer" of the society.[601]

While Qin observes the influence of both perspectives in contemporary Western perceptions of China, he proposes to accept foreign images as nothing more, or less, than what they are— perceptions originating from a foreign perspective:

> *We should be realistic and accept that Western perceptions are based on their own issues, so there is no need to feel self-loathing or to be arrogant about our own image in the West, either in the past or present.*[602]

Qin Hui draws attention to the fact that the foreigner, in his or her observations of

[600] Mason, *Western Concepts of China*.
[601] Qin Hui, "Transition in a Hundred Years: Perceptions of China from 'Merchants' and 'Missionaries'," in idem., *Wenti yu zhuyi*, p. 5.
[602] Qin, "Transition in a Hundred Years", p. 6.

China, naturally takes a different standpoint from that of a Chinese. And vice versa, Chinese perceptions of the West are also based on observations from a Chinese perspective. That is to say, when one evaluates foreign observations, the consciousness of the observer should be taken into account as something natural and inherent. Such a standpoint is significantly different from those analyzed so far: he does not propose to "use foreigners' lenses" to reflect on Chinese culture, as many cultural critics do; nor does he reject foreign perceptions on the ground that they are a manifestation of Orientalism or Eurocentrism.

As he elaborates in a book review[603], some of the Western perceptions being criticized as Orientalist views are in fact due to "deliberate" national or racial discrimination[604], which in Qin's understanding should be seen as a problem of morality or conflicting interest rather than an intellectual issue. And in other cases, if the mistakes in foreign observation are due to limited information or knowledge, they fall into the category of academic imprecision and should not be criticized because of the identity of the observer. In a third scenario, when a Western commentator employs certain Chinese or Oriental issues for the purpose of pointing at Western problems, whether in a positive or negative light, there is no need to escalate such a strategy into a generalized Orientalism.[605]

With regard to critiques of Orientalism, Qin Hui acknowledges that, in the West, they do represent valuable historical introspections, and, outside the West, the wakening of non-Western self-consciousness. Yet he warns against the tendency to conceal the real problem with the somewhat generalized critique of Orientalism.

In his opinion, Western reflections of Orientalism result from the contest of various schools of thought, centering on issues of Western society, rather than taking a new perspective in viewing the "Orient". And in terms of issues emerging in Chinese society, one should not be distracted by the rise and fall of the Orientalism in the West; instead, one should shift the focus from the East-West opposition to the real issue at hand, regardless of the geographic location of the observer.

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603 This is a review of the book by Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley [etc.]: University of California Press, 1998). See Qin Hui 秦晖, "Shei, mianxiang nage dongfang" 谁, 面向哪个东方? in idem., *Chuantong shi lun* 传统十论 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2004).

604 Qin, "Shei, mianxiang nage dongfang", p. 289.

605 Qin, "Shei, mianxiang nage dongfang", pp. 289-290.

How far Qin Hui's conception of Orientalism deviates from Edward Said's original concept is of course open to question, yet here the point of clarifying Qin's understanding of Western perceptions of China is that, when it comes to Chinese discourse of national character, Qin does not connect it with Orientalism. Or, to put it slightly differently, according to Qin, Chinese critiques of the national character are problematic, not because they represent a sort of internalized Orientalism, but because of the flaws in their inner logic—what he describes as a type of cultural determinism.

1) Critiques of the National Character as Cultural Determinism

Cultural determinism, Qin contends, assumes a causal link between the problems in society with the often deeply embedded, almost genetically determined, cultural tradition. He argues that this assumption is made out of an urge "to satisfy people's psychological needs"— the internal impulse to interpret issues in social reality and to change reality in a way that is in line with one's value judgment.[606] It is based on such an understanding that Qin evaluates the national character critique, both around the May Fourth era and in the reform period.

The most notable example that Qin takes to demonstrate the cause of cultural determinism is Liang Qichao's "new people" thesis, which Qin believes was formed out of Liang's urge to interpret the failure of the 1898 reform movement:

> *After the failure of the Hundred Day Reforms, some people attributed the failure of the movement to the "quality" (*suzhi*) of the Chinese nation. And that was how the "new people thesis" [of Liang Qichao] and the question of the national character came into being.*[607]
>
> *Liang Qichao launched a movement of critique against Chinese cultural characteristics or the national character… He did not look for the reason for the reform movement's failure from the ruling group's conservative nature or its internal conflicts, or from the reform movement's own defects or strategic mistakes, instead he was strongly enticed by a theory that incriminates the nature of the nation and its*

[606] Qin Hui 秦晖, "Wenhua juedinglun de pinkun—chaoyue wenhua xingtai shiguan" 文化决定论的贫困——超越文化形态史观 in idem., *Wenti yu zhuyi*, p. 307.

[607] Qin Hui 秦晖, "Zai jixu qimeng zhong fansi qimeng" 在继续启蒙中反思启蒙, in idem., *Biange zhi dao*, p. 209.

"evil roots".[608]

Similarly, in the eyes of Qin Hui, Chen Duxiu followed the reformist Liang after the revolution failed, and turned into "a believer of the theory of national character".[609] If Liang and Chen could not refuse the "enticement" to theorize the past as a way to avoid facing the real cause of the failure, either consciously or unconsciously, then, for other advocates of the national character reforms like Lu Xun, Qin argues, to negate the nation's culture serves as a pragmatic strategy to change social reality:

> *Take the most vigorous critic of "national defects", Lu Xun, as an example, he promoted "out of China, and into the West" in order to get "out of the medieval, and into the modern". In order to negate the medieval Chinese culture, he had to take the posture of total negation of Chinese culture*.[610]

According to Qin, a similar phenomenon is to be found in cultural critiques in the reform era, especially in the 1980s. Qin criticizes the tendency to incriminate the national character during the cultural fever, and calls it a phenomenon of "*Jing Ke ci Kongzi*"—the assassin Jing Ke, in his mission to kill the tyrant Emperor of the Qin Dynasty, ended up stabbing the scapegoat Confucius.[611]

Whereas Qin Hui recognizes the benign intention of such critiques, he is rather skeptical about the pursuit of social change through cultural interpretation. As he maintains, he is not "optimistic about Enlightenment through national character criticism",[612] and he even believes that such criticism might have "counterproductive consequences".[613]

Qin's skepticism is not only caused by the idea that critiques of the national character are produced out of an urge to "satisfy the psychological needs", or as a pragmatic strategy to develop Chinese culture from "medieval" to "modern"; more importantly, it is caused by his refutation of a deterministic view of history. To put it simply, Qin

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608 Qin Hui 秦晖, "Xi ru huirong, jiegou fa dao hubu" 西儒会融，解构法道互补, in idem., *Chuantong shi lun*, p. 232.
609 Qin, "Xi ru huirong", p. 232.
610 Qin, "Wenhua juedinglun", p. 323.
611 Qin Hui 秦晖, "Kegui de fengmang—xu yujie *Shanguang shi*," 可贵的锋芒——序余杰〈闪光石〉in idem., *Shijian ziyou*, p. 174.
612 Qin, "Kegui de fengmang", p. 174.
613 Qin, "Xi ru huirong", p. 232.

believes that Chinese culture is not responsible for failures in political movements because "the cause of the cause of a cause is no cause".[614] It is in this sense that Qin finds the logic of cultural determinism flawed, for one cannot interpret history with the single parameter of national character, whether it entails national defects or national merits.

2) The Incomparable National Character

The inner logic of cultural determinism that establishes a link between social problems and national character has a theoretical assumption that Qin Hui finds problematic. That is, the cultural deterministic concept of "culture" has a strong racial connotation, which usually confuses the concept "culture" with "nation" or "the national character".

According to Qin Hui, the meaning of "national character" as employed by cultural critics is close to Ruth Benedict's definition as a way of thinking and a behavioral pattern that is manifested in the nation's activities and that distinguishes the nation from others.[615] Such a conception is comprised of two key elements—a distinctive national character and its consistency and transcendence.

Qin does not object to such a terminology, or definition of national character. However, he believes that such a national character, with its innate racial connotations, is very different from what the critics call "culture". It is on this ground that he criticizes the discourse of "culture" in the 1980s as well as in contemporary China:

> *People nowadays are used to define a culture with a nation, and define a nation with its culture: culture is the characteristic of a nation, and the nation is the carrier of a culture. In such a discourse, culture is actually the synonym of "the national character"…Yet what eventually constitutes "the national character" remains unclear…… The culture that distinguishes one nation from the other also includes the idea that it is consistent, or it does not make the nation of today different from that of yesterday. Therefore "culture" emphasizes the parts of the national character that transcend time.*[616]
>
> *…culture has become "the characteristics of a nation that is different*

[614] Qin, "The Common Baseline", p. 15.
[615] Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (New York: New American Library, 1946).
[616] Qin, "Wenhua juedinglun", p. 290.

> *from other nations"…it points to both behavior patterns and ways of thinking…to put it bluntly, in this sense, culture is the national character...*[617]

The racial perspective in the understanding of culture is very misleading in Qin Hui's eyes, for a "horizontal comparison of national character" creates an irreconcilable binary in perceptions of nations:

> *Cultural determinism often presumes two types of nations: one of an active nature, of competition and independence; the other of a nature of community, in favor of a protected and harmonious life…*[618]

Critics of the national character often opt to criticize Chinese culture by comparing it with Western culture. Such a comparison, Qin notes, usually concludes in binary conceptions such as the conservative Chinese and progressive Westerner, the collective Chinese and the individualistic Westerner, Chinese morality as opposed to Western instrumentality.[619] The binaries are sometimes expressed metaphorically, for example, as the differences between the yellow earth and the blue ocean in the documentary series *River Elegy*.

Because Qin Hui regards national character as transcendent, something almost inherent in the people of a certain nation, he believes that it is not to be reformed or changed. As he puts it, after all, "the yellow civilization won't change into blue civilization".[620] Moreover, to him, it is also a result of different national and racial aesthetic preferences, which are not to be compared, if freedom of choices is ensured. Of course, this kind of incomparable racial-cultural preferences should not be subject to value judgment.

This implies that, if there is no freedom of choice and people's ways of thinking and behavioral patterns are limited by institutional constraints, the problem becomes one of the social system rather than the national character. In this case, Qin argues, differences

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617 Qin Hui 秦晖, "Wenhua bijiao yu ziji dui ziji fuze de lishiguan" 文化比较与自己对自己负责的历史观 in idem., *Biange zhi dao*, pp. 76-77.

618 Qin, "Wenhua juedinglun", p. 287.

619 Qin Hui 秦晖 and Su Wen 苏文, *Tianyuanshi yu kuangxiangqu: Guanzhong moshi yu qianjindai shehui de zai renshi* 田园诗与狂想曲:关中模式与前近代社会的再认识, with an original English title: *Pastorals and Rhapsodies: A Research of Peasant Societies and Peasant Culture* (Beijing: zhongyang bianyi chubanshe, 1996).

620 Qin and Su, *Pastorals and Rhapsodies*, p. 231.

among societies can be compared and value judgments are to be applied.[621]

As such, Qin Hui questions the concept of "culture" as the underlying assumption of cultural critics in that it confuses the incomparable racial (national)-cultural distinctions with the comparable social-cultural phenomena observed in different societies. When "culture" is mistaken as "nation", many of the incomparable national traditions and cultural symbols will be subject to undue value judgment, the evaluation of social-cultural phenomena will be misled towards "the value judgment of a nation",[622] hence prone to a racial evaluation to reckon the better or worse of the nature of a race.

Therefore, he proposes to make a very clear distinction between national culture, including national character, and social systems (*zhidu*). In his understanding, if one speaks of "culture" as a general term, only by singling out "the institutional" and "the social", can a certain "culture" be compared with another. Otherwise, "culture" in the sense of "the national" and "the racial", for example, the national character, is not comparable.

3) Culture as a Social and Historical Phenomenon

While cultural determinism attributes ills in a society to culture, civilization, and the nature of the nation, Qin argues that one should replace the racial approach with a social perspective. As he puts it, "culture" is essentially a "historical and social phenomenon" rather than "an index of national character"[623] such as perceived in the generic comparisons between China and the West during the cultural fever.

To put it in another way, he believes that the "Chinese culture" under criticism is essentially of a social nature instead of a racial nature.[624] The so-called "national characteristics" consist of social behaviour—a manifestation of a "social culture" rather than of a "racial culture".[625] By separating national culture from social systems, Qin stresses the social aspects of the problem of "culture" and argues that the attention

[621] Qin, "Wenhua bijiao", p. 93.
[622] Qin Hui 秦晖, "Disan bumen, wenhua chuantong yu Zhongguo gaige" 第三部门、文化传统与中国改革 in idem., *Biange zhi dao*, p. 52.
[623] Qin, "Dividing the Big Family Assets", p. 138.
[624] Qin and Su, *Pastorals and Rhapsodies*, p. 224.
[625] Qin and Su, *Pastorals and Rhapsodies*, p. 230.

on national distinctions should be diverted to social institutions and systems.[626]

Therefore, based on his study of Chinese rural society and peasant history, he takes an alternative perspective to the discourse of national character in his examination of the so-called cultural problems. Instead of focusing on the shortcomings in Confucianism, Qin's analysis of social culture begins with his study of peasant culture. As he believes, China is "originally an agrarian country" and the so-called "national character" is basically "the character of the peasants".[627]

As noted earlier, many of the stereotypical peasant images, such as the image of Ah Q created by Lu Xun, are interpreted as reflecting the defects in national character. Qin Hui's analysis treats the peasant personality as a type of community-dependent social behaviour, resulting from the patriarchal social order in rural China. Peasants confined to a patriarchal community such as in rural China, do demonstrate a mode of thinking that is not rational, according to Qin, and Ah Q can be seen as an example of such irrational thinking.[628]

However, Qin argues that the lack of rationality is not a specific characteristic of the Chinese nation, but more related to the patriarchal natural economy and the consequent ill-development of the individual personality that are also seen in other patriarchal communities. [629] In fact, Qin believes that the servility as criticized in the discourse of national character is also the result of the same social constraints. [630] Following this interpretation, Chinese peasant culture becomes as a logical consequence of the patriarchal society; and once the patriarchal system changes, the features of peasant culture will follow and change too:

> *The community that has bred the culture could be interpreted rationally—it came into being logically, and it will disappear logically as well.*[631]

With his distinction of social culture from racial-national culture, Qin Hui takes a fundamentally different perspective in viewing China's "national defects" as called by many cultural critics. In his opinion, these socially-determined cultural traits will

[626] Qin, "Disan bumen", p. 50.
[627] Qin and Su, *Pastorals and Rhapsodies*, p. 238.
[628] Qin and Su, *Pastorals and Rhapsodies*, pp. 323-324.
[629] Qin and Su, *Pastorals and Rhapsodies*, pp. 310, 314 & 321.
[630] Qin and Su, *Pastorals and Rhapsodies*, p. 326.
[631] Qin and Su, *Pastorals and Rhapsodies*, p. 230.

evolve together with the development of social institutions:

> *To state that the "cultural defects" have determined the servile social status of Chinese people is unreasonable. Many Confucian and Daoist ideas accompanying the patriarchal society are able to transmute along with the institutional changes brought about by globalization.*[632]

If the national characteristics are social features, but not genetically linked with a race or a nation, the solution to ills in society will be social reforms—to reform an agrarian society into a modern society—rather than reforms of the people. In his view, if the patriarchal community in rural China is dissolved, the peasant will be freed from his social contract and eventually also be free from the way of thinking that has been constrained in the patriarchal community. Then, like turning pastorals to rhapsodies, the peasants can transform themselves into farmers, acquiring "the freedoms of a modern citizen"[633] as well as the liberal personality that their ancestors were not able to develop.[634]

Departing from such a social viewpoint, Qin Hui's research has been centered on the question of how to transform "peasant states, agricultural civilizations, and traditional societies" into "citizen states, industrial civilizations, and modern societies".[635] And it is exactly in this sense that he contends that "the peasant question is essentially a problem of China's modernization"[636]

Qin's interpretation of culture as a logical consequence of socio-political institutions leads to an understanding of "the national character" that is very similar to Chen Lai's "g*uomin xing*". The cultural characteristics are temporary, formed within the context of a certain socio-political environment, and once the social structure changes, many of the so-called national characteristics will no longer exist.

While Chen Lai separates the eternal national spirit (*minzu xing*) from the temporal cultural features (*guomin xing*), Qin Hui makes a distinction between the definition of the unchangeable (racial) nation and changeable (social) culture. This distinction leaves him much room to defend the preservation of traditional culture, more

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632 Qin Hui 秦晖, "Zhidu pengzhuang yu wenhua jiaorong," 制度碰撞与文化交融 in idem., *Biange zhi dao*, p. 99.
633 Qin, "Dividing the Big Family Assets", pp. 150-151.
634 Qin and Su, *Pastorals and Rhapsodies*, p. 377.
635 Qin, "The Common Baseline", p. 13.
636 Qin, "Dividing the Big Family Assets", p. 139.

specifically, Confucianism, and at the same time to call for social and political changes.

4) The Trap of Cultural Determinism

Qin perceives the danger of cultural determinism in its tendency to confuse social culture with national culture, or culture with nation, which will then lead to a very pessimistic and deterministic view of the future. When "nation" becomes "culture", many of the cultural problems caused by social institutions will be seen as unchangeable national and racial characteristics; and if combined with cultural relativism, it will eventually result in a negation of progress. To look at it the other way around, if "culture" becomes "nation", evaluation of social systems might be leading towards the wrong direction and turning to value judgment of aesthetic and even racial differences in the cultural realm:

> *One cannot compare cultures but one can compare systems… we need to stand against two points of views: the first one is to obstruct institutional progress in the name of preserving culture; the second one is to enforce cultural assimilation in the name of improving the system/institution. I think both are equally unreasonable.*[637]

Yet, it is important to note that Qin Hui's rejection of cultural determinism is not limited to his skeptical attitude towards the national character criticism; it also points to the opponents of the national character critique. When analyzing the cultural movements around the May Fourth, he wrote:

> *It was just as if a consensus of "cultural determinism" has been reached through "the antithesis of Chinese and Western national characters", as well as "the antithesis of Western and Confucian theories"… The "cultural conservatism" that was pro-Confucianism and anti-Westernization after the May Fourth Movement was just another type of expression of such a consensus… The result was that while cultural critique and cultural conservatism were consciously opposing each other, they were objectively confirming each other.*[638]

Similarly, Qin argues that, during the reform era, cultural determinism is to be found

[637] Qin, "Wenhua bijiao", p. 87.
[638] Qin, "Xi ru huirong", p. 231.

not only in the criticism of the "national defects" before 1989, but also in the promotion of a "national root of excellence" after 1989. Both share a determinist view of history.[639] In his article *The Poverty of Cultural Determinism*, he explicitly pointed out that "both new-Confucianism and anti-traditionalism are colored by cultural determinism".[640]

In order not to fall into the trap of cultural determinism, Qin Hui proposes a historiography "of being responsible to ourselves" instead of holding the national character or cultural tradition responsible. As he wrote, "If tomorrow China does not do well, we shall not blame Confucius or Marx for it—only ourselves".[641] To him, it is vital to focus on the real social issues by disconnecting them from the national character or national culture.

5.2. Confucianism: The Wrong Target

When Qin Hui opposes what he calls "cultural determinism", he points out its theoretical flaw in that it confuses the transcendent, incomparable national character with culture as the historical result of different, comparable social systems. Yet it is not the only flaw that Qin finds in the critiques of national character. In his opinion, when cultural determinism is applied to analyze Chinese culture and society, it assumes a view of history that takes Confucianism as the sole representative of Chinese tradition. Consequently, critics usually place Confucianism at the center of criticism.

However, to Qin, Confucianism is the unfortunate wrong target of cultural reforms. As he puts it, "Confucianism is not the main obstacle to China's progress, though not some trump of salvation that transcends modernity either".[642] His own account of the socio-cultural structure of traditional China provides a different perspective than most cultural studies on traditional Chinese society do. He describes the Chinese cultural tradition as constituted not by a dominant Confucianism; instead, he perceives it as having formed out of a constant tension between Confucianism (*rujia*) and Legalism (*fajia*).

639 Qin, "Wenhua juedinglun", p. 291.
640 Qin, "Wenhua juedinglun", p. 324.
641 Qin, "The Common Baseline", p. 22.
642 Qin, "Zhidu pengzhuang", p. 100.

1) Confucianism, Legalism and Daoism

In Qin's narrative, it is the combination of Confucianism and Legalism that has been applied as the ruling ideology. These two, together with Daoism (*daojia*) as the third element, have formed a complementary ternary socio-cultural structure. In imperial China, although Confucianism had always been the formally dominant ideology, the essential ideologies at play were, respectively, Legalism for the ruling class, and Daoism for the people being ruled.

In his study of the official administration (*li zhi*) through the imperial history, Qin discovers two confronting philosophies—Confucian moral principle and Legalist power philosophy:

> *Although people often take Confucianism as the synonym of Chinese culture, the Chinese society, ruled by a political system of Qin Dynasty style, is precisely extremely anti-Confucian from its theory to its implementation. The ruling ideologies are almost two extremes—Confucian ideas of administration are based upon the human nature of virtue, centered on the principle of ethics, and with administrative justice taking precedence; while legalist ideas of administration are based upon the belief in the evil nature of people, centered on the principle of power, and with administrative security as the priority.*[643]

Qin then describes these two philosophies in their administrative implementation as rule of morality and rule of power. In the ideal Confucian society, the ruler draws his power from being the exemplar of morality, followed by his officials for being the embodiment of the highest Way (*Dao*); while in the Legalist society, the ruler exercises his power to bring order, and the officials are not able to challenge the imperial power (*jun quan*), no matter whether it is in accordance with moral principles or not.

Whereas most critics attribute Chinese autocracy to the "servile nature" of the people, and the servility to Confucianism, Qin finds the autocratic state a result of the tension between Confucianism and Legalism. He argues that the three cardinal guides (*san gang*), widely criticized as a Confucian ruling principle, are in fact a Legalist invention to assure absolute autocratic power; and Confucianism is a facade that is used to conceal its Legalist nature.[644]

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[643] Qin, "Xi ru huirong", p. 172.

[644] Qin Hui 秦晖, "'Qimeng de fansi' xueshu zuotan" "启蒙的反思" 学术座谈, in *Kaifang*

That is to say, traditional Chinese society was not one of a Confucian nature, but one in which Legalist power philosophy was implemented by the ruling class, with Confucianism being adhered to only as a matter of formality. And the legalist autocratic rule resulted in the popularity of Daoism as a response from the weaker social groups in their power relations with the ruling elite:

> *Traditional China has always had the obvious tension between legalist institutional culture and Confucian classics... The first consequence… is the split or dual personality of a traditional Chinese. That explains why Daoism is such an important tradition next to Confucianism and Legalism...*[645]

> *Daoist ideas are strongly colored by cynicism, the inaction (*wuwei*) conducted by the weaker to the stronger has turned into "drifting along" (*gouqie*)...* [646]

In such a ternary socio-cultural structure, Qin contends, Confucianism takes the most awkward position: in appearance, it is the most respected ideology; in reality, its survival is constantly at stake. Qin further argues that Confucian idealists have always felt the dual intrusion from Legalist power philosophy and Daoist cynicism[647] because the combination of a strong Legalist rule and a cynical social reaction towards it constantly weakened Confucian philosophy:

> *In the autocratic times in Chinese history, real Confucian idealism as a school of thinking has been hanging by a thread…Traditional culture as a whole has been mainly constructed by the complementary ideologies of Legalism and Cynicism rather than the formally respected ruling ideology of Confucianism.*[648]

With Confucian theories on ethics and morality in a predicament, the influence of Confucianism in society was considerably limited. In the perception of Qin Hui, that is why, contrary to what cultural determinism claims, Confucianism is neither the source of vice nor is it the origin of virtue. Apparently, what forms the real cause of many Chinese social and cultural problems is, in his eyes, the anti-liberal Legalist tradition

Shidai 开放时代 March, 2006, p. 23.

645 Qin, "Xi ru huirong", p. 184.

646 Qin, "Xi ru huirong", p. 185.

647 Qin, "Xi ru huirong", pp. 186-189.

648 Qin, "Xi ru huirong", p. 190.

implemented by the imperial court. As such, he holds Legalist tradition, instead of Confucian tradition, responsible for the state of autocracy:

> *...Only the schools that are extremely anti-liberalist, such as Chinese Legalism, propose the evil nature of the people. It does not have faith in anything else but the use of punishment, tactics and power.*[649]

2) The Twist in Anti-traditionalism: Late Qing to the May Fourth Movement

Based on Qin Hui's analysis of the traditional socio-cultural structure, his evaluation of anti-traditionalism around the New Culture Movement contradicts those of the critics of the national character. In a way, his standpoint against anti-Confucianism is more similar to Chen Lai's cultural stance. He shares Chen's idea that Confucianism was subject to undue criticism, and he proposes to rescue Confucianism from its crisis by disassociating it with autocracy and ills in society.

However, he also refutes the notion that Confucianism was the hegemonic ruling philosophy, a notion that has been shared by both guardians and critics of Confucianism analyzed in the previous two chapters. Instead, Qin shifts the focus away from Confucianism itself and towards the interplay between Confucianism and Legalism. In such a light, his interpretation of the intellectual movements of the late Qing and early Republican periods becomes quite different from the perceptions I have previously discussed. Hence, the influence of Western thought around that time is also read in a new light:

> *When Western ideas on liberty and democracy first came to China, what they initially conflicted with was not Confucian ideas, but the autocratic Legalist ruling philosophy and institutions. Therefore, many of the imperial officials with Confucian ideals, due to their antipathy towards Legalism, embraced Western liberal and democratic values with enthusiasm. From the Opium War to the Hundred Day Reforms, the mainstream school of "learning from the West" was to import Western liberty and democracy, and to save Confucianism from Legalism.*[650]

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649 Qin, *Shijian ziyou*, p. 181.

650 Qin Hui 秦晖, "Wanqing ruzhe yin xi jiu ru" 晚清儒者引西救儒 (2010), online article available at: http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4b5299520100khio.html

For a staunch advocate of liberty and democracy as Qin Hui, this initial intellectual movement seems to be leading the socio-political development of the late Qing in the right direction. In this regard, his reading of late Qing intellectual history differs significantly from the historical reading by Chen Lai. Whereas Chen Lai regards the movement to learn from the West as largely prompted by an instrumental urge to strengthen the country without giving up the fundamental political structure or values, Qin Hui believes that it was initially drawn by the intrinsic value of Western ideas such as liberty and democracy.

However, in Qin Hui's narrative, the movement of learning from the West took a fundamental turn for the worse after the Hundred Day Reforms failed, which brought it towards a path opposite to what was initially envisioned by the reformers:

> *Learning from the West gradually became a way of enriching the country and strengthening its military power. This turned many towards Legalism and against Confucianism. Therefore, standing completely opposite to the original process of Western learning, the most radical advocates of Western learning became the most radical advocates against Confucianism. This was an obvious transition in 1898, which led to the direction of centralization or totalism. I call it the road towards Legalism—leading towards the system of Qin Shihuang.*[651]

According to Qin Hui, the result of this turn was that around the May Fourth Movement, cultural critiques or the national character criticism seemed to have overshadowed the criticism of the autocratic state. In his words, the cultural critique started as a movement that was "pro-Confucianism, pro-Westernization, anti-Legalism and Daoism";[652] but on its way, it turned into holding Confucianism responsible for the national character that was deemed incompatible with the West.

As such, when the anti-traditional movement imported Western thought to criticize Confucianism, it stimulated on the contrary many Confucian scholars to reject Western thoughts in order to preserve Confucian ideals, pushing them away from what they originally meant to learn. Consequently, Qin believes that the universal conflict between modern spirit and medieval inertia was overshadowed in the New Culture

[651] Interview with Qin Hui on February 23, 2011.
[652] Qin, "Xi ru huirong", p. 231.

Movement by the symbolic conflict between Western and Chinese cultures.

This is where Qin believes that the May Fourth Movement became very problematic: it should not have equated autocracy with Confucianism and placed both at the opposite side of Western thought. The enlightenment movement, in order to save the nation, mistakenly targeted Confucianism instead of the autocratic state.[653] And the consequences of such a mistake were devastating, as Qin describes: "After we revolted against the Confucian thesis of benevolence and justice, and its tradition of leniency, goodness, respect, thrift and patience, we were getting further away from, instead of closer to, democracy and constitutional governance".[654]

Therefore, although Qin Hui recognizes the significance of the May Fourth Movement in its ideological enlightenment, he is of the opinion that, tragically, one of the legacies of the May Fourth Movement was the triumph of Legalism over both Confucianism and Western liberalism, which resulted in "the intensified autocratic state":

> *...The seed of crisis—the mutually complementary Legalism and Daoism—was overlooked and even empowered (*jili*). Eventually, while Western liberty and democracy perished together with traditional Confucian morality and justice, "power philosophy" (*qiangquan zhexue*) and "cynic philosophy" (*quanru zhexue*) further intensified each other, and reached a unified control to an unprecedented extent.*[655]

3) Anti-Confucianism: Radical or Conservative?

Once Qin Hui establishes his argument that anti-Confucianism was due to a misjudgment of the socio-cultural structure, he goes on to ask the question as to why, in the process of social and cultural reforms, Confucianism became the unfortunate wrong target. The apparent reason is that Confucianism was always regarded as the ruling ideology of the imperial court, as well as representative of Chinese culture. Neither guardians nor critics of Confucianism realized that it was a façade that the ruling elite painted to conceal the Legalist nature of the imperial administration. Therefore, the movement of anti-traditionalism became one of anti-Confucianism.

[653] Qin, "Qimeng de fansi", p. 24.
[654] Qin, "Xi ru huirong", p. 197.
[655] Qin, "Xi ru huirong", p. 231.

Aside from that, Qin contends that in the cultural comparison between Chinese and Western cultures, whether it was the Chinese comparing their own culture with those of Western nations or, vice versa, the observers tended to agree that Chinese society was community-based and Western societies were individual-based.

This, then, was added by the fact that Chinese learning from the West was combined with a dream of strengthening the nation, which stimulated aspirations for a strong state. Such an enlightenment movement "could hardly bring about deep reflection on the tradition of autocracy within the bigger community". Such a tendency, Qin Hui explains, was manifested, for example, in Chen Duxiu's differentiation of "the military West and the literary China".[656] Because the powerful military presence of the West had proven a strong state to be useful, the pursuit of individual liberty and rights were not directed against the bigger patriarchal community—the state, but against the smaller patriarchal community—the family.

Because both the critics and the guardians of Chinese tradition had their eyes on the smaller patriarchal community and Confucianism instead of Legalism, and the anti-traditional movement did not threaten the Legalist autocratic state. Learning from the West, originally a movement to aid Confucianism against Legalist state, eventually helped Legalism to reject Confucianism. It is in this sense that Qin Hui calls it "the tragedy of Enlightenment" (*qimeng de beiju*)[657]. To use Qin Hui's metaphor, Jing Ke, in his attempted assassination of Emperor Qin Shihuang, thrust his dagger in Confucius whom he set out to rescue from Qin Shihuang's tyranny.

Therefore, the anti-traditionalism in the New Culture Movement becomes in the eyes of Qin Hui a misjudgment of the causes of social problems, rather than a manifestation of what Chen Lai regards as radicalism. In fact, Qin Hui describes this phenomenon as "pseudo-radicalism". In his understanding, the national character criticism was to a large degree pseudo-radical because it only aimed at Confucianism, not the autocratic Legalist state.

> *I think the May Fourth New Culture Movement was severely problematic, not because it was too radical or not radical enough, but because of its selection and judgment of tradition. I think it negated too much where it should not have, that is, Confucianism; and did not*

[656] Qin, "Xi ru huirong", pp. 233-239.
[657] Qin, "Zai jixu qimeng zhong fansi qimeng", p. 24.

negate where it should, that is, Legalism.[658]

For the same reason, he criticizes the cultural fever of the 1980s as having relegated the real social issues into a simplified cultural question. The tendency to reduce everything into "culture" obfuscated modern notions such as liberal democracy or social democracy into "Western culture"; and in such a process, by dwelling on the differences between China and the West, it minimized the differences between the past and the present. Consequently, there is no real debate between the conservative and radical standpoints.[659] On this note, despite the significance of the 1980s in terms of "intellectual enlightenment", Qin Hui prefers to think of anti-traditionalism during the cultural fever as another tide of pseudo-radicalism.

If the cultural critique during the 1980s was pseudo-radicalism, which is different from the radicalism against autocracy, the appraisal of the so-called cultural tradition since the 1990s can be called pseudo-conservatism, for Qin is of the opinion that it has often been prompted by commercial incentives and drifted far from a genuine movement to preserve the Confucian spirit. Though he claims that "'pseudo' only points to the fact that it is not genuine, but does not necessarily mean it is negative"[660], he nonetheless criticizes that both pseudo-radicalism and pseudo-conservatism originated from a cultural misinterpretation of the real social issues. And in his eyes, these real issues have little to do with being "radical" or "conservative":

> *The transitions in the past were full of uncertainties…you cannot attribute them to a determinist cause and say that Chinese people are too conservative or too radical. It applies to any nation. I think history is an objective yet basically uncertain process.*[661]

These uncertainties leave opportunities for those who are willing to "sacrifice for the mediocre, and to actively fight for others yet not to subdue others".[662] In a preface Qin Hui wrote for the writer and cultural critic Yu Jie (b. 1973), he commented that "Yu Jie's anti-traditionalism is no doubt influenced by the May Fourth cultural critique, Lu Xun's cultural criticism and the style of the culturally rebellious Li Ao and Bo Yang".

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658 Interview with Qin Hui.
659 Qin, "Dividing the Big Family Assets", p. 138.
660 Qin, *Shijian ziyou*, p. 165.
661 Interview with Qin Hui.
662 Qin, *Shijian ziyou*, p. 196.
663 Qin, "Kegui de fengmang", p. 173.

While many regarded Yu Jie's anti-traditionalism as "reverse racism" that jeopardizes the national spirit, Qin defended Yu and contended that he "does not agree to blame the so-called 'reverse racism' for the weakening of the national spirit".[664]

Then he went on to argue that Yu Jie's work has its "valuable edge"; and that Yu's critical attitude belongs to an important part of the Confucian intellectual tradition—to criticize social injustice through public opinion. As much as Qin disagrees to associate the national character with issues past and present, he has nothing against criticism towards social issues. In fact, this is precisely what Qin Hui has been doing through his critical inquiries.

5.3. Confucian Spirit in a Liberal Society

Qin Hui's criticism of cultural determinism suggests that, to change or improve the social-cultural behavior of a nation, it is not the people that have to be reformed, as the national character critics claimed. According to him, it is the socio-political institutions and structures that bred certain social behaviors that should be reformed in order to reach a more desirable form of society.

The underlying assumption is that, in the case of Chinese culture, once the institutional structure of the patriarchal society changes, the national culture as a social and historical phenomenon will transform into a modern one too. In the process of such a transformation, many of the cultural legacies, including Confucianism and Daoism, will transmute as well.

Therefore, the question Qin Hui poses is *not* how to reform the people, or the Confucian tradition that allegedly created the characteristics of the people, *but* how to transform "peasant states, agricultural civilizations, and traditional societies" into "citizen states, industrial civilizations, and modern societies".[665] Apparently, his socio-political choice would be a liberal society with a social-democratic political system.

To achieve such a goal, the vicious circle has to be deconstructed of the Legalist philosophy of the ruler and cynical philosophy of the ruled. And Qin's cultural proposal is what he calls "the alliance of Western thought and Confucianism that

[664] Qin, "Kegui de fengmang", p. 174.
[665] Qin, "The Common Baseline", p. 13.

replaces the complimentary Legalism and Daoism" (*xi ru huirong, jiegou fa dao hubu*).[666] So the question becomes, in the proposal of "the alliance of Western thought and Confucianism", what is Qin Hui's perception of "Confucianism" and "Western thought" respectively, and how does he envision the role of both in such an alliance?

1) Confucianism as the Local Source of Anti-autocracy

Confucianism is the most important part of the historical legacies in Qin Hui's outlook for a modern Chinese culture. As he contends, Confucianism is not the main obstacle to China's progress—it is not the source of vice, nor is it the origin of virtue. In fact, Qin believes that its influence in society is considerably limited by Legalism and cynicism, resulting in "Legalist Confucianism" and "Daoist Confucianism". And he argues that these two schools of Confucianism do not represent the more intrinsic, "real essence of Chinese culture".[667]

However, despite the intrusion of Legalism and cynicism, the "real Confucian idealism" as a school of thinking, as Qin puts it, "has not yet lost its brilliance."[668] And this real idealism can be found in what he calls "the third school" of Confucian theories on ethics and morality, which has survived the long history of autocratic rules:

> *Tan Sitong's* On Benevolence*, Kang Youwei's* Datong Shu*, New-Confucianists like Zhang Junmai and Liang Shumin, formed a local source of anti-autocracy, though it has only been a non-mainstream culture for over two thousand years.*[669]

This cultural legacy and "source of anti-autocracy" that he finds in these Confucian scholars is the idea of people-orientation (*minben*). As Qin continues to articulate, though very much a "local" expression, *minben* reflects the pursuit of a democratic principle that is humanistic and universal. In his own words, "Western or Confucian, there is no cultural barrier between free thinkers".[670]

To demonstrate that the most fundamental humanist spirit and values can be shared, he then takes the philosopher and political theorist Huang Zongxi (1610-1695) of the late

666 Qin, "Zhidu pengzhuang", p. 99.
667 Qin, "Zhidu pengzhuang", p. 98.
668 Qin, "Xi ru huirong", p. 190.
669 Qin, "Xi ru huirong", p. 229.
670 Qin, "Xi ru huirong", p. 229.

Ming and early Qing Dynasty as an example:

> *Some of the ideas of Huang Zongxi have touched upon the fundamental concept of modern liberalism, that is, the nature of autocracy lies in its deprivation of individual rights, or its oppression of individual freedom—any autocracy is eventually an autocracy from the community to the individual.*[671]

It seems that Qin Hui seeks from his "third school" of Confucian thought a spirit that is both of Confucian tradition and modern, both Chinese and universal. Yet it has to be noted that, although he regards this spirit as a local source of anti-autocracy, and emphasizes the idea of *minben* as potentially modern and universal, he does not try to look for a kind of equivalent of the modern Western notion of democracy (*minzhu*) in *minben*. On the contrary, as Davies argues, Qin Hui does not support the claim that the Confucian notion of *minben* is analogous to the modern concept of democracy; and he "warns against the use of facile analogies in the bid to promote a progressive Confucianism".[672]

What Qin Hui intends to find in this *minben* concept is a Chinese expression of a humanist value that could ally with liberalism against autocracy, for he believes that "it is possible to unite the modern civic consciousness and Confucian tradition".[673] To him, this is the key to the Chinese transition from a peasant state and a traditional society to a citizen state and a modern society. Furthermore, such a transition will eventually change the outlook of Chinese culture, for, once Confucianism and Daoism are freed from the oppression of Legalism, they are provided a chance to transmute in a modern society.

2) Confucianism as a Transcendent Spirit

As I stated in the beginning of this chapter, Qin Hui's perception of modernization is one with values upheld by both liberalism and social democracy. If he sees Confucianism as a source of anti-autocracy, how does he envision the joint venture of the Western enterprise of liberalism and the local resource of Confucianism in the process of modernization?

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671 Qin, "Xi ru huirong", pp. 222-4.
672 Davies, *Worrying about China*, pp. 131-132.
673 Qin, "Xi ru huirong", pp. 241-7.

The answer has to be sought, first of all, in Qin's understanding of liberalism. According to him, liberalism departs from the assumption that morality is limited, and therefore it bases its institutional arrangement on the limited morality or the "human nature of vice". As liberalism believes that a society cannot be built by relying on "the autocracy of the virtuous", or "the reckoning of the wise", it focuses on drawing "the bottom line"—the most fundamental principles that one should not compromise:

> *The system built upon the thesis of limited morality aims at preventing people from crossing the bottom line to fall into the abyss of evil, yet this bottom line is open to any higher possibility—we do not know whether it will vigorously elevate human nature to a higher level, but at least it does not prevent such an elevation.*[674]

However, a liberal society, despite its advantages in offering a practical framework to draw the bottom line, does not come into being automatically. Qin argues that, although it is "common sense" that liberty is preferred over autocracy, liberal societies only make up a small proportion among all human societies. In Qin's conception, this is determined by the nature of liberalism as an ideology:

> *The difficulties of fulfilling liberalism is a universal problem, which is unrelated to "culture" or so-called national characteristics, either positive or negative.*[675]

Again, this is the major difference between Qin Hui and the liberal critics of national character. When it comes to the problem of liberalism in China, cultural critics tend to attribute it to Confucian culture and the servility of the people. Qin Hui, on the contrary, argues that the problem does not lie in "the cultural genes", or "the lack of theoretical resources", but in liberalism itself:

> *People with liberal ideals have to be willing to sacrifice for the rights of the mediocre, and not expect anything in return from the mediocre —and this is not necessarily related to any "national defects" of the Chinese people.*[676]

Qin describes the principle of liberalism as "to keep one's own individual freedom, to respect the freedom of others, and to actively pursue liberty and oppose any

[674] Qin, *Shijian ziyou*, p. 182.
[675] Qin, *Shijian ziyou*, p. 194.
[676] Qin, *Shijian ziyou*, p. 193.

enforcement by another to anyone else."[677] Yet, according to this logic, one cannot force liberty on anyone else. As he further articulates:

> *The two main convictions of liberalism are that the world is diverse (factual judgment), and the world should be diverse (value judgment). Therefore, a liberal does not hope to build a world dominated by liberalism, nor does he hope to persuade or even subdue others…The only argument that liberalism requires is to prove that one should not subdue others (value judgment) and one cannot persuade others (factual judgment).*[678]

That is why, in the pursuit of secular liberalism, Qin calls for a "transcendent spirit of Martyrdom (*xunjiao*)"—a spirit to sacrifice for the mediocre, and to actively fight for others, yet not to subdue others.[679] In other words, the realization of a liberal Chinese society needs a kind of altruistic spirit to solve the practical dilemma caused by the inner logic of liberalism. Since China is not a country of Christian culture as is the case with most Western countries, Qin argues, such a transcendent spirit has to be found within the Chinese cultural tradition.

> *For liberalism to be recognized by the people, a local symbolic system is needed. To promote a modern value system would require a Chinese style expression.*[680]

> *In fact, the so-called "heaven" in Chinese culture is not, at least not completely, a transcendent religious conception. It has a strong secular color…and does not rely on the transcendent belief or the respect and fear for "the other world".*[681]

The strong secular nature of Chinese society does not provide a local expression of altruistic spirit in the same religious sense as what Christianity used to do in the formation of Western liberal societies. Qin searches for it in the equally transcendent Confucian idealistic "sage spirit", which he interprets as "to endeavor social righteousness as a nobody; and to cultivate one's own virtue as a somebody" (*qiong ze*

[677] Qin, *Shijian ziyou*, p. 193.
[678] Qin, *Shijian ziyou*, p. 181.
[679] Qin, *Shijian ziyou*, p. 196.
[680] Qin, "Xi ru huirong", pp. 241-247.
[681] Qin, "Xi ru huirong", p. 215.

jianji tianxia, da ze dushan qishen).[682] That means, the "nobody" needs to increase the awareness of his own rights; the "somebody" needs to limit his obsession with power. This is obviously his antidote against what he identifies as the complementary structure of Legalism and cynicism, and also his antidote against the dilemma of liberalism itself.

3) The Convergence of Confucianism and Liberalism

Qin Hui's conceptions of real Confucian idealism and liberalism provide him with an outlook of a Western-Confucian convergence in the future of Chinese culture. According to Qin, "the transition from autocracy to democracy is never an objective law or an inevitable process".[683] That is why the development of liberalism in China needs to draw from the transcendent spirit in order to overcome its inherent dilemma.

However, Confucian idealism tries to build a society on top of the presumption of the Confucian principle of morality and the eternal good nature of sages, which Qin sees as too high a standard to be achieved in social reality; the social order simply cannot be achieved by relying on the virtue of the sage, or a few Confucian exemplars at the highest moral ground.

As he asks, how does Confucianism provide a practical institutional design to maintain social order?[684] This question takes the alternative perspective to look at the convergence of liberalism and Confucianism. To put it the other way around, liberalism provides Confucianism the institutional and instrumental support to break the dual oppression of Legalism and cynicism.

It is Qin's belief that Confucianism is subject to manipulation of the Legalist autocratic power without the liberal principles to draw the bottom line. In order to break from "the incubus of being raped by the complementary structure of Legalism and Daoism", Qin argues, Confucianism has to be developed from "a study of mind" to "a study of institutions or socio-political systems",[685] specifically aiming at the deconstruction of the complementary Legalism and Daoism and autocratic power.

In this sense, the alliance of liberalism and Confucianism is a proposal, in Qin Hui's

[682] Qin, Shijian ziyou, pp. 199-200.
[683] Interview with Qin Hui.
[684] Qin, "Qimeng de fansi", p. 25.
[685] Qin, "Xi ru huirong", pp. 241-247.

understanding, to strive for a passive liberty with a proactive attitude, to hold on to secular liberal principles with transcendent Confucian virtue, to follow a seemingly selfish pursuit of individual rights with altruistic sacrifice, and to benefit the mediocre with a highly idealistic sage spirit.[686]

As I mentioned previously, Qin Hui describes himself as taking a "third path" and having a "superimposition" of both liberalism and social democracy. Can we conclude that he is also taking a third path in the cultural realm? Based on the analysis of his cultural perceptions and imaginations, such a description does reflect his standpoint as compared to those intellectuals studied in Chapter Three and Chapter Four.

Yet it is worthwhile to mention that Qin Hui is not alone down this path. The influential liberal scholar, Zhu Xueqin, for instance, also states that his understanding of liberalism entails "an ethical code" to protect different values.[687] To be more specific, he articulates it as a standpoint that is politically democratic, economically supportive of a free market, and culturally conservative.[688] Such a description is also applicable to Qin Hui.

Qin takes many inside and outside China as embodiment of what he refers to as "true liberalism". For instance, he speaks highly of Tan Sitong's sacrifice for his beliefs, as well as Huang Zongxi's idea of minben. At the same time, he finds the liberal principles from the endeavors of Czech liberal Václav Havel, and Qin's "true social democracy" is inspired by the Chilean Salvador Allende.[689] In a word, as Qin sees it, Confucian moral idealism can be combined with modern principles of human rights, liberty and democracy. Therefore, while many with a liberal mind criticize Confucianism as the main obstacle in the modernization process, Qin on the contrary is of the opinion that it can solve the problem of implementing liberalism, and he envisions the future of liberalism in China as such:

> *The political future of China will be more and more modern, that means, more and more lenient, with an increasing stress on negotiation and contractual arrangements among different interest*

686 Qin, *Shijian ziyou*, pp. 193 & 196.
687 Zhu Xueqin, "For a Chinese Liberalism," in Wang Chaohua (ed.), *One China, Many Paths*, pp. 87-107: 105.
688 Zhu Xueqin, "Sixiang zai poju, gaige yao kaifang—Zhu Xueqin fangtanlu" 思想在破局，改革要开放——朱学勤访谈录 in *Nanfang dushi bao* 南方都市报 Dec. 30, 2007.
689 Qin, "Dividing the Big Family Assets", p. 156.

groups. Then there is possibility for the so-called constitutional system.[690] *Such a constitutional system with compatible power and responsibility should be the contractual result of negotiation based on the most universal human nature. Therefore, it is not limited to any certain culture; nor should it be constrained by any particular culture.* [691]

It is precisely on these grounds that he rejects the national character criticism and what he calls the "cultural determinism" that is reflected in such criticism. In his perception, as Confucianism and liberalism are not mutually exclusive, there is a common ground to develop modern Chinese civilization with the Confucian ideal of personal perfection of virtue and endeavour for society, Western conceptions of liberty, human rights and rule of law, as well as the socialist ideal of justice and community.[692] And it is on top of such a common ground that he perceives Chinese-Western cultural differences and the place of Chinese culture in the world.

4) Liberalism and Nationalism

Qin Hui's view of culture, especially his distinction between the socially determined cultural phenomena and the aesthetically related cultural preferences, has greatly influenced his perception of the position of Chinese culture in the world. In terms of the former type of culture that he relates to socio-political systems, his liberal belief supports an improvement of social institutions and thereby improvement in the cultural realm. When it comes to the latter type of culture, Qin regards them as a matter of emotionally charged cultural identity that is not subject to rational comparison or evaluation.

The issue of nationalism and national identity, in the eyes of Qin Hui, falls into the latter category. As he puts it, national or cultural identity is essentially "an identity of pure aesthetic symbols".[693] Similarly, true nationalism originates from a natural affection towards the nation. And this affection is derived from the perception of the

[690] Interview with Qin Hui.
[691] Interview with Qin Hui.
[692] Qin Hui 秦晖, "Qiong ze jianji tianxia, da ze dushan qishen," 穷则兼济天下，达则独善其身 in idem., *Chuantong shi lun*, pp. 259-260.
[693] Qin Hui, "Ziyou zhuyi yu minzu zhuyi de qihedian zai nali?" 自由主义与民族主义的契合点在哪里 in *Dongfang* 东方 *Orient* (May 1996), pp. 45-48.

nation as family, as one of Qin's articles suggests.[694] As Davies points out, Qin's conception reflects that the language of Chinese intellectuals is "saturated with figurations of the nation as the domestic intimacy of home and family" with "an unquestioned ethos of communal or collective responsibility".[695]

In this light, such sentiments can be shared by people of different political and social convictions and, according to Qin Hui, they should be independent from the agenda of the state or national interests. That is to say, emotional identification with a nation or its culture is not to be affected by rational identification with a certain socio-political system. In this sense, true nationalism is certainly not negative, if not positive. That is why Qin contends that he never considered Chinese nationalism to be excessive, neither is he concerned with the nationalistic sentiments of Chinese people.[696]

This view seems to suggest a distinction between cultural nationalism and political nationalism. That is, identification with a nation's culture does not necessarily entail an xenophobic tendency as is often seen in political nationalism. As Qin Hui sees it, many issues of nationalism that appeared as cultural conflicts are in fact the result of conflicts of national interests, or better said, the conflicts of interests among different states.

Yet again, Qin Hui emphasizes that what he regards as "true nationalism" and national identity should be based upon "the realization of civil rights and democracy".[697] He argues that people without human rights do not have strong national sentiments out of his or her own dignity. Rather, their nationalistic sentiments are subject to the manipulation of the state, sometimes even regardless of what is right or wrong.[698] In that case, the discussion goes beyond Qin's cultural conception of "true nationalism"; instead, it belongs to the subject of state nationalism.

Taking it a step further, from a liberal standpoint, he goes on to defend his universal humanist concern and argues that it overrides nationalism. According to him, liberal value is a universal value that transcends the boundaries of nation-states:

> *A universal liberalism that requires free circulation of global resources, though not a form of nationalism, does offer a new moral*

[694] See Qin, "Dividing the Big Family Assets".
[695] Davies, *Worrying About China*, p. 61.
[696] Interview with Qin Hui.
[697] Qin, "Ziyou zhuyi yu minzu zhuyi", p. 45.
[698] Interview with Qin Hui.

> *ideal that is beyond nation and culture, an outlook of universal freedom and justice, and an idea of a world with equal opportunities.* [699]

Universalism might sometimes override nationalism or nationalistic sentiments, but it does not necessarily mean that one has to betray one's natural affection towards one's nation in order to pursue liberal values. In the optimistic scenario, the pursuit of a universal liberalism will bring about global equality, which, for a late-developing country, is in line with the nationalistic demand for an equal and just international order. And that is what Qin perceives as the conjunction of liberalism and nationalism.

Therefore, it is not surprising, if we follow Qin's distinction between true nationalism and state nationalism, that he approaches the subject of China's position in the world in the same way. As he puts it, the so-called rise of China has two meanings: one is the position of the state; the other is the position of the people.[700] And this distinction has to be stressed whenever one speaks of the rise of China or the status of the Chinese nation as compared to other nations.

In modern history, Qin contends, the turning point for the international position of the Chinese state is "the Twenty-One Demands" (1915), a set of demands from Japan that were perceived as an attempt to establish a Japanese protectorate over China. From then on, during the Nationalist government and the PRC period, the position of the state has indeed been rising internationally. However, when it comes to the status of Chinese people or Chinese citizens, Qin Hui is less optimistic—he sees it as very low, both at home and abroad:

> *This is a society that does not respect civil rights, if not human rights... The diplomacy of a "state of the people" should be diplomacy "for the people", and not "for the Emperor"...*[701]

This is a problem that is closely related to autocracy in Qin Hui's understanding. With the absence of the "common baseline", according to Qin's reading of modern Chinese history, the rise of the state is possible, but the outlook for a higher status of the Chinese people is rather gloomy. And it is exactly for this reason that Qin Hui proposes a convergence of liberalism and Confucianism.

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699 Qin, "Ziyou zhuyi yu minzu zhuyi", p. 48.
700 Interview with Qin Hui.
701 Interview with Qin Hui.

5.4. Concluding Remarks

The analysis of Qin Hui's rejection of the discourse of national character in this chapter has demonstrated the cultural viewpoints of a Chinese intellectual who holds a political-economic view of liberalism with a social democratic emphasis on equality. His cultural proposal to converge the Confucian transcendent spirit with liberal values places him in an interesting position between the cultural critics of Chinese national character and the guardians of Confucian tradition.

Qin "defends the values of universalism",[702] yet this universalism does not apply to what he regards as the aesthetic cultural preferences formed through a common national history. His conception of universal value is confined to the field of socio-political arrangements, but not in the realm of aesthetical culture. When it comes to the latter, he holds firm to a pluralism that views national culture as incomparable and cultural differences as something reasonable and to be respected.

Many of Qin Hui's cultural standpoints seem similar to those of Chen Lai's. They share a rejection of the national character discourse, a vision of a positive role for Confucianism, a sympathy for what Qin calls true nationalism, and a call for humanistic values in China. Yet their common cultural views come from rather different points of departure.

Whereas Chen Lai criticizes the national character discourse as a negation of historical continuity—part of the anti-traditionalism that is intimately related to cultural radicalism, Qin Hui rejects it as a representative of what he calls "cultural determinism", emphasizing the fact that it relegates complex social issues to a simplified and generalized question of culture. Following the logic of cultural determinism, one tends to draw the conclusion that the national defects, especially the so-called servile nature of the people, have resulted in the state of autocracy in China; and if the national character is not reformed, it will continue to lead the country through this pre-determined path towards an unchangeable autocracy. It is this interpretation of China's past and outlook of its future that Qin Hui argues against.

Qin Hui rejects cultural determinism because he believes that culture is not the cause of social problems, rather the historical consequence of social institutions and systems.

[702] Qin, "The Common Baseline", p. 16.

And this rejection not only applies to its "critical" form, but also to its "conservative" form. To be more specific, he disagrees with cultural determinism of a critical nature and argues that many issues in Chinese society are not caused by the Confucian cultural tradition; at the same time, he also warns against the idea that Confucianism itself will necessarily offer a solution to China's modernization or to the problem of modernity elsewhere.

On the one hand, he believes that the solution to social cultural issues has to be found in institutional changes, and such changes have to be made by adopting liberal principles such as human rights, democracy and rule of law. Only in this way can social reforms free people, in particular peasants, from their patriarchal social confinement to become modern citizens, thereby transforming peasant culture into modern culture. In his perception, Chinese people, if given the opportunity, prefer to enjoy their individual rights and freedom just as much as people elsewhere. Their aesthetics might differ from those of other nations, due to a distinctive cultural past, yet they share a universal human nature of a preference for liberty over autocracy.

On the other hand, his understanding of the dilemma of liberalism guides him to look for a sort of transcendent spirit as its antidote. And he finds in the Confucian intellectual tradition the Chinese "sage spirit" that sacrifices out of moral idealism. Obviously, such a conception of the spirit of Confucianism is very different from that of Chen Lai's. For Chen, Confucianism is a relation-oriented humanistic philosophy, and the Confucian cultural spirit lies in its emphasis on filial piety, intimate human relations, the value of people and respect for morality (*zhongxiao, qinren, guimin, chongde*).[703] But Qin Hui finds the spirit of Confucianism embodied in the highly elitist and idealistic "sacrifice for the mediocre".

Qin Hui and Chen Lai also have different outlooks on Confucianism in society. Whereas Chen Lai perceives an ideal society as one based on morality, Qin Hui contends that, as appealing as it may sound, such an ideal of moral high-ground is too far from social reality. With regard to the individual, Confucianism stresses responsibility and obligation, and Confucian morality focuses on introspection and cultivation; but there is little discussion on the issue of how to achieve individual rights.[704]

[703] Chen, "Rujia sixiang de genyuan", p. 38.
[704] Qin, "Qimeng de fansi", p. 25.

On this note, Qin argues that many of the discussions from the New-Confucian school are limited to the metaphysical level, and do not touch upon the institutional question. To him, metaphysical discussions do not offer a solution to the problem of social institutions.[705] Hence, he proposes to draw a bottom line to ensure individual rights, which does not require higher moral standards but still has the potential to attain them. As such, Qin Hui holds a cultural perception that differs not only from that of the cultural critics, but also from those of the New-Confucian school who reject the discourse of national character.

Aside from their differences in the rejection of the national character discourse and their understandings of Confucianism, Qin Hui and Chen Lai also perceive the issue of national identity in a different light. Chen Lai approaches the question of Chinese culture and its place in the world from a philosophical point of view, and stresses his "cultural subjectivity" in a pursuit of historical continuity. Qin Hui, while also claiming the autonomy for national culture in its aesthetic sense, focuses on identifying problems in the socio-political system and mending these problems by implementing universal humanist values.

Whereas Chen Lai views Chinese nationalism as a natural collective response towards Western imperialist intrusion, using the metaphor of "the bent twig"; Qin Hui, although defending "true nationalism" as affection for the nation, does not see it as necessarily a response towards imperialism. Moreover, just as many cultural critics, he is very vigilant towards any state manipulation of nationalistic sentiments, which he distinguishes from his notion of true nationalism.

Last but not least, while both Qin Hui and Chen Lai contend that Confucianism is not an obstacle to modernization, each has his own definition of modernization. What Chen Lai means by modernization is mainly a process based on economic development. To put it simply, a modernized country is an enriched country—there is no strict distinction between the state and the nation (the people). And unlike liberal intellectuals, Chen does not speak of political democracy as a criterion for modernization.

But for Qin Hui, the concept of modernization goes far beyond "enriching the country"; the key to modernization is the freedom of the individual from the autocratic state, which is the premise for a modernized society. This notion requires the peasant to

[705] Qin, "Qimeng de fansi", p. 25.

be transformed into the citizen, to ensure that the enrichment of the country (the state) does not weaken the people. Such a socio-political understanding of modernization is more in line with the viewpoints of liberal critics of the national character.

In a way, by promoting liberal principles in a Confucian idealistic fashion, Qin Hui is practicing what he promotes as "to endeavor social righteousness as a nobody, and to cultivate one's own virtue as a somebody".[706] With this antidote against Legalism and cynicism, he attempts to overcome the dilemma of liberalism and at the same time to strive for a better future against the uncertainties of history. As he puts it, what he believes in is a view of history that only holds oneself responsible: "If tomorrow China does not do well, we shall not be able to blame Confucius or Marx for it—only ourselves."[707]

[706] Qin, *Shijian ziyou*, pp. 199-200.
[707] Qin, "The Common Baseline", p. 22.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

In the early 1990s, Chen Lai described a situation in which he believed the May Fourth intellectuals and the intellectuals of the 1980s were both drawn into:

> *Confucian thought and tradition entail the crisis mentality, which created an unprecedented sense of urgency to free the nation from humiliation through political means. This cultural-psychological tradition in return has made intellectuals prone to a total negation of cultural tradition, thus making it impossible for cultural inheritance and construction, or to provide a stable cultural environment for a benign political order.*[708]

Then Chen Lai asked: "Is this really a dilemma for intellectuals?" This question refers essentially to a dilemma of positioning the Self between the past and the Other. Chen's question then can be rephrased as such: does Chinese culture really have to be torn between tradition and the West? To him, in the 2010s, this dilemma had already been solved.

But this research has shown that, nearly a century after the May Fourth Movement, the tension between the past and the Other has far from been resolved. The dilemma as described by Chen is constantly at play in national self-perceptions, and it is still able to evoke intense and sometimes contradictory emotions.

By examining the discourse of national character, I have outlined three different approaches, including the one of Chen Lai's, to the problem of positioning the Self between what look like two irreconcilables. The first approach is reflected in the critiques of national character. This discourse, formulated by Liang Qichao and Lu Xun, has been borrowed by contemporary cultural critics to ask the question of "What is wrong with us" and to advocate cultural reforms oriented towards the modern West. The rationale, the influence of Western perceptions, and the emotional dynamics behind such a question have been examinined in Chapters Two and Three.

The mode of thinking in the first approach is rejected by many others in their search for a cultural identity. In Chapters Three and Four, I have looked into the cultural

[708] Chen Lai, *Tradition and Modernity*, p. 81.

viewpoints of philosophor Chen Lai and historican Qin Hui. Chen criticizes the critiques of national character as a form of cultural radicalism, and Qin regards them as an embodiment of cultural determinism. As alternatives, Chen's approach is to assert a cultural subjectivity, and Qin proposes to make Confucianism converge with liberalism, both incorporating Confucianism as an indispensable part of their visions for the nation's future.

The contest of these three intellectual perceptions of Chinese culture has demonstrated that the formation of the Self is a constant negotiation process among different cultural forces. While some attempt to shape the boundaries set between China and the West, as well as of tradition and modernity, others strive to overcome such a framework.

In this research, the past and the Other have been analyzed as the two dimensions of a cultural identity: the historical and the international. Therefore, I will also summarize my findings from these two perspectives—how the Self is perceived through the Other, and how the present is constructed by appropriating the past.

6.1. Perceiving Self through the Other

The discourse of national character has been examined as a recurring theme in Chinese cultural debates and Chinese-Western communications. Critics of the national character, in their search for the ultimate cause of socio-political problems and a thorough solution to them, highlight the flaws and defects in Chinese culture. They regard cultural tradition, especially Confucianism, as the root of a perceived servile nature of the people, therefore the reason for national defeat and backwardness.

While they see the national character as an enduring and almost innate feature of the nation, they have nevertheless chosen to criticize it in a fierce manner, in the hope of transforming the nation to what they regard as a better one. What has led them to believe that the best way to improve the nation would be to question its cultural root?

This research has argued that the encounters with the modern West have played an important role in stimulating this extreme form of self-criticism. In the late Qing and early Republican periods, the imperial *Tianxia* worldview was challenged by the presence of modern, foreign powers and gave rise to national consciousness of the Self as compared to the Other. Similarly, after the Cultural Revolution, the image of China as the center of world revolution soon faded, leaving intellectuals in the 1980s

bewildered by the influx of Western influence as the new modern world permeated Chinese life.

A modernized West contrasted with an unsatisfactory socio-political reality at home and suggested that China was lagging behind. Self-reflective intellectuals began to question the cultural tradition and national psychological make-up that were deemed to be responsible for such a situation. Many characteristics of Chinese culture were regarded as national defects, as compared to the special features that were seen as having created the stronger and/or better cultures and civilizations in the West.

As such, cultural construction and invention of the Western Other has been the key in defining the Self. Certainly, there is no such thing as a stable, unified "West", "Western culture", or "Western civilization", but the West as a whole set of modern institutions and values has been undoubtedly "the Other" in the Chinese evaluation of the past and present, as well as its imagination for the nation's future. Thus, this research has concluded that Chinese self-perceptions have never been able to escape the powerful presence of "the West".

What is Wrong with the Chinese National Character?

By tracing the discourse of national character, from Arthur Smith to Liang Qichao, and from their time to contemporary cultural critiques, I have argued that Chinese self-perceptions have been shaped by Western perceptions in two ways. They have been influenced by imported Western conceptions and theories, and in particular, by Western worldviews and their consequent perceptions of China within a certain world order.

I have firstly demonstrated that Smith's account of the Chinese people and their culture was a missionary description of a backward, barbaric, and almost inscrutable nation in urgent need of Christian enlightenment. His racial, religious and cultural superiority was accompanied by a mixed feeling of contempt, fear, and paternalism for an inferior nation. The perceptions in Smith's book inspired the two most prominent advocates of national character reforms, Lu Xun and Liang Qichao. As I have argued, Liang's "new people" thesis incorporated many of the characteristics listed by Smith in its effort to renovate the cultural features of the nation.

Moreover, placing it in a bigger context, Smith's perception of the Chinese nation was not an isolated example; rather, it reflected the transition of Western perceptions of

China from a vague image to a personified character, witnessing the consolidation of Orientalist cultural constructions at the turn of 20th century. And the "missionary mind" as observed in Smith remains an important factor in today's Euro-American understandings of and dealings with China.

At the same time, Liang Qichao's calls to reform the nation did not go unnoticed. His "new people" thesis, together with his other thoughts on Chinese culture, inspired generations of intellectuals across the wide spectrum of various political and cultural convictions. The influence of such cultural interactions was later manifested in the May Fourth Movement of 1919 and the culture fever of the 1980s. The Chinese-Western dichotomy, with the assumption of a Western superiority, appeared in the texts of, for example, Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi, Gan Yang, and the documentary series *River Elegy*. It remains an important part of the contemporary discourse of Chinese national character, notably in *Wolf Totem* and Wang Xiaofeng's critiques. It is then justified to say that contemporary cultural critiques still echo Liang's propagation of cultural reforms, regarding themselves as continuing Liang's historical cause to revitalize the nation.

Furthermore, though many of these comparisons between China and the West and the consequent negative images of the Self have been created with political considerations —be it the pursuit of sovereignty or socio-political reforms, they have undoubtedly left their footprints on the Chinese national psyche. Chinese imaginations of modernity have been expressed with Western discourses; and the perceived status of a late-comer to modernity has, to various extents, resulted in an inferiority-superiority complex among different schools of intellectuals in their pursuit of modernization.

Based on the above findings, I have concluded that Western perceptions of China, including Orientalist perceptions, have been internalized and naturalized into Chinese self-perceptions, albeit to various degrees and for various purposes. The question of understanding the Self has become the question of understanding the Other. In the eyes of the critics of national character, wittingly or not, the diversity and complexity of different nations in the West have been ignored, and a homogeneous cultural image that meets the requirement of an imagined strong modern nation has been created for the national Self to compare itself with: whereas the West has been perceived as adventurous, progressive, aggressive, and powerful, Chinese culture has been reduced to Confucianism, and Confucianism to servility and autocracy.

There are two points that need further clarification. Firstly, my conclusion does not suggest that the interaction of different intellectual perceptions has been a process in which Chinese intellectuals passively accept the concept of a stronger West and an inferior position of Chinese culture. As I have noted, for example, in the case of Liang Qichao's "new people" thesis and Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem*, the Chinese incorporation of Western perceptions has been an eclectic process in which intellectuals actively selected, employed and re-invented some notions while at the same time rejected and disregarded others, for the eventual goal of finding the right place for the nation and the Self in the world.

Secondly, the Chinese discourse of national character is only one part of an ongoing interactive process. It has to be noted that the West as the Other has been used both in negative and positive light by different schools of Chinese thought; and the same intellectuals that once saw an inferior China through a Western lens could at other times use it as a mirror to reflect the positive self-image and to confirm Chinese superiority—Liang Qichao's call to save Western civilization with Chinese wisdom, partly inspired by Western self-reflections after WWI, was a case in point.

Returning to the Self

The second half of this research has examined two different efforts to refute the discourse of national character, thereby presenting two other approaches to resolve the tension between the Self and the Other.

Chen Lai has taken issue with the tendency of self-orientalization—to interpret Chinese culture with an overriding Western, modernist discourse. To him, this tendency, as part of the profound hegemonic impact of Western knowledge and perceptions, has led to xenophilia and the inferiority complex in Chinese cultural identity.

It is in this context that Chen Lai asserts his "cultural subjectivity". It is simultaneously a rectification of the tendency of self-negation and an attempt to reject a modernist view of culture. Chen is of the opinion that the Chinese cultural tradition should be viewed in its own historical context, independent from the normative framework of Western culture that has been drawn from its own historical experiences.

His notion of "cultural subjectivity" suggests a return to the Self—the local, the

indigenous, and the national tradition. As Chen himself points out, this return should be understood as part of the global trend of root-seeking. Within the West, this trend has given rise to various forms of critiques of modernity; and in other parts of the world, it has resulted in a growing assertiveness of local cultures and national tradition. The rise of cultural self-consciousness, be it nationalistic or post-colonial, is a "bent twig" that has been recently released from the hegemony of Western modernist perceptions of culture.

Qin Hui's approach to overcome the cultural dichotomy of Self-Other takes a different point of departure. In his eyes, perceiving the Self through the lens of the Other, or vice versa, is not as problematic as failing to identify the true Self. He criticizes the discourse of national character for confusing the aesthetic, transcendent part of a nation's historical legacy with the socio-political phenomenon of culture. While the former is the inherent feature of a nation—the true Self that cannot, and should not, be compared or simply uprooted, the latter is the temporary result of certain social constraints that can, and should, be changed with or without the inspiration from the Other.

Because Qin finds nothing wrong with the true Self as he identifies in the former category, he then tries to shift the focus to the latter, where he believes that the real problem lies. And in his opinion, the national character under criticism belongs to the latter category strictly. Here, he does not reject to view liberal principles as universal values, on the contrary, he believes that they are essentially things of human nature, rather than a special Western invention.

Both of their approaches try to guard a certain part of cultural tradition from the notion that there is something fundamentally wrong with the Chinese national character or the overall psychological make-up of the Chinese people. One way or another, both attempt to justify cultural particularity and to promote a pluralist view of culture; and in doing so, to liberate Chinese culture from the "shadow" of a Western normative framework. Therefore, they not only challenge the perception of Chinese culture as inferior to, and the follower of, modern Western culture; but also challenge the notion of the West as the sole representative of modernity.

2. The Problem of the Past

Next to the relations between the Self and the Other, the historical dimension in self-perceptions has been studied through the discourse of national character at the turn of both the 20th and 21st centuries. To better understand the views of the past in these two periods, the paramount significance of the past, or of history, has to be taken into account. Before the times of Smith and Liang, a tendency to romanticize the precedent in reflections of the present has been present in Chinese thinking. The Self used to be formed in its relations with past role models, for example, ancient sages; and the sense of self-fulfillment was at the same time achieved by glorifying the ancestors. In this sense, the Chinese past used to be the frame of reference for the evaluation of the present and for envisioning the future.

The encounter with the modern West and Western perceptions of China turned the focus of the Other from "the old" to "the new", and the subject of learning shifted from ancient wisdom to foreign enlightenment. Both reformers and revolutionaries have been occupied with making new proposals to steer the nation towards what they believe as the right direction, and the discourse of national character has reflected the consequent condemnation of the past and aspiration for the new.

Negating the Old, Imagining the New

The propagation of national character reforms was clearly prompted by the idea that thought reforms, or reforms of the people, would create a new culture, which would then lay the foundation of socio-political transitions. In the case of Liang, at least according to his "new people" thesis, his cultural ambition to create a new people was not to be separated from his political ambition to build a new and strong nation-state, with a reformist political agenda grounded on a revolutionary cultural ideal to change the national psychological make-up.

Yet I have argued that Liang's "new people" thesis was never a complete negation of the past. He had an eclectic approach, not only to Western thoughts, but also to the Chinese cultural tradition, because to "revive the existing cultural essence" was just as important to him as "to import the absent". However, the reformist intention and the eclectic syncretism in Liang's "new people" thesis were to a large extent lost in many

later interpretations of this thesis. While Liang Qichao in 1899 passionately predicted a young China to be the most powerful race in the world of the 20th century, the nation subsequently saw a century of revolutionary upheavals, rather than reformist projects, when it struggled its way towards fulfilling Liang's dream. Liberal and Marxist cultural reformers after him made iconoclastic claims to denounce the nation's past and cultural tradition.

The discourse of national character later drifted away from Liang's syncretic approach and took a turn towards a radical bifurcation of "thought reform" and even "thought revolution". Hu Shi proposed a "thorough Westernization", and Chen Duxiu called for "the last awakening"—to awaken people from Confucian ethics. Mao Zedong later became a master of thought and cultural reform. It seemed that the only way to build a new culture would be to destroy the old. Once "cultural reform" became "cultural revolution", few noted the romanticized image of Confucian culture as depicted in Liang's fictional *The Future of New China*.

My analysis of cultural critiques in the reform era has suggested a similar revolutionary tendency, with Confucian culture being viewed by critics of the national character as the most fundamental obstacle to China's road towards modernization. *River Elegy* described the yellow civilization as drawing its last breath, and Gan Yang in 1985 claimed that a "thorough, total and comprehensive" reform of the "overall national cultural psychological structure" was necessary to create a new and modern culture. In *Wolf Totem*, Jiang Rong had the ambition to turn the Chinese nation from "civilized sheep" into "civilized wolves" in order to survive the fierce competition around the world. To reform the national character has become the ultimate form of battling the old and the traditional.

As such, this research has shown that, in present day China, cultural critiques keep returning to an almost revolutionary approach in their perceptions of tradition. Such a discourse has identified Confucianism as, among others, the foundation of the people's servility that has hindered the nation's revival to greatness. Critics of the national character have imposed a social-Darwinist view on cultural tradition, holding Confucianism responsible for the lack of Socio-political progress as well as the unsatisfactory international status of Chinese culture.

Pride and Loathing in History

The criticism and even negation of the past have been saturated with a sense of urgency and a rather intense emotional dynamic. This research has identified the discourse of national character, accompanying the rise of a national self-consciousness, as largely created by the crisis mentality of intellectuals and their anxiety to reform the nation for the better—to become stronger and more modern. Consequently, it has demonstrated the entanglement of pride and loathing towards the nation's historical legacy and cultural tradition, at the same time a mixed complex of superiority and inferiority towards the West.

As I have discussed, the fierce criticism of the national past has also revealed the cultural imagination of a glorious national future, which resembles, ironically, the past glory that was lost in recent history. Liang envisioned a peace conference in Nanjing where a Mr. Confucius was lecturing guests from all over the world, *River Elegy* ended with an image of the Chinese dragon emerging around the coastal regions, and even the nation of loathsome sheep described in *Wolf Totem* would eventually be revitalized with the wolf spirit. To borrow Vivienne Shue's words, these alternating and paradoxical emotions are better understood as "continuing sub-themes within a larger saga—the saga of upholding the glory of the Sinic civilization".[709]

Furthermore, the intensity of such emotional dynamics also suggests that the intellectual search for a cultural identity is essentially a search for an individual identity. As the national Self and the personal self of the intellectual are closely linked together, the glory and dignity of Chinese culture becomes a matter of personal honor and dignity. Therefore, once the pride of national culture has been wounded, it becomes a moral obligation for intellectuals to resurrect it, and to find a rightful place for both the personal self and the national Self in history and in the world.

A Conservative Shift: History, Tradition and National Spirit

Whereas one school of thought tends to attribute the country's problems to the national character, Confucianism, and cultural tradition in general, many others regard it

[709] Vivienne Shue (2004), "Legitimacy Crisis in China?" in Peter Hays Gries & Stanley Rosen (eds.), *State and Society in 21st Century China: Crisis, Contention and Legitimation*, New York [etc.]: Routledge. p. 34.

problematic to appropriate the past in a such way that a Western universalist-style culture is propagated. The two rejections of the discourse of national character have led to the conclusion that the battle between "the old" and "the new" is an ongoing one. The intellectual debate of radicalism and conservatism is the most recent manifestation of such a battle: the 1990s saw a "thorough" intellectual shift from anti-traditionalism towards a "conservative style of thought".[710] With different schools of thought incorporating cultural tradition—Confucianism in particular—in their cultural blueprint, it seems that "the old" has returned to rectify the negative attitude towards it.

This rectification is a re-interpretation of history, of tradition, and of what the nation essentially is. When Qin Hui criticizes the cultural determinism in the discourse of national character, he maintains that history is an uncertain process. In his view, the outcome of history is not pre-determined by a nation's cultural tradition, either positively or negatively. Thus, Confucianism does not explain China's backwardness in modern history, nor is it responsiblefor political autocracy as the national character critics claimed.

In Chen Lai's efforts to rectify cultural radicalism, he asserts tradition as an indispendable part of modern culture. He does not reject change or reform, but merely stresses that changes and reforms should be based on the understanding of a continuous past and with respect for historical continuity. Thus, undue allegations against cultural tradition, in his eyes, will give rise to a sense of inferiority and even xenophilia, which would in return sabotage the nation's political and cultural well-being.

In a way, in their rejection of equating cultural tradition to Confucianism to servility, both Chen and Qin are claiming their own version of tradition. They both deny the interpretation of ills in society as a manifestation of national defects. Instead, they categorize the problems identified by cultural critics as part of a social and historical phenomenon instead of something inherent in Chinese culture.

Furthermore, Qin has also re-interpreted cultural history, both ancient and modern. He argues that Chinese society in imperial times was one in which Legalism and Daoist cynicism, rather than Confucianism, prevailed. A similar revision was made to the Chinese-Western intellectual exchanges in the late Qing: by describing the movement of learning from the West as one initially to import liberal ideas to aid Confucian idealism, he justifies his rectification of liberal attacks on Confucianism.

[710] Van Dongen, *Goodbye Radicalism!*, p. 241.

Whereas the critical discourse of national character perceives the elimination of cultural defects as the premise for modernization, to both Chen Lai and Qin Hui, the realization of modernization—though their understandings of modernization differ significantly—would provide a national condition for cultural change. In other words, contrary to what the national character critics claimed—"the ultimate solution is to reform the culture and the people", they believe it is the social condition that has to be changed.

In doing so, they intend to rescue tradition from the critiques of the national character, and to advocate a certain part of tradition as a positive and transcendent national spirit. For Chen, the national spirit is embodied in Confucian ethics as a humanistic, relation-oriented philosophy, and to Qin, it is the altruistic idealism in the Confucian tradition that he strives to revitalize. Instead of revolting against cultural tradition, both intellectuals search for a cultural identity by re-negotiating and making peace with tradition.

3. Revival of Confucianism: Cultural Nationalism?

Confucianism has undoubtedly been the most fundamental issue in the discourse of national character, around which the rationales, perceptions, and sentiments have been centered. By analyzing contemporary cultural critiques, I have shown how Confucianism has been reduced to an over-simplified notion of a backward feudalistic ideology; and by exploring the rejections of this notion, I have discussed how Confucianism has been brought into a positive light as part of the national spirit.

This counter-discourse of national character reflects the most recent Confucian revival in mainland China, the significance of which has been widely noticed both at home and abroad. It has to be noted, as many have done, that this non-radical intellectual turn is contributed to not only by New-Confucian scholars, but also by Chinese liberals, including the so-called New-Left scholars, Marxists, post-modernists, and so on.

The meaning of a Confucian revival has been further complicated by state efforts to incorporate Confucianism into the official ideology of "Socialism with Chinese characteristics": the Party-state's promotion of "its own affiliation with Confucian values"[711] has made the return of Confucianism subject to interpretation of its

[711] Davies, *Worrying About China*, pp. 133-134.

"suspicious involvement".[712]

From an international perspective, the return to tradition is also part of the global reflections of modernity that question the fundamental ideas, such as Enlightenment and scientific rationality, upon which the modern West has been based. The Confucian revival, then, as Dirlik describes, can be seen as "an articulation of native culture (and an indigenous subjectivity) against Euro-American cultural hegemony"[713].

As such, whereas Chinese critics of the national character have been very vigilant towards nationalistic sentiments, on the opposite side, the Confucian revival and "the identification with the national spirit" have been viewed as representing "a strong current of cultural nationalism".[714]

Indeed, Chen Lai uses Berlin's metaphor of "the bent twig" to describe nationalism as a natural collective response towards Western cultural hegemony, just as Qin Hui defends "true nationalism" as a natural attachment towards the nation—a nation that he compares with "family". Clearly, in their eyes, such a nationalism should be separated from political nationalism or popular nationalistic sentiments that are subject to state manipulation, therefore should be acknowledged as something not problematic. Yet is the term cultural nationalism adequate to make sense of the cultural perceptions of Chen Lai and Qin Hui?

I have previously argued that Levenson's history-value thesis is limited, yet here it is helpful to understand the transforming and transformed intellectual perceptions of tradition. This study has suggested that their return to tradition and their identification with a distinctive and transcendent national spirit can be understood as a re-union of history and value, if, at the time of Liang, they were drawn apart by various forces.

Chen Lai stands firmly against any attempt to reduce Confucianism to a tool of autocractic rule. He interprets Confucianism as a religio-ethical philosophy with a humanistic orientation. Furthermore, he contends that such a human-relations focus is an antidote against the problematic alienation of the individual in modern times. Qin Hui, while lamenting the fate of Confucian philosophy as having suffered from the dual intrusion of Legalism and Daoist cynicism, remains dedicated to what he describes as the transcendent Confucian spirit of altruistic moral idealism.

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712 Wang, *High Culture Fever*, p. 70.
713 Dirlik, "Chinese History and Orientalism", p. 113.
714 Guo, *Cultural Nationalism*, pp. 17 & 72.

For both, neither their emotional attachment nor their intellectual commitment to tradition is problematic. While history returns, its value has been reinterpreted in a way that is fundamentally different from the value that once drew Chinese intellectuals away from tradition as described by Levenson.

However, this return to the past and the Self does not signify a return to culturalism as an alternative to foreign barbarism. Rather, understanding the Confucian revival in the light of the discourse of national character, this research argues that these Chinese intellectual assertions of the intrinsic value of cultural tradition should also be viewed as voices to reject a cultural metamorphosis. In this sense, they are not simply a manifestation of cultural nationalism, but a rectification of self-negation and self-orientalization.

4. Confrontation of Perceptions: beyond the Intellectual Debate

The reform era has witnessed the rise and fall of different undercurrents that have shaped contemporary Chinese self-perceptions, bringing the century-old question of identity to a new context. Whereas the West, as the most powerful Other, has never left Chinese consciousness, the return of cultural tradition and Confucianism, the major features in the intellectual search for a cultural identity, has coincided with state efforts and popular sentiments to forge a sense of Chineseness.

As such, the negotiation between the past and the West remains the most important issue in Chinese self-perceptions and the Chinese search for a cultural identity. At the one end of the cultural spectrum, cultural iconoclasm tends to negate the past and calls for a radical reform of traditional culture, even national character. As dialectical responses to the anti-traditional tendency, many other schools of thought try to hold on to their belief in historical continuity and the right to cultural particularity without necessarily refusing to learn from the West.

Such unresolved tensions and the consequent adjustments in self-perceptions have been studied in the context of Chinese and Western perceptions. Western perceptions of China have gone through many transitions, taking turns throughout the course of Chinese-Western encounters. Most recently, the development of the Chinese economy, seen by many in the West in a positive light, has not eliminated the doubts about the rise of an authoritarian state as a global power. Despite continuous Chinese efforts to

promote a more positive international image and to boost its soft power worldwide, fundamental differences in the understanding of political-cultural values such as the form of government, human rights, etc. have affected Western perceptions of China. At times, the conflation of autocracy, servility and Chinese culture still echoes the voice of Arthur Smith from a century ago.

These perceptions have exerted longstanding and far-reaching influences on Chinese intellectuals as well as the general public. Since the late Qing and early Republican periods, the West has always been the most powerful Other in Chinese self-consciousness, which is a fact that no issue of political or cultural significance is able to steer away from. The presence of the Western Other has inspired many to learn from it, and at the same time also compelled many to overcome it.

The gap between Chinese and Western perceptions *of each other* is a result of an uneven flow of knowledge and perceptions over the last centuries. At the same time, it has drawn the two parts of the world closer, and in return created an ever-growing flow of knowledge and perceptions. Many in today's China have recognized the so-called universal values as seen represented in Western culture, and also accepted Western notions and even perspectives in making sense of the modern world. It is justified to say that a Western-oriented worldview has become an important part of Chinese perceptions—perceptions of the world, of the West, and of China itself.

However, the gap between Chinese and Western understandings *of China*—of its reality, its future direction, and the path it will take towards that future—still causes trade, diplomatic, strategic, and cultural confrontations and even conflicts. Along with increasing exchanges, this gap has played a crucial role in shaping the Chinese negotiation of a cultural identity.

What has been studied are three different answers to the question of cultural identity. My examination of the national character discourse was intended to do justice to the intriguing phenomenon of self-negation; at the same time, this research has aimed to shed light on the conservative turn in the cultural realm of mainland China that certainly deserves more study than it has already attracted.

Aside from the three types of self-perceptions, many other intellectual perspectives and approaches are not included in this research. The fact that they have not been discussed here does not suggest that they play a less significant role in contemporary Chinese cultural debate. This study invites further research to examine the cultural viewpoints

of, for example, the Marxists, the so-called New-Leftists, and the post-modernists that request equal academic and intellectual attention.

On a further note, the formation of intellectual perceptions is interwoven with many other factors that shape the landscape of contemporary Chinese culture. While intellectuals contribute in their unique ways, for being self-reflective and vocal, and with an imposed and self-imposed sense of social responsibility, their elitest perspective has undoubtedly been affected by the fast-changing and interacting forces of the media, the state and the market. Taking all these in mind, this research has served to remind us that the more we know, the more we know we do not know.

LIST OF CHINESE CHARACTERS

Ah Q 阿Q

baoshou zhuyi 保守主义

biaoceng 表层

Bo Yang 柏杨

Chen Duxiu 陈独秀

Chen Lai 陈来

Chen Pingyuan 陈平原

Chen Yinke 陈寅恪

Chen Zhen 陈阵

Chiang Kai-Shek (Jiang Jieshi) 蒋介石

chongfen shijiehua 充分世界化

chongyang meiwai 崇洋媚外

Choulou de Zhongguoren 丑陋的中国人

Da Xue (Great Learning) 大学

danhua 淡化

daojia 道家

Daqingguo 大清国

Deng Xiaoping 邓小平

dongya bingfu 东亚病夫

fajia 法家

fan chuantong zhuyi 反传统主义

Feng Youlan 冯友兰

Fu Manchu 傅满洲

Gan Yang 甘阳

gongde 公德

gongju lixing 工具理性

gongtong de dixian 共同的底线

gouqie 苟且

Gu Hongmin 辜鸿铭

guo cui 国粹

guo xue 国学

guojia sixiang 国家思想

guojin mintui 国进民退

guomin xing 国民性

Hai Guo Tu Zhi 海国图志

haiwai xin rujia 海外新儒家

He Shang 河觞

heping yanbian 和平演变

hequn 合群

Hu Shi 胡适

huang huo 黄祸

Huang Zongxi 黄宗羲

Huangyuan Feng 荒原风

huaqiao 华侨

jiang gang 酱缸

Jiang Rong 姜戎

jiazhi guannian 价值观念

jiazhi lixing 价值理性

jiben renge 基本人格

jijin zhuyi 激进主义

Jin Guantao 金观涛

jinbu 进步

Jing Ke ci Kongzi 荆轲刺孔子

jingwei 敬畏

jingshen qizhi 精神气质

jinqu maoxian 进取冒险

jiuxue wei ti, xinxue wei yong 旧学为体，新学为用

junquan 君权

kuanhou 宽厚

Lang Tuteng 狼图腾

Li Dazhao 李大钊

Li Zehou 李泽厚

lizhi 吏治

Liang Qichao 梁启超

Liang Shuming 梁漱溟

Lin Yusheng 林毓生

Lin Yutang 林语堂

Liu Qingfeng 刘青峰

Liu Xiaofeng 刘晓枫

Liu Yizheng 柳贻徵

Lu Xun 鲁迅

Mao Zedong 毛泽东

minben 民本

Ming Enpu 明恩溥 (Arthur Smith)

minqi 民气

minzhu 民主

minzu 民族

minzu guojia 民族国家

minzu jingshen 民族精神

minzu liegen xing 民族劣根性

minzu xing 民族性

minzu zhuyi 民族主义

pushi zhuyi 普世主义

Qian Liqun 钱理群

qiangquan zhexue 强权哲学

qimeng de beiju 启蒙的悲剧

Qin Hui 秦晖

qinghua guoxue yuan 清华国学院

Qingyi Bao 清议报

qiong ze jianji tianxia, da ze dushan qishen 穷则兼济天下，达则独善其身

qizhi 气质

quanli sixiang 权利思想

quanpan xihua 全盘西化

quanru zhexue 犬儒哲学

Quanxue Pian 劝学篇

renwen jingshen 人文精神

rujia 儒家

sangang wuchang 三纲五常

shangwu 尚武

shengli fenli 生利分利

Shi Misi 史密斯 (Arthur Smith)

Shiwu Bao 时务报

side 私德

sixiang jiefang 思想解放

Su Xiaokang 苏晓康

Sun Longji □ 隆基

suzhi 素质

Tang Junyi 唐君毅

Tang Yijie 汤一介

Tian'anmen 天安门

Tianchao 天朝

Tianxia 天下

ting li 挺立

tongyi 统一

Tu Weiming (Du Weiming) 杜维明

Wang Xiaofeng 王小峰

wenhua baoshou zhuyi 文化保守主义

wenhua de zhutixing 文化的主体性

wenhua jingshen 文化精神

wenhua minzu zhuyi 文化民族主义

Wenhua: Zhongguo Yu Shijie 文化：中国与世界

wenming 文明

wenti yishi 问题意识

wuwei 无为

xi 习

xi ru huirong, jiegou fa dao hubu 西儒会融，解构法道互补

xianshi 现实

xin lixue 新理学

xin rujia 新儒家

xin zuopai 新左派

xing 性

Xinmin Congbao 新民丛报

Xinmin Shuo 新民说

Xiong Shili 熊十力

Xueheng 学衡

xunjiao 殉教

Yan Fu 严复

yili 毅力

yiwu sixiang 义务思想

youhuan 忧患

Yu Jie 余杰

Yu Yingshi 余英时

Yuan Weishi 袁伟时

zaopo 糟粕

Zhang Taiyan 章太炎

Zhang Zhidong 张之洞

zhengzhi nengli 政治能力

zhenxia qiyuan 贞下启元

zhidu 制度

zhidu wenhua 制度文化

zhishi fenzi 知识分子

Zhongguo 中国

Zhongguo wenhua shuyuan 中国文化书　　院

Zhongguo chuantong xueshu wenhua 中国传统学术文化

zhongxiao, qinren, guimin, chongde 重孝， 亲人，贵民，崇德

Zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong 中学为体，西学为用

Zhongxue, ti ye, xixue, yong ye 中学，体也，西学，用也

ziyou 自由

ziyou zhuyi 自由主义

zizhi 自治

zizun 自尊

zizuo zhuzai zhi jingshen qigai 自作主宰之精神气概

Zouxiang Weilai Congshu 走向未来丛书

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SAMENVATTING

Dit onderzoek heeft drie verschillende hedendaagse Chinese intellectuele benaderingen van het vraagstuk culturele identiteit onderzocht, door te zich te richten op de discussie omtrent het nationaal karakter. De verschillende houdingen ten opzichten van het concept nationaal karakter zijn een afspiegling van strijdige percepties van het verleden, heden, en toekomst van een natie, daar het nationaal karakter wordt beschreven, geïnterpreteerd, en geëvalueerd binnen het referentiekader van haar plek in de geschiedenis en haar plek in de wereld.

De eerste benadering richt zich op het nationaal karakter verwoord als *guomin xing*. Deze term werd gebruikt in de periode van hervorming na 1978 door critici van de cultuur wiens doel het was om de grondslag van de veelvoud aan problemen in China aan haar culturele erfgoed te wijden. Deze critici, waaronder Jiang Rong en Wang Xiaofeng, kennen het door hun beziene gebrek aan moderniteit in hedendaags China toe aan de vasthoudenheid van de Confucianistische traditie en zelfs de psychologische blauwdruk van het volk. Met het identificeren van het nationaal karakter in termen van onderdanigheid en conservatisme, ontlenen ze hun materiaal uit eerder werk over het nationaal karakter uit de late Qing en de vroeg replublieke periode, zoals bijvoorbeeld dat van Liang Qichao en Lu Xun, als ook het recentere anti-traditionele werk van Gan Yang en overzeese critici zoals Bo Yang eind jaren tachtig.

Tegelijkertijd weerklinkt in de hedendaagse kritiek op het Chinese nationaal karakter ook een zelfde liberaal optimisme dat dominant is op globale schaal en dat gedeeld wordt door vele Chinese intellectuelen, zoals bijvoorbeeld Yuan Weishi. De modernistische lijn volgend meent deze groep intellectuelen dat het Chinese verleden en haar culturele traditie de modernisering van China in de weg staat. In hun optiek zou modernisering bereikt moeten worden door het Westers model te volgen.

Het anti-traditionele dat zich manifesteert in de discussie omtrent het nationaal karakter is slechts één puzzelstuk in een voortdurend debat omtrent traditie en moderniteit, radicalisme en conservatisme, China en het Westen, als ook de betekenis van het Chinees-zijn. De ‘cultuur koorts’ in de jaren tachtig en de verschuiving naar conservatisme in het intellectuele landschap in de decennia daarna, hebben beiden het

hedendaagse culturele landschap gevormd, met een nalatenschap van verschillende conflicterende en interacterende ideeën omtrent culturele identiteit. Daar waar sommige critici culturele hervormingen voorstaan om het gedachtegoed van het volk te moderniseren, om zo een moderne natie te herscheppen, zijn er net zozeer stemmen die Confucianisme en culturele traditie verdedigen.

De tweede benadering van het vraagstuk culturele identiteit in dit onderzoek komt vanuit het standpunt van de filosoof Chen Lai. Als exponent van het gedachtegoed en de filosofie van Confucius, weigert Chen de term *guomin xing* te gebruiken om de intrinsieke waarden van de Confucianistische cultuur en de cultureel-psychologische structuur van de Chinese geest te omschrijven. Alhoewel hij toegeeft dat veel kritiek op de culturele tekortkomingen gefundeerd is, is hij van mening dat de zogenoemde *guomin xing*, en wat diens critici beschouwen als nationale tekortkomingen, slechts een indicatie zijn van een socio-cultureel fenomeen van tijdelijke aard, en dat dit niet verward dient te worden met de ware aard van de Chinese cultuur, die hij *minzu xing* noemt.

De theoretische validiteit van de discussie omtrent nationaal karakter in twijfel trekkende, definieert Chen Lai *minzu xing* en de nationale geest als verankerd in de relatie-georiënteerde, humanistische, en transcedente Confucianistische filosofie. Wat hij verwerpt is een kader waarin traditie tegenover moderniteit staat, en waarin moderniteit wordt gedefinieerd door Westerse waarden. Het eerste noemt hij cultureel radicalisme, het laatste xenofilie. Zoals hij betoogt kan Confucianisme van grote betekenis zijn voor moderne samenlevingen, daarnaast hoeft het zijn legitimiteit niet te ontlenen aan haar instrumentele waarde tot modernisering. Daarbij is hij van mening dat de subjectiviteit van de Chinese cultuur niet in gevaar gebracht dient te worden door het modernistisch kader, dat een Westers product is.

Met historische en culturele continuïteit in het achterhoofd, voorziet Chen een opleving van Confucianisme boven op China's economische en sociale ontwikkeling. Echter, om Confucianisme te verdedigen tegen de beschuldiging dat het autocratie en gebrek aan democratie veroorzaakt, ziet Chen zich genoodzaakt om Confucianisme tot een soort morele richtlijn te reduceren om zo elke politieke implicatie te omzeilen.

De derde benadering wordt geleverd door Qin Hui. Deze historicus verwerpt ook de discussie omtrent het nationaal karakter, niet op grond van het corrigeren van cultureel radicalisme, maar omdat hij meent dat de logica van een dergelijke discussie

een vorm van cultureel determinisme weerspiegelt. Hij beargumenteert dat een kritiek als doel sociaal politieke instituties zou moeten hebben, in plaats van het zwart maken van de traditionele cultuur of het Confucianisme. Als een sterk voorstander van liberale principes neem Qin de 'derde weg' – een politiek-economisch liberalisme gecombineerd met sociale democratie – om zich de toekomst van de natie voor te stellen; dit in tegenstelling tot het zich zorgen maken om verschillende vormen van nationaal karakter, welke Qin beschouwt als esthetische preferenties die immuun zijn voor moreel oordeel.

Tegelijkertijd staat Qin de geest van de Confucianistische wijze voor om te compenseren voor de tekortkomingen van de liberaal-democratisch institutionele structuur, veroorzaakt door wat hij het inherente morele dilemma van liberalisme noemt. Zo bezien geeft hij het Confucianisme een idealistische transcedente gedachte van martelaarschap mee, *xunjiao*; dat wil zeggen: zich op te offeren voor middelmatigheid en te vechten voor de gewenste sociaal institutionele structuur. De Confucianistische geest in zijn conceptie is ook transcedent, net als Chen Lai's *minzu xing*, maar Qin's begrip van de betekenis van Confucianisme, en diens rol in de samenleving, verschilt sterk met Chen's begrip. Qin weet een veel duidelijker beeld te scheppen van de politieke implicaties van het Confucianisme door een samengaan van liberalisme en Confucianisme te suggereren, want zijn verdediging van het Confucianisme wordt ondersteund door zijn expliciete politieke standpunt.

Geschiedenis speelt een belangerijke maar ook ingewikkelde rol in deze drie benaderingen. De critici van het nationaal karakter zijn geïnspireerd door hun voorgangers van een eeuw geleden en door de 'cultuur koorts' in de jaren '80. De nalatenschap van hun voorgangers bestaat uit de vasthoudenheid om het verleden teniet te doen met als doel de natie in modernre en betere vorm te herscheppen, de strategie om zich zowel de geschiedenis van de 'Zelf' toe te eigenen, als om zich de Westerse 'Ander' met een eclectisch pragmatisme in te beelden. Het bestaan van Liang Qichao's "new people" thesis demonstreert Chinese integratie van Westerse percepties en kennis, zelfs Oriëntalistische, zoals duidelijk beschreven door Arhtur Smiths's *Chinese Characteristics*, in hun eigen zelf-perceptie en hun verbeelding van een modern China. In dat opzicht kan men stellen dat de intelligentsia ervoor gekozen heeft hun zorgen omtrent de toekomst van de natie uit te drukken in het omverwerpen van het imperialistische zelfbeeld van *Tianxia* en dit te vervangen door een sociaal Darwinistisch perspectief om de natie's plek in de wereld te evalueren in een

modernistisch kader. Ze werden hierbij gedreven door een dusdanig sterke crisis mentaliteit, *youhuan*, dat soms de radicale benadering te verkiezen was, zelfs al riskeerden ze hiermee gezien te worden als verraders van hun eigen verleden.

Als we de hervormingen van het nationaal karakter zien als een revolutionaire benadering, bewust gekozen om hervormingsdoelen te behalen, dan kan men stellen dat de opponenten van deze hervormingen een veel positievere houding ten opzichte van het verleden hebben. De culturele traditie en het Confucianisme zijn vanuit verschillende standpunten verdedigd, hetgeen duidt op een intellectuele trend die begon toe te nemen vanaf 1990. Chen Lai beschermt 'value rationality' van traditie en diens vanzelfsprekend recht in moderne samenlevingen op basis van zijn geloof in historische continuïteit, en Qin Hui is van mening dat de culturele hervormingen de verkeerde doelen nastreefden. Daar waar Chen de nadruk legt op "culturele subjectiviteit", staat Qin de convergentie van Confucianistisch gedachtegoed met liberale principes voor, beiden met een pluralistische visie op cultuur. Hun visies worden duidelijker in de context van een intellectuele verschuiving die samenvalt met een globale zoektocht naar de wortels van eigen cultuur.

De anti-traditionele geest aanwezig in de discussie omtrent nationaal karakter is verbonden met een paradoxale houding ten opzichte van geschiedenis, met gemixte gevoelens van trots en verafschuwing. De intellectuele neiging om die houding te corrigeren wordt idem gekenschetst door niet minder oprechte emoties. Alle drie benaderingswijzen delen de crisis mentaliteit en een gevoel van historische verantwoordelijkheid dat inherent is aan hun intellectuele identiteit. Alhoewel er onoverkomelijke verschillen in hun zelf-percepties liggen, is de morele plicht om de natie te verbeteren bij allen evenzeer te vinden in hun culturele proposities.

De vraag of men cultureel radicaal of cultureel conservatief is, hangt nauw samen met het vraagstuk van nationalisme. Critici van het nationaal karakter zijn waakzaam voor nationalistische sentimenten, daar dezen als irrationeel en manipuleerbaar door de staat worden gezien. Echter daar waar het de cultuur betreft, hebben Chen Lai en Qin Hui beiden hun sympathie voor nationalistische sentimenten laten horen, ofwel als een natuurlijke houding ten opzichte van de Westerse culturele hegemonie (de gebogen twijg), ofwel als oprechte compassie met de natie en emotionele identificatie met diens cultuur; iets wat in Qin's ogen gescheiden dient te worden van staats-nationalisme. De vaak gesignaleerde assertiviteit van een distinct

Chinese cultuur wordt geholpen door de ontwikkeling van overzees neo-Confucianisme, met name Tu Weiming's theorie van het "derde tijdvak van Confucianisme", met als gevolg globale speculatie over een Confucianistische opleving met implicaties die verder rijken dan de cultuur in China alleen.

De recente opleving van Confucianisme in China is geïnterpreteerd met behulp van cultureel nationalisme. Dit onderzoek beargumenteert dat de recente terugkeer naar traditie en de intellectuele identificatie van een distinct en transcedentaal nationaal gedachtegoed begrepen kan worden als een hereniging van geschedenis met normen en waarden, als, zoals Levenson stelt, ten tijde van Liang deze twee uiteengetrokken waren. Hedendaagse critici die de discussie omtrent nationaal karakter afwijzen, verwerpen ook tegelijkertijd dat hun eigen emotionele gehechtheid aan, of hun eigen intellectuele betrokkenheid bij traditie problematisch is. Deze Chinese intellectuele beweringen omtrent de intrinsieke waarde van culturele traditie moeten niet simpelweg gezien worden als een manifestatie van cultureel nationalisme, maar als stemmen die de culturele metamorfose afwijzen en als een herstel van zelf-ontkenning en zelf-Oriëntalisatie.

De drie intellectuele standpunten die dit onderzoek analyseert zijn verre van compleet om het gehele culturele landschap van China te beschrijven. Daarentegen is het doel van dit onderzoek ook eerder aandacht te schenken aan de complexiteit van een voortwoedend cultuur debat, en niet zozeer een poging het te reduceren. Het raadselachtige fenomeen van de zoektoch naar een culturele identiteit in een China in transitie behoeft verdere studie en interpretatie om een licht te werpen op de onderliggende drijfveren achter China's internationale imago, haar publieke diplomatie, en haar 'soft power'.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Shu Chunyan (March 10, 1980, Loudi, China) started her Ph.D. research at the Leiden Institute for Area Studies (LIAS), Leiden University in 2006, after she finished her one-year Mphil. training at the same department.

Prior to this Ph.D. research project, she received four years of university education at the School of International Business Management, Nankai University, Tianjin (B.A., 2001); and then went on to pursue her interests in International Communications at the School of Journalism and Communication, Beijing University (M.A., 2005), during which she spent half a year as an exchange student at Copenhagen University, Denmark (2003). Both her M.A. study and her exchange program were on full scholarship.

Next to her academic commitment, Shu Chunyan has worked at various institutes and companies since 2002, including *Trends* Magazine (Beijing), Research Center for Financial and Economic News at Beijing University, Pitzer College (USA) in China Program, Modern East Asia Research Center (MEARC) at Leiden University, Brill Academic Publishers, and the Chinese website for Radio Netherlands Worldwide (RNW).