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Goodbye Radicalism! Conceptions of conservatism among Chinese intellectuals during the early 1990s

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"GOODBYE RADICALISM!"

CONCEPTIONS OF CONSERVATISM AMONG CHINESE INTELLECTUALS
DURING THE EARLY 1990S

ELS VAN DONGEN

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“GOODBYE RADICALISM!”

CONCEPTIONS OF CONSERVATISM AMONG CHINESE INTELLECTUALS DURING THE EARLY 1990S

PROEFSCHRIFT

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*Are we to paint what's on the face,
what's inside the face,
or what's behind it?*

PABLO PICASSO

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>CLG</i>	<i>Chinese Law and Government</i>
<i>CYX</i>	<i>Chuantong yu xiandai</i>
<i>EYS</i>	<i>Ershiyi shiji</i>
<i>LOC</i>	<i>The Limits of Change</i>
<i>POCS</i>	<i>Political Order in Changing Societies</i>
<i>XGJ</i>	<i>Xiao Gongqinji</i>
<i>YZLG</i>	<i>Yu zhengzhi langman zhuyi gaobie</i>
<i>ZFL</i>	<i>Zhishi fenzi lichang</i>
<i>ZYG</i>	<i>Zhanlüe yu guanli</i>

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1.

INTRODUCTION

ON CONSERVATISM, CONCEPTS, AND CONTEXTS

Anschauungen ohne Begriffe sind blind.

IMMANUEL KANT

1.1 THE LIMITS OF CONSERVATISM

More than two centuries ago, the conservative thinker Edmund Burke (1729-1797) could never have imagined that his magnum opus *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) would play a central part in discussions among Chinese intellectuals during the early 1990s.¹ Around that time, the curious phenomenon of the re-examination of a century of history through the medium of Western thinkers—Edmund Burke being one of the most prominent among them—spread throughout Chinese academia. In addition, the concept of “conservatism” became an essential ingredient of debates on the nature of modern Chinese history. It is ironic, to say the least, that the ideas of a man who had been obsessed with particularity and context were now applied to a context with which they seemed to have nothing in common. What, then, did this reference to Burke and other thinkers in early 1990s China signify? Did debates on “conservatism” reflect a mere juggling with “isms,” a rhetorical and instrumental trick, or did they mark a shift in the intellectual world that can be described as a move toward conservatism?

Raising the issue of conservatism in a Chinese context is problematic. In order to show why, this introduction takes, in the tradition of the “essay-review,” a book as an entry point. This approach is beneficial in that it both presents the problems at hand and addresses the way in which others have attempted to resolve these problems, which amounts to what the intellectual historian Dominick La Capra has called a “dialogical”

¹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event: In a Letter Intended to Have Been Sent to a Gentleman in Paris* (London, 1790). Reprinted in Frank M. Turner, ed., *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2003).

critical discourse.² The book in question concerns the only Western monograph on modern Chinese conservatism during the Republican period, the 1976 volume *The Limits of Change*, which was the outcome of a 1972 conference at Harvard University on “Intellectuals and the Problem of Conservatism in Republican China.”³ This volume is not only relevant because it addresses the issue of conservatism in a Chinese context; it is also useful for the study of intellectual developments in 1990s China because at that time, many Chinese intellectuals were acquainted with the book and referred to it in articles on conservatism.⁴

The general framework of this 1976 monograph attempted to revise the argument put forward by the historian Joseph Levenson that after the encounter with the West, the Chinese resort to tradition could only arise from emotional and psychological needs.⁵ For Levenson, the arrival of the West had distorted the balance between Chinese “history” and universal “value,” and the embrace of Chinese tradition served to restore this balance. As such, Levenson’s “traditionalism” is reminiscent of the term as it has been used by the sociologists Karl Mannheim and Max Weber, namely as an unreflective and psychological clinging to tradition.⁶ Hugh Cecil has referred to “traditionalism” as “natural conservatism,” whereas Rossiter has called it “temperamental conservatism.”⁷ The positive contribution of *The Limits of Change* was that it rightly indicated that the resort to tradition in modern China was a modern phenomenon based on conscious choice.

The greatest shortcoming of the book was that it made an attempt to integrate a variety of phenomena into a general framework that suited some cases, but certainly not all—it ignored the limits of the concept of “conservatism.” In their introduction, both

² La Capra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*, 20-21.

³ Charlotte Furth, ed., *The Limits of Change: Essays on Conservative Alternatives in Republican China* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1976). (Henceforth: *LOC*)

⁴ Most of the essays in *LOC* (with the exception of the essays by Schneider, Eastman, and Dirlik) are translated in Zhou Yangshan and Yang Suxian, eds., *Jindai Zhongguo sixiang renwulun: baoshou zhuyi* (Taipei: Shibao wenhua chuban shiye youxian gongsi, 1980).

⁵ Levenson, “‘History’ and ‘Value’: The Tensions of Intellectual Choice in Modern China,” 146-194.

⁶ Mannheim, “Conservative Thought,” 152-156; Max Weber used the term both in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and in his studies on religious sociology.

⁷ Cecil, *Conservatism*, 9; Rossiter, *Conservatism in America*, 5. However, as Vierhaus has rightly noted, the distinction between “traditionalism” and “conservatism” is not absolute; many words derived from the field of meaning of “traditionalism” are used to define conservatism. Examples are the notions of organic growth, preservation and nurture, order, historical development and continuity. See Vierhaus, “Konservativ, Konservatismus,” 533.

Charlotte Furth and Benjamin Schwartz argued that a Western notion of conservatism based on the accounts of the German sociologist Karl Mannheim and the “founding father” of conservatism, Edmund Burke, could be applied to modern China. In his monumental article on conservatism in Germany, Mannheim had asserted that conservatism could be portrayed as a “style of thought,” a “dynamic, historical structural configuration” that changed over time and that had to be situated above concrete manifestations, but that was nevertheless connected to these individual expressions.⁸ As such, according to Mannheim, it allowed for both inner unity and variations in content. As a “style of thought,” conservatism opposed the rationality and abstract thought of the Enlightenment and replaced it with a stress on particularity and the historically grown. As distinct from “traditionalism,” modern conservatism only arose in particular circumstances. Whereas the progressive movement was marked by a belief in the “consciousness of the possible,” conservatism clung to the concrete and the qualitative.

Conservatism approached things from the past—everything that existed was the result of historical growth. Reform in this context was not based on future ideals, but on this very historical process: change had to be congruent with what had historically become. Progressivism, on the other hand, approached things from something above or beyond, such as a future utopia or transcendent principles. If one understood conservatism as an opposition to rationalism, it did not have to disapprove of change as such—what mattered was how change was approached. In his *Reflections on the Revolutions in France*, Edmund Burke had also underlined gradualism and continuity—society for Burke was a contract between past, present, and future generations. As Burke put it, “[p]eople will not look forward to posteriority, who never look backward to their ancestors.”⁹ On this basis, Burke made a case for historically grown institutions against changes based on revolutionary “blueprints” of society.

Basing herself on Mannheim, Charlotte Furth, the editor of *The Limits of Change*, argued that modern Chinese conservatism was characterized by a certain “style of thought” to which all subjects studied in the volume adhered, regardless of variations in content. This “style” was a historical consciousness according to which change through individual action could only have limited influence on the environment, since

⁸ Mannheim, “Conservative Thought,” 132, 155.

⁹ Burke, *Reflections*, 29.

this environment was ruled by external and contingent forces.¹⁰ Furthermore, both Charlotte Furth and Benjamin Schwartz claimed that modern Chinese conservatism was primarily a “cultural conservatism”; it was not a Burkean conservatism aimed at the preservation of the sociopolitical status quo.¹¹ They asserted that this was the case because the decline of the “mystique of the imperial monarchy” since the 1890s had separated the political order from the moral and cultural orders.¹² Apart from this distinction between culture and politics, Furth also divided conservatives into “nativists” for whom Chinese culture was a particular, and “universalists,” for whom Chinese values were primarily universal values.

Using this framework, then, the book included articles on National Essence (*guocui*), on political modernizers such as Yuan Shikai (1859-1916) and the Kuomintang (KMT), on the so-called “New Confucians”—who based their understanding of Confucianism on the Neo-Confucianism of the Song (907-1279) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties—and on “modern historicism.” The latter was used to refer to both the social evolutionism of the historian Tao Xisheng (1899-1988), and to the writer Zhou Zuoren’s (1885-1967) cyclical view of history and his retreat from the public sphere.¹³ These trends already indicate the problem with the term conservatism: how could the notion of “cultural conservatism” be applied to figures such as Yuan Shikai? And how could the defense of timeless universal values by New Confucians be interpreted as a Mannheimian rejection of abstract thought or a Burkean defense of the historically grown? Furth asserted that both were marked by what she termed “presumptions of continuity.”¹⁴

Schwartz posed the question: “Can people who are wholeheartedly committed to modernization ever be considered conservative?”¹⁵ For Schwartz, the answer was positive, since modernization was a process independent of human will, a process that

¹⁰ Furth, “Culture and Politics,” 51.

¹¹ Schwartz, “Notes on Conservatism,” 16.

¹² Furth, “Culture and Politics,” 25. However, Furth also notes that this separation was by no means a permanent attribute of modern Chinese conservatism. By the 1930s, the two realms were reunited in a “sociological view of historical evolution” as represented, for example, by Tao Xisheng, Chen Lifu, and Feng Youlan. See *ibid.*, 46.

¹³ Tao Xisheng’s social evolutionism, in which class struggle was not considered an indispensable element of dialectical materialism, represented the left KMT position on Chinese society. Tao defended this position in the so-called “social history controversy” of the late 1920s and early 1930s. After 1937, Tao had close ties with the KMT leadership under Chiang Kai-shek. Zhou Zuoren, a translator and essayist, was the younger brother of Lu Xun.

¹⁴ Furth, “Culture and Politics,” 50.

¹⁵ Schwartz, “Notes on Conservatism,” 12.

required stability and an awareness of the unique nature of Chinese historical culture.¹⁶ Furth did not distinguish between different motives behind advocacies of historical continuity; for her, both a subscription to continuity that was recommended for practical reasons and a defense of continuity based on the belief that things were historically grown were manifestations of conservatism. However, the resort to tradition of a Yuan Shikai was by no means marked by a Burkean belief in the historically grown; it was a utilitarian and calculated resort to tradition. Although one might perceive continuity, it was nevertheless a constructed effort based on pragmatic selection. Hence, the question rises of whether a belief in some sort of historical continuity as such is sufficient to apply the term “conservatism,” especially when the historical continuity that is upheld does not stem from a belief in the inherent value of tradition.¹⁷ Another problem with Furth’s argument is that she presents conservatism both as the belief that there are limits to the human interference in historical processes and as the endorsement of some sort of historical continuity. These, however, are two distinct definitions, and, as Arif Dirlik’s article on Tao Xisheng demonstrates, it is perfectly possible to combine an advocacy of historical continuity with a promotion of progress and voluntarism.¹⁸ If conservatism entails a belief in the “limits of change,” then this definition cannot be applied to all subjects of the study.¹⁹

Most authors in the volume did not adhere to the framework outlined in the introduction. Guy Alitto, for example, treated Chinese conservatism as part of a global reaction against modernization as rationalization.²⁰ In late modernizing countries such as China, Alitto contended, modernization was perceived of as a Western product; the result was a cultural conservatism that joined hands with nationalism.²¹ This, then, was in accordance with Levenson’s argument that the resort to tradition could only be emotional; it outlined the possibility of intellectual choice. Moreover, it also excluded

¹⁶ Ibid., 14, 18-19.

¹⁷ In his article on Tao Xisheng, Dirlik has phrased it as follows: “His stress on historical process was not so much a consequence of commitment to tradition as a reflection of concern with change in the present.” Dirlik, “T’ao Hsi-sheng: The Social Limits of Change,” 325.

¹⁸ Ibid., in *LOC*, 305-331.

¹⁹ A case in point is Liang Shuming’s rural reform program, which had strong utopian traits. Alitto has even compared some aspects of it to socialist programs.

²⁰ Alitto, “The Conservative as Sage: Liang Shu-ming,” in *LOC*, 213-241.

²¹ Alitto has also formulated this argument in *The Last Confucian: Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). See also Ai Kai (Guy S. Alitto), *Shijie fanwei nei de fan xiandaihua sichao: lun wenhua shoucheng zhuyi* (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1991).

the possibility of a universalism that was not utilized in the service of cultural nationalism. The New Confucians in the volume, Tu Wei-ming and Chang Hao, also discarded Levenson's thesis, but instead of adhering to the historical consciousness argument, they posited that New Confucianism was either a purely intellectual construct or a reaction to an intellectual crisis that was a crisis of meaning.²² Nowhere did Tu and Chang discuss "the limits of change"; on the contrary, although for New Confucians, the individual was indeed part of a larger cosmological scheme, this did not imply that the individual could have only a limited effect on the environment. It was through the inner cultivation of the individual that change in the outer world could be achieved.

Finally, Eastman's article on the Kuomintang was based on the definition of conservatism as a defense of the status quo, a definition that Furth certainly did not share.²³ Following Clinton Rossiter's argument that there was no conservatism in rapidly modernizing societies—in America, industrialism and democracy turned conservatism into a progressive force—Eastman held that this type of conservatism that was keen on preserving the status quo had been rare in modern China. The Kuomintang chose to create a new and modern order, not to preserve the status quo.²⁴ Consequently, this implies that the term was not suited to refer to the Kuomintang in a period of rapid change instead of preservation, which contradicts other articles in the book in which the term conservatism was associated with the Kuomintang. In the light of these observations, the question of whether the term "conservatism" is useful at all to discuss intellectual trends in modern China comes to mind. The book could be considered an example of what La Capra has termed "synoptic content analysis," or the unproblematic identification of entities or structures that are presented in a narrative form.²⁵

The Limits of Change was not the first book in which the term "conservatism" was used inconsistently; Mary Wright applied the term to discuss the Tongzhi

²² Tu Wei-ming, "Hsiung Shih-li's Quest for Authentic Existence," in *LOC*, 242-275; Chang Hao, "New Confucianism and the Intellectual Crisis of Contemporary China," in *LOC*, 276-302. Throughout this study, the names of those New Confucians who are generally referred to in Wade-Giles will be transcribed in Wade-Giles instead of in Pinyin. This is done because many overseas and Taiwanese scholars, including Yü Ying-shih, would not identify with a Pinyin transcription for political reasons. Hence, in this case, faithfulness to the convictions of the authors overrules consistency. (In the character list, however, these names have been organized alphabetically according to the Pinyin system, with the Wide-Giles transcription mentioned in parentheses).

²³ Young, "The Hung-hsien Emperor as a Modernizing Conservative," in *LOC*, 171-190.

²⁴ Rossiter, *Conservatism in America*, 219.

²⁵ La Capra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*, 33.

Restoration (1862-1874) in her 1957 book *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism*.²⁶ Wright declared that modern Chinese conservatism differed from “Western” conservatism in several important respects. The latter was typified by a belief in the divine and in original sin; it postulated the sacred character of private property; it distrusted reason and preferred a “prejudice” based on experience; it renounced the universal in favor of the parochial. Chinese conservatism, on the other hand, adhered to beliefs that were “radical” from the point of view of “Western” conservatism, such as the notion of a rational natural order; the priority of group interests over private property; the postulation of the innate goodness of man; the reverence of customs as a reflection of reason instead of a remedy against it; and the concept of the universal state. The reason why Wright availed herself of the term was, as she put it, that both European and Chinese conservatism had “the intent to conserve.”²⁷ However, if conservatism was merely about preservation, then the differences listed by Wright were not differences in the essence of conservatism; they were merely differences in the status quo that conservatives intended to preserve. For the Chinese side, Wright merely described the characteristics of a Confucian sociopolitical order and identified these with a Chinese conservatism.

Michael Gasster employed the term in a similar fashion in his 1969 book *Chinese Intellectuals and the Revolution of 1911: The Birth of Modern Chinese Radicalism*.²⁸ Gasster associated the term “radicalism” with the birth of a new intelligentsia and its quest for “rapid and thoroughgoing social, economic, and political change,” or modernization.²⁹ In line with the modernization theories of the 1960s, Gasster contrasted this “modern radicalism” with a “traditional conservatism” not so keen on innovation.³⁰ For Gasster, “radicalism” was a dissatisfaction with present conditions that was translated into both the creation of utopian goals in the future and reformist or revolutionary optimism. Conservatism, then, was merely the opposite of innovation. This dualist interpretation led Gasster to conclude that all modernizers

²⁶ Mary Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The T'ung-Chih Restoration, 1862-1874* (New York: Atheneum, 1966 (Stanford University Press, 1957)).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁸ Michael Gasster, *Chinese Intellectuals and the Revolution of 1911: The Birth of Modern Chinese Radicalism* (Seattle, London: University of Washington Press, 1969).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, viii.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, xvii.

during the first years of the twentieth century had been “radicals,” regardless of whether they had been revolutionaries or reformers.

Notwithstanding the simplistic identification of conservatism with preservation in the accounts of both Gasster and Wright, Wright’s account in particular raises questions about concrete manifestations of conservatism and their relation to general conservative themes. For example, authors such as Isaiah Berlin and Andreas Kinneging have argued that the conservative opposition to Enlightenment was not a mere opposition to abstract rationalism, as Mannheim claimed; it was directed against the denial of original sin in particular.³¹ The editors of *The Limits of Change* have treated the absence of the question of original sin in China as a mere variation in content that did not contradict the Mannheimian “style of thought,” but where does the “content” end and the “style” start?

1.2 1990S CHINA: THE “SYNCHRONIC” APPROACH

As can be seen from *The Limits of Change* and from the two books discussed above, much confusion arises because authors have applied different approaches in their analysis of “conservatism,” from which different definitions follow. For some, including Wright and Gasster, “conservatism” is the preservation of the status quo, an approach that one author has called the “commonsense” approach.³² Although this is the literal meaning of the term, it is not very useful, for it robs conservatism of any consistent content: if the status quo changes, the content of conservatism changes. In addition, since all ruling parties, including revolutionaries, aim to preserve their power, a functional definition is too broad to be useful.³³

As one author notes, the projection of the label “conservatism” onto a Left-Right axis, in a “two-dimensional field,” is mostly a strategy to relate beliefs in an “unambiguous” way.³⁴ This strategy might be politically efficient, but academically, it has little value. The praxis of locating conservatism on a Left-Right axis could be called a “horizontal” or “synchronic” approach, in which the focus is on the attitude towards the status quo. The Mannheimian and Burkean notions of conservatism, on the contrary,

³¹ Berlin, “The Counter-Enlightenment,” 264; Kinneging, “Het conservatisme,” 1-33.

³² Allen, “Modern Conservatism,” 583-584.

³³ Epstein, “Introduction,” 5, 8.

³⁴ McAllister, *Revolt Against Modernity*, 8.

could be called “diachronic” or “vertical” notions of conservatism in which the crucial aspect is the link between the past, the present, and the future. In the latter, change is not simply disapproved of; the core of conservatism is rather *how* to bring about change, a point that will be addressed further in this chapter. Therefore, in their objection to the “commonsense” approach, many authors are right in pointing out that conservatives do want change; some conservatives are reformers, whereas others are reactionaries.³⁵

Other approaches to conservatism are equally problematic. Mannheim has linked his notion of different “styles of thought” to different social groups or classes. According to this sociohistorical approach, interests are the driving force behind ideas and ideologies. Conservatives, then, defend the interests of the ruling class. According to Mannheim, intellectuals are unattached in the sense that they do not constitute a separate class or social group—they are “free-floating.” Intellectuals move freely between classes and are like “ideologues”: they come up with arguments for whatever cause they support. Since they are independent, it is easier for them to know the interests of others.³⁶ However, this does not explain why they choose to defend the interests of one class and not the other, which is in the end also a matter of rational choice. For this reason, the interest-driven approach reduces all forms of conservatism to apologetics, thereby depriving them of any philosophical content and intellectual choice.

The opposite approach in which thought is reduced to certain reappearing core ideas—as, for example, in Lovejoy’s notion of “unit ideas”—is equally problematic because it can lead to anachronism and false continuity.³⁷ Lovejoy’s approach does not account for individual aims: if all systems of thought consist of basic “unit ideas” that are continuous, then no thought can ever be attributed to a specific era or a specific thinker—all we have is a set of basic components that are combined in various ways.³⁸ The danger of this approach is, as the historian Butterfield puts it, that history might fall prone to the fallacy of “abridgment,” or the repression of discontinuities and the

³⁵ Epstein, for example, distinguishes between “defenders of the status quo,” “reform conservatives,” and “reactionaries.” See Epstein, “Introduction,” 7-15.

³⁶ Mannheim, “Conservative Thought,” 185.

³⁷ For Lovejoy’s “unit ideas” approach, see his “Introduction: The Study of the History of Ideas,” 3-23.

³⁸ For a criticism of Lovejoy, see Mandelbaum, “History of Ideas,” 33-66.

straightening of curved narratives.³⁹ La Capra has used the notion of “retrospective reconstruction” to indicate the danger of this approach: by focusing on certain core ideas in the present, one is inclined to rewrite history as the history of the unfolding of these core ideas, thereby ignoring other core ideas that have been equally important. In a similar vein, Fischer has referred to the “fallacy” of “presentism,” an approach in which the author starts from a certain condition in the present and understands the past merely in the light of this current state of affairs—he fails to see the past in its own terms.⁴⁰ One might object that all historians unavoidably embed facts in a certain narrative, as Hayden White reminds us, but by reducing intellectual history to certain basic themes, dissimilarities between individual manifestations are more likely to be obliterated and aberrations are more prone to exclusion.

The German author Epstein has solved the problem of the relation between timeless values and concrete manifestations by arguing that we can find some conscious conservative principles—which are tied to the denunciation of a progressive rationalism and utopianism—but we can only do so in *specific* forms in *specific* periods of time.⁴¹ Similarly, Muller has applied an approach to conservatism that identifies a “constellation” of recurrent assumptions, themes, and images that acknowledges both historical and national diversity and continuity.⁴² Hence, Muller describes certain “conservative” characteristics—such as the conviction that humans are imperfect and that institutions and habits (what Burke has termed the “second nature” or the “veil”) are needed to restrain individuals; the adherence to historicism and particularism; the emphasis on duties instead of voluntary contracts; and the belief in the social utility of religion—but he is still skeptical about meaningful general statements because conservatism is tied to very specific contexts.⁴³

This skepticism regarding general statements seems all the more justified if one looks at, for example, certain manifestations of post-1945 American conservatism. On the one hand, the “neo-conservatism” of the American intellectuals Russell Kirk (1918-1994)⁴⁴ and Robert Nisbet (1913-1996)⁴⁵ might be said to correspond largely to the

³⁹ Butterfield, *Whig Interpretation of History*, 24, 103.

⁴⁰ La Capra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*, 17; Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies*, 135-140.

⁴¹ Epstein, “Introduction,” 13.

⁴² Muller, “Introduction,” 23.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 10-14, 19-22, 23.

⁴⁴ Kirk studied at Michigan State University and Duke University and is most famous for his book *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Santayana* (Chicago: H. Regnery Company,

characteristics of Burkean conservatism.⁴⁶ Kirk has underlined the importance of social order, customs, and tradition, as well as the link between property and freedom.⁴⁷ Nisbet has likewise mentioned the importance of a “prejudice” based on experience; he has reiterated order, private property, religion, tradition, and the irreconcilability of liberty and equality.⁴⁸ On the other hand, however, there are important distinctions between Burkean and American conservatism; Rossiter has maintained that the latter is more optimistic, materialistic, and individualistic than the former.⁴⁹

Whereas Kirk and Nisbet have clearly reworked Burkean themes, it is harder to find these concerns in the works of, for example, the political philosopher Leo Strauss (1899-1973),⁵⁰ another important founder of post-1945 American conservatism. Strauss’s criticism of the inherent relativism in liberalism has led him to speak for a return to classical philosophy. In Strauss’s works, there is a tension between the Burkean reliance on tradition and the affirmation of a normative order that defies all forms of historicism and relativism. For McAllister, who has analyzed Strauss’s writings, conservatives are defenders of Western civilization; the belief in transhuman normative structures—whether it is in the form of the natural law tradition, revelation,

1953). In this book, Kirk outlined six “canons” or common themes in conservatism, namely (1) the belief in a transcendent order; (2) an attachment to the “variety and mystery” of human life; (3) the notion that social order is needed; (4) the conviction that property and freedom are linked; (5) the adherence to custom and convention; (6) the view that innovation must take place in relation to existing habits and traditions. In *The Politics of Prudence* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1993), Kirk expanded the six “canons” to ten principles. For an early version of these ten principles, see Kirk’s 1957 article “The Essence of Conservatism” at <http://www.kirkcenter.org/index.php/detail/essence-1957/>. See also the extended excerpt of his 1993 essay “Ten Conservative Principles” at <http://www.kirkcenter.org/index.php/detail/ten-conservative-principles/>.

⁴⁵ Robert Nisbet was a sociologist trained at the University of California, Berkeley. He is famous for his *Conservatism: Dream and Reality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

⁴⁶ Epstein even criticizes “neo-conservatives” in the United States for identifying *specific* manifestations of conservatism, namely Burkean conservatism, with conservatism as such. He refers to both Kirk and Nisbet in this respect.

⁴⁷ See Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 21-69.

⁴⁸ Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 37-84.

⁴⁹ Rossiter, *Conservatism in America*, 68-73.

⁵⁰ The political philosopher Leo Strauss was born in Kirchhain, Prussia, and obtained his Ph.D. at the University of Hamburg under the supervision of the Neo-Kantian philosopher Ernst Cassirer. In 1949, Strauss became a Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago. Strauss’s most famous work is *Natural Law and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971). In the latter, Strauss criticized historicism, positivism and modern rationalism and argued in favor of a return to the natural right theory of classical political thought.

or Platonic essences and forms—is the basic characteristic of conservatism.⁵¹ Because there is a clear tension between a Burkean emphasis on the historically grown and a Straussian quest for a normative order that casts aside relativism, Axel Schneider has made a distinction between a “classicist” conservatism that identifies timeless, universal norms—examples are Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin (1901-1985),⁵² Michael Oakeshott (1901-1990),⁵³ and Irving Babbitt (1865-1933)⁵⁴—and a “historicist” conservatism that leaves the question of universal standards unanswered and that stresses the particularity of traditions. Whereas the former can be found mostly in the Anglophone world, the latter was a crucial aspect of nineteenth-century German conservative thought, but it has also been present—be it in an embryonic form—in Burke’s thought.⁵⁵

From the above, it can be seen that a reduction of conservatism to either the defense of the status quo and certain interests, or to some general principles that can be applied to all times and places does not do justice to the complexities at hand. This leads us to the question of how both European and American authors have approached the issue of conservatism in 1990s China. How have they dealt with the issues that Furth and Schwartz addressed in the 1976 volume? What approaches have they brought into play and what definitions have resulted from this? A first point that can be made is that the dominant approaches for 1990s Chinese conservatism were the “commonsense” approach and the sociohistorical approach. In the former situation, the term “neo-conservatism” was associated with the preservation of the status quo—centralization in

⁵¹ McAllister, *Revolt Against Modernity*, 12, 262-264.

⁵² Eric Voegelin was born in Cologne and studied political science at the University of Vienna, where he obtained his Ph.D. under the Neo-Kantian Hans Kelsen. His most famous book is *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), a criticism of modernity’s belief in the power of knowledge to transform reality and an attempt to restore premodern political theory.

⁵³ Michael Oakeshott studied history at the Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, and later became a Professor of Political Science at the London School of Economics (LSE). Oakeshott is most famous for his collection of essays *Rationalism in Politics, and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1962). In “Rationalism in Politics,” Oakeshott distinguished between immediate or “practical knowledge” and general, abstract knowledge or “knowledge of technique.”

⁵⁴ Irving Babbitt was born in Dayton, Ohio, and studied Sanskrit, Buddhism, and romance languages at Harvard University and the Sorbonne. In 1912, Babbitt became Professor of French Literature at Harvard University. Together with Paul Elmer More, Babbitt developed the core ideas of what later came to be known as New Humanism, in which an attack was launched on the romanticism of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

⁵⁵ Schneider, “The One and the Many,” unpublished paper for AAS, 2005.

times of economic liberalization—and in the latter instance, the term was reduced to the defense of the “interests” of certain groups or individuals.⁵⁶

Most European and American researchers of Chinese “neo-conservatism” during the 1990s were political scientists, which explains why the term has mostly been associated with elitist struggles over reform.⁵⁷ According to this framework, “neo-conservatives” intended to preserve the centralized state of the pre-reform era in the face of the destabilizing consequences of economic reform. In addition, “neo-conservatism” was a response to both questions of political legitimacy and the crisis of Marxist ideology. To the element of centralization, most authors have thus also added nationalism, populism, authoritarianism, political stability, and ideology, the result of which was the emergence of a kind of “neo-conservative” “configuration.”⁵⁸ The German political scientist Schubert, for example, has used the term “neo-conservatism” in the context of a paradigm of “political nationalism.”⁵⁹ Some American authors have focused on the “anti-liberal” traits of “neo-conservatism” in particular.⁶⁰

The greatest disadvantage of this paradigm is that it reduces “neo-conservatism” to a debate on policy, thereby excluding the use of the term in intellectual circles and depriving it of any content that goes beyond questions of political legitimacy and the search for a new ideological foundation. Conservatism in this context is but a positional ideology that has nothing to do with a philosophical stance in which abstract thought is discarded in favor of the concrete or the qualitative; it does not oppose progressivism and it does not defend continuity because of the notion that things are historically grown. The general approach to 1990s conservatism, then, was synchronic—it was mostly concerned with how conservatism was utilized for present purposes, but it did not address the question of how conservatism, which was also concerned with the nature of change, could be employed to analyze the relation between past, present, and future.

⁵⁶ McCormick and Kelly, “Limits of Anti-Liberalism,” 805. Lin Min distinguishes between “hard” neo-conservatives (He Xin and Xiao Gongqin) who support the status quo, and “soft” neo-conservatives (Dai Qing, Wu Jiaxiang, and Yuan Zhiming) who support the reformers. See Lin Min, “Overview,” 70-71.

⁵⁷ Fewsmith, “Neoconservatism,” 79.

⁵⁸ Chen, “Neoconservative Political Thought,” 593.

⁵⁹ See Gunter Schubert, *Chinas Kampf um die Nation: Dimensionen nationalistischen Denkens in der VR China, Taiwan und Hong Kong an der Jahrtausendwende* (Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde, 2002).

⁶⁰ The title of McCormick and Kelly’s article, “The Limits of Anti-Liberalism,” is telling in this respect.

Those European and American researchers who *have* made use of the term “neo-conservatism” to refer to intellectual developments of the 1990s have analyzed it as part of a paradigm of “cultural conservatism,” but they have nevertheless reduced the latter to ideological perspectives in line with “cultural nationalism.” As Guo Yingjie has explained, cultural nationalists do not conceive of the nation in political-territorial or in civic terms; the nation is a “primordial expression of a national spirit and national solidarities like families, *organic* beings and living personalities.”⁶¹ The core of the nation is its unique civilization. Contrary to political nationalists, for whom the focus of loyalty is the Party, for cultural nationalists, the nation forms the primary object of loyalty.⁶²

By thinking of “cultural conservatism” and “cultural nationalism” together, analysts have interpreted references to Chinese tradition as a mere emotional response to a history of humiliation. As such, rather than analyzing “conservatism” in relation to intellectual trends of previous decades, they have merely concentrated on the relation between China and “the West.” Schubert, for example, has associated “cultural conservatism” with “cultural nationalism,” whereas Guo Yingjie has drawn on the notion of “cultural nationalism” to analyze a variety of intellectual phenomena during the 1990s, ranging from New Confucianism and revisionist historiography to debates on postmodernism and language reform.⁶³ Regardless of whether or not conservatism can be universalistic in nature—as Furth has insisted for New Confucianism—this framework is problematic because it either politicizes all references to tradition, or it presents them as emotional reactions. Although there are certainly some political and emotional aspects to the return to tradition, the rise of tradition cannot merely be reduced to these two factors. For some, the return to tradition was a conscious and intellectual choice.

This synchronic model has also reduced intellectual discussions to discussions on policy; questions that surpassed matters of political legitimacy and reform have therefore been ignored. Sullivan, for example, has read intellectual debates on “conservatism” as an attempt to seek a middle position between radical reformers and

⁶¹ Guo, *Cultural Nationalism*, 18. Emphasis in original.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶³ Schubert, “Was ist Neokonservativismus?,” 57-74; Guo Yingjie, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary China: The Search for National Identity under Reform* (London, New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004).

hard-line conservatives.⁶⁴ Meissner has ascribed the revival of traditional political thought in China to the official embrace of Confucianism since 1986; he has thus treated the resort to culture and tradition as an instrumental means to create order and stability and to construct a new national identity. Similarly, he has associated “neo-conservatism” with intellectuals who support the status quo, with the interests of “cadre capitalists” and with the rise of nationalism.⁶⁵

Although some attempts have been undertaken to reconcile developments in the political world with those in the intellectual world, once more, the actors involved have been political scientists. In a study on conservative thought in contemporary China, for example, Peter Moody has made use of the term “conservatism” to investigate power struggles among the elite, which has led him to a study of “traditionalism,” nationalism, populism, and “neo-conservatism.”⁶⁶ Although Moody has also dealt with some intellectual manifestations of conservatism, he has not addressed questions that go beyond policy matters. Fewsmith’s impressive book *China Since Tiananmen* has successfully addressed both political and intellectual changes since 1989, but it has been short on the wider implications of debates on conservatism for the intellectual world.⁶⁷

1.3 CONTESTED CONCEPTS: METHODOLOGICAL OUTLINE

The above reveals that the topic of what Chinese conservatism implied for the intellectual world of the 1990s has mostly been absent from European and American accounts. Instead of posing the question of how intellectual debates have shaped policy, this study deals with the broader meaning of intellectual debates in which figures such as Edmund Burke have been invoked; much more than a mere manifestation of nationalism or debates on policy, Chinese intellectuals tried to come to terms with the past and to redefine what it meant to be Chinese and to be an intellectual in a rapidly changing society. The resort to Chinese tradition surpassed questions of political legitimacy; for some, it was an intellectual choice to deal with problems of morality, whereas others made an attempt to rework socialist notions of Chinese identity. In

⁶⁴ Sullivan, *Democracy and Developmentalism*, 339.

⁶⁵ Meissner, “New Intellectual Currents,” 18-19.

⁶⁶ Peter Moody, *Conservative Thought in Contemporary China* (Lanham, Boulder: Lexington Books, 2007), 14.

⁶⁷ Joseph Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen: The Politics of Transition* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

dealing with these issues, instead of applying preconceived notions of “conservatism” to Chinese currents of thought that are then labeled as such, this research looks into how the *concepts* of “conservatism” (*baoshou zhuyi*) and “neo-conservatism” (*xin baoshou zhuyi*) were *used* and *discussed* in a Chinese context. Consequently, like Lovejoy’s “history of ideas,” this study moves away from “systems” and “isms,” but instead of focusing on “unit ideas,” it turns toward language.

This choice is justified by the fact that, as La Capra has rightly noted, “the rethinking of intellectual history by way of the text-context problem raises the issue of language.”⁶⁸ By turning to language, the “dialogical” relation to the past that La Capra had in mind can be realized, because instead of engaging in a “retrospective construction” in which clarity is assumed, this approach reveals the sense-making efforts of the historical subjects *themselves*.⁶⁹ A Chinese author has made the distinction between “neo-conservatism” as a “label” and “neo-conservatism” as a “banner,” the latter of which denotes the advocacy of a specific program.⁷⁰ This research distinguishes between “labels” and “banners” and attempts to understand why and how Chinese intellectuals have utilized them rather than to apply “labels” to Chinese intellectual currents on the basis of European or American “banners.”

Certain basic *concepts* form the primary unit of analysis in this study. As for Koselleck, the concept is a “factor,” or, in Skinner’s terminology, it is a weapon or an instrument.⁷¹ The great merit of the approach that Koselleck and others have employed in their monumental work *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* was that it connected the history of concepts with a social and political history.⁷² This approach broke with the older German approach of *Geistesgeschichte*, an approach that, drawing upon the history of philosophy, suggested the autonomous development of ideas of which concepts were the unproblematic reflection. The authors of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, on the contrary, linked concepts to different groups, classes, and strata in society and showed how concepts were contested. Secondly, they concentrated on

⁶⁸ La Capra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*, 18.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Jin Yuanpu, “He yi ‘baoshou zhuyi,’” 385.

⁷¹ Koselleck uses this term in *Futures Past*, 156.

⁷² Otto Brunner, Werner Conze and Reinhart Koselleck, eds., *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972-1997).

changes, ruptures, and conflict; these conceptual changes were related to changes in political, economic, and social structures.

As in Koselleck's *Begriffsgeschichte*, the key concepts analyzed here will be treated as *contested* intellectual constructions. However, whereas Koselleck aimed at documenting the sociopolitical order in its entirety by looking into the use of concepts among different social groups, this study concentrates on the use of concepts by different *intellectuals*. Hence, this study could be considered a microscopic version of Koselleck's approach, since the focal point is not how concepts are contested between different groups (inter-group), but on how they are contested within a certain group (intra-group). Another modification with regard to Koselleck's approach concerns the time frame of this study. Whereas Koselleck studied how the use of concepts changed over a period of a hundred years, this study only deals with the use of concepts during the early 1990s; as such, this study is more synchronic than diachronic. Nevertheless, given the rapid social changes at the time and the consequent change in the use of concepts, some diachronicity is nevertheless present.

Although Koselleck focused on contestation and rupture, he still believed in the possibility of the construction of a history of concepts, which meant that a general meaning could be derived from the use of concepts in various contexts. Intellectual historians such as Skinner, however, have argued that "there can be no histories of concepts; there can only be histories of their uses in argument."⁷³ Similarly, Pocock has applied the term "discourse" to point at the variety of contexts in which a concept can be put to use. However, although both Skinner and Pocock have centered on language and context, their approaches diverge in some crucial respects. For Pocock, what the author can say is constrained by existing language; it is because language is ambivalent that ideas are ambivalent. Criticism of this approach is therefore that individual beliefs are left out and that the idea is a mere reflection of social structures.⁷⁴ For Skinner, since every speech act is unique, one can only concentrate on the speech acts of individuals; no general meaning can be derived from it. Thus, Skinner has taken linguistic conventions as a focal point; he has treated theories as intentional speech acts.

⁷³ Skinner, "Reply to my Critics," 283. Quoted in Richter, "Political Languages," 64.

⁷⁴ For a criticism of Pocock and Skinner, see for example Bevir, "Mind and Method in the History of Ideas," 167-189.
" 167-189.

Consequently, for Skinner, beliefs are subordinate to intentions.⁷⁵ Critics of both Skinner and Pocock have accused them of not being concerned with coherence or belief systems, or of having treated the notion of “intention” as unproblematic.⁷⁶

Taking this criticism into account, this study also focuses on the use of concepts in argument, but unlike Pocock and Skinner, it does not exclude the question of coherent beliefs or meaning from the start. The focus of attention will not be on how existing language restricts its users, but whether or not the concrete uses of language can be tied to a coherent set of beliefs shared by all participants. Following Koselleck, this study does not rule out the possibility that concepts can obtain a meaning that is passed over time despite different uses in context. By focusing on the use of concepts, but by also asking the question of whether there is a higher unit behind them—individuals, groups, or even “styles of thought”—this study is an intellectual history that aims to be more than a history of “men thinking.” Consequently, this research takes from Koselleck the idea of *contested* concepts, but leaves out the diachronic aspect; it exchanges the history of concepts for a study of their use *in argument*.

In this context, Koselleck’s notion of *Gegenbegriffe* or “counterconcepts” is extremely useful.⁷⁷ As Koselleck explains, “counterconcepts” are utilized for self-definition; those who apply them attempt to create unity through the reliance on simplistic dualisms. In some instances, these dualisms are unequally antithetical or asymmetric, which means that those who set up the dualism present their own stance in such a way that readers cannot but negate the “counterconcept” and identify with their stance. Moreover, those who are associated with a certain “counterconcept” mostly do not identify with this position. Simplistic dualisms are therefore set up for polemical reasons; more than theoretically valuable, they are politically instrumental. Koselleck adds that one should not rely on these dualisms to read history; rather, one should look at how historical subjects employ these constructions, and one should question this usage in order to obtain historical meaning.

The “counterconcept” that will be examined in this study is that of “radicalism” (*jijin zhuyi*), against which the concepts of “conservatism” (*baoshou zhuyi*) and “neo-conservatism” (*xin baoshou zhuyi*) were projected. The idea for this entry point came

⁷⁵ See for example Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” 3-53.

⁷⁶ Bevir, “Mind and Method,” 167-169; LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*, 36.

⁷⁷ For an explanation and some examples of “counterconcepts,” see Reinhart Koselleck, “The Historical-Political Semantics of Assymetric Counterconcepts,” in *Futures Past*, 155-191.

after the discovery of a Chinese volume entitled *Intellectual Positions: The Turbulence between Radicalism and Conservatism*.⁷⁸ This 1999 volume is a collection of debates on “radicalism” and “conservatism” in a variety of contexts, which hence unites both manifestations of a so-called “neo-conservatism” as described above, and a “cultural conservatism” in which intellectuals resort to traditional culture. However, the volume does not contain an introduction in which an attempt is made to bring these different manifestations together and to compare the use and content of the concepts at hand. This research, then, attempts to fill that gap because it considers the unifying “counterconcept” of “radicalism” to be a fruitful entry point for analysis.

By starting from both the usage and the meaning given to the notion of “radicalism” in different contexts, the discursive construction of conservatism will be analyzed. Since the meaning of “radicalism” and “conservatism” is contested and constructed through discourse and dialogue, we are dealing with, as Mikhail Bakhtin has phrased it, a “dialogical” construction. In Bakhtin’s view, language can be perceived of as enabling “an almost Manichean sense of opposition and struggle.”⁷⁹ Language incessantly stratifies, leading to an interaction between different languages that can be perceived of as “dialogism.” Bakhtin has used the metaphor of the ray of light, which is refracted and distorted before it reaches object and receiver. In other words, any action of transmission of information is also an action of appropriation.⁸⁰ Although Bakhtin’s focus of research was the novel, his notion of “heteroglossia” can also be interpreted as a general model of discourse in which meaning is “refracted,” to use a term from physics. Words for Bakhtin were “multi-accentual,” or, as Eagleton puts it, “they were always the words of one particular human subject for another,” which is why Eagleton links Bakhtin’s philosophy of language to that of J.L. Austin.⁸¹

Eagleton makes this link because both Bakhtin and Austin have accentuated the particular context of statements and the particular audience to which they are addressed. Austin notes that statements are always made in certain circumstances, to a certain audience, for certain purposes, and with certain intentions.⁸² For Bakhtin, every speaker

⁷⁸ Li Shitao, ed., *Zhishi fenzi lichang: jijin yu baoshou zhijian de dongdang* (Changchun: shidai wenyi chubanshe, 1999).

⁷⁹ Holquist, “Introduction,” xviii.

⁸⁰ Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination*, 424, 432.

⁸¹ Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 102-103.

⁸² Austin, *Doing Things with Words*, 145.

has a “social horizon”; the enunciation is always directed at a well-defined audience.⁸³ We find an echo of this claim in La Capra’s definition of intellectual history: “If intellectual history is anything, it is a history of the situated uses of language constitutive of significant texts.”⁸⁴ Secondly, for both Bakhtin and Austin, language is not just descriptive; it is a form of social action. Austin argues against what he calls the “descriptive fallacy,” or, the idea that statements are merely made to describe or state facts. Since “constative” speech acts are also “performative,” one should not just analyze the meaning of words but also look into what act was performed in what circumstances.⁸⁵ Bakhtin agrees with the fact that isolated enunciations constitute the substance of language, but he rejects the “individual subjectivism” in favor of a social understanding of enunciations—verbal interaction is the key to understanding.⁸⁶

This research, then, picks up the linguistic contextualism of both Bakhtin and Austin, and it draws on Bakhtin’s “pluriaccentuation” in particular, but it detaches these notions from their original frameworks.⁸⁷ This is done because Bakhtin’s Marxist philosophy of language reduces the struggle of meaning to a mere ideological struggle between classes, whereas Austin’s speech act theory does not move beyond the utterance as a unit of analysis. Instead, the central research question that will be dealt with here is the following: was the use of the concepts of “conservatism” and “neo-conservatism” by intellectuals during the early 1990s tied to a general “style of thought” that went beyond individual utterances? The term “conceptions” in the title of this study refers to both the aspects of the concrete use of terms and the question of a general “style of thought.” On the one hand, it includes the word “concept,” which, as the English translation of Koselleck’s *Begriff*, refers to the specific use of the terms “conservatism” and “radicalism.” On the other hand, however, “conception” also refers to a more general understanding, or to a broad or abstract idea of something. Since the term “conception” also means “fertilization,” it is also suited for the study of conservatism in a Chinese context, because new formations and creations occurred when Chinese intellectuals appropriated existing terms.

⁸³ Yaguello, “Introduction,” 15.

⁸⁴ La Capra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*, 18-19.

⁸⁵ In *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin distinguishes between three different “uses of language”: (1) “locutionary acts” or utterances that have meaning (what we do *in* saying something); (2) “illocutionary acts” or utterances that have a certain force; and (3) “perlocutionary acts” or utterances that achieve a result *by* saying something.

⁸⁶ Bakhtine, *Philosophie du langage*, 134, 136.

⁸⁷ Term from *ibid.*, 44.

The question of whether the use of concepts is tied to a more fundamental shift in ways of thinking can be said to be a return to the Mannheimian “style of thought” question, but the approach is very different, or, to put it in the words of the object of research, more “conservative”: it starts from the *particular* use of concepts instead of from abstract notions or ideas. Do the concepts used represent a certain *Denkstil* or *Zeitgeist*, and if not, are they at least expressions of a common set of presuppositions? Or, are we merely dealing with *individual* speech acts in which concepts are invoked for unrelated purposes? In order to judge whether various uses of concepts were indeed manifestations of a conservative “style of thought,” it is necessary to first define what is understood by that term. Contrary to Furth’s conviction that notions of continuity are sufficient to identify conservatism, this study does not treat references to tradition based on practical motives as manifestations of conservatism. In 1861, a German author claimed that the deeper meaning of conservatism could only be understood through the question of what was being preserved on which *grounds* and for which *goal*.⁸⁸ As distinct from a mere focus on the reference to tradition or the defense of historical continuity, both the principles on which tradition is upheld and the goal of this promotion will be taken into account.

For Rossiter, the *goal* of change must be the preservation of tradition, laws, habits, or customs, all of which belong to the community. The change that is recommended must be limited, and it must be a response to a social need. According to this definition, the mere defense of status or property—what Rossiter calls “possessive conservatism”—or the defense of the status quo because one is satisfied with it—“practical conservatism”—are not conscious conservative positions.⁸⁹ Only what Rossiter calls “philosophical conservatism” is a conscious conservative position. Rossiter describes this as follows:

The philosophical conservative subscribes consciously to principles designed to justify the established order and guard it against careless tinkering and determined reform. His conservatism is explained in intellectual as well as psychological, social, and economic terms. He is conscious of the history, structure, ideals, and traditions of his society; of the real tendencies and implications of proposals of reform; and of the importance of

⁸⁸ Vierhaus, “Konservativ, Konservatismus,” 561. Vierhaus refers to Wagener, “Konservativ,” in *Staats- und Gesellschafts-Lexicon*, Vol. 5 (1861), 541.

⁸⁹ Rossiter, *Conservatism in America*, 5-8.

conservatism in maintaining a stable social order. (...) His loyalty to country projects into the past, and his sense of history leads him to appreciate the long and painful process through which it developed into something worth defending.⁹⁰

In other words, Rossiter asserts, the true conservative prefers stability to change, continuity to experiment, and the past to the future. Change must take place respectful of the past; the possibilities of reform are limited. Rossiter's distinction between different kinds of conservatism clearly shows the importance of the question of *how* things are defended, and for what *goals*. A reference to tradition must be based on conservative *principles*, such as a criticism of the modern as regards its progressivism, its notion of mechanical and calculated time, and its abstract Enlightenment thought. Instead, a conservative mode of thinking focuses on the organic, on the historically grown nature of things, on the "prejudice" of habits and institutions, and on the particular. In other words, a defense of tradition or historical continuity can only be called a conservative outlook if it is based on anti-progressivism and on the belief in the weight of the historically grown. True conservatism does not return to tradition because this suits modernization—it does so because it is critical of the time consciousness of modernity; because it argues against an abstract reason that does away with the local, the particular, and the historically grown; and because it defies a progressivism in which utopian goals are projected into the future.

1.4 ADVANTAGES OF THE APPROACH FOR THE STUDY OF 1990S CHINA

Based on models from political science, intellectuals can be categorized as those "within the system" (*tizhinei*), and those "outside the system" (*tizhiwai*); in other words, there are the "state" actors and the "society" actors.⁹¹ As Bonnin and Chevrier have claimed, though, the "state" versus "society" distinction is too simplistic with regard to the post-Mao era. Instead, the relation between intellectuals and political actors during that epoch needs to be conceived of as a "continuum": even autonomous-based intellectuals often deliberately sought political patrons; they were also subjected to

⁹⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁹¹ For a distinction between "state" and "society" actors, see, for example, Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen*, xvi.

informal influences and political circumstances.⁹² Moreover, like the Confucian literati, Chinese intellectuals had an ambiguous relation with the state—they were both its servants and its critics.⁹³ Even those intellectuals who were not “establishment intellectuals” did not necessarily criticize the government; they rather wanted “to discover and transmit the truth” about their objects of research.⁹⁴

Gu and Goldman have contended that there are two main definitions of “intellectuals,” one that categorizes them as experts, the other which focuses on their critical nature. Whereas the first definition is positive in that it is encompassing, its negative aspect is that it equates intellectuals with professionals. The second definition, although narrower, problematically focuses on the confrontational aspect of the relation between intellectuals and the state only.⁹⁵ Given these limitations, then, what definition of intellectuals suits the context of 1990s China? In order to answer this question, it is useful to look into Zhidong Hao’s modes of organization of intellectuals.⁹⁶ Apart from the location of intellectuals as a criterion—within the system or outside the system—Hao has also made a distinction between “humanistic” and “technocratic” intellectuals based on their professional orientation. If one takes the distance between intellectuals and interest groups as a criterion, they can be categorized as “organic,” “critical,” “unattached,” and “revolutionary” intellectuals. “Organic” intellectuals, as Gramsci has defined them, represent the interests of the new class—the bourgeoisie. In a Chinese context, this means that “organic” intellectuals support the interests of the CCP.

If we combine these various modes of organization, we can say that in this study, intellectuals are mostly “humanistic” intellectuals “outside the system,” but “technocrats” “within the system” will also be investigated. As will be demonstrated, those “outside the system” could have certain “organic” qualities; it was not necessarily the case that all intellectuals “outside the system” were “critical” intellectuals. In addition, even those intellectuals “within the system” were also very “critical” in several respects. Concerning the “humanistic” intellectuals in this study, as Schumpeter has phrased it, they “talk or write about subjects outside their professional competence.”⁹⁷ Similarly, Irving Kristol has defined an intellectual as “a man who speaks with general

⁹² Bonnin and Chevrier, “The Intellectual and the State,” 579, 582.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 571.

⁹⁴ Gu and Goldman, “Introduction,” 12.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 2-4.

⁹⁶ Hao, *Intellectuals at a Crossroads*, 1-72.

⁹⁷ Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, 146.

authority about a subject on which he has no particular competence.”⁹⁸ Kristol adds that this seems ironic, but it is not—the lack of specialization separates the intellectual from the professional. Many of those who engaged with the terms “radicalism” and “conservatism” in modern Chinese history were not historians by training—some were philosophers, others were literary critics.

These “humanistic” intellectuals raised their voices from within universities because, as distinct from the organization of intellectual debate around publishing houses and editorial committees during the 1980s, universities were the driving factor behind debates during the 1990s.⁹⁹ In the tradition of the Confucian scholar-official, Chinese “humanist” intellectuals discussed social, political, and cultural issues because they still considered the fate of the nation their personal responsibility.¹⁰⁰ Although the modern *zhishi fenzi* (knowledgeable elements) differed from the traditional literati (*shi*) in several respects, what the two had in common is that they both underscored the importance of public concerns. The Western term “intelligentsia,” which had emerged in Russia in the 1860s, also contained this meaning of public concern and of serving the nation.¹⁰¹ In 1990s China, then, this concern with the fate of China translated itself into the implicit question of the role of the intellectual in society. In spite of the differences in attitude pertaining to the question of political engagement, it was clear that most intellectuals nevertheless envisaged a leading role for intellectuals in Chinese society.

Because reflections on modern Chinese history were driven by present problems, a Chinese history Professor Emeritus has remarked that the rewriting of history during the 1990s by intellectuals of various disciplines resembled H.G. Wells’s *The Outline of History* (1920). The predicament of the post-war era had urged Wells to rewrite the history of mankind with a stress on humanism and education. The predicament that Chinese intellectuals faced during the early 1990s was that of a conflict between a revolutionary past and a present that focused on reform, and between the break with tradition and the rediscovery of that tradition. Following the suppression of the Tiananmen Square demonstrations on June fourth, 1989, and in the context of the decline of socialism, the scrutiny of history was not just a historical effort; it was also a *moral* effort to found “norms of objective historical judgment” that were not susceptible

⁹⁸ Kristol, *Neoconservatism*, 75.

⁹⁹ Wang, “Introduction,” 14.

¹⁰⁰ Davies, *Worrying about China*, 50, 54.

¹⁰¹ Hao, *Intellectuals at a Crossroads*, 377-385.

to the mistakes of past norms. It was assumed that the intellectual who engaged with a century of history had “the authority to judge the past for its moral flaws and merits from the vantage point of an omniscient observer.”¹⁰²

The discursive approach allows for an interaction between culture and politics and between intellectual phenomena and official policy. By including “radicalism” in particular, the interaction between a semi-official “neo-conservatism” and intellectual manifestations of conservatism becomes manifest: many intellectuals, regardless of whether they were “humanistic” or “technocratic” intellectuals, utilized the same concepts. Nevertheless, the fact that intellectuals employed terms from official propaganda did not mean that they simply echoed official reform policies. During the 1990s, intellectual thought did not serve as a “weathervane of reform directions” anymore, as had been the situation during the 1980s.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, the two were not entirely separated; both often mirrored each other because both sides managed to appropriate discourses according to their own needs and advantages. This “curious parallel” between official ideology and intellectual debates first appeared in the theme of reflections on “radicalism,” a theme on which both groups “initiated discussions separately, yet converged pragmatically.”¹⁰⁴ By focusing on “radicalism,” it becomes clear that intellectual debates were not simply “orchestrated” by official ideology; instead of a “coerced outcome,” they were a response to the same conditions as official ideology was.¹⁰⁵

Moreover, by including the “counterconcept” of “radicalism,” “conservatism” can be studied in a wider context, since a variety of debates come into the picture. In a footnote, one author has noted the interconnection between debates on “radicalism” and other debates by pointing out that the Harvard-based “New Confucian” Tu Wei-ming also took part in rejections of “radicalism.”¹⁰⁶ This research shows that the overlap went much further than what can be explained in the space of one footnote. The issue of “radicalism” was entangled with debates on civil society, New Confucianism, commercialization, and postmodernism. By focusing on the concepts of both “conservatism” and “radicalism,” the practice of Chinese “taxonomy,” as Davies has

¹⁰² Davies, *Worrying about China*, 55.

¹⁰³ Wang, “Introduction,” 15.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 16, 17.

¹⁰⁵ Chen, “Neoconservative Political Thought,” 596.

¹⁰⁶ Wang, “Introduction,” 18, fn. 17. Wang refers to Tu’s article “Beyond the Enlightenment Syndrome,” *EYS* 1 (December 1990), 12-13.

called it, in Chinese discourse can be mapped. Davies goes as far as treating the “taxonomy” of “conservatism” versus “radicalism” as an example of the Confucian practice of “rectifying names.”¹⁰⁷ The fact that positive or negative moral qualities were projected onto concepts reveals once more that the use of concepts went beyond an academic exercise.

Most importantly, however, the dialogical approach takes into account the *diachronical* nature of the reference to tradition. The main focus is not on the relation between China and “the West,” but on the relation between a present based on reform and a revolutionary past that has discarded tradition. As such, reductionist interpretations in which all treatments of tradition are explained as manifestations of a merely emotional and “anti-Western” “cultural nationalism” can be avoided. By also reading the debates as an expression of a conflict between the present and the past, the question of identity can be dealt with without necessarily leading to a narrow concern with “cultural nationalism.” Although Guo Yingjie has also concentrated on the relation between the return to tradition and a past revolutionary identity, he has nevertheless still interpreted all resorts to tradition as instances of “cultural nationalism,” as explained above. Although, as Davies has rightly declared, Chinese discourse is a “nation-centered discourse,” this does not mean that all Chinese intellectuals who have applied the term “radicalism” can be referred to as “cultural nationalists.”¹⁰⁸

That the relationship between present and past is of crucial importance for the understanding of rejections of “radicalism” can be seen from the central role that history occupied in the debates. History functioned as a medium to discuss political, economic, social, or ethical issues, and, in some instances, in the tradition of “allusion historiography,” the detour of history was used to discuss sensitive political issues in particular. This had been a well-known practice among Chinese intellectuals during previous decades, which is why officials had often interpreted historical works as political criticisms.¹⁰⁹ Nonetheless, the reference to history in intellectual debates on

¹⁰⁷ Davies, *Worrying about China*, 127.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁰⁹ A famous example that comes to mind is Wu Han’s play on the dismissal of the Ming official Hai Rui, which was seen as a reference to the dismissal of Peng Dehuai after the latter had criticized the Great Leap Forward. On this play, see Tom Fisher, “‘The Play’s the Thing’: Wu Han and Hai Rui Revisited,” in Jonathan Unger, ed., *Using the Past to Serve the Present*, 9-45.

“conservatism” and “radicalism” cannot be *reduced* to the practice of “allusion historiography.”

History also constituted the very object of debate: events in modern Chinese history were subjected to reinterpretation. The condemnation of “radicalism” points at “the road not taken”—by suggesting that certain incidents had been mistaken, the rewriting of modern history was in some way also an exercise in counterfactual history. The attempts to cast off “radicalism” were, as Nietzsche has formulated it, “an attempt to gain a past *a posteriori*.”¹¹⁰ In this sense, for the participants, the disclosure of the “essence” of history was more important than the reconstruction of historical facts.¹¹¹ This revaluation of modern Chinese history, as will be demonstrated, had important consequences with regard to conceptions of the political legitimacy of the CCP, national identity, and the role of intellectuals in society.

Some intellectuals went even further and tied their revaluation of modern Chinese history to a conception of an ideal moral order that they desired to restore. In Chinese historiography, the image of a mirror has often been invoked with reference to the relationship between past and present, or, by extension, the past and the future—it was believed that one could “know the future in the mirror of the past” (*jianwang zhilai*). Hence, the past was looked upon as a storehouse of moral examples that could be used for guidance; the past was perceived of as being reflected in the present. Benjamin Schwartz has called this reference to history an “‘unhistorical’ history” because it considered history to be a “reservoir of metahistorical experience in ethical, political, and other aspects of life.”¹¹² As Schneider has phrased it, “it was by writing history that the *dao* was made visible to the present.”¹¹³ Since it was believed that the ideal moral order had been realized in history—namely during the Three Dynasties—history was, so to speak, a channel to Truth.¹¹⁴ Although the rise of modern Chinese

¹¹⁰ Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, 21.

¹¹¹ Weigelin-Schwiedrzik has characterized Party historiography in China as a combination of *shi* (historical facts, *shishi*) and *lun* (historical interpretation (*pinglun*) and theories (*lilun*)). Whereas the former aims to reconstruct the facts for remembrance, the latter is more interested in what is perceived of as the “essence” of history than in factual details. See Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, “Party Historiography,” 160-162.

¹¹² Schwartz, “History in Chinese Culture,” 23.

¹¹³ Schneider, “Between *dao* and History,” 55. Schneider mentions the position of Zhang Xuecheng as an example. According to Zhang, “all classics are history” (*liu jing jie shi*), which implies that their description of past events is also an exposure of the *dao*.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8. The Three Dynasties include the Xia Dynasty (ca. 2000 B.C.- ca. 1600 B.C.), the Shang Dynasty (ca. 1600 B.C.- ca. 1100 B.C.), and the Zhou Dynasty (ca. 1100 B.C.-249 B.C.).

historiography meant that many Chinese historians turned towards scientific methods, modern historiographers still resorted to history to make moral claims. The study of historiography should thus be investigated in a wider perspective.

Finally, the focus on the use of concepts in Chinese debate allows us to pay closer attention to the process of appropriation, a process that requires us to abandon preconceived and familiar notions in favor of the study of the use of concepts in a new context. As Davies notes, intellectual discourse in China is tied to the very consequences of political violence; it is, in many respects, a “battlefield.”¹¹⁵ Another important characteristic of Chinese discourse that Davies identifies is the quest for national perfection and the notion that the Chinese intellectual has a moral obligation toward his or her country, as already briefly touched upon before. As such, foreign theories are often employed instrumentally in the service of this very “crisis mentality” (*youhuan yishi*) of the Chinese intellectual; they are employed to identify and solve Chinese problems.¹¹⁶ This is not to say that all theories are used instrumentally in a Chinese context, but observations like these remind us of the fact that, in a Chinese context, the concept of conservatism might be subjected to a “creative transformation.”

1.5 SOURCES AND OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Given the notion of contested concepts, this study mostly relies on debates among intellectuals, but it also investigates articles that were not part of academic discussions. Articles published in the leading academic Hong Kong journal *Ershiyi shiji* (Twenty-first Century) and in the mainland journals *Dongfang* (Orient) and *Dushu* (Reading) constitute the main object of research. The older journal *Reading*, which was founded in 1979, had a liberal orientation, whereas the intellectuals around *Dongfang*—which was founded in 1993, but closed down at the end of 1996—were mostly liberals, but they also included intellectuals with conservative inclinations. *Twenty-first Century* is of particular importance because Chinese intellectuals overseas inspired mainland criticisms of “radicalism”; the journal *Twenty-first Century* functioned as a bridge between mainland and overseas scholars. Since this research concentrates both on intellectuals who were based at universities and on intellectuals who operated in the

¹¹⁵ Davies, *Worrying about China*, 2-3.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-8.

vicinity of policy circles, journals that were closer to official ideology and more politically-oriented, such as *Zhanlüe yu guanli* (Strategy and Management)—a journal that one scholar has referred to as the “major forum of neo-conservatism”—have also been consulted.¹¹⁷

Apart from these Hong Kong and mainland journals, some Chinese journals in the United States, such as *Zhongguo zhi chun* (China Spring), have also been included for the evident reason that those who had sought refuge abroad after the suppression of the Tiananmen uprising during the spring of 1989 uttered criticism of “neo-conservatism” in overseas journals. Moreover, given the nature of intellectual debate during the 1990s—namely, the interaction between overseas intellectuals and intellectuals from mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan—these journals also need to be taken into account. Secondly, in addition to debates in journals, the collective writings of some intellectuals have also been consulted in order to link their viewpoint on “anti-radicalism” with their broader intellectual framework. Finally, interviews conducted by the author with both the key intellectuals in this study and prominent other Chinese intellectuals in the field constitute a third important source of information.

The unifying thread throughout this study is the rejection of something referred to as “radicalism.” In Chapters Two and Three, this happens in the context of the advocacy of a political theory of “neo-conservatism,” that is, a theory that deals with the legitimacy and authority of government. Chapters Four to Six deal with various uses of the term “conservatism” in response to “radicalism” in modern Chinese history. As will be demonstrated, the advocacies of “technocratic” intellectuals and the concerns of “humanistic” intellectuals greatly overlapped, and a crucial chapter in this respect is Chapter Three, which investigates the “neo-conservatism” of the historian Xiao Gongqin.

Although Xiao Gongqin’s theory contained many of the features of the theory of “neo-conservatism” as discussed in Chapter Two, the projection of “radicalism” into modern Chinese history also resembled the intellectual practice of “humanistic”

¹¹⁷ Zhao, “Nationalistic Writing,” 736. *Strategy and Management* was founded in 1993 by the Chinese Strategy and Management Research Society, which reportedly had ties with the headquarters of Military General Staffs. According to Suisheng Zhao, his interviews suggest that the intellectuals behind the journal used this military influence in support of their work. See *ibid.*, fn. 35.

intellectuals of the time. Therefore, Chapter Three functions as a hinge between the criticism of “radicalism” by the “technocratic” intellectuals of Chapter One, and the reflections on “radicalism” in modern Chinese history that are expressed in Chapters Four, Five, and Six. Because Xiao’s theory contained both elements, it is presented as a “politics of history” that not only dealt with questions in the political realm, but that also overlapped with the critique of “radicalism” in modern Chinese history.

Chapter Two first analyzes the study of Chinese “neo-conservatism” in American and European research, after which it focuses on how Chinese intellectuals made use of the concept in relation to the discarding of “radicalism.” Apart from dealing with Xiao Gongqin’s interpretation of the concept, this chapter also discusses the concept of “neo-conservatism” as it appeared in the semi-official document “Realistic Responses and Strategic Options for China After the Soviet Coup,” which was drafted in response to the Soviet Coup of August 1991. Throughout this chapter, special attention is paid to the issue of contextualization and to the question of whether the concept was used in a way that surpassed questions of political legitimacy.

The tension between the renunciation of “radicalism” for the promotion of stability in the present, on the one hand, and the challenge to political legitimacy through the location of this very “radicalism” in the past, on the other hand, becomes manifest in the writings of the intellectual Xiao Gongqin, the subject of Chapter Three. This chapter reveals a side of Xiao Gongqin that has hitherto not been studied, namely his distinction between three “types” of “radicalism” in modern Chinese history, as well as his Burkean reading of the late nineteenth-century translator Yan Fu. Based on this reading, Xiao argued that society was a social organism; tradition was the product of historical growth. Conversely, this Burkean element was contradicted with the stress on a strong central authority, which leads to the question of just how Burkean Xiao’s beliefs really were.

Chapter Four deals with the first public debate on “conservatism” and “radicalism” in modern Chinese history, a debate that was conducted between mainland intellectuals and the Princeton-based scholar Yü Ying-shih in 1992. Yü’s critique of “radicalism” and his plea for historical continuity largely transcended the gradualism that was subscribed to for reasons of political legitimacy in Chapter Two. As such, it offers a picture of a reference to “conservatism” that dealt with questions such as the role of intellectuals in society, the nature of Chinese modernity, and the future of

Confucianism. Mainland intellectuals transformed Yü's argument by advocating gradual economic reform in particular, but their engagement with the topics of revolution, socialism, and the Enlightenment of the 1980s also revealed a concern with questions of identity and the role of intellectuals in society.

Chapter Five exemplifies the interconnection between criticisms of “radicalism” and different debates, in this case, that of New Confucianism. This chapter looks into the contributions to the debate on “radicalism” by the philosopher Chen Lai. It analyzes how Chen Lai reconciled his rejection of the “radicalism” of the May Fourth Movement with his New Confucian convictions. Although Chen Lai also discussed “radicalism” throughout modern Chinese history, his main concern was the “antitraditionalism” of the May Fourth intellectuals and the effects of this attitude on Confucianism. This chapter analyzes Chen Lai's unusual interpretation of “radicalism” as “instrumental rationality” and it explores the consequences of this reading in connection with the solution Chen Lai proposed in response.

Chapter Six, finally, discusses another discarding of the “radicalism” of May Fourth, this time from the angle of the 1994 debate on the Literary Revolution that was triggered by the poetess Zheng Min. The debate on language reform was entangled with the debate on postmodernism because both Zheng Min and other intellectuals resorted to post-theories in the debate on language reform. Consequently, here, the criticism of “radicalism” became transformed into a question of “Chineseness,” and the main issue of debate turned into the relation between China and “the West.” This chapter looks into the reasons why postmodernism was used to defend historical continuity, and, in extension, it explores the validity of criticisms of Chinese postmodernism as manifestations of a “neo-conservative” trend.

2.

DOING THINGS WITH “ISMS” ON CHINESE “NEO-CONSERVATISM”

No one created a doctrine and called himself a neoconservative.

MARTIN LIPSET

2.1 INTRODUCTION: WHY “NEO-CONSERVATISM”?

When the term “neo-conservatism” rose to prominence in an American context several decades ago, three objections to the use of the concept were raised. For some, the “ism” was the main problem; they maintained that there was no coherent unity behind the stances denoted as such. Others claimed that the conservative element was missing because, in a country with a distinct liberal tradition, all conservatives were in fact liberals. Still others questioned the prefix “neo” and argued that “neo-conservatism” was no different from conservatism.¹¹⁸ All these objections make sense in some way: as addressed in the previous chapter, American “neo-conservatism” was both consistent with certain Burkean themes and in tension with it because some “neo-conservatives” attempted to fight relativism with absolute moral standards. Moreover, in an American context, “neo-conservatism” did indeed acquire new features, such as respect for the market and economic growth.

During the early 1990s, the concept of “neo-conservatism” made its entry into Chinese intellectual and policy circles. Remarkably, however, neither Chinese nor foreign analysts objected to the use of the term. This was peculiar given the fact that, as outlined in the previous chapter, it was not clear what Chinese conservatism entailed—how, then, should the “neo” and the “conservative” part of the term be understood? In addition, if all American “neo-conservatives” were in fact liberals, could it be said that all Chinese “neo-conservatives” were in fact socialists? As already briefly indicated in the previous chapter, those European and American political scientists who analyzed Chinese “neo-conservatism” applied the term in the context of the struggle over reform,

¹¹⁸ Steinfels, “Short Happy Life,” 20. The argument that the United States are characterized by an essentially liberal tradition has been made by, among others, H.G. Wells and Louis Hartz.

but they did not question the term in itself. In an article on the topic, Chen Feng wrote *in a footnote*:

Using “neoconservatism” to label the arguments discussed in this article may cause terminological confusion, because it is a precise term used in the United States for a political position that combines a definite dedication to personal freedom, civil rights and a free market economy (sic), with a stress on limited social welfare policies. Neoconservatism shares with the older variety of conservatism a high respect for tradition and a view of human nature that some would call pessimistic. However, in the past few years the term has acquired its specified connotation in the Chinese context, which has been accepted by students of Chinese politics both in China and in the West. Indeed, just as liberalism and conservatism mean different things in the U.S. and Europe, a contextual interpretation of neoconservatism in the Chinese political society should not be viewed as improper.¹¹⁹

It is unusual, to say the least, that Chen Feng wrote an entire article on Chinese “neo-conservatism” without exploring the question of the appropriation of the theory in a Chinese context in detail. Why was the term “neo-conservatism” coined at all? Were Chinese theorists inspired by American “neo-conservatism”? Moreover, if American “neo-conservatism” was related to previous manifestations of conservatism in its respect for tradition and its pessimistic view of human nature, was it possible, then, that Chinese “neo-conservatism” was in any sense also connected with older manifestations of conservatism, either in a Chinese setting or in a European context?

The nebulous prefix “neo,” as one author has put it, may be reminiscent of the “hard glare of the neon sign,” but it generates “more heat than light.”¹²⁰ In general, the prefix is used either to provide a theory with respectability by giving it a historical dimension, or to discredit it by linking it to a previous theory with negative connotations.¹²¹ In Chen Feng’s article, as in most articles on the topic, questions about this possible historical dimension or negative connotation were avoided. Instead, European and American political scientists used the term to denote “a body of arguments calling for political stability, central authority, tight social control, role of

¹¹⁹ Chen, “Neoconservative Political Thought,” 593.

¹²⁰ Kroes, “Neo-conservatism,” 7.

¹²¹ Robertson, *Routledge Dictionary of Politics*, 337.

ideology and nationalism.”¹²² Although the “neo-conservative” elements mentioned by analysts were certainly present in the works of many intellectuals at the time, the elements as such had nothing to do with conservatism; they might as well be associated with Marxism. This suggests that, although “neo-conservatism” was presented as a substantive configuration of ideas, it was rather a positional concept that was linked to the preservation of the status quo. In a Chinese context, “neo-conservatives” wanted to preserve both the centralized rule of the pre-reform era and the interests of the CCP.

This chapter will investigate whether Chinese “neo-conservatism” was indeed a mere preservation of the status quo and a blunt defense of interests—as the “commonsense” and “sociohistorical” approaches would have it—or whether there was more to the theory in its new context.¹²³ If there was indeed more to “neo-conservatism,” did this imply the existence of some Burkean traces? Was it in any way marked by a defense of conservative *goals* on the basis of conservative *principles*? In order to answer these questions, this chapter will first challenge the notion of a unified concept of “neo-conservatism” by analyzing different uses of the concept as a “label,” after which the two most famous—or infamous—examples of “neo-conservatism” as a “banner” will be discussed.

2.2 A POSITIONAL CONFIGURATION: PRESERVATION AND RENEWAL

European and American political scientists have related the rise of Chinese “neo-conservatism” to the political situation between 1989 and 1992 in particular. This period was a kind of intermezzo that started with the repression of the demonstrations on Tiananmen Square on June fourth, 1989, and that ended with the deepening of economic reforms following Deng Xiaoping’s Southern Tour (*nanxun*) in early 1992.¹²⁴ Two important international events in this respect were the decline of socialism in the international arena and the so-called “Soviet Coup” that took place in Moscow on August 19, 1991. The coup was important because it heralded the beginning of the end of the Soviet Communist Party and the USSR. Given the fact that China’s twentieth-century history was greatly affected by developments in the Soviet Union, the Soviet

¹²² Chen, “Neoconservative Political Thought,” 593.

¹²³ For a description of these two approaches, see Chapter One, 8-9.

¹²⁴ Deng’s Southern Tour was highly symbolic in comparison with the negative and disruptive image of the South that had been propagated during the Mao era. For the positive image of the South during the reform era, see Friedman, “Reconstructing China’s National Identity,” 67-91.

Coup, the subsequent end of the Soviet Communist Party, and the implosion of the Soviet Union had a great impact on China.¹²⁵

The repression of the spring 1989 demonstrations—which were perceived of as an attempt to overthrow the CCP and to end the socialist regime—on June fourth, 1989, and the blow to socialism in the international arena, then, confronted the CCP with a crisis on two fronts. In response, some coined the theory of “neo-conservatism,” which was an attempt to mediate the dangers of both an outdated socialism and an excessive liberalism by means of centralization, the stress on political stability, and alternative sources for cohesion, such as the resort to tradition and nationalism. Then again, the theory of “neo-conservatism” never became official policy; by 1992, when Deng Xiaoping managed to reassert his vision of reform, it had lost momentum. The true deathblow to “neo-conservatism” as a political theory of reform arrived with the Fourteenth Party Congress in October 1992, which confirmed Deng Xiaoping’s vision of rapid economic reform.¹²⁶

As Fewsmith has noted, for the period after 1989, the characterization of policy struggles as debates between “conservatives” and “reformers” is not accurate; it was too late to oppose reform after more than a decade. As Fewsmith put, “the question is not so much whether to reform as to how to hold on in the face of reform.”¹²⁷ The paradox of the Chinese reforms was that they threatened the authority of those who had enabled those very reforms, as some analysts have noted.¹²⁸ “Neo-conservatism” can be said to reflect this very paradox, which consisted of “development on the one hand and the Communist Party’s attempts to maintain its hegemonic grip on political power on the other.”¹²⁹

Because “neo-conservatism” tried to mediate between economic development and the preservation of political power, American and European political scientists have located the concept in the middle of a Left-Right axis. It was an “intermediate” ideology, a “middle position” or a “middle path” between “conservatives”—which in a Chinese context would mean the Old Left, namely figures such as Hu Qiaomu, Deng

¹²⁵ For the impact of these events on the CCP, see Garver, “The Chinese Communist Party and the Collapse of Soviet Communism,” 1-26.

¹²⁶ Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen*, 80.

¹²⁷ Fewsmith, “Neoconservatism,” 635.

¹²⁸ See Goldman and MacFarquhar, eds., *The Paradox of China’s Post-Mao Reforms* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

¹²⁹ Schell and Shambaugh, *The China Reader*, xx.

Liqun, and Chen Yun—and “radical reformers” or liberals.¹³⁰ Some have also described it as a *modus vivendi* between different groups, including capitalists, rulers, and liberal intellectuals.¹³¹ In accordance with this perception, others have also asserted that “neo-conservatism” safeguarded the interests of particular institutions or groups.¹³² Depending on whether one considered the glass half empty or half full, then, “neo-conservatism” was either a move away from Leninism or the very continuation of it. Sullivan, for example, has analyzed the emergence of “neo-conservatism” as part of discourses on transitions from Leninism.¹³³ Similarly, McCormick and Kelly have pointed at the “ironies of New Conservatism” because it attempted to counter liberalism, but it made “crucial concessions” to liberalism that opened the door for others to resort to liberal arguments.¹³⁴ For Wen-hui Tsai, on the other hand, the transition from Leninism was less clear, since “neo-conservatism” resisted political democratization.¹³⁵

The middle position of “neo-conservatism” on this political axis meant that the question of what was “conservative” and what was “new” about the theory could be resolved with the argument that it advocated the preservation of the status quo, but that the *grounds* on which this happened were new. For Chen Feng, “neo-conservatism” defended the existing political order, but it did so from different “approaches” and with a different “rhetoric.”¹³⁶ Others noted that, on the one hand, the theory broke with Marxism-Leninism, but on the other hand, it wanted to preserve those elements of the latter that supported its legitimacy.¹³⁷ Since “neo-conservatism” attempted to preserve the power structure of the elite but replace its ideology, Li Youzhuo has coined the term “communist liberalism.”¹³⁸

What all these accounts referred to concerning the “replacement” of Marxism as a guiding ideology was the reliance on traditional Chinese culture and nationalism as legitimating devices. Because of the instrumental use of cultural tradition, some

¹³⁰ McCormick and Kelly, “Limits of Anti-Liberalism,” 821; Gu and Kelly, “New Conservatism,” 220; Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen*, 80; Sullivan, *Democracy and Developmentalism*, 342.

¹³¹ Gu and Kelly, “New Conservatism,” 231.

¹³² McCormick and Kelly, “Limits of Anti-Liberalism,” 805.

¹³³ Sullivan, *Democracy and Developmentalism*, 328.

¹³⁴ McCormick and Kelly, “Limits of Anti-Liberalism,” 821.

¹³⁵ Tsai, “Resistance to Political Modernization,” 1.

¹³⁶ Chen, “Neoconservative Political Thought,” 593.

¹³⁷ Gu and Kelly, “New Conservatism,” 220.

¹³⁸ Li, “Neo-conservatism,” 39.

scholars have compared “neo-conservatism” to the policies of Yuan Shikai and Kuomintang leader Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975); both these figures had made use of a “traditionalism” in which tradition was incorporated in the modernization project.¹³⁹ According to Suisheng Zhao, since the reference to tradition in “neo-conservatism” was purely instrumental, “neo-conservatism” was in accordance with the outlook of state-led nationalism.¹⁴⁰ According to these interpretations, the reliance on tradition was not an expression of a conservative “style of thought,” since it had nothing to do with the belief in the inherent value of tradition. Tradition was but a vehicle that could be utilized to increase political legitimacy in a period of both national and international crisis.

Economically, some authors have noted that “neo-conservatism” moved away from orthodox Marxism because it was the continuation of the theory of “neo-authoritarianism.”¹⁴¹ This theory had been coined during the late 1980s; it championed a mixture of economic liberalization and political centralization. Since “neo-conservatism” also attempted to combine these two elements, it was at the same time “conservative” in its advocacy of political centralization and “new” in that it turned to market forces. Fewsmith has described the “conservative” and the “new” elements of “neo-conservatism” in the economic realm as follows:

The emphasis on strengthening the power of the central government and ensuring authority over a limited but important part of the economy puts neoconservative economic thinking in the tradition of Chinese conservative thought. What is new about neoconservative economic thought is first, the acceptance of a much broader and more important role for market forces than traditional conservative thinking ever contemplated, and second, the application of contemporary economic concepts to the management of both planned and market economies.¹⁴²

In brief, political scientists associated the term “neo-conservatism” with a political Left-Right specter in which it was located somewhere on the middle of the axis; in this defense of the status quo on different grounds, traditional elements only played an instrumental role. Based on these accounts, at this point, it seems impossible to answer

¹³⁹ Gu and Kelly, “New Conservatism,” 229.

¹⁴⁰ Zhao, *Nation-State*, 246-247.

¹⁴¹ Gu and Kelly, “New Conservatism,” 221.

¹⁴² Fewsmith, “Neoconservatism,” 640.

the question of the connection between Chinese “neo-conservatism” and conservative *principles* positively. Nonetheless, “neo-conservatism” was less clear-cut than it seems: as will be developed in the next section, “neo-conservatism” did not only serve to strengthen political legitimacy; it also contained certain traits that challenged the legitimacy of the CCP. As we will see, this challenge had everything to do with the conception of the nature of change implicit in “neo-conservatism.”

2.3 “NEO-CONSERVATISM” AND OFFICIAL IDEOLOGY

At first sight, “neo-conservatism” seems very close to the official ideology of the times. After Tiananmen, a period of repression followed, which was part of a cycle of reform and retrenchment of economics, politics, and ideology since the start of the reforms in 1978. As Baum has stated about Chinese leaders of the post-Mao era: “Letting go (*fang*) with one hand, they instinctively tightened up (*shou*) with the other.”¹⁴³ In the aftermath of Tiananmen, the pace of reform was slowed down, and the CCP launched propaganda campaigns in order to promote stability in the face of chaos. After the death of Hu Yaobang and the ouster of Zhao Ziyang in 1989, conservative moderates such as Jiang Zemin and Li Peng, and hard-line ideologues of the ilk of Gao Di—then editor of *Renmin Ribao* (China Daily)—and Deng Liqun gained power. This power shift enabled the occurrence of propaganda that emphasized patriotism, political stability, economic development, and the importance of “national conditions” (*guoqing*). The latter was particularly put to use to fight “universalist” discourses on human rights and democracy.¹⁴⁴

In combination with this propaganda, the CCP launched Party rectification campaigns and anti-corruption campaigns. The stress on “national conditions” was part of a patriotic education campaign that started after Tiananmen, that came in full swing at the time of Deng’s so-called Southern Tour in early 1992, and that peaked in 1994. The unique “national conditions” underscored in the campaign included China’s overpopulation, limited natural resources, an economy that was not fully developed due to a history of foreign imperialism and struggle, and, finally, China’s long history and

¹⁴³ Baum, *Burying Mao*, 5. Baum’s model was a modification of Deng Liqun’s 1987 claim that between 1978 and 1987, the even-numbered years had witnessed openness (*fang*), whereas the odd-numbered years had seen relative restriction (*shou*).

¹⁴⁴ Sullivan, *Democracy and Developmentalism*, 324-326, 328.

cultural tradition. These “national conditions” revealed that the current strategy of “reform and opening up” (*gaige kaifang*) was the right one—China was still in “the primary stage of socialism.”¹⁴⁵ As Suisheng Zhao has noted, this statement also indicated that the leadership of the CCP was indispensable.¹⁴⁶ The “national conditions” required a path of development distinct from Western approaches; China was not ready for political liberalization. By pointing at restraining elements, authoritarian rule was justified as a *conditio sine qua non*.¹⁴⁷

During 1990 and 1991, the CCP’s policy toward the Soviet Union was to a great extent guided by the anxiety over the mounting global hegemony of the United States. Fears over a domino effect of “peaceful evolution” (*heping yanbian*) were uttered in Chinese policy circles.¹⁴⁸ Conservative ideologues interpreted the Soviet Coup and the concomitant implosion of the Soviet Union a few months later as the confirmation of a Western strategy of “peaceful evolution”; in response, they coined the slogan “defend state power and stop peaceful evolution” (*baowei zhengquan, fangzhi heping yanbian*). Deng Xiaoping himself was against this campaign, but the old ideologues controlled the media at the time and Deng was also in bad health.¹⁴⁹ Deng drew exactly the opposite lesson from the Soviet experience: that more reform was needed. This stance would gain the upper hand by October 1992, when the Fourteenth Party Congress was held.

There were important similarities between “neo-conservatism” and official ideology, such as the emphasis on ideology, the reliance on nationalism, and the advocacy of a strong state and political stability in the context of fears over implosion.

¹⁴⁵ As Barmé notes, the term *guoqing*—which literally means “national situation” (*Zhongguo qingkuang*)—had been used in cultural and political debate long before the 1990s: at the end of the nineteenth century, those who opposed reform used the term to claim that Western institutions did not suit China, whereas during the 1930s, opponents of communists employed the term to make the same argument with regard to communism. Barmé traces the use of the term for propaganda purposes back to 1981. See Barmé, “To Screw Foreigners,” 212, fn. 11.

¹⁴⁶ Zhao, *Nation-State*, 218-227.

¹⁴⁷ As Zhao notes, there was even a special course named “National Conditions,” as well as textbooks and magazines on the topic. Zhao further mentions the foundation of the Research Center on National Conditions (*Zhongguo guoqing yanjiu zhongxin*) at Peking University. See Zhao, “Nationalistic Writing,” 743. Barmé also mentions the 1989 Beijing journal *Guoqing yanjiu* (Studies in National Conditions), See Barmé, “To Screw Foreigners,” 212, fn. 11-13.

¹⁴⁸ The term “peaceful evolution” was first used in a 1958 speech held by president Eisenhower’s Secretary of State John Foster Dulles (1888-1959). In this context, it was used to denote peaceful means—such as cultural and scientific exchange—to influence communist nations.

¹⁴⁹ Zhao, *Nation-State*, 214-217. Die-hard ideologues included Chen Yun, Ding Guangen, and Deng Liqun; Deng Xiaoping received support from Yang Shangkun, Liu Huaqing, Qiao Shi, Li Ruihuan, Zhu Rongji, and Tian Jiyun.

This was the occasion because both were a response to a crisis of legitimacy, which, as Habermas has claimed, is at the same time always also a crisis of identity.¹⁵⁰ Externally, the revolutionary identity of the CCP was threatened by the decline of socialism, whereas internally, its role of the vanguard of economic reforms was challenged by its repression of the Tiananmen Square demonstrations in June 1989.

Official ideology and “neo-conservatism” differed in the solution they offered to the legitimacy crisis. Since the Party’s legitimacy was founded on revolution, it could not abandon revolution. As Arif Dirlik has phrased it, the official solution was a “negotiated settlement on the past that seeks to historicize the revolution while distancing it from the present.”¹⁵¹ The CCP’s strategy was to *supplement* Marxism with culture and nationalism. For “neo-conservatives,” on the other hand, the revolutionary identity was part of the problem; they pleaded for a move away from Marxism and the revolutionary identity and envisioned a greater role for culture and nationalism. For some nationalists, the problem with the Leninist anti-imperialism of the Mao era was that it had failed to create a common identity, which is why nationalism should be utilized to foster cohesion and to prevent political chaos.¹⁵²

Although in practice, both “neo-conservatism” and official policy embraced economic reform instead of revolution, they differed in their justification of economic reform. Official ideology presented the reforms as a continuation of the former emphasis on class struggle; they by no means formed a break with Marxism or the revolutionary identity of the CCP. At the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee in 1978, the move from class struggle to economic development had first been legitimated with the argument that “practice as the sole criterion of truth” was in line with Mao’s own statements. Furthermore, in the 1981 *Resolution on CPC History*, it was declared that Mao Zedong Thought had been part of the revolution, but that Mao’s teachings had been wrong. At the Twelfth Party Congress in 1982, the phrase “socialism with Chinese characteristics” was coined. At the same Party Congress, Hu Yaobang declared that, since 1979, the Party had returned to ideological orthodoxy after the detour of the Cultural Revolution. Hu Yaobang also argued in favor of the

¹⁵⁰ Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 46.

¹⁵¹ Dirlik, “The Past as Ideology and Critical Resource.”

¹⁵² Friedman, “China’s National Identity,” 83.

development of a “socialist spiritual civilization.”¹⁵³ By using this phrase, Hu wanted to reiterate the Marxist project and to restore the morality of the CCP.

By 1987, the reform policies had challenged the “national myth” of liberation and revolution; the Party responded by coining the theory of the “first stage of socialism.”¹⁵⁴ Because China had never gone through a capitalist stage, so it was argued, its forces of production had not been developed and, hence, it was only in the “primary stage of socialism.” At the Fourteenth Party Congress in 1992, Mao Zedong was once more relegated to the past: he was associated with the “first revolution,” whereas Deng Xiaoping’s reform program was declared to be a “new revolution.” In addition, the phrase “socialist market economy” was coined.¹⁵⁵ These developments demonstrate that official ideology attempted to justify economic reform as congruous with the future goal of socialism; it was not contradicted to the former stress on class struggle. For “neo-conservatives,” on the other hand, economic reform did not have to be justified on Marxist grounds. As a Chinese theorist has noted, “neo-conservatism” recommended the market economy on the basis of Western theories, whereas official rhetoric had always presented the market economy as a necessary step for the realization of socialism.¹⁵⁶ In “neo-conservative” accounts, the Marxist rhetoric was replaced with a reference to foreign theorists, something that will be discussed further.

As Chen Feng has rightly noted, another crucial distinction between “neo-conservatism” and official ideology concerns their conception of nationalism. Whereas for the regime, “nationalism” stood for the Party, the state, and the nation, the “neo-conservative” imagery of “nationalism” did not entail loyalty to the Party or the state in particular, but to China as a country. An important element of official ideology that was lacking in “neo-conservatism” was the notion of patriotism. In official ideology, patriotism was defined in historical and cultural terms, or, as Suisheng Zhao has

¹⁵³ Ye Jianying had first used the term in 1979; Deng Xiaoping had elaborated the phrase as part of his program of “reform and opening up.”

¹⁵⁴ The first stage had been that of a transition from capitalism to socialism, which had been completed in the 1950s. The second stage, the “primary stage of socialism,” would last until about 2050, when the third stage of the completion of socialist modernization would commence. The “primary stage” itself was also divided into three phases: (1) doubling the GNP of 1980 (which Zhao Ziyang considered accomplished in 1987), (2) doubling the economy by the year 2000, and (3) a GNP at the level of that of relatively developed countries by 2050.

¹⁵⁵ Kluver, *Legitimizing the Chinese Economic Reforms*, 39-119.

¹⁵⁶ Wang Shaoguang, “Xin baoshou zhuyi,” 76-77.

formulated it, as a “somewhat simplified or imagined Chinese history and tradition.”¹⁵⁷ The emphasis on patriotism during the early 1990s was in fact nothing new; since the beginning of economic reform in 1978, the socialism of class struggle had been supplanted with a socialism that underlined patriotism. Since the reliance on class as a category of identity only had a limited appeal and was not inclusive, patriotism could be utilized as a source of cohesion.¹⁵⁸ This patriotism had not only been present in the agenda of economic construction, but also in the agendas of unification and opposition to international hegemony.¹⁵⁹ Already at the beginning of the reforms, Deng Xiaoping had made it clear that the CCP was the object of loyalty by coining the “Four Cardinal Principles”—adherence to the socialist road, the leadership of the CCP, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought—which “amounted to the claim that “the party *is* the country.”¹⁶⁰ In “neo-conservatism,” on the other hand, ideology was replaced with national interest and the country was more predominant than the Party was.

Official ideology and “neo-conservatism” further differed on the issues of democracy and a strong state. For the regime, democracy could not be envisioned because it would overthrow the regime, whereas “neo-conservatives” disapproved of it because of its impracticality. “Neo-conservatives” did not challenge democracy outright and considered it an eventual outcome, whereas the regime cast it aside and did not commit to it, not even in the long run. For “neo-conservatives,” a strong authority was needed as a means to reach the final goal of democracy, whereas the regime considered it an end in itself and part and parcel of its very ideology.¹⁶¹

Because there were both similarities and dissimilarities between “neo-conservatism” and official ideology, Xu Ben has coined the term “rivalry-complicity relationship”: they were complicit in their denunciation of immediate democratization, their stress on political stability, and their advocacy of cultural nationalism; they were rivals because “neo-conservatism” discarded revolution and promoted cultural tradition.¹⁶² Both the critique of revolution and the return to Chinese tradition, then, also

¹⁵⁷ Zhao, *Nation-State*, 212.

¹⁵⁸ Smith, *National Identity*, 5-6.

¹⁵⁹ Hughes, *Chinese Nationalism*, 12-15. Hughes refers to Deng Xiaoping’s 1980 speech “The Present Situation and the Tasks Before Us,” *Selected Works*, 224-258.

¹⁶⁰ Goldman, Link, and Wei, “China’s Intellectuals,” 136.

¹⁶¹ Chen, “Neoconservative Political Thought,” 611.

¹⁶² Xu Ben, *Disenchanted Democracy*, 183-184.

posed a threat to the legitimacy of the CCP. In this sense, “neo-conservatism” was a double-edged sword. The fact that “neo-conservatism” implied a denial of revolution—which means that it had a different conception of how to bring about change—leads us back to the question of conservative principles. Was the reference to tradition in “neo-conservatism” only instrumental, or was it part of a new mode of identification that went beyond issues of legitimacy?

2.4 “ISMS” AND LABELS: SOME EXAMPLES

In order to answer these questions, we will move from an abstract characterization of “neo-conservatism” as a unified concept to a discussion of the works and persons commonly associated with the term in a Chinese context. By looking into the use of the label “neo-conservatism” in American research on China in particular, some problematic aspects of the term can be identified. Some authors have clearly recognized the limits of the “neo-conservative” configuration approach. As Fewsmith has phrased it, “neo-conservatism” is a “loose term” that indicates a “set of concerns and a “broad intellectual orientation rather than a well-developed and consistent body of thought.”¹⁶³ The themes that Fewsmith has associated with “neo-conservatism” are “incrementalism,” “central-local relations,” its roots in “neo-authoritarianism,” “state-centered nationalism,” and a move away from “cultural cosmopolitanism” to cultural nationalism.¹⁶⁴ The question then rises: if a work manifests one or some, but not all of these traits, what is “neo-conservative” about it?

The application of the label “neo-conservatism” to works in which nationalist sentiments were expressed, for example, is questionable. As both Hughes and Barmé have argued, during the early 1990s, nationalism could be found across the political spectrum; it was used as a strategy by both “leftists” and those in favor of marketization.¹⁶⁵ An example of the perceived link between Chinese “neo-conservatism” and nationalism in American research concerns the 1997 theme issue of *Chinese Law and Government* on “Nationalism and Neoconservatism in China in the 1990s.”¹⁶⁶ Whereas the nationalism favored by “neo-conservatives” arose in the specific

¹⁶³ Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen*, 80.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Hughes, *Chinese Nationalism*, 8; Barmé, “To Screw Foreigners,” 215.

¹⁶⁶ *CLG* 30:6 (November-December 1997).

context of post-1989 and post-1991 events in China, Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the nationalism of some authors that was linked to “neo-conservatism” in this journal dated from a later period and had nothing to do with the fear of political instability.

Liberal Chinese intellectuals in particular have employed the label “neo-conservatism” to discredit nationalists, even though it is difficult to pinpoint what exactly was “neo-conservative” about these works. As Rosen has noted, during the 1990s, intellectual independence was considered a badge of honor, and different factions accused each other of alignment with the government.¹⁶⁷ In this context, liberals applied the term “neo-conservatism” to suggest the complicity of intellectual opponents with the government. In the 1997 theme issue, then, both works in which Chinese liberals used the term “neo-conservatism” and works that contained nationalist or other “neo-conservative” traits were presented as manifestations of “neo-conservatism.” In the above-mentioned journal issue, the works of authors such as Wang Xiaodong, Sheng Hong, and Xiao Gongqin were supplemented with criticism of “liberal” intellectuals such as Xu Jilin and Xu Youyu.

The theme issue included one 1996 article by Wang Xiaodong—under the pseudonym of Shi Zhong—in which the latter argued that the rise of nationalism during the 1990s was a return to normalcy after the “reverse racism” or “national nihilism” of the 1980s.¹⁶⁸ According to Wang Xiaodong, this nihilism had been especially strong in the documentary *River Elegy* (Heshang).¹⁶⁹ Broadcasted in the summer of 1988, the six-part series *Heshang* presented China’s cultural symbols—such as the Great Wall, the dragon and the Yellow River—not as markers of China’s greatness, but as symbols of its backward nature. Symbolically, the makers of *Heshang* argued for more openness

¹⁶⁷ Rosen, “Guest Editor’s Introduction,” 7.

¹⁶⁸ Shi Zhong, “Chinese Nationalism,” 8-27. The article was a translation of Shi Zhong, “Zhongguo de minzu zhuyi he Zhongguo de weilai,” which appeared in *Mingbao yuekan* (Mingbao Monthly) 9 (1996).

¹⁶⁹ On *Heshang*, see Su Xiaokang and Wang Luxiang, *Heshang* (River Elegy) (Beijing: Xiandai chubanshe, 1988); Su Xiaokang and Wang Luxiang, *Deathsong of the River: A Reader’s Guide to the Chinese TV Series Heshang* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Woei-Lien Chong, “Su Xiaokang on His Film ‘River Elegy,’” *China Information* 4:3 (Winter 1989-1990), 44-55; Chen Feng and Jin Guantao, *From Youthful Manuscripts to River Elegy: the Chinese Popular Cultural Movement and Political Transformation 1979-1989* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1997); Jing Wang, “Heshang and the Paradoxes of the Chinese Enlightenment,” in idem, *High Culture Fever*, 118-136. For a brief overview of the cultural movement of the 1980s, see Fong-ching Chen, “The Popular Cultural Movement of the 1980s,” in Gloria Davies, ed., *Voicing Concerns*, 71-86.

towards the West and urged the “Yellow River” to flow towards the “Blue Ocean.” Under a growing U.S. pressure, Wang Xiaodong argued, China should be aware of its national interests, but it should opt for a “constructive” instead of an “emotional” nationalism.¹⁷⁰ He further asserted that both Western media and Chinese liberals had deliberately linked nationalism with “authoritarianism” and “anti-democracy,” whereas Chinese nationalists were not against democracy; they just looked for efficient ways to obtain it. Nationalists often underscored order and state power because they knew—as the events in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe had shown—that the West would not come to rescue in the event of chaos.¹⁷¹

Wang Xiaodong had also expressed his nationalist views some years earlier in several articles in the newly founded journal *Strategy and Management* (*Zhanlüe yu guanli*), one of the main vectors of debates on nationalism. The journal had organized two national conferences on the topic of nationalism, in 1994 and 1995 respectively.¹⁷² One of Wang Xiaodong’s articles was a response to the thesis put forward by the American political scientist Samuel Huntington (b. 1927) that future conflicts would not be ideological, but cultural in nature. Inspired by the historian Arnold Toynbee, Huntington had divided the world into a handful of civilizations that would form the basis of future clashes.¹⁷³ In line with his emphasis on national interests, Wang Xiaodong refuted Huntington’s thesis and argued that future conflicts would remain economic in nature.¹⁷⁴ Wang Xiaodong’s nationalism clearly arose in the new context of tension with the United States and the regained confidence after the economic boost of 1992; it was different from the concerns as expressed between 1989 and 1992.

Similarly, the economist Sheng Hong’s article on nationalism referred to in the issue was not linked to the “neo-conservative” concerns as described above. Sheng Hong discussed the cultural strategies of nationalism and “cosmopolitanism” (*tianxia*

¹⁷⁰ Shi Zhong, “Chinese Nationalism,” 19, 21.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 22, 24-25.

¹⁷² Zhao, “Nationalistic Writing,” 736. The 1994 conference was entitled “Changing World Patterns,” whereas the 1995 conference dealt with “Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Century.”

¹⁷³ Huntington, “Clash of Civilizations,” 22-49. The civilizations that Huntington mentioned in his article were: Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin-American, and African. Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) had studied the rise and fall of civilizations in his twelve-volume *A Study of History* (1934-1961).

¹⁷⁴ Shi Zhong, “Weilai de chongtu,” *ZYG* 1993:1, 46-50. Another article on nationalism by Shi Zhong was “Zhongguo xiandaihua mianjian de tiaozhan,” *Zhanlüe yu guanli* 1994:1, 7-9.

zhuyi) from the angle of global economic efficiency.¹⁷⁵ Referring to the Chinese philosopher Liang Shuming (1893-1988) and Toynbee, Sheng Hong insisted that China had been a cosmopolitan cultural civilization ever since the unification under the Qin (221 B.C.-A.D. 206) dynasty, whereas a divided Europe had only known nationalism and “warring states rules.”¹⁷⁶ In response to the “bullying and humiliation” of Western powers ever since the First Opium War (1839-1842), China had no choice but to embrace nationalism. Nevertheless, its nationalism still contained “cosmopolitan” traits: it was defensive, not expansionist, and it included elements of compromise.¹⁷⁷

Like Wang Xiaodong, Sheng Hong had also expressed his nationalist concerns in a response to Huntington in the journal *Strategy and Management*.¹⁷⁸ In an article with a much sharper tone than the one mentioned above, Sheng Hong upheld that the expansion of Western civilization had not been based on rules of free trade, but on brute force. Chinese civilization, on the contrary, had disapproved of this Social Darwinism. This aggressive nationalism could clearly not be related to a “neo-conservative” stance; it was neither about political legitimacy, nor about social stability. Although in terms of his views on economic reform, as Fewsmith has argued, Sheng Hong can be identified as a “neo-conservative” because he criticized the “romantic attitude” toward reform and exchanged it with gradual reform, this does not suffice to treat his viewpoint in any other field as a manifestation of “neo-conservatism.”¹⁷⁹

The examples of Wang Xiaodong and Sheng Hong demonstrate that one should distinguish manifestations of nationalism from a “neo-conservative” stand. Although the two might be related in the sense that both stressed *Realpolitik*, there was a great contrast between the advocacy of nationalism in 1996 and the concerns that intellectuals expressed between 1989 and 1992. Since the articles mentioned above were written in 1996, they were a response to an entirely different context. This context included a growing national Chinese pride as a result of economic success, and the perception that other nations were hostile to China after the *Yinhe* incident and the award of the 2000

¹⁷⁵ Sheng Hong, “From Nationalism to Cosmopolitanism,” 31-42. Originally published as “Cong minzu zhuyi dao tianxia zhuyi,” *ZYG* 1996:1, 14-19.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 38. On Liang Shuming, see also Chapter Five, 218-221.

¹⁷⁷ Sheng Hong, “From Nationalism to Cosmopolitanism,” 39-41.

¹⁷⁸ Sheng Hong, “Shenme shi wenming,” *ZYG* 1995:5, 88-98. In the February 1996 issue of *ZYG*, both Sun Liping and Xu Youyu criticized Sheng Hong.

¹⁷⁹ Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen*, 81-82.

Olympics to Sydney instead of Beijing in 1993.¹⁸⁰ Other factors that had given rise to this nationalism were the opposition to China's bid to enter GATT, as well as the Taiwan Straits crisis of 1995 and 1996. This popular nationalism was more in line with the anti-Americanism expressed in the 1996 bestseller *China Can Say No* than with "neo-conservative" concerns of political stability and centralized rule.¹⁸¹ In addition, this popular nationalism, as Fewsmith has noted, also contained an antigovernment tone, whereas "neo-conservatism" was rather an attempt to strengthen government; it was highly elitist in nature.¹⁸²

Another work often associated with "neo-conservatism" is the 1994 book *Looking at China Through a Third Eye*, which addresses a whole range of different topics.¹⁸³ The book was allegedly written by a German author, in Chinese Luoyi Ningge'er, and translated by Wang Shan, a deputy director of the Beijing Opera Academy. Nevertheless, after an interview with the Hong Kong magazine *Asia Weekly* during which Wang could not mention the English title of the book, it was admitted that Wang Shan was the author.¹⁸⁴ The themes treated in the six chapters of the book were the foreign intervention in Chinese affairs, the dangerous problem of the peasants, the weaknesses of Chinese intellectuals, Chinese cadres, methods for social control, and China in the international community. The common theme in all the chapters was the mounting disintegration as a result of Deng Xiaoping's reforms, which had led to a decline in authority, the waning of ideology and morality, and the rise of social problems. Deng Xiaoping stood in contrast with Mao Zedong, who was not to blame for

¹⁸⁰ On August 3, 1993, the U.S. Navy stopped the Chinese ship *Yinhe* in international waters because the U.S. believed that the ship carried materials to produce chemical weapons.

¹⁸¹ Song Qiang, Zhang Zangzang, and Qiao Bian, *Zhongguo keyi shuo bu* (Beijing: Zhonghua gongshang lianhe chubanshe, 1996). On *China Can Say No*, see Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen*, 154-156.

¹⁸² Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen*, 156.

¹⁸³ Wang Shan, *Disanzhi yanjing kan Zhongguo* (Taipei: Zhouzhi wenhua, 1994).

¹⁸⁴ Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen*, 148. See also Liu Binyan, "Ping *Disanzhi yanjing kan Zhongguo*," 23-39. Former Minister of Culture Wang Meng criticized the book for its anti-intellectualism. According to He Pin, there was a "third hand" involved in the publication of the book, namely the "princeling" Pan Yue. Because of its attack on popular movements, He Pin has also linked the book to He Xin. See He Pin, "'Disanzhiyan' haishi 'disanzhi shou'?" 21-22. Pan Yue was not the only person who was allegedly involved in the publication of the book. In a footnote, Liu Kang suggests that the book had the backing of top leaders, including Jiang Zemin. See Liu Kang, "Debate about Modernity," 215, fn. 36.

any mistakes—present problems were to blame on intellectuals, who “lacked an autonomous spirit,” and on the peasantry, which was a source of great danger.¹⁸⁵

The book has been labeled “neo-conservative” because, as Suisheng Zhao has formulated it, it was a “kind of mournful elegy” that marked the death of the socialist model.¹⁸⁶ Hughes has argued that the views expressed in the book came “closest to the wholesale departure from socialism in favor of elitist authoritarianism,” as expressed in some “neo-conservative” advocacies.¹⁸⁷ Author Wang Shan criticized both Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin for not taking the right measures with regard to the weakening of the state as a consequence of reform and opening up. Nationalism came in as part of the new ideology of the “third eye” point of view, the other two elements being Social Darwinism and Marxism. In general, then, what was “neo-conservative” about the book was its advocacy of elitist nationalism to guide market reforms and the stress on the importance of the middle class, as Hughes has rightly argued. However, “neo-conservatives” would certainly dismiss the anti-intellectualism of the book.

Although Peter Moody has also treated Wang Shan’s book as an expression of “neo-conservatism,” he has applied the label for different reasons. For Moody, the book was part of a trend of “conservative populism,” or “radical conservatism,” in which it was identified with leftist tendencies. In his definition of conservatism, Moody has included the “leftist” tendencies, because they were “an as-it-were conservative populist critique of market liberalism.”¹⁸⁸ Hence, for Moody, Wang Shan’s book belonged to the same type of conservative reform criticism as the so-called 1996 *Ten-Thousand-Character Manifesto* that was attributed to the Marxist ideologue Deng Liqun.¹⁸⁹ Here, we see the recurrence of a “neo-conservative” configuration that is defined in a positional rather than in a substantive way: for some, Wang Shan’s book marked the decline of Leftist tendencies, whereas for others, it *was* a Leftist criticism of reform.

¹⁸⁵ Wang Shan, *Disanzhi yanjing*, 147.

¹⁸⁶ Zhao, *Nation-State*, 263.

¹⁸⁷ Hughes, *Chinese Nationalism*, 93. Hughes also mentions the support of Chen Yuan and Pan Yue, both relatives of CCP officials, for the book.

¹⁸⁸ Moody, *Conservative Thought*, 7.

¹⁸⁹ The official title of the *Ten-Thousand-Character Manifesto* that was attributed to Deng Liqun was “Various Factors Influencing the Country’s National Security” (*Yingxiang wo guo guojia anquan de ruogan yinsu*). For a selected translation of the document, see Shell and Shambough, *The China Reader*, 116-135.

He Xin (b. 1949), a former literary critic and researcher at the Institute of Modern History of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), is also often dubbed a “neo-conservative.” The political liberal Liu Xiaobo (b. 1955) has called He Xin “the most visible symbol of China’s so-called ‘neo-conservatism’ movement” in the aftermath of the June Fourth incident.¹⁹⁰ Although Liu Xiaobo applied the term to utter political criticism of He Xin’s support for the government crackdown in 1989—in this sense, the use of the term resembles the liberal criticism of nationalists as discussed above—others have called He Xin a “neo-conservative” because of his emphasis on statism, nationalism, gradual economic reform, and *Realpolitik*.¹⁹¹ Fewsmith has referred to He Xin as an example of a “muscular” “neo-conservatism,” since his nationalist writings in particular were more extreme than those of other nationalists.¹⁹² He Xin’s advocacies were invoked in the official media to promote gradualism.

Already in 1988, He Xin had compared the “radicalism” of 1980s liberalism with that of the Cultural Revolution.¹⁹³ On March 24, 1989, an article appeared in *The People’s Daily* in which He Xin criticized the “radical antitraditionalism” of May Fourth and the 1980s that had peaked in the documentary *River Elegy*.¹⁹⁴ In a January 1991 article in *China Youth Daily*, it was reported that He Xin argued in favor of gradual modernization in line with a creative transformation of Chinese culture.¹⁹⁵ He was further said to condemn rash reform talk and to expose the “latent strategic interests” behind the Western bourgeoisie’s “peaceful evolution.” He Xin’s call for a calm and rational approach to modernization and his cultural nationalism were further expressed in his 1991 book *The Renaissance of the East*.¹⁹⁶ In various other writings,

¹⁹⁰ Liu Xiaobo, “Neo-Political Conservatism,” 12. The fact that Liu Xiaobo used strong language is not surprising given the fact that He Xin, in a secret report to the authorities, reportedly mentioned Liu Xiaobo as one of the people who had been responsible for the spring 1989 demonstrations. He Xin worked as the research assistant of Li Shu, Marxist-Leninist historian at CASS; he later became affiliated with the department of Cultural History in the Modern History Institute of CASS. He Xin allegedly received the support of Hu Qiaomu and the son of Chen Yi, the “princeling” Chen Haosu.

¹⁹¹ On statism, see for example He Xin’s collection of writings *Lun zhengzhi guojia zhuyi* (Beijing: shishi chubanshe, 2003).

¹⁹² Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen*, 93.

¹⁹³ See He Xin, “Wode kunhuo yu youlü,” *Xuexi yuekan* 12 (1988), 36-37. Translated by Barmé in “Word of Advice,” 54-55.

¹⁹⁴ Liu Qingfeng, “Topography of Intellectual Culture,” 63. The article was entitled “‘Wusi’ jingshen de jicheng yu chaoyue” (Continuing and going beyond the spirit of May Fourth).

¹⁹⁵ Fang Wang, “He Xin de wenhuaxue yanjiu,” 4.

¹⁹⁶ He Xin, *Dongfang de fuxing: Zhongguo xiandaihua de mingti yu qiantu* (Ha’erbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, Heilongjiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991).

He Xin warned against the global hegemony of the United States and criticized the “romanticism” of Chinese reform.¹⁹⁷

Although many of the “neo-conservative” themes can be found in He Xin, an important point that needs to be made is that he was, apart from being an exponent of tradition, also a fervent supporter of Chinese Marxism; he even argued that it should become a “national religion.”¹⁹⁸ This contradicts the argument of some political scientists that “neo-conservatism” exchanged Marxism for tradition and nationalism; it is not clear in which respect He Xin’s theories differed from official ideology. He Xin’s advocacy of a strong state in particular can be said to be a Leftist theme as much as a “neo-conservative” theme. There was also nothing particularly “neo-conservative” about an advocacy of nationalism, as will be elaborated further.

Finally, the names of Hu Angang and Wang Shaoguang have been linked with “neo-conservatism” because of their 1993 research report on China’s state capacity.¹⁹⁹ Wang Shaoguang, a political scientist, was based at Yale University at the time; Hu Angang, an influential economist, worked at the Chinese Academy of Science (CAS).²⁰⁰ In the report, the two researchers only addressed one aspect of state capacity, namely its capacity to extract central state revenues. They argued that this capacity had been weakened due to the tax reforms of the 1980s; it mostly depended on state-owned enterprises (SOEs).²⁰¹ Deng Xiaoping’s reforms had led to decentralization—or, in specific terms, to “devolving authority and granting benefits” (*fangquan rangli*)—and

¹⁹⁷ See Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen*, 93-95. Fewsmith quotes from a vast amount of articles that are collected in He Xin, *Zhonghua fuxing yu shijie weilai* (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1996).

¹⁹⁸ Barmé, “Word of Advice,” 342.

¹⁹⁹ Hu Angang and Wang Shaoguang, *Jiaqiang zhongyang zhengfu zai shichang jingji zhuanxing zhong de zhudao zuoyong: guanyu Zhongguo guojia nengli de yanjiu baogao* (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1993). The report was translated by Joseph Fewsmith as Wang Shaoguang Proposal (I) and (II) in *The Chinese Economy* 28: 3 and 4 (May-June and July-August 1995). A shorter version of the report appeared in the February 1994 issue of *EYS* under the title “Zhongguo zhengfu jiqu nengli de xiajiang ji qi houguo,” and it was followed by a debate. Participants in the debate included Hu Angang, Wang Shaoguang, Dali Yang, Cui Zhiyuan, Rao Yuqing, and Xiao Geng. In the April 1994 issue of *EYS*, Wang Shaoguang replied to the criticisms uttered in the debate.

²⁰⁰ Wang Shaoguang received his Ph.D. in political science from Cornell University in 1990, after which he taught at Yale University until 2000. Since 2000, Wang Shaoguang is based at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

²⁰¹ Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen*, 134-135. As other components of state capacity, Fewsmith mentions legitimation capacity, corruption, and bureaucratic efficiency (134). In the United States, research on state capacity flourished under Joel Migdal, John Zysman, and others during the 1980s (132).

thus, the authors advocated a more centralized reform.²⁰² The dissimilarities between the report and the Old Leftists' point of view become clear if we compare the report to, for example, the series of *Ten-Thousand-Character Manifestos* that appeared between 1995 and 1997, of which the one attributed to Deng Liqun has been mentioned above. These manifestos considered both the decline of the public sector and the emergence of a “non-governmental bourgeois class” and embryonic “new bureaucrat and comprador bourgeoisie classes” a threat, whereas Wang Shaoguang and Hu Angang did not oppose these changes as such.²⁰³ As Fewsmith has correctly pointed out, the “neo-statists” had some things in common with the “popular nationalists”: both wanted to bring in the voice of the people and to deconstruct the special interests of the privileged.²⁰⁴

The case of Hu Angang and Wang Shaoguang in particular illustrates the fact that the advocacy of a strong state was both a Leftist and a “neo-conservative” theme. For Zhang Xudong, a member of the so-called New Left—another example of the practice of “labeling”; the term was put forward by liberal opponents, and those designated as such did not always accept the label—the argument of Hu Angang and Wang Shaoguang was congruent with the concern for social justice that members of the New Left expressed. For Zhang Xudong, Wang Shaoguang belonged to the New Left, together with intellectuals such as Cui Zhiyuan, Gan Yang, Wang Hui and others.²⁰⁵ Zhang Xudong considered the “state capacity” thesis a response to the disaster of unchecked neoliberalism in the former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia.

Moreover, for Zhang Xudong, the “state capacity” theory was about exploring a “socially just” way to reach a “socialist market economy.”²⁰⁶ In line with Zhang Xudong's interpretation, Fewsmith has also argued that the central concern of Hu Angang and Wang Shaoguang was social justice, which was also the main concern of New Left intellectuals.²⁰⁷ This application of the label “neo-conservatism” to Leftist

²⁰² See also Hu Angang and Wang Shaoguang, *The Political Economy of Uneven Development: The Case of China*, Mark Selden, ed. (Armonk, NY, London: M.E. Sharpe, 1999).

²⁰³ Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen*, 136.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 139-140. Hu Angang and Wang Shaoguang also collaborated with Kang Xiaoguang, the author of *Xin baoshou zhuyi zhenglunji* (Beijing, s.n., 2002). Thanks to Joseph Fewsmith for mentioning this book to me. See also Fewsmith's translation of Kang Xiaoguang's article “Zhongguo gaige shidai de zhengzhi fazhan yu zhengzhi wending” (Political development and political stability in the era of reform), *The Chinese Economy* 35:5 (September-October 2002), 6-92.

²⁰⁵ Zhang Xudong, “Post-Tiananmen Intellectual Field,” 49-50.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁰⁷ Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen*, 138-139.

concerns can also be found in Suisheng Zhao, who has linked the term not only to the works discussed above, but also with the “Mao fever” of the early 1990s.²⁰⁸

2.5 A CONSCIOUS CONSERVATIVE POSITION?: ENTER “RADICALISM”

As the examples above demonstrate, situating the term “neo-conservatism” on a political Left-Right axis creates confusion because “conservatism” is somehow equated with the preservation of the Chinese socialist status quo. Even the association of “neo-conservatism” with a set of core themes tells us little about what was truly conservative about “neo-conservatism.” In order to dig deeper into the essence of Chinese “neo-conservatism,” we will first investigate whether it was linked to American “neo-conservatism” in any respect. This is done because, as argued above, some manifestations of American “neo-conservatism” managed to reconcile issues that were particular to an American context with general Burkean themes.

Some Chinese intellectuals have referred to American “neo-conservatism” in their analysis of its Chinese counterpart. Chen Xiaoming, a researcher in the Institute of Literature of CASS, has claimed that those who made use of the term in a Chinese context did recognize the American version, but in terms of content, there was no connection between the two.²⁰⁹ Wang Yuechuan, a Professor of Chinese Literature at Peking University, has not only related the use of the prefix “neo” in a Chinese context to the revival of conservatism after a long period of decline, but also to the fact that Chinese “neo-conservatism” acknowledged classical liberalism.²¹⁰ If we compare this statement with the findings of American and European researchers, this appears to be a contested claim. Wang Sirui has questioned the applicability of the label “neo-conservatism” to China. In the United States, “neo-conservatism” took the form of Burkean conservatism, but its essence was classical liberalism. Chinese “neo-conservatives,” however, were anti-liberal; they upheld “statism” (*guojia zhuyi*), “new order-ism” (*xin zhixu zhuyi*), and nationalism.²¹¹

In order to find out whether American and Chinese “neo-conservatism” were indeed unrelated to each other, we briefly have to investigate American “neo-

²⁰⁸ Zhao, “Nationalistic Writing,” 735.

²⁰⁹ Chen Xiaoming, “Baoshouxing yu hefahua,” 93.

²¹⁰ Wang Yuechuan, “Jijin yu baoshou zhiwei,” *ZFL*, 432.

²¹¹ Wang Sirui, “Xin baoshou zhuyi,” 412.

conservatism.” American “neo-conservatives,” most of them sociologists, resisted a strong state, but respected the market, as well as traditional values and institutions.²¹² Irving Kristol, a leading figure in American “neo-conservatism,” has identified religion, nationalism, and economic growth as the three pillars of modern American conservatism. To these he has added “neorealism” in foreign policy, which took the form of anti-communism.²¹³ Others have noted that American “neo-conservatives” discerned a crisis of authority and legitimacy in governing institutions, and that they accorded importance to social stability.²¹⁴ Another aspect of American “neo-conservatism” was its belief in the rise of the so-called “New Class,” a class of professional intellectuals that subverted civilization through modernism, and that was responsible for the rise of an “adversary culture.”²¹⁵ Finally, Martin Lipset, another protagonist of American “neo-conservatism,” has argued that there was an affinity between American “neo-conservatism” and liberalism, especially in terms of welfare policy and anti-Stalinism.²¹⁶ The argument that American “neo-conservatism” was linked to the liberal tradition can be found in a different form in Huntington’s thesis that conservatism was not an *inherent* theory that defended the interests of a particular group, but a *positional* ideology that responded to a specific social situation. Since conservatism was about the preservation of institutions rather than about a belief in particular ideas, American liberals should engage in a defense of institutions that were liberal in nature.²¹⁷

If we adhere to the analysis provided above, then Chinese “neo-conservatives,” among them many economists, supported traits that were in many ways opposite to American “neo-conservatism.” They were not against a strong state, but they argued precisely the opposite, namely that a strong state was *required*. Huntington’s reference to the “crisis of authority,” which in an American context signified an overload of the state, was invoked to press for more state power in a Chinese context. The individual

²¹² Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives*, 51-52.

²¹³ This was the reason why Kristol founded the journal *The National Interest* in 1985.

²¹⁴ Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives*, 53-69.

²¹⁵ Van Rossem, “Neo-conservatism,” 20. The idea of the “New Class” and its ideological instrument of “modernism” was taken from the writings of both Lionel Trilling and Joseph Schumpeter.

²¹⁶ Lipset, “Neoconservatism,” 2. However, Steinfels adds that liberalism itself contains conservative traits as well, both in the U.S. and in the “classical” version. See Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives*, 3.

²¹⁷ Huntington, “Conservatism as an Ideology,” 463, 467-468, 472.

was subordinated to the interest of the state. Nonetheless, as will be discussed below, since those who applied the term “neo-conservatism” in a Chinese context did not oppose the goal of political liberalism *per se*—some presented “neo-conservatism” as a more efficient road to political liberalism—it is possible that the term was also coined because some proponents were convinced that their theory was a theory in the service of liberalism.

Another considerable distinction between American and Chinese “neo-conservatism” concerns the absence of the turn to morality in a Chinese context; it was simply not an issue. The cultural and moral crisis, which was central to the American “neo-conservative” ideology, took the form of a crisis of legitimacy in the Chinese context. Chen Xiaoming has argued that “neo-conservatism” could engage in the construction of a non-mainstream value system precisely because of the crisis of legitimacy that took place.²¹⁸ Chinese “neo-conservatism” sought to resolve this crisis through the reference to traditional cultural values, but these values were used instrumentally, as a means to restore political legitimacy; they were not invoked because of a perceived moral crisis in society. For this reason, Moody’s thesis that both Chinese and American “neo-conservatism” reacted against “leftists” and returned to traditional values and that both shared a similar “temperament,” but different “contents” needs to be modified.²¹⁹

In an American context, the term was first coined as a *label* to discredit political renegades—“no one created a doctrine and called himself a neoconservative,” as Martin Lipset has put it.²²⁰ The label was used in particular to denote the intellectual trajectory of the so-called New York Intellectuals—a group of socialists who had first turned to liberalism, after which they embraced what critics called “neo-conservatism”—between the 1930s and the 1960s.²²¹ Some “neo-conservatives” nevertheless accepted the label. Irving Kristol, for example, who is often considered to be the “godfather” of the

²¹⁸ Chen Xiaoming, “Baoshouxing yu hefahua,” 96.

²¹⁹ Moody, *Conservative Thought*, 151.

²²⁰ Lipset, *Neoconservatism*, 15.

²²¹ During the 1930s, this had been a group of radicals organized around the journal *Partisan Review*, but the totalitarianism in the Soviet Union under Stalin turned them into anti-communist liberals who exchanged their earlier critical attitude towards the United States for a praise of the “death of ideology” by the 1950s. This was expressed in the works of, for example, Daniel J. Boorstin and Daniel Bell. It was the socialist Michael Harrington, the leader of the Democratic Socialists, who first used the term “neo-conservatism” to discredit the social democrats on the right.

American neo-conservative “movement,” has described his own intellectual development from “youthful socialism” over “self-critical liberalism” to “neo-conservatism.”²²²

In a Chinese context, on the contrary, some intellectuals consciously used the term “neo-conservatism” to set up a reform program. This was very different from the use of the label on behalf of liberal opponents to criticize nationalist viewpoints, as discussed in the previous section. In the next part of this chapter, we will move from the term as a “label” to those who have applied the term as a “banner,” as Jin Yuanpu has phrased it.²²³ More specifically, the use of the term “neo-conservatism” as a “banner” will be related to the use of the “counterconcept” of “radicalism” (*jijin zhuyi*), because this term appeared in many Chinese discussions on conservatism and “neo-conservatism.” In order to answer our question of whether there was indeed a conservative “style of thought” behind different uses of the term “conservatism,” it is useful to compare how the “counterconcept” of “radicalism” was defined in relation to “conservatism.”

The term “radicalism” is no less problematic than the term “conservatism” is. The *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*—in which Koselleck and others have reconciled the history of core concepts in Germany between 1750 and 1850 with the social and political history of the era—also contains an overview of the use of the term “radicalism.”²²⁴ Although the context and time frame is different from that of this study, it is nevertheless helpful to look at the different meanings ascribed to the term. Initially, the term “radical” meant “deep-seated,” “rooted,” or “inborn,” but since the eighteenth-century, the term was applied in the sense of “that what goes to the root.”²²⁵ In philosophy, at the end of the eighteenth century, Immanuel Kant employed the term “radical” evil in the sense of innate evil, but in political vocabulary, the term was hardly

²²² Kristol, *Neoconservatism*, ix. The founding of the magazine *The Public Interest* in 1965 by Irving Kristol and Daniel Bell is generally considered the start of “neo-conservatism” in retrospect, but Kristol adds that the term was not used at the time, and that those around the magazine still considered themselves liberals. Other influential journals around which neo-conservatives organized themselves were *Commentary* (edited by Norman Podhoretz from 1960 until 1995), *The New Criterion* (since 1982, lead by Hilton Kramer), *The National Interest* (published by Irving Kristol since 1985), and, finally, *The American Spectator*, a less academic journal. Other famous “neo-conservatives” include Midge Decter, Nathan Glazer, and Seymour Martin Lipset; most of them are sociologists by training.

²²³ Jin Yuanpu, “He yi ‘baoshou zhuyi,’” 385.

²²⁴ Wende, “Radikalismus,” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, Vol. 5, 113-133.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

used before 1830.²²⁶ It was only after the July Revolution of 1830 that the term was utilized as a political concept, but its content was by no means fixed. The author of the entry on “radicalism” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* has discerned three meanings of “radicalism” as a political concept, which existed more or less at the same time. Firstly, “radicalism” meant being true to one’s principles. Secondly, and in a more narrow sense, “radicalism” was tied to a concrete political content, such as “democracy” or “revolution.” Thirdly, the term was invoked to denote the political program of parties.

As a political concept, “radicalism” was also associated with certain goals and means of action. These were defined as a priori goals, as opposition for the sake of opposition, and as the expression of a will for renewal and progress. Whereas all of these were perceived of as negative, some tried to return to the initial—and positive—meaning of the term as “that what goes to the root.” After 1848, the concept became historicized and “ideologized”: in order to emphasize the antirevolutionary stance of conservatism and national liberalism, “radicalism” was linked to revolution and socialism. “Radicalism” was now defined as a worldview that dwelled in the utopia and actions of a blind will to renew. It followed Enlightenment axioms and it ignored reality through a faith in abstract reason. Moreover, it adhered to the belief that new institutions could bring about new people. In contradistinction to its initial meaning of thorough change, “radicalism” now became associated with a nihilistic nature and an abstract worldview of a flat “radicalism” that was inconsiderate and willing to go to extremes.

As the German use of the concept of “radicalism” shows, the correlation between “radicalism” and a political faction of democrats, as reflected in the works of some Chinese analysts, might be too simplistic; “radicalism” could also stand for certain goals and means of action. An example of the association of “radicalism” with a concrete political content concerns a 1992 article by Wang Zhaojun in the journal *Zhongguo luntan* (China Forum). According to Wang Zhaojun, the “radical” faction against which “neo-conservatism” reacted pressed for natural rights, social justice and private ownership. In addition, most intellectuals of the “radical” faction were elitist intellectuals located outside of the political system, whereas “neo-conservatives” were

²²⁶ Kant used the term “radical” in his *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft* (Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason), 1793, 32, 37.

mostly non-elitist and part of the system.²²⁷ Another example of how “radicalism” was mostly understood as a program of political parties concerns a 1993 article by Wu Yifu in *Beijing zhi chun* (Beijing Spring). In the article, Wu Yifu did not only connect “radicalism” with liberalism, but also with socialism. In Wu Yifu’s view, both liberals and “neo-conservatives” denounced violent revolution and argued for the foundation of a pluralist democracy.²²⁸

In order to move away from vague statements about “neo-conservatism” and “radicalism” such as the ones above, we will focus instead on how *advocates* of the theory applied these two terms. The question will be posed of whether exponents of “neo-conservatism” only referred to the “counterconcept” of “radicalism” to reject a concrete political content, such as, for example, democracy, or whether they also employed it to refer to the *nature* of goals and means of action, as in the German treatment of “radicalism.” As discussed in the introduction, a true conservatism upholds gradual change because it opposes Enlightenment progressivism. If “radicalism” also stood for “progressivism,” then it was possible that Chinese “neo-conservatism” did indeed rise above a plea for centralization and strong rule.

2.6 THE USE OF “NEO-CONSERVATISM” AND “RADICALISM”

2.6.1 “Radicalism” and “Neo-conservatism” in Xiao Gongqin

As briefly indicated, unlike in the American context, the term “neo-conservatism” did not first arise in China as a derogatory label coined by political opponents. Xiao Gongqin (b. 1946), a historian from Shanghai Normal University, first coined the term “neo-conservatism” (*xin baoshou zhuyi*) at a December 1990 conference on “Chinese Tradition and Socialist Modernization,” which was organized by the Ideology and Theory Department of China Youth Daily (*Zhongguo qingnian bao*).²²⁹ Xu Weicheng and Yuan Mu, two former Cultural Revolution propagandists, reportedly attended the

²²⁷ Wang Zhaojun, “New Conservatism,” 83, 86-87, 91.

²²⁸ Wu Yifu, “Ziyou zhuyi he ‘xin baoshou zhuyi,’” 14.

²²⁹ Xiao Gongqin was the son of a Kuomintang general from Sichuan province. See Sullivan, *Democracy and Developmentalism*, 231 (fn.) One year after graduation, in 1982, Xiao became a lecturer at the History Department of Shanghai Normal University, where he would later become Professor, a position he still holds up to this date.

conference.²³⁰ According to the Hong Kong media, the literary critic and political commentator He Xin and affiliates of *China Youth Daily* also attended the conference. Xiao allegedly also received the support of Chen Haose, the son of marshal Chen Yi; in addition, Xiao is believed to have had contact with associates of Jiang Zemin and the offspring of several officials.²³¹ Nevertheless, it remains unclear to what extent there was political support for Xiao's theory.

An extended version of Xiao Gongqin's speech at the December 1990 conference appeared in *China Youth Daily* of February 1991 under the title "Yan Fu's Reflections on China's Modernization and its Enlightenment."²³² In this article, Xiao argued that the nineteenth-century translator Yan Fu (1854-1921) had been a proponent of "gradualist" or "incrementalist" modernization (*jianjin zhuyi de xiandaihua*). Unlike "radical modernizers," Yan Fu had not considered traditional culture and values obstacles to modernization; he had treated them as indispensable "media" (*meijie*) and "levers" (*ganggan*) in the process of modernization.²³³ In the February 1991 article, Xiao Gongqin summarized the advocacy of "gradual modernizers" like this:

[B]y using enlightened despotism as an authority lever to push Chinese modernization and by considering traditional cultural value symbols intermediaries for modernization, they propose to induce the growth and maturation of endogenous modernization factors. They do this in order to let them harmonize with the correspondent new system and to form a development mechanism with the endogenous as the mainstay (...).²³⁴

As can be seen from this brief passage, Xiao invoked organic terms such as "growth" and "maturation," terms that can also be found in Burkean conservatism. Remarkably, in this edited version of the speech, the term "neo-conservatism" (*xin baoshou zhuyi*)

²³⁰ Xu Weicheng was also the vice-mayor of Beijing. According to the Hong Kong press, Xu was the person behind the 26 April 1989 editorial in *People's Daily* "We Must Take a Firm Stand and Oppose Turmoil" (*Bixu qizhi xianming de fandui dongluan*).

²³¹ "Behind the CCP Princes Party," *Pai-hsing* (Paihsing), Hong Kong, no. 260 (March 16, 1992), 32-35. Translated in *Inside China Mainland* (Taipei) 14: 5 (May 1992), 6-10. Chen Haose was the vice-minister of telecommunications at the time. His father Chen Yi (1901-1972) had been a commander in the Chinese army in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1955, he became a Marshal in the PLA. Between the 1950s and 1970s, Chen Yi had held the positions of vice-premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs.

²³² Xiao Gongqin, "Yan Fu dui Zhongguo xiandaihua de sikao ji qi qishi," *Zhongguo qingnianbao*, February 6, 1991, 3.

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

did not appear once; it was supplanted with the term “neo-gradualism” or “neo-incrementalism” (*xin jianjin zhuyi*). Then again, in a longer version of the speech that appeared in Xiao Gongqin’s *Collected Works* (1995), the term “neo-conservatism” was mentioned; the word “conservatism” even appeared in the title.²³⁵

Apart from Xiao Gongqin’s reference to tradition as a “lever” in the introduction of foreign elements, tradition could also function as a means to strengthen political cohesion. For Xiao, in a transitional era of modernization, nationalism in a broad sense—loyalty towards one’s nation—could function as a coagulation force; it was a “‘natural’ political resource.”²³⁶ The problem with Chinese nationalism since modern times, Xiao argued, was precisely that it had not relied on “mainstream culture” (*zhuliu wenhua*), namely Confucianism, but had rejected it fiercely. Nevertheless, since the “mainstream culture” was the collective experience of a people grown in response to challenges, and since it represented the “national character” (*guoxing*) of a nation, it was particularly useful to strengthen legitimacy.²³⁷ Since 1949, both Chinese nationalism and patriotism had drawn from marginal cultural elements, such as the wisdom of the lower classes, anti-imperialism, or scientific and technological achievements. The cohesion force of this patriotism was limited, but for the period before the economic reforms, it had been sufficient. With the start of economic reform since 1978, however, it had become inadequate.²³⁸ Here, we can find some similarities with official ideology, in which tradition was also utilized to complement socialism. Xiao pledged allegiance to socialism by stressing his adherence to the “Four Cardinal Principles.” Nevertheless, he also noted that the principles had changed in relation to the realities of the reform era: the “socialist road” had become “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” the “leadership of the party” was in fact the leadership to push reforms, and the “thought of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong” had turned into “practice as the sole criterion for truth.”²³⁹

²³⁵ Xiao Gongqin, “‘Yan Fu beilun’ yu jindai baoshou zhuyi biangeguan,” *XGJ*, 18-41. The article was originally published in *Zhongguo yanjiu* 1996:6. Excerpts of the article have been translated in *CLG* 30:6 (November-December 1997), 64-76.

²³⁶ Xiao Gongqin, “Minzu zhuyi yu Zhongguo zhuanxing shiqi de yishi xingtai,” *XGJ*, 350-358. Originally published in *ZYG* 1994:4. Quote from 351.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 352.

²³⁸ On economic performance as a source of legitimacy, see for example Chen Feng’s article “The Dilemmas of Eudaemonic Legitimacy in Post-Mao China,” *Polity* 29:3 (1997), 421-440.

²³⁹ *Zhongguo shibao zhoukan bianji*, “Dalu xin baoshou zhuyi” (*xia*), 98.

Xiao Gongqin claimed that his “neo-conservatism” was rooted in his criticism of “radicalism.” He distinguished between three kinds of “radicalism,” namely “mental radicalism” (*xintaishang de jijin zhuyi*), “system determinism” (*zhidu jue ding lun*) and “political romanticism” (*zhengzhi langman zhuyi*).²⁴⁰ The first type, “mental radicalism,” stood for reform plans based on a sense of anxiety instead of on a realistic assessment of affairs, which resulted in rash and impetuous action. This type of “radicalism” often manifested itself in times of crisis, when those who resorted to sudden action used it to obtain peace of mind. As Xiao explained it:

In reality, this “mental” radicalism implies that when people demand a bold and resolute destruction of the old order and the old systems, and when they demand the import of new systems through swift and violent battle-style methods that seek to accomplish the task in one stroke, subconsciously, they often consider this way of doing things to be a strategy for psychological balance and self-comfort.²⁴¹

“System determinism” was “radical” in that it advocated the import of Western systems without taking into account that every institution or system was the product of a long process of social and historical growth.²⁴² According to Xiao Gongqin, if one transplanted a system without the supporting elements of the society of which it was the product, the result in another context would be different; it might even lead to social disorder. Xiao described this type of “radicalism” as follows:

In the West, a certain system A produces a certain effect B. For this kind of causal relation, it is necessary that a number of social, economic, and cultural elements internal to society function as supporting conditions. When people, in order to obtain the effect described above in China, import a certain Western system in isolation, then, because Chinese society lacks the relevant Western social supporting conditions, the

²⁴⁰ Xiao Gongqin, “Zixu,” *XGJ*, 9.

²⁴¹ Xiao Gongqin, “Lishi jujue langman: Zhongguo gaige di’er sichao de jueqi,” *XGJ*, 109-122. Quote from 115. The article also appeared in *Zhongguo xiandaihua yanjiu*, 9 December 1994. An abstract was published in *Beijing qingnian bao*, 19 January 1992, 6. A revised translation can be found in *CLG* 30:6 (Nov-dec 1997), 77-88.

²⁴² In an ironic twist of fate, the New Left intellectual Cui Zhiyuan has used a similar term for radically different purposes, namely “institutional fetishism” (*zhidu baiwujiao*). Like Xiao Gongqin, Cui Zhiyuan has applied this term to refer to the equation of institutions with abstract ideals without taking into account specific contexts. See Cui Zhiyuan, “Zhidu chuangxin yu di’erci sixiang jiefang,” *EYS* 8 (August 1994), 5-16.

outcome will not only be that it is impossible to produce the causal relation between system A and effect B, but also—because the original old system has already been artificially destroyed, and because the new system lacks the supporting conditions and cannot be established or operate—that the new and old systems are both unable to carry out the integration of the social order. The result of this is that an increasingly severe loss of order and various “landslide effects” might emerge.²⁴³

Finally, “political romanticism” implied a notion of reform based on abstract principles and blueprint designs of society, as in French revolutionary rationalism. This type failed because it ignored the particular and the historically grown.

Under the effect of aspirations and projections, people with this mentality are often likely to regard certain principles that are considered “naturally reasonable” abstract principles, utopian-style “natural laws,” or transcendent “first moral principles” as the basis for the reconstruction of the social order. The reason why this trend is called “idealism” is that those who hold this kind of ideas profoundly believe that history can be reconstructed or transformed according to certain a priori and self-explanatory logical ideas—just like engineers design products—and that it is unnecessary to take into account the empirical facts of history proper.²⁴⁴

Although Xiao Gongqin did not mention Karl Popper here, the perceived link between “radicalism” and “romanticism” and the very imagery of the engineer in connection with social reform were two elements present in Karl Popper’s *The Open Society and Its Enemies*.²⁴⁵ Whereas Xiao Gongqin’s “radicalism” implicitly referred to the political liberalism of the late 1980s in particular, it also exceeded a concrete political content. It entailed certain goals and means of action dominated by a priori principles, utopianism, and abstract rationalism. In accordance with this rejection of abstract principles and utopian projections, Xiao underscored the weight of the historical growth of institutions and the particular contexts in which they had been shaped. In Western research on the topic, though, this more abstract dimension of Xiao’s conception of “radicalism” has been ignored. For example, Chen Feng has argued that there was an ironic twist in

²⁴³ Xiao Gongqin, “Lishi jujue langman,” 116.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

²⁴⁵ See Popper, *The Open Society*, Vol. 1, “Chapter nine: Aestheticism, Perfectionism, Utopianism,” 157-168.

Xiao's usage of "rationalist radicalism": whereas Western scholars had employed the term before to attack "radical communist programmes," Xiao directed it at a "capitalist utopia," or, at "an attempt at a total change of China along Western lines."²⁴⁶ For Chen Feng, Xiao's "radicalism" was "democratic radicalism"; the term was reduced to a concrete political content.

Then again, Cheng Feng was not entirely mistaken. If one only takes into account how Xiao Gongqin's theory was utilized in the Chinese media, the identification of "radicalism" with a concrete political content seems correct. In the media, Xiao's theory was presented as a theory of gradual reform that avoided both Leftist and liberal extremism. Apart from Xiao's article on Yan Fu in the *China Youth Daily*, several other of Xiao's articles were published in both *Beijing Youth Daily* and *China Youth Daily*.²⁴⁷ Xiao was also mentioned in a book entitled *The Third Generation of the PRC* (Gongheguo de di sandai), which contained an introduction by propagandist Yuan Mu.²⁴⁸ The book included a section on "radicalism," in which author Yang Fan, a Beijing-based economist, defined it along these lines:

So-called "radicalism" is a kind of thing that is similar to "leftist" opportunism. It is characterized by subjective aspirations that transcend objective reality; it hopes to develop China through exceeding stages and with increasing speed. (...) During the era of reform and opening up, radicalism manifests itself in two trends of thought. The first one is "the trend of thought of extreme democratization," which manifests itself politically in bourgeois liberalization; the second one is "the trend of thought of returning to the ancients and remembering the past," which manifests itself politically in the opposition to modernization.²⁴⁹

Yang Fan explained that the trend of "extreme democratization" considered the Western model of multiple parties, private property, and a market economy its ideal, whereas the

²⁴⁶ Chen, "Neoconservative Political Thought," 599.

²⁴⁷ Articles by Xiao Gongqin appeared in *Beijing qingnianbao*, 4 September 1990, 4; *Beijing qingnian bao*, 19 January 1992, 6 (extended version appeared in *XGJ*, 109-122 and in *Zhongguo xiandaihua yanjiu* 12 (1994); and in *Beijing qingnianbao*, 13 May 1993, 3 (an extended version appeared in *XGJ*, 123-139).

²⁴⁸ Yang Fan, *Gongheguo de di sandai* (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1991).

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 187. The author also mentioned two other manifestations of "radicalism" that predated the reform era, namely the "trend of thought of blood lineage theory" (*xuetonglun sichao*) and the "trend of thought of the rebel factions" (*zaofanpai sichao*) of the Cultural Revolution era. They are described in chapter two of the book.

trend of “returning to the ancients and remembering the past” was rooted in “peasant-style utopia” and populism. The convergence of these two trends, then, had formed the intellectual basis of the “June fourth incident.” Both manifestations of “radicalism” were marked by the ignorance of China’s “national conditions,” by a subjective mentality divorced from reality, by ideal models, by praising virtue over history, by “overcorrection,” by the philosophy of struggle, by a stress on oppositions, and by the appraisal of revolution at the expense of reform.

The author further mentioned that *The Third Generation of the PRC* was a defense of “gradualism” (*wenjin zhuyi*) against both conservatives and liberals within the Party, and it was here that he invoked Xiao Gongqin. According to Yang Fan, Xiao distinguished “gradualism” from “conservatism”; the basic difference between the two was that “conservatives” identified with traditional value symbol systems, whereas “gradualists” “merely considered these traditional value symbols, principles and rules, along with the traditional authority form, to be levers that were indispensable for orderly evolution and economic reform.”²⁵⁰

As regards Xiao Gongqin’s theory of “neo-conservatism” and the way it was presented in the official media, several things can be noted. Firstly, whereas Xiao’s “radicalism” clearly also referred to certain *goals* and *means* of action—namely, blueprint designs, utopianism, and abstract rationalism—in the official media, “radicalism” was merely associated with Old Leftism and liberalism. Secondly, by including the Leftists in the camp of “radicalism,” “gradualism” could be presented as a “middle road” in between Old Leftists and liberal reformers. Here, we can see that the view of “neo-conservatism” as presented in European and American accounts does indeed apply to the theory as it was presented in official media. But, as will be argued further, this was only one side of the story. Thirdly, from the propagandists’ point of view, “conservatism” was a dangerous term because it implied the *identification* with traditional elements, whereas “gradualism” could be presented as a strategy in which traditional elements only functioned as a means for political stability. Consequently, the term “neo-conservatism” was replaced with the more neutral term “neo-gradualism.”

²⁵⁰ Yang Fan, *Gongheguo de di sandai*, 251-255. Quote from 255.

2.6.2 “Radicalism” and “Neo-conservatism” in “Realistic Responses”

The “banner” of “neo-conservatism” was also raised in the policy paper “Realistic Responses and Strategic Options for China after the Soviet Coup” (*Sulian jubian zhihou Zhongguo de xianshi yingdui yu zhanlüe xuanze*), a document that has been attributed to the relatives of high officials referred to as the “princelings” (*taizidang*).²⁵¹ The document was published by the Ideology and Theory Department of *Zhongguo qingnian bao* (China Youth Daily)—the same organ that had organized the conference at which Xiao Gongqin had coined the theory of “neo-conservatism” one year earlier—on September 9, 1991.²⁵²

“Realistic Responses” was a response to the Soviet Coup that had taken place in August of the same year, a coup during which communist “hardliners,” including the heads of the KGB, army, and police, had plotted against the president of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev.²⁵³ Yet the President of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin, managed to rally the people against the plotters and mass demonstrations followed. Although order was restored and the plotters were arrested by August 21, the *putsch* had exposed the cracks in the Soviet ideology and it brought Boris Yeltsin to the foreground. The coup was of great importance because it was the prelude to the end of the Soviet Communist Party and the USSR.

Despite the official background of “Realistic Responses”—the *China Youth Daily* is a research department within the central office of the CCP’s Youth League—the document was only published informally; it never appeared in official Party journals. Overseas Chinese critics have attributed this to the fact that an official publication would be tantamount to publicly admitting the Party’s “ideological bankruptcy.”²⁵⁴ The alleged author of the document was the head of the Ideology and Theory Department of *China Youth Daily*, Yang Ping, but it has also been related to the princelings Chen Yuan and Pan Yue, as well as to Wang Xiaodong, who later became

²⁵¹ The document first circulated internally as a publication of the Ideology and Theory section of *China Youth Daily* (*Zhongguo qingnian bao*). After it had leaked, however, it was published in the New York-based democratic liberal Chinese journal *Zhongguo zhi chun* (China Spring) 1 (January 1992), 35-39. An English translation of the document can be found in *CLG* 29:2 (March-April 1996), 13-31. This theme issue on the document “Realistic Responses” also contains translations of liberal democratic criticism by overseas Chinese intellectuals.

²⁵² Fewsmith, “Neoconservatism,” 642.

²⁵³ On the Soviet coup, see Michael Mandelbaum, “Coup de Grace: The End of the Soviet Union,” *Foreign Affairs* 71:1 (1992), 164-183; John B. Dunlop, “The August 1991 Coup and Its Impact on Soviet Politics,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 5:1 (Winter 2003), 94-127.

²⁵⁴ Hu Ping, “Program of CCP Heirs,” 36.

the editor of the journal *Strategy and Management*.²⁵⁵ In brief, one could use the words of critic Hu Ping to summarize the nature of the document: it had an “obviously official background,” but no “official affiliation.”²⁵⁶

The influence of Chen Yuan, a graduate of Qinghua University and the vice-governor of the People’s Bank of China,²⁵⁷ can be discerned in the document in the form of a critique of the “radical reform” in the Soviet Union. Since the late 1980s, Chen Yuan had gathered a group of “largely conservative economists and social scientists” around him in the “Beijing Young Economists Association.”²⁵⁸ Already before the coup, Chen Yuan had emphasized that planning and centralization were crucial with regard to economic reform.²⁵⁹ Chen Yuan had also criticized reform in both the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe because it went hand in hand with social, economic, and political instability. Instead, Chen Yuan argued for gradual and stable reform; he found an example of this in the reform policies of premier Li Peng.²⁶⁰

“Realistic Responses” outlined the tasks that China needed to carry out in order to avoid the same fate as the Soviet Union. It predicted that the Soviet Union would

²⁵⁵ According to one source, Yang Ping wrote the document together with *China Youth Daily* deputy editor Pan Yue, the son-in-law of general Liu Huaqing, who was the vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), and a Politburo member. According to another source, Yang Ping based the document on a speech delivered at a 1990 conference. Among the attendants of the 1990 conference that reportedly led to the document “Realistic Responses” were Jiang Hong and Tang Ruoxi. Jiang Hong worked for the Beijing Municipality Policy Research Department at the time. Tang Ruoxi established the Rural Research Institute together with Deng Yingtao, the son of Deng Liqun, and was involved in the reform policy of the SEZ Shekou. Chen Yuan was the son of Chen Yun, the chairman of the Central Advisory Commission (CAC).

²⁵⁶ Hu Ping, “Program of CCP Heirs,” 36.

²⁵⁷ Zhao Ziyang had given Chen Yuan this post after he had lost the 1987 “elections” to the Beijing Party Committee. See *China Since Tiananmen*, 84. See also Lam, “China’s ‘Gang of Princelings,’” 1.

²⁵⁸ Lam, “Chen’s Son Bids to Expand Power Base,” 11. This group, which was also dubbed “Chen’s club,” included scholars from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), scholars and cadres from the Research Office of the Communist Party Central Committee, and members of a former think tank under the State Council, namely the Chinese Economic System Reform Research Institute (CESRRI). The former director of this now dysfunctional institute was Chen Yizi, one of the persons allegedly associated with the “northern” school of “neo-authoritarianism.” Other princelings in the group included Deng Yingtao, Tang Ruoxi, and Du Ying, the nephew of Hu Qiaomu.

²⁵⁹ Fewsmith mentions two papers that Chen Yuan presented on this topic. One dates from 1987 and was entitled “Report on the Stages of the Socialist Economic Operating Mechanism.” The second paper, presented in 1990, was entitled “China’s Deep-Seated Economic Problems and Choices: Several Issues Regarding China’s Economic Development Situation and the Operating Mechanism (Outline).” See Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen*, 84-85.

²⁶⁰ Kwan, “Stability Put Before Reform,” 12.

witness a rise of “racial nationalism.”²⁶¹ On an international level, the document warned against the “collective hegemony of the West.”²⁶² Within China, instability and separatist minority forces would increase, and the battle over radical versus gradual reform would recommence. Nonetheless, the authors noted that there were important differences between China and the Soviet Union, which meant that reaction should not be too fierce.²⁶³ These concerns already indicate that the document focused more on policy issues—such as economic reform, unity, and the transnational question of China’s location in the world—than Xiao Gongqin’s “neo-conservatism” did. Xiao Gongqin’s theory was coined in response to the problems of reform and the political liberalism of the late 1980s; Xiao analyzed these issues from an academic perspective. “Realistic responses,” on the contrary, was a more practical and immediate response to the Soviet Coup of August 1991.

The document went on to describe the deeper cause of the Soviet and Eastern European upheavals as “utopian capitalism” (*kongxiang ziben zhuyi*) in the people’s mode of thought.²⁶⁴ It further criticized the economic “shock therapies” (*xiuke liaofa*) of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, which were “radical reform plans” based on abstract blueprints and revolutionary methods that ignored the gradual nature of reform.²⁶⁵ Apart from “utopian capitalism,” the authors also discerned “utopian socialism” (*kongxiang shehui zhuyi*), which they described as follows: “Its mode of thought is concretely manifested in thinking that as soon as some perfect system has been established, all other problems will be readily solved.”²⁶⁶ The authors further criticized the “utopian socialism” manifested in the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

²⁶¹ *Zhongguo qingnianbao* sixiang lilunbu, “Yingdui yu xuanze,” 35. This claim needs to be understood against the background of demonstrations in Tibet and Xinjiang in March 1989 and April 1990, respectively.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ The main differences were: that economic reforms were more successful and had reached a higher stage in China; that ethnic minorities constituted less than five percent of the population in China, versus about fifty percent in the Soviet Union; that there were relatively more educated people in the Soviet Union than in China, where peasants made up eighty percent of the population; that the Soviet Union had been “transformed into a Western country” due to Western influence, as opposed to China; and that in China, contrary to the situation in the Soviet Union, the first generation of revolutionary leaders, among them Chen Yun and Deng Xiaoping, still left its imprint on policy.

²⁶⁴ *Zhongguo qingnianbao* sixiang lilunbu, “Yingdui yu xuanze,” 36.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

The “realistic responses” and “strategic options” that the authors proposed, then, were several. The CCP should be transformed from a “revolutionary party” (*gemingdang*) into a “ruling party” (*zhizhengdang*) in response to the state of socialist construction.²⁶⁷ The party should not underline class struggle during the construction phase; “populism” and mass movements should be avoided. The reason for this was that reforms, as Huntington had phrased it, were often “the forerunner of revolution.”²⁶⁸ The socialist party could learn from the experience of “bourgeois political parties” for its transformation:

In order to counterattack “socialist liberalization,” and, at the same time, in order to eliminate the radicalism, romanticism, and irrationalism within the bourgeois camp, many bourgeois scholars came out in defense of the capitalist system. For example, Russell, Popper, von Hayek, and others epitomize Western rationalist philosophy and science. They played a significant role in eliminating “countercharge” mechanisms and radical aspects from the bourgeois system, and they provided a new theoretical basis for the transformation of the bourgeoisie from a revolutionary to a ruling party, and for the safeguarding of the capitalist system. A socialist political party is essentially different from the bourgeoisie, but at the stage of holding power, they face many common problems, such as, for example, social stability, gradual reform, and the like.²⁶⁹

The document further addressed changes on the ideological level, where transformation required the “creative interpretation” of “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” Given the fact that one of the sources of legitimacy of the CCP, namely the October Revolution of 1917, had dried out with the end of the Soviet Communist Party, there was only one source left, namely the “socialism with Chinese characteristics” that had been favored by Mao Zedong. The authors argued that the latter had to be reinterpreted with a stress on China’s “particular national conditions” (*teshu de guoqing*). China was a huge, populous, and long-term oppressed country, which determined “that only socialism can save China and only socialism can develop China.”²⁷⁰ Thirdly, these “national conditions” also dictated that gradual reform based on realism (*xianshi zhuyi*)

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 36-37.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 37.

and rationalism (*lixing zhuyi*) was the only way to carry out the process of “reform and opening up.” Gradual reform should draw from two things: (1) “neo-conservatism” in the history of reform of modern China” and (2) Western rationalism.²⁷¹ The document said:

By neo-conservatism, we mean a view of reform that differs from that of the traditional die-hard conservative forces. It stands for the use of rational elements in the traditional and current orders, and for the gradual introduction of the rational elements in Western systems in order to realize China’s modernization. Western rationalist philosophy refers to a school [of philosophy] different from romanticist and irrationalist philosophy. It stands for proof, instrumental rationality, and orderly, gradual advancement. It opposes romanticism and violence, as well as the anti-order, anti-society, and anti-culture conduct of irrationalism. Neo-conservatism and Western rationalist philosophy have always existed in opposition to radicalism (...).²⁷²

Another element mentioned by the authors was the importance of nationalism, patriotism, and national interest in the struggle against “peaceful evolution.”²⁷³ Also, China’s interests, its socialist system, and its modernization could be safeguarded by the “creative transformation of traditional Chinese culture.”²⁷⁴ The Confucian tradition of collectivism and altruism in the field of ethics, its “this-worldly spirit” of common responsibility, and its “heroic manner of man” should be used as a “source of values” in the process of socialist modernization. In the economic sphere, the “radical reform view” (*jijin de gaigeguan*) should be refused, because a change in the relations of production could possibly intensify the contradictions within the system and weaken the control of the central government.

The authors further argued that the “romantic reform view” (*langman zhuyi gaigeguan*) that wanted to “solve problems from the very basics” and the “mentality of deep-level reform” (*shencengci gaige silu*), according to which the issue of ownership was the crux to solving problems of reform, should be done away with.²⁷⁵ Changing Mao Zedong’s famous dictum that “power comes from the barrel of a gun,” the authors

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 38.

stated: “The CCP must grasp not only the gun but also the asset economy.”²⁷⁶ For the authors, government and enterprise should be separated strictly, but Party and government should only be separated up to a certain degree.²⁷⁷ Finally, the authors insisted that a policy based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and “national interest” should take the place of a foreign policy guided by moral principles and ideology.²⁷⁸ A “greater Chinese cultural and economic sphere” should be founded in response to the emergence of regional economic blocs. China should cooperate economically with those areas in Asia that had “the same culture and the same race” (*tongwen tongzhong*) as the Chinese.²⁷⁹

Since there was no open debate on “neo-conservatism” on the mainland, the only dissenting voices that could be heard were those of liberal democrats in Hong Kong or the United States. Some denounced the document as a program of fascism.²⁸⁰ Others stressed that the agenda of Party ownership was irreconcilable with the idea of a “Third Way” in between capitalism and socialism; the program was nothing but a reflection of Party interests.²⁸¹ In this respect, the program offered nothing new; it partly supported Chen Yun’s “birdcage economy” and it partly supported Deng Xiaoping.²⁸² Still others claimed that in essence, “neo-conservatism” did not differ from the “old Stalinist dogma”—like father, like son.²⁸³ Moreover, the CCP’s resistance against

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid. There were four reasons why the princelings recommended CCP ownership of assets: (1) the CCP was most closely linked with the “process of economic movement”; (2) conflicts between the functions of managers/supervisors and asset owners could be avoided; (3) it helped to attain stability and advanced political reform because the Party would be an interest group separated from the government; (4) it was easy to carry out.

²⁷⁸ Ibid. Zhou Enlai coined the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” at the 1955 Bandung Conference. The principles were: mutual respect for territorial sovereignty, mutual nonaggression, mutual noninterference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ See, for example Su Wei, “Yifen taizi dang jiebian de baipishu,” *Zhongguo zhi chun* 1 (January 1992), 28-29. Translated in *CLG* 29:2 (March-April 1996), 58-51; Zhao Yuesheng, “Xin faxisi zhuyi de xuanyan,” *Zhongguo zhi chun* 1 (January 1992), 29-30. Translated in *CLG* 29:2 (March-April 1996), 52-54.

²⁸¹ Lu Wei, “Taizidang paozhi ‘shizheng gangling’ shimo,” *Qianshao* 2 (February 1992), 92-93. Originally published in *Xin bao*, 16 January 1992. Translated in *CLG* 29:2 (March-April 1996), 32-34.

²⁸² Chen Kuide, “Wangchao mori de xinzheng,” *Zhongguo zhi chun* 1 (January 1992), 24-25. Translated in *CLG* 29:2 (March-April 1996), 38-41.

²⁸³ Ruan Ming, “Cong xin quanwei zhuyi dao xin baoshou zhuyi,” *Kaifang Zazhi*, February 1992, 28-32. Translated in *CLG* 29:2 (March-April 1996), 58-70. Quote from page 64.

“peaceful evolution” was useless.²⁸⁴ Conversely, other critics pointed at the new aspects of “neo-conservatism”: it was an attempt at formulating a new theory in times of “the ideological bankruptcy of the CCP.”²⁸⁵ Seen from this point of view, the document urged a shift from a “revolutionary” to a “ruling” party and already manifested this shift in terms of language.²⁸⁶ As to the lack of a concrete time schedule for democracy, one critic stated: “If this speed is maintained at the same rate as that which can be reached by the mainland government, then new conservatism might as well set up office in Li Peng’s toilet.”²⁸⁷ Other criticisms were that “neo-conservatism” did not prescribe how to avoid an arbitrary authority, that it remained vague on how to achieve democracy, that it was elitist, that it wrongly reduced corruption and bureaucracy to problems of individual behavior, and that it placed too much stress on the political and economic orders and stability.²⁸⁸

2.6.3 A Comparison between Xiao Gongqin and “Realistic Responses”

As already noted, the main overall distinction between Xiao’s “neo-conservatism” and the term as it was used in “Realistic Responses” was that the former was coined in the context of the political instability following the repression of the Tiananmen Square demonstrations in June 1989, whereas the latter was a response to both the decline of socialism in the international arena and the dangers of rapid economic reform. Since “Realistic Responses” was formulated in response to an *external* threat that could have serious consequences for China, it was notable for its advocacy of *Realpolitik*. On the other hand, since Xiao Gongqin reacted mostly to *internal* threats related to quick political liberalization, he was more concerned with conflicts within the Chinese system. Moreover, Xiao Gongqin was a humanistic scholar working for a university,

²⁸⁴ Xue Wei, “Heping yanbian bu ke zudang,” in *Zhongguo zhi chun* 1 (January 1992), 26. Translated in *CLG* 29:2 (March-April 1996), 42-43.

²⁸⁵ Hu Ping, “Bitan Zhonggong jiebanren de gangling: ruhe kandai ‘yingdui yu xuanze,’” *Zhongguo zhi chun* 1 (January 1992), 23-24. Translated in *CLG* 29:2 (March-April 1996), 35-37.

²⁸⁶ Ding Chu, “Cong ‘yi’ dao ‘li’ de zhanlüe zhanbian,” *Zhongguo zhi chun* 1 (January 1992), 30-31. Translated in *CLG* 29:2 (March-April 1996), 55-57. Quotes from pages 55-56.

²⁸⁷ Wang Zhaojun, “New Conservatism,” 96.

²⁸⁸ Yin Huimin, “Xin baoshou zhuyi yu Zhongguo qianjing,” *Jiushi niandai* 4 (April 1993), 86-88. Translated in *CLG* 29:2 (March-April 1996), 77-81; Ruan Ming, “Cong xin quanwei zhuyi dao xin baoshou zhuyi,” 58-70; Wang Zhaojun, “Xin baoshou zhuyi yu dalu zhishi fenzi,” *Zhongguo luntan* 21 (July 1, 1992), 106-114. Translated in *CLG* 29:2 (March-April 1996), 83-96.

whereas the princelings were technocratic intellectuals close to the power center. It is evident that the latter were more concerned with the future of the CCP and its preservation of power in particular.

Xiao Gongqin's own view on the relation between "Realistic Responses" and his "neo-conservatism" was that there were both important similarities and dissimilarities. The two overlapped in the sense that both examined the impact of "radicalism" on the PRC, and both criticized the Cultural Revolution and Mao Zedong's policies from the perspective of the preservation of stability. Xiao added, however, that the authors behind "Realistic Responses" started from class interests (*jieji liyi*)—the interests of the "offspring of the revolution," whose "empire" was threatened by "radicalism"—whereas his own underlying concerns were related to China's "national interests" (*minzu de liyi*).²⁸⁹ Nevertheless, Xiao also stated that although the CCP should be cleared of its radical heritage, its continuity should not be questioned.

Apart from Xiao Gongqin's own views on the differences between the two references to "neo-conservatism," what can be said if we compare them? Firstly, Xiao Gongqin and the princelings had a different conception of the "counterconcept" of "radicalism." The princelings mentioned "radicalism" in the same breath with "romanticism" and "irrationalism." Rationalism was a good thing; it was related to order, proof, and reason, whereas romanticism and irrationalism were linked with disorder. The princelings adhered to rationalism because they wanted to throw light on the rational and practical nature of the Party, in response to the utopian dominance of the Mao era.²⁹⁰ For Xiao Gongqin, on the other hand, "radicalism" was related to abstract rationalism; his "neo-conservatism" attempted to retreat from rationalism by focusing on the concrete and the historically grown nature of societies.

More specifically, Xiao Gongqin and the princelings each talked about a different kind of rationalism: the princelings referred to rationalism (*lixing zhuyi*) as the opposite of "irrationalism" (*fei lixing zhuyi*); for them, it was about using the positive powers of reason instead of relying on emotions and "utopian ideals." Xiao Gongqin applied the term in an epistemological sense; he referred to the philosophical tradition of rationalism (*weili zhuyi*), according to which knowledge is gained through reason. Xiao Gongqin discarded this tradition in favor of the tradition of empiricism (*jingyan*

²⁸⁹ Interview with Xiao Gongqin, Shanghai, August 4, 2006.

²⁹⁰ Davies, *Worrying about China*, 168.

zhuyi), which holds that knowledge is gained through experience. In accordance with conservative beliefs, Xiao Gongqin found fault with rationalism because he associated it with universalism and the ignorance of particular historical conditions. The princelings mentioned Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), Karl Popper (1902-1994), and Friedrich von Hayek (1899-1992) as representatives of “Western rationalism.” Russell was a logician and mathematician; Popper was a philosopher of science. Although von Hayek was not a rationalist in the strict sense, he dealt with the problem of the rational distribution of resources in an economy.

A second important difference between Xiao Gongqin and the princelings concerns their economic advocacies. From the terminology used by the princelings, we can see that they still adhered to a Marxist framework; they disapproved of “radical” reform because it would change the relations of production. The princelings clearly associated market reforms with capitalism, whereas Xiao Gongqin was very much in favor of market reforms, as long as they were introduced in a gradual manner. Furthermore, whereas Xiao Gongqin subscribed to private ownership and the depoliticization of economics, the princelings argued that the Party should not give up its control over the economy; it should even become the owner of assets. Although the princelings upheld that the use of Western theories could be useful for the transformation of the CCP from a “revolutionary” into a “ruling” party, they still thought within a Marxist framework of “socialist” versus “bourgeois” thought and the “capitalist system.”

A third point that can be noted is that Xiao Gongqin and the princelings invoked different foreign thinkers, something that will become more clear in the next chapter. Michael Sullivan is the only researcher who has analyzed how Western political thought has been re-appropriated for the formation of “neo-authoritarianism” and “neo-conservatism.” As Sullivan has stated: “Once entering a different political-historical context, theory often plays a role in the transformation of that society and the theory itself is also recreated.”²⁹¹ Sullivan has argued that Chinese “neo-conservatives” referred to Edmund Burke, Karl Popper, Paul Tillich (1886-1965), Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), and Samuel Huntington.

According to Sullivan, Chinese “neo-conservatives” invoked Edmund Burke’s criticism of “radicalism” during the French Revolution to denounce the universal

²⁹¹ Sullivan, “Western Political Thought,” 79.

models of liberal reform and democracy and to promote gradual change. Burke had not only criticized the destruction of the old, but also the usage of abstract universals. Burke was also useful for “neo-conservatives” because he had not *opposed* change—he had recommended gradual change, not a mere preservation of the status quo.²⁹² As the analysis of “Realistic Responses” has revealed, this claim is only true for some “neo-conservatives”; the princelings did not refer to Burke. As will be explored in the next chapters, both Xiao Gongqin and other intellectuals used Burke to criticize the Cultural Revolution and to argue that gradual economic reform was needed.

Sullivan has also argued that Chinese “neo-conservatives” invoked Karl Popper and the theologian Paul Tillich to criticize utopianism. Since the princelings were not concerned with the moral aspects of tradition, but only with its “rational” elements and how these could be used practically, they only referred to Popper in their denunciation of “utopianism,” “romanticism,” and “irrationalism.” The appropriation of Popper in the service of state interests was ironic in the sense that Popper had gone to great lengths to criticize Plato’s theories of justice and truth in his *The Open Society and Its Enemies* precisely because they merely served the interests of the state.²⁹³ The staunch liberal Popper, whose major concern had been the foundation of democratic policy, was now put to use as a means to strengthen the legitimacy of the CCP.

Sullivan has further noted that “neo-conservatives” championed the postponement of democracy by referring to Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* (1835-1840). According to Tocqueville, political participation required a certain degree of economic development without which the people would fall prone to arbitrary rulers. Since the authors of “Realistic Responses,” in line with official policy, discarded the goal of democracy outright, they did not invoke Tocqueville. As will be discussed in the next chapters, though, other intellectuals did rely on Tocqueville to make this point. Finally, Sullivan has mentioned that “neo-conservatives” promoted political stability and authoritarianism through an interpretation of Samuel Huntington’s *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968). The princelings referred to Huntington to argue that a stable environment was needed for reform, since reform might lead to instability and even revolution. In the next chapter, Xiao Gongqin’s use of Huntington

²⁹² Ibid., 86.

²⁹³ The first volume of Popper’s *The Open Society and Its Enemies* is entirely dedicated to a criticism of Plato’s theories of justice and truth. See Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, Vol. 1: The Spell of Plato* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962).

will be discussed in detail. What can be noted at this point is that the only common thinker referred to by Xiao Gongqin and the princelings was Samuel Huntington.

From this comparison between the two most notable uses of the concept “neo-conservatism” and the counterconcept of “radicalism” during the early 1990s, it can be concluded that there was a substantial difference between the two that is important concerning our question of whether “neo-conservatism” was in any sense linked to Burkean themes. Xiao Gongqin’s conception of both terms does reveal some Burkean traits at first sight: he referred to the notions of “growth” and “maturation”; he was critical of abstract principles; and he underscored the importance of context and the historically grown nature of institutions. “Realistic Responses,” on the contrary—although it also emphasized the gradual nature of reform and although it denounced abstract blueprints models—upheld rationalism and discarded “irrationalism” and “romanticism” in a fashion that appeared to oppose Burkean notions of conservatism that were critical of the notion of rationalism. The princelings even referred to “instrumental rationality” and gradual “progress” in their description of “neo-conservatism,” both of which indicate that their gradualism was a mere procedural gradualism that was supported for instrumental purposes.

2.7 THE CONTINUATION OF “NEO-AUTHORITARIANISM”?

The findings above indicate that “neo-conservatism” was not a unified theory. This also raises questions about the relation between “neo-conservatism” and the so-called theory of “neo-authoritarianism,” which was popular among Chinese intellectuals during the late 1980s. Researchers on Chinese “neo-conservatism” have agreed that “neo-conservatism” was the “re-emergence,” “re-making,” or “reworking” of the political theory of “neo-authoritarianism.”²⁹⁴ Richard Baum has even gone as far as calling “neo-conservatism” “a highly centralized, repressive variant of neo-authoritarianism.”²⁹⁵

²⁹⁴ See Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen*, 75; Schubert, “Was Ist Neokonservatismus?,” 59; Li, “Will Neo-conservatism Dominate?,” 32; Tsai, “Resistance to Political Modernization,” 7; Sullivan, “Western Political Thought,” 85; Fewsmith, “Neoconservatism,” 637; Chen, “Neoconservative Political Thought,” 593; Gu and Kelly, “New Conservatism,” 221; Lin, “Overview,” 70; McCormick and Kelly, “Limits of Anti-Liberalism,” 821-822; Sullivan, *Democracy and Development*, 324.

²⁹⁵ Baum, *Burying Mao*, 328.

Both theories advocated strong rule, but the contexts in which this happened differed. During the late 1980s, as Kalpana Misra has phrased it, “the terms of discussion were largely set by radical reformers”; neo-authoritarians would thus stress that they had the same goals as liberal democrats.²⁹⁶ Yet during the early 1990s, the advocacy of authoritarian rule was not only related to the establishment of a market economy, but also to the prevention of political instability.²⁹⁷ However, both theories were a response to uncertainties amidst rapid socioeconomic change.²⁹⁸ As both Ma Shu Yun and Waterman have asserted, the elitist and gradualist strategy behind “neo-authoritarianism” was conservative in nature.²⁹⁹ Nevertheless, economically, “neo-authoritarianism” moved away from orthodox Marxism and supported market mechanisms and privatization. From this perspective, as Ma Shu Yun has argued, “in terms of its demand for the replacement of public ownership with a market and private economy, it is perhaps the most radical doctrine that has ever been proposed in the history of Communist China.”³⁰⁰

Once again, it was Xiao Gongqin who reportedly first used the Chinese term for “neo-authoritarianism” (*xin quanwei zhuyi*) at an August 1988 conference on problems that Chinese intellectuals faced. Discussions on the topic of “neo-authoritarianism,” however, can be traced back to 1986.³⁰¹ On the 1988 conference, Xiao Gongqin gave a speech on three choices that Chinese intellectuals had made in modern times concerning policy. These choices were policy renewal under the traditional system, “parliamentary romanticism,” and, finally, “neo-authoritarianism.” The latter, Xiao Gongqin explained, had a modernization orientation; through the “visible hand” of authoritarian rule, it created the “invisible hand” of the market economy and the conditions for democratic rule.³⁰² Xiao also presented his ideas on “neo-authoritarianism” to Jiang Zemin—the

²⁹⁶ Misra, “Neo-Maoism and Neo-Conservatism,” 147.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

²⁹⁸ Gong and Chen, “Neo-Authoritarian Theory,” 84-85; Petracca and Xiong, “Chinese Neo-Authoritarianism,” 1102.

²⁹⁹ Ma, “Rise and Fall,” 1-2; Waterman, “Which Way to Go?,” 14.

³⁰⁰ Ma, “Rise and Fall,” 16.

³⁰¹ The conference was held at Beidaihe and organized by the *World Economic Herald*, *China Youth News*, the theoretical department of *Guangming Daily*, and the Xingzhi Institute. As to earlier manifestations of similar arguments, Zhang Bingjiu, for example, had used the term “semi-authoritarian” (*banjiquan*) in 1986. Also during the late 1980s, Wang Huning had argued in favor of a strong government and gradual democratization.

³⁰² Xiao Gongqin, “Zixu,” in *YZLG*, 6. One month after the conference, on September 8, 1988, a report on the conference appeared in *Guangming Daily*. According to Xiao Gongqin, this was the first time the term “neo-authoritarianism” was used in the Chinese media.

Party Secretary of Shanghai at the time—at a bi-monthly gathering with intellectuals in November 1988.³⁰³

On January 16, 1989, an article by Wu Jiexiang, an economist and researcher in the General Office of the Central Committee and an advisor to premier Zhao Ziyang, was published in the Shanghai newspaper *World Economic Herald* (Shijie jingji baodao).³⁰⁴ Wu Jiexiang argued that, in the transition from authoritarianism to democracy, an intermediate stage of “neo-authoritarianism” was needed. The latter would differ from the traditional form of authoritarianism because authority would be deployed for the development of individual freedom.³⁰⁵ One day later, Xiao Gongqin published his views in the Shanghai paper *Wenhuibao*.³⁰⁶ The debate that followed was an exchange between advocates of “neo-authoritarianism” and liberal democrats. Whereas the former, basing themselves on development models in East Asia, argued that economic reform had to predate political reform, the latter argued that, because China’s situation was special, political reform could not be postponed.³⁰⁷ As Sautman has noted, these two viewpoints mirrored debates on the topic among Western scholars during the 1960s and 1970s in the context of decolonization.³⁰⁸ With the repression of the Tiananmen Square demonstrations on June fourth, 1989, the debate ended abruptly. Nevertheless, since most supporters of immediate political liberalization fled abroad, the discussion continued outside mainland China.

The publication of the articles by Wu Jiexiang and Xiao Gongqin in January 1989 also marked the official launch of the so-called “northern” and “southern” schools

³⁰³ Sullivan, “Western Political Thought,” 84.

³⁰⁴ More specifically, Wu Jiexiang, who had studied economics at Peking University, was an associate researcher at the Policy Research Centre of the General Office of the Central Committee of the CCP (CCPCC). Wu Jiexiang specialized in the modernization of property rights. See Sautman, “Neo-Authoritarianism,” 74, fn. 8. Wu’s article was entitled “Xin quanwei zhuyi shuping.” It was reprinted in Qi Mo, *Xin quanwei zhuyi*, 4-8, and in Liu Jun and Li Lin, *Xin quanwei zhuyi*, 34-38.

³⁰⁵ Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen*, 75-76.

³⁰⁶ Xiao Gongqin, Zhu Wei, “Tongku de liangnan xuanze: guanyu ‘xin quanwei zhuyi’ lilun dawenlu,” *Wenhui bao*, January 17, 1989. Reprinted in Qi Mo, *Xin quanwei zhuyi*, 13-19.

³⁰⁷ Critics of “neo-authoritarianism” included Qin Xiaoying, Gu Xin, Huang Wansheng, Zheng Yongnian, Rong Jian, Sun Hui, Yu Haocheng, Zhou Wenzhang, Zhang Zhonghou, Wang Yizhou, and Li Shengping. For an English translation of democratic criticism before 1989 by critics residing in China, see *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology* 23:4 (Summer 1991); for criticisms of democrats residing in the United States after Tiananmen, see *ibid.*, 24:1 (Fall 1991).

³⁰⁸ Sautman, “Neo-authoritarianism,” 96. Sautman refers to Michael Sahlin, who considered Gunnar Myrdal to embody arguments in favor of the theory, whereas Maurice Duverger represented the views of opponents.

of “neo-authoritarianism,” whose spokesmen were located in Beijing and Shanghai respectively. The “northern school,” of which the main proponents were Wu Jiaxiang, Chen Yizi, Zhang Bingjiu, and Yang Baikui,³⁰⁹ and the “southern school” of Xiao Gongqin and Wang Huning differed over three issues: (1) the causes of China’s socio-economic crises, (2) the issue of “state power,” and (3) the speed of economic reform.³¹⁰ For the “northern school,” the causes of the crisis were inflation and corruption, whereas the “southern school” attributed them to a “governmental authority crisis and the lack of autonomous societal organizations.”³¹¹ The “northern school” wanted to adhere to state power to stabilize the market; state power could prevent the fragmentation of economic units and it could remove bureaucratic obstacles to reform. This would enable quick-paced reforms. The “southern school,” on the other hand, favored state power in order to gradually push reforms forward and to retain political stability. It further emphasized the importance of the development of an independent middle class and the need for continuity with China’s traditional culture.³¹²

Another distinction between the two schools was that the “northern school” highlighted the universal applicability of “neo-authoritarianism,” whereas the “southern school” argued that the theory was only applicable to late-modernizing Third World countries in their early stages of modernization.³¹³ The attempts of these countries to establish parliamentary democracies after decolonization had failed because of the “lack of internal factors for modernization.”³¹⁴ Finally, some members of the “northern” school—notably Wu Jiaxiang and Chen Yizi—were advisors to Zhao Ziyang, whereas the members of the “southern school” had no clear political affiliation at the time.³¹⁵

³⁰⁹ Chen Yizi was the director of the Chinese Economic System Reform Research Institute (CESRRI) under the State Council. Zhang Bingjiu was a Ph.D. candidate at Peking University; Yang Baikui was a political scientist at CASS and a research assistant of the democrat Yan Jiaqi, who was heading the Political Science Institute at CASS at the time. Wang Huning was a Professor of International Politics at Fudan University. Wang Huning did not take part in the 1989 debate.

³¹⁰ Sullivan, *Democracy and Developmentalism*, 247, 249, 257.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 256.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 248-249 and 256-257.

³¹³ Sautman, “Neo-authoritarianism,” 82, 88. See, for example, Xiao’s article “Quanwei yu minzhu: houfazhan guojia xiandaihua de liangnan xuanze,” *XGJ* 42-52. A different version of the same article appeared in *Wenhuibao*, January 17, 1989; see also Xiao Gongqin and Zhu Wei, “A Painful Dilemma,” 69, 76.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 69; Qi Mo, *Xin quanwei zhuyi*, 13.

³¹⁵ At the time, because in 1995, Wang Huning became the head of the Political Section of the Central Committee’s Policy Research Office under Jiang Zemin.

Xiao Gongqin also argued that he was more skeptical than the “northern school” about the democratic outcome of “neo-authoritarianism”—the theory might as well lead to a regression, depending on whether or not a strong middle class could be created.³¹⁶ The fact that the traditional value system on which “neo-conservatism” drew was autocratic-oriented facilitated a regression; the personification of power in the figure of the “strongman” could lead to corruption and the mishandling of power. Xiao’s answer was that “checks and balances” should be built in to prevent a setback.³¹⁷ Moreover, it was more likely that a relapse into “traditionalism” would take place in an early stage; with the “spread of modernization consciousness” and the “increase of the democratic consciousness of the populace,” the chances of a successful transition to democracy would increase.³¹⁸ Because the presence of a strong middle class was a crucial factor in the transition to democracy, and because this class had been artificially destroyed during the planned economy, Xiao Gongqin stated: “China should take the path of modernization that fits its own conditions and that has its own characteristics.”³¹⁹ Although Xiao Gongqin questioned the applicability of “neo-authoritarianism” to China, he indicated that it could be used as a reference and a source of inspiration.

To indicate the weight of political stability, “neo-authoritarians” drew on Samuel Huntington’s 1968 book *Political Order in Changing Societies*, which was translated into Chinese in 1988.³²⁰ Huntington’s main thesis had been that “rapid social change and the rapid mobilization of new groups into politics coupled with the slow development of political institutions” would lead to political instability.³²¹ In other words, economic development did not automatically lead to political stability, but could, especially in transitional stages, also lead to political disorder. As with other theories, though, Chinese intellectuals interpreted the theory according to their own

³¹⁶ Sullivan, *Democracy and Developmentalism*, 246. In an interview, Xiao referred to the theory of “path dependency” in relation to the dilemma of “neo-authoritarianism.” Once the path of strong rule had been chosen, it was difficult to deviate from this path; the possibility of “degeneration” was hence always present.

³¹⁷ Sautman, “Neo-Authoritarianism,” 86.

³¹⁸ Xiao Gongqin and Zhu Wei, “A Painful Dilemma,” 74.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

³²⁰ Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1968). The most widely read translation of *POCS* was Li Shengping, Yang Yusheng et al., *Biange shehui zhong de zhengzhi zhixu* (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 1988). It was part of the series *Ershi shiji wenku*, of which the main editor was Deng Pufang, the son of Deng Xiaoping. Some Chinese intellectuals had reportedly been familiarized with Huntington’s book as early as 1986, through study abroad or by reading the original version.

³²¹ Huntington, *POCS*, 6.

needs. According to Pye, “Huntington stressed political stability as rule by law and not as rule by a modernizing elite.”³²² Whereas Huntington had underscored both the importance of state action and the integration of social forces, Chinese intellectuals only concentrated on the former.³²³ Peter Moody has argued that Huntington’s point had been that economic and social modernization did not necessarily lead to democracy; in the initial stage of economic modernization, reform could lead to disorder. For Chinese intellectuals, on the contrary, Huntington’s theory was a theory of democratization, namely, to reach democracy, authoritarian rule had to come first.³²⁴

Different readings of the theory have led to a very diverse picture of “neo-authoritarianism,” ranging from a tool in elitist struggles over reform to a continuation of advocacies of “enlightened despotism” and “political tutelage,” or an outgrowth of debates on democracy in previous decades.³²⁵ Sullivan has analyzed the debate as an “intellectual *cum* political” debate of which the political aspect was not restricted to a reform struggle between the factions of Zhao Ziyang and Deng Xiaoping, as is generally accepted.³²⁶ For Sullivan, the debate was also linked to an intra-Zhao Ziyang-camp-struggle, namely that between Zhao Ziyang and Jiang Zemin.³²⁷ It was also an intellectual debate because intellectuals explored non-Leninist development models

³²² Sullivan, “Western Political Thought,” 82.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 82-83.

³²⁴ Moody, *Conservative Thought*, 152-153. The relationship between economic and political development has been perceived of as a process of different stages. As Petracca and Xiong have pointed out, the most famous thesis in which economic growth and democratization were linked was Walt Rostow’s *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960). Both the “Austrian school of economics,” represented by Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich von Hayek, and the “Chicago school of economics,” of which the most famous associate was Milton Friedman, argued that political freedom was the result of economic freedom in a democratic system. See Petracca and Xiong, “Chinese Neo-Authoritarianism,” 1108, fn. 21.

³²⁵ Sullivan, *Democracy and Developmentalism*, 225. The first interpretation can be found in most articles on “neo-authoritarianism.” For an example of the second perspective, see Arthur Waldron’s “Warlordism Versus Federalism: The Revival of the Debate,” *China Quarterly* 121 (March 1990), 116-128. Merle Goldman’s book *Sowing the Seeds of Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994) represents the third interpretation. See *ibid.*, 267, fn. 3-5.

³²⁶ This view is supported by the fact that Wu Jiayang, the main advocate of the “northern school,” was a policy advisor to Zhao Ziyang. Sullivan, *Democracy and Developmentalism*, 236. On Wu’s political connections, see also Sautman, “Neo-Authoritarianism,” 74, fn. 8. On the political entanglements of the theory, see for example Ma, “Rise and Fall,” 5, 12-13; Petracca and Xiong, “Chinese Neo-Authoritarianism,” 1116; Sautman, “Neo-authoritarianism,” 77, 89. Zhao Ziyang reportedly promoted “neo-authoritarianism” to Deng Xiaoping in March 1989. See Sullivan, “Western Political Thought,” 80-82.

³²⁷ Sullivan, *Democracy and Developmentalism*, 230, 263-266.

after the Cultural Revolution; they turned to the study of social and political aspects of modernization.³²⁸

This brief overview demonstrates that “neo-authoritarianism” was no less a fragmented theory than “neo-conservatism” was. “Neo-conservatism” in general can be said to be a continuation of “neo-authoritarianism” only with respect to its stress on a strong central authority. Yet from an economic point of view, only Xiao Gongqin’s “neo-conservatism” was the continuation of “neo-authoritarianism.” Even this statement is only partly true, for Xiao Gongqin did not agree with the advocacies of the “northern school” of “neo-authoritarianism.” Both Xiao Gongqin’s “neo-conservatism” and the “southern school” of “neo-authoritarianism” advocated gradual modernization, the creation of a middle class, the introduction of market mechanisms, as well as the importance of central authority for social stability, in order to reach the final goal of democracy. A key element of both the “northern” and “southern” versions of “neo-authoritarianism” was the advocacy of privatization and market mechanisms; the princelings’ “neo-conservatism” was not a continuation of this crucial aspect. Their controversial advocacy of Party ownership of assets and their association of market mechanisms with “capitalism” indicate that they were not concerned with the creation of a market economy or future democracy. Their program was designed to keep the CCP in power and to provide alternative means of legitimacy.

2.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In American and European research, only political scientists have analyzed the term “neo-conservatism”; they have related it to the struggle over economic reform between 1989 and 1992. In this setting, “neo-conservatism” has been defined as a “middle position” between the Old Left and liberal factions; it has been associated with the themes of centralization, the advocacy of a strong state, nationalism, political stability, gradual reform, and the resort to traditional elements. Analysts have further asserted that “neo-conservatism” differed from official ideology in several important respects: it did not justify economic reform as a necessary step towards socialism, but made use of foreign theories instead; its reference to nationalism did not merely stand for loyalty to

³²⁸ By the late 1980s, works by authors such as Daniel Bell, Cyril E. Black, Alex Inkeles, Barrington Moore, Jr., Talcott Parsons, W.W. Rostow, and Joseph Schumpeter had been translated into Chinese.

the Party, but for loyalty to China as a country; and, finally, it did not oppose democracy as an eventual outcome of reform.

Nevertheless, none of these traits have revealed why Chinese intellectuals coined the particular term of “neo-conservatism” at the time. The themes that political scientists have identified with “neo-conservatism” were not specifically “conservative”; both centralization and nationalism—as in Wang Xiaodong, Sheng Hong, Wang Shan, and Wang Shaoguang, for example—were also Marxist themes. In American and European research, the term has been explained as a positional rather than a substantive concept: it has been interpreted as a defense of the status quo—the power of the CCP—on different grounds, namely through the use of alternative resources, such as nationalism and Chinese tradition. Implicitly, the themes of centralization and ideology have been related to a defense of the interests of the CCP in particular. This positional interpretative framework left no room for the question of what was inherently “conservative” and “neo” about “neo-conservatism.”

Instead of merely locating the term within the political framework of the struggle over reform, it has been investigated whether Chinese “neo-conservatism” was in any way related to a conscious conservative position in which a return to tradition was not upheld for reasons of political legitimacy, but because tradition was the product of historical growth. For this reason, Chinese “neo-conservatism” has been compared to its American counterpart, which both contained Burkean elements and new traits that were the product of the interaction with a new context. As such, American “neo-conservatism” was a good example of how the theory had both been linked to a conservative constellation that surpassed specific contexts and to a particular setting that had required a careful appropriation. It has been concluded that Chinese “neo-conservatism” was in many respects the exact opposite of American “neo-conservatism,” which opposed a strong state and which was convinced that American society faced a rampant moral crisis.

An important distinction between American and Chinese “neo-conservatives” was that the former did not invoke the term “neo-conservatism” to denote a reform program of their own making; in an American context, the term had first been used as a derogative label by political opponents. Because of this distinction, this chapter has attempted to move from the use of the term “neo-conservatism” in American and European research as a “label” for nationalist positions or advocacies of a strong state to

the use of the term as a “banner,” as one Chinese intellectual has phrased it. Two concrete usages of the concept have been studied, both of which have been analyzed in relation to the “counterconcept” of “radicalism.” The meaning of concept, as has been noted by the authors of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, had been threefold in a German context. It had been given a concrete political content, or the content of the program of political parties, but it had also denoted certain means and goals of action, such as a priori goals, or the will to renew.

Those Chinese intellectuals who made use of “neo-conservatism” as a banner, namely the Shanghai-based historian Xiao Gongqin and the offspring of officials known as princelings, both invoked the counterconcept of “radicalism” as part of a program of “neo-conservatism.” Xiao Gongqin, who coined the term “neo-conservatism” in December 1990, applied the term in the context of the advocacy of a gradual modernization program in which traditional elements would function as “levers.” Xiao Gongqin based his program for gradual modernization on a criticism of three kinds of “radicalism,” namely “mental radicalism,” “system determinism,” and “political romanticism.” Although Xiao Gongqin implicitly connected these types of “radicalism” with the concrete concept of instant democratization, they also referred to certain goals and means of action; Xiao cast aside abstract rationalism and a priori principles. This suggests that Xiao Gongqin’s “neo-conservatism” might have gone beyond a positional conservatism—Burkean conservatism also criticized abstract Enlightenment thought and first principles. In the Chinese media, though, Xiao’s thought was invoked to discard a “radicalism” that was related to both the Old Left and liberals. At this point, it can be concluded that we can at least suggest that Xiao’s “neo-conservatism” was more than a positional ideology on a Left-Right axis.

The so-called princelings used the term “neo-conservatism” in the 1991 document “Realistic Responses and Strategic Options for China after the Soviet Coup,” which was written in response to the Soviet Coup of August 1991. For them, “neo-conservatism” stood for a reform program based on rational elements in tradition and a rational philosophy that stood in contrast with “romanticism” and “irrationalism,” which were mentioned in the same breath with “radicalism.” From this, it can be seen that the princelings’ “neo-conservatism” was in fact in tension with Burkean conservatism, according to which the irrational and the romantic would be accepted precisely because they opposed abstract rationalism. Moreover, the princelings

advocated Party ownership of assets, which was not in accordance with Xiao Gongqin's defense of market principles and the depoliticization of the economy. Given these differences between the uses of the term "neo-conservatism," the general claim that "neo-conservatism" as such was the continuation of "neo-authoritarianism" has been contested. Since the latter argued for a combination of economic privatization and rule by strongmen, only Xiao Gongqin's "neo-conservatism" was a continuation of "neo-authoritarianism"—and of the "southern school" in particular. The princelings' advocacy of Party ownership of assets was in tension with the economic privatization that was promoted in "neo-authoritarianism."

A final point that needs to be made is that "neo-conservatism," with its advocacy of political stability and gradual reform, was in fact already in contradiction with the logic of the revolution on which the legitimacy of the CCP was based. Consequently, the very usage of the term "radicalism" in support of stability was a double-edged sword. As long as it referred to the economic "shock therapies" of the Soviet Union and the political turmoil of the spring 1989 demonstrations on Tiananmen Square in the present, a denunciation of "radicalism" suited the interests of the CCP. Conversely, as soon as the concept of "radicalism" was projected into the past, it invaded the domain of the legitimacy of the CCP. As Feng Chen has noted on "neo-conservatism," "[I]ts critique of radicalism, though aiming at stability and order, paradoxically poses a threat to the legitimacy of the central authority that grew out of a radical revolutionary tradition."³²⁹ In the following chapters, the consequences of the projection of "radicalism" into the past will be explored.

³²⁹ Chen, "Neoconservative Political Thought," 613.

3.

THE POLITICS OF HISTORY XIAO GONGQIN'S "NEO-CONSERVATISM"

Natura non facit saltum.

GOTTFRIED W. LEIBNIZ

3.1 INTRODUCTION: FROM POLITICS TO HISTORY

As indicated in the previous chapter, at first sight, Xiao Gongqin's "neo-conservatism" appeared to transcend a mere defense of the status quo on the basis of alternative resources such as nationalism and Chinese tradition—Xiao's emphasis on aspects such as the "growth" of indigenous elements, as well as his condemnation of "radicalism" as abstract rationalism, suggested a concern with Burkean themes. Nevertheless, it was of course also possible that Xiao's reference to "growth," particular circumstances, and the historical nature of institutions did not serve conservative goals such as the preservation of the community; it might have been a rhetorical device to argue for a strong state and to oppose immediate democratization. However, instead of discarding the question altogether, this chapter will look deeper into the nature of Xiao's reference to Burkean themes.

Apart from the Burkean factor in Xiao's advocacies, another element that needs to be investigated is the fact that, as distinct from those behind "Realistic Responses," Xiao projected his "radicalism" into modern Chinese history. In general, Xiao's historical take has been either ignored or interpreted as a history in the service of politics. Nonetheless, since Xiao Gongqin was a historian, was it not possible that he identified with the concerns of "humanistic" Chinese intellectuals? This chapter will analyze the role of history in Xiao's "neo-conservatism" in order to find out whether his flirtation with history was but a manifestation of the practice of "using the past to serve the present," or whether there was more to the picture.

In American and European research, it has been argued that Xiao's reference to history was merely rhetorical. For example, on Xiao's famous essay on Yan Fu, which will be analyzed later in this chapter, Gu Xin and David Kelly have stated: "While it is

couched as an essay in modern intellectual history, it is in fact a customary mode of expression for Xiao, as for many contemporary Chinese intellectuals, to deliver opinions through the mouths of historical personages.”³³⁰ With this statement, they suggested that Xiao only employed the *form* of intellectual discourse, whereas in terms of content, his “neo-conservatism” did not differ from the manifestations discussed in the previous chapter.³³¹

Any reference to a conservative outlook in which conservative goals are subscribed to on conservative grounds has been absent from research on Xiao Gongqin; he has not been associated with intellectual concerns, but with an explicitly political “neo-conservatism.” In spite of this, Gu and Kelly have claimed that Xiao was “concerned with three perennial sources of controversy among Chinese intellectuals,” namely the issue of gradualism versus radicalism, the role of traditional values in the modernization process, and the question of who was privileged by “the modernizing social force.”³³² In general, though, Xiao’s critique of “radicalism” has not been addressed in the context of intellectual concerns. Sullivan, for example, has excluded Xiao from the subgroup of “intellectual historians” who debated “radicalism” after a lecture on the “radicalization” of modern Chinese thought by the Princeton-based historian Yü Ying-shih in 1988, the subject of the following chapter.³³³

In accordance with this “political determinism”—an excessive stress on the political aspects of Xiao’s theory at the expense of other equally important traits—the focus has been on the “anti-liberal” aspects of Xiao’s thought and on “apologetic” interpretations of Xiao’s “neo-conservatism” as an expression of his surrender to “the Machiavellian ambition to whisper in the ear of the prince.”³³⁴ A plethora of sources have mentioned Xiao’s alignment with the government or with “neo-conservative-type elites,”³³⁵ have used a framework of anti-liberalism,³³⁶ have considered his work the “preparation” for “Realistic Responses,”³³⁷ or have criticized his authoritarian form of

³³⁰ Gu and Kelly, “New Conservatism,” 223.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 221.

³³² *Ibid.*

³³³ Sullivan, “Western Political Thought,” 84.

³³⁴ Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, 60.

³³⁵ Sullivan, *Democracy and Developmentalism*, 347; Lin, “Overview,” 70; Meissner, “New Intellectual Currents,” 19.

³³⁶ McCormick and Kelly, “The Limits of Anti-Liberalism,” 804-831.

³³⁷ Tsai, “Mainland China’s Resistance,” 7-8.

“Maistrian” conservatism.³³⁸ Others have merely studied him as a “cultural nationalist,” as a “political conservative,” or as both.³³⁹ Nevertheless, Chen Feng has noted: “It is important to point out that, although the following analysis is confined to its political dimensions, neoconservative ideas, unlike the neo-authoritarian debate, go beyond the political domain. (...) Their cultural ramifications, however, deserve a separate study.”³⁴⁰ This “separate study,” however, has never exceeded the space of a footnote.

Xiao Gongqin regretted the fact that an overseas scholar called “neo-conservatism” “the principal culprit of human nature,” and that other overseas journals have treated him as a mere representative of political forces.³⁴¹ He felt that his views had at times been “considerably misunderstood by the world, and even by his friends”.³⁴² Xiao considered himself part of an “academic faction” that differed from the “policy faction,” the “scholarly faction,” and the “social critique faction” in terms of its concerns.³⁴³ The distinction that Xiao made between these several factions was based on the degree of proximity of intellectuals to the political center. The “policy faction,” Xiao explained, consisted of policy advisors; the “academic faction” was concerned with politics but did not directly affect it; the “scholarly faction” was one of literati who dealt with the consequences of commercialization on literary creation; and the “social critique faction,” or, the so-called “New Left,” criticized the official reform policy. The concerns of the “academic faction” with which Xiao identified included the history of Chinese modernization, civil society, the transformation of traditional Chinese culture, and the Chinese national character. The “policy faction,” on the other hand, was concerned with the relation between central and local government, the relation between the population and its resources, and the relation between state power and democratic rule.³⁴⁴ The topics that Xiao associated with the “policy faction” have been identified as major themes of “neo-conservatism” as discussed in the previous chapter. Although

³³⁸ Xu Ben, *Disenchanted Democracy*, 169. Xu Ben called Xiao’s conservatism “Maistrian” in a reference to the conservative thinker Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821). As opposed to Burke, de Maistre linked political stability with the Catholic Church and sacrosanct institutions. See Muller, *Conservatism*, 134-135.

³³⁹ Schubert, “Was ist Neokonservatismus?,” 61-62; Zheng, *Chinese Nationalism*, 71.

³⁴⁰ Chen, “Neoconservative Political Thought,” 594.

³⁴¹ Xiao Gongqin, “Zixu,” *YZLG*, 8.

³⁴² Xiao Gongqin, “Zixu,” *XGJ*, 16.

³⁴³ Xiao Gongqin, “Zhuanxingqi Zhongguo renwen zhishi fenzi de sizhong leixing,” *XGJ*, 182-189. Originally published in *Tansuo yu zhengming* 1994: 8.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 183-185.

Xiao Gongqin is generally considered to be the main figure of Chinese “neo-conservatism,” the academic concerns that he mentioned have nevertheless been absent from existing research.

Regarding the role of history in Xiao’s works, Xiao has indicated that history was important for his study of reform.³⁴⁵ Xiao has referred to himself as a “historian who shows solicitude for the nation’s fate,” and, as a historian, he considered himself to be privileged: he could enter history through the door of reality and vice versa.³⁴⁶ The key to understanding social problems in reality, according to Xiao, was to “break the historical code” and to use this code to disentangle problems in real life.³⁴⁷ Being a historian, Xiao did have a genuine interest in history, and most of his works revolved around history and the role of intellectuals in the history of reform in China.³⁴⁸ Xiao has further claimed to be against the use of history as a tool to legitimize a certain belief system, as had happened during the 1950s as well as after the revolution of 1911, when history was written to justify the beliefs of the “winners.”³⁴⁹ Both Xiao’s remarks regarding Chinese intellectuals and his reference to history indicate that the picture was at least more complex than research suggests.

3.2 FROM THE YUAN DYNASTY TO THE 1980S: XIAO’S INTELLECTUAL TRAJECTORY

It is useful to look at both Xiao’s understanding of the different “stages” in his academic research and his view of intellectual history. For Xiao, in a Toynbeeian fashion, thought was “a strategy to deal with the challenges of the environment”; it was “the great solution of people facing problems.”³⁵⁰ To understand why a certain thought

³⁴⁵ See, for example, his article “Lishixue zai Zhongguo biange shidai de yiyi,” *XGJ*, 359-364. Originally published in *Shixue lilun* 1988: 4.

³⁴⁶ Xiao Gongqin, “Zixu,” *XGJ*, 12, 16.

³⁴⁷ Xiao Gongqin, “Lishixue,” *XGJ*, 360.

³⁴⁸ The titles of Xiao’s main works reveal a plethora of issues that go far beyond an advocacy of strong rule and order. See for example *Rujia wenhua de kunjing: Zhongguo jindai shidai fu yu xifang tiaozhan* (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1986); *Weiji zhong de biange: qingmo xiandaihua jin Cheng zhong de jijin yu baoshou* (Shanghai: Shanghai sanlian shudian, 1999); *Yu zhengzhi langman zhuyi gaobie* (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001); *Zhishi fenzi yu guannian ren* (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2002); *Rujia wenhua de kunjing: jindai shidai fu yu zhongxi wenhua pengzhuang* (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2006).

³⁴⁹ Xiao Gongqin, “Lishixue,” *XGJ*, 363. See also Xiao Gongqin, “Qingmo xinzheng yu Zhongguo xiandaihua yanjiu,” *XGJ*, 251-264. Originally published in *ZYG* 1 (November 1993), 61-66.

³⁵⁰ Xiao Gongqin, “Sixiang de meili,” 4-5.

appeared at a certain place and time, it sufficed to look at the specific problems people faced at that point in time. Xiao has used the metaphor of a “river-with-rocks”: if the river is a specific era, and the rocks in that river represent the problems faced at that particular time, then the foam of the waves, which is aroused by the existing contradictions and problems, is the thought of that era.³⁵¹ The problems of different eras, according to Xiao, have a similar structure, which is why one should rely on the enlightening views of thinkers of previous eras to solve contemporary problems.

Xiao has divided his intellectual path into four stages. The first stage (1978-1981) covers his years as an MA-student. After having spent twelve years as a factory worker in Shanghai’s suburbs during the Cultural Revolution, dedicating the scarce free time he had to reading, Xiao was admitted to the History Department of Nanjing University, where he specialized in the history of the Yuan dynasty (1260-1368).³⁵² During the second stage (1982-1987), Xiao started to research issues in modern Chinese history that were related to the problems of reform at that time. He made a leap from the Yuan dynasty to the clash of Chinese and Western culture and the reasons behind this clash. He considers *The Predicament of Confucian Culture: Modern Chinese Literati and the Challenge of the West* his main work of this stage. In this book, Xiao explored the reasons for the failure of China’s modernization process from the angle of those who had obstructed these changes. For Xiao, it was the “cultural conservatism” and the “fundamentalist-style Confucian dogmatism” of the literati under what Xiao perceived of as a “closed system” that had led to the setback in the modernization process.³⁵³ This interpretation of the distortion of the “cultural mode of thought” of the literati under a “closed system” was shaped by Xiao’s own experiences during the Cultural Revolution. People of his generation, so Xiao claimed, had a strong “problem consciousness” when it came to a closed system because they had experienced it first-hand.³⁵⁴

³⁵¹ Ibid., 4-6.

³⁵² Xiao Gongqin, “Zixu,” *XGJ*, 2. Xiao’s MA thesis, which was entitled *Lun Yuandai de huangdi jicheng wenti* (On the issue of throne succession during the Yuan dynasty), was an analysis of the political crisis during the Yuan dynasty (1260-1368) from a cultural angle, which focused on the tensions between the political systems of the pastoral and farming communities respectively. Xiao further mentioned that his interest in “the conflicts between heterogeneous systems and the political disorder aroused from this” started here, an issue he would later relate to the Durkheimian concept of “anomy” (*shifan*). (Ibid.) During this stage, apart from systems theory, Xiao also applied structuralism in his historical research.

³⁵³ Ibid., 3.

³⁵⁴ Xiao added that his criticism of Confucianism did not apply to pre-Qin Confucianism because the latter had not yet been allied with political authoritarianism; it had instilled a sense

Xiao has underlined the continuity of this stage of thought with his later advocacy of “neo-conservatism”: his criticism of the “fundamentalism that created the disease of cultural confinement” during this stage did not entail a radical denial of tradition.³⁵⁵ As he has phrased it, a criticism of the negative aspects of tradition and the advocacy of reform that preserved “the continuity of historical culture” were “two organic components” of his thought.³⁵⁶ Nonetheless, at that point, in line with the *Zeitgeist* of the mid-1980s, Xiao’s answer to this “inertia” was an advocacy of more reform, a solution he later criticized for being too simplistic. In his third stage of thought (1988-1989), Xiao shifted his focus from the conservative forces that had “obstructed” modernization to an investigation of the extent to which the reform faction had been responsible for the failure of reform. He has called this “research on the history of early modernization” (*zaoqi xiandaihua lishi yanjiu*), which is distinct from “research on modern history” (*jindaishi yanjiu*). At this point, Xiao became concerned with the political choices of Chinese reformers; in this context, he criticized the “radical mode of thought” of reformers since modern times.³⁵⁷

During the fourth stage (1989-), Xiao shifted to the theoretical aspects of reform; he wanted to apply his research on early modernization to the study of reform. Borrowing from political sociology, Xiao analyzed which political models were most suited to the completion of the modernization process. For this, he drew inspiration from the French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) and from the Chinese translator of English works Yan Fu. As for Durkheim, the concept that Xiao found most suited to explain the problems of Chinese modernization was that of “anomy” (*shifan*), which Durkheim had coined in *The Division of Labor in Society*, and which had later reappeared in *Suicide*.³⁵⁸ Secondly, Xiao used Durkheim’s distinction between different

of mission in Chinese intellectuals. Xiao has explored this topic further in an article entitled “Ruxue de sanzong lishi xingtai,” *XGJ*, 315-337.

³⁵⁵ Xiao Gongqin, “Zixu,” *XGJ*, 4.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

³⁵⁸ Émile Durkheim, *De la division du travail social: étude sur l’organisation des sociétés supérieures* (Paris: Alcan, 1893); Émile Durkheim, *Le Suicide: étude de sociologie* (Paris: Alcan, 1897). Xiao mentioned that *The Division of Labour in Society* had been translated into Chinese in the 1930s; he regretted both the fact that it had been out of print ever since, and that no new translation had appeared (*XGJ*, 3). The 1930s translation referred to by Xiao was Wang Liaoyi, *Shehui fengonglun* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan chubanshe, 1935). Against Xiao’s claim, a Chinese translation of Durkheim appeared in 1985, namely Wang Li, *Shehui fengonglun* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan chubanshe, 1985). In 2000, another translation came out: Qu Dong, *Shehui fengonglun* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian chubanshe, 2000). The name

modes of cohesion in societies, namely “organic solidarity” (*youji tuanjie*) and “mechanical solidarity” (*jixie tuanjie*). Linking this differentiation to political reform, Xiao argued that societies marked by different modes of cohesion required different political systems and value systems.³⁵⁹ As to Yan Fu, he was the first Chinese thinker who had paid attention to the different conditions behind Western and Chinese systems; he was able to avoid the pitfalls of modernization.

3.3 THE “YAN FU PARADOX,” OR WHY COWS WILL NEVER BE HORSES

3.3.1 *The Contested Legacy of Yan Fu*

Xiao Gongqin’s “neo-conservatism,” then, was a modernization theory. Xiao considered the late nineteenth-century translator Yan Fu to be the first representative of the theory. At first, this interpretation seems quite remarkable, given the fact that Yan Fu, upon his return from England in 1879, had been an early spokesman for Western ideas in China—Mao Zedong mentioned Yan Fu on a par with personalities such as Hong Xiuquan, the leader of the Taiping rebellion, Sun Yat-sen, and Kang Youwei, all of whom had “turned towards the West to seek truth.”³⁶⁰ Similarly, the CASS historian Zheng Dahua has interpreted Yan Fu as an early pleader for Westernization.³⁶¹

To the historian Ma Yong, who is based at the Institute for Modern History (*jindaishi*) at CASS, Yan Fu was one of the most famous “Enlightenment thinkers” of modern China.³⁶² What accounted for Xiao Gongqin’s reading of Yan Fu as a “conservative” was the fact that the latter neither supported the revolution of 1911 nor the foundation of a republic; he advocated a constitutional monarchy. Ma Yong added that Yan Fu’s support for Yuan Shikai after 1912 was also a factor that was conducive to a “conservative” reading.³⁶³ Ma Yong’s remarks already indicate the problematic use of the term “conservatism” with reference to Yan Fu: some have called the late Yan Fu a “conservative” either because of his political views or because of his “traditionalism,”

“Durkheim” has been translated into Chinese as both “Di’er kaimu” (1985 translation) and “Tu’ergan” (1935 and 2000 translations).

³⁵⁹ Xiao Gongqin, “Zixu,” *XGJ*, 10.

³⁶⁰ Mao Zedong, “Lun renmin minzhu zhuanzheng,” *Mao Zedong xuanji* (1991), Vol. 4, 1469.

³⁶¹ Zheng Dahua, “Xiandai Zhongguo wenhua baoshou zhuyi,” 446.

³⁶² Ma Yong, “Yan Fu wannian sixiang,” 46.

³⁶³ Interview with Ma Yong, Beijing, August 8, 2005.

but *not* because he recommended change that respected historical continuity, as in Burkean conservatism.

Moreover, some theorists, including Yan Fu's biographer Zhou Zhenfu, have contrasted Yan Fu's late "conservatism" and "traditionalism" with his early "liberalism" and "Westernization," whereas others have focused mainly on the liberal traits in Yan Fu's thought.³⁶⁴ In his 1964 work on Yan Fu, *In Search of Wealth and Power*, Benjamin Schwartz discarded the simplistic image of either a liberal, "antitraditionalist" Yan Fu, or the idea of a "break" between a young "liberal" and an old "conservative" Yan Fu.³⁶⁵ Yan Fu's most "radical" defense of democracy, namely the 1895 essay "In Refutation of Han Yu," already contained traits of his later "conservatism."³⁶⁶ Yan Fu's ultimate aim was wealth and power, and whether or not his belief in democracy was genuine, he nevertheless interpreted it as a means to reach this goal.³⁶⁷ Secondly, for Yan Fu, democracy could not be realized immediately, because conditions were not ripe yet. Schwartz further noted that Yan's "conservatism" was much broader than "traditionalism" in the sense that it had also been influenced by Spencerian evolution

³⁶⁴ Others who adhered to the view that Yan Fu was essentially a liberal and an "antitraditionalist" include Wang Zhongjiang, based at Qinghua's Philosophy Department, and Lei Yi, a researcher at CASS. An example of the perceived "break" in Yan Fu's thought can be found in Chow Tse-tsung. For Chow Tse-tsung, Yan Fu was a "leading liberal reformer" between 1895 and 1902, and a "conservative" since 1902. The latter denounced revolution, liberalism, and nationalism; he promoted ancient Chinese thought. Chow has also discussed Yan Fu as an advisor to Yuan Shikai; he has included Yan Fu's name among the "six gentlemen" who founded the Peace Planning Society (*Zhou'an hui*) that financed Yuan Shikai's movement for the restoration of the monarchy in 1915 and 1916. See Chow, *The May Fourth Movement*, 62 fn. s and 64, fn. t. However, according to Schwartz, who has focused on the accounts of Yan Fu and Hou Yi, Yan Fu did not authorize the use of his name as a sponsor for the Peace Planning Society. See Schwartz, *Wealth and Power*, 215-216 and 224-228.

³⁶⁵ Benjamin Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964).

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 215-216, 224-228. More precisely, Schwartz asserted that between 1911 and 1915, Yan Fu still believed in liberalism as the means to wealth and power, that his adherence to Confucianism could also be interpreted as a calculation, and that his support for the Peace Planning Society was questionable. The historian Ma Yong has also challenged the notion of the "break" in the thought of Yan Fu. See Ma Yong "Yan Fu wannian sixiang," 46-53. For the essay "In Refutation of Han Yu," see "Pi Han," in Wang Shi, ed., *Yan Fuji*, Vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju chubanshe, 1986), 32-36. The essay was originally published in *Zhibao*, March 13-14, 1895, and in *Shiwubao*, April 12, 1897. Translated by François Houang in *Les Manifestes de Yen Fou*, 139-151.

³⁶⁷ Similarly, the Chinese intellectual Wang Rongzu has maintained that for Yan Fu, as for other intellectuals, liberalism was an instrument to reach wealth and power. Because Yan Fu stressed the importance of enlightening the people and because he thought the road to liberty was long, Wang argued, Yan avoided the term "liberty" in his Chinese translation of John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*. See Wang Rongzu, "Ziyou zhuyi yu Zhongguo," 33-37.

theory.³⁶⁸ Like Schwartz, Theodore Hutters has also outlined the complexities in Yan Fu's thought by arguing that Yan Fu stressed the difference between China and the West in order to return to an ancient past, but he also used the argument of difference in a "rhetoric of alarm," namely to criticize China and to champion Westernization.³⁶⁹

In line with Schwartz's interpretation, Xiao Gongqin has found fault with the commonly acknowledged "break" between the early "radical" Yan Fu and the late "conservative" Yan Fu, who discarded the parliamentary system of the early Republic and who supported Yuan Shikai's authoritarian rule. It is questionable whether Yan Fu was a liberal: he believed that wealth and power were to be reached through enlightened authoritarian rule, not through liberalism.³⁷⁰ Elsewhere, Xiao Gongqin has stressed that Yan Fu did confirm the value of liberalism, but in the political realm, he opposed Western liberalism.³⁷¹

3.3.2 *The Theory of the Social Organism*

For Xiao, the central aspect of Yan Fu's "gradual modernization thought" was his "theory of the social organism" (*shehui youjilun*) as expressed in, for example, *Shehui tongquan* (A History of Politics, 1904).³⁷² This theory had received influence from Spencer's image of the "social organism" as being analogous with the biological organism, an idea that Spencer developed in *The Principles of Sociology*.³⁷³ It was Yan Fu who introduced the terms "grouping" (*qun*) and "society" (*shehui*) to China, both of which stressed the strength of individuals and the relationship between them. The latter was expressed through the metaphor of "crystals chemically bonded together," as opposed to "loose potatoes in a sack."³⁷⁴

³⁶⁸ Schwartz, *Wealth and Power*, 84.

³⁶⁹ Hutters, "Appropriations," 314.

³⁷⁰ Xiao Gongqin, "'Yan Fu beilun,'" *XGJ*, 19-20.

³⁷¹ Xiao Gongqin, "Dangdai Zhongguo xin baoshou zhuyi de sixiang yuanyuan," *EYS* 40 (April 1997), 126-135. Reference from 132.

³⁷² Xiao Gongqin, "'Yan Fu beilun,'" *XGJ*, 22. Wang Shi, *Yan Fuji*, Vol. 4, 922-935. This was a 1904 translation by Yan Fu of *A History of Politics* by E. Jenks (1861-1939), published in 1900.

³⁷³ Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1877-1896).

³⁷⁴ Wang Fanshen, "Evolving Prescriptions," 75. Yan Fu used the term "grouping" in his translation of Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* (Tianyan lun), as well as in *On Strength* (Yuanqiang) and *On Liberty* (Qunxue yiyan) (Ibid., 76-77). Yan first used the term "society" in *On Liberty*, in which he distinguished it from "grouping" by adding that "society" is "grouping with laws" (Ibid., 83). Furth has noted that Yan Fu's term *qunxue* was an allusion to Xunzi's idea of "groups." Xunzi had claimed that those at the top of the social hierarchy had obtained this position through their instinct for "social" grouping. See Furth, "Intellectual Change," 335.

In China, as several authors have noted, Darwinism was used to promote collective strength.³⁷⁵ For Spencer, the quality of the social organism depended on the quality of the individuals in it; the release of physical, moral, and intellectual energies had individual happiness as its aim. Yet Yan Fu interpreted the release of energy as a means to national wealth and power—the nation was like one organism among many in the struggle for survival.³⁷⁶ Another aspect of Yan Fu’s interpretation of evolution theory was that he stressed its voluntarism and its Faustian-Promethean aspect rather than its determinism, as Ban Wang has argued.³⁷⁷ On a more general plane, as Furth has noted, many Chinese intellectuals gave a “Lamarckian twist” to evolution theory during the late Qing dynasty (1644-1911), which was not only due to the fact that this had been inherent in Spencer, but also to the fact that, in human societies, characteristics that had been “acquired” were indeed transmitted.³⁷⁸ Therefore, some Chinese intellectuals focused on history and culture and their respective transmission.

For Xiao Gongqin, Yan Fu was a “neo-conservative” because his theory of the social organism was an expression of Burke’s “gradualist conservatism” (*jianjin zhuyi de baoshou zhuyi*). Although Xiao used the adjective “gradualist” in Chinese, he translated the term in English as “evolutionary.”³⁷⁹ This already indicates that, rather than considering Yan Fu’s thought a manifestation of Burkean conservatism, Xiao read Burke into Yan Fu’s evolutionism—Xiao even argued that Yan Fu had read Burke, and that is why Xiao discerned a Burkean influence in between the lines.³⁸⁰ This already leads us to the following questions: why was the first representative of Xiao’s “neo-conservatism”—a term that Xiao employed to indicate the effect of Burkean conservatism—a thinker who has generally been associated with Spencerian evolution

³⁷⁵ Apart from Schwartz, as mentioned above, see also Wang Fanshen, “Evolving Prescriptions,” 76. Wang also refers to Pusey, *China and Charles Darwin*, 64.

³⁷⁶ Schwartz, *Wealth and Power*, 56, 59, 69-80. Schwartz has posed the question of whether this was a distortion of Spencer or but a logical conclusion of certain trends in Spencer unnoticed by Western researchers. These trends concern the fact that, in the biological organism, individual parts become more subordinated to the whole as the organism evolves. Hence, one could point out that the “individual” in Spencer was a mere “particle” and that Yan Fu’s interpretation was an extension of this inherent weakness.

³⁷⁷ Wang, *Illuminations from the Past*, 29.

³⁷⁸ Charlotte Furth, “The Sage as Rebel: The Inner World of Chang Ping-lin,” in *LOC*, 113-150. Reference from 130-131.

³⁷⁹ Xiao Gongqin, “Zhongguo xin baoshou zhuyi de sixiang yuanyuan: Yan Fu dui zhengzhi jijin zhuyi de pipan ji qi dangdai yiyi,” *YZLG*, 25-40. Reference from 25-26.

³⁸⁰ Xiao Gongqin, “Dangdai Zhongguo xin baoshou zhuyi,” *EYS*, 134; Interview with Xiao Gongqin, Shanghai, August 4, 2006.

theories? Why did Xiao Gongqin not take Edmund Burke himself as an example to make his point? How important was Burke really in Xiao's "neo-conservatism"?

Xiao added that this Burkean conservatism needed to be distinguished from "Maistrian-style conservatism," which was "reactionary" (*fandong*) in nature.³⁸¹ For this reason, whereas Schwartz had questioned Yan Fu's "distortion" of liberalism, Xiao embraced this "authoritarian" interpretation but did not present it as such. Xiao also added a footnote to the application of Burke to China: whereas Burkean conservatism had civil society as its basis, this condition was lacking in China—the aim of "neo-conservatism" there was precisely the realization of a civil society and the elimination of certain traditional elements. In China, the reverence of tradition could obstruct its modernization and, hence, "neo-conservatism" had a contradictory attitude toward its own tradition: it criticized radical antitraditionalism, but in returning to tradition it should be careful not to become a "fundamentalist conservatism."³⁸² As will be discussed further, Xiao's advocacy of historical continuity was based on a selective interpretation of tradition.

According to Yan Fu's "theory of the social organism," then, this organism reacted and adapted to circumstances; the adaptation of one single element affected the entire structure. Yan Fu compared the import of a foreign system to taking the hoofs of a horse, placing them on a cow's nape, and expecting it to become a "winged steed" (*qianlima*).³⁸³ The reason why this was impossible was, according to Yan Fu, that the social organization (*ti*) and the system within society (*yong*) could not be separated from each other (*tiyong buke li lun*). The early reformers had been mistaken in their advocacy of "*Zhongti xiyong*" (Chinese learning as the substance, Western learning as the function) because "ti" and "yong" were inseparable. Instead, Yan Fu called it "*Zhongxue tiyong*" and "*Xixue tiyong*" (Chinese learning as substance and function; Western learning as substance and function). As such, Yan Fu had been the first to realize the dilemma of Chinese modernization, namely the dilemma between "single import" (*danxiang yinjin*) and "wholesale import" (*quanxiang yinjin*). "Single import" was impossible because each element was part of an organic system and needed the

³⁸¹ Xiao Gongqin, "Dangdai Zhongguo xin baoshou zhuyi," *EYS*, 126. The distinction between "Burkean" and "Maistrian" conservatism was taken from Peter Viereck's study on conservatism. See Peter Viereck, *Conservatism from John Adams to Churchill* (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1956).

³⁸² Xiao Gongqin, "Yan Fu beilun," *XGJ*, 36, 39-40.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 23; Wang Shi, *Yan Fuji*, Vol. 3, 560.

support of other elements of that system. Consequently, the import of one element automatically had to lead to the import of an entire system. “Wholesale import,” on the other hand, was also impossible because the elements that supported and defined the system were in fact endless; it was impossible to import every supporting element behind a certain system. Even if one would transplant all the elements that made a horse a horse onto a cow, the cow would never be a horse. Xiao has termed this the “Yan Fu paradox” (*Yan Fu beilun*) because Yan Fu was the first to point out the problems of both the “single” and “wholesale” import strategies. Xiao did admit that Yan Fu discussed these problems in different texts; it was not a systematic theory in Yan Fu’s work.³⁸⁴

Xiao Gongqin phrased it as follows: “One could say that Yan Fu was the earliest neo-conservative thinker in China since modern times who argued that gradual reform was necessary from the angle of ‘circumstance theory’ (*tiaojianlun*).”³⁸⁵ What this meant was that for Yan Fu, one had to take into account the “customs and popular feelings” when considering reform because these customs and feelings had been shaped over a long period of time. Yan Fu compared good government with vegetation, which could only grow if the three conditions of “heaven, earth, and man” were suitable.³⁸⁶ Yan Fu already advocated gradual reform in *Yuanqiang* (On Power) in 1895, three years before the reform movement of 1898.³⁸⁷ Xiao has contrasted Yan Fu’s approach with the approach of the reformers of 1898, whose radical reform strategy was a “crisis theory” (*weijilun*): reformers wanted to imitate the Japanese Meiji reforms of 1868 without taking into account the variations between China and Japan.³⁸⁸

Xiao described Yan Fu’s way of overcoming the “Yan Fu paradox” in these words: “It was that one should pay special attention to the degree of development and ripening of new elements inside the social organism and that one should regard this as

³⁸⁴ Interview with Xiao Gongqin, Shanghai, August 4, 2006.

³⁸⁵ Xiao Gongqin, “‘Yan Fu beilun,’” *XGJ*, 29.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁷ Wang Shi, *Yan Fuji*, Vol. 1, 5-15. This text appeared in the Tianjin journal *Zhibao* of March 4 to 9, 1895, and in the Shanghai journal *Shiwubao*, October 1896. Translated by François Houang in *Les Manifestes de Yen Fou*, 47-99.

³⁸⁸ Xiao elaborated these differences in “Zhongguo zaoqi xiandaihua de cuozhe ji qi lishi houguo,” *XGJ*, 199-223. See 207-208 and 218-220 in particular. The article was originally published in Yang Nianqun, ed., *Jiawu bainian cha: duoyuan shiye xia de Zhongri zhanzheng* (Beijing: zhishi chubanshe, 1995).

the basis for the import and use of external systems.”³⁸⁹ One should guide the survival and growth of inner elements and make them function as the “endogenous basis” (*neiyuanxing*) for the import of external systems, so that internal elements and external systems could merge.³⁹⁰ This was the case because the common culture, beliefs, virtues and customs of a people formed its “national character” (*guoxing*)—they were the “cultural soul” (*wenhua linghun*) of a nation, without which survival was impossible. The national character was embodied in the collective experience of a nation and in its “mainstream culture” (*zhuliu wenhua*), value symbols, and ideology. As briefly noted in the previous chapter, this “mainstream culture” for Xiao consisted of Confucianism.

Different from Liang Qichao’s definition of the Chinese “national character” in terms of language, custom, and religion, Xiao defined it in terms of Confucianism.³⁹¹ Xiao’s stance was not unique; figures such as Liang Shuming’s father Liang Zhi had also defined the Chinese character in terms of Confucian values.³⁹² But whereas Liang Zhi and others had conceived of Confucian values as universal values, a topic that will be further explored in Chapter Five, Xiao defended the particularity of Chinese culture; it was the product of the particular experience of the Chinese nation. Tradition was a “carrier” (*zaiti*), “intermediary” (*zhongjie*), or “receptor” (*shouti*) of outer system elements because its basis was “national particularity” (*minzi texing*), without which traditional culture would be nothing but an empty shell. This stress on historical continuity, then, concerned the main difference between Xiao’s previous advocacy of “neo-authoritarianism” and his theory of “neo-conservatism.” To be sure, Xiao had already referred to the “traditional value system,” which could act as “supporting ground for the coagulation of the social spirit,” in the context of his research on the theory of “neo-authoritarianism.”³⁹³ Then again, behind his view of tradition as a means to enhance nationalism and cohesion, there had been no systematic and historical argument as it was developed in his theory on “neo-conservatism.”

The distinction between “neo-conservatism” and “radicalism” and between “neo-conservatism” and “fundamentalist conservatism,” then, was that tradition, for Yan Fu, had a positive meaning for modernization. Yan Fu approached tradition from a

³⁸⁹ Xiao Gongqin, “‘Yan Fu beilun,’” *XGJ*, 31.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁹¹ Liang had expressed his ideas in “Guoxing pian” (On national character), *Rongren bao* (The Justice) December 1, 1912.

³⁹² See Lin Yü-sheng, “The Suicide of Liang Chi,” *LOC*, 151-168.

³⁹³ Xiao Gongqin and Zhu Wei, “A Painful Dilemma,” 73; Qi Mo, *Xin quanwei zhuyi*, 17.

pragmatic philosophical angle: it was the “experience” (*yueli*) shaped in response to the challenges of the natural and social environment. Cultural tradition³⁹⁴ was a condensed “collective experience” (*jiti jingyan*). This view is somewhat reminiscent of Hayek’s definition of tradition as stemming from “habits of responding.”³⁹⁵ Xiao Gongqin then employed one of his many organic metaphors to describe the function of Chinese traditional culture in the process of the import of foreign systems:

It is like a naturally grown ecological forest belt that encircles the throng of a certain area. It has the ecological function of buffering, filtering, and regulating the “wind, sand, rain, and dew” of external cultures. This function of ecological regulation is not the result of rational and conscious planning and design by the people who have lived at the place in question for a long period of time; it is the result of a natural ecology of balancing and “screening” in the long-term process of historical evolution. If people practically fell it because of insect pests, once the buffering and screening of this cultural protective screen is lost, although on the surface, external cultures can be vastly implanted without difficulty or resistance, in reality, it can only result in all-round and rapid soil erosion (...).³⁹⁶

It can be seen from this passage that Xiao Gongqin stressed the importance of “natural growth,” evolution, and the limits of human interference in this process—processes of change are beyond human will.³⁹⁷ Another important element concerned the long-term and gradual nature of the process, which meant that tradition could not be destroyed overnight. Xiao repeatedly quoted Yan Fu’s phrase: “The new has not been obtained yet, but the old has already been destroyed.”³⁹⁸ Yan Fu paid attention to the growth and ripening of new elements in the social organism, but his weakness lay in the fact that he did not truly transform tradition, possibly because the Classics were too close to him.

³⁹⁴ During the 1980s, a debate unfolded on the difference between “cultural tradition” (*wenhua chuantong*) and “traditional culture” (*chuantong wenhua*). The scholar Pang Pu was the first to make a distinction between the two terms. Pang considered the latter to be something that belonged to the past, whereas the former was a living tradition that was still developing, a view that was shared by the philosopher Tang Yijie.

³⁹⁵ Hayek, *Collected works of F.A. Hayek*, 21-22.

³⁹⁶ Xiao Gongqin, “Yan Fu beilun,” *XGJ*, 36.

³⁹⁷ Xiao Gongqin, “Dangdai Zhongguo xin baoshou zhuyi,” *EYS*, 130.

³⁹⁸ For example, Xiao Gongqin, “Yan Fu beilun,” *XGJ*, 31; Xiao Gongqin, “Zhongguo zaoqi xiandaihua,” *XGJ*, 221.

Yet on a positive note, Yan Fu was the first thinker who had been truly aware of the complexity of East and West and the respective differences between the two.

3.3.3 *Burkean Conservative or Social Darwinist?*

Xiao Gongqin appears truly convinced that Yan Fu's theories bore a Burkean stamp. The thought of Yan Fu and Burke does overlap in the sense that both are characterized by the belief in "trial-and-error," by the stress on natural growth, and by the importance given to particular circumstances, all of which justify a limited interference in the process of change. Also, both in the case of Burkean conservatism and Yan Fu's thought, the cultural and the natural are conflated. Conservatives have invoked the metaphor of the "second nature" for habits, customs, and culture in order to stress the inevitability of things.³⁹⁹ Social evolutionists like Yan Fu have likewise compared social processes to natural processes. Moreover, one might argue that both social evolutionism and conservatism are preoccupied with continuity and order; some theorists do find the two theories compatible.⁴⁰⁰

Nevertheless, as the conservative Robert Nisbet has argued, social evolutionism and conservatism have different views of change. For the former, change is continuous, directional, endogenous, necessary, and related to big, abstract entities, whereas for conservatives, change is accidental, exogenous, and related to concrete historical data.⁴⁰¹ Also, social evolutionism is determinist in that it reduces change to natural laws, which leaves little room for human interference. Conservatives, on the other hand, underscore that processes of historical change are complicated, but they nevertheless believe that there is some room for human interference.

Another important dissimilarity between conservatism and social evolutionism concerns the reference to nature. Whereas Social Darwinists make natural analogies for the purpose of predictability, conservatives do so in order to show the inevitability of events. For Social Darwinists, nature plays a major part because it can offer a model to analyze societies; for conservatives, although nature should be respected, culture and history play an equally important role. Or, whereas Social Darwinists remain within the framework of natural group markers, such as climate, conservatives use cultural group

³⁹⁹ Muller, "Introduction," 19-20.

⁴⁰⁰ For example, Larry Arnhart, *Darwinian Conservatism* (Exeter, Charlottesville: Imprint Academic, 2005).

⁴⁰¹ See Robert Nisbet, "Reflections on a Metaphor," in idem, *Social Change*, 240-304.

markers, such as history and language.⁴⁰² For conservatives, it is culture that restrains man from natural inclinations; culture is needed precisely because of the limits of human nature. On the one hand, Xiao Gongqin stressed the naturally grown aspect of the cultural markers to the extreme—which implied that human interference was in fact impossible and not just limited—but on the other hand, he did mention the importance of the restraining force of culture.

Perhaps the issue of the role of tradition in the modernization process could clarify the nature of Xiao Gongqin’s “neo-conservatism.” As discussed above, Xiao argued that traditional elements should function as “levers” in the modernization process. Nowhere, though, did Xiao specify how this was to be realized *in concreto*. As regards China, the “mainstream culture” Xiao referred to was Confucianism, and, more particularly, the “moral autonomy” (*daode zizhuxing*)—a central element in the Kantian tradition of moral philosophy—that Xiao discerned in original Confucianism.⁴⁰³ But apart from some vague Confucian slogans, Xiao did not explain how this “moral autonomy” could function as a lever in the Chinese modernization process.⁴⁰⁴ Xiao’s claim that Confucianism contained moral autonomy was in line with Thomas Metzger’s argument in *Escape from Predicament*.⁴⁰⁵ Metzger had put forward this argument in response to Max Weber’s claim that Confucianism could not have the same function as Protestantism had had in the West as regards the rise of the spirit of capitalism because Confucianism lacked moral autonomy. In Chinese intellectual circles, Metzger’s argument of the moral autonomy of Confucianism had been utilized in debates on New Confucianism, the subject of Chapter Five. In this context, New Confucians had subscribed to the Confucian value of benevolence (*ren*), a universal value that could be applied to tackle problems of modernization. The liberal Lin Yü-sheng, whose thesis of

⁴⁰² The terms “natural group markers” and “cultural group markers” are taken from Margaret Sleeboom, who used them in the context of a discussion of academic nationalism in China and Japan. See Margaret Sleeboom, *Academic Nationalism* (Ph.D. diss., University of Amsterdam, 2001).

⁴⁰³ See Xiao Gongqin, “Ruxue de sanzong lishi xingtai,” *XGJ*, 315-337.

⁴⁰⁴ Xiao mentioned Confucian adages such as “weiren youji” (acting benevolent from within the self) and “qiuren deren” (seek benevolence and get benevolence) as manifestations of moral autonomy. *Ibid.*, 336. Elsewhere, Xiao also referred to “zhiqiang buxi” (continuous self-renewal). Xiao Gongqin, “Minzu zhuyi,” *XGJ*, 356. On the Weber-Metzger discussion, see also Chapter Five.

⁴⁰⁵ Thomas A. Metzger, *Escape From Predicament: Neo-Confucianism and China’s Evolving Political Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977). The book was translated into Chinese in 1990 under the title *Baituo kunjing: xin ruxue yu Zhongguo zhengzhi wenhua de yanjin*, published by Jiangsu renmin chubanshe.

“radical anti-traditionalism” had inspired mainland intellectuals—as will be discussed in Chapter Four—had also mentioned the moral autonomy of Confucianism in the context of his theory of the “creative transformation” of Chinese tradition.⁴⁰⁶ Lin Yü-sheng had used the theory to argue for the foundation of a liberal and democratic order in particular.

Xiao Gongqin used the moral autonomy argument in a different way. He argued that it was moral autonomy that had instilled literati with a feeling of mission, an inner conscience and a “crisis mentality” (*youhuan yishi*).⁴⁰⁷ The problem with different manifestations of Confucianism was that moral autonomy had been repressed. In original Confucianism, the stress on benevolence (*ren*) had been contradicted with an equal stress on propriety (*li*). After the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220), when Confucianism became “bureaucratized” and merged with the autocratic system, the function of propriety become more important, which resulted in a repression of moral autonomy and a passive national character. After the chaos of the Five Dynasties (4th-6th century), scholars of the Song dynasty (907-1279) reacted against the ritualized Confucianism of the previous dynasties and developed *lixue*, which Xiao considered a third form of Confucianism. This was an attempt to restore moral autonomy, but it failed because although the Heavenly principles (*li*) were reflected in people’s hearts (*xing*), and although the unity between Heaven and man could be brought about by individual moral cultivation, the content of the Heavenly principles was nevertheless still the feudal Confucian ethical code. Therefore, if the second form of Confucianism had created a passive personality from outside, the third form had created it from inside.

Given this historical development, Xiao argued that the value rationality of “benevolence” could revive the repressed moral autonomy of Confucianism; it could provide intellectuals with a “feeling of mission.” This stress on “benevolence,” however, was in tension with Xiao’s argument that some elements in Chinese tradition could function as “levers” in the modernization process. It is hard to imagine how the abstract notion of “moral autonomy” could function as a “lever” for Chinese modernization. It would have seemed more logical for Xiao to stress Confucian values that suited the promotion of order, stability, or harmony, as happened in the official

⁴⁰⁶ Lin Yü-sheng, “Reflections,” 91-100.

⁴⁰⁷ Xiao Gongqin, “Ruxue de sanzong lishi xingtai,” *XGJ*, 336. On the “crisis mentality” in Chinese critical discourse, see Gloria Davies, *Worrying about China: The Language of Chinese Critical Inquiry* (Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard University Press, 2007).

promotion of Confucianism, which will be discussed in Chapter Five. The role of tradition in Xiao Gongqin's "neo-conservatism," then, was rather ambiguous; perhaps a focus on the discursive communalities between Xiao Gongqin and other intellectuals at the time will shed more light on the question of the Burkean factor in Xiao's theory.

3.4 THE LESSONS OF HISTORY: THREE KINDS OF "RADICALISM"

As will be discussed in the next chapter, intellectual historians and historians who engaged in public debates on "radicalism" and "conservatism" during the early 1990s based themselves on Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) for their criticism of "radicalism" in modern Chinese history. The reason why Chinese intellectuals invoked Burke was, according to Xiao, that Burke was easy to understand—Chinese intellectuals read his criticism of the French Revolution as a criticism of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). The conservatism of American thinkers such as Leo Strauss and Carl Schmitt, on the other hand, was not recognizable for Chinese intellectuals, because China lacked the Greek tradition that they referred to.⁴⁰⁸ Xiao Gongqin also noted that he himself had invoked Burke because the latter did not oppose change, but argued instead that change was necessary for preservation.⁴⁰⁹

On "radicalism," Xiao has stated: "One can say that the criticism, reflections, and research with regard to radicalism in the early Chinese modernization process are the historical resource for the formation of my reform thoughts with gradualism as a basis."⁴¹⁰ A common pattern used in the reevaluation of modern Chinese history at the beginning of the 1990s was that of three "stages" of "radicalism." The beginning of the first stage was generally situated at the end of the nineteenth century, when reformers Kang Youwei (1858-1927), Tan Sitong (1865-1898), and Liang Qichao (1873-1929) launched the so-called "Hundred Days Reform Movement" (*wuxu bianfa*) of 1898. The second stage revolved around the revolution of 1911, or, for some, the May Fourth Movement, which critics applied in a broad sense, namely to refer to both the cultural and political movements between 1917 and 1921. The third and final stage consisted of Marxism, and, in particular, of the Maoist excesses of the Cultural Revolution. Just like other Chinese intellectuals who condemned this century-old radicalism, Xiao said

⁴⁰⁸ Interview with Xiao Gongqin, Shanghai, August 4, 2006.

⁴⁰⁹ Xiao Gongqin, "Dangdai Zhongguo xin baoshou zhuyi," *EYS*, 126.

⁴¹⁰ Xiao Gongqin, "Zixu," *XGJ*, 10.

farewell to what he called “utopianist political myths,” and he did so by looking into China’s past.⁴¹¹ Although this conception of “radicalism” only became a consensus in the intellectual world of mainland China during the 1990s, Xiao claimed to have “discovered” the destructive forces of “radicalism” as early as the 1980s, because he was “more lucky”: he studied history.⁴¹²

Like other intellectuals at the time, Xiao condemned “radicalism” as a mode of thought that Chinese intellectuals had adhered to since modern times.⁴¹³ In particular, Xiao criticized the impact of the revolutionary thought model since modern times, which had unconsciously created a “dislocation” (*cuowei*) of reform thought, or, a “destructive mode of thought” (*pohuaixing siwei*) relating to reform. This was manifested in the mentality of “overcorrection” (*fei jiaowang bu zuyi guozheng*); in the perception that reform was a revolution; in the dichotomy of good versus bad; and in the belief that aims could be reached in one step.⁴¹⁴

As already noted in the previous chapter, Xiao discerned three types of “radicalism,” which he termed “mental radicalism,” “system determinism,” and “political romanticism.” Here, the focus will be on how Xiao located these types of “radicalism” in the Chinese past, since Xiao argued that they could be perceived as “successive stages” (*cengceng dijie*) in modern Chinese history.⁴¹⁵ The Hundred Days Reform of 1898 was marked by “mental radicalism,” the parliamentary democracy of the Republic (1912) suffered from “system determinism,” and during the period before and after the May Fourth Movement (1917-1921), “political romanticism” flourished in the form of “radical anti-traditionalism” (*jijin fanchuantong*) and “wholesale Westernization theories” (*quanpan xihualun*). Then again, the cycle that connected them reappeared in different historical conditions, and was by no means limited to a certain period in history. Xiao drew a parallel between these three types of “radicalism” in the early modernization stage and the reform modes of thought of some intellectuals

⁴¹¹ Xiao Gongqin, “The Political Attitudes,” 59.

⁴¹² Interview with Xiao Gongqin, Shanghai, August 4, 2006.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ Xiao Gongqin, “Zouxiang chengshu: Zhongguo gaige de fansi yu zhanwang,” *XGJ*, 123-139. Reference from 134. An earlier version of the article appeared in *Zhongguo shibao zhoukan*, February 1993. An abstract was published in *Beijing qingnianbao*, 13 May 1993, 3.

⁴¹⁵ Xiao Gongqin, “Zixu,” *XGJ*, 9. Xiao also mentioned the “relationship of stages” (*dijiexing guanxi*) of the three kinds of radicalism in “Lishi jujue langman,” *XGJ*, 117.

during the 1980s. The history of modern China and the China of the 1980s manifested a “similar historical structure” (*lishi tonggouxing*).⁴¹⁶

Elsewhere, Xiao contended that the radical attitude towards tradition of the late Qing intellectual Tan Sitong (1864-1898) had also been present in the May Fourth Movement (1910s), the Cultural Revolution, and in the so-called “culture fever” (*wenhua re*) of the 1980s. Xiao considered Tan Sitong a “radical” because he had attacked the kernel of the moral and social Confucian order, namely the doctrine of the three bonds (*sangang*)—that between ruler and subject, father and son, and husband and wife. As Tan put it in his *Renxue* (On Humanity), it was necessary to “smash the network” of tradition.⁴¹⁷

Although Xiao associated each of these three periods in modern Chinese history with a distinctive “type” of “radicalism,” he added that this did not signify that the other forms of “radicalism” were nonexistent during that respective period; the three modes of “radicalism” were different aspects of one and the same “collective unconscious” (*jiti wuyishi*).⁴¹⁸ Hence, the second stage of “radicalism” had in fact already been present during the late Qing period of “New Policies” (*xinzheng*).⁴¹⁹ In addition, although Xiao situated “system determinism” during the early Republic, he also discerned “political romanticism” during the same period. He traced this romanticism back to the period before the Republic, and to the constitutionalist movement in particular.⁴²⁰ Xiao also added that the student demonstrations during the spring of 1989 had been the result of the convergence of two types of “radicalism,” namely the “system determinism” of the early Republic and the “political romanticism” after May Fourth. Despite the fact that different types of “radicalism” overlapped during one period in history, what united

⁴¹⁶ Xiao Gongqin, “Zixu,” *XGJ*, 9-10; Xiao Gongqin, “Zixu,” *YZLG*, 4.

⁴¹⁷ On Tan Sitong’s *Renxue*, see Furth, “Intellectual Change,” 331-334.

⁴¹⁸ Xiao Gongqin, “Sixiang de meili,” 109; Xiao Gongqin, “Zixu,” *YZLG*, 9.

⁴¹⁹ In “Qingmo xinzheng yu Zhongguo xiandaihua yanjiu,” Xiao has analyzed this top-down reform movement because he found it useful for research on the reform of centralized bureaucratic systems. See *XGJ*, 251-264. The “New Policies” reform was launched by the Qing court in 1901, and included, among other things, the abolition of the examination system (1905), the establishment of the first modern school system, and the reform of the judiciary and police. Xiao’s treatment of the reforms as a modernization movement was in line with Douglas Reynolds’s interpretation of the reforms as a “revolution,” a thoroughly transformative movement, and not, as commonly believed, as the efforts of a weakened dynasty to preserve its power. For Joseph Levenson, the movement was insignificant, and it revealed the incompatibility of the traditional imperial state and nationalism.

⁴²⁰ See “Cong zhengzhi langman zhuyi dao zhengzhi jijin zhuyi: dui Zhongguo zaoqi yihui minzhu sichao de lishi kaocha,” *XGJ*, 265-280. This was a reprint of the same article that appeared in *Zhongguo shehui kexue jikan*, Hong Kong, 1993, no. 2.

Xiao with other intellectuals at the time was the perceived link between the “radicalism” of the 1980s and the “radicalism” manifested in modern Chinese history.

3.4.1 *The “Mental Radicalism” of the Hundred Days Reformers (1898)*

In “Re-examining the Hundred Days Reform Movement: Discussing the Cultural Root of Early Political Radicalism,”⁴²¹ Xiao examined why the educational, political, economic, and military innovations that Kang Youwei and Emperor Guangxu had set up between June 11 and September 21, 1898, ended with a coup d’état and a revocation of the most important changes.⁴²² Xiao argued that it was mistaken to reduce the failure of the Reform Movement to “unfavorable objective conditions” (*keguan buli tiaojian*) or to the role of the conservative opposition.⁴²³ Instead, Xiao sought the causes of failure in the Reform Movement itself, and, more precisely, in the fact that reformer Kang Youwei’s subjective perception of the crisis caused him to pursue fast and wholesale reform.

In other words, Kang Youwei’s “mental radicalism” (*xintaishang de jijin zhuyi*) was at the heart of the failure of the movement. Responding to their feeling of cultural anxiety (*wenhua jiaolügan*), the reformers used large-scale reforms to achieve psychological balance.⁴²⁴ Xiao has called this translation of anxiety into massive reforms the “reform naivety disease” (*gaige youzhibing*).⁴²⁵ This feeling of crisis and urgency was related to the sorry state of affairs in which China found itself after its defeat in the Sino-Japanese war (1894-1895). As a result, there was a discrepancy between the reformers’ subjective aspirations and what was realistically feasible. Here, Xiao’s definition of “radicalism” is reminiscent of Michael Gasster’s definition of “radicalism” as a dissatisfaction with the present that leads to the creation of better conditions in the mind.⁴²⁶ Just like Plato had compared social decay to an illness and the statesman to a physician, Xiao compared the reformers to “radical doctors” who

⁴²¹ Xiao Gongqin, “Wuxu bianfa de zai fanxing: jianlun zaoqi zhengzhi jijin zhuyi de wenhua genyuan,” *ZFL*, 121-141. This text was an adapted and shorter version of “Wuxu bianfa yu Zhongguo zaoqi zhengzhi jijin zhuyi de wenhua genyuan,” *XGJ*, 224-250. The article also appeared in *ZYG* 1995: 4.

⁴²² For the course and program of the Reform Movement, see Chang Hao, “Intellectual Change and the Reform Movement, 1890-1898,” 274-338.

⁴²³ Xiao Gongqin, “Wuxu bianfa,” *ZFL*, 135.

⁴²⁴ Xiao Gongqin, “Zixu,” *XGJ*, 9.

⁴²⁵ Xiao Gongqin, “Lishi jujue langman,” *XGJ*, 115.

⁴²⁶ Gasster, *Birth of Radicalism*, 237-238.

believed that a major operation was the only solution to China's grave state of illness.⁴²⁷ Because this type of radicalism was driven by anxiety, Xiao has also referred to it as "feeling-of-anxiety radicalism" (*jiaolügan de jijin zhuyi*).⁴²⁸

If Kang Youwei had taken the objective conditions into account, he would have known that the structure of the bureaucracy was not conducive to radical reform. There was a dual structure of authority, in which a complex amalgam of power relationships preserved the balance between the Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908) and the emperor Guangxu (1871-1908). Firstly, by proposing radical reforms, Kang Youwei caused a polarization of these two forces. Secondly, the contrast between Kang Youwei's advocacies and the Confucian values of the bureaucracy was too great. Lastly, the vast size of the bureaucratic system negatively affected the chances of success of the reforms.

For this last point, Xiao relied on Samuel Huntington's research on political reforms in countries with large-scale bureaucratic systems. Huntington had argued that these countries—for example, Russia, China, and the former Austrian Empire—were much harder to reform than non-centralized countries such as Japan, which had a system of enfeoffment (*fenfengzhi*).⁴²⁹ The Japanese emperor did not face the opposition of the old nobility; he was not forced to exclude some people from government because there was no selection process. Huntington had reiterated that gradualism was the only option for large bureaucracies, because fast and radical reform could turn hidden opponents into active opponents. In his book on the birth of "radicalism" in modern China, Michael Gasster had also referred to Huntington's idea that successful modernization through revolution was unlikely, and that the disruption caused by modernization should be solved through institutionalization.⁴³⁰

The "right" strategy that Xiao proposed is what Huntington has termed the "Fabianist strategy" (*Feibianshi de zhanlüe*).⁴³¹ Huntington coined this term in the context of his research on the modernization of Turkey, in which it referred to the

⁴²⁷ Xiao Gongqin, "The Political Attitudes," 77. Since Plato was discussed in great length in Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, it is possible that Xiao got the idea for the metaphor by reading Popper. See Karl Popper, *The Open Society*, Vol. 1, 40, 138-139. Plato used the medical analogy in *Republic* and *Statesman*.

⁴²⁸ Interview with Xiao Gongqin, Shanghai, August 4, 2006.

⁴²⁹ See Huntington, *POCS*, chapter 3: "Political Change in Traditional Polities" (140-191). See also 366-367.

⁴³⁰ Gasster, *Birth of Radicalism*, 246.

⁴³¹ Xiao Gongqin, "Wuxu bianfa," *ZFL*, 128.

strategy of the father of modern Turkey, general Mustafa “Kemal” “Atatürk.”⁴³² Huntington had contrasted Kemal’s “right” strategy to the “wrong” strategy of both Guangxu and Joseph II.⁴³³ Following Huntington, Xiao argued that Kemal disentangled problems and solved them one by one instead of coming up with one master plan to solve all problems at once. Secondly, Kemal started with easy issues, in order to secure the support of the majority. Xiao called this “first-the-easy-then-the-difficult-strategy” (*xianyi hounan zhanlüe*).⁴³⁴ Lastly, after each successful reform, Kemal hinted at the next step, but he did not make his entire plan public from the very beginning, which Huntington had referred to as the “foot-in-the-door approach.”⁴³⁵ As such, Kemal was able to avoid explicit opposition. He resolved contradictions within the system, he used traditional authority to guide reforms, and he relied on the legitimacy he had obtained after each concrete step of reform to ensure the success of the next step.

The Qing reformers, on the contrary, Xiao argued, sought quick reforms because of the sense of crisis that blurred their capacity to think rationally. They advised a break with tradition because the old and the new were irreconcilable opposites to them. Xiao interpreted the optimism of the reformers as a psychological defense against their feeling of crisis. Kang Youwei’s extreme optimism was expressed in his view that it had taken Europe three hundred years to modernize, Japan had needed only thirty years, and China would need three years to set up a rough outline of modernization.⁴³⁶ Unlike Kemal, Kang Youwei “forestalled his opponents by a show of strength” (*xiansheng duoren*).⁴³⁷ Kang Youwei made his entire reform plan public from the start, which increased the oppositions between the different factions. Huntington had termed this the “blitzkrieg” approach, an approach that he disapproved of for overall reform, but that he approved of for piecemeal changes.⁴³⁸ Moreover, by choosing the side of the reformers

⁴³² Huntington applied the term “Fabianist” in reference to the British Fabian Society, which was founded in 1884. Fabianists advocated gradual and incremental reform instead of revolutionary approaches as a means to obtain social democracy. They chose the name “Fabian” in honour of the Roman General and politician Quintus Fabius Maximus (ca. 280-203 B.C.), who was referred to as the “Delayer” with regard to his tactics in the Second Punic War (218-201 B.C.) between Rome and Carthage.

⁴³³ Huntington, *POCS*, 344-356.

⁴³⁴ Xiao Gongqin, “Wuxu bianfa,” *ZFL*, 128.

⁴³⁵ Huntington, *POCS*, 346, 353.

⁴³⁶ More precisely, it would take three years to set up a “macroscopic model,” five years to arrange things properly, eight years to put things into practice, and ten years to establish a power map.

⁴³⁷ Xiao Gongqin, “Wuxu bianfa,” *ZFL*, 132.

⁴³⁸ Huntington, *POCS*, 36.

instead of adopting a neutral stance, Kang Youwei also increased the tensions by turning the officials into opponents. In brief, the reformers focused on the necessity of the reforms (*biyaoxing*), but not on their feasibility (*kexingxing*).⁴³⁹

In a last section, Xiao located the roots of “psychological radicalism” in traditional Chinese political culture; the reformers felt morally superior and shunned compromise. They adhered to a dual structure of “good” versus “evil”; they ascribed failure to “evil opponents.” Here, Xiao made use of the term “consummatory value system, which had been coined by David Apter, a political scientist from Yale University.⁴⁴⁰ For Apter, there were two types of “political norms”: “consummatory norms,” which embodied “ultimate ends,” and “instrumental norms,” which embodied “empirical ends.”⁴⁴¹ Drawing on Apter’s description of “consummatory norms,” Xiao translated the term as “*wanmei zhuyi*” (perfectionism) or “*jizhi zhuyi*” (ultimate ends-ism), a term that he used to describe traditional Chinese political culture.⁴⁴² Traditional Chinese political culture was not suited for reform, since reform required compromise and consensus instead of a politics of “you die, I live” (*nisi wohuo*), or “where you are, I am not” (*youni wuwo*).⁴⁴³ To some extent, the connection that Xiao made between traditional Chinese political culture and “radicalism” is reminiscent of Lin Yü-sheng’s analysis of the “wholesale anti-traditionalism” of the May Fourth reformers.⁴⁴⁴ Lin Yü-sheng also traced the roots of “radicalism” back to Chinese tradition: in the instance of the May Fourth reformers, their “radicalism” was caused by their “holistic” way of thinking, which made them pursue ultimate goals only.

⁴³⁹ Xiao Gongqin, “Wuxu bianfa,” *ZFL*, 136.

⁴⁴⁰ Apter had used this term in *Political Change: Collected Essays* (London: Routledge, 1973). Xiao’s reference to the political scientist David Apter was in line with the renaissance of political science in China during the 1980s. Apter was one of the American visiting scholars in China, others being David Easton, Samuel Huntington, Robert Salisbury, Robert Scalapino, and Marc Petracca. Meissner, “Intellectual Currents,” 12-14. Huntington had referred to Apter’s *The Politics of Modernization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965) in *POCS*, 174.

⁴⁴¹ Apter, *Political Change: Collected Essays*, 106. Apter combined these two types of political norms with two types of “political structures,” which Apter termed “hierarchical” and “pyramidal,” to construct a model of “political systems types.”

⁴⁴² Xiao Gongqin, “Zhongguo zaoqi xiandaihua,” *XGJ*, 208. Elsewhere, Xiao has also used the term “consummatory culture” (*jizhixing wenhua*), which he has contrasted with “instrumental culture” (*gongjuxing wenhua*). See “Wuxu bianfa,” *XGJ*, 248.

⁴⁴³ Xiao Gongqin, “Wuxu bianfa,” *ZFL*, 140. Xiao’s perception of Chinese political culture resembles Tang Tsou’s conception of Chinese politics as a “winner-take-all” conflict. See Fewsmith, *Elite Politics in Contemporary China*, xiv.

⁴⁴⁴ Lin Yü-sheng, *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditionalism in the May Fourth Era* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979).

Xiao's interest in the reform movement of 1898 was not a coincidence. For Xiao, the division between traditional and modern China was neither the Opium War, nor the start of technological reforms since the 1870s. Modern China had started with the 1898 Reform Movement because it was only then that the feeling of crisis of the literati had taken shape.⁴⁴⁵ Yü Ying-shih has also situated the first sense of crisis of the literati around this time, when the "marginalization" of China finally occurred to them.⁴⁴⁶ Since the Reform Movement signified the start of modern China for Xiao, it was only logical that Xiao returned to this specific moment in history to solve problems of reform in the present. Xiao's use of the 1898 Reform Movement to discuss the reforms of Deng Xiaoping was not unique at the time; during the early 1990s, there was a true revival of interest in late Qing politics, and in the Reform Movement of 1898 and the "New Policies" (*xinzheng*) between 1901 and 1907 in particular.

More specifically, Xiao adhered to the so-called "impact-response model" of the Harvard-based scholar John King Fairbank to depict the process of Chinese modernization. According to this model, Chinese modernization was a "response" to the "impact" of the West since the Opium War.⁴⁴⁷ This was reflected in Xiao's argument that the ability to establish what he called a "comprehensive reaction capacity" (CRC) (*zonghe fanying nengli*) greatly determined the success of reform. Xiao defined this CRC as "the ability of traditional sovereign states to unite, to generate an efficient and rational response to the external impact of the Western challenge, and to adapt oneself."⁴⁴⁸ The problem with China was precisely that it had lacked a CRC; it had therefore been unable to make objective judgments.

⁴⁴⁵ Xiao dedicated an entire book to reform in late Qing China, with several chapters focusing on the Reform Movement of 1898. See *Weiji zhong de biange: qingmo xiandaihua jincheng zhong de jijin yu baoshou* (Shanghai: Sanlian shudian, 1999). Chapters 3-6 deal with the Reform Movement of 1898.

⁴⁴⁶ Yü Ying-shih, "The Radicalization of China," 135-136.

⁴⁴⁷ John King Fairbank and Ssu Yu-teng had outlined the "impact-response" model in *China's Response to the West: A Documentary Survey, 1839-1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954). Fairbank's student Paul Cohen criticized the model in his *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), which was translated into Chinese in 1989. Xiao acknowledged the value of Paul Cohen's criticism, but he still considered the "impact-response" model to be the model to understand the "basic trend of history" (*lishi de jiben quxiang*) in China. See Xiao Gongqin, "Zhongguo zaoqi xiandaihua," *XGJ*, 203.

⁴⁴⁸ This "comprehensive reaction capacity" consisted of three basic aspects: the leading value system, the structure of the traditional political system, and the policy-making abilities of the ruling elite. Xiao Gongqin, "Zhongguo zaoqi xiandaihua," *XGJ*, 204.

Xiao found an example of a quick CRC in Japanese modernization. The Sinocentrist cultural psychology of the Chinese “sunlight culture,” as the French sociologist Amaury de Riencourt put it, repressed knowledge of Western culture and led to cultural inertia, whereas Japanese culture was a “moonlight culture” that attracted foreign cultures.⁴⁴⁹ The consequences of China’s slow CRC were, apart from its legitimacy crisis, the polarization of the political-intellectual elite into a conservative and a radical faction. Another consequence of the slow CRC was what Xiao called the “multiple diseases of anomy” (*shifan zonghezhen*), or, a downward spiral of political, cultural, and moral anomy.⁴⁵⁰ Xiao also referred to Eisenstadt’s concept of “the breakdowns of modernization” (*xiandaihua de duanlie*), which referred to a setback after a period of relative progress in modernization.⁴⁵¹

Xiao was also not the first Chinese intellectual to draw lessons from the Turkish experience. During the time of the Turkish revolution (1908-1910), Chinese revolutionaries in Japan had just ended a three-year long debate over the future of China, in which the central question had been whether revolutionary overthrow followed by republican-style government was the solution to the Chinese problem, or whether it would be better to preserve the dynastic system under a constitutional monarchy. The Turkish experience was then “immediately instrumentalized in the service of already formed political and ideological positions.”⁴⁵² The model of Turkey had also played a role in the modernization of Taiwan under the Kuomintang. The “revival” of the Turkish model since the late 1980s can partly be attributed to the debates on “neo-authoritarianism,” in which Chinese intellectuals drew on Western modernization research of the 1960s and 1970s. In this context, Xiao’s reference to the Turkish revolution revealed a new interest in the role of the elite in reforms, as opposed to the past view that the masses constituted the driving force of history.

⁴⁴⁹ See, for example, the chapter on “The Moonlight Civilizations” in Amaury De Riencourt, *The Soul of China* (London: Jonathan Cape/Honeyglen, 1958), 109-132, and, in the same volume, the chapter on “The Collapse of Chinese Civilization,” 179-200. “Moonlight civilizations,” according to de Riencourt, appeared throughout Asia at a time when Chinese, Indian and Islamic civilizations were in decline. Under Western influence, they managed to adapt to “modern” life.

⁴⁵⁰ Xiao Gongqin, “Zhongguo zaoqi xiandaihua,” *XGJ*, 221.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 222. Xiao also used the term *xiandaihua de cuozhe* (setbacks of modernization).

⁴⁵² Karl, *Staging the World*, 177-178.

3.4.2 *The “System Determinism” Following the Revolution of 1911*

When analyzing early parliamentary democracy in China, Xiao discovered that one of the pitfalls of institutional reform at that time was the lack of consideration of the different conditions surrounding political systems in the West and in China, which resulted in a naive “transplantation” (*zhiru*) of an entire ready-made Western system. Problems in China were blamed on its system, and when the import of a Western system was not successful, the problem was believed to be that the import had not been thorough enough. Xiao called this excessive stress on the import of systems to solve problems “system determinism.” He found examples of this in the thought of Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), the “father” of the revolution of 1911, but it had also been present in the earlier generation, namely in the thought of Kang Youwei and Chen Tianhua (1875-1905).⁴⁵³

What these reformers did not take into consideration was that every system was the outcome of a long evolutionary process. A certain result could only be obtained through the existence of supporting conditions, as already exposed in Xiao’s discussion of Yan Fu. Chinese reformers, however, wrongly believed that the import of a system as such would produce the same effects as had been obtained in the original context. Kang Youwei, for example, was convinced that the solution to China’s problems was a mere imitation of the Western economic, political, and educational systems. To describe Western systems, Chen Tianhua used the metaphor of “delicacies” (*zhenxiu*) spread out on a table: they were ready to be prepared and enjoyed at once. For this reason, Chen Tianhua believed that there was a greater chance of success in imitating than in inventing.⁴⁵⁴ Sun Yat-sen used the metaphor of an advanced machine for the Western political system: the invention of a new machine meant that years of patience were required before the actual manufacturing of products; the imitation of an existing machine, on the contrary, guaranteed output after a short period of time. Another

⁴⁵³ Xiao Gongqin, “Lun dangdai Zhongguo de langman zhuyi gaigeguan: dui ‘zhidu jue ding lun’ de piping,” *XGJ*, 87-108. Reference from 89. The article also appeared in *Zhishi fenzi* 1989:1. Chen Tianhua was an intellectual who had studied in Japan and who had engaged in anti-Qing politics. He had also been involved in the founding of the Revolutionary Alliance (*Tongmenghui*) in 1905.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.* From Chen Tianhua, “Lun Zhongguo yigai chuang minzhu zhengti,” in *Xinhai geming qianshinian shilun xuanji*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 122.

comparison Sun Yat-sen came up with was that it was always better to use the newest locomotives than to rely on old-timers.⁴⁵⁵

A basic problem of this “system determinism,” according to Xiao, was that it always explained problems within its own framework: if reform did not succeed, it could only be because there was a problem with the old system, which obstructed the successes of the new system. As a result, radicalism was fought with more radicalism, and a vicious cycle of destruction was born.⁴⁵⁶ Since the old system was blamed for all problems, the only solution was to break entirely with the traditional system. Reform, according to this logic, became a revolution.⁴⁵⁷ The final result of this spiral of “system determinism,” disorder, and radicalism was a social breakdown.⁴⁵⁸ Here, we can also discern some similarities with Gasster’s reference to the term “radicalism”: Gasster had made mention of a special form of “radicalism” according to which failure of reform was seen as a proof that more reform was needed. In this context, Gasster had mentioned exactly the same examples, including Sun Yat-sen’s locomotive analogy.⁴⁵⁹

In “On the Romanticist View of Reform in Contemporary China: A Criticism of ‘System Determinism,’” Xiao integrated his research on radicalism in modern China with the problems of contemporary reform. Xiao stated on “system determinism” during the reforms of the 1980s:

Its core concept is that all sorts of maladies in Chinese economy and society come into being because the system is not rational; the rapid economic development of Western industrial countries and the East Asian newly industrialized areas reveals the vitality and rationality of the market economy system. Since the crux of being economically advanced or backward is a problem of the system, hence, one must utilize the authoritative and administrative power of the government to introduce effective market model economic systems and methods from abroad into Chinese economic life, in order to replace the ossified Soviet model planned economy system of the 1950s. Once the systems that people consider both indispensable for the market economic order and

⁴⁵⁵ Xiao Gongqin, “Lun dangdai Zhongguo de langman zhuyi gaigeguan,” 89. From Sun Zhongshan, “Zai dongjing liuxuesheng huanyinghui shang de yanshuo,” in *Xinhai geming qianshinian shilun xuanji*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 125.

⁴⁵⁶ Xiao Gongqin, “Lun dangdai Zhongguo de langman zhuyi gaigeguan,” 93-94.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁴⁵⁸ Xiao Gongqin, “Lishi jujue langman,” *XGJ*, 116.

⁴⁵⁹ Gasster, *Birth of Radicalism*, 241.

mutually corresponding are established in China, a new market economic order will certainly take shape naturally, and it will guide China toward its economic take-off.⁴⁶⁰

The mainstream thought of the 1980s, Xiao continued, was that the large-scale import of the market system would foster market mechanisms. Nonetheless, this was a reversed logic: importing a system without the required social structures was like “wearing a rain suit and hoping it will rain.”⁴⁶¹ Since the old system had already been wiped out, whereas the new system had not been established yet, the result would be anomy. Those who believed in system determinism would ascribe this anomy to the fact that the old system had not been wiped out thoroughly. They would propose “economic shock therapies” (*jingji shangde xiuke liaofa*) or the direct import of Western-style pluralist democratic rule, but the result would be more anomy and a decline of authority and efficacy. When the two vicious circles of anomy leading to more radicalism and anomy leading to the decline of authority and efficacy converged during the 1980s, the social background of Tiananmen was created.⁴⁶² Expanding political participation during a time of crisis was like “quenching thirst with poison” (*yin zhen zhi ke*).⁴⁶³

Xiao put forward two basic strategies for system transplantation. The first one, which Xiao called the “guidance model system” (*youdaoxing zhidu*), stood for the import of a system in accordance with the ripeness of the “modernizable factors” (*ke xiandaihua de yinsu*) of the social organization. The system in turn would stimulate the ripening of these factors, and during this process, the system and the internal factors would be able to integrate gradually. The second possibility, which Xiao called the “greenhouse model system” (*wenshixing zhidu*), was that a different system and its elements would first be imported in one relatively isolated area. As in a greenhouse, in this closed environment, the reaction of the old system to the new system could be tested in order to avoid later confrontations on a larger scale. Examples of this model were the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in China, of which the first four came into being in 1979.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶⁰ Xiao Gongqin, “Dui ‘zhidu juedinglun’ de piping,” *XGJ*, 87.

⁴⁶¹ Xiao Gongqin, “Zouxiang chengshu,” *XGJ*, 126.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 126-127.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁴⁶⁴ Xiao Gongqin, “Dui ‘zhidu juedinglun’ de piping,” *XGJ*, 103-105. The first four SEZs, cities in which direct foreign investment was allowed to stimulate export and to introduce foreign technology, were Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou, and Xiamen. In 1986, fourteen more cities and the island Hainan were turned into SEZs. Xiao also mentioned a third import method that could

Xiao proposed to use the “guidance model system” in an initial stage, when the level of modernity was still very low. On the other hand, Xiao also added that the process of ripening of the social organization’s inner elements was a very slow one; moreover, an extra obstacle concerned the fact that the natural ripening of these elements had been interrupted by the planned economy between the 1950s and the late 1970s. In comparison with the blueprints of the reformers, this method of guidance was one of “ruling by non-action” (*wuwei er zhi*).⁴⁶⁵ As a complementary system, the “greenhouse model system” could be employed. However, the latter could only be used after a certain period, when conditions for import were ripe. What these two methods had in common, however, was their “trial-and-error” way of solving problems instead of starting out from a rational design.⁴⁶⁶ Xiao’s stress on the application of new elements in a relatively isolated area and on the importance of “trial-and-error” is reminiscent of Karl Popper’s defense of “piecemeal engineering.” In *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Popper cast aside the argument that social experiments had to be conducted on a large scale in order to get enough information. For Popper, social experiments under “laboratory conditions” or in an “isolated village” were developed by “trial-and-error” and were based on reason instead of passion.⁴⁶⁷ In spite of these similarities, though, Xiao made no mention of Popper in his exposition of the models.

3.4.3 *The “Political Romanticism” around May Fourth*

The third and final type of “radicalism” that Xiao discerned in modern Chinese history was that of “political romanticism.” For Xiao, “romanticism” had two interrelated layers of meaning, namely the specific “mood” of loving the spontaneous and breaking with the restrictions of existing norms, and, secondly, the projection of ideals and aspirations onto outer objects without taking into account the true nature of the objects in question. Because of this second aspect, according to Xiao, romanticists often started from a “rational state” (*heli zhuangtai*) or an “orderly state” (*zhixu zhuangtai*) that did

only be used when the first two methods were already fully realized. He called this third strategy the “integration model system” (*zhenghexing zhidu*), which he only explained briefly and vaguely as “those regulating instrumental macro-systems that are considered to maintain the operation of the socio-economic order in industrialized societies.” (Ibid., 104). Examples Xiao mentioned were the use of inflation to stimulate production, and the thorough relaxation of price controls to facilitate market growth and to guide production and circulation.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 105.

⁴⁶⁶ Interview with Xiao Gongqin, Shanghai, August 4, 2006.

⁴⁶⁷ Popper, *The Open Society*, Vol. 1, 162-163.

not exist in reality, such as, for example, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1712-1778) image of the Middle Ages, which the latter derived from poems on the countryside.⁴⁶⁸ The basic characteristic of romanticism was what Xiao called its "subjectivism" (*zhuti zhuyi*), and he referred to the intellectual historian Stromberg's description of "the participation of mind in shaping reality" to define romanticism, as well as to John Keats' saying "beauty is truth."⁴⁶⁹ This projection alleviated feelings of repression and anxiety, but romanticism also functioned as a spiritual resource for action.

Whereas in the West, romanticism had arisen as a reaction against society's mechanical, stiff, and mediocre life style, or against the loss of subjectivity that accompanied industrialization, in China, political romanticism arose against the background of the struggle for national survival. One of the earliest representatives of "romantic nationalism" (*langman de minzu zhuyi*) was Chen Tianhua. In his 1905 article "On China's Suitability for Establishing a Democratic Political System," Chen Tianhua argued that the nature of Chinese people differed from that of other nations, but their brightness had been suppressed by the despotic system of the Qing dynasty.⁴⁷⁰ Therefore, once this system had been reversed, due to the superior qualities of the Chinese people, a democratic system could be realized quickly. The same romantic aspect of idealization could be discerned in Wang Jingwei (1883-1944), who argued that liberty, equality, and fraternity were present in the Chinese spirit; Chinese people since ancient times had the ability for constitutionalism.⁴⁷¹ A third representative of romantic thought in the early twentieth century was Sun Yat-sen, who was convinced that the reversal of the Qing dynasty could immediately be followed by democratic rule.

By advocating the direct realization of Western parliamentary democracy, Chinese thinkers failed to recognize that the Western political system was the product of the evolution of society; it was linked to its economic system, social structure, and value system.⁴⁷² Chinese intellectuals also fell prone to what the British philosopher and

⁴⁶⁸ Xiao Gongqin, "Cong zhengzhi langman zhuyi," 266.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid. Quote from Roland N. Stromberg, *European Intellectual History since 1789* (New Jersey: Printice Hall, Inc., 1981), 50.

⁴⁷⁰ Xiao quotes from Chen Tianhua's "Lun Zhongguo yi gaichuang minzhu zhengti," in *Xinhai geming qianshinian shilun xuanji*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 120-125.

⁴⁷¹ Wang Jingwei had studied in Japan and was a member of Sun Yat-sen's Revolutionary Alliance. Initially a Left KMT politician, Wang collaborated with the Japanese during the time of the Wang Jingwei Government in Nanjing. Wang was also a strong opponent of Chiang Kai-shek.

⁴⁷² Xiao Gongqin, "Cong zhengzhi langman zhuyi," *XGJ*, 274.

mathematician Alfred Whitehead (1861-1947) called the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness” (*cuozhi jutigan de miuwu*), or the false belief that something was a concrete reality, when in fact it was an abstract belief.⁴⁷³ Xiao borrowed this reference to Whitehead from Lin Yü-sheng, who had used it to criticize the use of foreign concepts in a Chinese context.⁴⁷⁴ Although Lin had invoked the concept to criticize the liberal Hu Shi (1891-1962) and the New Confucian Tang Junyi (1909-1978) in particular, Xiao also applied it to Chen Tianhua, Sun Yat-sen, and Wang Jingwei, whose parliamentary democracy was nothing but a “projection of desires” (*yuanwang toushe*).⁴⁷⁵ The early republic suffered from endless party struggles and a cabinet crisis because the old and the new system could not integrate.

In “History Rejects Romanticism: The Rise of the Second Trend of Reform in China,”⁴⁷⁶ Xiao also referred to this third type of radicalism as “French-Revolution-style rationalist radicalism” (*faguo dagemingshi de weili zhuyi de jijin zhuyi*).⁴⁷⁷ Xiao called this rationalism because reforms were based on abstract principles of natural law, or on transcendent “first moral principles” (*diyi daode yuanli*), as briefly touched upon in the previous chapter.⁴⁷⁸ Xiao’s equation of the French Revolution with “rationalism” and his discarding of “first principles” can also be found in Edmund Burke.⁴⁷⁹ Xiao clarified that this “rationalism” was also “romanticism” because unconscious ideals were projected onto a system that had nothing to do with reality anymore. This romanticism was thus directly linked with “system determinism.”⁴⁸⁰ As a consequence of “political and economic romanticism,” two different systems came into being: the one that really existed, and the one created by the idealist projections of the reformers. To point out the problems of this approach, Xiao referred to the German theologian Paul Tillich, according to whom romanticism forgot all about the limitations of men and

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 275. Whitehead coined the concept of “the fallacy of misplaced concreteness” in his *Science and the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927 (1926)).

⁴⁷⁴ See, for example, Lin Yü-sheng, “Reflections,” 89.

⁴⁷⁵ Xiao Gongqin, “Cong zhengzhi langman zhuyi,” *XGJ*, 276.

⁴⁷⁶ Xiao Gongqin, “Lishi juejue langman,” *XGJ*, 109-122.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 117.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid. See Chapter Two, 61-62.

⁴⁷⁹ Turner, “Introduction,” xxv and xliii, fn. 13. Burke contrasted “first principles” with history and circumstances in a letter to Joseph Hartford that dates from September 27, 1780. Chen Feng has related Xiao’s “rationalist radicalism” to J.L. Talman’s concept of “political Messianism.” However, whereas Xiao directed his criticism at liberal democracy, Talman used the concept to attack “totalitarian democracy.” See Chen, “Neoconservative Political Thought,” 599, fn. 19.

⁴⁸⁰ Xiao Gongqin, “Dui ‘zhidu juejinglun’ de piping,” *XGJ*, 90.

created blueprints that were not conform to reality, the result of which was tragedy.⁴⁸¹ Chinese intellectuals therefore had to refuse romanticism, although Xiao admitted that it was hard, especially given the fact that they had been repressed for a considerable amount of time.⁴⁸² Notwithstanding his reference to a German thinker in the context of “romanticism,” Xiao emphasized that his “romanticism” differed from its use in a German context. For Xiao, “romanticism” was a “special state of mind” (*yizhong teshu de jingshen zhuangtai*) related to Chinese problems; it was a kind of “emotionalism” (*qingxu zhuyi*).⁴⁸³

This romanticism was prevalent during the 1980s, in the form of what Xiao referred to as “pan-moralistic democracy” (*fan daode zhuyi de minzhu*). In contrast with the existing “contractual democracy” (*qiyuexing minzhu*) in the West, which was the historical product of civil society and the market economy, the “pan-moralistic” version was nothing but a political ideal created in the minds of Chinese intellectuals. “Contractual democracy” was the manifestation of a social system in which autonomous individuals bargained for rights and interests in a market economy based on economic contractual relations. “Pan-moralistic democracy”—which had already been present in the thought of literati such as Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692) and Huang Zongxi (1610-1695)—treated democracy as a tool for virtuous rule, in line with Confucian ideals, but it was also influenced by idealism and Rousseau’s moral democracy.⁴⁸⁴ Because the conditions for democracy were missing in China, it often turned into political “radicalism,” as had happened in 1989. At that time, the “pan-moralistic democrats” included a moderate constitutionalist faction and a more radical liberal human rights faction. The latter believed that the democratic order could be designed according to first principles.⁴⁸⁵

Apart from its appearance during the 1980s and 1990s, romanticism also manifested itself since May Fourth, in the form of theories of wholesale Westernization. In “Rethinking the Struggle Between ‘Isms and Problems’ in Modern Intellectual History,” Xiao argued that the period since May Fourth had witnessed “the adoration of

⁴⁸¹ Xiao Gongqin, “Lishi jujue langman,” *XGJ*, 122.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*

⁴⁸³ Interview with Xiao Gongqin, Shanghai, August 4, 2006.

⁴⁸⁴ Xiao Gongqin, “Zouxiang chengshu,” *XGJ*, 127-130.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 130-132. In 1994, Xiao also used the terms “romanticism and “radicalism” in relation to the so-called “New Left.” For Xiao, they were idealists who had not experienced the Cultural Revolution, and hence, they had no understanding of China’s “national conditions” and the importance of economic reform. See Xiao Gongqin, “Renwen zhishi fenzi,” *XGJ*, 187.

ideas” (*linian chongbai*).⁴⁸⁶ Thinkers were convinced that the solution to all problems resided in abstract concepts. In fact, Xiao stated, this trend had also existed before May Fourth, for example in the belief since the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905) that “constitutionalism” would rescue China (*lixian jiuguolun*).⁴⁸⁷ The first Chinese intellectuals who doubted “isms” to solve “problems” were, according to Xiao, Yan Fu and Hu Shi. Given Xiao’s admiration for Yan Fu, he devoted most of the article to Yan Fu’s criticism of natural law and “ideas determinism” (*linian jue ding lun*). Yan Fu already criticized thinkers from Plato to Rousseau in his *Zhengzhi jiangyi* (1906).⁴⁸⁸ Since 1913, he specifically criticized Rousseau’s “natural law theory” (*ziran gonglilun*) in several works, such as *Tianyan jinhualun* (Evolution Theory, 1913),⁴⁸⁹ *Shudang* (On Parties, 1913),⁴⁹⁰ and *Minyue pingyi* (A Critique of the Social Contract, 1914).⁴⁹¹ In all these works, Xiao argued, Yan Fu attacked the rationalist tradition of continental philosophy. Yan Fu’s most representative work in this respect was *Minyue pingyi*, in which he criticized Rousseau’s social contract theory for its reliance on abstract principles and its ignorance of practical experience and historical reality. Yan Fu disapproved of the political “perfectionism” (*wanmei zhuyi*) in the rationalist tradition; he preferred the tradition of British-American empiricism, a tradition in which liberty had grown out of the old society.⁴⁹² Yan Fu stressed the importance of inducting theory from experience instead of deducting theory from idealism because society was an organism that operated independent of the human will.

In “*Zhuangzi*” *pingyu* (Comments on “*Zhuangzi*”),⁴⁹³ Xiao further argued, Yan Fu mentioned the growth of habits out of experience; for him, tradition was shaped through dealing with challenges in the environment. In *Yuedang*, Yan Fu condemned

⁴⁸⁶ Xiao Gongqin, “Jindai sixiangshi shang de ‘zhuyi yu wenti’ zhizheng de zai sikao,” *ZFL*, 142-157. The same text appeared in *XGJ* under the title “‘Ziran gonglilun’ yu xiandai jijin sixiang: Yan Fu yu Hu Shi de sikao ji qi qishi,” 281-299. A shorter version of the text, in which Hu Shi was not discussed, appeared in *Zhishifenzi yu guannianren*, 57-71.

⁴⁸⁷ Xiao Gongqin, “‘Zhuyi yu wenti’” *ZFL*, 142.

⁴⁸⁸ Wang Shi, *Yan Fuji*, Vol. 5, 1241-1316. Originally published in 1906 by Shangwu yinshuguan chubanshe.

⁴⁸⁹ Wang Shi, *Yan Fuji*, Vol. 2, 309-319. The article appeared in the Beijing journal *Pingbao* of April 12-May 2, 1913; it was divided into twelve subsequent parts.

⁴⁹⁰ Wang Shi, *Yan Fuji*, Vol. 2, 298-308. Originally appeared in *Pingbao* in six parts, from March 6 until May 4, 1913.

⁴⁹¹ Wang Shi, *Yan Fuji*, Vol. 2, 333-340. It was originally published in *Yongyanbao*, in a combined issue of February 1914 (25 and 26).

⁴⁹² Xiao Gongqin, “‘Zhuyi yu wenti,’” *ZFL*, 145.

⁴⁹³ Wang Shi, *Yan Fuji*, Vol. 4, 1104-1150.

the use of “natural law” to measure tradition, because it could only lead to political radicalism. In the same work, Yan Fu considered the French Revolution to be the standard of this radicalism. In *Tianyan jinhualun*, Yan argued against the destruction of the old, because he realized that it would inevitably lead to the disintegration of both old and new. In brief, long before other Chinese intellectuals, Yan Fu understood the struggle between continental rationalism and British empiricism, the opposition between their respective methods of deduction and induction, and the link between rationalism and utopianism, on the one hand, and between empiricism and gradual reform, on the other hand. Yan Fu also criticized idealism from another perspective, namely from the angle of the struggle for survival. In this sense, Yan Fu was, according to Xiao, the pioneer of “political realism” (*zhengzhi xianshi zhuyi*).⁴⁹⁴ Nevertheless, tragically, he lived in an era of chaos during which people sought immediate and total solutions.

Like Yan Fu, Hu Shi criticized rationalism in the journal *Meizhou pinglun* (Weekly Critic) in 1919.⁴⁹⁵ For Hu Shi, “isms” were solutions to concrete problems, a point that has also been made in Lin Yü-sheng’s research on Hu Shi. Hu Shi objected to separating “isms” from the concrete environment in which they had originated and argued that one should first study both the background of the “ism” and the essence of the problem in question. As in Yan Fu, Xiao discerned an empiricist stance in Hu Shi’s talk of “isms” and problems. Although one specific “ism” Hu targeted was socialism, according to Xiao, his criticism was much broader and was directed at “ism determinism” (*zhuyi juedinglun*) in general.⁴⁹⁶

Although Xiao supported Hu Shi’s empiricist approach, he was critical of Hu Shi because the latter had failed to see that there are two kinds of “isms”: empiricist-type “isms” (*jingyan zhuyi leixing de zhuyi*) and rationalist-type “isms” (*weili zhuyi leixing de zhuyi*).⁴⁹⁷ Whereas the former were related to concrete problems, the latter were derived from abstract “first principles,” or from ideas of the ultimate good. Only by making this division into two kinds of “isms” could one explain why, during the early twentieth century, Chinese intellectuals had only been attracted to “French

⁴⁹⁴ Xiao Gongqin, “Zhuyi yu wenti,” *ZFL*, 150.

⁴⁹⁵ Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao, who were both working for the recently established Peking University, founded this journal in December 1918.

⁴⁹⁶ Xiao Gongqin, “Zhuyi yu wenti,” *ZFL*, 152.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

revolution style idealism” (*Faguo dagemingshi de lixiang zhuyi*), and not to “Anglo-American style empiricist liberalism” (*yingmeishi jingyan zhuyi de ziyou zhuyi*).⁴⁹⁸ This point, Xiao claimed, distinguished Yan Fu’s analysis from Hu Shi’s. Yan Fu saw the connection between the rationalist philosophical tradition and the French Revolution. Both, however, offered criticism of abstract Western “isms” from the angle of empiricism, and both made their own particular historical reality their point of departure. “Rationalist “isms” were popular in China because they rose above concrete circumstances and they were considered to be universally valid. Given the crisis of the traditional cultural order since the late nineteenth century, it was easy for Chinese intellectuals to cast reality aside and to aim at idealist principles. Another reason why rationalist “isms” held sway was, according to Xiao, that they contained the same structure as Confucian tradition; both the dichotomy between good and bad and the idea of perfectionism were elements of Confucian tradition.

3.5 “RADICALISM,” BURKE, AND HISTORY

What do these manifestations of “radicalism” in modern Chinese history tell us about the role of Burkean conservatism in Xiao Gongqin’s “neo-conservatism”? As regards “mental radicalism,” the only Burkean element present is the idea of caution when it comes to reform. Yet in this context, caution was not advocated because of the underlying notion that institutions were historically grown; gradual reform was not defended on conservative grounds. In addition, conservative goals related to the preservation of the community were absent from Xiao’s defense of the “Fabianist approach”; the goal as such was political reform. Xiao’s defense of gradualism, then, was driven by tactical reasons, by realism, and by efficiency. Gradual reform was upheld because it could avoid a legitimacy crisis, the polarization of the bureaucracy, and anomy. The only conservative aspect was the concern with political stability. The dominant force behind Xiao Gongqin’s “mental radicalism” was not Edmund Burke, but Samuel Huntington, who pressed for caution regarding reforms in large-scale bureaucracies.

Xiao has combined this Huntingtonian approach with a psychological analysis of the reformers’ mindset. This move needs to be understood in the context of a

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

growing interest in a variety of Western theories that were now available in Chinese translation. The historian Ma Yong, for example, also made use of psychoanalysis in his historical research at the time; he likewise referred to the approach of the 1898 Reform Movement as “romantic idealism.”⁴⁹⁹ Like Xiao Gongqin, Ma Yong blamed intellectuals of modern China for always seeking perfection, for wanting to change China overnight, and for not facing reality. All great men in Chinese history, Ma Yong claimed, suffered from the mental problem of not being able to accept imperfection.⁵⁰⁰ These modes of analysis were a clear move away from the explanatory model of class analysis, as will be explained in detail below.

As for “system determinism,” Xiao criticized a naïve “system transplantation” on the basis that societies were historically grown and that they formed organic entities. Xiao emphasized the importance of evolution, ripening, and trial-and-error instead of engineering. Although the grounds on which Xiao defended his gradualism—namely, the notion of historical growth and the theory of the social organism—appeared to be conservative, his goal was nevertheless still economic reform. This goal can only be called conservative if it serves to protect tradition, habits, the community, or intermediate groups. But Xiao made no mention of these elements and merely focused on economic reform *in se*. In addition, the conservative grounds on which Xiao made his argument can also be questioned, for Xiao’s reading seemed more based on Yan Fu’s evolutionism than on Burkean conservatism. Xiao *read* Burkean notions into Yan Fu’s social Darwinism, but his advocacy of historical continuity was more evolutionist than Burkean in nature. The Burkean belief in the accidental nature of change—one never knows what exactly will happen, because processes of change are beyond the human ability to comprehend them—was exchanged for an evolutionist scrutiny of laws of development in order to apply them to small-scale models.

⁴⁹⁹ In an article on the Reforms of 1898, Ma Yong used the term “romantic political idealism” to refer to the reform strategy of the movement. However, in contrast with Xiao Gongqin, Ma Yong studied the intra-elite struggle in particular. He attributed the failure of the reforms to the errors in policy making and to the nature of the political system, in which the government was but an instrument of the emperor. Instead of reducing the problem to the “radicalism” of Kang Youwei, Ma Yong looked at the tensions between emperor Guangxu and the Empress Dowager Cixi, as well as at the wider context of a “fin-de-siècle” mentality in which hasty decisions were made. It would have been wiser, Ma Yong argued, to adhere to the gradual reform plans of Zhang Zhidong. See Ma Yong, “Jiawu zhanzheng yu Zhongguo jingying jieceng de jijin yu kun’e,” *ZYG* 1994:6, 97-105. Reprinted in *ZFL*, 103-120.

⁵⁰⁰ Interview with Ma Yong, Beijing, September 1, 2005.

Xiao's "political romanticism" resembles Burke's criticism of rationalism and natural law, and in that respect, it can be said that Xiao made his argument on conservative grounds. However, as regards this type of radicalism, conservative goals were also lacking. Xiao talked about "contractual democracy" as the product of both civil society and the market economy, which suggests a liberal rather than a conservative framework. In fact, the argument Xiao makes here is reminiscent of Hayek's comparison between two traditions of liberty in *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960).⁵⁰¹ For Hayek, only the British tradition was a tradition of liberty because of its different view of evolution and the functioning of society. The French tradition, of which Jean-Jacques Rousseau was one of the main representatives, based itself on Cartesian rationalism to design society rationally and *ex nihilo*. The British tradition of Edmund Burke and others, on the contrary, drew on experience to promote change, as well as on the belief that change was rooted in adaptive evolution and cumulative growth, which is why tradition played such an important role in processes of change.

Xiao had access to Hayek in Chinese because some of Hayek's works had been translated in Taiwan during the 1970s and 1980s, after which mainland translations followed.⁵⁰² Xiao can be said to be closer to Hayek than to Burke in that he defended the historical growth of societies in relation to Hayek's *liberal* argument: political democracy had to be based on certain social structures that could not be imported overnight. This interpretation is confirmed by Xiao's argument that Yan Fu's empiricism was influenced by the tradition of English liberalism. Hayek has referred to this tradition as "true liberalism," namely the empiricist tradition rooted in history.⁵⁰³ Xiao has also noted that Burke's conservatism was rooted in the tradition of civil society and "English-style liberalism."⁵⁰⁴

3.5.1 "Using the Past to Serve the Present"?

As for the role of history in Xiao Gongqin's argument, several elements can be discerned. On the one hand, since Xiao took the reality of reform during the late 1980s

⁵⁰¹ See F.A. Hayek, "Freedom, Reason, and Tradition," in *The Constitution of Liberty*, 49-62.

⁵⁰² Haiyeke, F.A., *Dao muyi zhilu*, trans. Zhang Shangde (Taipei: Guiguan tushu gufen youxian gongsi, 1982); Haiyeke, F.A., *Gerenzhuyi yu jingji zhixu*, trans. Xia Daoping (Taipei: Taiwan yinhang jingji yanjiushi, 1971); Haiyeke, F.A., *Gerenzhuyi yu jingji zhixu*, trans. Jia Zhan, Wen Yueran et al. (Beijing: Beijing jingji xueyuan chubanshe, 1989).

⁵⁰³ Xiao Gongqin, "Dangdai Zhongguo xin baoshou zhuyi," *EYS*, 130.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 134.

and early 1990s as a point of departure, his usage of history showed signs of what Timothy Cheek has called “historical pragmatism,” or, the reference to the past as a “storehouse of human experience” that was consulted to solve present problems.⁵⁰⁵ Concerning the Reform Movement of 1898, for example, the historian Ma Yong has noted that the 1880s and 1890s in many ways resembled the 1980s and 1990s. After several decades of exposure to Western impact, in both instances, intellectuals reached the conclusion that modernization required not only economic modernization, but also political modernization. In both cases, these reforms failed, caused a short period of setback, and were followed by new policies.⁵⁰⁶ This perceived similarity between the two eras explains why history was looked upon as a storehouse of examples.

Nevertheless, the difference between Xiao Gongqin and scholars like Ma Yong was that the latter engaged with the Reform Movement of 1898 because they wanted to answer questions concerning their field of specialization, whereas Xiao Gongqin was not a specialist on modern Chinese history; he used it for theoretical reflections on problems of reform. From Ma Yong’s perspective, Xiao Gongqin undoubtedly merely utilized history as a tool, which is why non-specialists such as Xiao should “give history back to the historians.”⁵⁰⁷ Then again, the distinction that Ma Yong made between a genuine interest in history and an instrumental exploitation of it was a bit simplistic, since his own engagement with the 1898 Reform Movement in particular was also driven by a growing interest in issues of political reform. The explosion of interest in the Reform Movement of 1898 was in itself also stimulated by the spirit of the times. Although specialists hence criticized the study of modern Chinese history by non-specialists, in debates and books in which topics in modern Chinese history constituted the subject of discussion, their articles appeared side by side.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁵ Cheek, “Historians as Public Intellectuals,” 209.

⁵⁰⁶ Interview with Ma Yong, Beijing, September 1, 2005. The “setback” in the case of the 1890s lasted from 1898 until 1900, when the Qing government launched the “New Policies” (*Xinzheng*). In the case of 1989, a three-year period of relative closure followed, after which more thorough reforms were launched with Deng’s Southern Tour in early 1992.

⁵⁰⁷ Interview with Ma Yong, Beijing, August 8, 2005, and June 6, 2006.

⁵⁰⁸ Interview with Ma Yong, Beijing, August 8, 2005. For example, Ma Yong’s article “Jiawu zhanzheng yu Zhongguo jingying jiecheng de jijin yu kun’e” and Xiao Gongqin’s “Wuxu bianfa de zai fanxing: jianlun zaoqi zhengzhi jijin zhuyi de wenhua genyuan” both appeared in the 1999 volume *ZFL* and in *ZYG*. Several texts by both authors—on topics ranging from the 1898 Reform Movement and the elimination of the examination system in 1905 to the 1911 Revolution—appeared in *Chongxin renshi bainian Zhongguo*. See Feng Lin, ed., *Chongxin renshi bainian Zhongguo: jindaishi redian wenti yanjiu yu zhengming*, Vol.1. (Beijing: Gaige chubanshe, 1998).

Concerning the question of just how instrumental Xiao's projection of "radicalism" into modern Chinese history was, one important distinction needs to be made, namely that between historical allusions and analogies. Whereas the latter is open and stresses the similar structure of events, the former is hidden and works by means of reference.⁵⁰⁹ Peter Moody has interpreted Xiao's writings on 1898 as an allusion to both the turmoil of 1989 and Deng Xiaoping's "radical" reform program; Xiao's criticism amounted to a defense of the Jiang Zemin line of reform. According to this reading, 1898 stood for 1989, the Empress Dowager was Deng Xiaoping, and both the emperor and Kang Youwei could stand for Zhao Ziyang. Or, Kang Youwei and other members of the Reform Movement could refer to the protest movement of 1989. Consequently, the meaning of the essay on 1898 would be that the goals of the liberal reforms were right, but that the methods were wrong.⁵¹⁰ This interpretation seems too narrow given the fact that other Chinese historians—Ma Yong could serve as an example—have used the late Qing reforms as part of a historical analogy between these reforms and the reforms of the 1980s and early 1990s. Moreover, Xiao's research on the topic is much too extensive to be reduced to a mere allusion; it was so vast precisely because of elements of analogy, not of allusion. Like other historians, Xiao was convinced of the similar structure of the 1890s and the 1980s.

Another element that contradicts a pure "instrumentalist" reading of Xiao's reference to history can be found in Xiao's saying that for Yan Fu, any politics should be rooted in history; it should not be based on abstract principles.⁵¹¹ This quote reflects Xiao's own view concerning history as a source of legitimacy. In a conservative sense, Xiao believed that only the historically grown contained legitimacy, which is why he spent so much energy on a reading of history. Hence, history did not merely function as mere decorum or as a mode of discourse in Xiao's works; history contained a moral force because it was the accumulation of past wisdom. Xiao's politics was a politics of history in the sense that he, on the one hand, made use of history to study problems of reform in the present—and to make his argument for political centralization—and that he, on the other hand, only valued a politics that was rooted in history.

⁵⁰⁹ Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik has made this distinction in "Linear Versus Cyclical Time: The Problem of Restoration in Marxist Chinese Historiography," conference paper for the conference on The Writing of History in 20th Century East Asia: Between Linear Time and the Reproduction of National Consciousness," Leiden, June 4-7, 2007.

⁵¹⁰ Moody, *Conservative Thought*, 158-159.

⁵¹¹ Xiao Gongqin, "Dangdai Zhongguo xin baoshou zhuyi," *EYS*, 133.

What Moody has also overlooked is the fact that modern Chinese history itself also constituted the object of revision: the reform movement of 1898 was studied as “the earliest attempt of the Chinese people at the all-round pursuit of modernization.”⁵¹² By projecting “radicalism” into the past, Xiao applied the modernization paradigm to modern Chinese history, which was challenging with regard to official historiography. Xiao’s focus on modernization in modern Chinese history was in line with new developments in the historiography of modern China since the start of the reform period in 1978. Arif Dirlik has argued that this period signified a “paradigm shift” in Western historiography on China; the analytical framework of revolution was supplanted with that of modernization. In spite of this, the embrace of the modernization paradigm did not signify a total rejection of the revolutionary paradigm; the two still coexisted. In a Western context, Huntington’s *Political Order in Changing Societies* reworked modernization theory under the influence of revolution theory; it was by no means the substitution of one paradigm for another. Huntington argued that modernization could lead to revolution, and therefore, “for non-Euramerican societies, authoritarian modernization provided an alternative to revolution.”⁵¹³

Concerning the Chinese historiography of modern China, it can be said that there was also a “proliferation of paradigms,” but the modernization paradigm was never officially accepted and remains controversial up to this day.⁵¹⁴ In a foreword to a volume entitled *Re-apprehending a Hundred Years China*, which includes one of Xiao Gongqin’s articles, Dirlik’s argument can be found literally, including a reference to Kuhn’s “paradigm shift”:

Different scientific communities have different research methods, emphases, methods to formulate questions, and theoretical systems—different “paradigms.” Scientific progress is the alternation of “paradigms”; the decline of old “paradigms” and the emergence of new “paradigms” are closely tied to the social environment and the social psychology of that moment. (...) From this point of view, it is no coincidence that the re-apprehension of a hundred years of history of modern China and the “new era” of reform and opening up almost started simultaneously. The “Zeitgeist” of this

⁵¹² Ma Yong, “Jindai lishi renwu,” 677.

⁵¹³ Dirlik, “Reversals, Ironies, Hegemonies,” 258.

⁵¹⁴ Dirlik, “The Past as Ideology and Critical Resource,” unpublished conference paper for Workshop on Revisionism, Leiden, November 2005.

era had already shifted from fierce “revolution” and “struggle” to the pursuit of modernization (...).⁵¹⁵

3.5.2 *The Modernization Paradigm and Marxist Approaches*

From the perspective of Marxist historiography, rewriting modern Chinese history as the history of modernization was a thorough shift. According to the old historiographical “paradigm,” the main narrative of modern Chinese history (*jindaishi*)—which stretched from the First Opium War (1839-1842) until the May Fourth Movement of 1919—was the struggle against both feudalism and imperialism.⁵¹⁶ Chinese society was a “semi-colonized” and “semi-feudal” society; historical incidents were weighed on the basis of their struggle against or alignment with colonization and feudal forces. This model was referred to as the “two semis” (*liangban*). In this scheme, there was a standard interpretation of the “great eight events” (*bada shijian*) in late Qing history.

Firstly, the Opium War had marked the beginning of the “semi-colonial” and “semi-feudal” historical stage, but it had also meant the start of the revolutionary struggle against this stage. Second, the Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864) represented the “glorious revolutionary tradition” of the Chinese people, for it had struggled against the two “semis.” It had failed, however, because it had been a simple peasant rebellion that lacked the leadership of workers. Third, the Self-strengthening Movement (*yangwupai*) (1860s-1890s) was judged negatively because it had relied on capitalism to preserve feudalist rule. The fourth event, the Sino-French war of the 1880s, had been a struggle of the Chinese people against imperialist invasion. Fifthly, the Sino-Japanese war (1894-1895) had heralded more “semi-colonization,” but it had also signaled the start of a more intense struggle against it. Sixth, the reforms of 1898 had been mistaken because

⁵¹⁵ Lei Yi, “Zongxu,” 2.

⁵¹⁶ The demarcation lines of “modern Chinese history” (*jindaishi*) have changed over time. In 1950, when the historian Fan Wenlan founded the Modern History Research Institute of CASS, modern Chinese history (*jindaishi*) was conceived of as stretching from the Opium War (1840) until the May Fourth Movement of 1919. The period after 1919 was referred to as *xiandaishi*. Nowadays, *jindaishi* usually stretches from the Opium War until the foundation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. See Jiang Tao, “Wanqing zhengzhishi,” 19-22. Some researchers also claim that the “jindai” period only ended in 1976, with the death of Mao Zedong, after which the true period of modernization started. Another (older) viewpoint is that 1956 should be the demarcation line, because that was the year when socialism was purified of capitalist elements and when the march toward a “pure” socialism started. Interview with Ma Yong, Beijing, June 6, 2006.

they had caused China to embark on the capitalist road. It had been a movement led by intellectuals driven by Western capitalist thought; it had upheld reformism and had thus boycotted the peasant revolution. The Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901), on the contrary, had been a great peasant rebellion, but its struggle against imperialism had failed because it lacked proletarian leadership. Finally, the revolution of 1911 had been the first “great democratic revolution”; it had ended two thousand years of monarchical rule. It had offered the conditions for the spread of capitalism in China, but this had paved the way for later liberation.⁵¹⁷

A well-known example of this narrative was Fan Wenlan’s *Modern Chinese History*, which was first published in 1947.⁵¹⁸ Fan Wenlan ended the first volume with the concluding phrase that the world proletariat would be “forever the true friend of the Chinese people,” whereas imperialism and its running dogs was “the evil enemy.”⁵¹⁹ Fan Wenlan was also the historian who had developed Mao’s theory of the “two basic contradictions” (*liangge genben maodun*) in modern Chinese history, namely that between imperialism and the Chinese people, and that between feudalism and the Chinese masses.⁵²⁰ A variation on the same theme of the revolutionary struggle against foreign imperialism can be found in Hu Sheng’s well-known 1981 account *From the Opium War to the May Fourth Movement*.⁵²¹ Hu Sheng applied the model of the “three revolutionary peaks” (*sanci geming gaochao*) of the period, namely the Taiping Rebellion, the period following the Sino-Japanese war (1895-1900), and the period from the founding of the Revolutionary Alliance until the Revolution (1905-1911).⁵²² In this scheme, each revolution was analyzed according to the class basis of its instigators. The New Culture Movement had been mistaken because it believed in the primacy of

⁵¹⁷ Jiang Tao, “Wanqing zhengzhishi,” 24-30.

⁵¹⁸ In his preface, Fan indicated that he intended to write the history of the “old democratic revolution” before 1949 and that of the “new democratic revolution” since 1949. His *Zhongguo jindaishi* divided the former into two periods, namely the period from the Opium War until the Boxer Rebellion, and the period from the Boxer Rebellion until the May Fourth Movement of 1919. See Fan Wenlan, *Zhongguo jindaishi*, 2 vols. (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1947).

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 403.

⁵²⁰ Mao had coined this phrase in his “Zhongguo geming he Zhongguo gongchandang”; Fan explained it in his article “Zhongguo jindaishi de fenqi wenti (yi),” *Fanwenlan lishi lunwen xuanji* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1979), 117.

⁵²¹ Hu Sheng, *Cong yapian zhanzheng dao wusi yundong*, 2 vols. (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1981).

⁵²² The model of the “three revolutionary peaks” was not coined by Hu Sheng, but Hu Sheng adapted it by not reducing the second “peak” to the Boxer Rebellion, but by also including the “reformist movement that pursued capitalist ideals,” namely the Reform Movement of 1898. See Hu Sheng, *Cong yapian zhanzheng*, 4.

intellectual revolution, but it had broken with the feudalist tradition. It had been a patriotic movement against imperialism; it had “pronounced the end of the old democratic revolution led by the bourgeoisie and the beginning of the new democratic revolution led by the proletariat.”⁵²³

Hu Sheng started writing his *From the Opium War to the May Fourth Movement* in 1973, but by the time of its publication in 1981, the model of the “two semis” had come under attack; people were no longer satisfied with a historiography along revolutionary lines only. As Jiang Tao put it, the revolution against imperialism and feudalism concealed the other side of the story, namely that of semi-independence and semi-capitalism. The famous historian Liu Danian therefore rephrased the “two basic problems” of national independence and feudal rule as problems of modernization and industrialization.⁵²⁴ In 1980, the framework of three stages of development, namely the Self-strengthening Movement, the 1898 Reform Movement, and the “bourgeois” revolution of 1911, was applied in an article. This perspective was referred to as the “three ladders” (*sange jieti*).⁵²⁵

Pang Pu followed this new model of interpretation by arguing that Chinese modernization had first been oriented towards material aspects, such as military equipment. Later, it focused on political and cultural reform respectively.⁵²⁶ One of the leading Chinese scholars on modernization theory was Luo Rongqu (1927-1996) of Peking University.⁵²⁷ Luo Rongqu was a graduate of the History Department of Peking University who later specialized in modern world history and the history of the relations between China and the United States. As the head of the newly founded Research Center of the Global Modernization Process (*Shijie xiandaihua jin Cheng yanjiu zhongxin*) of Peking University, Luo Rongqi became a pioneer of modernization research on mainland China.⁵²⁸

⁵²³ Ibid., 965.

⁵²⁴ Jiang Tao, “Wanqing zhengzhishi,” 38. Ma Yong also mentioned that historians of the older generation, such as Liu Danian, acknowledged the existence of a third set of contradictions in modern Chinese history, namely that between a modern and a backward China. Interview with Ma Yong, Beijing, June 6, 2006.

⁵²⁵ Jiang Tao, “Wanqing zhengzhishi,” 37-38.

⁵²⁶ Interview with Ma Yong, Beijing, June 6, 2006.

⁵²⁷ See for example Luo Rongqu, ed., *Cong “xihua” dao xiandaihua* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1990); Luo Rongqu, Dong Zhenghua, eds., *Dongya xiandaihua: xin moshi yu xin jingyan* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1997).

⁵²⁸ *Zhongguo dangdai mingrenlu*, 579.

The focus on modernization meant that the former “heroes” of modern Chinese history—the leaders of peasant rebellions and mass movements—had lost ground. Since the yardstick was now modernization instead of the struggle against feudalism and imperialism, a “reversal of verdicts” (*fan’an*) on historical figures took place. Therefore, research on the heroes of the Opium War, such as Lin Zexu (1785-1850), or the leader of the Taiping rebellion, Hong Xiuquan (1814-1864), now made room for research on members of the ruling class or literati, such as the late Qing Empress Dowager Cixi, or Zeng Guofan (1811-1872), the general who had fought against the Taiping rebels.⁵²⁹ Chinese historians praised the “Self-strengtheners” and the reformers of 1898, whereas Sun Yat-sen and the “bourgeois revolution” became the objects of criticism.⁵³⁰ The historian Ma Yong has attacked the mushrooming of reversals of verdicts on historical figures during the 1990s because they turned into a mere “research method of the denial of denial.”⁵³¹ Similarly, Jiang Tao has compared this reversal of verdicts during the 1990s to a “flipping pancake”-style.⁵³² A famous example of this reversal concerns Zeng Guofan, the man who had previously been considered a “traitor” in Chinese historiography because he had suppressed a progressive peasant rebellion. During the 1990s, however, Chinese historians evaluated Zeng as a great man with Confucian qualities.⁵³³

Although modernization was also the central preoccupation of the CCP during the early 1990s, the CCP did not accept the modernization paradigm as a narrative of modern Chinese history. Efforts were made to keep the paradigm out of historical textbooks, and they continue up to this day. An example concerns the controversy

⁵²⁹ Ma Yong, “Jindai lishi renwu yanjiu,” 660; Chen Baiming, “Wenhua jijin zhuyi,” 133-134. For an overview of the “heroes” and “villains” of the early 1990s, see Zhang Haipeng, “Jinnian lai Zhongguo jindaishi yanjiu zhong de ruogan yuanzexing lunzheng,” *Makesi zhuyi yanjiu* 1997: 8, 14-22.

⁵³⁰ Other historical figures that were evaluated negatively included Li Dazhao (1888-1927) and Lu Xun (1881-1936). Among those who were reevaluated were Li Hongzhang (1823-1901), Yuan Shikai (1859-1916), Hu Shi (1891-1962), Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975), and Wang Jingwei (1883-1944).

⁵³¹ Ma Yong, “Jindai lishi renwu yanjiu,” 683

⁵³² Jiang Tao, “Wanqing zhengzhishi,” 42.

⁵³³ See Guo Yingjie, “Rewriting National History: The ‘Zeng Guofan phenomenon,’” in *idem, Cultural Nationalism*, 49-71. In 1993, Tang Haoming’s historical novel *Zeng Guofan* came out, and it became such a success that it was printed 19 times between October 1993 and May 1996 (*ibid.*, 49). Zeng Guofan was also positively portrayed in the series *Zouxiang Gonghe* (Toward the Republic), and a TV-series called *Zeng Guofan* was dedicated to him. Tang Haoming’s trilogy on Zeng Guofan can be found at <http://www.shuku.net/dblx/html/52/1057-2-0.html> (accessed on February 2, 2009).

caused by a 2006 article by Yuan Weishi, a Professor in the Philosophy Department of Zhongshan University in Guangzhou, who condemned the heroic and patriotic portrayal of the Chinese struggle against foreign invasion in both the Opium Wars and the Boxer Rebellion from the perspective of Chinese modernization.⁵³⁴ In response to the article, the Marxist historian Zhang Haipeng reiterated that the basic themes in modern Chinese history were the struggle against imperialism and feudalism.⁵³⁵

Xiao Gongqin's engagement with modernization research, although it partly suited official interests, was also in tension with these very interests, since it challenged official interpretations of modern Chinese history. By rewriting modern Chinese history as the history of modernization, Xiao did not just "use the past to serve the present"; he also engaged in a revision of modern Chinese history. Xiao's emphasis on the role of intellectuals in modern Chinese history also implied that he, as an intellectual, could play an important role in China's modernization process. Nevertheless, there was still a difference between Xiao's rewriting of modern Chinese history and the critique of "radicalism" that will be discussed in the next chapter. Whereas Xiao never explicitly attacked the legitimacy of the CCP, other intellectuals explicitly and directly criticized the notion of revolution, as will be explained further.

3.6 A "NEO-CONSERVATISM" SUI GENERIS: "STRUCTURES" AND "SYSTEM CULTURES"

For the final piece of the puzzle of Xiao's "neo-conservatism," we have to look into his reference to the French sociologist Émile Durkheim. Apart from Xiao's use of the Durkheimian concept of *anomy*, as mentioned before, Xiao also drew on Durkheim's distinction between different types of "solidarity" in societies to support his idea that different social structures required different political, economic, and cultural systems. As such, Xiao did not base his relativist argument on differences in culture or values,

⁵³⁴ Yuan Weishi's article "Modernization and History Textbooks" (*Xiandaihua yu jiaokeshu*) was originally published in *Bingdian* (Freezing Point), a weekly supplement of *China Youth Daily*, on January 11, 2006. After the publication of this article, *Freezing Point* was shut down and its editors, Li Datong and Li Erliang, were replaced. For Yuan Weishi's article and debates surrounding the issue, see <http://edu.people.com.cn/GB/1055/4016350.html> (retrieved on February 27, 2008).

⁵³⁵ *Freezing Point* resumed publication in March 2006; Zhang Haipeng's article appeared in the March 1st issue. The article was entitled "The Main Theme in Modern Chinese History Is Anti-Imperialism/Anti-Feudalism."

but on differences pertaining to the structural bases of Eastern and Western systems. The use of Durkheim underscored Xiao's criticism of "system determinism" in particular, but it was also consistent with his criticism of other types of "radicalism."

In "The Research of Durkheim, Marx, and Xunzi on Homogenous Societies and Its Enlightenment," Xiao took Durkheim's distinction between "mechanical" and "organic" "solidarity" as a starting point of inquiry.⁵³⁶ Durkheim had made this distinction in the context of his research on the division of labor in society. For Durkheim, primitive societies were marked by "mechanical solidarity," or, the domination of a collective conscience that left little room for the development of individual personalities. Advanced societies, on the contrary, following the division of labor, were typified by "organic solidarity," or, the development of individual consciences and the specialization of functions that led to cooperation and the mutual interdependence of individuals.

Following Durkheim in his *The Division of Labor in Society*, Xiao discerned two different types of solidarity in societies: "mechanical solidarity" (*jixie tuanjie*) in societies with "homogenous" individuals (*tongzhi geti*), and "organic solidarity" (*youji tuanjie*) in societies composed of "heterogeneous" individuals (*yizhi geti*).⁵³⁷ Xiao argued that for Durkheim, the relationship between these two types of solidarity had been chronological: Durkheim had applied "mechanic solidarity" to primitive societies only; "organic solidarity" could merely be found in industrial societies. Durkheim's model was a European model in which European societies were mapped over different periods of time. Xiao criticized this "Eurocentrism" and modified the theory into a theory to explain differences between East and West. "Mechanical solidarity," Xiao argued, was not just a characteristic of primitive societies; it was also present in 1980s China, where the division of labor was still on a basic level.

Xiao explained that in societies based on "mechanical solidarity," people shared the same values and lacked autonomy; society was orderly, as in an army. With the division of labor, the differentiation of functions, the rise of autonomy, and the pluralization of values substituted for this orderly form. Consequently, horizontal contractual relationships (*qiyuexing renji guanxi*) and interest groups (*liyi jituan*) came into being. Following Durkheim, Xiao compared societies based on "organic solidarity"

⁵³⁶ Xiao Gongqin, "Du'erkaimu, Makesi yu Xunzi dui tongzhi shehui de yanjiu ji qi qishi," *XGJ*, 3-17. The article also appeared in *Tianjin shehui kexue* 1992: 6, and in *YZLG*, 435-448.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

to living organisms in which each “organ” had its own function.⁵³⁸ For Xiao, the type of solidarity of a society determined its “system culture” (*zhidu wenhua*), a conviction that supported his view that systems could not be transported because they were the product of long-term historical factors.⁵³⁹ The problem with Chinese reformers since modern times was precisely that they had been unaware of the existence of different social structures underneath the Chinese and the Western systems; they had considered it sufficient to simply transplant the “system culture” of Western societies. It was the difference between “mechanical” and “organic” solidarity in particular that determined the differences between Eastern and Western cultures. Contemporary Western culture, because its society was heterogeneous, had developed a system of multiple democratic parties, interest groups, contractual relationships, autonomy, and self-rule.

In China, on the contrary, the planned economy between the 1950s and the 1970s had created an unnatural division of labor. The relationships among individuals were not a natural outgrowth of the social structure; they were formed by means of authority. Xiao called this a “para-homogenous structure” (*leitong zhiti jiegou*): although society was not “homogenous” anymore, individual autonomy and the horizontal voluntary contractual relationships were still on the lowest level.⁵⁴⁰ Since this structure was the furthest away from the heterogeneous, organic social structure found in Western societies, different strategies of reform were required. The existing authority had to push reforms forward; the market economy was needed for the ripening of autonomous and heterogeneous individuals. Consequently, authority also functioned as a kind of intermediary between the existing structure and new elements of modernization.⁵⁴¹

Xiao took this basic distinction between “homogenous” and “heterogeneous” societies as a point of entry to read both Karl Marx’s writings on the so-called “Asian mode of production” (AMP) and the ancient Chinese philosopher Xunzi’s (ca. 315-235 B.C.) argument in favor of clear social divisions in society.⁵⁴² Marx, Xiao argued, had

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁴¹ Xiao Gongqin, “Lishi jujue langman,” *XGJ*, 113. On the “authority lever” for modernization in a “post-totalitarian society,” see Xiao Gongqin, “The Political Attitudes,” 59.

⁵⁴² Xunzi, a philosopher whose real name was Xun Kuang, but who is generally known as Xun Qing, was born in the state of Zhao during the Warring States period (453-256). For a translation of Xunzi’s complete works, see John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, 3 vols. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988).

partly explained the despotic rule in Asian societies by relying on the fact that they consisted of homogenous individuals. The other part of Marx's explanation was that these homogenous individuals had turned to a despotic and centralized form of government in order to deal with social and environmental challenges. Xunzi had also favored hierarchy by basing himself on the fact that Chinese society was a homogenous society. As Xunzi formulated it: "All men desire and dislike the same things, but since desires are many and the things that satisfy them are relatively few, this scarcity will necessarily lead to conflict."⁵⁴³ In other words, it was because homogenous individuals had similar interests that Xunzi defended hierarchy.⁵⁴⁴ Since there were no horizontal contractual relationships in "homogenous" societies, Xiao explained, there was a Hobbesian struggle of all against all. Analogous with his reading of Xunzi, Xiao defended his own advocacy of centralized rule as a necessity for a society that still largely consisted of homogenous individuals.

As Nisbet has noted, although modern functionalism started with Durkheim, his *The Division of Labor in Society* was still written in the classic pattern of nineteenth-century social evolutionism. What Durkheim described were "the stages of development of social solidarity within human society at large."⁵⁴⁵ The different types of social organization outlined in this work were a way to show that the evolution of societies could be explained entirely from within the system, and that mankind was evolving in a positive direction. In other words, Xiao's reference to Durkheim underscored social evolutionism rather than Burkean conservatism. Although Xiao referred to Durkheim to indicate the historically grown nature of Eastern and Western cultures, Durkheim's analysis was at the same time a structural explanation that was in tension with Xiao's stress on the importance of historical growth.

Nevertheless, Xiao's reference to Durkheim was congruent with his reference to Yan Fu and his theory of the social organism in that Xiao recommended the move towards an "organic solidarity" in which society was an organism and in which

⁵⁴³ Knoblock, *Xunzi*, Vol. 2, 121. Xunzi made a division between, on the one hand, the upper classes of society, which consisted of the ranks from "knight" (*shi*) to ruler, and, on the other hand, the commoners, which included farmers, artisans, and merchants. Whereas the former were to be controlled by means of rituals and music, the latter were to be regulated by penal law.

⁵⁴⁴ More precisely, Xunzi stressed the importance of "fen," which Xiao explains as status (*mingfen*) or position (*zhifen*). Xiao's reference to "fen" is taken from book 10, "Fuguo" (On enriching the state), translated in Knoblock, *Xunzi*, Vol. 2, 120-138.

⁵⁴⁵ Nisbet, *Social Change*, 229.

individuals performed different tasks in accordance with the division of labor. On the other hand, however, Xiao's text on homogenous societies also reveals how Xiao's theory of the social organism was linked to a liberal argument: Xiao argued that political pluralism, contractual relationships, and autonomy were characteristics of heterogeneous societies. Yet since China was still largely a homogenous society, centralized rule could be defended as something that was required in the present.

3.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Xiao Gongqin was an intellectual who was specialized in history, which means that there was another side to his theory of "neo-conservatism"—a side that has generally been ignored in research on the topic. Xiao coined the term "neo-conservatism" for his theory of modernization because it was based on a Burkean reading of the social evolutionism as upheld by the late nineteenth-century translator Yan Fu. Affected by the Social Darwinism of Spencer, Yan Fu had interpreted society as an organism that adapted to historical circumstances. For Yan Fu, both the import of single Western elements and the import of an entire Western system into a Chinese context were problematic, an awareness that Xiao referred to as the "Yan Fu paradox." In response, Yan Fu argued that, given the historical growth of social organisms, reform should be executed gradually and with respect for national particularity and historical continuity; internal elements should function as "levers" for the gradual introduction of foreign elements.

Although there are certainly some similarities between Burkean conservatism and the social evolutionism as championed by Yan Fu, such as the belief in the historically grown nature of things and the notion that each element should be understood as part of a larger whole—both of which lead to the conclusion that human interference in these processes can only be limited—there are some crucial differences between the two that prevent a Burkean reading of Yan Fu. One important difference concerns their conception of the nature of change. In social evolutionism, change is based on natural laws of evolution; conservatism shuns any law-like approach and argues instead that change is based on contingency. Consequently, social evolutionists and conservatives conceive of the relation between past, present, and future in different ways. Social evolutionism considers the present but the beginning of more progress;

humankind moves in ever better directions. Conservatives, on the other hand, treat the present as the result of a long historical chain; they are skeptical of progress.

Even though for Xiao, societies were historically grown and particularistic, his support of gradual reform was not based on the Burkean notion that the present was but the last part of a historical chain. Like the thought of Yan Fu and Durkheim, Xiao's thought was marked by evolutionary optimism and the desire to make China prosperous and strong—his “neo-conservatism” was a modernization theory. Hence, although he promoted his gradualism on conservative grounds, his goal as such was not conservative. His advocacy of historical continuity was not part of a move to protect traditions and habits; it served to ensure that Chinese modernization would not bring about social instability. In Yan Fu, the element of historical growth had been subordinated to China's struggle for survival and the dream to make China prosperous and strong. As Xiao phrased it, Yan Fu understood that China's “wealth and power” and modernization could only be realized under the condition of a respect for the existing order and historical continuity.⁵⁴⁶ For Xiao, then, this was no different.

Xiao Gongqin did not only call upon Yan Fu in his defense of “neo-conservatism”; another important distinction between Xiao's advocacy and the “neo-conservatism” as favored by the princelings was that Xiao, like other intellectuals at the time, based his theory on a denunciation of three “stages” of “radicalism” in modern Chinese history. Xiao associated “mental radicalism” with the Reform Movement of 1898; the early Republic suffered from “system determinism,” and after May Fourth, “political romanticism” flourished. Though Xiao denounced “radicalism” on Burkean grounds—the critique of wholesale change, the stress on particularity and the historically grown, the belief that society is an organism, and the criticism of abstract principles and blueprint designs—it has been argued that the goal of his enterprise was everything but conservative.

Apart from the impact of Samuel Huntington, another influence that can be discerned in Xiao is that of the liberal intellectual Friedrich von Hayek. Like Hayek, Xiao defended the historically grown nature of institutions; he further contrasted the French tradition of “rationalism” with the British tradition of “empiricism,” a point of view he discerned in Yan Fu's criticism of Rousseau. Especially in Xiao's criticism of “political romanticism,” it becomes clear that Xiao's goal was the establishment of a

⁵⁴⁶ Xiao Gongqin, “Dangdai Zhongguo xin baoshou zhuyi,” *EYS*, 133.

market economy and the creation of a civil society. Moreover, Xiao's emphasis on contractual relationships and liberal autonomy was also closer to liberal than to conservative goals. As Muller has argued, contractualism is very much a liberal trait; conservatives would stress moral duty instead of contractual relations between people.⁵⁴⁷

At the same time, though, Xiao highlighted the significance of a strong authority, which was inconsistent with his emphasis on spontaneous growth. Huntington has also noted that, under a Confucian framework, since it perceives of state and society as one, there is no legitimacy for autonomous social groups.⁵⁴⁸ The New Left intellectual Wang Hui has criticized the belief of economic liberals in the spontaneous growth of a civil society because they treat democracy as an apolitical process, whereas, especially in China, reform had been initiated by a strong state.⁵⁴⁹ Edmund Burke very much opposed a strong state. Therefore, Xiao's eclectic mix of Huntington, Burke, and Hayek locates him in between political theories of "neo-conservatism" in defense of a strong state and Burkean criticisms of "radicalism" in which a strong state is condemned for having destroyed the natural growth of civil society. It is paradoxical, to say the least, that Xiao invoked a Hayekian belief in spontaneous growth to champion a strong authority in response to a fear of chaos.

Liberals would also discard Xiao's notion of the social organism. Although Xiao and Karl Popper, for example, overlapped in their defense of gradual and partial social reform, Popper was an individualist whose "open" society was a society in which individuals made personal decisions; the social organism, if anything, would represent the "closed" tribalist and collectivist society that Popper fiercely opposed. Popper explicitly stated that the social organism was not compatible with his theory of the "open" society because there was no competition among its members; "there is no inherent tendency on the part of the legs to become the brain, or of other members of the body to become the belly."⁵⁵⁰ The dynamic and competitive character of society that Xiao envisioned, then, was incompatible with Xiao's organicist analogy.

Xiao's reference to history was more than a mere instrumentalism or "allusion historiography," as some political scientists have argued. Rather, like other intellectuals

⁵⁴⁷ Muller, "Introduction," 12-13.

⁵⁴⁸ Gamer, "Modernization and Democracy in China," 56.

⁵⁴⁹ Wang Hui, *China's New Order*, 87-90; 175-181.

⁵⁵⁰ Popper, *The Open Society*, Vol.1, 174.

at the time, Xiao made use of historical allegories in the context of research on the history of modernization. At the same time, history also constituted the object of revision. By rewriting modern Chinese history as the history of modernization, and by focusing on the role of Chinese intellectuals in this process, Xiao challenged the official historiographical paradigm of modern Chinese history as the struggle against imperialism and feudalism. By focusing on the larger agenda of modernization, as opposed to a narrow concern with political stability in the present, Xiao's concerns surpassed those of the princelings as discussed in the previous chapter.

Xiao further invoked Durkheim's distinction between "mechanical" and "organic" "solidarity" in societies to support his argument that Western culture and values could not be imported to China. Since democracy, autonomy, self-rule, and contractual relations were traits of "heterogeneous" societies that were based on "organic solidarity," they could only be applied to China if the suitable underlying structures were also present. Nevertheless, in 1980s China, heterogeneity was only developed on a very basic level; this still largely "homogenous" society required different strategies of reform in which political centralization and economic reform occupied a central role. As has been argued, Xiao's reference to Durkheim made his explanation more structural than historical; his association of liberal values with "organic solidarity" also demonstrates that his reference to the social organism was not part of a conservative argument.

What concerns the role of tradition in Xiao's framework, Xiao argued that traditional elements should function as "levers" in the modernization process, but he also referred to the importance of "benevolence" (*ren*), a term Xiao adopted from the moral discourse of New Confucianism. Yet given the vagueness of this reference, it can be said that Xiao's reference to tradition remained largely instrumental in nature. As such, his conservatism was limited to a form of "conservative modernization," as had been manifested in, for example, Yuan Shikai, who had made use of traditional values in the modernization process, and who had argued against political modernization.⁵⁵¹ In the end, Xiao's thought was shaped more by a flirtation with the ideas of Huntington, Hayek, and the Social Darwinism of a Yan Fu than by a Burkean belief in the limits of change.

⁵⁵¹ Young, "The Hung-hsien Emperor," *LOC*, 189.

4.

ON “RADICALISM” AND REVOLUTIONS THE 1992 DEBATE AND BEYOND

In spite of all the sacrifices made, we may never get anywhere at all.

KARL POPPER

4.1 INTRODUCTION: HISTORY IN A BINARY KEY

We have now reached the third part of the trilogy on “conservatism” and “radicalism.” In Chapter Two, the main focus has been on a “neo-conservatism” that was mainly concerned with issues of political legitimacy and social stability; the document “Realistic Responses” can be considered a manifestation of this type of “neo-conservatism” that was not Burkean in any sense. Although Xiao Gongqin’s advocacy also contained many of the traits discussed in Chapter Two, it has been argued in Chapter Three that Xiao’s theory also included features of intellectual rejections of “radicalism” at the time: it was based on a criticism of three “stages” of “radicalism” in modern Chinese history. As such, it can be situated in between the “neo-conservatism” of Chapter Two and the intellectual critique of “radicalism” in modern Chinese history that constitutes the subject of this chapter and the following chapters.

This chapter analyzes the first public debate on “conservatism” and “radicalism,” which took off in the spring of 1992 in the pages of the Hong Kong-based highbrow journal *Ershiyi shiji* (Twenty-first century). The geographical location of the journal was symbolic, for *Twenty-first Century* connected mainland scholars with scholars in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas. The context in which the debate was conducted differed considerably from the background against which the political theory of “neo-conservatism” had been coined: now, the main political threats had been overcome, and when Deng Xiaoping made his Southern Tour (*nanxun*) in the beginning of 1992, a second round of economic reforms was launched. As Koselleck has argued, concepts change when social conditions change. This chapter can be considered an example of how this new situation was reflected in the meaning allocated to the concepts of “conservatism” and “radicalism.”

In the previous chapters, Chinese intellectuals have only applied the term “neo-conservatism” in the framework of a reform program; they have not engaged in debates on the meaning of the term. In this chapter, on the contrary, humanistic intellectuals devoted much energy to a debate on the meaning of concepts—they clearly ignored Karl Popper’s criticism that the tendency to focus on the meaning of terms only leads to “verbalism” and “scholasticism,” or empty quarrels about words.⁵⁵² Consequently, the “dialogical” and “multiaccentual” nature of the key concepts became all the more obvious. In the 1992 debate, more so than in the instance of the utilization of “radicalism” as a “counterconcept” in the formulation of a “neo-conservative” reform program, the terms “conservatism” and “radicalism” were used as part of a simplified dualist framework to reevaluate a century of modern Chinese history.

Instead of taking this reading of history at face value, here, the focus will be on the particular choice of this binary framework at that specific time: why did many feel the need to condemn “radicalism” in modern Chinese history? If we turn the question around: what does the debate reveal about the changes in society? Was it merely in line with the official reform program, or was there more to it? Given the fact that the reference to tradition in the service of modernization had not generated a genuine conservative argument, was it possible that the discussion on modern Chinese history reflected a shift toward conservatism? Or did intellectuals invoke Edmund Burke for other reasons?

4.2 YÜ YING-SHIH’S THEORY OF “RADICALIZATION”

To understand the 1992 debate, we first have to look into the critique of “radicalism” that triggered the debate. The Princeton-based historian Yü Ying-shih (b. 1930), who was born and raised in China but educated in Hong Kong and the United States, put forward the most prominent criticism of “radicalism.”⁵⁵³ In a lecture entitled “The Radicalization of China in the Twentieth Century,” which Yü Ying-shih delivered at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in September 1988, he proclaimed: “Since the turn of

⁵⁵² Popper, *The Open Society*, Vol. 2, 22-23.

⁵⁵³ Yü Ying-shih was born in Tianjin, but left China for Hong Kong in 1950, where he studied at the newly founded New Asia College. He received his Ph.D. from Harvard University; he taught at, among other universities, Yale, Princeton, and Harvard.

the century, a radical mode of thinking has dominated the Chinese mind.”⁵⁵⁴ This happened because, like the prisoners in Plato’s cave who had encountered the sunlight of the “real” world, Chinese intellectuals who studied abroad at the end of the nineteenth century “discovered that there was a new and better *Way* in the West,” and they confronted their fellow countrymen with this new truth.⁵⁵⁵ Yü contrasted this “discovery” of a new moral framework since modern times with the “interpretation” of the existing moral framework of Confucianism before modern times.⁵⁵⁶

Yü Ying-shih discerned three stages of “radicalization,” the first one of which occurred between the 1890s and the revolution of 1911. It was the translator Yan Fu, the very same intellectual who was the first “neo-conservative” modernizer in Xiao Gongqin’s eyes, who had initiated the process of radicalization. Especially in his 1895 essay “In Refutation of Han Yu,” Yan Fu had denounced the Confucian Way and had implied that the Western democratic system was closer to the Way.⁵⁵⁷ Whereas Yan Fu’s “radicalism” was still “tempered” with “evolutionary gradualism,” Kang Youwei and Tan Sitong (1864-1898) pushed for both wholesale and immediate change.⁵⁵⁸ Finally, the scholars around the Journal of National Essence (*Guocui xuebao*), which circulated between 1905 and 1911, all drew on Western theories to study Chinese learning.⁵⁵⁹

During the first stage of radicalization, thinkers disguised “discovery” as “interpretation” by presenting the new truth as a reinterpretation of Chinese tradition.⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁴ Yü Ying-shih, “The Radicalization of China,” 125.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁵⁵⁶ Yü borrowed this terminology from Michael Walzer (b. 1935), a political theorist and Professor at the Institute for Advanced Study of Princeton University. In *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (1987), Walzer contended that there were three common approaches to moral philosophy, namely “the path of discovery, the path of invention, and the path of interpretation,” of which the last one was most suited to “our everyday experience of morality.” (*Ibid.*, 3) Walzer’s claim that morality cannot be discovered is reminiscent of Edmund Burke’s statement: “We know that *we* have made no discoveries, and we think that no discoveries are to be made, in morality; nor many in the great principles of government, nor in the ideas of liberty, which were understood long before we were born (...).” Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 73 (Turner edition).

⁵⁵⁷ Translated by Francois Houang in *Les Manifestes de Yen Fou*, 141-151.

⁵⁵⁸ Yü Ying-shih, “The Radicalization of China,” 129.

⁵⁵⁹ The main figures around the *Journal of National Essence* were Zhang Binglin (1869-1935), Liu Shipai (1884-1919), Huang Jie (1874-1935), Deng Shi (1877-1941), Chen Qubing (1874-1933), and Ma Xulun (1884-1970).

⁵⁶⁰ In the case of Yan Fu, Yü Ying-shih found evidence of this “discovery disguised as interpretation” in Yan Fu’s translator’s notes, in which Yan frequently referred to the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*. Kang Youwei partly drew on Yan Fu’s Social Darwinism for his “three stages

Chinese intellectuals had realized that China had been marginalized in Asia; the reinterpretation of Chinese tradition functioned as a method to bring China back to the center. The use of this method was also related to the fact that, until 1905, when the examination system was abolished, traditional scholars (*shi*) were still directly linked to politics. After 1905, the modern “intellectual” (*zhishi fenzi*) was separated from the political system, and thus, as a marginalized figure, he was more susceptible to a radicalization that questioned the traditional moral order of which he was no longer a central part.⁵⁶¹

During the second stage of radicalization, it was “neither necessary nor possible to disguise discovery as interpretation.”⁵⁶² Instead of viewing the problem of the marginalization of China in terms of a spatial *problematique* of China versus the West, intellectuals now tried to bring China back to the center by importing the newest ideas, which Yü Ying-shih called “the neoterist mentality,” or, “a mentality obsessed with change, with what is new.”⁵⁶³ Under the effect of Enlightenment rationalism, romanticism, utilitarianism, positivism, and Marxism, May Fourth figures such as Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu (1879-1942) developed an attitude of “iconoclastic antitraditionalism,” a concept that Yü Ying-shih borrowed from Lin Yü-sheng.⁵⁶⁴ The third and highest stage of radicalization began with the ideological confrontation between liberalism and Marxism. Like May Fourth liberals, Marxists started from abstract theories instead of concrete realities; their thought also manifested “iconoclastic antitraditionalism.” The embodiment of “Marxist radicalism” was Mao Zedong, whose masterpiece of destruction was the Cultural Revolution.

Another lecture that Yü Ying-shih delivered in September 1988 that was of importance for the later debate was entitled “Radicalism and Conservatism in Modern

theory”; he did not only rely on the *Gongyang* commentary on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. As for Tan Sitong, the title of his work *Renxue* (A study of humanity) indicated that he was reinterpreting *ren*, one of the core virtues of Confucianism. The scholars around the *Journal of National Essence* not only insisted that Western values had originated in China; they also adhered to the so-called “theory of the Western origin of the Chinese race,” which had been coined by the Belgian Sinologist Terrien de la Couperie (1844-1894) during the 1880s.

⁵⁶¹ See also Yü’s article “Zhongguo zhishi fenzi de bianyuanhua,” *EYS* 6 (August 1991), 15-25.

⁵⁶² Yü Ying-shih, “The Radicalization of China,” 130.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁵⁶⁴ Yü takes these “five major schools of radical thought” from Russell Kirk’s *The Conservative Mind from Burke to Eliot* (Chicago, Ill. and Washington, D.C.: Regnery Books, 7th rev.ed., 1986), 9.

Chinese Intellectual History.”⁵⁶⁵ Whereas Yü had first defined conservatism as an attitude toward the Confucian tradition, and radicalism as “antitraditionalism,” he now argued that modern China had not known conservatism because it had lacked a status quo. This argument is reminiscent of Clinton Rossiter’s argument that a conservatism that seeks to preserve the status quo is rare in rapidly modernizing societies.⁵⁶⁶ Conservatism or radicalism, Yü explained, was neither “any (other) set of thought,” nor “a certain fixed faction”—it was a “disposition” (*taidu*) or “orientation” (*qingxiang*) towards the existing status quo that often appeared in times of change. In other words, a “fixed point” (*dingdian*), standard (*biaozhun*) or coordinate (*zuobiao*) was needed to determine someone’s position.⁵⁶⁷ In the United States, for example, conservatism and radicalism were relative to a liberal status quo that functioned as their “commonground”—one could compare this to the “three legs of a *ding* vessel.”⁵⁶⁸

Here, we can discern the impact of the theory that all American “neo-conservatives” were liberals, or that American “neo-conservatism” was in essence a *positional* ideology, as discussed in Chapter Two. In modern China, from the First Opium War (1839-1842) until the end of the nineteenth century, on the contrary, the status quo changed continuously, and the focus of intellectual conflict was on tradition versus modernity. During this period, the basic value was “change”—modern Chinese history had not witnessed any serious Burkean conservatism. Yü Ying-shih criticized the volume *The Limits of Change* that has been discussed in Chapter One because none of the persons dealt with were conservatives.⁵⁶⁹ Yü also referred to two debates to demonstrate that there had been no such thing as conservatism in modern China. Firstly, Zhang Junmai (1886-1969), the main opponent of “scientism” in the 1923 debate on “Science and Metaphysics,” was not a conservative because he subscribed to Western-style constitutional democracy.⁵⁷⁰ Secondly, in the 1930s debate on “Democracy and

⁵⁶⁵ Yü Ying-shih, “Zhongguo jindai sixiangshi shang de jijin yu baoshou,” *ZFL*, 1-29. The lecture also appeared in *Qian Mu yu Zhongguo wenhua*, 188-222.

⁵⁶⁶ Rossiter, *Conservatism in America*, 219.

⁵⁶⁷ Yü Ying-shih, “Jijin yu baoshou,” *ZFL*, 1-3.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁶⁹ See Chapter One, 1-6.

⁵⁷⁰ The 1923 debate on “Science and Metaphysics” (also referred to as the debate on “Science and the Philosophy of Life” (*kexue yu renshengguan*)) was held between February and December 1923. The main participants were Zhang Junmai (Carsun Chang), Ding Wenjiang, Liang Qichao, Hu Shi, and Wu Zhihui (1865-1953). The geologist Ding Wenjiang was Zhang Junmai’s main opponent; for Ding Wenjiang, science could answer all questions, including those related to the philosophy of life.

Dictatorship,” the faction of Ding Wenjiang (1887-1936), Jiang Tingfu (1895-1965) and others was not conservative because, although it adhered to dictatorship, its final aim was also democracy.⁵⁷¹

Though Yü Ying-shih associated conservatism with a defense of the status quo, he also associated it with traditional Chinese culture and certain institutions. Yü argued that the destruction of the latter reached its peak under Marxism: after 1950, the CCP, following the Stalinist model of the Soviet Union, destroyed the private property system and all traditional “intermediate groups.” These included patriarchal clans, guilds, private schools, religious groups, and village associations. The destruction of traditional Chinese culture continued during the 1980s, when intellectuals returned to May Fourth values and embraced Western modernization. At this point in time, the first cycle of “radicalism” was completed, as can be seen from the six-part 1988 documentary *River Elegy*, in which the Yellow River (China) was urged to open up and learn from the Blue Ocean (the West).⁵⁷² Yü pointed out that this discarding of tradition in the service of modernization was outdated and had been condemned in the West several decades earlier.⁵⁷³ In order to bring the process of “radicalization” to a close, a strong middle class had to be created, but a tradition of democratic thought was equally important. In Taiwan, then, both of these aspects were present.

Elsewhere, Yü Ying-shih rephrased the problem of “radicalization” in a Chinese context as an excessive stress on “renewal” (*chuangxin*), thereby ignoring “preservation” (*baoshou*).⁵⁷⁴ This was opposite to the usage of “conservatism” and “radicalism” in a Western context, where the two did not exclude each other: the “radical” Marx had continued many elements of Hegel, whereas the “conservative” Burke had highlighted the importance of change. Whereas in the West, the two great political forces were liberalism and conservatism, modern China suffered from a “revolution complex.”⁵⁷⁵ In some instances, then, Yü Ying-shih’s “radicalism” seems equal to “progressivism” in a Mannheimian sense; Yü referred to a “neoterist” mentality. In a Burkean manner, he defended intermediate groups in society or the

⁵⁷¹ The debate on “Democracy and dictatorship” (*minzhu gen ducai de zhengbian*) was held during the early 1930s between Hu Shi, Jiang Tingfu (1895-1965), Ding Wenjiang, and others in the journal *Duli Pinglun* (Independent Critique).

⁵⁷² For works on *River Elegy*, see Chapter Two, 44, fn. 169.

⁵⁷³ Yü refers to S.N. Eisenstadt, Edward Shils, and Allan Bloom in particular.

⁵⁷⁴ See Yü Ying-shih, “‘Chuangxin’ yu ‘baoshou,’” *Qian Mu yu Zhongguo wenhua*, 288-295.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 289-292.

importance of the traditional moral order. Elsewhere, though, he linked “conservatism” with a particular status quo without which it could not develop.

Yü Ying-shih’s stance can be explained if we analyze his conception of Confucianism. Yü was a disciple of the historian Qian Mu (1895-1990), who is often associated with “New Confucianism,” a topic that will be explored in the next chapter.⁵⁷⁶ In a long essay, Yü countered the claim that his teacher was a New Confucian and further posed that Qian Mu was against the idea of a lineage of transmission of the “Way” (*daotong*) as New Confucians had conceived it. According to the latter, Chinese philosophers had transmitted the “Way” in the form of transcendental values. In Yü Ying-shih’s view, instead, his teacher’s transmission of the “Way” had been that of an intellectual historian for whom the object of transmission had been the Chinese cultural tradition in its totality.⁵⁷⁷ Yü Ying-shih was critical of the discourse on Confucianism (*ru xue*) since the 1980s because it was devoid of the lived experience of Confucian culture—it had become an empty discourse, a “wandering soul.”⁵⁷⁸ He further disapproved of the focus on abstract philosophical topics at the expense of matters related to politics, society, and economics because Confucianism had made its way to the everyday life of Chinese people through social institutions; it was part and parcel of Chinese society.⁵⁷⁹

Since Confucianism was not some transcendent moral system, Yü Ying-shih focused precisely on this social dimension of Confucianism in his work. This concern also runs through what is probably Yü’s most famous work, namely the application of Weber’s Protestantism thesis to Confucianism in China in *The Modern Chinese Religious Ethic and the Spirit of Merchants*.⁵⁸⁰ In this book, Yü argued that, since the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the Confucian ethic—and the Neo-Confucianism of Wang Yangming (1472-1528) in particular—had benefited the rise of commercial activities in China, a thesis that became influential in East Asia, but that was criticized fiercely

⁵⁷⁶ Qian Mu was born in Jiangsu province. As a renowned historian, he was affiliated with, among other universities, Yanjing University, Peking University, Qinghua University, and National Southwest Associated University. In 1949, he founded the New Asia College in Hong Kong. Since 1967, Qian Mu resided in Taiwan.

⁵⁷⁷ Yü Ying-shih, “Qian Mu yu xin rujia,” *Qian Mu yu Zhongguo wenhua*, 30-90. Yang Zuhan, Luo Yijun, Li Minghui, and Zheng Jiadong have criticized Yü’s position. For an overview of these criticisms, see Makeham, *Lost Soul*, 153-166.

⁵⁷⁸ Makeham, *Lost Soul*, 2.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 111, 114.

⁵⁸⁰ Yü Ying-shih, *Zhongguo jinshi zongjiao lunli yu shangren jingshen* (Taipei: Taipei lianjing chubanshe, 1987).

outside of East Asia.⁵⁸¹ During the 1980s, Yü had also been an advisor to the introduction of a Confucian Ethics program in Singapore's secondary schools, the failure of which Yü ascribed to the lack of an institutional structure.⁵⁸² This remark already indicates Yü's direction in the debate on "radicalism" and "conservatism": for Yü Ying-shih, Confucian values were tied to certain social structures, without which these values could not survive.

4.3 LIN YÜ-SHENG: "RADICALISM" AS "TOTALISTIC ICONOCLASM"

Mainland rejections of "radicalism" were also inspired by the ideas of Lin Yü-sheng (b. 1934), a historian based at the University of Wisconsin. Already in 1979, Lin Yü-sheng had criticized May Fourth "radicalism" in his book *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness*, which was translated into Chinese as early as 1983.⁵⁸³ Lin Yü-sheng was born in Shandong province, but studied in Taiwan with the political liberal Yin Haiguang (1919-1969) of National Taiwan University. Lin also studied at the University of Chicago under Friedrich von Hayek, the famous liberal of the Austrian School of Economics. What Lin Yü-sheng tried to explain in his book is why May Fourth "antitraditionalism" was what he called "totalistic." Contrary to intellectuals of the previous generation (1890s), such as Yan Fu, Kang Youwei, Tan Sitong, and Liang Qichao, who never denied tradition wholeheartedly, May Fourth intellectuals such as Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi, and Lu Xun (1881-1936) negated tradition *in toto*.

Lin Yü-sheng ascribed this contrast between the first and second generations to two factors. Firstly, the historical element behind this change was that, from the Opium War onwards, the sociopolitical and cultural-moral orders had commenced to disintegrate, and it was the collapse of the empire in 1911, or, the breakdown of the link

⁵⁸¹ In "Confusing Confucianism With Capitalism," Zurndorfer has outlined several criticisms of Yü's thesis. Firstly, Yü oversimplified the Neo-Confucianism of the Wang Yangming school and excluded the history of political struggle with which it was linked. Secondly, Yü distorted certain traits of Confucianism, such as its denigration of profit. Thirdly, Yü only focused on the Confucian ethics of the merchants, whereas other less morally laudable qualities were left out. Finally, "the elevation of the status of merchants came about, not in spite of Confucianism, but because of it" (Ibid., 8).

⁵⁸² Makeham, *Lost Soul*, 22-24. The program had the support of both Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew and the Minister of Education Goh Keng Swee, but was canceled in 1990 after less than eight years.

⁵⁸³ Lin Yü-sheng, *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditionalism in the May Fourth Era* (Madison: the University of Wisconsin Press, 1979).

of “universal kingship” between the two orders that gave the final blow. Lin stated: “Over a long period, the gate of a dike may be eroded away; when it finally bursts, nothing can hinder the thrust of the flood that spreads ruin and destruction in the natural order beyond.”⁵⁸⁴ The disintegration of this traditional framework, then, provided the “structural possibility” for May Fourth intellectuals to negate Chinese tradition in its totality. Secondly, the political element was that iconoclasm rose against the background of the attempts of Yuan Shikai and Zhang Xun (1854-1923) to restore the monarchy. The radical iconoclasts considered Yuan’s tactics “stark manifestations of traditional evils,” and concluded that Confucianism was “predisposed to despotism.”⁵⁸⁵

This “wholesale antitraditionalism,” Lin further argued, was influenced by the Confucian way of holist thinking. Drawing on Mannheim, Lin distinguished between a “radical” “content of thought” and a “style of thought” that was very traditional. For Lin Yü-sheng, “radical” referred to a “systematic” and inflexible ideology that he described as “totalistic iconoclasm.”⁵⁸⁶ In response, he coined the notion of the “creative transformation” of Chinese tradition, a concept that referred to both the continuation of the May Fourth spirit and aims—such as science, democracy, and liberty—and the reinvestigation of the relation between the latter and Chinese tradition.⁵⁸⁷ As discussed in Chapters Two and Three, proponents of Chinese “neo-conservatism” also called into use the notion of the “creative transformation” of Chinese tradition in the context of their modernization program. Yet Lin Yü-sheng applied the term in the context of the foundation of institutions of liberty. Unlike the previous generation of liberals such as Yin Haiguang, who had accused Confucianism of being despotic, Lin and others believed in the “creative transformation” of Confucianism, which enabled its reconciliation with democracy.⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., 24.

⁵⁸⁶ Lin Yü-sheng, “Reflections,” 74. Yan Jiayan has criticized Lin’s notion of “wholesale antitraditionalism” in his article “Ping wusi, wenge yu chuantong wenhua de lunzheng,” *EYS* 42 (August 1997), 133-136. Brunhild Staiger has likewise declared that there was no such thing as “wholesale antitraditionalism” in the works of all May Fourth intellectuals. Only Chen Duxiu can be said to have been “radical” because he rejected tradition as a whole, including Buddhism and Daoism. See Brunhild Staiger, “Classical Heritage and May Fourth Movement,” *The May Fourth Movement in China*, 68-101.

⁵⁸⁷ Lin Yü-sheng, *Zhongguo chuantong de chuangzaoxing zhuanhua* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1988). See also Lin Yü-sheng, “Reflections on the ‘Creative Transformation of Chinese Tradition,’” 73-114.

⁵⁸⁸ Bresciani, *Reinventing Confucianism*, 477.

Drawing on the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, Lin Yü-sheng first developed the idea of the “creative transformation” of Chinese tradition in a paper written for a Harvard University conference on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the May Fourth Movement in 1969.⁵⁸⁹ As Lin defined the undertaking:

The creative transformation of Chinese tradition refers to a process in which, by employing a pluralistic approach, selected indigenous Chinese symbols, ideas, values, and modes of behavior (including political, social, and economic modes of behavior) are reorganized and/or reconstructed in such a way as to provide propitious seeds for change, while these reorganized and/or reconstructed elements received a clear sense of cultural identity as a result of being effectively realized in practice with great benefits.⁵⁹⁰

Lin added that two conditions had to be fulfilled with reference to this “creative transformation,” namely it had to benefit the foundation of liberal institutions, thought, and culture, and, secondly, elements of Chinese tradition should “not only maintain their authenticity but also be more creatively put into practice.”⁵⁹¹ More specifically, Lin wanted to transform Confucian humanism by uniting it with Western liberal humanism. Lin gave three examples of how this transformation could take place in practice. Firstly, he mentioned the enrichment of Confucian family ethics by blending them with a notion of natural rights. Consequently, the elements of respect for others and “empathetic reciprocity” in Confucian family ethics could become more prominent. Secondly, Lin argued that the Confucian-Mencian concept of moral autonomy could be linked to the Kantian defense of human rights; in self-cultivation, as in Kantian philosophy, man was always an end and never just a means. Finally, Lin referred to the creation of a “modern civil and civic society,” which should be independent of the state, and which should engage in political participation.

⁵⁸⁹ Lin Yü-sheng, “Radical Iconoclasm in the May Fourth Period and the Future of Chinese Liberalism,” 23-58.

⁵⁹⁰ Lin Yü-sheng, “Reflections,” 78.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

4.4 FROM THE 1980S TO MODERN CHINESE HISTORY

4.4.1 *The 1980s and the 1990s: Continuities and Discontinuities*

Both Yü Ying-shih and Lin Yü-sheng coined the term “radicalism” as part of a framework in which they tried to combine political liberalism with the continuity of a “transformed” Chinese tradition that was compatible with modernization. Since rejections of “radicalism” by intellectuals overseas were appropriated according to the mainland context of the times, the accusation of one critic that Chinese intellectuals were but “grass in the wind,” echoing whatever foreign trend was popular at the time, is overtly simplistic.⁵⁹² In order to understand how mainland intellectuals appropriated the theories of Yü Ying-shih and Lin Yü-sheng, we first have to look into the “Enlightenment” spirit of the 1980s against which the theory of “radicalism” was shaped on the mainland.

The so-called “New Enlightenment Movement” (*xin qimeng yundong*) of the mid-to-late 1980s was, as Xu Jilin has argued, an outgrowth of the “Movement to Liberate Thinking” (*sixiang jiefang yundong*) of the late 1970s.⁵⁹³ In December 1978, Deng Xiaoping reiterated the need to “emancipate thinking” and to move away from the ideological rigidity of the Mao era by “seeking truth from facts.”⁵⁹⁴ At the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Party Congress in December 1978, the Party declared “socialist modernization” to be the official agenda. These changes paved the way for a more fundamental criticism of the utopian socialism of the Mao era during the early 1980s. In 1983, the CCP Deputy Propaganda Director Zhou Yang and Wang Ruoshui, a writer for *People’s Daily*, argued in favor of a “socialist humanism” that did away with the dogmatism of the Cultural Revolution.⁵⁹⁵ The controversial claim that alienation could also arise under socialism led to the campaign on “spiritual pollution” in late 1983 and early 1984. After the campaign, the criticism of utopian socialism continued, this time in the form of a call for “Enlightenment.”

An important event in the formation of the “New Enlightenment Movement” was the foundation of the editorial committee of *Zouxiang weilai* (Towards the Future)

⁵⁹² Zhang Zhizhong, “Shiji mo huimou,” 44.

⁵⁹³ Xu Jilin, “The Fate of an Enlightenment,” 183.

⁵⁹⁴ Baum, *Burying Mao*, 63.

⁵⁹⁵ For an overview of the debate on “humanist Marxism,” see Jing Wang, “‘Who Am I?’: Questions of Voluntarism in the Paradigm of Socialist Alienation,” in idem, *High Culture Fever*, 9-36.

in 1984. This committee, which was headed by Jin Guantao, the Director of the Philosophy of Science in the Research Institute of the Academy of Natural Sciences, introduced both scientific methodologies and the philosophy of science to China. In 1985, the Academy of Chinese Culture (*Zhongguo wenhua shuyuan*) was founded, which, under the guidance of Tang Yijie, a Professor in the Department of Philosophy of Peking University, brought together a group of philosophers who had been influenced by overseas Confucian scholars. As Xu Jilin has argued, the Academy played an important role in developments of the 1990s: “their efforts provided the bedrock on which the ‘craze for national studies’ (*guoxue re*) of the 1990s developed,” a topic that will be discussed further in the following chapter.⁵⁹⁶

The year 1985 witnessed the spread of a “culture fever” (*wenhua re*), or the obsession with comparative research on Chinese and Western cultures in the form of debates, lectures, and newspaper articles.⁵⁹⁷ Another important event in the movement was the foundation of the editorial committee of *Wenhua: Zhongguo yu shijie* (Culture: China and the World) in 1986. Under the leadership of Gan Yang, this group of writers introduced Western thinkers from the humanities, philosophy, and the social sciences to Chinese audiences via two translation series. The “culture fever” of 1985 culminated in the 1988 documentary *Heshang* (River Elegy), which has already been mentioned in Chapter Two and in the above section on Yü Ying-shih.⁵⁹⁸ Although the makers of the series upheld the liberation from tradition through modernization and Westernization, the documentary also reflected the “apocalyptic anxiety” of a society caught in rapid transformation.⁵⁹⁹

The discourse of the 1980s was utopian in nature; the overall belief in modernization and the optimism of the times caused intellectuals to project goals into the future. When the “New Enlightenment Movement” came to an abrupt end with the repression of the demonstrations on June fourth, 1989, the intellectual consensus of the 1980s made room for a plurality of viewpoints, all of which were less optimistic in nature. Some scholars abandoned the political engagement of the previous years and opted for specialized academic research instead. In this climate, academic journals such

⁵⁹⁶ Xu Jilin, “The Fate of an Enlightenment,” 194.

⁵⁹⁷ Crucial in this respect were the lecture series organized by the Academy of Chinese Culture in Beijing. See Wang, *High Culture Fever*, 49-50.

⁵⁹⁸ See Chapter Two, 44; Chapter Four, 142.

⁵⁹⁹ Wang, *High Culture Fever*, 119.

as *Xueren* (The Scholar) and *Yuandao* (Original Path) were founded, both of which were considered to be “conservative” journals that ran articles on topics related to Chinese culture.⁶⁰⁰ The rise of these journals indicated that many intellectuals struggled with their role in Chinese society. As Wang Jing has put it succinctly, whereas during the 1980s, intellectuals discussed *socialist* alienation, now, they complained about their *social* alienation.⁶⁰¹

Chinese intellectuals have used several explanatory models to denote the intellectual shift of the early 1990s: some have interpreted it as a “cyclical change,” whereas others have explained it as an intellectual paradigm shift, as a shift in the role of intellectuals, or as the consequence of the effect of Western theories.⁶⁰² Nonetheless, the notion of a clear break between the two decades needs to be avoided for several reasons. Already during the second half of the 1980s, some intellectuals had turned their attention towards Chinese tradition in the context of the “culture fever”; the official support for Confucianism also goes back to the 1980s, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Although the main trend of the 1980s was that of antitraditionalism, it was certainly not the only intellectual trend.⁶⁰³

In addition, already during the 1980s, many intellectuals were critical of the May Fourth Movement and the “Enlightenment” project. The philosopher Li Zehou (b. 1930), for example, famously argued that the “salvation” or “nationalist” (*jiuwang*) element of May Fourth had repressed its “Enlightenment” (*qimeng*) aspect.⁶⁰⁴ As Wang Jing has noted, the “utopian” mood of the 1980s also suffered important setbacks before the 1990s. At the beginning of 1987, General Secretary Hu Yaobang was forced to

⁶⁰⁰ *Yuandao* came out in bookform; the first volume appeared in October 1994, under the editorship of Chen Ming (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe). Other academic journals that were founded during the early 1990s included *Zhongguo shehui kexue jikan* (China Social Sciences Quarterly), *Xueshu Jilin* (Scholarship Collection), and *Yuanxue* (Original Studies).

⁶⁰¹ Wang, *High Culture Fever*, 5.

⁶⁰² Ji Xianlin, for example, contended that culture is like a river; after thirty years of floating eastward, a new cycle of thirty years of floating westward will follow. Pang Pu explained the intellectual changes of the 1990s as a paradigm shift from culture criticism to national studies. Chen Lai interpreted the shift as a turn from the political engagement of intellectuals to scholarship. Zhu Xueqin referred to the importance of Tiananmen. See Liu Qingfeng, “Topography of Intellectual Culture,” 60.

⁶⁰³ Interview with Chen Lai, Beijing, August 10, 2005.

⁶⁰⁴ Li Zehou, “Qimeng jiuwang de shuangzhong bianzou,” *Zhongguo xiandai sixiangshi lun* (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 1987), 7-49. Originally appeared in *Zouxiang weilai* 1986:1. Similarly, Vera Schwarcz has claimed that there was a tension between the goals of “Enlightenment” and “salvation” in the May Fourth Movement. See Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment*, 1.

resign because he had failed to combat “bourgeois liberalization.” In the same year, the new General Secretary Zhao Ziyang stated that the country was only in the “primary stage of socialism.”⁶⁰⁵ Also in 1987, a campaign against “bourgeois liberalism” was launched. All these elements reveal that it is also important to keep the continuities between the two decades in mind.

As regards the critique of “radicalism,” this continuity between the 1980s and the 1990s was reflected in the fact that the phenomenon of “anti-radicalism” in China predated the events of 1989, but it only became widespread in the context of the questions that arose after this date. A Chinese intellectual has compared this to the introduction of Marxism in China: although introduced before 1917, it only spread with the “cannon shot” of the October Revolution—now, the “gunshots” of June Fourth provided the backdrop against which revaluations of “radicalism” spread.⁶⁰⁶ 1989 was perceived of as the deathblow to the “New Enlightenment” spirit.⁶⁰⁷ Since Chinese intellectuals have often compared the “New Enlightenment” spirit of the 1980s to that of the May Fourth Movement during the 1910s, rejections of “radicalism” were extended to a criticism of the latter.

As Rana Mitter has phrased it, before 1989, different generations had passed on the “talismans” of May Fourth; they had put emphasis on various elements of the May Fourth heritage—now, the heritage itself was claimed.⁶⁰⁸ Because of this retreat from the May Fourth agenda after 1989, both Wang Hui and Xu Jilin have compared the 1990s to the period between the late 1920s and the outbreak of the Second World War in 1937, in which a departure from idealism and the fragmentation of the intellectual landscape substituted for the “explosive energies” of the May Fourth era.⁶⁰⁹ Reflections on the 1980s and the May Fourth Movement were finally extended to reflections on modern Chinese history as a whole; events such as the Revolution of 1911 and the Reform Movement of 1898 also became subjected to criticism and reevaluation.

Despite this, reflections on “radicalism” did not only revolve around the year 1989. The reinterpretation of a century of history was also induced by the decline of

⁶⁰⁵ Wang, *High Culture Fever*, 37.

⁶⁰⁶ Zhu Xueqin, “Chinese Liberalism,” 102.

⁶⁰⁷ Chen Xiaoming, “Fan jijin zhuyi yu dangdai zhishi fenzi de lishi jingyu,” *ZFL*, 310; Chen Baiming, “Wenhua jijin zhuyi,” 128.

⁶⁰⁸ Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution*, 273-274.

⁶⁰⁹ Wang, “Introduction,” 11. Xu Jilin makes this comparison in “The Fate of an Enlightenment: Twenty Years in the Chinese Intellectual Sphere,” 183-203.

socialism in the international context. One Chinese author has mentioned the significance of both the events in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe for the development of reflections on “radicalism”; in 1990, for example, a conference was held in Madrid on the relationship between reform and revolution.⁶¹⁰ Internally, Deng Xiaoping’s Southern Tour of early 1992 also triggered reflections on revolution and on the socialist identity of a country that had turned to reform. Since both 1989 and 1992 were important events in the debate on “conservatism” and “radicalism,” the point that the politics of intellectual discourse during the 1990s were “overdetermined by how they simultaneously came to terms with 1989 and 1992” is more than valid.⁶¹¹

4.4.2 *Early Revaluations of Modern Chinese History*

The Hong Kong-based highbrow journal *Twenty-first Century* played an important role in the cross-fertilization of overseas and mainland scholars because it “offered a new kind of bridge between mainland and overseas intellectuals,” as well as between mainland scholars and scholars based in Hong Kong and Taiwan.⁶¹² Liu Qingfeng and Jin Guantao, two key figures in the cultural debates of the 1980s, had set up the journal in 1990 as a bimonthly publication of the Institute of Chinese Studies of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Yü Ying-shih’s first criticism of the destruction of Chinese tradition, which was entitled “Picking up the pieces for a new start,” appeared in the December 1990 issue of *Twenty-first Century*.⁶¹³ In his brief but bold statement, Yü predicted that the twenty-first century would not look too bright for China given the fact that “the wrongdoings Chinese people had inflicted upon themselves during the twentieth century had been too serious.”⁶¹⁴ In the entire course of Chinese history, the twentieth century had been the darkest period of all; throughout its chain of revolutions, “the old had been destroyed in order to found the new” (*pojiu lixin*).

In the same issue of *Twenty-first Century*, Tu Wei-ming (b. 1940), one of the exponents of New Confucianism in North America, argued in favor of the dissolution of

⁶¹⁰ Chen Baiming, “Wenhua jijin zhuyi,” 129-130.

⁶¹¹ Zhang Xudong, “Post-Tiananmen Intellectual Field,” 9.

⁶¹² Wang, “Introduction,” 16. The highbrow character of the journal was reflected in its limited circulation: one source mentions a circulation of three thousand five hundred copies per issue, in comparison with a circulation of eighty thousand per issue for the journal *Reading*, which, at its peak—under the editorship of Wang Hui—reached a circulation of a hundred to a hundred and twenty thousand copies per issue. See *ibid.*, 28, 56.

⁶¹³ Yü Ying-shih, “Dai congrou, shoushi jiu shanhe,” *EYS* 2 (December 1990), 5-7.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

what he called the “Enlightenment mentality.”⁶¹⁵ This mentality was one of rational spirit—as manifested in the values of science and democracy—but it was also exemplified by the instrumental rationality of scientism. Chinese tradition, Tu argued, could play a positive role in dealing with the negative aspects of this mentality. Although the New Confucian criticism of the dominance of reason in the modern world was not new, the appearance of Tu’s article in *Twenty-first Century* in 1990 was important because it left an imprint on mainland intellectuals who were coming to terms with the “Enlightenment” of the 1980s at the time.

In the next issue of *Twenty-first Century*, Gan Yang, formerly a major actor in the “New Enlightenment Movement,” now expressed criticism of “Enlightenment” in the form of a denunciation of the French revolutionary model in favor of the so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688.⁶¹⁶ The latter had resulted in the foundation of a constitutional monarchy and an English Bill of Rights; this goal had been achieved through minor bloodshed. Gan Yang’s appraisal of the Glorious Revolution and his denial of the French Revolution signified a thorough shift, for some important figures of the May Fourth Movement had drawn inspiration from the French Revolution. Chen Duxiu, for example, had based his claim that a revolution would lead to a modern civilization on the French model; Li Dazhao had engaged in a comparison between the French and Russian revolutions.⁶¹⁷

As discussed in the previous chapter, the liberal Friedrich von Hayek had also discarded the French model in favor of the British model regarding liberty in his *The Constitution of Liberty*.⁶¹⁸ According to Hayek, the French tradition of liberty was

⁶¹⁵ Tu Wei-ming, “Huajie qimeng xintai,” *EYS* 2 (December 1990), 12-13. Tu Wei-ming was born in Kunming, but received a B.A. in Chinese Studies (1961) at Tunghai University, Taiwan. Tu obtained both his M.A. (1963) and Ph.D. (1968) at Harvard University, where he holds a Professorship in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations since 1981. Since 1996, Tu also served as the Director of the Harvard-Yenching Institute.

⁶¹⁶ King James II was overthrown in a conspiracy between English deserters on the one hand, and the Dutch stadtholder William III and his wife Mary Stuart—the daughter of James II—on the other. Mary Stuart was the lawful heir to the throne, but her father was only willing to accept her as an heir if she shared his pro-Catholicism. Mary refused, and a Dutch invasion of England followed. It was the Member of Parliament John Hampden who first used the term “Glorious Revolution” in 1689.

⁶¹⁷ See Chen Duxiu, “Falanxi ren yu jindai wenming,” *Xin Qingnian* 1:1, 15 September 1915. Reprinted in Chen Song, *Wusi qianhou dongxi wenhua wenti lunzhan wenxuan*, 3-6. See also Li Dazhao, “Fa’e geming zhi bijiaoguan,” *Li Dazhao wenxuan* (Beijing: renmin dabanshe, 1984), Vol.1, 572-575. Originally published in *Yanzhi* 3, July 1, 1918.

⁶¹⁸ Friedrich A. Hayek, “Freedom, Reason, and Tradition,” in *The Constitution of Liberty*, 49-62.

based on Cartesian rationalism and grand collective purposes, whereas the British tradition was founded on empiricism and cumulative growth; it adhered to spontaneity and the absence of coercion.⁶¹⁹ The argument that the French Revolution had failed in the foundation of liberty was hardly new; Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) had already made this claim in his two works on democracy, namely *De la Démocratie en Amérique* (1835-1840) and *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution* (1856). For Tocqueville, the French Revolution was nothing but a continuation of the Ancien Régime; every attempt to destroy absolute power had resulted in “placing the head of Liberty on a servile body.”⁶²⁰

In line with these criticisms of the French Revolution, Gan Yang argued that the May Fourth slogan “democracy and science” should be questioned because the actions based on this slogan had led to results that were far removed from it.⁶²¹ Gan Yang had already criticized this May Fourth slogan in a 1989 article in *Reading*, which was written for the eightieth anniversary of May Fourth.⁶²² Referring to Friedrich von Hayek and the liberal British philosopher and historian of ideas Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997), Gan Yang argued that the French revolutionary model did not know liberty, as opposed to the Anglo-American constitutional model of “liberty and order.” Gan Yang also referred to Berlin’s distinction between “positive” and “negative” freedom, or the difference between the freedom to do what one wishes and the freedom from interference by others.⁶²³ Like Berlin, Gan Yang repudiated the “positive” freedom of the French revolutionaries and Rousseau. But liberals in socialist countries in particular

⁶¹⁹ Thinkers who belonged to the French tradition were the “Encyclopedists,” or, those around the *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*. The “Encyclopedists” included Denis Diderot (1713-1784), Jean le Rond d’Alembert (1717-1783), André le Breton (1708-1779), and others. Other thinkers that belonged to the French tradition included Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot (1727-1781), François Quesnay (1694-1774), and the Marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794). Those who belonged to the British tradition included David Hume (1711-1776), Adam Smith (1723-1790), Edmund Burke, Adam Ferguson (1723-1816), Josiah Tucker (1713-1799), and William Paley (1743-1805). Hayek adds, however, that there are exceptions to this national division: Alexis de Tocqueville and Benjamin Constant (1767-1830) can be said to be closer to the British tradition, whereas Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), William Godwin (1756-1836), Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), Richard Price (1723-1791) and Thomas Paine (1737-1809) can be associated with the French tradition.

⁶²⁰ de Valk, *Democratie: wezen en oorsprong*, 310.

⁶²¹ Gan Yang, “Yangqi ‘minzhu yu kexue,’ dianding ‘ziyou yu zhixu,’” *EYS* 3 (February 1991), 7-10.

⁶²² This article, entitled “Ziyou de linian: wusi chuantong zhi queshimian,” appeared in *Dushu* 5, 1989.

⁶²³ Berlin elaborated this distinction in his essay “Two Concepts of Liberty.”

had based themselves on the French Revolution, possibly because the communist Revolution was the inheritor of the French Revolution.⁶²⁴

Nonetheless, early revaluations of modern Chinese history were not always a direct response to the events of 1989. An example of a new interpretation of the May Fourth period that predates June fourth, 1989, concerns an article on the scholars around the journal *Xueheng* (1922-1933) that dates from early 1989.⁶²⁵ Its author was the literary theorist Yue Daiyun, the wife of the head of the Academy of Chinese Culture, Tang Yijie. Whereas the scholars around this journal had long been considered opponents of May Fourth, Yue Daiyun argued that they had attempted to answer the same questions as their May Fourth contemporaries.⁶²⁶ The *Xueheng* scholars had tried to unite the best in Chinese and Western culture; they had adhered to a spirit of openness and dialogue. They had often been portrayed as “backward” because of the existence of different scholarly factions and under the political judgment of the CCP.⁶²⁷ Yue Daiyun ascribed her early revaluation of conservative figures to her experience as a visiting scholar at the Comparative Literature Department of Harvard University in 1985, a department where the *Xueheng* scholars had studied under Irving Babbitt (1865-1933).⁶²⁸

4.5 THE 1992 DEBATE

4.5.1 *Reflections on the Cultural Revolution*

As can be seen from the above, Yü Ying-shih was preoccupied with the revolutionary tradition of the CCP and with its effect on traditional social institutions in particular, whereas mainland intellectuals mainly attempted to come to terms with the failure of the political engagement of the 1980s, or with the new reality of a second round of

⁶²⁴ The liberal Gu Xin used the same models to criticize Gan Yang in his response article “Anggelu ziyou chuantong yu Falanxi langman jingshen,” *EYS* 6 (August 1991), 138-140. Relying on Hayek’s distinction between the English and the French traditions of liberty, Gu Xin described the English model as a model that relied on spontaneous growth, whereas the French model could be characterized by “rationalism” and not, as Gan Yang claimed, by science and democracy.

⁶²⁵ Yue Daiyun, “Chonggu ‘xueheng’: jianlun xiandai baoshou zhuyi,” in *Lun chuantong yu fan chuantong*, 415-428.

⁶²⁶ On the *Xueheng* group, see Schneider, “Bridging the Gap,” 1-33.

⁶²⁷ Interview with Yue Daiyun, Beijing, July 12, 2006.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*

economic reforms. These different concerns would lead to a debate on “radicalism” and “conservatism” that moved in several directions.

In the April 1992 issue of *Twenty-first Century*, the Marxist historian Jiang Yihua (b.1939) of Fudan University challenged Yü Ying-shih’s elitist account of modern Chinese history as a process of “radicalization” brought about by intellectuals.⁶²⁹ As a Marxist, Jiang was more concerned with the fate of the vast majority living in poverty than with highbrow debates about ideas. As he phrased it in a text on Confucianism: “When scholars are indulging in high-sounding tirades in studies and classrooms, one should be sure not to forget the realities of life on China’s vast earth.”⁶³⁰ Jiang Yihua attacked Yü’s definition of “conservatism” and “radicalism” as the preservation and destruction of the status quo respectively; he invoked the English political writer Hugh Cecil for his definition of the former. Jiang Yihua argued that Hugh Cecil, in his 1912 *Conservatism*, had discerned three main elements of modern British conservatism, namely the innate adherence to old things familiar, the safeguarding of religion and authority, and the love for the greatness of one’s country.⁶³¹ Basing himself on both Cecil and Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Jiang concluded that conservatism obviously did not mean an opposition to change, or an advocacy of small change, but that change should occur “within the range of specific value orientations,” such as respect for tradition, authority, and nationalism.⁶³² According to this definition, conservatives in modern China had not been too few, but too many in number.

As for “cultural conservatism,” or the advocacy of change with a respect for tradition, Jiang Yihua referred to those who had tried to reinvigorate Confucianism or to investigate Chinese learning. This included the intellectuals that Yü Ying-shih had categorized as “radicals,” such as Kang Youwei and the scholars around the *Journal for*

⁶²⁹ Jiang Yihua, “Jijin yu baoshou: yu Yü Ying-shih xiansheng shangque,” *EYS* 10 (April 1992), 134-142.

⁶³⁰ Jiang Yihua, “Ershi shiji ruxue zai Zhongguo de chonggou,” 35.

⁶³¹ What Jiang Yihua referred to was Hugh Cecil’s claim that there were three “component elements” of conservatism, namely “natural conservatism,” “Toryism” or “the defense of Church and King,” and the “reverence for religion and authority,” and finally, “imperialism,” or “a feeling for the greatness of the country and for that unity which makes its greatness.” Cecil, *Conservatism*, 244.

⁶³² Jiang Yihua, “Jijin yu baoshou,” 135.

National Essence.⁶³³ In another article, Jiang Yihua also dealt with eleven manifestations of “political conservatism.” Since Jiang defined the latter as the advocacy of change within the framework of respect for authority, all the manifestations of political conservatism he referred to in his account appeared in opposition to democracy and liberalism.⁶³⁴ More precisely, Jiang referred to several theories of dictatorship in support of Yuan Shikai and Chiang Kai-shek, to the dictatorship of Mao Zedong, and, finally, to “neo-authoritarianism” and the rise of a “new political conservatism” since 1990.⁶³⁵

Yet the main focus of Jiang Yihua’s attack on Yü Ying-shih concerned the latter’s characterization of the Cultural Revolution as “radical.” For Jiang, on the contrary, the defining essence of the Cultural Revolution had been “all-round dictatorship” and political conservatism; it had continued “the harmful tradition of feudal despotism in thought and politics.”⁶³⁶ As Jiang Yihua phrased it:

Mister Yü Ying-shih considers the ten-year period of the Cultural Revolution to be the peak of the modern radicalization process. In fact, this only catches sight of a couple of slogans that thoroughly break with feudalism, capitalism, and revisionism, and that stir

⁶³³ Before 1911, these manifestations of “cultural conservatism” included: Zhang Zhidong’s 1898 work *Quanxuepian* (Exhortation to Learn), an opposition to the radical reform plans of Kang Youwei; Zhang Zhidong’s adage “Chinese learning for the essence, Western learning for application” (*zhongti xiyong*); Ye Dehui’s *Yijiao congbian*, also a criticism of the reforms of 1898; the works of Kang Youwei; the *Guocuibao* (National Essence Journal). For the period after 1911, Jiang referred to: the spread of Confucian associations (*kongjiao hui*) during Yuan Shikai’s rule; the wholesale affirmation of Chinese traditional culture during the reign of the Northern Warlords; Chiang Kai-shek’s 1934 New Life Movement (*xin shenghuo yundong*); the movement to praise Confucius and to read the Classics; the 1930s movement for the construction of a Chinese native culture; the movement for the renaissance of Chinese culture in Taiwan during the 1950s and 1960s; New Confucianism; and, finally, the resurgence of national studies during the 1990s.

⁶³⁴ Jiang Yihua, “20 shiji Zhongguo sixiangshi shang de zhengzhi baoshou zhuyi,” *ZFL*, 57-73. Originally published in *Tansuo yu zhengming* 1993:1, 47-56, 30.

⁶³⁵ The eleven manifestations were: Liang Qichao’s “theory of enlightened despotism” (*kaiming zhuanzhi lun*) in 1906; the “theory of constitutional monarchy for national salvation” (*junzhu lixian jiuguo lun*) proposed by Yang Du, a legal advisor to Yuan Shikai, in 1915; the 1925 nationalist movement (*xingshi yundong*) of Ceng Qi, Li Huang, Zuo Shunsheng, and others; Chiang Kai-shek’s tutelary government (*xunzheng*) between 1928 and 1929; the fascism of the Kuomintang between 1934 and 1935; the 1935 “new style despotism theory” (*xinshi ducai lun*) of Ding Wenjiang and Jiang Tingfu; the New Legalist Movement (*xin fajia yundong*) of before and after 1936; the “warring states strategy” (*zhanguo ce*) promoted by Lin Tongqi, Chen Quan, Lei Haizong and others at the beginning of the 1940s; Mao Zedong’s all-round dictatorship theory; the theory of “new authoritarianism” between 1988 and 1989; and, finally, “new political conservatism” (*xin zhengzhi baoshou zhuyi*) since 1990.

⁶³⁶ Jiang Yihua, “Jijin yu baoshou,” 137.

up revolution within the depth of the soul. It has not thoroughly investigated what it actually is that the Cultural Revolution safeguards and upholds. Its pan-moralism, its pan-politicism, its egalitarianism that only serves to spread poverty, its totemization, its religious idolatry and its individual arbitrariness are all deeply rooted in Chinese tradition.⁶³⁷

Jiang Yihua refuted Yü Ying-shih's argument of "radicalization" from the perspective of the mode of production. For Jiang, the land reforms and people's communes were not "radical" because they had preserved the peasants' original mode of production and mode of life; Jiang even compared them to the land system of the Taiping Rebellion.⁶³⁸ Mao Zedong's choice for the peasants instead of the urban proletariat, Jiang claimed, had been a distortion of Marxism and a disaster for Chinese modernization. As for Mao's thought, it was not "radical," but it contained elements of idealism, "thick populism," and rural socialism (*nongye shehui zhuyi*).⁶³⁹ Yü Ying-shih was unable to see this because he was an overseas intellectual who obtained many of his views through the Party journal *Red Flag* and the *People's Daily*.⁶⁴⁰ His understanding of the Cultural Revolution was "too shallow" and neglected all nuances.⁶⁴¹ Jiang clearly gave "radicalism" a positive connotation; it was associated with progress and modernization. "Radicalism" had been weak in modern Chinese history because the modernization forces had been weak. Moreover, instead of being part of a "radicalization" process without any direction, Jiang argued that changes in modern China had taken place within the framework of economic modernization, the creation of modern values, and the distribution of wealth. For Jiang, it was not a matter of more or less "radicalism," but a matter of different choices regarding modernization.

⁶³⁷ Ibid., 137-138.

⁶³⁸ The land system of the Taiping, as outlined in the 1853 document *Tianchao tianmu zhidu* (The land system of the Heavenly Kingdom) consisted of "economic egalitarianism, totalitarian communism, authoritarian hierarchy, and messianic zeal." Therefore, it can be said that it "foreshadows aspects of the Chinese Communist movement of the twentieth century" as the authors of *Sources of Chinese Tradition* have formulated it. See chapter 29, 224.

⁶³⁹ Interview with Jiang Yihua, Shanghai, August 8, 2006. Jiang Yihua's criticism of Mao Zedong's thought as the preservation of the old forms of life and production was in line with Lenin's criticism of Russian Populism. See Maurice Meissner, "Leninism and Maoism: Some Populist Perspectives on Marxism-Leninism in China," *The China Quarterly* 45 (Jan-March, 1971), 2-36.

⁶⁴⁰ Jiang Yihua and Chen Yan, "Jijin yu baoshou: yiduan shangwei wanjie de duihua," *ZFL* 30-36. Quote from 32-33. Originally published in *Kaifang shidai* 1997:1, 37-41.

⁶⁴¹ Interview with Jiang Yihua, Shanghai, August 8, 2006.

In the same issue of *Twenty-first Century*, Yü Ying-shih attacked Jiang Yihua for focusing on politics, society, and economics, whereas his main concern had been the intellectual radicalization of modern China.⁶⁴² In spite of this, Jiang's argument of the predominance of conservative social forces in modern Chinese history, Yü claimed, did not contradict his thesis, for Jiang's text demonstrated that radicals could not but rely on traditional resources. Here, Yü's rooting of "radicalism" in tradition is reminiscent of Lin Yü-sheng's thesis that the May Fourth generation's "content of thought" was "radical," whereas its "style of thought" was nevertheless very traditional. For Yü Ying-shih, Jiang Yihua's text revealed "the paradox of revolution": a revolution's radical elements always desired to wipe out tradition in its entirety, but in reality, they ended up employing the very traditional elements they had attempted to eradicate. The "paradox of conservatism," on the other hand, implied that renewal was indispensable for preservation. As Edmund Burke formulated it in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*: "If a country does not have the ability to change, it can also not have the ability to preserve."⁶⁴³

Yü Ying-shih further argued that 1949 was a very important line of demarcation for modern Chinese history, since it signified the start of the destruction of Chinese popular society (*minjian shehui*) through the eradication of private property rights. Yü's main target of attack was the CCP, which he described as a group of marginal elements that had grabbed power amidst revolutionary violence.⁶⁴⁴ Their monopolization of all resources, military backing, and absolutist despotic power was nothing but Stalinism in disguise. Yü referred to Richard Pipes' *The Russian Revolution*, and to the chapter on "The Red Terror" in particular, the implication being that for Mao, as for Lenin, terror had been "an indispensable instrument of revolutionary government."⁶⁴⁵ Yet the biggest

⁶⁴² Yü Ying-shih, "Zailun Zhongguo xiandai sixiang zhong de jijin yu baoshou: da Jiang Yihua xiansheng," *EYS* 10 (April 1992), 143-149.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, 145. In *Reflections*, Burke stated: "A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation. Without such means it might even risk the loss of that part of the Constitution which it wished the most religiously to preserve." Kramnick, *The Portable Edmund Burke*, 424.

⁶⁴⁴ Yü has elaborated this point further in "Zhongguo zhishi fenzi de bianyuanhua," *EYS* 6 (August 1991), 15-25.

⁶⁴⁵ See Richard Pipes, "The Red Terror," in *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 789-840. Quote from 790. Lenin's Red Terror consisted of the invalidation of the legal system, the establishment of Revolutionary Tribunals, and the institution of mass executions by the *cheka*—the "Extraordinary Commission to Fight the Counterrevolution and Sabotage"—an organ that was also responsible for the creation of the concentration camp in its modern form.

characteristic of communism for Yü was what Milovan Djilas, a critic of Stalinism, had called the “New Class.”⁶⁴⁶ This class was “new” because of its power composition of “owners and exploiters” in the name of collective ownership, which in fact meant totalitarianism and monopoly.⁶⁴⁷ In line with Djilas account, Yü stated elsewhere that the CCP was “a big landlord, a big capitalist, and a big slaveholder.”⁶⁴⁸

Although Jiang Yihua’s verdict on modern Chinese history was opposite to that of Yü Ying-shih, he also argued in favor of economic development and a strong middle class; the primary focus on the peasants and the struggle against Western capitalism in the Comintern during the 1920s had caused the neglect of economic development.⁶⁴⁹ Elsewhere, Jiang described the period in China since the late 1970s as a “peaceful revolution towards modernization and ‘new rationalism.’”⁶⁵⁰ Jiang used this term to refer to the development of the market economy, urbanization, the rise of the middle class, globalization, and, finally, a change in values, social structures, and the political system. However, since Jiang associated Confucianism with “small peasant civilization” and the obstruction of modernization, for him, the shortcomings of modernization could only be solved with more modernization.⁶⁵¹ Jiang fiercely criticized what he referred to as the “Confucianization of Marxism.”⁶⁵²

Whereas Jiang Yihua, as a Marxist historian, stressed the importance of economic development as such and did not engage with issues related to superstructure,

⁶⁴⁶ Djilas (1911-1995) was a proponent of “socialism with a human face”; his works have often been utilized to attack the Stalinist version of the communist state. Djilas was born in Montenegro and had supported Tito before becoming one of the fiercest critics of both Yugoslav communism and the Soviet Union, which resulted in his expulsion from the Party and prison sentences.

⁶⁴⁷ Milovan Djilas, *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System* (New York, Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1971 (1957)), 52.

⁶⁴⁸ Jin Zhong, “Pulinsitun lun ‘bian,’” 43-44.

⁶⁴⁹ In an article on nationalism in modern China, Jiang Yihua stated that the result of the focus on race, politics, and culture instead of on the development of a national economy in modern Chinese nationalism had been “exclusionism” and “backwardness.” See Jiang Yihua, “Zhongguo minzu zhuyi de tedian ji xin jieduan,” *EYS* 15 (February 1993), 60-64.

⁶⁵⁰ Jiang Yihua, “Zhongguo zouxiang xiandaihua de heping geming yu xin lixing zhuyi,” *ZFL*, 493-506. Originally published in *Wenshizhe* 1996:3, 3-11.

⁶⁵¹ See Jiang Yihua, “Ershi shiji ruxue zai Zhongguo de chonggou,” *EYS* 1 (October 1990), 28-35.

⁶⁵² Jiang Yihua’s argument is in line with some Western interpretations of Chinese Marxism as the continuation of Chinese tradition. The Mao specialist Stuart Schram was the first person to point out the Chinese and traditional elements in Mao’s thought, but he criticized an interpretation of Mao’s leadership *primarily* in those terms, because it overlooked the importance of Leninist and Stalinist elements. See Stuart S. Schram, “Mao Zedong a Hundred Years On: The Legacy of a Ruler,” *The China Quarterly* 137 (March 1994), 125-143.

Yü's biggest concern relating to modernization was that it had to be continuous with Chinese tradition. As Michael Quirin has argued, Yü wanted to secure nothing less than "the future of Chinese culture and society."⁶⁵³ In Yü's view, the theme of culture was closely connected with the suppression of intellectuals, since the intellectual was the guardian of Chinese culture. For Quirin, Yü's political stance could be defined as a conservative position because Yü defended historical continuity; nevertheless, his preoccupation with intellectuals was not aimed at restoring their political and social privileges—it was about restoring their cultural hegemony.⁶⁵⁴ Yü's criticism of "radicalization" served to reveal the cultural identity crisis of modern China: for Yü, it was the identification with Western culture that had led to the denial of Chinese cultural identity.⁶⁵⁵ Although this claim is reductionist, as will be disclosed throughout this chapter and the following chapters, Yü was indeed preoccupied with Chinese culture.

Apart from their different concerns, Yü Ying-shih and Jiang Yihua also had a different conception of what constituted China. For Yü, "China" was a cultural entity that went beyond the geographical boundaries of the Chinese nation-state. Since Yü did not accept the political legitimacy of the CCP, he also challenged its Party-centered notion of "Chineseness." For Jiang, on the contrary, "China" was a mere geographical concept that was associated with a politically defined territory. Consequently, intellectuals of Chinese descent who resided outside Chinese borders had no right to represent China, which explains why Jiang attacked Yü's "shallow" conception of events such as the Cultural Revolution. Yü's cultural conception of "Chineseness," on the contrary, was reminiscent of Tu Wei-ming's "cultural China thesis."⁶⁵⁶

According to Tu Wei-ming's thesis, "cultural China" consisted of the interaction between intellectuals of three symbolic universes. The first symbolic universe was composed of mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, whereas the second and third universes consisted of overseas Chinese and individuals of non-Chinese descent who attempted to understand China. Tu Wei-ming upheld the view that members of these three universes could "assume an effective role in creatively constructing a new vision of Chineseness that is more in tune with Chinese history and

⁶⁵³ Quirin, "Yü Yingshi, das Politische und die Politik," 54.

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 55-57.

⁶⁵⁵ Yü Ying-shih, "Zixu," 1-6.

⁶⁵⁶ Tu Wei-Ming, "Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center," 1-34.

in sympathetic resonance with Chinese culture.”⁶⁵⁷ As Paul Cohen has noted, this vision was highly elitist and very much a concern of intellectuals; the culture referred to was mostly intellectual culture.⁶⁵⁸ The notion of “cultural China,” Cohen argued, contained both a substantive and a strategic side. The substantive side was that it proposed “a cluster of values, behavior patterns, ideas, and traditions” that people identified as “Chinese.” The strategic element was that it enabled members of the three universes to take part in the definition of “Chineseness” “without inhabiting the geographical or political space known as Zhongguo.”⁶⁵⁹

Despite Yü’s concern with Chinese culture, his fierce criticism of the CCP, and his politically liberal sympathies, he did not come up with a concrete political program. The foundation of Yü’s political stand was what Quirin has termed “Machtferne,” or, a discrepancy between Yü’s utopian political desires and his limited interest in mechanisms and institutions that could crystallize these political hopes. Yü approached political responsibility in the form of a moral call; his primary concern was not a concrete political program, but an accusation of those in power.⁶⁶⁰ Yü’s criticism of “radicalism” in modern Chinese history thus reveals that he considered Chinese intellectuals to be the carriers of the moral qualities that could rescue China from “radicalization”—the CCP had caused China to stray from the moral order of Confucian times, and it was up to the Chinese intellectual to restore this lost moral order.

4.5.2 *Criticizing the CCP and Affirming Gradual Reform*

Whereas Jiang Yihua’s criticism already deviated from Yü Ying-shih’s central concern of the preservation of Chinese culture, other intellectuals from outside mainland China who joined the debate not only moved further away from Yü’s cultural agenda; they also devoted less energy to the discussion of the nature of modern Chinese history. Instead, they used the debate to discuss a variety of other issues, such as the policy of the CCP or the economic reform program of Deng Xiaoping. Like Jiang Yihua, most discussants focused on political, social, and economic factors rather than on intellectual history; although they differed from Jiang in their definition of “conservatism” and “radicalism,” they also turned to the issue of modernization. For many, “conservatism”

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., 34.

⁶⁵⁸ Cohen, “Cultural China: Some Definitional Issues,” 557.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁰ Quirin, “Yü Yingshi, das Politische und die Politik,” 60-64.

in this respect was but the preservation of interests or the status quo, whereas “radicalism” was connected with revolution and the destruction of the status quo.

An example of the criticism of “radicalism” as part of a defense of gradual economic reform concerns an article by Wang Rongzu (b. 1940), a Professor in the History Department of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University who had been educated in Taiwan and the United States.⁶⁶¹ Wang Rongzu argued that Deng Xiaoping’s economic reform program was the perfect way to balance conservatism and radicalism. As Wang Rongzu put it: “Reform is neither blindly conservative, nor blindly radical—it seems to be the middle road between the two.”⁶⁶² Instead of focusing on intellectual history proper, Wang Rongzu included conservative social forces in his analysis. Although he agreed with Yü Ying-shih that modern Chinese history had indeed witnessed several waves of radicalization—namely 1898, 1911, and May Fourth—Wang added that each wave had also faced a conservative backlash. The reforms of 1898 had failed because of conservative adversaries; the revolution of 1911 had likewise been weakened by the conservative opposition of the gentry, of landowners, and of merchants. Wang Rongzu’s “conservatism” was obviously not about the preservation of cultural continuity; for Wang, conservative forces attempted to preserve their interests against the “radicalism” of revolutionary elements. Wang Rongzu’s sociohistorical approach to the topic, then, did not contain any Burkean traits—his argument was that economic reform was the best way to avoid the extremes of both social “conservative” and “radical” revolutionary forces.

In another article, Wang Rongzu explicitly criticized the permanent revolutionary movement of modern China for having destroyed the material basis of liberalism and democratic rule in China. Wang Rongzu wrote:

The modern meaning of the word ‘revolution’ is nothing but violence and destruction. However, those with lofty ideals in modern China often considered revolution the most sacred aim—revolution was a synonym for progress; opposing the revolution became a charge of guilt of the most heinous crimes.⁶⁶³

⁶⁶¹ Wang Rongzu, “Jijin yu baoshou zhuiyan,” *EYS* 11 (June 1992), 133-136.

⁶⁶² *Ibid.*, 135.

⁶⁶³ Wang Rongzu, “Ziyou zhuyi yu Zhongguo,” *EYS* 2 (December 1990), 33-37. Quote from 34-35.

The revolution of 1911 destroyed the constitutional basis, whereas the Second Revolution of 1913 established the military dictatorship of Yuan Shikai.⁶⁶⁴ The May Fourth Movement paved the way for yet another revolution that eradicated the basis for democracy and founded a dictatorial government. From this, we can see that Wang Rongzu associated reform with the conditions for the creation of liberalism and democratic rule. The debate on “conservatism” and “radicalism,” then, was reduced to the century-old debate on the question of reform versus “revolution.” What was new, though, was that reform was now considered a prerequisite for liberalism—the latter could not be obtained through revolution.

Like Yü Ying-shih, other mainland intellectuals who took part in the 1992 debate launched an assault on the CCP in particular. But whereas Yü’s criticism of the CCP had been related to his conservative advocacy of intermediate institutions—which the CCP had destroyed since 1949—these intellectuals only criticized the CCP for political reasons. Being intellectuals based outside of mainland China, they criticized the repressive political climate on the mainland. Sun Guodong, a Professor in the History Department of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, attacked Jiang Yihua’s negative portrayal of conservatism, his views on the Cultural Revolution, and his praise of the CCP’s policies.⁶⁶⁵ Although both Yü Ying-shih and Jiang Yihua had referred to Edmund Burke in their discussion, Sun Guodong only reproached Jiang for his uncritical application of both Edmund Burke and Hugh Cecil to China, which ignored differences in context. As American conservatism had demonstrated, Sun Guodong argued, it was mistaken to associate conservatism with authority and nationalism: American conservatism took issue with authority and contained no nationalist traits.

Sun Guodong further criticized Jiang Yihua for his argument that the errors of the Cultural Revolution could be ascribed to Chinese tradition, and for his positive portrayal of the changes that had occurred in modern China. Since 1949 in particular, the creation of a modern economy, a modern value system, and the equal distribution of wealth was highly questionable. The CCP had always pursued an economic policy under strong political force, and only recently had there been some openness. Given the

⁶⁶⁴ In July 1913, discontentment among the military and revolutionaries led to a rebellion against Yuan Shikai, the Provisional President of the Republic of China. Yuan Shikai managed to suppress the rebellion and was formally elected President of the Republic in October of the same year.

⁶⁶⁵ Sun Guodong, “Du Jiang Yihua ‘jijin yu baoshou’ shu hou,” *EYS* 11 (June 1992), 141-143.

repression of intellectuals, a modern value system that acknowledged autonomy and liberty was also non-existent. Since the CCP was, following Djilas, a “New Class,” its concern with social justice could also be doubted. In Sun Guodong’s account, then, the preoccupation with Chinese culture and with intermediate groups in Chinese society was absent; his argument was a liberal criticism of the CCP.

Wang Shaoguang, who has been discussed in Chapter Two as one of the persons generally associated with “neo-conservatism” because of his defense of a centralized state, did not engage with modern Chinese history either in his contribution to the debate. Instead, Wang argued in favor of gradual reform, a viewpoint that was congruent with the economic gradualism defended by “neo-conservatives.”⁶⁶⁶ Like Yü Ying-shih, Wang Shaoguang emphasized that conservatism did promote change; it was not an attitude towards tradition, ultimate aims, the status quo, or the future, but “an attitude of people towards how to change the condition they are in.”⁶⁶⁷ Wang Shaoguang also followed Yü in his reference to Burke’s dictum that preservation required change. Conservatism, then, was an attitude towards the *speed* of changing the status quo.

In Wang Shaoguang’s opinion, the debate between Yü Ying-shih and Jiang Yihua was not about a “conservatism” in which the “ism” referred to a “systematic theory and advocacy.”⁶⁶⁸ The debate only dealt with “conservative trends” (*baoshou sichao*), or with a widespread embrace of what Wang called a “conservative tendency” (*baoshou qingxiang*), which was “an inclination towards gradualism on a personal level.”⁶⁶⁹ The debate also considered “conservative actions” (*baoshou xingwei*), but these were not necessarily linked to “conservative tendencies.”⁶⁷⁰ Wang Shaoguang concluded from the debate that both “conservative trends” and “conservative actions” had been prominent in modern Chinese history, but conservatism as a theoretical system had nevertheless been rare. Wang explained that conservatives pressed for gradualism because they were convinced that gradualism was “a principle that must be abided by in all historical processes.”⁶⁷¹

⁶⁶⁶ Wang Shaoguang, “‘Baoshou’ yu ‘baoshou zhuyi,’” *EYS* 12 (August 1992), 135-138.

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁶⁷¹ *Ibid.*

In this sense, Yü Ying-shih was not a serious conservative for Wang Shaoguang, since he proposed radical measures to reverse the CCP. A true conservative would opt for gradualism in all circumstances; he considered society to be an organic whole and he acknowledged the limits of human knowledge. Although this argument was based on conservative grounds, Wang Shaoguang employed it in the service of his plea for social reform based on Popper's "piecemeal engineering" and on Oakeshott's concept of "practical knowledge."⁶⁷² Wang Shaoguang's embrace of a procedural gradualism concerning economic reform, then, was in line with his statement that "neo-conservatism" opposed a "radicalism" of pace (*buzhou*), and a "radicalism" of strategy (*shouduan*).⁶⁷³ Economically and politically, this "radicalism" attempted to reach goals in one step. Like Xiao Gongqin, Wang Shaoguang further argued that "neo-conservatism" did not argue against a "radicalism" of aims (*mubiao*), namely the establishment of political democracy and a market economy. Like Yü Ying-shih, Wang Shaoguang's goal of the establishment of a market economy also involved the creation of a middle class, but as distinct from Yü Ying-shih's combination of an economic and political liberalism with a promotion of the Chinese cultural tradition, Wang Shaoguang only underscored economic liberalism; Yü's concern with cultural identity and intermediate groups in society was nowhere to be found.

4.5.3 "Piecemeal Engineering" and Conservative Liberalism

Mainland intellectuals who joined the debate also confirmed gradual economic reform, but like Gan Yang, they embedded this argument in a criticism of the French revolutionary model. Although they also invoked Burke, this was not done to argue that change was needed for the preservation of Chinese tradition; instead, Burke was referred to in order to justify the importance of gradual economic and political reform. Since this criticism of "radicalism" amounted to the defense of a liberalism that was to be achieved gradually, it might be considered an advocacy of "conservative liberalism." However, as will be discussed, its "conservative" aspect was rather procedural than substantive in nature; the concern with the community was absent from the debate. Another significant difference between Yü Ying-shih's argument of "radicalization"

⁶⁷² Oakeshott coined this concept in his *Rationalism in Politics*. See Chapter One, 12, fn. 53.

⁶⁷³ Wang Shaoguang, "Qiubian paluan de xin baoshou zhuyi sichao," *China Times Weekly*, March 8, 1992, 76-77.

and mainland uses of the concept of “radicalism” was that “radicalism” was now only conceived of as revolution and French-style liberalism, whereas British gradual liberalism was related to “conservatism.” Since Yü Ying-shih had applied the term “radicalism” to refer to an attitude toward Chinese tradition, in his conception, both Marxists and liberals had been “radicals.” Conversely, in the context of the intensified economic reform since 1992, mainland intellectuals disconnected gradual forms of liberalism from the notion of “radicalism.”

The perceived link between liberalism and gradualism was already present in an article on “radicalism” in modern Chinese history that dates from February 1991. In the pages of *Twenty-first Century*, Lin Gang (b. 1957), an associate researcher in literature at CASS, argued that liberalism was a form of gradualism, whereas “radicalism” believed in “basic solutions.”⁶⁷⁴ The latter took a stand against tradition in the cultural realm and advocated violence and revolution in the political realm; it drew on Rousseau and the French Revolution.⁶⁷⁵ “Radicalism” could not be disconnected from revolution: “‘Basic solutions,’ ‘ultimate solutions,’ ‘thorough solutions’ and other popular predicates of the late ‘May Fourth’ period are but synonyms of violent revolution.”⁶⁷⁶ Here, Lin Gang associated “radicalism” both with its initial meaning of “that what goes to the root” and with the concrete political content of revolution.

Like Lin Gang, other mainland intellectuals who took part in the 1992 debate did not connect liberalism with “radicalism,” as both Yü Ying-shih and Xiao Gongqin had done. Liberalism was now associated with gradualism, and Popper’s notion of “piecemeal engineering” was often invoked to speak for gradual reform. The reference to Popper was not strange in the early 1990s, a time when Popper’s popularity in China rose.⁶⁷⁷ Already in 1987, a seminar on Popper was organized in Wuhan, at which the researcher Fan Dainian (CASS) argued that Chinese modernization should take place according to Popper’s “piecemeal social engineering,” and not according to “utopian

⁶⁷⁴ Lin Gang, “Jijin zhuyi zai Zhongguo,” *EYS* 3 (February 1991), 17-27.

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 20. According to Lin Gang, both the late-Qing reformer Liang Qichao and Zou Rong, the writer of the anti-Manchu tract *Revolutionary Army* (1903), had based themselves on Rousseau and the French Revolution.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶⁷⁷ Some of Popper’s works were translated into Chinese as early as 1986. See Popu’er, *Caixiang yu fanbo* (Conjectures and refutations), trans. Fu Jichong et al. (Shanghai: Shanghai yiwen chubanshe, 1986); Babai, Ka’er, *Kaifang shehui ji qi diren* (The open society and its enemies), trans. and eds. Zhuang Wenrui and Li Yingming (Taipei: Guiguan tushu gongsi), 1986.

social engineering,” a lesson the CCP had already put into practice. Fan Dainian phrased it as follows:

In the past seven or eight years, Chinese Communists, having learned from the heavy losses caused by Utopian social engineering, have emphasized that we should be “practical and realistic” and “grope our own way” (through trial and error) from now on, that is, implement what Popper called piecemeal social engineering.⁶⁷⁸

The accent on Popper’s “piecemeal engineering” was in accordance with the pragmatism and realism of the official reform policy, as expressed in, for example, the slogan “crossing the river by stepping the stones” (*mozhe shitou guohe*). The “new era” (*xin shiqi*), which had begun with the policy of reform and opening up in 1978, was marked by the formation of what Xu Jilin has referred to as a “secular socialism” that intended to move away from the “idealism of utopian socialism” of the previous era.⁶⁷⁹ The reference to Popper’s criticism of “utopian social engineering” reflected this new economic context.

Another Chinese participant of the Wuhan conference on Popper considered Popper’s “fallibilism” to be an “antidote to some eternal dogmas which were said to be absolutely right and absolutely immune to criticism.”⁶⁸⁰ Even though Popper was invoked for the promotion of gradual instead of “utopian” reform, he was also quoted to condemn the ideological rigidity of the Mao era. Popper also suited the debate on “conservatism” and “radicalism” in particular, since Popper himself had used the term “radicalism” in a reference to utopianism in his *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. On utopianism, Popper wrote:

It is the conviction that one has to go to the very root of the social evil, that nothing short of a complete eradication of the offending social system will do if we wish to “bring any decency into the world” (as Du Gard says). It is, in short, its uncompromising *radicalism*. (The reader will notice that I am using this term in its original and literal sense—not in the now customary sense of a “liberal progressivism”, but in order to characterize an attitude of “going to the root of the matter”).⁶⁸¹

⁶⁷⁸ Fan Dainian, “Science, Open Society and China,” 19.

⁶⁷⁹ Xu Jilin, “The Fate of an Enlightenment,” 184.

⁶⁸⁰ Ji Shu-li, “The Worlds of Cultures and World 3,” 111.

⁶⁸¹ Popper, *The Open Society*, Vol. 1, 164.

Contrary to the “utopian engineering” of ultimate ends and blueprints for the reform of society as a whole, Popper argued, “piecemeal engineering” was about reforming particular institutions based on reason instead of passion; it concentrated on the struggle against existing evils. The “piecemeal engineer” could thus avoid the problems of “utopian engineering,” such as the lack of a rational method to define ultimate goals, the changing of goals in the process of accomplishment, and the risk of dictatorship.

One of the participants in the 1992 debate who promoted Popper’s “piecemeal engineering” was Xu Jilin (1957), a Professor at the History Department of East China Normal University in Shanghai.⁶⁸² In the June 1992 issue of *Twenty-first Century*, Xu Jilin argued that, in the absence of a status quo that could function as a coordinate, Popper’s concepts of “piecemeal engineering” and “utopian engineering” should replace the terms of “conservatism” and “radicalism” as yardsticks to discuss modern Chinese history.⁶⁸³ Both “radicalism” and “conservatism” belonged to the “utopia social engineering” type. In the cultural and academic realm, both were monistic and lacked an open attitude. In the political layer, Chinese conservatism was even more radical because it monopolized resources, it used holism to solve problems, it created “authoritative and self-contained ideological myths,” and it turned down demands from the lower layers of society.⁶⁸⁴ In twentieth-century China, both “radicalism” and “conservatism” had been too strong, whereas the “piecemeal social engineering” of liberalism had been too weak. From this, it can be seen that Xu Jilin, like Lin Gang, attached liberalism to gradual reform. Nonetheless, in spite of Xu Jilin’s embrace of gradualism, he was not in favor of Hayekian liberalism because it could not solve problems of social inequality. In its place, Xu Jilin upheld a liberalism that also incorporated John Rawls’ concern with social justice.⁶⁸⁵

Other intellectuals did not only support gradual liberalism, but they explicitly associated liberalism with conservatism. Fu Keng (b. 1959), a graduate of Fudan’s

⁶⁸² Xu Jilin, “Jijin yu baoshou de mihuo,” *EYS* 11 (June 1992), 137-140. Reprinted in *ZFL*, 37-41 as “Jijin yu baoshou zhijian de dongdang.”

⁶⁸³ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.* Xu Jilin contended that this form of liberalism had been dominant during the May Fourth era through the influence of the American “democratic liberalism” of John Dewey, Hu Shi’s teacher, and through the English “social democracy” of the Fabianist Harold Laski. See Xu Jilin, “Zhongguo zhishi fenzi de ziyou zhuyi chuantong,” *Xu Jilin zixuanji*, 98-109. Originally appeared in *EYS* 42 (August 1997), 27-35.

History Department and a researcher at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS), tied the tradition of French rationalism to socialism; he upheld a conservative liberalism in the spirit of Hayek, Burke, and de Tocqueville.⁶⁸⁶ Fu Keng argued that Chinese intellectuals had wrongly based themselves on the French Revolution and Rousseau because they believed it broke with feudal tradition, whereas they treated the Glorious Revolution as a continuation of feudalism. Fu Keng compared the harm caused by the Cultural Revolution with the “idealist romantic political delusions” of the French Enlightenment thinkers.⁶⁸⁷ Both manifested a “spirit of utopian saviorism”; both adhered to Max Weber’s “ethic of ultimate ends” or “ethic of intentions.” Lin Yü-sheng had also made this reference to Weber; he had explained it as follows: those with an “ethic of ultimate ends” were often convinced that it was permitted to make use of unjust strategies to achieve ultimate targets, since the rightness of intentions was more important than the results. The same could not be said of those who adhered to the “ethic of responsibility”; they tried to foresee the consequences of their actions.⁶⁸⁸

For his criticism of socialism and French rationalism, Fu Keng drew on the liberal French sociologist Raymond Aron (1905-1983) and his book *L’Opium des Intellectuels* (1955). In the latter, Aron had established a link between modern politics and the ideal of the “rational kingdom” of the French Revolutionaries.⁶⁸⁹ For Fu Keng, intellectual radicalism—be it the radicalism of the socialist tradition or that of the French Revolution—and liberty could not go together, because the former harmed individual liberty and the system of property rights. Hayek, Burke, and de Tocqueville were cultural conservatives with liberal inclinations; they were convinced that tradition was relevant for freedom. Elsewhere, basing himself on Isaiah Berlin’s distinction between two types of liberty, Fu Keng added that the “negative freedom” of the British

⁶⁸⁶ Fu Keng, “Dalu zhishi fenzi de jijin zhuyi shenhua,” *EYS* 11 (June 1992), 144-147.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁶⁸⁸ Lin Yü-sheng elaborated the relation between the two types of ethics in his “Ruhe zuo ge zhengzhijia?,” *Zhongguo chuantong de chuangzaoxing zhuanhua*, 373-382. For Max Weber, the “ethic of ultimate ends” (*Gesinnungsethik*) did not take the possible effects of an action into account, whereas the “ethic of responsibility” (*Verantwortungsethik*) did look at causality. Hence, the question of action became the question of which means to choose. Although the two seemed irreconcilable because the former was deontological in nature, whereas the latter was consequentialist, Weber declared in his lecture “Politics as a Vocation” (1919) that only a person who could foster a character that combined these two ethics was capable of a “vocation for politics.” Liu Junning has also referred to these two Weberian terms in his critique of rationalism. See Liu Junning, *Baoshou zhuyi*, 56-58.

⁶⁸⁹ The book was translated into Chinese as Along, *Zhishifenzi de yapian*, transl. Cai Yingwen (Taipei: Lianjiang chubanshe gongsi, 1990).

Enlightenment guaranteed the protection of civil society, whereas the “positive freedom” of the French Revolution assured political participation, but not the protection of civil society.⁶⁹⁰

4.5.4 *Other Manifestations of Conservative Liberalism*

The established link between liberalism, gradualism, and conservatism in the 1992 debate was continued in later years in the advocacy of conservative liberalism. A clear example of this can be found in the works of Liu Junning, a researcher at the Political Science Department of CASS, and the editor of the liberal journal *Gonggong luncong* (Res Publica). In a 1998 volume entitled *Conservatism*, Liu Junning argued that the “Burke of the Whigs is the Burke of liberty.”⁶⁹¹ Chinese supporters of “neo-conservatism” and “neo-authoritarianism” had distorted conservatism by subscribing to centralized power. For Liu Junning, conservatism without liberalism led to political authoritarianism, whereas liberalism without conservatism brought about rationalism and radicalism.⁶⁹² Modern China had only witnessed the rise of “conservative factions” (*baoshoupai* or *shoujiupai*) that had tried to preserve either tradition or the old system; it had not known a true Burkean conservatism that aimed at the preservation of liberty and that upheld gradual change.⁶⁹³

Liu Junning argued that “constructivist rationalist” liberalism, a term that he borrowed from Hayek—who applied it to describe the belief that man could shape the world according to his desires—was furthest away from conservatism.⁶⁹⁴ Liu Junning clearly followed the interpretation that Hayek was a conservative liberal (although

⁶⁹⁰ Fu Keng, “Langman lixiang yu shigong jingshen,” *Dushu* 1992:1, 30-37.

⁶⁹¹ Liu Junning, *Baoshou zhuyi* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1998). Quote from page 9.

⁶⁹² *Ibid.*, 14, 264.

⁶⁹³ *Ibid.*, 255-257. However, Liu Junning did recognize some “conservative elements” in Chinese history, such as Confucius’ philosophy of the Golden Mean; the Five Virtues; Laozi’s non-action (*wuwei*) and his opposition to powerful government; and Yang Zhu’s thought of nobility by birth (*guisheng*). For the twentieth century, Liu Junning mentioned the thought of Yan Fu, Liang Qichao, Chen Yinke, Xu Fuguan, and Gu Zhun as examples of a “healthy conservatism” (*Ibid.*, 263).

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 27. Hayek first used the term “constructivist rationalism” in *Economic Freedom and Representative Government* (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1973), but he also elaborated on the concept in *The Fatal Conceit* (London: Routledge, 1988). See *The Fatal Conceit*, 8, 22, and 60-62 in particular.

Hayek himself had underlined that he did not want to be related to conservatism).⁶⁹⁵ For Liu Junning, rationalism and radicalism were two sides of the same coin—both adhered to abstract ideals, wholesale change, and meliorism.⁶⁹⁶ Like participants in the 1992 debate, Liu affirmed the American and English revolutions as “realistic revolutions,” whereas the French revolution had been “utopian” in nature.⁶⁹⁷ With the embrace of the economic reforms, Liu argued, political radicalism had been denounced.⁶⁹⁸

The embrace of conservative liberalism also marked the writings of other scholars in the humanities who were by no means political scientists of a liberal bent. An example concerns some writings by Tao Dongfeng, a Professor in Literary Studies at the Chinese Department of Capital Normal University in Beijing. Tao Dongfeng argued that, in 1990s China, a tension still existed between conservatism and liberalism; yet thinkers such as Burke, de Tocqueville, and Hayek had supported a conservative liberalism.⁶⁹⁹ In China, conservatism had often joined hands with cultural nationalism, whereas liberalism had merged with “radicalism” and antitraditionalism because Chinese intellectuals had been affected by the tradition of radical individualism and direct democracy of French liberalism. The conservative liberalism that Tao Dongfeng had in mind stressed continuity and gradual reform, it recognized the limits of reason, and it envisioned the union of order and liberty.

Why did Chinese intellectuals match liberalism to gradual reform; why did many embrace the British tradition of liberalism? Xu Jilin has connected the rise of interest in gradual reform during the 1990s in China with several influential books and articles.⁷⁰⁰ One of them was the above-mentioned 1989 article by Gan Yang on English and French liberalism, which explains why liberalism was already paired with gradualism before the mid-1990s. In 1994, the collected works of Gu Zhun (1915-

⁶⁹⁵ See his “Postscript: Why I am not a Conservative,” *The Constitution of Liberty*, 343-355. The sociologist Anthony Giddens has separated “neoconservatism” from “neoliberalism” because of the latter’s emphasis on economic individualism, which is incompatible with the conservative stress on community and social solidarity. Hence, for Giddens, Friedrich von Hayek was by no means a “conservative liberal.” See Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right*, 39-41.

⁶⁹⁶ Liu Junning, *Baoshou zhuyi*, 49, 51, 70.

⁶⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 263.

⁶⁹⁹ Tao Dongfeng, “Baoshou ziyou zhuyi: Zhongguo wenhua jiangou de disantiao daolu,” *ZFL*, 475-485. Originally published in *Kaifang shidai* 1997:5, 32-37; Tao Dongfeng, “Ershi shiji Zhongguo de baoshou zhuyi: jianlun ziyou yu chuantong zhi guanxi,” 217-261.

⁷⁰⁰ Xu Jilin, “The Fate of an Enlightenment,” 198.

1974), a critic of the Cultural Revolution, were published posthumously.⁷⁰¹ Gu Zhun's stance has often been defined as liberal and individualist.⁷⁰² Some of Gu Zhun's arguments appealed to intellectuals of the 1990s. For example, the argument that direct democracy was only feasible in the Greek city-state, not in a country such as China; the argument that the utopianism of the revolution had been mistaken: "on earth, it is impossible to found a Heavenly Kingdom"; or the argument that ultimate goals were to be renounced—the only ultimate goal was progress.⁷⁰³ Another important source of inspiration was Friedrich von Hayek, whose *The Road to Serfdom* and *The Constitution of Liberty* were translated into Chinese in 1997. As mentioned earlier, Hayek had been translated into Chinese before that time, but the translations had not been as widely available as during the late 1990s.

The explicit connection between conservatism and a form of liberalism in the 1992 debate and after clearly differed from the use of the concept of "neo-conservatism" in the years before 1992, during which it had been coined as part of the advocacy of a strong state. Whereas the embracement of conservative liberalism only became widespread since the mid-1990s, there was already a clear movement in this direction in the 1992 debate. The New Left intellectual Wang Hui has described the shift in the use of the term "conservatism" as a label as follows:

In the mid-nineties, the group around Liu Junning argued publicly, claiming that true liberalism is a form of conservatism, because of its belief in order. This is a very revealing shift of terms, since in the eighties and early nineties conservatism was always used as a pejorative term to describe anyone who was regarded as insufficiently enthusiastic about the market, or too willing to envisage a positive role for the state—the label was applied to people like Hu Angang or Cui Zhiyuan.⁷⁰⁴

Though Wang Hui's comment is not entirely correct—already during the early 1990s, as shown in the previous chapters, some intellectuals consciously used the term "conservatism" to denote their point of view—it is true that the term had first been

⁷⁰¹ Gu Zhun, *Gu Zhun wenji* (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1994). The collected works included Wang Yuanhua's introduction to Gu Zhun's *From Idealism to Empiricism*, which also appeared in Wang Yuanhua, *Sibianlu*, 185-187; Gu Zhun, *Gu Zhun riji*, eds. Chen Minzhi and Ding Dong (Beijing: Jingji ribao chubanshe, 1997).

⁷⁰² Davies, *Worrying about China*, 157.

⁷⁰³ Gu Zhun, *Gu Zhun wenji*, 370.

⁷⁰⁴ Wang Hui, "The New Criticism," 68.

associated with the defense of a strong state, whereas now, it entered the framework of meaning of liberalism and gradualism. The negative connotation that had previously been ascribed to “conservatism” was now reserved for “radicalism,” which was explicitly tied to socialism and revolution. Nonetheless, despite the marriage between “conservatism” and gradual reform, the term was rarely applied in this context to uphold the preservation of customs, institutions, or habits.

4.6 ON REFORM AND REVOLUTION

4.6.1 *Radicalism, Revolution, and Progressivism*

The 1992 debate reveals that the advocacy of gradualism was clearly not based on a denial of abstract rationalism as a style of thought; rationalism was only rejected in the concrete political form of socialism and revolution. Since “radicalism” was now coupled to revolution, whereas liberalism was linked to gradual reform, at an academic forum in 2003, Xu Jilin argued that the model of “conservatism” versus “radicalism” was but a replacement of the model of reform versus revolution.⁷⁰⁵ For the 1992 debate, this claim was mostly true; denunciations of “radicalism” were not related to Yü Ying-shih’s criticism of “progressivism” as a conception of how to bring about change.

In spite of this, in some criticisms of “radicalism” that date from after 1992, intellectuals did attach “radicalism” to a certain style of thought that approached Yü Ying-shih’s “neoterism.” As such, the reference to the pair of “isms” of “conservatism” and “radicalism” during the 1990s also reached further than a discussion on reform versus revolution; it cannot be denounced as a mere imitation of the official preoccupation with reform. The literary critic Wang Yuanhua (b. 1920), for example, argued that both the positive connotation of “radicalism” and the obsession with new things in China could be attributed to the impact of evolution theory in particular.⁷⁰⁶ Elsewhere, Wang Yuanhua stated that he used to write under the guidance of “fixed concepts,” which led him to affirm reform, revolution, and progress.⁷⁰⁷ Wang Yuanhua did not only denounce revolution; he attacked the entire intellectual framework of which it was a part.

⁷⁰⁵ For an outline, see “‘Zhongguo jindai sixiangshi shang de baoshou yu jijin’ xueshu taolunhui zongshu,” *Jindaishi yanjiu* 2004:2, 291-301.

⁷⁰⁶ Wang Yuanhua, “Guanyu jinnian de fansi dawen,” *Wenyi lilun yanjiu* 1995:1, 2-8.

⁷⁰⁷ Wang Yuanhua, “Ji wo de sanci fansi licheng,” *Qingyuan jinzuoji*, 10-22. Reference from 19.

In a 1995 article, Ji Guangmao argued that it was the linear concept of time in particular that had formed the basis of all manifestations of “radicalism.”⁷⁰⁸ In China, this concept of time had not only brought about nihilism with regard to the Chinese past, it had also led to the embrace of progressivism and “only ‘new’-ism” (*weixin zhuyi*), or the belief that only new things were valuable. According to progressivism, Ji Guangmao explained, societies permanently moved into ever better directions, and positive value was placed on the future. Ji discerned two kinds of progressivism, namely “gradualism” (*jianjin zhuyi*) and “radicalism.” Both adhered to a linear concept of time and a positive view of the future, but gradualists were convinced that change should occur in an orderly and slow manner. “Radicalism,” on the other hand, perceived of permanent revolution as a progressive force. In this sense, Ji Guangmao argued, “one could also call all forms of ‘radicalism’ ‘revolutionism.’”⁷⁰⁹ Conservatism, on the other hand, envisioned the preservation of the blood tie between the present and the past. Nevertheless, Ji Guangmao argued, conservatism in China had not left the linearity of “radicalism”: like “radicalism,” it had a nationalist spirit; its goal remained Chinese development, progress, and prosperity.

Although Ji Guangmao coupled “radicalism” to revolution, his conception of “radicalism” nevertheless surpassed a concrete political program. “Radicalism” referred to a certain time consciousness and a conception of change that is reminiscent of Mannheim’s notion of “progressivism.” Moreover, since Ji Guangmao also conceived of Chinese conservatism as subjected to this very time consciousness, his account outdid the simplistic dualism that dominated most articles on the topic. Moreover, Ji Guangmao’s description revealed the problematic use of the concept of “conservatism” in the context of the obsession with modernization, prosperity, and development. Could a true conservatism arise in this type of environment? Could it ever go beyond the “linearity” that Ji Guangmao discerned?

Similarly, although Chang Hao also thought of “radicalism” and revolution together, his “radicalism” was a historical view of linear development in which the present formed the historical turning point on the road towards a bright and ideal

⁷⁰⁸ Ji Guangmao, “Nanyuan yu beizhe zhijian: cong liangpian wenzhang lüekui baoshou zhuyi yu jijin zhuyi de xunxi,” *Wenyi zhengming* 1995:4, 12-20.

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

future.⁷¹⁰ This linear view, Chang Hao argued, had been the product of both Chinese tradition and Western evolution theory. For Chang Hao, “radical idealism” consisted of two trends of thought, namely a “group consciousness” and an “individual consciousness.” The former manifested itself in the belief in nationalism, utopianism, and a populist concept of direct democracy—as in Rousseau’s “General Will”—whereas the latter was epitomized by the faith in man’s moral integrity and his ability to transform the world, a trait that had been inherited from the moral idealism of Confucianism. This “radical idealism,” then, constituted the main element of revolutionary thought: it adhered to utopianism and the deification of man. Consequently, Chang Hao found fault with both conceptions of linear development and the neglect of the limits of man’s abilities.

These authors surpassed a political criticism of revolution; they took issue with the meaning that the word revolution had acquired in the modern period. As Koselleck has noted, originally, the word revolution involved the notion of a return or circulation.⁷¹¹ More precisely, the term had a naturalistic and transhistorical connotation because it had entered politics via astronomy. In astronomy, the concept had been applied to describe the “circular movement of celestial bodies,” as expressed in the title of Copernicus’ *De revolutionibus orbium caelestium* (1543). Since the time of the French Revolution, however, the concept of revolution had been stripped of this connotation of the return to things familiar; revolution “led forward into an unknown future.”⁷¹²

In this modern sense, “revolution” became a metahistorical concept that stood for social revolution, or the emancipation of mankind; revolution was perceived of as global and permanent. Also, in contradistinction to the original meaning, it was believed that men could make revolutions. In *On Revolution*, Hannah Arendt has also pointed out the distinction between the initial meaning of the astronomic term revolution as the “regular, lawfully revolving motion of the stars” and its association with elements such as “novelty” and “beginning” in the modern age.⁷¹³ It was the emphasis on “novelty,”

⁷¹⁰ Chang Hao, “Zhongguo jinbainian lai de geming sixiang daolu,” *ZFL*, 42-56. Originally published in *Kaifang shidai* 1999:1, 39-47.

⁷¹¹ See Koselleck’s chapter on “Historical Criteria of the Modern Concept of Revolution,” in *Futures Past*, 43-57.

⁷¹² *Ibid.*, 49.

⁷¹³ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 32, 37.

the projection of goals into the future, and the linear conception of change in particular that intellectuals tackled in the abovementioned articles.

4.6.2 Farewell to Revolution: *A Controversial Volume*

Rejections of revolution based on a criticism of a progressivist time consciousness were nevertheless rare. As in the 1992 debate, other criticisms of revolution mostly took the errors of the Chinese socialist experience as a point of departure, on the basis of which a more gradual and rational approach to social change was recommended. One important manifestation of the explicit denunciation of revolution in favor of reform concerns the controversial 1995 volume *Farewell to Revolution*, the account of a dialogue between the philosopher Li Zehou and the literary critic Liu Zaifu (b. 1941), the former head of the Research Institute of Literature at CASS, both of whom resided in the United States at the time.⁷¹⁴

In his writings on literature between 1984 and 1986, Liu Zaifu had denounced a historical materialism in which the human subject had practically been obliterated. This criticism, as Wang Jing has noted, was a clear echo of the 1983 debate on “humanist Marxism.”⁷¹⁵ Li Zehou had played an important role in the “Enlightenment” movement of the 1980s as a spokesperson for liberty, democracy, and subjectivity; many of the themes expressed in *Farewell to Revolution* were a continuation of concerns that Li Zehou had expressed in earlier writings. As Woei-Lien Chong has argued, the core argument that ran through all Li Zehou’s writings was that Maoism was not related to Marxism; it was a continuation of traditional Chinese philosophy. When Marxism was received in China, it had not been understood as the product of a European philosophy in which the subject wanted to conquer nature; it had been interpreted according to traditional frameworks in which nature could be transformed according to the human will. Li Zehou attacked Mao Zedong’s emphasis on “consciousness” and the moral will

⁷¹⁴ Li Zehou, Liu Zaifu, *Gaobie geming: huiwang ershi shiji Zhongguo* (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1995). Li Zehou arrived in the United States on January Fourth, 1992. He was based at Colorado College; Liu Zaifu was affiliated with the University of Colorado at Boulder.

⁷¹⁵ Wang, *High Culture Fever*, 202. On Liu Zaifu’s concern with subjectivity, see *ibid.*, 201-206.

in particular, because this ignored the fact that the crux of development lay in changing the mode of production.⁷¹⁶

In the controversial 1995 volume, the revolution that the authors bade farewell to, they explained, referred to “fierce actions by which the existing system and authority are reversed with mass violence and drastic methods”; it did not involve the national revolution against foreign invasion.⁷¹⁷ The authors parted with Lenin, Stalin, and Mao Zedong, all of whom had been preoccupied with class struggle, revolution, dialectical materialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat. In brief, they had focused too much on ideology, “isms,” and the superstructure. Instead, Li Zehou and Liu Zaifu proposed, among other things, economy as the basis, historical materialism, class cooperation, gradual reform, and the separation of society and government.⁷¹⁸

Several years before the book appeared, Li Zehou had already explicitly argued that China did not need revolution, but reform, and that the revolution of 1911 had neither been necessary nor unavoidable.⁷¹⁹ In a 1992 article, Li Zehou claimed to be in favor of pluralism, tolerance, rationality, and the rule of law; he mentioned John Locke (1632-1704), Karl Popper, Edmund Burke, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Friedrich von Hayek as inspiration sources.⁷²⁰ Two years later, in two 1994 issues of *Orient* (*Dongfang*), Li explicitly linked the reform practice of “crossing the river by touching the stones” to Hayek’s opposition to an excessive belief in rationality and to Popper’s “piecemeal engineering.”⁷²¹ Li stated that liberty was the product of the accumulation of experience and that the rule of law was a gradual process—the door to Chinese democracy had to be opened slowly. Li Zehou also argued that a true moral reconstruction process could only take place after the unity between religion, ethics, and politics, as in the “pan-moralism” of both Confucianism and Mao Zedong, had been destroyed.

⁷¹⁶ Chong, “Mankind and Nature in Chinese Thought,” 139, 147, 151, 154-167; idem, “Philosophy in an Age of Crisis,” 218-219.

⁷¹⁷ Li Zehou, Liu Zaifu, *Gaobie geming*, 4.

⁷¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 10, 14-15.

⁷¹⁹ Li Zehou, “Heping jinhua, fuxing Zhonghua (*shang*),” 42-43. Li Zehou had already made the comparison between English liberalism and reform, on the one hand, and between French liberalism and revolution, on the other hand, in his *Zhongguo jindai sixiangshi lun* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1979). In *Farewell to Revolution*, Li Zehou stated that his division between the French and the English model went back to 1978. See *ibid.*, 66.

⁷²⁰ Li Zehou, “Heping jinhua, fuxing Zhonghua (*shang*),” 44.

⁷²¹ Li Zehou, Wang Desheng, “Guanyu wenhua xianzhuang, daode chongjian de duihua,” *ZFL*, 74-83. Originally appeared in *Dongfang* 1994:5, 69-73, and in *Dongfang* 1994:6, 85-87.

In the 1995 volume, the authors further condemned Mao's "philosophy of struggle" and the "irrationality" of the Mao era; they proposed to supplant it with a "philosophy of eating," "economics as the basis," and "constructive rationality."⁷²² For this purpose, Hayek and Popper, so the authors claimed, had more to offer than Mao Zedong, whose politics of "you die, I live" (*nisi wohuo*) had caused a lot of "radical sentiments."⁷²³ Li Zehou and Liu Zaifu praised the "pragmatic rationality" of Deng Xiaoping's reforms: they were based on common sense and reason, and they were congruous with classical Marxism.⁷²⁴ As to political democracy, the authors conceived of it as a process of four stages, namely economic development, individual liberty, social justice, and, finally, political democracy.

The authors traced the origins of "radicalism" back to the late Qing intellectual Tan Sitong, who had attacked the core of the Confucian order, namely the theory of the "three bonds" (*sangang*) between ruler and official, father and son, and husband and wife.⁷²⁵ They further stated that the constitutionalism of Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao would have been preferable to the Revolution of 1911. Although the Qing dynasty was rotten, it could still have fulfilled a stabilizing function, whereas its sudden collapse only led to warlordism and chaos. The English model of the Glorious Revolution was preferable to that of the French Revolution, as exemplified in the Meiji restoration (1868), a topic to which the authors devoted an entire chapter.⁷²⁶ The authors compared a republic with a nominal emperor to the English model, whereas the violent overthrow of the emperor resembled the French model. Like Hayek, the authors further equated the English and the French model with two different traditions of individualism and liberty.⁷²⁷

Liu Zaifu later described the book as having given a "new acknowledgment" and a "new understanding" of hundred years of Chinese history, an understanding that did away with "the adoration of revolution, the adoration of necessity and other mentalities."⁷²⁸ What Liu Zaifu meant by this was that the authors had argued in favor

⁷²² Li Zehou, Liu Zaifu, *Gaobie geming*, 2-3.

⁷²³ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁷²⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷²⁵ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

⁷²⁶ See the chapter on "Geming yu gailiang: shijixing de tongku xuanze" (Revolution and reform: the painful choice of a century), *ibid.*, 65-78.

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁷²⁸ Liu Zaifu, "Lixing chongping bainian Zhongguo," *EYS* 31 (October 1995), 38-39. Quote from page 38.

of an attitude that would replace determinism with the recognition that there were different sides to each story. This attitude, then, was in line with the “antinomy” (*erlü beifan*) of the historical process itself. As Li Zehou explained it, “history always advanced amidst contradictions”—each side had its value; it was difficult to say which side was right and which side was wrong.⁷²⁹

Although Li Zehou and Liu Zaifu had not explicitly denounced the revolution of 1949, they had openly relinquished the idea that revolution was the main narrative of modern Chinese history. In a section on the “philosophy of struggle,” the authors disapproved of the works of the famous historians of modern China Hu Sheng and Liu Danian, who had depicted the history of modern China as a history driven by revolution and struggle.⁷³⁰ It is no surprise, then, that Marxist historians such as Jiang Yihua criticized the thesis that the Revolution of 1911 had not been the product of radical intellectuals. In response, Jiang Yihua argued that history was not driven by the individual will; the problem with the revolution of 1911 was precisely that it had not been thorough enough.⁷³¹ Similarly, Li Jinqian argued in response that the failure of constitutional reform at the end of the Qing had been decided by the objective circumstances of a semi-colonized and semi-feudal society.⁷³²

The authors were attacked from one side for having abandoned historical determinism. Paradoxically, from another side, critics argued that the four-stage theory to democracy that they had proposed in the 1995 volume amounted to historical determinism. The political scientist Tang Tsou (Zou Dang) from the University of California argued that the relationship between economic development and democracy was one of probability, not one of necessity. Moreover, the four-stage model ignored the crucial aspect of the choice of the political actors.⁷³³ Chang Jiang noted that the “four steps” to democracy corresponded to the very historical determinism that Li

⁷²⁹ Li Zehou, Liu Zaifu, *Gaobie geming*, 152.

⁷³⁰ Instead, the authors sympathized with the view of Li Yimang that the main events in modern Chinese history were the Self-strengthening Movement, the Reform Movement of 1898, and the Revolution of 1911. Although Li Yimang was very influential in the Party, his views were nevertheless criticized and repressed. *Ibid.*, 180.

⁷³¹ Jiang Yihua, Chen Yan, “Jijin yu baoshou: yiduan shangwei wanjie de duihua,” 35.

⁷³² Li Jinqian, “Zhongguo jindaishi jige wenti pingjia de zai pingjia,” *ZFL*, 84-92. Originally published in *Zhexue yanjiu* 1995:10, 3-7.

⁷³³ Zou Dang (Tsou Tsang), “Du ‘gaobie geming’: zhi Li Zehou, Liu Zaifu,” *EYS* 33 (February 1996), 62-67.

Zehou had criticized so fiercely before.⁷³⁴ From a liberal point of view, then, like mainland intellectuals, Li Zehou and Liu Zaifu merely emphasized the primacy of economic reform.

Nevertheless, despite the similarities between *Farewell to Revolution* and the advocacy of gradual economic reform in the 1992 debate, there were also some crucial differences. Although in both cases, intellectuals adhered to a belief in the “rhetorics of transition”—economic reform would lead to political reform in the future—and although both tied “radicalism” with socialism and the French model of liberty, *Farewell to Revolution* argued in favor of a return to orthodox Marxism. Whereas many mainland intellectuals had invoked Hayek and Popper in the context of a framework of conservative liberalism, Li Zehou and Liu Zaifu quoted these thinkers because they had emphasized the significance of experience. Following the princelings in Chapter Two, Hayek and Popper were put into use as critics of utopian socialism and advocates of realism and reason rather than as spokesmen for economic liberalism. Although Li Zehou and Liu Zaifu underscored the value of the rule of law, they subscribed to economic reform not as part of an economic liberalism, but as part of a healthy socialism.

4.7 CRITICISMS OF “ANTI-RADICALISM”

4.7.1 *Marxist and Other Criticisms*

As the harsh treatment of both socialism and revolution in modern Chinese history reveals, history was more than a vehicle in the debate on “conservatism” and “radicalism”; as already argued in Chapter Three, history also constituted the very object of revision. Because *Farewell to Revolution* went further than other rejections of “radicalism” in its explicit condemnation of revolution, it became the main object of attack in official media such as *Guangming ribao* (Enlightenment Daily), *Renmin ribao* (People’s Daily), *Beijing ribao* (Beijing Daily), and the Party journal *Hongqi* (Red Flag). In *Guangming ribao* of March 12, 1996, for example, an article on the “correct” assessment of modern Chinese history appeared.⁷³⁵ According to the article, “without

⁷³⁴ Chang Jiang, “Shehui zhuanxingqi de yizhong wenhua xianxiang: ping ‘Gaobie geming,’” *EYS* 33 (February 1996), 68-71.

⁷³⁵ “Zhengque renshi Zhongguo jindaishi shang de geming yu gailiang,” *Guangming ribao*, March 12, 1996, 5.

the armed revolution led by the CCP, there would be no talk of today's socialist modernization construction.”⁷³⁶ Other points made in the article were that the 1911 Revolution and the failure of peaceful construction afterwards had to be ascribed to the historical conditions of imperialism and feudalism; the “soft reformism” of the English model reform had been based on violent struggle no less than the revolution had been.⁷³⁷ In brief, the claim that reform was better than revolution amounted to “historical idealism.”⁷³⁸

Marxist responses to these revaluations of history also appeared in the pages of journals such as *Gaoxiao lilun zhanxian* (Theoretical Front in Higher Education), *Zhexue yanjiu* (Philosophy Research), and *Qiushi* (Seeking Truth), as well as in the form of several volumes that discussed crucial events in modern Chinese history.⁷³⁹ In the latter, the “correct” view of modern Chinese history, namely dialectical materialism, was exposed, and the “cultural view of history” (*wenhua shiguan*) was fiercely attacked. Two famous volumes in this respect were *History's Response (Lishi de huida)* and *Which Way to Go (Zou shenme lu)*, both of which dealt with modern Chinese history *in toto*.⁷⁴⁰ In the journal *Theoretical Front in Higher Education*, the Marxist Confucian Fang Keli argued that attacks on “radicalism” were part of a “cultural conservative trend” that denied revolution and that took a stand against Marxist ideology.⁷⁴¹ Elsewhere, Fang Keli also warned against this “culturalist” and “idealist” view of history that was part of an international attempt to bring down socialism in the context

⁷³⁶ Ibid.

⁷³⁷ Ibid. In the article, it was argued that the bourgeoisie had used armed force to reverse King Stewart during the revolution of 1642-1649. This revolution had not been “soft” at all; in essence, it was not different from the French Revolution. Without the violent revolution of 1642-1649, the peaceful reform of 1688 could not have taken place. Similarly, the Meiji reformers first had to reverse the old government before they were able to push forward their “peaceful” reform.

⁷³⁸ Ibid.

⁷³⁹ See, for example, Zhang Lin, Wang Yinhuan, Jing Jianbin et al., “Qingnian xuesheng shiye zhong de Zhongguo yilai de lishi daolu,” *Gaoxiao lilun zhanxian* 1997:6, 31-40; Gong Shuduo, Li Wenhui, Zhang Haipeng et al., “Wusi yundong yu ershi shiji Zhongguo de daolu,” in *ibid.*, 1996: 6, 16-25; Kong Lingzhao, “Ba lishi de neirong huangei lishi: ping yizhong guannianlun de wenhua shiguan,” *Zhexue yanjiu* 1995:4, 3-7.

⁷⁴⁰ Gong Shuduo, Jin Chongji, and Song Xiaoqing, *Lishi de Huida: Zhongguo jindaishi yanjiu zhong de jige yuanze lunzheng* (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 2001); Sha Jiansun and Gong Shuduo, eds., *Zou shenme lu: yu Zhongguo jinxiandai lishi shang de ruogan zhongda shifei wenti* (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 1997).

⁷⁴¹ Fang Keli, “Yao zhuyi yanjiu 90 niandai chuxian de wenhua baoshou zhuyi sichao,” *Gaoxiao lilun zhanxian* 1996:2, 30-36.

of the end of the Cold War.⁷⁴² For Marxist theorists, the rise of rejections of “radicalism” in a Marxist climate was therefore not coincidental; it obviously served an ideological purpose.⁷⁴³ In this context, then, the label “cultural conservatism” was applied to target what was perceived of as a dangerous and anti-socialist trend that took culture instead of matter as the starting point of analysis.

Similarly, in a Ph.D. thesis on the topic of the “value characteristics” of “cultural conservatism” during the 1990s, author Jiang Xudong mentioned the denial of revolution in the critique of “radicalism” as one trait of this trend, the other traits being the return to tradition and the opposition to modernization.⁷⁴⁴ As Jiang Xudong phrased it, the only right choice to wealth and power was to walk the road of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” under the guidance of Marxism.⁷⁴⁵ In a chapter on the denial of revolution, Jiang Xudong fiercely criticized the idealist historical perspective of “cultural conservatism.” Jiang referred to Deng Xiaoping’s comment that Mao Zedong Thought could not be discarded; that would mean a denial of the Party’s history.⁷⁴⁶

In the abovementioned Ph.D. thesis, Jiang Xudong also referred to a book by Li Yi on the relation between Chinese Marxism and “cultural conservatism.” In the book, Li Yi argued that, during the 1990s, “cultural conservatism,” or the attempt to rescue China through culture, had acquired some new features. The revival of Confucianism had been instigated by Confucian scholars abroad; it made use of the criticism of “cultural radicalism” to attack the “political radicalism” of the Cultural Revolution and utopian socialism. Consequently, its criticism of “cultural radicalism” coincided with a denial of revolution and with a reversal of verdicts on “traitors” (*hanjian*) in modern Chinese history.⁷⁴⁷ This was opposite to the practice of “cultural conservatives” of previous generations, such as the so-called New Confucians, who had never deployed cultural criticism to attack revolution in this manner.

In academic journals, Marxist scholars also perceived of the discarding of “radicalism” as part of a “conservative trend” that aimed at the reversal of socialism. Xie Wujun, for example, divided this “conservative trend” into “neo-conservatism,”

⁷⁴² Fang Keli, “Lüelun jiushi niandai de wenhua baoshou zhuyi sichao,” 145-161.

⁷⁴³ Fang Keli, “Yao zhuyi wenhua baoshou zhuyi,” 35.

⁷⁴⁴ Jiang Xudong, *Lun dangdai Zhongguo wenhua baoshou zhuyi de jiazhi tezheng*, Ph.D. diss., Zhongguo renmin daxue, 2003.

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 95-138. Reference from 138.

⁷⁴⁷ Li Yi, *Zhongguo makesi zhuyi yu dangdai wenhua baoshou zhuyi sichao yanjiu*, 13-14.

“cultural conservatism,” and “conservative liberalism.”⁷⁴⁸ Xie Wujun considered “conservative liberalism” the greatest challenge to socialism, because those who adhered to it praised Edmund Burke’s attack on the French Revolution and Friedrich von Hayek’s denial of socialism and the planned economy. “Cultural conservatism,” on the contrary, could be used for the construction of “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” and “neo-conservatism,” Xie Wujun argued, also included the socialist tradition in its conception of tradition.

Whereas Marxist critics thus considered denunciations of “radicalism” to be a denial of socialism and revolution, from another angle, critics argued that rejections of “radicalism” were a blind confirmation of the official reform policy. For Wang Hui—who has been labeled a “New Leftist” since the late 1990s—the fact that criticism was only directed at socialism and not at “modernity” in a general sense meant that capitalist modernity remained unchallenged. Therefore, for Wang Hui, there was no difference between liberals and conservatives during the 1990s—both embraced a “neoliberalism” that advocated the expansion of the market without including social guarantees.⁷⁴⁹ Similarly, Zhang Xudong argued that mainland debates on Edmund Burke were debates on democracy that were held in a “coded language,” partly because of political repression, but also because Western thought was used to claim legitimacy.⁷⁵⁰ The “radicalism” of May Fourth was erased, and its liberal heritage was drawn into a neoliberal modernization ideology.⁷⁵¹

Zhang Xudong also added that mainland intellectuals had distorted Yü Ying-shih’s political liberalism by only advocating gradual economic reform without highlighting the crucial factor of political reform.⁷⁵² Zhang Xudong’s claim that mainland criticisms of “radicalism” neglected the aspect of political reform was not unique. Gan Yang, who had earlier inspired mainland intellectuals with his rejection of the French Revolution in favor of the Glorious Revolution, now denounced mainland references to the English model that served the denial of both democracy and liberty.⁷⁵³ The discarding of “radicalism” on mainland China implied a historical rejection of the

⁷⁴⁸ Xie Wujun, “Ping Zhongguo dangdai de baoshou zhuyi sichao,” *Dangdai sichao* 2001: 4, 13-29.

⁷⁴⁹ Wang Hui, *China’s New Order*, 144.

⁷⁵⁰ Zhang Xudong, “Intellectual Politics,” 5.

⁷⁵¹ Zhang Xudong, “Post-Tiananmen Intellectual Field,” 31.

⁷⁵² *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷⁵³ Gan Yang, “Debating Liberalism and Democracy in China in the 1990s,” 79-101. A different version of this article is Gan Yang’s “A Critique of Chinese Conservatism in the 1990s,” 45-66.

revolutionary path, a cultural rejection of May Fourth, a political conservatism disguised as liberalism, and an economic liberalism.⁷⁵⁴ Gan Yang reiterated that his previous criticism of science and democracy in favor of liberty and order had been a necessity after the events of 1989, but in retrospect, he questioned the “intellectual quality” and “ideological inclination” of this stance.⁷⁵⁵ Edmund Burke’s position had been one of “old European aristocratic liberalism”; the advocacy of mainland Chinese intellectuals thus amounted to a pre-democratic liberalism.⁷⁵⁶

Gan Yang’s conclusion was too farfetched; the fact that the advocacy of “science and democracy” was supplanted with an advocacy of “liberalism” did not mean that all intellectuals relinquished the ideals of science and democracy *tout court*. In a 1997 article in *Twenty-First Century*, Ye Wen phrased the matter as follows: “Of course we love democracy, but what we need more is liberty.”⁷⁵⁷ For Ye Wen, liberty was “the soul of democracy”; de Tocqueville was a liberal first, and a democrat second. Instead of an outright anti-democratic stance, the embrace of economic liberalism can also be interpreted as a shift in terms of strategy. Whereas before, intellectuals had opted for the strategy of direct confrontation, now, it was generally believed that gradual economic reform was a better way to reach the goal of democracy. Intellectuals like Li Zehou and Wang Yuanhua, for example, by no means abandoned the ideals they had cherished during the 1980s; they merely made a case for a more realistic and pragmatic approach given the fact that the strategy of the 1980s had failed.

According to the political liberal Xu Ben, the pair “conservatism/radicalism” was nothing but a “pseudo-binary.”⁷⁵⁸ Xu Ben attributed the choice for “radicalism” instead of “liberalism” as the opposite of “conservatism” to the fact that liberalism was low-key and that the meaning of “radicalism” could be stretched to include anything that went against the status quo. Furthermore, the concept of “antiradicalism” provided Chinese conservatives with several advantages: it granted the discourse an indigenous

⁷⁵⁴ Gan Yang, “Debating Liberalism and Democracy,” 79-81. For Gan Yang’s argument that mainland Chinese liberalism of the 1990s was anti-democratic, see also his “Fan minzhu ziyou zhuyi haishi minzhu ziyou zhuyi,” *EYS* 39 (February 1997), 4-17.

⁷⁵⁵ Gan Yang, “Debating Liberalism and Democracy,” 89.

⁷⁵⁶ For his criticism of Burke, Gan Yang based himself on Isaiah Berlin, for whom Burke was a reactionary inspired by de Maistre. Gan Yang referred to Berlin’s article “Maistre and the Origins of Fascism.” For another criticism of Maistre, see Isaiah Berlin, “The Romantic Revolution: A Crisis in the History of Modern Thought,” 168-193.

⁷⁵⁷ Ye Wen, “Zhengzhi de baoshou zhuyi he wenhua de baoshou zhuyi,” 137.

⁷⁵⁸ Xu Ben, *Disenchanted Democracy*, 182.

touch, it allowed intellectuals to distance themselves from anti-liberal rhetorics, and it enabled liberals to embrace conservative ideas.⁷⁵⁹ The fact that Yü Ying-shih, who did not have to hide his liberal aspirations, also availed himself of the terms “conservatism” and “radicalism” shows that Xu Ben’s criticism was overtly simplistic and that it overstated the role of liberalism in the debate. The reason why intellectuals adhered to a simplistic dualist framework had nothing to do with the place of liberalism in Chinese society. Rather, the use of the asymmetric “counterconcept” of “radicalism” enforced the reader to identify with “conservatism,” whatever content it was granted.

4.7.2 *Manifestations of “Cultural Conservatism”?*

Apart from the employment of the label “conservatism” for ideological purposes by Marxist critics, as discussed above, non-Marxist Chinese intellectuals have also carelessly applied the idea of a “conservative” trend to criticism of “radicalism” in general. For example, Chen Xiaoming, a researcher at the Institute of Literature at CASS, has argued that, since “radicalism” formed one side of a “dual antagonistic model,” the rejection of “radicalism” naturally led to “a value position of praising conservatism.”⁷⁶⁰ For Yang Chunshi, a Professor at the Chinese Department of Hainan Normal College, criticisms of “radicalism” were part of a “cultural conservative” trend, together with national studies (*guoxue*) and New Confucianism—which will be explored in the next chapter—and advocacies of postcolonialism and postmodernism, the subject of Chapter Six.⁷⁶¹ For Meng Fanhua, also a researcher at the Institute of Literature of CASS, the “cultural conservatism” of the 1990s contained three traits: a critical spirit that denied “radicalism” to realize a moderate and stable discourse, a move from collective to personal concerns, and the repudiation of ultimate goals and values in favor of a focus on concrete problems.⁷⁶² But what was “culturally conservative” about these three traits? Was anything “conservative” *at all* about these three traits? It appears

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁰ Chen Xiaoming, “Fan jijin zhuyi yu dangdai zhishi fenzi de lishi jingyu,” *ZFL*, 309-320. Reference from 314.

⁷⁶¹ Yang Chunshi, “Xin baoshou zhuyi yu xin lixing zhuyi,” *ZFL*, 486-492. Originally published in *Hainan shifan xueyuan xuebao* 1996: 2.

⁷⁶² Meng Fanhua, “Wenhua bengkui shidai de taowang yu guiyi: jiushi niandai wenhua de xin baoshou zhuyi jingshen,” *ZFL* 287-292. Reference from 289. Originally published in *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu* 1994: 2.

that critics echoed arguments from the Marxist camp without being able to justify their preference for the terms “cultural” and “conservative.”

As demonstrated in this chapter, the reference to Edmund Burke in criticisms of “radicalism” was rarely part of an argument in which conservative goals were defended on conservative grounds. It has been exposed that “radicalism” was a nebulous concept that intellectuals appropriated for their own purposes. There was not only a considerable difference between the way criticisms of “radicalism” were appropriated by the princelings, by Xiao Gongqin, and by the intellectuals discussed in this chapter; there was also no consistent use of the concepts of “radicalism” and “conservatism” *within* the 1992 debate. In line with the “multiaccultural” nature of the counterconcept of “radicalism,” then, the notion of a “conservative trend” needs to be treated with caution. As Wang Hui has rightly argued, “anti-radicalism” was a distinct historical phenomenon between 1989 and 1993 that was not a “unified intellectual trend” based on a “comprehensive conservative theory.”⁷⁶³ Instead, much energy in the debate was devoted to the analysis of “radicalism” as a political strategy; not all participants gave up “radical” goals and identified with “conservatism.” As Chen Shaoming, a Professor in the Philosophy Department of Zhongshan University, has formulated it, there was “low-key” criticism of “radicalism,” which negated its means, but not its social goals, and “high-key” criticism that negated both means and goals.⁷⁶⁴

The general applicability of the term “cultural conservatism” to the critique of “radicalism” is even more questionable. It can be derived from the debate that the criticism of “radicalism” was not necessarily part of the promotion of Chinese culture. Whereas Yü Ying-shih was concerned with the continuity of Chinese tradition, other intellectuals were more interested in gradual economic reform than in Chinese tradition. Although the notion of gradual reform based on evolutionary instead of revolutionary change implied historical continuity, the advocacy of gradual reform was not a manifestation of “cultural conservatism,” for the goal was not the safeguarding of Chinese culture as such. In brief, then, there was a big contrast between Yü Ying-shih’s cultural concerns and the preoccupation with procedural gradualism of some intellectuals in the 1992 debate.

⁷⁶³ Wang Hui, *China’s New Order*, 81.

⁷⁶⁴ Chen Shaoming, “Didiao yixie: xiang wenhua baoshou zhuyi jinyan,” *ZFL*, 507-513. Reference from 509. Originally published in *Dongfang* 1996: 3.

Many Chinese intellectuals have also contrasted this “cultural” form of conservatism as an attitude toward Chinese tradition with a “political” conservatism that was set on preserving the political status quo. Wang Yuechuan, for example, has linked “political radicalism” with the myth of power, politics, and ideology, whereas “cultural radicalism” denied the value of cultural tradition.⁷⁶⁵ In a text by Ye Wen, “cultural conservatism” was used to denote both the “national studies” of the 1990s and the revival of postcolonialism in China. “Political conservatism,” on the other hand, consisted of both “old conservatism” and “neo-conservatism.”⁷⁶⁶

Given the fact that Chinese intellectuals have interpreted “radicalism” both as “antitraditionalism” and as “revolution” or “socialism,” the simplistic distinction between a “cultural” and a “political” conservatism does not reflect the complexity of the issues at hand. Whereas Furth and Schwartz had initially applied the concept of “cultural conservatism” to Republican China because, they argued, a Burkean preservation of the political status quo had been absent—and the political and cultural orders had been separated after the fall of the empire—it is harder to apply the concept to 1990s China. For it can hardly be upheld that the cultural and the political orders were separated. Both in the “neo-conservatism” of the princelings and Xiao Gongqin, and in the 1992 debate, politics played a prominent role. Even Yü Ying-shih tied his cultural concerns to a political criticism of the CCP. “Cultural conservatism” was political because it challenged Marxist conceptions of “Chineseness”; “political conservatism” was also cultural in that it accorded a role to traditional elements in the modernization program. The main distinction between the two, then, was the *role* attributed to tradition: whereas “political conservatism” envisioned a largely instrumental or procedural role for tradition, “cultural conservatives” promoted tradition because of its intrinsic value.

In addition, the cultural variant has often been aligned with something referred to as “cultural nationalism.” As discussed in Chapter One, this notion implied that the focus of loyalty was not the Party, the state, or the country, but a cultural conception of the Chinese nation; the essence of the Chinese nation was primarily located in Chinese culture. Implicit in this notion of “cultural nationalism” was the concern with the relation between Chinese and Western culture, which is why it has often been reduced

⁷⁶⁵ Wang Yuechuan, “Jijin yu baoshou zhiwei,” *ZFL*, 423-425.

⁷⁶⁶ Ye Wen, “Ying qubie zhengzhi de baoshou zhuyi he wenhua de baoshou zhuyi,” *EYS* 40 (April 1997), 137-138.

to an emotional reaction of Chinese intellectuals to “Western” culture. For Wang Yuechuan, for example, “cultural conservatism” was part of a global reaction against modernity; it often aligned with cultural nationalism.⁷⁶⁷ Zheng Dahua, a researcher at the Department of Intellectual History of the Institute of Modern History at CASS, also discerned strong nationalist traits in “cultural conservatism,” since it dealt with the problem of the relation between foreign and Chinese culture.⁷⁶⁸ The notion that “cultural conservatism” was somehow linked to a viewpoint of “cultural nationalism” and that it was a global reaction against modernity was too reductionist. Although figures such as Yü Ying-shih were certainly concerned with the preservation of Chinese cultural identity, the main *problematique* they discerned was not spatial but temporal in nature. Although both Marxism and liberalism were Western products, Yü did not attack them because they were Western, but because they had destroyed historical continuity. As Yü has remarked, since May Fourth, Chinese intellectuals did not focus on the fact that concepts were Western, but that they were *new*. Yü Ying-shih advocated Confucian values not primarily because they represented Chinese culture, but because they glued the community together; they were good first, and Chinese second. Other intellectuals attempted to reconcile conservatism with liberalism; they relied on Western conceptions of these theories in order to pursue gradual reform, which shows that the debate cannot simply be perceived of as a resistance against modernization along Western lines. In the next chapter, the association of Chinese conservatism with “cultural nationalism” will be criticized from a different angle.

4.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

According to the historian Yü Ying-shih, who triggered the first public debate on “conservatism” and “radicalism” in 1992, modern Chinese intellectual history had witnessed three stages of “radicalization,” namely the use of Western theories to reinterpret Chinese tradition between the 1890s and 1911, the rejection of Chinese tradition during the May Fourth era, and, finally, the arrival of Marxism to China. Yü’s “radicalism” entailed an attitude toward the Confucian tradition, but it also implied the lack of a political status quo, and, in a Burkean fashion, the eradication of intermediate

⁷⁶⁷ Wang Yuechuan, “Jijin yu baoshou zhiwei,” *ZFL*, 423-425.

⁷⁶⁸ Zheng Dahua, “Wenhua baoshou zhuyi,” 440.

groups in society. Yü's shifting perception of "radicalism" has been explained through his interpretation of Confucianism as manifested in social institutions—the safeguarding of Chinese tradition for Yü meant that social institutions had to be preserved, and this was more feasible under a stable political status quo.

Yü's account of "radicalism" was influenced by traditional Chinese historiography in the sense that for Yü, the history of modern China was the history of the loss of the Confucian moral order. For this reason, implicit in Yü's account was the notion that this order should be restored. Moreover, Yü's elitist conception of Chinese society meant that only the intellectual was capable of undoing the consequences of "radicalism." In addition, Yü's narrative implied that the CCP had no legitimacy; the history of "radicalization" was at the same time a political criticism of the CCP. Nevertheless, Yü's criticism was not tied to a political program for action, as Quirin has rightly argued; it was a moral accusation of the power holders.

Another source of inspiration for mainland critics of "radicalism" was the historian Lin Yü-sheng, a student of Friedrich van Hayek, who described May Fourth "radicalism" as "wholesale antitraditionalism." Like Yü Ying-shih, Lin Yü-sheng also discerned a move toward more radicalism with the May Fourth generation; he also found traces of this antitraditionalism in Maoism. Whereas both Lin Yü-sheng and Yü Ying-shih can be considered political liberals, Yü's stance was unique in that it combined this political liberalism with a conservatism that upheld historical continuity on conservative grounds and for conservative goals.

Mainland intellectuals appropriated the accounts of "radicalism" of both Lin Yü-sheng and Yü Ying-shih in the context of both the repression of the demonstrations on June fourth, 1989, and the intensification of economic reform since the start of 1992. It has been argued that denunciations of "radicalism" predated 1989—the "culture heat" of the 1980s had already brought about a renewed attention on Chinese culture and a critical view of the May Fourth Movement—but the events of 1989 brought these criticisms to the surface. The intellectual climate of the 1990s needs to be understood in relation to the "New Enlightenment Movement" of the 1980s, of which it was the logical consequence. Despite this continuity, the year 1989 occupied a central place in rejections of "radicalism."

Yü Ying-shih's highly elitist and hierarchical view of Chinese society, as well as his cultural conception of "Chineseness," diverged radically from the views of his main

opponent in the debate, the Marxist historian Jiang Yihua. The main point of discussion between Yü and Jiang Yihua concerned the nature of the Cultural Revolution, which was either considered the peak of “radicalism,” or the continuation of a feudal tradition. As a Marxist historian, Jiang approached the discussion from the angle of economic production and modernization, which meant that Yü’s cultural concerns became overshadowed by a discussion on history, society, and politics.

Other intellectuals in the 1992 debate either focused on a political criticism of the CCP or on a defense of gradual economic reform, but none of them engaged with Yü’s conservative argument of the preservation of intermediate groups in society. It has been argued that there was no consistent conservative position behind the use of the terms “conservatism” and “radicalism” in the 1992 debate. Although some made their argument for gradual reform on conservative grounds and referred to the notion of the social organism, the limits of reason, and historical growth, none of the participants argued in favor of gradual reform to defend conservative goals, such as the preservation of intermediate groups or other elements that could safeguard the community. Instead, the notion of gradual reform was incorporated in a liberal framework that was based on a selective interpretation of Karl Popper and Friedrich von Hayek.

Whereas Yü Ying-shih had invoked Edmund Burke’s criticism of the French Revolution to highlight that there could be no preservation without change, other intellectuals in the debate relied on the French Revolution as part of a liberal framework: following Hayek, they argued that the French Revolution represented a tradition of liberty based on abstract rationalism and grand social designs, whereas the Glorious Revolution of 1688 epitomized a tradition of liberty based on empiricism and concrete experience. As Gan Yang has summarized this shift, it was a move away from “science and democracy” toward “order and liberty.” As regards Popper, the most common reference concerned his notion of “piecemeal engineering,” which was merely quoted to speak for gradual economic reform. The core concerns of Popper, namely individualism, the security of freedom by the state, the institutional control of rulers, and a humanitarian concept of justice, were absent from the debate.⁷⁶⁹

A significant shift in the meaning ascribed to the concepts of “radicalism” and “conservatism” was that “radicalism” was now mostly connected with socialism and

⁷⁶⁹ Popper, *The Open Society*, Vol. 1, 102. On the institutional control of rulers and the proper understanding of justice, see *ibid.*, chapters six and seven respectively.

revolution, or with the liberalism of the French model, whereas “conservatism” was linked with British liberalism. Xiao Gongqin had already moved in this direction by linking “radicalism” with rationalist philosophy and “conservatism” with the tradition of empiricism, but he had not explicitly interpreted British liberalism as a form of conservative liberalism. This shift can be ascribed to the change in context: by 1992, economic reform had been affirmed as the status quo; the political intermezzo between 1989 and 1991 had ended. Instead of an argument for centralized rule, participants used a “rhetoric of transition” according to which economic reform was sufficient to reach the goal of democracy.⁷⁷⁰ Those who argued in favor of a conservative liberalism did not invoke the notion of the social organism. For liberals such as Popper, the social organism was a form of “tribalism”; it could only be connected with the closed society he opposed.⁷⁷¹

Some intellectuals who interpreted “radicalism” as revolution criticized the notion of progressivism, or, the linear conception of time according to which future development justified the eradication of tradition. As such, their outlook did contain some Mannheimian traits in that it did not merely provide “radicalism” with a concrete political content, but also with a more abstract “style of thought.” The question has been raised whether a conservative criticism of progressivism was possible at all in the context of the widespread obsession with modernization. Most criticisms of revolution were still based on the realities of the Chinese revolutionary experience rather than on a criticism of a mode of thought associated with progressivism or abstract reason. The controversial 1995 volume *Farewell to Revolution*, for example, reacted against the utopian socialism of the Mao era in particular. Referring to Popper and Hayek, the authors Li Zehou and Liu Zaifu presented economic reform as a return to orthodox Marxism after the aberrations of the Mao era, during which the primacy of economic development had been ignored.

In addition, Li Zehou and Liu Zaifu also defined the revolution of 1911 as a failure; it was this denial of revolution in modern Chinese history especially that evoked official criticism. As argued before, from an official point of view, economic reform was deemed necessary in the present, but revolution was nevertheless still the basic thread of modern Chinese history. When “radicalism” was understood as revolution,

⁷⁷⁰ Term from Latham, “Rethinking Chinese Consumption,” 217.

⁷⁷¹ Popper, *The Open Society*, Vol. 1, 80, 173.

Marxist critics perceived this as a manifestation of a “cultural conservative trend” that challenged socialism. From another angle, those who were skeptical of the official economic reform policy because it marked a move away from socialism regarded rejections of “radicalism” as but another embrace of “neo-liberalism.” A truly critical investigation of modernity, so it went, would not only involve a scrutiny of socialism, but a scrutiny of modernity as a general construct.

Concerning non-Marxist intellectuals’ application of the label “cultural conservatism” to the discarding of “radicalism,” it has been contended that this label did not reflect the “multiaccultural” nature of Chinese interpretations of the concept of “conservatism.” Most intellectuals were concerned with gradual economic reform, not with the preservation of Chinese culture in particular. Moreover, it has been asserted that a distinction between a “cultural” and a “political” conservatism cannot be upheld because the two realms were united during the 1990s. The difference between a “cultural” and a “political” conservatism did not concern a difference in advocacy, but rather a difference in the nature of the reference to tradition. Whereas “cultural conservatism” promoted tradition because of its intrinsic value, “political conservatism” attempted to incorporate tradition in a modernization program. In addition, the claim that “cultural conservatism” often joined hands with “cultural nationalism” has been criticized because the advocacy of the Chinese nation in cultural terms was not primarily posited against a “Western” cultural dominance. Chinese tradition was not necessarily upheld because it was Chinese; it was also upheld because its moral values were conceived of as good.

Despite the divergence between Yü Ying-shih’s advocacy of a cultural conservatism based on the intrinsic value of tradition and the defense of a procedural gradualism on behalf of mainland intellectuals, the 1992 debate did indicate a crucial shift in perception in the intellectual world. The fact that revolutionary breaks and “progressivism” were repudiated in favor of a gradualist approach that ensured historical continuity paved the way for the revival of tradition that would peak several years later. In 1994, the “national studies fever” (*guoxue re*) broke out, and the 1992 debate provides an understanding as to why this happened.

5.

“RADICALISM” AS “INSTRUMENTALISM”

CHEN LAI’S MORAL QUEST

Past events do not fade like smoke.

CHEN LAI

5.1 INTRODUCTION: “RADICALISM” AND CONFUCIAN VALUES

Apart from the historian Yü Ying-shih, another person who concerned himself with the role of Confucianism in the modern world was the mainland philosopher Chen Lai (b. 1952), a so-called New Confucian based at Peking University. Chen Lai’s solicitude for Confucianism led him to engage in an investigation of “radicalism,” which he, like Yü Ying-shih, interpreted as an attitude of “antitraditionalism.” Because Chen Lai approached the issue of “radicalism” from a New Confucian perspective, this chapter exemplifies how the topic of “radicalism” became entwined with other discourses; it reveals once again that the concept of “radicalism” was versatile and multifaceted in essence.

Like the historian Lin Yü-sheng, Chen Lai focused on the “radicalism” of May Fourth intellectuals in particular. As such, unlike in the previous chapter, Chen Lai’s main focus was neither modern Chinese history *in toto*, nor the violence of revolution in twentieth-century China; the debates on Eastern and Western cultures during the May Fourth era constituted his main object of research. Chen Lai’s criticism of “radicalism” was closely connected to the events of 1989, as well as to the “New Enlightenment Movement” of the 1980s. Nonetheless, the reason why Chen Lai and others returned to May Fourth at this point in time can also be understood in the context of both the end of the Cold War and the end of Maoism. As Mitter has phrased it: “Under these circumstances, the idea that Communist China was the logical endpoint of the country’s early twentieth-century quest for modernity is less convincing than it might have been in the 1950s or 1960s.”⁷⁷²

⁷⁷² Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution*, 21.

Unlike Yü Ying-shih, Chen Lai did not perceive of “cultural radicalism” in modern Chinese history as a specifically Chinese phenomenon—he understood the *problematique* of “radicalism” as part of the overall problem of modernization-as-rationalization. This understanding was in line with New Confucian criticism of what the sociologist Max Weber has termed the “instrumental rationality” inherent in the modernization process. In the previous chapter, the New Confucian Tu Wei-ming’s critique of “instrumental rationality” and the quest for world-mastery that underlay the “Enlightenment mentality” have already briefly been mentioned.⁷⁷³ In this chapter, both the New Confucian condemnation of “instrumental rationality” and Chen Lai’s attempt to incorporate “radicalism” into to this framework of interpretation will be explored further.

Given the fact that the debate on “radicalism” overlapped with Chen Lai’s advocacy of Confucian values, we need to investigate how he reconciled his understanding of the former as part of a global process of modernization with his Confucian agenda. In addition, the question arises of how he employed the term “conservatism” in this framework; was his defense of Confucian values rooted in a concern for the community and did he base his argument on conservative grounds? Or, did he, like some intellectuals in the previous chapters, blend a conservative rhetoric with a defense of goals that were everything but conservative? To answer these questions, this chapter will look into Chen Lai’s understanding of “cultural radicalism” as “instrumental reason” and the notion of “cultural conservatism” that he coined in response. These issues will be addressed within the broader framework of the New Confucian debate and its relation to the official reevaluation of Confucianism on mainland China.

5.2 REVISITING THE MAY FOURTH MOVEMENT (1917-1921)

In order to understand Chen Lai’s argument, it is necessary to first look into what the May Fourth Movement entailed, and how other intellectuals have evaluated the movement since the late 1980s. As both Li Zehou and Chow Tse-tsung have noted, the term “May Fourth Movement” (*wusi yundong*) was first used in May 1919, in which sense it referred strictly to the protests of May Fourth, 1919. This date is also known as

⁷⁷³ Tu Wei-ming, “Huajie qimeng xintai,” *EYS* 2 (December 1990), 12-13.

the May Fourth Incident, which took place in response to the Shandong Resolution of the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, in which the German rights to Shandong would be transferred to Japan.⁷⁷⁴ Later, the term was used in a broader sense, and it is in this sense that Chow Tse-tsung applied the term to the events between 1917—the year in which the New Literature and New Thought Movements were launched—and 1921, when social and intellectual reform were exchanged for political action.⁷⁷⁵

A crucial article in the evaluation of the May Fourth Movement since the late 1980s concerns a 1986 piece by Li Zehou that has already been mentioned in the previous chapter. The latter criticized May Fourth because its element of “saving the nation” or “nationalism” (*jiuguo*) had repressed “Enlightenment” (*qimeng*).⁷⁷⁶ The central question that Li Zehou addressed in the article was the relationship between the so-called New Culture Movement (*xin wenhua yundong*) that had commenced in 1917, and the patriotic anti-imperialist movement that had culminated in the protests of May Fourth, 1919. Li Zehou argued that the national crisis had repressed the pursuit of liberty, democracy, equality, and human rights; because of this crisis, the revolutionary struggle of “basic solutions” had been substituted for gradual action.⁷⁷⁷

Although Li Zehou, like Lin Yü-sheng before him, favored the continuation of May Fourth, he denounced its rejection of tradition. Tradition was a “cultural-psychological structure” (*wenhua xinli jiegou*) that was “sedimented” (*jidian*) in people’s modes of action, ways of thinking, and emotional attitudes, which is why the abstract denial or confirmation of tradition was impossible.⁷⁷⁸ Instead, Li Zehou subscribed to the “transformational creation” (*zhuanzaoxing de chuangzao*) of

⁷⁷⁴ Li Zehou, “Qimeng yu jiuwang,” 1; Chow, *The May Fourth Movement*, 1-2.

⁷⁷⁵ Nevertheless, Chow Tse-tsung added that some developments preceded 1917 and that there were also outgrowths after 1921. In 1915, for example, there was an outburst of nationalist sentiment in response to Japan’s so-called “Twenty-one Demands,” which included the Japanese colonization of Manchuria, Inner Mongolia, Shandong, the southeastern coastal region, and the Yangzi Valley, as well as the employment of Japanese advisors and joint police forces. Some consider 1915 the start of the New Culture Movement because the journal *Xin qingnian* (New Youth) was launched in that year. As for the ending of May Fourth, some refer to 1923, when the debate on “Science and Metaphysics” was held, whereas others hold that it stretched until 1925, when the “May Thirtieth Incident” took place.

⁷⁷⁶ The term *jiuguo* was first used after the defeat of China in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), but it was also widely used during the May Fourth period.

⁷⁷⁷ Li Zehou, “Qimeng yu jiuwang,” 36.

⁷⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

tradition.⁷⁷⁹ This included the continuation of some elements in tradition in combination with the foundation of legal institutions and the separation of powers.

The denial of tradition that Li Zehou addressed in 1986 became a prominent theme of discussion since 1989. Already during the first months of 1989, in the context of the approaching seventieth anniversary of the May Fourth Incident, the May Fourth legacy was scrutinized. In 1990, Peking University Press published a collection of articles on this very occasion.⁷⁸⁰ Questions addressed in the volume were: What constituted the “essence” or “spirit” of the May Fourth Movement? Could it be defined as “wholesale antitraditionalism”? How should the relation between tradition and modernity be conceived? A well-known contribution to the volume was an article by Ji Xianlin (b. 1911), the famous scholar of Indian languages and culture, in which the latter compared the relation between Eastern and Western culture to a river: “For thirty years the river flows East; for thirty years the river flows West.”⁷⁸¹ Ji Xianlin’s argument that it was time for Chinese culture to flow westward was in accordance with the rise of a more critical awareness of the antitraditionalism of May Fourth. Similarly, in volumes that appeared in Hong Kong and Taiwan, questions of wholesale antitraditionalism, wholesale Westernization, and the break with the past were addressed.⁷⁸²

Apart from these collections of articles on May Fourth, debates on the topic were also conducted in academic journals such as *Orient* (Dongfang), *Wenxue pinglun* (Literary Review), *Xueren* (Scholar), and *Yuandao* (Original Path). In the January 1994 issue of *Yuandao*, for example, both Wang Shuren and Han Demin discussed the cultural crisis, the “cultural nihilism,” and the thorough antitraditionalism that had

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid., 36.

⁷⁸⁰ Beijing daxue shehui kexuechu, ed., *Beijing daxue jinian wusi yundong qishi zhounian lunwenji* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1990).

⁷⁸¹ Ji Xianlin, “Cong hongguan shang kan Zhongguo wenhua,” 4.

⁷⁸² The reevaluation of May Fourth is such a broad topic that it would require a separate study. Some of the main volumes include: Zhou Yangshan, ed., *Cong wusi dao xin wusi* (Taipei: Shibao wenhua chuban qiye youxian gongsi, 1989); Tang Yijie, ed., *Lun chuantong yu fan chuantong: wusi qishi zhounian jinian wenxuan* (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1989); Lin Yü-sheng et al., *Wusi: duoyuan de fansi* (Xianggang: Sanlian shudian youxian gongsi, 1989); Li Zehou, Lin Yü-sheng et al., *Wusi: duoyuan de fansi* (Taipei: Fengyun shidai chuban gongsi, 1989); Liu Guisheng and Zhang Buzhou, eds., *Taigang ji haiwai wusi yanjiu lunzhu xieyao* (Beijing: Jiaoyu kexue chubanshe, 1989); Ding Xiaoqiang and Xu Zi, eds., *Wusi yu xiandai Zhongguo: wusi xinlun* (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1989).

resulted from May Fourth.⁷⁸³ In articles that appeared in the literary journal *Wenxue pinglun* in 1993 and 1994, the Literary Revolution of 1917 in particular was debated, a topic that will be analyzed in detail in the next chapter. In 1993, in the first issue of *Dongfang*, an article by Chen Lai on “cultural radicalism” appeared, which will be analyzed further below. One year later, Liu Dong criticized the May Fourth Movement in the same journal; he pointed out both the tolerant, liberal spirit of May Fourth in the intellectual sphere and the negative consequences of “cultural radicalism” and “political radicalism” with regard to modernization, morality, and culture.⁷⁸⁴

As already noted in the previous chapter, some intellectuals who had been staunch defenders of the Enlightenment spirit during the 1980s became critics of “radicalism” during the early 1990s. A good example of this trend can be found in the person of the literary critic Wang Yuanhua, a former Professor at Fudan University who had also been a proponent of “socialist humanism” during the early 1980s.⁷⁸⁵ During the late 1980s, Wang Yuanhua had criticized the notion of the “wholesale antitraditionalism” of May Fourth because it was not based on historical reality, but driven by the will of some intellectuals to revive Confucianism.⁷⁸⁶ Yet in 1994, after having read the works of Du Yaquan (1873-1933)—the founder and editor of the journal *Dongfang zazhi* (Eastern Miscellany)—Wang Yuanhua criticized the “intention ethics” (*yitu lunli*), utilitarianism, radical mood, and evolutionism of the May Fourth spirit.

Notwithstanding the widespread critical evaluation of the May Fourth Movement, the terms “conservatism” and “radicalism” were rarely used. Only two articles in the Peking University Press volume contained the term “conservatism”; in both instances, the hitherto common interpretation of the dichotomy between the “progressive” intellectuals of the New Culture Movement and their “conservative” opponents was challenged. In one of these articles, the literary critic Yue Daiyun reconsidered the widely held belief that the scholars around the journal *Xueheng* (Critical Review) had been opponents of the New Culture Movement. She argued

⁷⁸³ Wang Shuren, “Wenhua de weiji, ronghe yu chongjian,” *Yuandao* 1 (1994), 95-114; Han Demin, “Chuantong wenhua de weiji yu ershi shiji fanwenhua sichao,” in *ibid.*, 311-340.

⁷⁸⁴ Liu Dong, “Beida xuetong yu ‘wusi’ chuantong,” *Dongfang* 1994:4, 12-17. Reprinted in *ZFL*, 241-251.

⁷⁸⁵ Together with Wang Ruoshui, Wang Yuanhua had drafted the speech that Zhou Yang delivered at the official symposium that was held at the occasion of the centenary of Karl Marx’s death in 1983. See Xu Jilin, “The Fate of an Enlightenment,” 186.

⁷⁸⁶ Wang Yuanhua, “Lun chuantong yu fan chuantong,” 13-38.

instead that all intellectuals of that period had sought answers to the question of modernization. This article was a revised edition of Yue Daiyun's article on *Xueheng* that had appeared in the Hong Kong and Taiwan volumes on May Fourth as described in the previous chapter.⁷⁸⁷ In a similar vein, in an article on the May Fourth debates on Eastern and Western cultures that will be analyzed below, Chen Lai presented the "conservatives" of the May Fourth era as modernizers.⁷⁸⁸

5.2.1 "Cultural Radicalism" and the Politicization of Culture

Chen Lai's participation in the debate on "radicalism" took the form of a denunciation of "cultural radicalism" in particular. Chen Lai had initially written an article on "cultural radicalism" for a conference that was held in Hawaii in February 1991—at which Yü Ying-shih, Lin Yü-sheng, and Tu Wei-ming were present—but an extended version of this article later appeared in the journal *Orient* in 1993.⁷⁸⁹ Chen Lai singled out three "cultural movements" of twentieth-century China, namely the May Fourth Movement, the Cultural Revolution, and the 1980s, all of which had "radicalism," or, the "totalistic" denial of tradition, as a core trait.

Chen Lai explained that for him, the term "cultural movements" referred to relatively influential movements that were especially composed of the cultural activities of intellectuals. Although this would exclude the political mass movement that was the Cultural Revolution, Chen Lai argued that the latter still qualified as a "cultural movement" because of its aspect of "cultural criticism."⁷⁹⁰ The basic mode of thought of "radicalism" was what Chen Lai termed "straightening the crooked to excess," "overcorrection" (*jiaowang guozheng*), or, going to extremes to rectify perceived wrongs. According to this logic, the solution to a feudal old culture was the abolishment of characters; the response to too much softness had to be "barbarity"; too much stress

⁷⁸⁷ See Chapter Four, 154. Yue Daiyun, "Shijie wenhua duihua zhong de Zhongguo xiandai baoshou zhuyi: jianlun 'Xueheng' zazhi" *Beijing daxue jinian wusi yundong*, 56-67. The article also appeared in *Zhongguo wenhua* 1989:1, 132-136.

⁷⁸⁸ Chen Lai, "'Wusi' dongxi wenhua lunzheng de fansi," *Beijing daxue jinian wusi yundong*, 157-174.

⁷⁸⁹ Chen Lai, "Ershi shiji wenhua yundong zhong de jijin zhuyi," *Dongfang* 1 (1993), 38-44. The article was reprinted in *ZFL* 293-308, and in *CYX*, 68-83. An adapted version of the article appeared in *Zhexue zazhi* 1992: 2. Translated in *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 29:4 (Summer 1998), 5-28. For more writings by Chen Lai on the topic of "cultural radicalism," see *Chongxin renshi bainian Zhongguo*, Vol. 2, 451-466.

⁷⁹⁰ Chen Lai, "Ershi shiji wenhua yundong," *ZFL*, 294.

on chastity could only be solved by promiscuous sexual behavior. In brief, then, the three “movements of cultural criticism” by far exceeded the “movement of the reconstitution of Confucianism” (*ruxue chonggou yundong*).⁷⁹¹

Regarding the May Fourth Movement, Chen Lai pointed out some of its problematic core characteristics. Firstly, the movement had reduced political problems since the reforms of 1898 to cultural problems: “May Fourth leaders regarded political contingency as cultural necessity.”⁷⁹² Chen Lai also called this “culturalism directed at political action” (*zhixiang zhengzhi xingwei de wenhua zhuyi*), or “pan-politicism” (*fan zhengzhi zhuyi*), an attitude that could be traced back to the impact of the political orientation of traditional scholars.⁷⁹³ Here, we can discern some similarities with Li Zehou’s thesis that changes in the cultural realm served political purposes. Secondly, May Fourth intellectuals desired to make China rich and strong after a history of humiliation, which made them resort to utilitarianism. Finally, May Fourth intellectuals were obsessed with science and democracy; these values were mistakenly used as a yardstick to judge all other values.

As for the Cultural Revolution, it had not been the direct product of May Fourth; it was also related to international changes, inner CCP struggles, and Mao Zedong’s personal authority. Nonetheless, the heritage of May Fourth also played a role in the participation of the masses, since the Cultural Revolution continued the resolute separation of “new” and “old” of the May Fourth era, as epitomized in slogans such as “there is no making without breaking” (*bupo buli*) and “destroy the old and establish the new” (*pojiu lixin*). From the Cultural Revolution, it could be seen that the May Fourth Movement had turned criticism of Confucius and Confucianism into a positive value that intellectuals with different political orientations acknowledged. The third “radical” “cultural movement” was that of the 1980s, during which the lack of democracy was criticized through Confucianism, and during which scientism flourished.⁷⁹⁴ During the

⁷⁹¹ Chen Lai referred to a text on Confucianism by Jiang Yihua in which the latter discerned five “peaks” of Confucianism, as part of his narrative that twentieth-century Chinese intellectual history was predominantly “conservative,” and not “radical.” See Jiang Yihua, “Ershi shiji ruxue zai Zhongguo de chonggou,” 28-35.

⁷⁹² Chen Lai, “Ershi shiji wenhua yundong,” *ZFL*, 295.

⁷⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 305, 307.

⁷⁹⁴ Three theories were popular at the time, namely systems theory, information theory, and cybernetics. Apart from that, there was a great interest in scientific methods and the philosophy of science, as already mentioned in the previous chapter.

1980s, then, the politicization of culture and the adoration of science were prevalent, but now, modernization had become the core issue of debate.

If we compare Chen Lai's account with that of Yü Ying-shih and Lin Yü-sheng, several things can be noted. Firstly, Chen Lai referred to two of the three "stages" of "radicalism" mentioned by Yü Ying-shih, namely the May Fourth Movement and the Cultural Revolution, but he added the "culture craze" of the 1980s as a third stage. Chen Lai criticized Yü Ying-shih for not including this last stage, when "antitraditionalism" was consciously present in the minds of Chinese intellectuals.⁷⁹⁵ Secondly, like Lin Yü-sheng, Chen Lai believed that the "antitraditionalism" of the May Fourth intellectuals had been wholesale; Chen Lai described his critique of "radicalism" as "anti-antitraditionalism" (*fan fanchuantong zhuyi*).⁷⁹⁶ Chen Lai also followed Lin Yü-sheng in his attack on the reduction of all political problems to culture, and he likewise argued in favor of the separation of the cultural and political realms.

The perceived link between the May Fourth Movement and the Cultural Revolution that can be discerned in Chen Lai's article, in Yü Ying-shih's theory of "radicalization," and in Lin Yü-sheng's connection between May Fourth antitraditionalism and Maoism was fiercely attacked by some intellectuals. One critic argued that the May Fourth Movement disapproved of the very feudal despotism and superstition that the Cultural Revolution embodied.⁷⁹⁷ Another critic claimed that both movements had different ideals; the disasters of the Cultural Revolution had to be ascribed to its ideals rather than to its "cultural radicalism."⁷⁹⁸ These criticisms demonstrate that scholars took Chen Lai's equation at face value, whereas Chen Lai and others only intended to compare the movements with reference to their mode of thought. Moreover, as in the previous chapters, the term "radicalism" was employed as an asymmetric counterconcept in order to convince other scholars of the destructive

⁷⁹⁵ Interview with Chen Lai, Beijing, August 10, 2005. Although Yü Ying-shih had not included the 1980s in his three stages, he had criticized it as part of the start of a new "cycle" of "radicalism," which is why Chen Lai's criticism is not entirely correct.

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid. Although Chen Lai would not go as far as Lin Yü-sheng, who claimed that May Fourth was in terms of its method a conservative movement in which "tradition was fought with tradition," Chen Lai also discerned a traditional influence in the "totalistic" or "wholesale" anti-traditionalism of May Fourth: "if it had not been for the influence of the Confucian thought that considers national and social concerns as the highest moral duty, their criticism of Confucianism could not have been so fierce." See Chen Lai, "Zhongguo jindai sixiang de huigu yu qianzhan," *CYX*, 13-30. Reference from 19. This was an adapted version of an article that was originally published in *Tianjin shehui kexue* 1989:5, 3-8.

⁷⁹⁷ Yan Jiayan, "Ping wusi, wenge yu chuantong wenhua de lunzheng," 134.

⁷⁹⁸ Chen Shaoming, "Didiao yixie," 509.

force of the cultural movements. Rather than engaging in a scholarly exercise, Chen Lai aimed to prove that the harm inflicted upon tradition had been mistaken. The question, then, should not be whether or not the May Fourth Movement was essentially different from the Cultural Revolution, but *why* and *how* Chen Lai used this framework of “radicalism” in connection with May Fourth.

5.2.2 *The “Instrumental Rationality” of May Fourth “Radicals”*

Chen Lai contrasted the concept of “cultural radicalism” with what he referred to as “cultural conservatism”; he used these terms in a discussion of the debates on Eastern and Western cultures during the May Fourth era. “Cultural conservatives” used “value rationality” (*jiazhi lixing*) as a yardstick to measure cultural values, whereas “cultural radicals” made use of “instrumental rationality” (*gongju lixing*).⁷⁹⁹ For this division, Chen Lai drew on Max Weber’s distinction between “substantive-value rationality” (*Wertrationalität*) and “formal-procedural rationality” (*Zweckrationalität*), two types of social action that Weber had outlined in his *Economy and Society* (1922).

For Max Weber, “instrumental rationality” was a type of rational action in which the actor calculated how to reach a certain end; this type of action was present in modern capitalism and in the bureaucracy. “Value rationality,” on the contrary, referred to an action that was not a means to an end, but that was “determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake,” as for example a religious calling or some higher cause.⁸⁰⁰ Weber added that these ideal types were heuristic devices; in practice, it was hard to find action that could be reduced to one type of rational action only.⁸⁰¹ In an article in which Chen Lai sought ways to dissolve the tension between tradition and

⁷⁹⁹ Chen Lai also used the term “functional rationality” (*gongyong lixing*) instead of “instrumental rationality” (*gongju lixing*). See, for example, Chen Lai, “Huajie jinzhang,” *Chen Lai zixuanji*, 377. In other articles, Chen Lai also employed the terms “jiazhi helixing” and “gongju helixing,” as well as “shizhi lixing” (essence rationality) and “xingshi lixing” (form rationality). See, for example, Chen Lai, “Xin lixue yu xiandaixing siwei de fansi,” *CYX*, 174.

⁸⁰⁰ Weber, *Economy and Society*, 24-25. Weber discerned two other types of action, namely “affectual” and “traditional” action. Both of these were situated on a lower level, since they were actions based on habit instead of on worldview or choice. However, since Weber relied on ideal types, he added that the line between meaningful and reactive action was hard to draw. See *ibid.*, 4-5.

⁸⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

modernity, he applied the terms somewhat differently.⁸⁰² Chen Lai explained the distinction between the two types of rationality as follows:

The standard of functional rationality refers to taking the efficiency of politics or economics of a certain society as a starting point. The standard of value rationality is taking ethical and cultural values in itself as a yardstick.⁸⁰³

In other words, Chen Lai employed Weber's distinction to support his criticism of the politicization or instrumentalization of culture and to argue for cultural autonomy instead. In Chen Lai's view, the main representative of this "radical utilitarianism" (*jijin gongli zhuyi*) had been Chen Duxiu; his articles in *New Youth* (*Xin qingnian*) in particular were typified by this trend. Although Chen Duxiu had not been aware of the fact that he used different standards to judge values, he had discerned a contrast between "value rationality" and "scientific and technological rationality" (*keji lixing*) in his text "The French and Modern Civilization." In this article, Chen Duxiu praised the French for having given mankind the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity; he contrasted this with the German orientation towards technological inventions and a strong country.⁸⁰⁴

Nevertheless, Chen Lai argued, in general, Chen Duxiu used both standards interchangeably. For example, when he promoted Western individualism, he applied the standard of "value rationality," but when he supported the elimination of feelings in favor of the rule of law, and the replacement of the Eastern love of peace with war—which "nearly turned him into an admirer of war and blood"—he did so on the grounds of "instrumental rationality."⁸⁰⁵ For Chen Lai, the danger of drawing "instrumental

⁸⁰² Chen Lai, "Huajie chuantong yu xiandai de jinzhang: wusi wenhua sichao de fansi," *Chen Lai zixuanji*, 373-398. Originally appeared in Lin Yü-sheng, ed., *Wusi: duoyuan de fansi*, 151-185. Part of the text was published in *Dushu* 1989:5 under the title "Wusi dongxi wenhua lunzheng de fansi," another part was published in *Guowen Tiandi* 1989:5 under the title "Wusi dui rujia de piping." Finally, in *Beijing daxue xuebao* 1989:3, part of the article appeared under the title "Xiaojie chuantong yu xiandai de jinzhang."

⁸⁰³ Chen Lai, "Huajie jinzhang," *Chen Lai zixuanji*, 377.

⁸⁰⁴ Chen Lai referred to Chen Duxiu, "Falanxi yu jinshi wenming" (The French and modern civilization), *Xin Qingnian* 1:1 (September 1915). Reprinted in Chen Song, ed., *Wusi qianhou dongxi wenhua wenti lunzhan wenxuan* (henceforth: *Dongxi wenxuan*), 3-6.

⁸⁰⁵ Chen Lai, "Huajie jinzhang," *Chen Lai zixuanji*, 378. Chen Lai referred to Chen Duxiu, "Dongxi minzu genben sixiang zhi chayi" (The differences in basic thought between Eastern and Western nations), *Qingnian zazhi* 1:4 (December 1915). Reprinted in *Dongxi wenxuan*, 12-15.

rationality” into the realm of values, then, was that core values, such as virtue, religion, aesthetics, peace, justice, and harmony, could be abandoned in order to reach political goals, which in turn could bring about imperialism and militarism.

The “radicalism” in *New Youth* was countered with what Chen Lai referred to as the “cultural conservatism” of those around the journal *Dongfang zazhi* (Eastern Miscellany), who used “value rationality” as a yardstick to judge values. Against the background of the First World War, the success of the Russian Revolution, and the Marxist critique of capitalism, “cultural conservatives” were critical of the West and demanded the continuity with Chinese tradition. From the fact that Chen Lai discerned a connection between Chinese “cultural conservatives” and global developments, it can be seen that he conceived of Chinese conservatism as more than just a reaction to May Fourth thought; it was “created by complex dynamics in the global political-cultural process.”⁸⁰⁶

Because May Fourth conservatives had a wider knowledge about both the West and the ills of capitalism, and because they had been exposed to Marxism, Chen Lai would later state that it was better to describe them as “cultural pluralists.”⁸⁰⁷ Other Chinese intellectuals have also argued that modern Chinese conservatism bore the stamp of Western critics of capitalism, and that Chinese conservatism was hence more concerned with socialist themes, such as inequality.⁸⁰⁸ Elsewhere, Chen Lai argued that, in order to grasp the positions of “conservatives” and “radicals” correctly, one should make use of a “pluralistic progress concept” (*duoyuan de jinbu guannian*): a positive evaluation of progress should not only contain the “radicalism” of cultural criticism, but also the “conservatism” of cultural identity. Despite their different views about culture, both groups shared the same views on political progress and economic reform.⁸⁰⁹

Contrary to “cultural radicals” such as Chen Duxiu, for whom the “old” and the “new” were irreconcilable opposites, “cultural conservatives” such as Zhang Shizhao

⁸⁰⁶ Chen Lai, “Dui xin wenhua yundong de zai sikao: cong ‘wusi’ houqi de Liang Shuming shuoqi,” *Nanchang daxue xuebao*, 31:1 (January 2000), 1-5. Quote from page 3. Chen Lai also made this point in “Bayu: shiji zhi jiao hua chuantong,” *CYX*, 287-288.

⁸⁰⁷ Chen Lai, “Dui xin wenhua yundong de zai sikao,” 4.

⁸⁰⁸ Tao Dongfeng, “Baoshou ziyou zhuyi,” *ZFL*, 478-480.

⁸⁰⁹ Chen Lai, “Bayu,” *CYX*, 288. Bresciani has also challenged the dichotomy between conservatives and modernizers: “since the beginning of this century, all Chinese intellectuals have thought of the best way to modernize their country.” See Bresciani, *Reinventing Confucianism*, 467.

(1881-1973) spoke on behalf of cultural continuity.⁸¹⁰ In addition, cultural conservatives criticized the overall presence of “instrumental rationality” in the service of struggle and war. Du Yaquan, the founder of *Dongfang zazhi*, for example, condemned the resort to force as a yardstick for morality because it could only lead to the rule of power and to war.⁸¹¹ Liang Qichao, in his *Impressions of a Trip to Europe* (*Ouyou xinying lu*, 1919), complained about the reign of the “survival of the fittest,” about the adoration of power and money, and about militarism and imperialism.⁸¹²

Chen Lai also made use of Weber’s two types of rationality to read the 1923 debate on “Science and Metaphysics,” in which the main participants had been Zhang Junmai, Ding Wenjiang, Liang Qichao, Hu Shi, and Wu Zhihui. Yü Ying-shih had referred to this 1923 debate in his 1988 lecture to illustrate the view that modern China had not known conservatism.⁸¹³ Conversely, for Chen Lai, those participants in the debate who argued against scientism, such as Zhang Junmai, were conservatives who stood on the side of “value rationality.” Advocates of scientism, such as Ding Wenjiang, on the other hand, were “radicals” who reduced modern civilization to “instrumental rationality.” Chen Lai drew on the same framework to criticize the views of Chang Yansheng (1898-1947), the editor of the journal *Guomin zazhi* (Citizen Magazine), and a Professor of History at Peking University. Like Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu, Chang Yansheng had also taken part in the repudiation of feudalism and the promotion of science and democracy, but his stance on Confucianism had been much more moderate than that of Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu.

Chang Yansheng was remarkable for Chen Lai because, in the debates over the differences between Eastern and Western cultures, he had supplanted the emphasis on geographical disparities between East and West (*dongxi shuo*) with a stress on the

⁸¹⁰ Zhang Shizhao is mostly known for having founded the *Tiger Magazine* (*Jiayin zazhi*) in 1914. In 1925, he published *The Tiger Weekly* (*Jiayin zhoukan*), a magazine in which he criticized May Fourth intellectuals. Zhang Shizhao recommended a blending of old and new culture; he was in favor of the development of existing institutions instead of the imitation of Western institutions. Since China was an agricultural nation, Zhang Shizhao claimed that a political system different from the West was needed.

⁸¹¹ Chen Lai, “Huajie jinzhang,” *Chen Lai zixuanji*, 380. Chen Lai referred to Cang Fu (Du Yaquan), “Miluan zhi xiandai renxin” (The confused modern feeling), *Dongxi wenxuan*, 41-47; Cang Fu, “Zhanhou dongxi wenming zhi tiaohu” (The blending of Eastern and Western civilizations after the war), *Dongxi wenxuan*, 25-32.

⁸¹² Chen Lai, “Huajie jinzhang,” *Chen Lai zixuanji*, 381. Quote from Liang Qichao, “Ouyou xinying lu” (Impressions on a trip to Europe), *Dongxi wenxuan*, 333-374 (excerpts).

⁸¹³ See Chapter Four, 141.

temporal contrast between both civilizations (*gujin shuo*).⁸¹⁴ Despite Chang Yansheng's insight, Chen Lai attacked the latter's classification of religion under the denominator "ancient," because modern civilization still needed "value rationality." Western civilization, for example, had never abandoned Christianity, in spite of the challenges posed by the Enlightenment and several centuries of scientific development. For Chen Lai, "value rationality" did not lend itself to an opposition between "old" and "new"—it was continuous.

In a way, Chen Lai's thesis is reminiscent of the plea of those in the 1923 debate on "Science and Metaphysics" who, as Furth described it, "defended the autonomy of value—and by implication Confucianism—with arguments drawn from the European *Kulturkampf* between science and Christianity."⁸¹⁵ Then again, what negatively influenced the credibility of Chen Lai's argument was the all too simplistic application of a dualist framework of "value rationality" versus "instrumental rationality" to what was in essence a complex era. In addition, the sharp distinction that Chen Lai made between the two types of rationality had also not been present in Max Weber. As Franco Crespi has argued, the point of Weber's distinction between "goal-rational" and "value-rational" was not the importance of the distinction between "goals" and "values"—Weber recognized that they were interchangeable. In response to positivists, Weber wanted to show that "to act in the name of values (religious, ethical, aesthetical, etc.) can also be rational."⁸¹⁶

If we base ourselves on Weber's typology, then both Chinese "conservatives" and "radicals" of the May Fourth era manifested "value rationality": both groups upheld a certain value, planned to realize this value, and acted accordingly, regardless of the result.⁸¹⁷ "Radicals" did not uphold science and democracy merely to obtain a strong China; they also believed in their intrinsic value. And as for the goal of "modernization," as Chen Lai himself has also argued, "cultural conservatives" all adhered to it. The simplistic dualism in Chen Lai's argument revealed the "ideologization" of the concept of "radicalism": in order to make his argument

⁸¹⁴ See Chang Yansheng (Chang Naihui) "Dongfang wenming yu xifang wenming" (Eastern civilization and Western civilization), *Guomin* 2:3 (October 1920). Reprinted in *Dongxi wenxuan*, 266-278.

⁸¹⁵ Furth, "Culture and Politics," 37.

⁸¹⁶ Crespi, "Book Review," 250-251.

⁸¹⁷ Swedberg, *The Max Weber Dictionary*, 246-247.

convincing, Chen Lai resorted to a black-and-white picture. “Radicalism” was portrayed negatively as the embodiment of “utilitarianism” and the politicization of culture.

Yet if Chen Lai really intended to demonstrate that Chinese conservatives were progressives who were on the side of modernization, then this interpretation of the Weberian distinction between “value rationality” and “instrumental rationality” did not suit this purpose. Instead of giving the impression that both conservatives and radicals operated within the same framework and dealt with the same questions, Chen Lai suggested that the two groups adhered to a different logic. Paradoxically, Chen Lai’s effort to obliterate the simplistic distinction between tradition and modernity and between the spokespersons for Western culture and the exponents of a blending of both Chinese and Western culture resulted in the replacement of existing dichotomies with an even more reductionist dualist framework. Could this really rescue “cultural conservatives” from mistaken historical judgments?

5.3 CONFUCIANISM AS TRANSCENDENTAL VALUES

5.3.1 *The Influence of Tu Wei-ming*

Chen Lai’s reevaluation of the May Fourth era and his characterization of “cultural conservatives” as those who adhered to “value rationality” was in line with his overall argument that morality, and Confucianism in particular, was very much needed in modern society. Chen Lai’s “cultural radicalism” did not imply the denial of Chinese culture *in toto*, but the negative attitude towards Confucianism. According to Chen Lai, Confucianism was in crisis, a concern the he first expressed in an article entitled “A Propitious New Start,” which was written for *Twenty-first Century* during the winter of 1992. Chen Lai described how, after decades of denial, the situation had started to improve—“Confucianism has already passed the hardest time; it has already left the low ebb.”⁸¹⁸

In other articles, Chen Lai also addressed the issue of the crisis of Confucianism, which he conceived of as both a cultural crisis and a crisis of the belief in values.⁸¹⁹ Before May Fourth, although Confucianism had been erased from politics and

⁸¹⁸ Chen Lai, “Zhenxia qiyuan,” *EYS* 10 (April 1992), 10-11. Reprinted in *CYX*, 290-292.

⁸¹⁹ Chen Lai, “Ershi shiji Zhongguo wenhua zhong de ruxue kunjing,” *Zhejiang shehui kexue* 1998:3 (May 1998), 26-32. Reference from 30.

education, it still stood firm in the ethical and spiritual realms.⁸²⁰ With May Fourth, it also disappeared from these realms; “tearing down the shop of Confucius” became one of the main May Fourth slogans.⁸²¹ Although the marginalization of Confucianism was temporarily halted in the decades that followed the May Fourth Movement, since 1949, its position was damaged fiercely, this time not by liberals, but by dogmatism and “extreme leftist false Marxism.”⁸²²

For both Lin Yü-sheng and Yü Ying-shih, as discussed in the previous chapter, Confucianism was tied to concrete “social referents,” and it was very much intertwined with social institutions. Yü Ying-shih’s argument for the preservation of intermediate organizations was driven by the very fact that he considered these institutions to be embodiments of Confucian culture as a living culture. For Chen Lai, on the contrary, Confucianism could not be reduced to its amalgamation with society, which harmed its transcendental values.⁸²³ Since “cultural radicalism” for Chen was the politicization and instrumentalization of Confucianism, he argued in favor of a conception of Confucianism detached from sociopolitical reality.

Chen Lai criticized Chen Duxiu, for example, who had reduced Confucian ethics to the “three bonds” (*sangang*)—the bond between ruler and official, father and son, and husband and wife—and who had claimed that “advocating respect for Confucius must necessarily lead to an emperor ascending the throne.”⁸²⁴ Chen Duxiu’s fierce attack on Confucianism had been directly related to the restoration movements of Yuan Shikai and Zhang Xun, who had both invoked Confucianism in their political

⁸²⁰ Chen Lai mentioned the abolition of the “eight-legged essay” in 1899, the Imperial Edict of 1901 to found Western-style academies, the elimination of the examination system in 1905, and Cai Yuanpei’s decrees as a Minister of Education (1912) in which he proposed the eradication of the Classics and the reverence for Confucius. See *ibid.*, 27.

⁸²¹ Yan Jiayan has asserted that the slogan “tear down the shop of Confucius” was never a true May Fourth slogan in the sense that “democracy,” “science,” and the “Literary Revolution” had been. Hu Shi first jokingly used the phrase as a literary expression in his preface to the writings of Wu Yu in 1921: Wu Yu was “an old hero who single-handedly reversed the shop of Confucius in Sichuan province” (*Sichuan sheng zhishou da kongjiadian de lao yingxiong*). See Yan Jiayan, “Ping wusi, wenge yu chuantong wenhua de lunzheng,” 132.

⁸²² Chen Lai, “Ershi shiji Zhongguo wenhua zhong de ruxue kunjing,” 31.

⁸²³ *Ibid.*, 28.; Chen Lai, “Wusi sichao yu xiandaixing,” *CYX*, 60-67. Reference from 62-63.

⁸²⁴ Chen Lai, “Ershi shiji Zhongguo wenhua zhong de ruxue kunjing,” 27. Chen Lai referred to Chen Duxiu’s text “Fubi yu zunkong” (Restoration and revering Confucius), *Xin qingnian* (New Youth) 3:6.

maneuvers.⁸²⁵ “Radicals” such as Chen Duxiu embraced the logic of “replacing the whole with one side” (*yipian gaiquan*): in their assault on Confucianism, they focused on political ethics (*zhong*), family ethics (*xiao*), and sexual ethics (*zhenjie*); on the basis of this, they discarded Confucianism as a whole.⁸²⁶

The argument that Confucianism had been distorted in the process of its practical usage in political and social life was not unique to Chen Lai; other New Confucians had uttered similar criticism. The argument was popular in particular with Tu Wei-ming, one of the main exponents of New Confucianism (*xiandai xin rujia* or *dangdai xin rujia*) in North America whom Chen Lai considered his teacher.⁸²⁷ Tu Wei-ming had spent six months as a lecturer in the Philosophy Department of Peking University in 1985. Between 1986 and 1988, Chen Lai was a visiting scholar at Harvard University, where Tu Wei-ming was a Professor in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations. In addition, in the intellectual context of the late 1980s and early 1990s, mainland scholars and overseas scholars interacted through an increasing number of international conferences.

During his time in China, Tu Wei-ming lectured throughout the country on what he termed “the third epoch of Confucianism,” a theory that some consider to have triggered the New Confucian revival on mainland China.⁸²⁸ It was not Tu Wei-ming who coined the notion of “three epochs” of Confucianism; the philosopher and New Confucian Mou Zongsan (1909-1995) had first come up with this idea. According to Mou Zongsan, the first epoch had been that of Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi, whereas the second epoch referred to the Neo-Confucianism of the Song (907-1279) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties. The third era, then, was contemporary Confucianism. Whereas Mou Zongsan had used the theory to refer to China, Tu Wei-ming expanded the theory to a model of development for humanity as a whole: it was the revival of Confucianism in the periphery that would restore the damage done to Confucianism on mainland China.⁸²⁹ Tu Wei-ming’s interpretation of Mou Zongsan’s theory, then, was in

⁸²⁵ In “Radicalism in Twentieth-Century Cultural Movements,” Chen Lai quoted from Chen Duxiu’s “Baoshou zhuyi yu qinlüe zhuyi” (Conservatism and aggressionism), when touching upon this point. See *ZFL*, 295.

⁸²⁶ Chen Lai, “Huajie jinzhang,” *Chen Lai zixuanji*, 388.

⁸²⁷ Bresciani, *Reinventing Confucianism*, 411.

⁸²⁸ *Ibid.*, 423. Tu Wei-ming had already visited China in 1978; in 1980, he spent nine months at Beijing Normal University.

⁸²⁹ See Tu Wei-ming, *Ruxue disanqi fazhan de qianjing wenti: dalu jiangxue, wendan, he taolun* (Taipei: lianjing chubanshi gongsi), 1989.

accordance with his idea of a “cultural China,” which granted scholars outside mainland China a vital part in the re-conceptualization of Chinese identity, as discussed in the previous chapter.

For Tu Wei-ming, Confucianism had a religious dimension—it was a “religio-philosophy”—and its core element was *ren* (humaneness), which Tu also translated as “human-relatedness.”⁸³⁰ As the title of Chen Lai’s collection of cultural writings, *Tradition and Modernity: The Scope of Humanism (Chuantong yu xiandai: renwen zhuyi de shijie)*, shows, humanism (*renwen zhuyi*) was also a focal concern for Chen.⁸³¹ Chen Lai applied this concept in response to “cultural radicalism”; the original title of the book even contained the subtitle “A Critique of Cultural Radicalism.”⁸³² In this context, humanism needs to be understood as Yue Daiyun described it in her article on the *Xueheng* (Critical Review) group, namely as those virtues that make man human.⁸³³ For Chen Lai, the virtues that made man human were the Confucian values of benevolence (*ren*) and harmony (*he*), values that New Confucians also identified as the kernel of Confucianism.⁸³⁴

5.3.2 *New Confucianism*

New Confucianism, as its literal translation “contemporary neo-Confucianism” indicates, was a reinterpretation of the Neo-Confucianism that flourished during the Song (907-1279) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties, but opinions on its scope and definition vary. In a broad sense, it includes those twentieth-century Chinese

⁸³⁰ Neville, *Boston Confucianism*, 56-57; Makeham, *Lost Soul*, 280.

⁸³¹ Chen Lai, *Chuantong yu xiandai: renwen zhuyi de shijie* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2006). This book was a revised edition of *Renwen zhuyi de shijie* (Nanning: Guangxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 1997). The latter was a collection of Chen’s writings on culture between 1988 and 1997.

⁸³² In Chinese: *wenhua jijin zhuyi pipan*. Interview with Chen Lai, Beijing, August 10, 2005.

⁸³³ Yue Daiyun, “Zhongguo xiandai baoshou zhuyi,” 59.

⁸³⁴ As Gloria Davies has noted, the term “humanism” (*renwen zhuyi*) as it was applied during the 1990s was not unrelated to the use of the term “humanism” (*rendao zhuyi*) during the 1980s. However, whereas the latter was a response to an inhuman and irrational Maoism, the 1990s term intended to restore traditional values. In the debate on the “humanist spirit” (*renwen jingshen*), the term was a response to commercialism in particular. Davies, *Worrying about China*, 121. Although Chen Lai indicated that there were some overlaps between the debate on the “humanist spirit” and his advocacy of humanism, his term included much more than a mere opposition to commercialism.

intellectuals who supported the Confucian tradition.⁸³⁵ In a narrow sense, it refers to the philosophical school of Xiong Shili (1885-1968) and his students Tang Junyi (1909-1978), Xu Fuguan (1903-1982) and Mou Zongsan.⁸³⁶ Yü Ying-shih upholds a three-fold distinction and adds the criterion of those who created a philosophical system based on Confucianism and Western philosophy, which would also include the mainland philosophers Feng Youlan (1895-1990), who based his philosophical system on Zhu Xi, and He Lin (1902-1992), who combined Wang Yangming's thought with Hegelian idealism.⁸³⁷

There were two schools in Song and Ming Neo-Confucianism: the “heart-mind centered learning” (*xinxue*) of Lu Xiangshan (1139-1192) and Wang Yangming, and the “principled-centered learning” (*lixue*) of Cheng Yi (1033-1107) and Zhu Xi (1130-1200). According to the Lu-Wang school, the universe was identical with the mind, and it was through the development of the innate knowledge of the good and the native ability to do good that the unity between man and heaven was to be realized. For the Cheng-Zhu school, the principles of the universe had to be grasped through the “investigation of things,” which would in turn enabled the realization of one's good nature. Xiong Shili, then, was a twentieth-century representative of the Lu-Wang school, whose central work was entitled *Xin weishi lun* (A New Theory on Consciousness-Only), whereas the famous philosopher Feng Youlan (1895-1990) developed the ideas of the Cheng-Zhu school in his *Xin lixue* (A New Philosophy of Principle).⁸³⁸

A core concept from Neo-Confucianism that has been elaborated by twentieth-century New Confucians is the so-called doctrine of “the study of mind and nature”

⁸³⁵ Using the broad definition and basing himself on Tu Wei-ming's distinction between three “generations” of New Confucians, Bresciani named Liang Shuming, Ma Yifu, Xiong Shili, Zhang Junmai, Feng Youlan, He Lin, and Qian Mu as members of the first generation (1921-1949) of New Confucians. The second generation (1950-1979) included Fang Dongmei, Tang Junyi, Xu Fuguan, and Mou Zongsan. Finally, the third generation (1980-) consisted of Cheng Zhongying, Liu Shu-hsien, Tu Wei-ming, and Yü Ying-shih, out of which only Liu Shu-hsien and Tu Wei-ming belonged to the Xiong Shili lineage. Bresciani, *Reinventing Confucianism*, 23.

⁸³⁶ *Ibid.*, iv-v.

⁸³⁷ Yü Ying-shih's definition excluded, among others, his teacher Qian Mu. See Yü Ying-shih, “Qian Mu yu xin rujia,” in *idem*, *Qian Mu yu Zhongguo wenhua* (Shanghai: Shanghai yuandong chubanshe, 1994), 30-90.

⁸³⁸ For a brief overview of Xiong Shili's elaboration of the idealistic school and Feng Youlan's reworking of the rationalistic school, see Wing-tsit Chan, “What Is Living and What Is Dead in Confucianism,” 3-53, and 30-53 in particular.

(*xinxing zhi xue*). As Chang Hao explains, for New Confucians, nature (*xing*) has to be understood in a metaphysical sense; it implies the belief in inner transcendence. This inner transcendence is connected with the outer transcendence of heaven (*tian*); together they constitute the “unity between man and heaven” (*tianren heyi*). Another critical concept is *ren* (benevolence), which is actualized through self-cultivation. Once “inner sage” (*neisheng*), one has to rise above this moral cultivation by taking part in the outer world and by becoming “outer king” (*waiwang*).⁸³⁹

In the 1958 document that has generally been treated as the “manifesto” of New Confucianism, the “Declaration on Behalf of Chinese Culture Respectfully Announced to the People of the World” (*Wei Zhongguo wenhua jinggao shijie renshi xuanyan*), Mou Zongsan, Tang Junyi, Xu Fuguan, and Zhang Junmai made use of the Neo-Confucian concepts mentioned above to put forward a “correct” understanding of the true nature of Chinese culture against mistaken Western understandings that had failed to grasp Chinese culture as the “expression of the spiritual life of mankind.”⁸⁴⁰ The core of Chinese culture, the authors argued, was the doctrine of *xinxing*, or, the “conformity of heaven and man in virtue.”⁸⁴¹ The authors disapproved of the use of external standards to evaluate Chinese culture and criticized the “feverish pursuit of progress” of the West.⁸⁴² The authors envisioned a modernization that included both science and democracy and Confucian ethics.

In line with the New Confucian agenda, then, for Chen Lai, the problem of the renunciation of Confucian values was part of the general problem of the rationalization process inherent in modernity, which had led to the repression of morality. Confucianism could cure the ailments of modernity and exist in a positive tension with rationalization. The core of Confucianism revolved around two concepts: *ren* (benevolence) and *he* (harmony). Chen Lai explained that *he* contained five layers of meaning: harmony between heaven and man and man and nature; harmony between

⁸³⁹ Chang Hao, “Intellectual Crisis,” 289-296.

⁸⁴⁰ For an English version of the manifest, see Zhang Junmai, “A Manifesto for a Re-appraisal of Sinology and Reconstruction of Chinese Culture,” 455-483. Reference from 460. The Declaration was published in the journals *Zaisheng* (Renaissance) and *Minzhu pinglun* (Democratic Tribune) in the New Year issues of 1958. Tang Junyi, the Dean of the New Asia College in Hong Kong, provided the initial draft of the document, and the idea came from Zhang Junmai, who was living in the United States at the time. The declaration was reprinted in Feng Zusheng, ed., *Dangdai xin rujia* (New Confucianism) (Beijing: Shenghuo dushu xinzhishe, 1989), 1-52.

⁸⁴¹ Zhang Junmai, “Manifesto,” 464.

⁸⁴² *Ibid.*, 476.

countries; harmony between people; harmony within the individual spirit; and harmony between cultures and civilizations. On the basis of these five meanings, Chen Lai claimed that *he* could form an antidote to the exploitation of nature, Huntington's theory of the "clash of civilizations," the distance between people, the anxiety of the individual, and the lack of tolerance and peaceful coexistence between different cultures. Nonetheless, although *he* formed the basic orientation of Confucian culture, it was not its ultimate principle; that was *ren*. Consequently, Chen Lai considered *ren* to be the "substance," whereas *he* was the "function" of Confucian culture (*yi ren wei ti, yi he wei yong*).⁸⁴³ The meaning of *ren* could be stretched to include many meanings of *he*, such as the love for nature and universal love. As Chen Lai phrased it: "One could say that "ren" is the representation of Confucian value rationality and the concentrated manifestation of substantive tradition."⁸⁴⁴

As in Yü Ying-shih's account of modern Chinese history, in Chen Lai's historiography of the May Fourth era, history was not just an object of debate; it was a channel to discuss broader ethical issues. Chen Lai's account of "radicalism" also implied that modern China had deviated from the ideal moral Confucian order—although Chen Lai did not accuse the CCP of this process, as Yü Ying-shih had done—and it was the Confucian sage who could restore this moral order through self-cultivation. The political implications of Chen Lai's view were that the CCP, despite of its reference to Chinese traditional culture, was unable to restore the connection with the Chinese past. Like Yü Ying-shih, Chen Lai's view of what it meant to be Chinese was highly elitist; it focused on the moral qualities of intellectuals in particular. As has already been discussed, whereas Yü Ying-shih conceived of the existence of intermediate groups and institutions as crucial elements for the restoration of the Confucian moral order, Chen Lai, in the tradition of Neo-Confucianism, highlighted the significance of transhistorical Confucian values.

As will be discussed further, despite Chen Lai's claim that the core Confucian values he embraced were universal, he did not tie them to the restoration of a moral order that was universal in nature. As Chen Lai explained, the universal values

⁸⁴³ Gloria Davies has translated this as "humanity as the foundation and synthesis for application." See Tang Yijie, "Some Reflections on New Confucianism," 125.

⁸⁴⁴ Chen Lai, "Rujia sixiang yu xiandai dongya shijie," *CYX*, 179-187. Reference from 186. Originally published in *Dongfang* 1994:3, 10-13. Chen Lai also mentioned the concept of "harmony that differs from mere conformity" (*he er butong*), a notion taken from the *Analecets*, book 13, section 23.

manifested themselves in particular cultures; Chen Lai shunned any absolutist claims as regards a moral Confucian civilization. Chen Lai's engagement with "radicalism" in modern Chinese history, then, was not connected with a call for political action; on the contrary, for Chen Lai, the Confucian scholar was a mere guardian of cultural values. Any engagement in politics was to be avoided, because it would endanger the autonomy of the cultural and value spheres. As such, Chen Lai can be regarded as an example of those scholars who subscribed to a pure scholarship during the 1990s.

5.4 "DIALECTICAL DENIAL" AND "CULTURAL CONSERVATISM"

Whereas most participants in the 1992 debate had avoided the topic of Chinese tradition, and whereas Chinese "neo-conservatives" had attempted to incorporate Chinese tradition into their modernization project, Chen Lai supported historical continuity based on the intrinsic value of tradition. For this purpose, Chen Lai outlined a Hegelian model of "dialectical denial" in an article written for a symposium on the commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of May Fourth in April 1989.⁸⁴⁵ Chen's Hegelian framework of "dialectical denial" was not only politically acceptable for a Marxist audience—Hegel had continued to exist in the margin of Marx since 1949—but it was also in accordance with the popularity of Hegel at the time.⁸⁴⁶ In the article, Chen Lai expressed support for the "dialectical attitudes" of "critical inheritance" (*pipan de jicheng*), "creative development" (*chuangzao de fazhan*), "developing what is useful and discarding what is not" (*yangqi*), and "transformation" (*zhuanhua*), all of which did not carve up historical continuity.⁸⁴⁷

Referring to Hegel's *Logic*, Chen Lai explained that "dialectical denial" only denied the concrete content, the concrete fixedness (*guiding*) of a thing, but not the overall abstract thing—it was not wholesale denial. Since it was both affirmation and denial, or the unity of opposites, it resulted in more richness. "Dialectical denial" did not cut off the development of history, but was connected to it in a continuous and

⁸⁴⁵ Chen Lai, "Huajie chuantong yu xiandai de jinzhang: wusi wenhua sichao de fansi," in Lin Yü-sheng, *Wusi: duoyuan de fansi*, 151-185. Reprinted in *Chen Lai zixuanji*, 373-398.

⁸⁴⁶ German idealism was popular on mainland China during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Between 1987 and 1992, between 3500 and 3800 Chinese translations and other works on Western philosophy were published, half of which dealt with German idealism. Meissner, "New Intellectual Currents," 7.

⁸⁴⁷ Chen Lai, "Huajie jinzhang," *Chen Lai zixuanji*, 393. In a Hegelian sense, the term "yangqi" could also be translated as "Aufhebung."

organic manner. It was based on a law of development of ethico-religious traditions that distinguished between “particular content” (*teshu neirong*) and “active model” (*huodong yangshi*) on the one hand, and “universal essence” (*pubian benzhi*) and “guiding spirit” (*zhudao jingshen*) on the other.⁸⁴⁸ Notwithstanding the abundant presence of philosophical terminology, Chen Lai did not really explain how this process worked in practice. He did add that, in the instance of Confucian ethics, this basic content or “substance” (*ti*) was the belief in self-realization through knowledge, self-cultivation and practice. As to the social ideals of Confucian ethics, they included benevolence and righteousness (*renyi*), universal love, equality, and justice.

Based on this Hegelian scheme, Chen Lai presented certain core values of Confucianism as “basic inner laws” that were universal. As an example of “dialectical denial,” Chen mentioned Wu Mi, the former editor of the journal *Critical Review* (*Xueheng*). Wu Mi had made a distinction between basic inner laws of religious virtue that were identical in all religions and in all countries, and outer forms that differed per religion and per country.⁸⁴⁹ Wu Mi belonged to what Axel Schneider has called the group of “Neo-humanists” around the journal *Xueheng*.⁸⁵⁰ This group of scholars had studied under Irving Babbitt in the United States. In line with Babbitt’s criticism of the materialist and utilitarian aspects of modernity, Schneider argued, scholars like Wu Mi promoted a universal humanist civilization based on Greek philosophy, Indian Buddhism, and Chinese Confucianism. Schneider has further contended that the “neo-Humanists,” unlike Liang Shuming, did not perceive of Confucianism as a “Chinese cure to the *Western* illness of modernity,” but as “one part of a classicist answer to the problems of modernity.”⁸⁵¹ In accordance with this argument, one could hold that Chen Lai invoked Wu Mi because he conceived of Confucian values as universal values that could solve universal problems.

From the above, it can already be seen that Chen Lai’s advocacy of Confucian values was not based on a Burkean belief in the historical growth of tradition. Neither

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid., 395-396.

⁸⁴⁹ Ibid., 396. Chen Lai referred to Wu Mi’s “Lun xin wenhua yundong” (On the New Culture movement), *Dongxi wenxuan*, 528-542. The text originally appeared in *Xueheng* 4 (April 1922).

⁸⁵⁰ Schneider, “Bridging the Gap,” 13-21. The “Neo-Humanists” included Wu Mi, Mei Guangdi and Hu Xiansu. Schneider discerned two other groups around *Xueheng*, namely the “School of historical geography,” which included Liu Yizheng, Miao Fenglin, Zheng Hesheng, and Zhang Qiyun, and a group of historians, among them Wang Guowei, Chen Yinke, Tang Yongtong, and Zhang Yinlin.

⁸⁵¹ Ibid., 14.

did Chen Lai criticize “radicalism” as abstract thought or universalism from the angle of the particularity of Chinese tradition. Instead, Chen Lai’s promotion of universal values resembled the quest for a normative order of some American “neo-conservatives.” Leo Strauss, for example, had intended to fight moral relativism with the advocacy of an absolute and universal moral order, for which he found inspiration in Greek philosophy. Axel Schneider has called this type of conservatism “classicist conservatism”; he has included Strauss, Voegelin, and Babbitt as its representatives.⁸⁵²

As already mentioned above, Chen Lai applied the term “cultural conservatism” (*wenhua baoshou zhuyi*) to the stance of those who upheld Confucianism based on its inherent value. As also noted, Benjamin Schwartz and Charlotte Furth had coined the term “cultural conservatism” in their 1976 book *The Limits of Change*.⁸⁵³ The authors applied the term to Republican China because the cultural and political realms had been separated, which caused Chinese intellectuals to either combine a stance of “political radicalism” with “cultural nativism” or to defend the autonomy of the cultural realm.⁸⁵⁴ Schwartz had identified “cultural conservatism” as one of the traits of modern Chinese conservatism: a “Burkean” conservatism in defense of the sociopolitical status quo had been rare at the time.⁸⁵⁵

Chinese scholars also made use of the term “cultural conservatism” to describe a stance that was distinct from sociopolitical conservatism, but Chen Lai discerned some problems relating to the concept.⁸⁵⁶ Firstly, since radicalism, conservatism, and liberalism were categories from Western political philosophy and political thought, it was troublesome to simply add “culture” to these three categories to transform them into analytical tools for cultural perspectives. Moreover, in a Chinese context, the word “conservative” (*baoshou*) had a negative connotation, which is why Western specialists on China had avoided the term. Instead, they had relied on terms such as “maintaining

⁸⁵² Schneider, “The One and the Many,” unpublished paper for AAS, 2005.

⁸⁵³ See Chapter One, 4; Chapter Four, 187.

⁸⁵⁴ Furth, “Culture and Politics,” 27.

⁸⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁸⁵⁶ Chen Lai referred to Fang Keli, a professor in the Philosophy Department of Nankai University, and to Feng Tianyu, a member of the so-called “Enlightenment School” of the 1980s. This school had maintained that the origins of the Chinese Enlightenment could be traced back to the late sixteenth century.

the achievements of one's predecessors" (*shoucheng*), as demonstrated in, for example, Guy Alitto's book on the topic.⁸⁵⁷

Chen Lai's conception of "cultural conservatism" differed from that of Alitto in several essential respects. Firstly, for Alitto, "cultural conservatism" was an "anti-modernization theory," whereas for Chen Lai, it only took issue with the negative consequences of modernization, such as the destruction of spiritual life and national culture. Chen Lai reiterated that a conservative stance was not tantamount to hostility towards social reform or revolution; in the previous section, Chen Lai's argument that "cultural conservatives" were progressives has already been analyzed. Secondly, whereas both Schwartz and Alitto had claimed that "cultural conservatism" lined up with nationalism, a statement that was also echoed by Chinese intellectuals, Chen Lai argued that the advocacy of Confucianism was not mainly based on the demands of national identity.

For Chen Lai, "cultural conservatism" was a "moral conservatism" (*daode baoshou zhuyi*).⁸⁵⁸ "Cultural conservatives" believed that science, democracy, or the market economy could not automatically create public virtue or ethical order; they were convinced that the individualism and utilitarianism of modern society harmed community life.⁸⁵⁹ In this context, Chen also referred to the American neo-conservative Daniel Bell's criticism of late industrial societies. Chen Lai asserted that this criticism could also be applied to China because it addressed the question of "how to establish a humanist environment suited to the modernization project."⁸⁶⁰ In a Western context, the concept of "cultural conservatism" did not have negative connotations; it implied the opposition to the destruction of culture in the modernization process and the safeguarding of humanist values in a commercialized society. Apart from "anti-antitraditionalism" (*fan fanchuantong zhuyi*), Chen Lai also described "cultural conservatism" as "anti-pan-utilitarianism" (*fan pangongli zhuyi*).⁸⁶¹ Although Chen Lai sympathized with this viewpoint, he added that he resisted to be labeled a "cultural conservative" or to impose the label on others.

⁸⁵⁷ Ai Kai (Guy S. Alitto), *Shijie fanwei nei de fan xiandaihua sichao: lun wenhua shoucheng zhuyi* (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1999 (1991)), 4-5.

⁸⁵⁸ Chen Lai, "Renwen zhuyi de shijie," 18.

⁸⁵⁹ Chen Lai, "Ershi shiji Zhongguo wenhua zhong de ruxue kunjing," 31.

⁸⁶⁰ Chen Lai, "Renwen zhuyi de shijie," 16. Daniel Bell's *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* had been translated into Chinese in 1989 as Bei'er, *Ziben zhuyi de wenhua maodun*, trans. Zhao Yifan et al. (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1989).

⁸⁶¹ Chen Lai, "Renwen zhuyi de shijie," 16.

Since Chen Lai's "cultural conservatism" was a response to the rationalization process inherent in modernization, it had certain traits in common with Marxist criticisms of capitalism. As Jing Wang has noted, none of the Chinese critics made mention of this Marxist criticism, but there were certain similarities. Both Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) and Max Horkheimer (1895-1973) had criticized rationalism and capitalism; both had noticed the humanizing effect of substantive rationality. Both had also maintained that late capitalist modernity signified the disappearance of the public in favor of the private. Jing Wang has contended that Chinese intellectuals did not draw on these Marxist criticisms because they were a "radical critique of reason" that "inevitably leads to the critique of the sovereign rational subject, and, by extension, to a frontal attack on the whole tradition of humanism itself."⁸⁶² Chinese New Confucians, on the contrary, were strong defenders of humanism—their criticism was directed more at the rationalization process of modernity than at the rational subject. Because New Confucians still affirmed the modernization process, Jing Wang has argued that they failed to grasp the contradictions inherent in this process, a criticism that is reminiscent of Wang Hui's argument that rejections of "radicalism" did not truly reflect on modernity.⁸⁶³

Chen Lai's "cultural conservatism," then, was far removed from a Burkean or Hayekian defense of liberty and order; its focus was not on individual liberty, but, in line with Chinese tradition and with the Weberian criticism of "instrumental rationality," on the importance of community in times of rationalization. Chen Lai's reference to universal values was based on the belief in the inherent value of tradition, which was a far cry from the defense of a conservative liberalism or a "neo-conservatism" in which culture was employed in the service of modernization. Nevertheless, Chen Lai did not put forward this conservative goal on Burkean grounds, but on moral grounds, as in some forms of American neo-conservatism. Notwithstanding the different form that Chen Lai's conservatism took, it was also a defense of historical continuity.

⁸⁶² Wang, *High Culture Fever*, 76-77.

⁸⁶³ *Ibid.*, 78.

5.5 HISTORICAL CONTINUITY, THE PARTICULAR, AND THE UNIVERSAL

5.5.1 *Liang Shuming: Modernizer beyond Instrumental Rationality*

Given the fact that Chen Lai's "cultural conservatism" was a moral conservatism that identified Confucianism with certain core universal values, how could this guarantee the continuity of Chinese tradition? Chen Lai was rather vague on this topic, since he considered it a given that Chinese culture was a concrete manifestation of the universal values he had in mind. Although Chen Lai did not suggest that Chinese culture was the *only* manifestation of these universals, he nevertheless did not refer to other manifestations and, perhaps not surprisingly, he took Chinese culture as his point of departure. To discuss the issue of historical continuity, as well as Chen Lai's interpretation of the relation between universal values and Chinese tradition, some of Chen's writings on the mainland philosophers Liang Shuming and Feng Youlan will be analyzed.

Mainland scholars often identify Feng Youlan, He Lin, and Ma Yifu as New Confucians, whereas overseas New Confucians exclude them from their ranks.⁸⁶⁴ Both Liang Shuming and Feng Youlan were attacked on mainland China in the decades between 1949 and 1979, and they were also the first to be treated positively by the end of the 1970s.⁸⁶⁵ As Alitto has summarized Liang Shuming's image under communist China, he was seen as a "subjective idealist who tried to anesthetize the revolutionary rural masses with feudal morality," as an opponent of industrialization, and as an ally of Western imperialism.⁸⁶⁶ Liang Shuming is most famous for his 1921 book *Eastern and*

⁸⁶⁴ Makeham, "Retrospective Creation," 30. Whether Feng Youlan was a New Confucian remains highly debated. The mainland New Confucian Zheng Jiadong has identified him as such, but Lauren Pfister has argued that Feng's *Xin lixue* was "forward looking," unlike the conservative and "backward looking" bent of those who signed the 1958 Manifesto. See Lauren F. Pfister, "A Modern Chinese Philosophy Built upon Critically Received Traditions: Feng Youlan's New Principle-Centered Learning and the Question of Its Relationship to Contemporary New Ruist ("Confucian") Philosophies," in Makeham, *New Confucianism*, 165-184. Similarly, although Alitto has portrayed Liang as "the last Confucian," John Hanafin has challenged this notion by referring to him as the "last Buddhist." See John J. Hanafin, "The 'Last Buddhist': The Philosophy of Liang Shuming," in Makeham, *New Confucianism*, 188-218.

⁸⁶⁵ Whereas Liang Shuming's books were burnt and Liang was re-educated, Feng Youlan had to write over a hundred self-criticisms and his *Xin lixue* was abolished on the mainland during the 1950s. Liang Shuming was further urged to criticize himself after a row with Mao Zedong in 1953. In 1955, Liang became the subject of a campaign in the press, after which he made a formal self-criticism in 1956.

⁸⁶⁶ Alitto, *The Last Confucian*, 5.

Western Cultures and Their Philosophies (Dongxi wenhua ji qi zhexue).⁸⁶⁷ In the book, Liang Shuming asserted that all forms of life, including culture, were a manifestation of a general Will, an idea he borrowed from the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860).⁸⁶⁸

More specifically, Liang Shuming distinguished between three different cultural ideal types, which reflected different solutions to the contradictions posed by the Will and by obstacles in the environment. Western culture was a manifestation of a Will aimed at conquering the environment; Chinese culture reflected a Will that sought harmony with its environment; Indian culture, finally, epitomized a Will that envisioned the annihilation of the self. Although Liang perceived the relation between the three types of culture to be one of successive stages, he also interpreted the three culture types as different roads towards modernization. This meant that China was on a track different from the West; it also meant that, since culture was the holistic reflection of an underlying direction, cultural blending was impossible. As Alitto has claimed, the solution Liang proposed to China's cultural dilemma contracted his theory of the Will, because it amounted to a combination of the critical acceptance of Western culture and the reappraisal of China's cultural attitude.⁸⁶⁹ Alitto has also held that the gist of Liang's book was that "Chinese culture was both on a higher spiritual level than Western culture and compatible with modernization."⁸⁷⁰

Chen Lai praised Liang Shuming because, in contrast with the "wholesale modernizers," Liang discerned value in Chinese tradition. Although the "Westernizers" had often presented Liang as a conservative who resisted modernization, Chen Lai depicted Liang as a proponent of Western culture who avoided the fallacies that Chen Duxiu and the ilk had fallen prone to.⁸⁷¹ Referring to Liang's 1921 book, Chen Lai insisted that Liang confirmed the value of Western culture for the present—now, all had to embark on the "first road"—but he also acknowledged the value of Chinese and Indian culture for the future. Like the Westernizers, Liang criticized the backwardness of ancient China in the field of "civilization," but he did not denounce the "attitude

⁸⁶⁷ Liang Shuming, *Dongxi wenhua ji qi zhexue* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1922).

⁸⁶⁸ Schopenhauer's main work was *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (The World as Will and Representation). The first part of this work appeared in 1819, the second part was published in 1844.

⁸⁶⁹ Alitto, *The Last Confucian*, 121.

⁸⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 129; Chen Lai, "Liang Shuming zaoqi de dongxi wenhuaguan," *CYX*, 97-129. See also Chen Lai, "Dui xin wenhua yundong de zai sikao," 3-4.

towards life” (*rensheng taidu*) of Chinese culture as backward. In fact, the revival of Chinese culture that he predicted for the future would occur in the realm of “attitude towards life.”⁸⁷²

By repudiating the image of Liang Shuming as a conservative who resisted modernization, Chen Lai followed Guy Alitto’s reevaluation of Liang in *The Last Confucian*.⁸⁷³ Alitto had argued that Liang’s advocacy of Confucian values, instead of being a marker of an anti-modern traditionalism, or just another manifestation of “cultural conservatism,” was not only modern, but it also shared certain aspects with Marxist thought.⁸⁷⁴ For Alitto, Liang Shuming’s criticism was part of a global critique of modernity that was also expressed in, for example, the philosophy of Vitalism in France at the time.⁸⁷⁵ As already noted in the previous chapter, Alitto maintained that Chinese conservatism, as a reaction against modernization, contained cultural nationalist traits. Alitto agreed with Levenson’s argument that the perception that modernization was a foreign product had resulted in the tension between “history” and “value”—the emotional response to modernization had initiated the separation between “spirit” and “matter.” But for Chen Lai, Liang Shuming was not just a cultural nationalist; Chen Lai referred to Liang Shuming in the context of his argument that Confucian values could cure the ailments of the modern world.

In his promotion of “value rationality,” Chen Lai invoked Liang Shuming’s concept of *lixing*. Although the concept is generally translated as “reason,” Liang’s use of the concept differed somewhat from its modern meaning. According to Alitto, in Liang Shuming’s cultural writings between 1930 and 1949, the concept of *lixing* took the place of the concepts of *ren* (benevolence) and *zhijue* (intuition) in his earlier writings. Furthermore, Liang Shuming’s interpretation of the latter was based on the

⁸⁷² Chen Lai, “Liang Shuming zaoqi de dongxi wenhuaguan,” 111-112.

⁸⁷³ Guy Alitto, *The Last Confucian: Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

⁸⁷⁴ As to the resemblances with the Chinese Communist Party, Alitto mentioned Liang Shuming’s rural reconstruction program, which combined moral mobilization with economic cooperation. Both in the voluntarism of Chinese Marxism and in the idealism of Neo-Confucianism, on which Liang based himself, the emphasis had been on the transformation of members of society through teaching. The greatest difference between Liang Shuming and Mao Zedong was that Liang denounced class struggle. See Frederic Wakeman, Jr., “Foreword” in *The Last Confucian*, ix-xiv.

⁸⁷⁵ In France, the most famous proponent of Vitalism was the philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941), who countered mechanistic philosophies of the time with a Philosophy of Life based on intuition. Bergson criticized Darwinist evolution theory and insisted that evolution was driven by a struggle between what he called the *élan vital* and matter.

French philosopher Henri Bergson's (1859-1841) understanding of intuition as put forward in *L'évolution créatrice* (1907).⁸⁷⁶ In Bergson's view, "intuition" offered a way to understand life because it was close to experience, unlike the abstractions of reason. Alitto held that Liang used the term *lixing* on par with *lizhi* (intellect), the faculty of reasoning. *Lixing* transcended *lizhi* because it was for Liang "the normative sense that directs moral action... the sense of right and wrong which makes man human."⁸⁷⁷

If *lixing* was accredited with a normative sense, it becomes clear why Chen Lai, in his quest for morality, referred to this concept especially. For Chen Lai, Liang Shuming's concept of *lixing* in some aspects resembled Habermas' concept of "communicative rationality," because it was a "manner of interaction," a "mutual understanding," or a "mentality of mutual connection"—this, Chen Lai noted, was like benevolence (*ren*).⁸⁷⁸ Whereas Habermas' theory of "communicative rationality" had accorded a central role to communication in the establishment of rationality, Chen Lai interpreted this communication as a moral concept that connected people and that offered normative guidance—communication was essential in the formation of a community. Chen Lai was not the only intellectual who united Liang Shuming's concept of *lixing* with Habermas' "communicative rationality"; in his book on Habermas and the Chinese modernization discourse, Tong Shijun made the same connection; he added that Liang Shuming's concept of *lizhi* resembled "instrumental rationality."⁸⁷⁹ For Tong Shijun, "communicative rationality" was socialist and communitarian in nature; it could offer an antidote to instrumental rationality. For Chen Lai, on the contrary, "communicative rationality" had Confucian rather than socialist traits, but it was nevertheless also oriented towards the community.

5.5.2 Feng Youlan: The Question of "Particulars" and "Universals"

Chen Lai also utilized the writings of the Chinese philosopher Feng Youlan in order to support his argument that our conception of modernization should include "value rationality." Feng Youlan had studied at Columbia University between 1920 and 1923 and is most famous for his *History of Chinese Philosophy (Zhongguo zhhexueshi)*, 1934). Feng Youlan was noteworthy for Chen Lai because he had addressed the issue of

⁸⁷⁶ Alitto, *The Last Confucian*, 177.

⁸⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁸⁷⁸ Chen Lai, "Rujia sixiang yu xiandai dongya shijie," 186.

⁸⁷⁹ Tong Shijun, *Dialectics of Modernization*, 104-105.

modernization in his works. As Luo Rongqu has noted, the concept of modernization was first used in Chinese political and cultural debates in the 1930s; both the philosophers Feng Youlan and He Lin had discussed the concept during the 1940s.⁸⁸⁰

Chen Lai drew on Feng Youlan's discussion of the relation between "particulars" and "universals" in both Feng's metaphysical and cultural writings specifically. The problem of "universals" versus "particulars" constituted the basis of Feng Youlan's later work *A New Philosophy of Principle (Xin lixue)*.⁸⁸¹ An example of the metaphysical discussion can be found in "New Dialogues," a series of articles published in the supplement *Currents of Thought* of the Tianjin newspaper *Dagong Bao* in 1931. In these articles, Feng Youlan discussed the relation between "particulars" and "universals" in the form of fictive dialogues between historical figures. Chen Lai made mention of two "dialogues" in particular, namely the first one and the last one.⁸⁸²

In the first dialogue, the Neo-Confucian scholar Zhi Xu told the Qing scholar Dai Zhen (1724-1777), a critic of Neo-Confucianism, that morality could not be divided into "new" and "old." Moreover, Zhu Xi distinguished between some basic "invariant morals" (*bubian de daode*) and "changeable morals" (*kebian de daode*). Basic virtues, including "benevolence," were a necessary condition for the existence of humanity.⁸⁸³ In the last "dialogue" between Zhu Xi and Chen Tongfu (1143-1194), a contemporary of Zhu Xi who criticized idealism, Zhu Xi noted that there were different types of social organization, but all types contained the same basic and invariant moral principles.⁸⁸⁴

In Feng Youlan's cultural writings, the topic of the relation between "particulars" and "universals" was explored in the form of a discussion on the relation between Chinese and Western cultures. For Feng Youlan, the problem with the debates over "wholesale Westernization" versus "native culture" was that they had been too vague. Therefore, in a text from 1936, Feng Youlan proposed a distinction between "particular" (*geti*) and "type" (*leixing*) in order to deal with culture. If culture was treated as a "type," the relevant aspects of culture that also belonged to other cultures of the same "type" could be discerned; if, on the other hand, culture was treated as a

⁸⁸⁰ Luo Rongqu, *Cong "xihua" dao xiandaihua*, 100.

⁸⁸¹ Feng Youlan, *The Hall of Three Pines*, 255. Four parts of the series can be found in Feng Youlan, *Sansongtang quanji* (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1986), Vol. 5, 275-317.

⁸⁸² Chen Lai, "Feng Youlan wenhuaguan de jianli yu fazhan," *CYX*, 130-162, and 156 in particular. Originally published as "Feng Youlan wenhuaguan shuping," *Xueren* 4, 129-164.

⁸⁸³ Feng Youlan, "Xin duihua (yi)," *Sansongtang quanji*, Vol. 5, 275-282.

⁸⁸⁴ Feng Youlan, "Xin duihua (si)," *Sansongtang quanji*, Vol. 5, 300-305.

“particular,” it was more difficult to notice the relevant aspects of that culture.⁸⁸⁵ Moreover, since Western culture represented the “type” of “industrial culture,” only those elements related to that specific type should be preserved:

Logically, there is the difference between the so-called particular and the type. A particular can represent many types; Confucius, for example, can represent many types, such as a man from the Spring and Autumn period, a man from Shandong, a man who has lived seventy years, a wise man, and so on. (...) What is called the West is a particular; culturally, it represents many types, such as Protestant culture, scientific culture, industrial culture, and so on. When we talk about studying the West, in reality, we study a certain culture type or several culture types it represents, such as scientific culture or industrial culture. Those elements within original Chinese culture that are not in conflict with this should of course not be altered.⁸⁸⁶

Feng Youlan developed his argument for the treatment of Western culture as a “culture type” instead of a “particular” in his later work *Xinshilun* (A New Discourse on Events, 1940), in which the methodology of *A New Philosophy of Principle* was applied to practical problems.⁸⁸⁷ In the first chapter of *Xinshilun*, Feng made use of the terms “universal” (*gongxiang*) and “particular” (*shuxiang*) instead of “type” and “particular,” but the approach remained the same. Since the “universal” of Western culture was industrialization, those elements in Western culture related to industrialization had to be studied. As such, for Feng Youlan, the dilemma between “native culture” and “wholesale Westernization” could be resolved: both groups could agree with industrialization.⁸⁸⁸ According to the logic of *A New Rational Philosophy*, Chen Lai

⁸⁸⁵ Chen Lai, “Feng Youlan wenhuaguan de jianli yu fazhan,” 143-144. The 1936 text that Chen Lai referred to was Feng Youlan’s “Zhongguo xiandai minzu yundong zhi zong dongxiang” (General trends in nationalist movements of modern China), *Sansongtang quanji*, Vol. 11, 308-316.

⁸⁸⁶ Chen Lai, “Feng Youlan wenhuaguan de jianli yu fazhan,” *CYX*, 144-145. From Feng Youlan, “Cong Zhongguo zhexuehui shuodao zhexue de yongchu,” *Shenbao*, January 24th, 1937. *Sansongtang Quanji*, Vol. 5, 356-359. Quote from 359.

⁸⁸⁷ Feng Youlan, *Xin shilun* (A new discourse on events) (Changsha: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1940). Feng Youlan’s *Xin lixue*—in which Feng elaborated the methodology that he later applied to *Xin shilun*—drew on Plato, Zhu Xi, and New Realism. Feng was drawn toward the Platonist school of New Realism in particular, which “argued not only that truth was objective, but that all ideas and concepts have their objective referents.” See Feng Youlan, *The Hall of Three Pines*, 219.

⁸⁸⁸ Chen Lai, “Xin lixue yu xiandaixing siwei de fansi,” *CYX*, 163-179. Reference from 165. Originally published in *Beijing daxue xuebao*, 1995: 1.

explained, a thing contained the principles of things of its kind, but it also contained the principles of things beyond its kind; any individual culture also contained the principles of “society.”⁸⁸⁹ Thus, traditional Chinese culture also included the principles of general societies; it was, to use a Hegelian notion, a “concrete universal” (*yi juti de gongxiang*).

Basing himself on Feng Youlan, Chen Lai discarded a “particularist” approach in which the focus was on the difference between the modern and the traditional. Instead, along the lines of Feng Youlan’s usage of “general types,” Chen Lai posited an approach that brought the connections between traditional and modern societies to the surface. As Feng Youlan wrote:

Regarding existence, the reason why modern societies can exist, is because they not only have to be at par with the principles of modern societies different from tradition (instrumental rationality), they must also be at par with the principles of all societies (including value rationality).⁸⁹⁰

By treating societies primarily as “universals,” the “value rationality” of tradition could be included in modern society; the historical continuity of tradition could hence be assured. According to Chen Lai, this historical continuity between present and past was not only expressed in Weber’s concept of “value rationality,” but also in Edward Shils’ concept of “substantive tradition.” Shils explained the latter as “the appreciation of the accomplishments and wisdom of the past and of the institutions especially impregnated with tradition,” and “the desirability of regarding patterns inherited from the past as valid guides.”⁸⁹¹ From this, it can be seen that Chen Lai’s defense of historical continuity was rooted in a belief in the inherent value of tradition—Chen Lai cherished the wisdom of the past.

5.6 A CULTURAL NATIONALISM?

Whereas for Chen Lai, the focus on the universal nature of cultures and societies was beneficial rather than detrimental to the historical continuity of Chinese tradition, for Lin Yü-sheng—who had formulated his own solution of the “creative transformation”

⁸⁸⁹ Chen Lai, “Feng Youlan wenhuaguan de jianli yu fazhan,” *CYX*, 155.

⁸⁹⁰ Chen Lai, “Xin lixue yu xiandaixing siwei de fansi,” *CYX*, 177.

⁸⁹¹ Shils, *Tradition*, 21.

of tradition in response to the “totalistic antitraditionalism” of May Fourth intellectuals—the New Confucian solution to the predicament of Confucianism was not a true solution. Lin Yü-sheng’s main objection was that, in Chinese tradition, the universal values that New Confucians promoted had been tied to concrete “social referents,” namely family ethics. As such, the moral and sociopolitical orders had been integrated. Nevertheless, New Confucians abandoned these referents and championed universal values to preserve Chinese tradition. However, as Lin Yü-sheng posed the question: “If Chinese moral tradition contains nothing but the universally human, what is particularly Chinese about it?”⁸⁹² For Charlotte Furth, on the other hand, there was no contradiction between the advocacy of Chinese cultural continuity and the identification of Confucianism with universal values:

To call conservative those who have continued to use Confucian symbols to allude to their meaning is to say that the historical specificity of the religious form is inseparable from the timeless truth being expressed, and that this embodiment of the eternal in the historically conditioned human is seen by the believer as both necessary and right.⁸⁹³

For Furth, the New Confucian advocacy of universal values was a form of “universal” conservatism that manifested the same “style of thought” as the “nativist” conservatism that perceived of Chinese culture as a particular culture. As noted before, Axel Schneider has also distinguished between a “historicist” or “romantic” conservatism that based itself on particularity and a “classicist” conservatism that intended to revive universal values drawing on classical philosophy.⁸⁹⁴ According to this scheme, New Confucianism could be interpreted as an expression of a “universal” conservatism that was similar to certain forms of American “neo-conservatism” in which the Burkean emphasis on tradition was complemented with the reference to a normative order.

Other scholars did not pose the question of how universal values could be reconciled with the promotion of the historical continuity of Chinese tradition, since they did not consider New Confucianism a “universal” conservatism that defended a moral order, as in some manifestations of American “neo-conservatism.” Instead, they interpreted New Confucianism as the promotion of a Chinese tradition that was

⁸⁹² Lin Yü-sheng, “The Suicide of Liang Chi,” *LOC*, 165.

⁸⁹³ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

⁸⁹⁴ Schneider, “The One and the Many,” unpublished Paper for AAS, 2005.

particularistic in essence. Inspired by John Hutchinson's *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism*, scholars such as Guo Yingjie linked the rise of New Confucianism during the 1990s to a trend of cultural nationalism.⁸⁹⁵ As already noted in Chapter One, cultural nationalists regarded the nation as their primary focus of loyalty. Moreover, they turned down class conceptions of Chinese identity and attempted to “renationalize” the state’s conception of “Chineseness,” which they considered illegitimate.⁸⁹⁶ For Guo Yingjie, New Confucianism, historiographical revisionism, debates on linguistic reform, and Chinese appropriations of postcolonial theory during the 1990s were all typified by cultural nationalist traits.⁸⁹⁷ In her study of academic nationalism in China, Margaret Sleeboom has also treated “globalist group markers,” or the reference to universal categories in Chinese and Japanese discourses, as but a manifestation of nationalism.⁸⁹⁸ According to this scheme, Chen Lai’s universalistic interpretation of Chinese values could be perfectly in accordance with a nationalist argument; universalism was but a disguised form of particularism.

John Makeham has applied the concept of “cultural nationalism” to the New Confucian discourse because it avoided the problems related to the distinction between “culturalism” and “nationalism.” These problems had surfaced in the works of the historian Joseph Levenson.⁸⁹⁹ Levenson had asserted that “culturalism,” or, taking Chinese culture as the object of loyalty, had set apart traditional Chinese thought; it was only under the impact of Western imperialism, between 1895 and 1919, that this mode of identification had given way to nationalism. Both Prasenjit Duara and James Townsend attacked Levenson’s “culturalism-to-nationalism thesis”; they asserted that the distinction between the two forms was not as clear-cut as Levenson had imagined it.⁹⁰⁰ Taking these criticisms into account, Makeham coined the term “ruxue-centered Chinese cultural nationalism” for the discourse on New Confucianism, a term which he

⁸⁹⁵ John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London, Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1987).

⁸⁹⁶ Guo, *Cultural Nationalism*, 19.

⁸⁹⁷ Guo Yingjie, “Reconstructing a Confucian Nation: the Confucian Revival,” in idem, *Cultural Nationalism*, 72-90.

⁸⁹⁸ See Margaret Sleeboom, *Academic Nations in China and Japan: Framed in Concepts of Nature, Culture and the Universal* (London, New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004).

⁸⁹⁹ See Joseph R. Levenson, *Liang Ch’i-ch’ao and the Mind of Modern China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 108-122 in particular; Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), Vol. 1, 98-104 in particular.

⁹⁰⁰ James Townsend, “Chinese Nationalism,” 1-30; Prasenjit Duara, “De-constructing the Chinese Nation,” 31-55.

described as “a movement based on the ideological conviction that *ruxue* is a cultural formation fundamental to the identity consciousness of the Chinese (*Zhonghua*) nation.”⁹⁰¹

Makeham nevertheless also recognized the limits of “cultural nationalism” as a framework for the analysis of the New Confucian discourse, since not all “*ruxue*-centered cultural nationalists” had backed the recreation of Chinese civilization. Li Zehou, for example, although his thesis that *ruxue* was a “cultural-psychological formation” (*wenhua xinli jiegou*), sedimentation (*jidian*) or deep structure (*shenceng jiegou*) was very influential, had not insisted that *ruxue* had to be promoted. Since Confucianism was such a fundamental part of the Chinese character, there was no need to revive or advocate it.⁹⁰² In addition, scholars such as Tu Wei-ming only wanted to revive the Confucian tradition, not Confucian society as such. Another objection to the framework of “cultural nationalism” concerns the existence of notions such as “East Asian *ruxue*” and the “Han cultural circle,” both of which pointed in the direction of an identification with a cultural sphere that exceeded the scope of the nation.⁹⁰³

Given these objections, one might ask whether the fact that New Confucians treated Confucianism as “the core of Chinese culture” was sufficient to treat New Confucianism as a manifestation of “cultural nationalism.” New Confucians would very much argue against the “cultural nationalism” thesis, since it suggested an emotional identification with tradition. For Tu Wei-ming, the New Confucian project was very much an intellectual project. Tu Wei-ming declared that Xiong Shili’s thought contained nationalist elements, but Xiong had nevertheless consciously chosen self-realization as the means to cultural continuity. Tu added that one could not treat Xiong’s thought as a form of “particularism” just because he “made a conscious attempt to philosophize from a specific point of view.”⁹⁰⁴ In the words of Tu Wei-ming:

To use a Mencian analogy, the search for the spring of wisdom commences with digging the ground of one’s true self. Yet the intention is to assert neither the strength

⁹⁰¹ Makeham, *Lost Soul*, 15.

⁹⁰² Li Zehou, “Chu ni *ruxue* shenceng jiegou jiangshuo,” 59-78. Although this article dates from 1990, Li Zehou also expressed this idea in various writings before 1990. For the role of the theory of sedimentation in Li Zehou’s thought, see Chong, “Mankind and Nature in Chinese Thought,” 147-153.

⁹⁰³ Makeham, *Lost Soul*, 16.

⁹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 262-264.

of one's ethnicity nor the power of one's cultural heritage, but the universal relevance of "authentic existence".⁹⁰⁵

Whereas Tu Wei-ming disapproved of the "cultural nationalism" interpretation, he did not object to the use of the term "cultural conservatism" for New Confucianism. New Confucians were removed from political power; Confucianism in the New Confucian scheme was not a "political ideology," but a "tradition of religious philosophy."⁹⁰⁶ This view largely corresponded to Chen Lai's attempt to separate Confucianism from the political realm.

Although the New Confucian Chang Hao did not respond to the "cultural nationalism" thesis, his comments on the notion of "cultural identity" as an explanatory concept for the rise of New Confucianism also expose his attitude toward "cultural nationalism." According to Chang Hao, the notion of "cultural identity" implied that New Confucianism was a response to rapid change that abolished the continuity with the past, an explanation that was at the same time too broad and too narrow. It was too broad because it did not explain why New Confucians identified with Confucian values in particular; it was too narrow because it overlooked the universalistic elements of New Confucianism. Instead, Chang Hao claimed that New Confucianism was a response to an intellectual crisis, which he interpreted as a crisis of meaning under the supremacy of scientism. This spiritual crisis could not be understood as an intellectual crisis of modernization, but it was nevertheless related to this intellectual crisis.⁹⁰⁷

The resort to universal Confucian values, then, was more complicated than Makeham has presented it. Since New Confucians were concerned not only with the negative aspects of modernity in all societies, but also with the fate of Confucianism in Chinese society in particular, it is no wonder that their focus of interest was Chinese tradition. Moreover, as New Confucians, in the tradition of the Confucian scholar-official, they conceived of the fate of China as their personal responsibility, which explains why their advocacy also contained some nationalistic traits. Nevertheless, although the resort to Confucian values could not be reduced to a manifestation of "cultural nationalism," the New Confucian presentation of the choice for Confucian values as a purely intellectual undertaking was also too simplistic. Not only are there

⁹⁰⁵ Ibid., 273.

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid., 246.

⁹⁰⁷ Chang Hao, "New Confucianism," *LOC*, 302.

unconscious and irrational elements at work in every choice, but the idea of a purely intellectual choice also neglects the political implications of the New Confucian project. The very insistence of New Confucians on the purely “cultural” and “intellectual” nature of the project—and their very embrace of the term “cultural conservatism”—illustrates the political implications of the project. If the project had not been political, there would have been no need to reiterate its apolitical nature in the first place.

5.7 MARXISM, CONFUCIANISM, AND “NATIONAL STUDIES”

5.7.1 *The Integration of New Confucianism into the Socialist Modernization Project*

As Guo Yingjie has noted, Marxism and New Confucianism differed considerably with regard to their views of nature and historical change. For New Confucians, nature was an organic whole with interdependent parts, and change was gradual. For Marxists, on the other hand, the dualist structure of reality in which opposites united could only be temporary; in the end, struggle would prevail and make room for a new social reality. The ideological implications of the Confucian worldview were obvious: revolution and struggle only led to destruction and deviation from the Way; gradual change and social harmony, on the other hand, were in accordance with the Way.⁹⁰⁸

These theoretical differences reveal why the CCP and New Confucians had a different attitude towards Chinese culture. Whereas New Confucians identified with cultural values, the CCP only intended to use them instrumentally, as also explained in Chapter Two. The Party had discovered the potential of culture as a means of cohesion; it attempted to complement its class-based identity with culture instead of replacing it with cultural notions of identity. As the Marxist historian Xie Wujun put it, the CCP could use New Confucianism for the construction of “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” but New Confucianism could constitute only one aspect of it; it could not function as its basis.⁹⁰⁹ The New Confucian identification with Chinese culture in the form of Confucian values, on the other hand, implicitly supplanted class-based notions of identity. The religious identity of New Confucians was based on “alignments

⁹⁰⁸ Guo, *Cultural Nationalism*, 75, 79.

⁹⁰⁹ Xie Wujun, “Ping Zhongguo dangdai de baoshou zhuyi sichao,” 20.

of culture and its elements,” such as “values, symbols, myths, and traditions,” as Anthony Smith has phrased it.⁹¹⁰

Whereas New Confucians accentuated the universality of Confucian values, the official Marxist interpretation was that New Confucianism was a part of Chinese culture. Officially, New Confucianism was understood in a broad sense, namely as a representative element of “Chinese culture.” In this sense, it was not very different from Confucianism. The assignment of New Confucianism as one of the seventy-five “national research topics” in 1986 was a landmark in what Song Xianlin has called “the transformation of Confucianism in the shape of New Confucianism in mainland China.”⁹¹¹ A research committee consisting of forty-seven scholars from sixteen institutions, among them Guo Qiyong, Zheng Jiadong, and Luo Yijun, was set up under the heading of Fang Keli from Nankai University and Li Jinquan from Guangzhou University, two Marxist Confucians who supported a dialogue between Confucianism and Marxism. In the book *New Confucianism and Chinese Modernization (Xiandai xin ruxue yu Zhongguo xiandaihua)*, Fang Keli defined New Confucianism as follows:

The New Confucian Movement was born in the 1920s. Its program has been to reclaim for Confucian thought a leading role in Chinese society, to rebuild the Confucian value system, and on the foundation of it to absorb and master, and finally to amalgamate with Western learning, in order to pursue the modernization of Chinese culture and society.⁹¹²

As can be seen from the above, this definition was remarkably broad. In the introduction to the first volume of the *Collected Essays on New Confucian Studies (Xiandai xin ruxue yanjiu lunji)*, Fang Keli mentioned two scholarly reasons for the research on Confucianism, namely to define the position of New Confucianism in the history of modern Chinese thought and to map out the movement. There were also two political reasons, namely to make sure that it would not go against Marxism—as had occurred in Taiwan and Hong Kong—and, secondly, to understand it because it was a

⁹¹⁰ Smith, *National Identity*, 6.

⁹¹¹ Song, “The Confucian Ideal,” 86.

⁹¹² Bresciani, *Reinventing Confucianism*, iv. From Fang Keli, *Xiandai xin ruxue yu Zhongguo xiandaihua* (Tianjin: Renmin chubanshe, 1997), 453.

phase in China's modernization process.⁹¹³ Fang Keli further criticized "Confucian capitalism," claimed adherence to the "Four Cardinal Principles," and stressed that the study of Confucianism was part of socialist modernization.⁹¹⁴

On mainland China, then, attempts were made to incorporate Confucianism into the Chinese modernization project, partly because this was a way to control what was perceived of as a threat, and partly to fill the ideological vacuum as discussed in Chapter Two. For Fang Keli, the excessive stress on concepts and the spiritual in New Confucianism amounted to an "idealist" view of history and cultural determinism, accusations that were reminiscent of Marxist criticism of rejections of "radicalism" as discussed in the previous chapter.⁹¹⁵ Intellectually, Fang Keli noted, New Confucianism was a positive phenomenon, but politically, it was mistaken in its denial of the revolutionary struggle against imperialism and feudalism.⁹¹⁶ Not all mainland New Confucians were interested in the dialogue proposed by Marxist Confucians. Jiang Qing, Chen Kejian, and Luo Yijun, for example, identified with New Confucians outside mainland China. Luo Yijun even left the research project of Fang Keli and Li Jinquan because he disapproved of its Marxist approach.⁹¹⁷

5.7.2 *The Official Revaluation of Traditional Chinese Culture*

The incorporation of New Confucianism into the socialist modernization project was a continuation of the official revaluation of Confucianism that had taken place since the beginning of the reform era. As early as August 12th, 1978, the word "Confucius" was first mentioned positively and said to be in need of revaluation in the official *Guangming Daily*; in the same year, a symposium on Confucianism was held in

⁹¹³ Bresciani, *Reinventing Confucianism*, 426-427. See Fang Keli, "Guanyu xiandai xin rujia yanjiu de jige wenti," 1-13. Other examples of the work of the Research Committee include Fang Keli and Zheng Jiadong, eds., *Xiandai xin rujia renwu yu zhuzuo* (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 1995); and Fang Keli and Li Jinquan, eds., *Xiandai xin Rujia xue'an* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1995).

⁹¹⁴ Song, "The Confucian Ideal," 95.

⁹¹⁵ Fang Keli, "Lüelun jiushi niandai de wenhua baoshou zhuyi sichao," 153. For Marxist criticism of rejections of "radicalism," see Chapter Four, 180-183.

⁹¹⁶ Fang Keli, "Lüelun jiushi niandai de wenhua baoshou zhuyi sichao," 157-161.

⁹¹⁷ The 1994 book *Rationality and Life* by Luo Yijun and Chen Kejian has been referred to as "the mainland New Confucian Manifesto." See Chen Kejian, ed., *Lixing yu shengming: dangdai xin ruxue wencui* (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1993); Luo Yijun, ed., *Lixing yu shengming: dangdai xin ruxue wencui* (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1994).

Shandong.⁹¹⁸ In 1984, at a conference in Qufu for the 2535th birthday of Confucius, symbolically, a statue of Confucius was disclosed. In the same year, the China Confucius Foundation was established in Qufu, with economist Gu Mu—the Vice-Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference and former Vice-premier of the State Council—as honorary president.⁹¹⁹

In 1985, in the heat of the “culture fever,” both the Academy of Chinese Culture (*Zhongguo wenhua shuyuan*) and the Chinese Confucius Research Institute (*Zhonghua Kongzi yanjiusuo*) were founded. In 1987, Gu Mu gave a speech at the first international conference on Confucianism, also in Qufu, in which he stated that Confucianism was part of Chinese culture and that both the “critical inheritance” of traditional Chinese culture as well as a “critical assimilation” of elements of other cultures were needed. Two years later, at the conference that marked the 2540th birthday of Confucius, Gu Mu went further: he explicitly praised Confucianism and pointed out its relevance for contemporary China.⁹²⁰ In 1994, the International Confucian Association (*Guoji Ruxue lianhehui*) was founded; in the same year, the opening ceremony of the conference that marked the 2545th birthday of Confucius was attended by, among others, high officials such as Gu Mu and Li Ruihuan. The most famous attendant was Lee Kuan Yew, the former prime minister of Singapore.⁹²¹ Jean Philippe Béja has referred to this “artificial repacking” of Confucianism and Chinese culture for political goals as “national-Confucianism.”⁹²²

Since 1993, the official revival of traditional Chinese culture occurred not only in the shape of the promotion of Confucianism, but also in the form of the advocacy of “national studies” (*guoxue*). As Axel Schneider has pointed out, the renewed interest in “national studies” during the 1990s was “neither a clearly defined intellectual position, nor a clear-cut academic current.”⁹²³ “National studies” denoted the revival of interest in academics and journalists from the Republican period and their non-Marxist, non-liberal approaches, which entailed continuity with tradition instead of a break with tradition. This “new *guoxue*” included research on National Essence scholars, on the debates on Eastern and Western culture and the 1923 debate on “Science and

⁹¹⁸ Wang, *High Culture Fever*, 68.

⁹¹⁹ De Bary, “The New Confucianism,” 180.

⁹²⁰ Song, “The Confucian Ideal,” 86-87.

⁹²¹ De Bary, “The New Confucianism,” 175.

⁹²² Béja, “National-Confucianism,” 10.

⁹²³ Schneider, “Bridging the Gap,” 9.

Metaphysics,” on Yan Fu and Liang Qichao, on the *Xueheng* group, and on New Confucianism between the 1920s and 1940s.⁹²⁴

On August 16, 1993, an article appeared in the *People’s Daily* at the occasion of the publication of the first volume of “national studies research” by the Traditional Chinese Culture Research Center of Peking University.⁹²⁵ This was remarkable, since it was not only the first long article to report on Peking University in *People’s Daily* since the repression of the Tiananmen uprising, but it was also entirely devoted to the topic of “national studies.”⁹²⁶ In the article, “national studies” were praised as part of the construction of a socialist spiritual civilization; mention was also made of the Marxist approach in “national studies” research. Two days later, the same newspaper devoted a front-page article to “national studies.”⁹²⁷ In 1994, a third long article on the same topic came out, also in *People’s Daily*.⁹²⁸ Apart from other articles in official newspapers, several broadcasting stations in Beijing had special programs on “national studies.”⁹²⁹

When, in December 1992, Peking University and Central China Television signed a contract to shoot a series of a hundred-and-fifty lectures on traditional Chinese culture, the agreement said: “The aim is to promote the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation so as to boost the people’s self-confidence, self-respect, and patriotic thought.”⁹³⁰ Consequently, from an official point of view, both “national studies” and “Confucianism” were synonymous with Chinese culture, and their “Chineseness” was more significant than their actual content. Chen Lai has criticized this “ideologization” of “national studies” in which “traditional culture” was mistaken for “national

⁹²⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁹²⁵ Bi Quanzhong, “Guoxue, zai yanyuan you qiaoran xingqi,” *Renmin ribao*, August 16, 1993, 3.

⁹²⁶ Liu Qingfeng, “Topography,” 54.

⁹²⁷ “Jiuyuan le, guoxue!,” *Renmin ribao*, August 18, 1993, 1.

⁹²⁸ “Chuantong wenhua nengfou zaixie huihuang,” *Renmin ribao*, December 6, 1994, 11.

⁹²⁹ Chen Lai reported that the appearance of the August 16 article was mentioned in the news on the Central People’s Broadcasting Station. On October 14, *Guangming Daily* had an article on “National Studies and the Charm of National Studies Masters.” During the same month, students of Peking University organized a “National Studies Month.” On November 14, the Central Broadcasting Station had an item on “The Enlightenment of Peking University’s ‘National Studies Craze,’” and *China Youth Daily* of November 30 contained an article entitled “National Studies: Amidst Sudden Recollections.” In December, the Beijing broadcasting station invited Peking University Professors to answer questions from the audience on “national studies.” Interview with Chen Lai, Beijing, August 10, 2005.

⁹³⁰ Makeham, *Lost Soul*, 68.

studies.”⁹³¹ For Chen Lai, the latter stood for a certain academic tradition of early twentieth-century China, a tradition that was above all “scientific, objective, and historical.”⁹³² The “national studies craze” was nothing but a propaganda strategy, a rhetorical twist, which was guided by the media for commercial benefits—the only real craze at the time was not that of “national studies,” but that of “talking about national studies” (*shuo guoxue re de re*).⁹³³

Chen Lai’s criticism of the “national studies fever” was in accordance with the criticism of other scholars. Those behind the journal *Yuandao* (Original Path), for example, maintained that its foundation in 1994 had two objectives: it responded to the simplistic portrayal of tradition in the Enlightenment discourse, and it reacted against the “intellectualization” of tradition under the “national studies fever.”⁹³⁴ For the scholars behind the journal, tradition was not just an object of research; it had a living spirit. In spite of these criticisms of “national studies,” the fact remains that there was a change of attitude concerning traditional Chinese culture in intellectual circles. As argued in the previous chapter, the 1992 debate and the influence of overseas scholars played a key role in this shift in perception in the intellectual world. From 1993 onwards, there was a wide interest in traditional Chinese culture that went beyond concerns of procedural gradualism; Yü Ying-shih’s cultural conception of Chinese identity became widespread in the form of a revival of interest in non-liberal and non-Marxist views.

This change in the intellectual climate was exemplified by the popularity of a work by Lu Jiandong, entitled *The Last Twenty Years of Chen Yinke* (*Chen Yinke de zuihou ershi nian*).⁹³⁵ Chen Yinke (1890-1969) was a historian who had been loosely associated with the *Critical Review* journal, and whose research had focused on the development of the Chinese “national spirit” between the third and tenth century AD.⁹³⁶

⁹³¹ Chen Lai, “Jiushi niandai bulü weijian de ‘guoxue yanjiu,’” *Dongfang* 1995:2, 24-28. Reference from 24-25. Translated in *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 29:4 (Summer 1998), 35-49.

⁹³² Chen Lai, “Guoxue yanjiu,” 26, 28.

⁹³³ Chen Lai, “‘Guoxue re’ yu chuantong wenhua yanjiu de wenti,” *Kongzi Yanjiu* 1995:2, 4-6. Reference from 5.

⁹³⁴ *Yuandao* bianweihui, “*Yuandao* shinian zishu,” 98.

⁹³⁵ Lu Jiandong, *Chen Yinke de zuihou ershi nian* (Beijing: xinhua shudian, 1995).

⁹³⁶ On Ranke, Chen Yinke, and Fu Sinian (1896-1950), see Axel Schneider, “Reconciling History With the Nation?: Historicity, National Particularity, and the Question of Universals,” 117-136. For an outline of Chen Yinke’s historiography and its relationship to Chen Yinke’s political detachment, as well as to his conception of Chinese identity, see Axel Schneider,

Because the heroes of the 1990s were scholars such as Chen Yinke, Wang Guowei, and Wu Mi instead of thinkers such as Hu Shi, Lu Xun, or Chen Duxiu, the philosopher Li Zehou has coined the phrase “thinkers fade out, scholars protrude” (*sixiangjia danchu, xueshujia tuxian*).⁹³⁷ The popularity of scholars like Chen Yinke and the promotion of “national studies” was part of a general commitment to the establishment of academic norms (*xueshu guifan*). During the 1990s, as Gloria Davies has noted, those in scholarly circles identified themselves as scholars (*xuezhe*) instead of intellectuals (*zhishi fenzi*), the latter of which had the more “radical” connotation of political engagement. Nonetheless, Davies also noted that that the advocacy of autonomy was by no means apolitical: political reform was strived for through scholarly excellence instead of through direct political action.⁹³⁸ For this reason, the term “intellectuals” has still been applied in this research; although the tactics had changed, the public concern of Chinese intellectuals was nevertheless still present, as revealed in the fact that many non-specialists suddenly engaged in discussions on modern Chinese history.

5.8 THE “EAST ASIAN DEVELOPMENT MODEL”

As already mentioned above, Makeham has noted that one of the objections to the “cultural nationalism” interpretation of New Confucianism was the advocacy of an “East Asian development model.” However, from a different angle, it can also be contended that this notion contradicted both the stress on universal and transcendental values and the advocacy of “value rationality” of New Confucians. The notion of an “East Asian development model” tied Confucianism to the very socio-economic factors that New Confucians, given the history of the politicization of Confucianism, wanted to avoid. The question of the role of Confucianism in economic development was in itself a question of “instrumental rationality.” How did New Confucians deal with these contradictions?

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber had held that the Calvinist doctrine of predestination had affected the formation of capitalism because mystical contemplation was exchanged for ascetic and this-worldly action. Ascetic

“Between *Dao* and History: Two Chinese Historians in Search of a Modern Identity for China,” 54-73.

⁹³⁷ *Yuandao* (Original Path) 1 (1994), 1.

⁹³⁸ Davies, *Worrying about China*, 65-68.

Protestantism in particular provided a “systematic rational ordering of moral life as a whole.”⁹³⁹ It was this “spirit” of rational conduct, duty, and discipline on the basis of the idea of the calling that gave rise to modern rational capitalism.⁹⁴⁰ In his *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Daoism*, Weber further asserted that “Protestant rationalism” was marked by its “disenchantment” with the world; there was a tension between the rational ethical imperatives of Protestantism and this-worldly irrationalities.⁹⁴¹ Confucianism, on the contrary, had not benefited the rise of capitalism in China because it differed from Protestantism in three critical respects.

Firstly, the tension between the ethical demands of Confucianism and this-worldly realities was minimal; for Confucians, “the world was the best of all possible worlds; human nature was disposed to the ethically good.”⁹⁴² Confucian ethics aimed at an affirmation of and adjustment to the world, and although both Confucianism and Protestantism demanded self-control, the former aimed at the moral perfection of the “man of the world,” whereas the latter’s goal was to enable man to focus on God’s will.⁹⁴³ Furthermore, contrary to Protestants, Confucians were not ascetics; they exalted material wealth instead.⁹⁴⁴ Like Protestants, they were sober and thrifty, but they invested their savings in education, not in business.⁹⁴⁵ Finally, relations between people were personalized instead of rationalized; they were based on tradition, custom, and personal favors.⁹⁴⁶ Although the Chinese social structure had consisted of elements both

⁹³⁹ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 126.

⁹⁴⁰ Weber’s rational bourgeois or industrial capitalism contained the following features: (1) it had profit-making as its sole goal; (2) this was done through rationality and moral restraint; (3) the labor force was legally free, wage-earning, and separated from the ownership of the means of production; (4) labor was organized under the bureaucracy; and (5) it made use of modern technology. As for the “spirit” of capitalism: (1) it had money acquisition as an end; (2) it pursued gain without limits; (3) the means and traditional modes of operation were not sacred; (4) hard work was a duty and an obligation; (5) it was marked by discipline and control. Yang, “Introduction,” in Max Weber, *The Religion of China*, xv-xvi.

⁹⁴¹ Weber, *The Religion of China*, 226-227. *The Religion of China* was part of a series that would contain six parts, but Weber only lived to finish three, namely *The Religion of China* (1916), *The Religion of India* (1916-1917), and *Ancient Judaism* (1917-1919). The other three planned works would deal with early Christianity, medieval Christianity, and Islam, respectively.

⁹⁴² *Ibid.*, 227. Elsewhere, Weber has formulated it as follows: “Completely absent in Confucian ethic was any tension between nature and deity, between ethical demand and human shortcoming, consciousness of sin and need for salvation, conduct on earth and compensation in the beyond, religious duty and sociopolitical reality.” *Ibid.*, 235-236.

⁹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 242.

⁹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 229, 236-237, 241.

suitable and not suitable to capitalism, Weber claimed that the “spirit” of capitalism was lacking in China because of the above-mentioned factors.⁹⁴⁷

Although Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* was only translated into Chinese in 1986, mainland scholars had eagerly studied Weber before that year, and Weber had also appeared in the translation series of the editorial committee *Culture: China and the World*.⁹⁴⁸ The topic of the relation between Confucianism and modernization was taken up during the mid-1980s, when many mainland intellectuals went to the United States, where the discussion on Weber and Parsons was all the rage at the time. Already in 1985, Chen Lai recalls, a Ph.D. on Weber appeared in China.⁹⁴⁹ After the interest in Weber peaked in 1986, the New Confucian discourse changed from a reevaluation of Confucianism in China to a debate on the existence of an East Asian development model.⁹⁵⁰

By applying Weber’s “Protestantism thesis” to Confucianism, Chinese scholars refuted Weber’s verdict on Confucianism in *The Religion of China*. Like Tu Wei-ming, Chen Lai held that the economic miracle of East Asia formed a serious challenge to Weber’s theories on Confucianism. Then again, Chen Lai added that his stance differed from Tu Wei-ming’s political position, which was based on a criticism of the Cultural Revolution.⁹⁵¹ Not surprisingly, Tu Wei-ming’s cultural agenda was highly political, for it downplayed the role of the Party in social and cultural life, it criticized the Party’s response to the spring 1989 protest movement, and it predicted the rise of democracy.⁹⁵² Chen Lai was much less explicit; although, like other New Confucians, he upheld science, democracy, and pluralism, he did not criticize the CCP outright.

Chen Lai further argued that the debate on Confucian ethics and East Asian modernization did not focus on the “coming into being” (*chansheng*) of capitalism, but rather on the “assimilation” (*tonghua*) of it; some Chinese authors had made distinctions

⁹⁴⁷ Negative structural factors were: the lack of an effective monetary system, the lack of politically and military autonomous cities, the lack of legal foundations for guilds, and a patrimonial bureaucracy. Other obstacles were: the kinship system and the existence of substantive ethical law instead of a rational legal system. Positive elements were: the lack of status restriction by birth, free migration and freedom of choice with regard to occupation, the lack of compulsory military service and schooling, and the lack of restraints on trade. Yang, “Introduction,” in Weber, *The Religion of China*, xx-xxviii.

⁹⁴⁸ Wang, *High Culture Fever*, 66.

⁹⁴⁹ Interview with Chen Lai, Beijing, August 10, 2005.

⁹⁵⁰ Wang, *High Culture Fever*, 68.

⁹⁵¹ Interview with Chen Lai, Beijing, August 10, 2005.

⁹⁵² Tu Wei-ming, “Introduction: Cultural Perspectives,” xi-xxvii.

in that direction.⁹⁵³ Following Tu Wei-ming, Chen Lai stated that Weber himself had made the distinction between “creation” and “assimilation”; he had stated in his last chapter of *The Religion of China* that “the Chinese in all probability would be quite capable, probably more capable than the Japanese, of assimilating capitalism.”⁹⁵⁴ Although Weber did not specify whether Confucian ethics could play a role in this “assimilation,” for Chen Lai, it was clear that, at least in an initial stage, they could. It was in this context that Chen Lai referred to the Boston sociologist Peter Berger’s term “vulgar Confucianism” (*shisuhua de rujia lunli*).⁹⁵⁵ Whereas Weber had focused on the ethics of Chinese imperial ideology, Berger had analyzed the daily ethics of the commoners. He had concluded from this that daily ethics had indeed played a role in economic development; the existence of an “East Asian development model” could be confirmed.⁹⁵⁶ This, Chen Lai posited elsewhere, was in fact a revision of the non-consistency in Weber, who had looked at ethical beliefs and attitudes in daily life in the case of Protestantism, but who had analyzed religion instead of beliefs and attitudes in daily life in the case of Confucianism.⁹⁵⁷

Chen Lai admitted that a cultural explanation of East Asian development was too simplistic. Modernization could not be reduced to economic function, and even if Confucian values had nothing to do with the coming into being and assimilation of capitalism, this did not mean that they lost value in a modern society. Precisely because Confucianism exceeded the issue of economic development proper, Confucian values could exist in a positive tension with “instrumental rationality.” Therefore, Chen Lai distinguished between his own advocacy of Confucian values as part of a moral debate

⁹⁵³ Chen Lai mentioned that Jin Yueji opened the Weber debate in China in 1983; in 1986, Fu Yongjian coined the difference between “inner development” (*neifa*) and “learning from abroad” (*waixue*); in 1988, Lao Siguang reiterated the division between “coming into being” (*chuangsheng*) and “imitation” (*moni*); he asserted that Confucianism might have a function in the “imitation” of capitalism. See Chen Lai, “Shisu rujia lunli yu houfa xiandaihua,” *EYS* 22 (April 1994), 112-120. Reference from 113. Chen Lai also mentioned the difference between the debate on the “coming into being” of capitalism and the relation between Confucian ethics and modernization in “Rujia lilun yu Zhongguo xiandaihua,” *CYX*, 188-206. See 194-195 and 198-201 in particular. Originally published in *EYS* 21 (February 1994).

⁹⁵⁴ Weber, *The Religion of China*, 248. Tu Wei-ming had also referred to this statement by Weber in his “Introduction” to *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity*, 4.

⁹⁵⁵ Chen Lai, “Shisu rujia lunli yu houfa xiandaihua,” 112-120.

⁹⁵⁶ See Berger, “An East Asian Development Model,” 3-11.

⁹⁵⁷ Chen Lai, “Rujia lilun yu Zhongguo xiandaihua,” 195.

and the sociopolitical debate on “Asian values,” in which these values were reconciled with “instrumental rationality” rather than existing in tension with it.⁹⁵⁸

Chen Lai further separated the debates on East Asian development and Confucianism from New Confucianism by pointing out that the issue of the relation between Confucian ethics and the economic modernization of East Asia had not been raised by New Confucians, but by political scientists.⁹⁵⁹ Chen Lai defended Tu Wei-ming in this respect, who supported the idea of the relationship between Confucianism and Industrial East Asia, but who would not propagate it overall. As Tu Wei-ming explained, applying Weber to China “must be subsumed under Weber’s general comparative civilizational perspective”: “what can the Confucian influence in industrial East Asia tell us about the relation between tradition and modernity?”⁹⁶⁰ Another implication of the discussion was the question of alternative modernities. Tu Wei-ming, for example, made mention of some distinct characteristics of the East Asian model, such as the lack of distinction between the public and the private, the importance of the family, duty, and the community spirit, but he also mentioned the universal aspects of modernity, such as democracy, the market economy, and Enlightenment values.⁹⁶¹

Although Chen Lai attempted to interpret the Weberian debate in a broader sense, as a debate on the meaning of tradition in the modern world, critics have understood the engagement of New Confucians with the debate on Weber as a defense of “Asianism” or some Oriental “essence” that was not successful in its attack on instrumental rationality. Arif Dirlik has criticized the revival of Confucianism during the 1990s for joining forces with Global Capitalism, and for being a “manifestation in East Asia of a global postcolonial discourse,” which led to the “self-Orientalization of the ‘Orientals’ themselves.”⁹⁶² Tu Wei-ming’s resort to Confucianism to resolve the ills of capitalism did not lead to serious criticism, because it confirmed the utility of

⁹⁵⁸ Chen Lai, “Rujia sixiang yu xiandai dongya shijie,” *CYX*, 179-187; Interview with Chen Lai, Beijing, August 10, 2005. Zhang Haiyun has traced the concept of “Asian values” back to a Singapore white paper of 1991. President Lee Kwan Yew of Singapore reportedly summarized it as the priority of society over the individual. See Moody, *Conservative Thought*, 95.

⁹⁵⁹ Chen Lai, “Rujia lilun yu Zhongguo xiandaihua,” *CYX*, 188-206. Chen Lai mentioned, among others, Ezra Vogel and Robert Bellah, a student of Talcott Parsons, who explained Japan’s economic success in structural terms. Chen Lai also referred to the Japanese economist Michio Morishima, who coined the concept of “Confucian capitalism.” Furthermore, Chen Lai included Kahn, MacFarquhar and Berger, who applied Weber’s theory to East Asia.

⁹⁶⁰ Tu Wei-ming, “Introduction,” in *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity*, 6.

⁹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 6-9.

⁹⁶² Dirlik, “Confucius in the Borderlands,” 230, 273.

Confucianism for capitalism; the alleged challengers ended up “Weberizing Confucianism,” or “modernizing tradition.” The final result was that “Confucius has been moved from the museum to the theme park.”⁹⁶³ Timothy Brook made a similar point when he insisted that Confucianism was both utilized as an antidote against the ills of capitalism and employed in the very service of capitalism:

The irony of calling up Confucianism for present service is that both sides can appeal to this tradition as a source for constructing narratives of meaning: those who resist capitulation to an amoral capitalism as much as those who seek to install the labor discipline and consumption patterns needed to maintain profitable linkages to the global economy.⁹⁶⁴

On a similar note, Jing Wang has used the term “pan-East-Asianism” and has claimed that the alliance between Confucianism and capitalism de-legitimated its claim of value rationality, for “Confucianism is no less susceptible to instrumental reason and materialistic motivation on which capitalism is based than capitalism itself.”⁹⁶⁵ Similarly, Zhang Xudong has maintained that the New Confucian resort to culture was simply a way to revive national politics in the face of the universalism of global capital. The Confucian resort to humanity was a matter of emphasizing “Chineseness.”⁹⁶⁶ Liu Kang has added “regional anticommunism” to “global capitalism” as the ideological and political implications of New Confucianism.⁹⁶⁷

Whether or not Chen Lai’s critics were right, the fact remains that Chen Lai’s advocacy of universal Confucian values was in tension with the Weberian debate, in which an East Asian development model was discerned. Moreover, since the Weberian debate focused on the question of the usefulness of Confucianism for modernization, it resulted in questions of instrumentality, questions that New Confucians attempted to overcome. The debate did not suit Chen Lai’s advocacy of “cultural conservatism” as “value rationality,” because the stress in the debate was more on modernization than on tradition, which carried the danger of, as critics called it, “Weberizing Confucianism,” or, “modernizing tradition.” The question of the moral role that tradition could play in

⁹⁶³ Ibid., 267, 273.

⁹⁶⁴ Brook, “Profit and Righteousness in Chinese Economic Culture,” 44.

⁹⁶⁵ Wang, *High Culture Fever*, 66, 67.

⁹⁶⁶ Zhang Xudong, “Post-Tiananmen Intellectual Field,” 44.

⁹⁶⁷ Liu Kang, “Debate about Modernity,” 206.

the modern world was transformed into the question of how tradition could be used in the modernization process.

5.9 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The mainland New Confucian Chen Lai launched an attack on the “radicalism” of the May Fourth Movement, a standpoint that needs to be situated in the context of the overall reevaluation of the “antitraditionalism” of May Fourth since the late 1980s. However, Chen Lai also linked the “cultural radicalism” of May Fourth with that of the Cultural Revolution and the “culture craze” of the 1980s. As such, his account shared similarities with both the theory of the “stages” of “radicalism” of Yü Ying-shih and Lin Yü-sheng’s argument that May Fourth was typified by “wholesale antitraditionalism.” Although Chen Lai’s interpretation of the term “radicalism” resembled Yü Ying-shih’s conception of “radicalism” as “antitraditionalism,” for Chen Lai, an extra element was that “radicalism” also referred to utilitarianism, or the instrumental use of culture in the service of politics.

To interpret the May Fourth debates on Eastern and Western culture, Chen Lai made use of Max Weber’s concepts of “instrumental rationality” and “value rationality.” Whereas Weber had contended that these were heuristic ideal types, Chen Lai nevertheless utilized them to make a dualist distinction between “cultural radicals” and “cultural conservatives.” According to Chen Lai’s definition, the “radicals” took politics and economics as an outer standard to evaluate morality, whereas the “conservatives” started from the inherent value of tradition. It has been argued that Chen Lai’s framework was a clear manifestation of the employment of “radicalism” as an asymmetric counterconcept: a simplistic dualist framework served to invoke the reader’s identification with “conservatism.” In reality, both the “conservatives” and the “radicals” of the May Fourth era had made use of the two types of rationality: both cherished ideals, and both adhered to the outer goal of modernization. The clear-cut distinction Chen Lai made between “conservatives” and “radicals” did not serve his argument that “conservatives” had also been progressives who pursued modernization. Chen Lai’s framework reinforced rather than eliminated the dichotomies that he intended to eradicate.

As for “cultural conservatism” during the May Fourth era, Chen Lai asserted that it was not only a response to Chinese “radicalism,” but that it was also related to global developments such as World War One, the Russian Revolution, and Marxist criticism of capitalism. “Cultural conservatives” advocated the historical continuity of Chinese tradition, and of Confucianism in particular. As a New Confucian who regarded himself as the student of Tu Wei-ming, one of the main spokesmen for New Confucianism in the United States, Chen Lai understood Confucianism as the core values of *ren* (benevolence) and *he* (harmony). Contrary to the perception of Yü Ying-shih and Lin Yü-sheng, for whom Confucianism was entrenched in society and tied to “social referents,” New Confucians held that its sociopolitical attachment had distorted Confucianism. Instead, they identified Confucianism with certain transhistorical, universal values. For both Tu Wei-ming and Chen Lai, Confucianism was a “religio-philosophy.”

Whereas other intellectuals had employed the concept of “radicalism” to answer a set of historical questions relating to China in particular, Chen Lai incorporated the term in the New Confucian criticism of modernization-as-rationalization. Modern societies, Chen Lai claimed, still needed “value rationality.” In order to ensure the historical continuity of Confucianism, Chen Lai outlined a Hegelian model of “dialectical denial” that only denied the concrete content of a thing, but not its universal essence. Chen Lai’s understanding of Confucianism as universal moral values revealed that his conservatism was not a Burkean conservatism that upheld a particular Chinese tradition based on the fact that it had been historically grown. His advocacy of moral values was clearly also not based on a critique of abstract universalism. It has been put forward that Chen Lai’s “cultural conservatism” resembled the moral conservatism of those American “neo-conservatives” who, inspired by Greek philosophy, promoted universal values. Chen Lai presented the “radicalism” in modern Chinese history, and the “radicalism” of the May Fourth era in particular, as a process of the repression of “value rationality” by “instrumental rationality.” Like Yü Ying-shih, Chen Lai was convinced that only the intellectual was capable of the restoration of the moral order. Although Chen Lai did not engage in a criticism of the CCP, he clearly opposed the political interference in cultural matters that had dominated previous decades. Instead, Chen Lai opted for a position of pure scholarship.

As distinct from a definition of conservatism as the advocacy of historical continuity or the belief in the limits of change, as Furth would have it, Chen Lai's outlook has been identified with conservatism because it promoted conservative goals on conservative grounds. Unlike the conservative liberalism upheld in the previous chapter, which focused on economic liberty instead of on Chinese tradition, Chen Lai's goal was the preservation of Confucian values and the fostering of community in times of individualism and alienation. Moreover, in contradistinction to the instrumentalist reference to tradition in Chapters Two and Three, Chen Lai's support for tradition was rooted in his belief in its inherent value. Chen's moral quest shows the "multi-accentualism" of the debate on "radicalism" and the various faces of the "conservatism" proposed in response. Although Chen Lai was one of the few intellectuals who did not refer to Edmund Burke in his critique of "radicalism," his viewpoint was at the same time one of the rare mainland positions based on a genuine concern with tradition and morality.

Scholars like Lin Yü-sheng conceived of a contradiction between the safeguarding of the historical continuity of Chinese tradition and the advocacy of universal values, but for Chen Lai, the two could be combined. In his view, Chinese tradition was but a concrete manifestation of transcendental values. As Chen Lai put it, "respecting tradition is respecting the universality of historical development."⁹⁶⁸ Chen Lai's articles on the philosophers Liang Shuming and Feng Youlan have been analyzed in order to grasp how Chen Lai envisioned the relation between the historical continuity of Chinese culture and the identification of Confucian values as universal values. Concerning Liang Shuming, Chen Lai referred to the concept of *lixing* in particular, which Chen Lai associated with a normative sense, with benevolence, and with Habermas' notion of "communicative rationality." As for Feng Youlan, Chen Lai made reference to those writings in which Feng discussed the relation between "particulars" and universals." As regards morality, Chen mentioned Feng's distinction between "changeable" and "invariable" morals. With regard to the relation between Chinese and Western culture, Chen invoked Feng Youlan's distinction between "particulars" and "types" in the latter's writings on culture. Whereas a "particular" denoted the characteristics of one specific culture, a "type" included those characteristics of a

⁹⁶⁸ Chen Lai, "Jiazhi, quanwei, chuantong yu Zhongguo zhexue," *CYX*, 254-266. Reference from 262. Originally published in *Zhexue yanjiu* 1989:10, 26-32.

culture that were also present in other cultures. Chen Lai declared that it was the conception of culture as a general “type” that enabled the preservation of the historical continuity between the traditional and the modern.

In contradistinction to scholars such as Furth, who have treated New Confucianism as a manifestation of a universal conservatism that was not in tension with Burkean notions of particularity and historical growth, others, including Guo Yingjie and John Makeham, have contended that New Confucianism was a manifestation of “cultural nationalism.” Yet Makeham has also noted the limits of this concept with regard to New Confucianism: New Confucians did not attempt to revive a Confucian civilization; the idea of an “East Asian Confucianism” or a “Han cultural circle” also went against the idea of narrow nationalism. Moreover, for New Confucians, the notion of “cultural nationalism” implied a reduction of their project to a mere emotional reaction, whereas they conceived of it as an intellectual undertaking. The theory that New Confucianism was purely a matter of intellectual choice was nonetheless also too simplistic, for the New Confucian project had clear political implications.

These political implications were that the Confucian emphasis on gradual change and harmony posed a challenge to the Marxist conception of the struggle of opposites. The CCP attempted to co-opt Confucianism into the Chinese modernization project, but the goal behind this move was to complement the notion of class struggle and to seek new legitimating devices. The official conception of Confucianism was that it was quintessentially Chinese, which is why it could be utilized in the construction of a modern Chinese civilization. From an official point of view, as Levenson phrased it, Confucianism was valid because it belonged to China (*meum*), whereas for New Confucians, it represented truth (*verum*).⁹⁶⁹ Those who discerned truth in Confucianism had a “philosophical attachment” to Confucianism, whereas the adherence to Confucianism of nationalist modernizers was merely “a belief in the need to profess belief.”⁹⁷⁰ This official co-optation took place both in the form of the study of New Confucianism and in the form of the promotion of “national studies,” both of which were used to promote Chinese tradition in a broad sense. Despite this instrumentalization that scholars like Chen Lai objected to, the revival of “national

⁹⁶⁹ Levenson, “‘History’ and ‘Value,’” 150.

⁹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 172.

studies” also reflected a renewed interest in non-liberal and non-Marxist thinkers. This shift had been shaped by rejections of “radicalism” as discussed in the previous chapter, and by the popularity of overseas scholars such as Yü Ying-shih.

Finally, it has been argued that the New Confucian engagement in the debate on Weber in China and on the existence of an “East Asian development model” contradicted the New Confucian stress on universal values. Although New Confucians attempted to present the debate as a broad debate on the role of tradition in the modern world, the focus in the debate on the usefulness of Confucianism, “Asian values,” and the merger of Confucianism with socio-economic realities was a deviation from the defense of transhistorical values. In addition, on the basis of the debates on Weber, critics maintained that the New Confucian attitude amounted to a defense of capitalism. It remains to be seen, then, how efficient Chen Lai’s moral quest really was—for a scholar who disapproved of “instrumental rationality,” however, that issue was not of crucial importance.

6.

ON LANGUAGE AND “POST-ISMS”

REFLECTIONS ON THE LITERARY REVOLUTION

How can one love without a heart?

ZHENG MIN on the simplified Chinese character for “love”

6.1 INTRODUCTION: “ANTI-RADICALISM” AND POSTMODERNISM

Another reevaluation of the May Fourth Movement occurred in the form of a debate on the so-called New Literature Movement of 1917. As part of the latter, Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu had promoted a “living language expressed in a free form” to replace “the dead language bound by classical poetry and prose.”⁹⁷¹ In 1993, the Chinese mainland poetess Zheng Min (b. 1920) launched an attack on this literary movement in the journal *Wenxue pinglun* (Literary Review), which triggered the first debate on “radicalism” and “conservatism” in mainland journals. Whereas Chen Lai’s denouncement of May Fourth “radicalism” had been rooted in a New Confucian preoccupation with universal values, Zheng Min’s criticism of the May Fourth Movement was embedded in an argument that drew on the theories of structuralism and poststructuralism. This caused the debate on “radicalism” to merge with the debate on postmodernism in China.

Zheng Min’s main criticism of the Literary Revolution was that it had distorted the historical continuity of the Chinese language, and of Chinese poetry in particular. Some critics have applied the label “conservative” to Zheng Min’s standpoint, but, as argued throughout this study, a defense of historical continuity as such does not amount to a conservative stance. One should ask the question of what it was that Zheng Min intended to preserve and on which grounds she championed its preservation. Whereas the previous chapter has documented how the discourse on New Confucianism shaped interpretations of “radicalism,” this chapter will investigate how the merger of the debates on “radicalism” and postmodernism affected conceptions of “radicalism” and “neo-conservatism.” Moreover, the question will be posed of why Zheng Min resorted

⁹⁷¹ Yeh, *Modern Chinese Poetry*, 11.

to postmodernism in particular to promote the historical continuity of the Chinese language.

Michelle Yeh has asserted that Zheng Min's condemnation of May Fourth language reform went much further than a criticism of language proper; it dealt with issues of cultural identity and "Chineseness," or the tension between China's dependence on the West, and its attempt to resist the West.⁹⁷² If the main focus in Zheng Min's argument and in the debate that followed was indeed on the relation between China and the West, as well as on Chinese identity vis-à-vis Western identity, then there was a possibility that Zheng Min's resort to Chinese tradition was not based on the inherent value of tradition, but on emotional needs instead. On the other hand, the question of "Chineseness" would still imply a concern with the relation between the Chinese past, present, and future, as well as with questions of historical change. Just how conservative was Zheng Min's postmodernist escapade? In brief, points of discussion will involve the nature of Zheng Min's argument and the debate that followed, the "creative transformation" of postmodernism in a Chinese context, and the question of whether mainland postmodernism was indeed part of a "neo-conservative" trend.

6.2 REVALUATING THE NEW LITERATURE MOVEMENT OF 1917

6.2.1 *Zheng Min's Postmodern Twist*

The poetess Zheng Min, formerly a Professor in the English department of Peking Normal University, gained fame during the 1940s as a modernist poetess who belonged to the so-called "Nine Leaves Poets" (*jiuye shipai*), a group of nine poets associated with journals such as *Poetic Creation* and *Modern Chinese Poetry*.⁹⁷³ This group of modernists dealt with the theme of alienation under industrial modernity; they deployed avant-garde techniques and psychoanalytical critique in their poetry.⁹⁷⁴ Apart from being a successful poetess, Zheng Min also obtained a Ph.D. in English Literature from Brown University in 1952, after which she became a researcher in the Institute of

⁹⁷² Yeh, "Chinese Postmodernism," 103.

⁹⁷³ During the 1940s, the "Nine Leaves Poets" were based at the National Southwest Associated University (*Xinan lianhe daxue*), where Zheng Min graduated from the Philosophy Department in 1943. Other poets who belonged to this group were Chen Jingrong, Du Yunxie, Mu Dan, and Xin Di.

⁹⁷⁴ Lee, *Troubadours, Trumpeters, Troubled Makers*, 65, fn. 4.

Literature of CASS.⁹⁷⁵ During the 1980s, in the context of the revival of modernism, the interest in Zheng Min's poetry increased.⁹⁷⁶ Given her reputation as a modernist and avant-garde poetess, it came as a surprise that in 1993, Zheng Min fulminated against the protagonists of the New Literature Movement (*Xin wenxue yundong*) of 1917.

The New Literature Movement, in which it was upheld that vernacular language (*baihua*) should take the place of literary language (*wenyan*), was born when Hu Shi's article "Some Tentative Suggestions for the Reform of Chinese Literature" was published in *New Youth* in January 1917.⁹⁷⁷ In this article, Hu Shi put forward eight principles as a basis for the reform of literature, including the use of vernacular language.⁹⁷⁸ Given the strong opposition to his article at the time, Hu Shi still referred to the movement as a reform movement; he did not call it a revolution. Chen Duxiu's article in *New Youth* of February 1917, on the contrary, was entitled "On the Literary Revolution."⁹⁷⁹ In this article, Chen Duxiu praised European revolutions for having realized a radical break between the old and the new, whereas Chinese revolutions had never been carried out thoroughly. A true revolution, Chen Duxiu claimed, should not only focus on the political realm, but also on the realms of ethics, literature, and arts.⁹⁸⁰ In the field of literature, Chen Duxiu supported the creation of a plain and popular literature of realism.⁹⁸¹

In an article that appeared in the literary journal *Wenxue pinglun* (Literary Review) in 1993, Zheng Min began her inquiry of modern Chinese poetry with a question raised in "international Sinological circles": Why was it that contemporary Chinese literature, with its history of several millennia of poetry, had not produced any

⁹⁷⁵ *Zhongguo dangdai mingrenlu*, 612.

⁹⁷⁶ Idema en Haft, *Chinese letterkunde: een inleiding*, 285. Another member of the Nine Leaves group whose popularity rose at that time was Chen Jingrong (1917-1989).

⁹⁷⁷ Hu Shi, "Wenxue gailiang chuyi" (Some tentative suggestions for the reform of Chinese literature), reprinted in Wang Zhongjiang and Yuan Shuya, *Xin qingnian: minzhu yu kexue de huhuan*, 146-155.

⁹⁷⁸ In full, the eight principles were: (1) avoid classical allusions; (2) discard stale literary phrases; (3) discard parallel constructions; (4) do not avoid using vernacular words and speech; (5) follow literary grammar; (6) do not write that you are sick or sad when you are not sick or sad; (7) do not imitate the writings of the ancients; (8) writing should have meaning or substance. From Chow, *The May Fourth Movement*, 274.

⁹⁷⁹ Chen Duxiu, "Wenxue geminglun" (On the Literary Revolution), reprinted in Wang Zhongjiang and Yuan Shuya, *Xin qingnian: minzhu yu kexue de huhuan*, 164-167.

⁹⁸⁰ Chow, *The May Fourth Movement*, 275.

⁹⁸¹ For an overview of the Literary Revolution, see Chow, "Chapter XI: The Literary Revolution" in idem, *The May Fourth Movement*, 269-288.

internationally recognized masterpieces or renowned poets?⁹⁸² Michelle Yeh has suggested that the “international Sinological circles” Zheng Min referred to in her article were the Sinologists William Jenner of the Australian National University and Stephen Owen of Harvard University. Both of them had disparaged modern Chinese poetry in their review articles of Bei Dao’s *The August Sleepwalker* several years before.⁹⁸³ Jenner had contended that “no really memorable Chinese verse has been written for the last forty years,” whereas Owen had discerned a lack of “Chineseness” in modern Chinese poetry.⁹⁸⁴

Zheng Min echoed the Sinologists’ “nostalgia for Chinese tradition,” as Gregory Lee has phrased it, and insisted that modern Chinese poetry had lost its “authenticity” and “Chineseness” because it had been cut off from tradition.⁹⁸⁵ For Zheng Min, the answer to why this had happened lay with Chen Duxiu and Hu Shi, the architects of the New Literature Movement of 1917. Chen Duxiu and Hu Shi had applied the “logic of dual oppositions” with respect to language—namely, the renewal versus the preservation of tradition, vernacular versus literary Chinese, and colloquial versus written Chinese—and they had attempted to construct a “new” language through rational design. In sum, they had “denied continuity” with ancient literature, from its language to its content, by taking *baihua* novels from the Yuan dynasty (1260-1368) as the point of departure for the reform of language.⁹⁸⁶ Both Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu had neglected the rule that theory comes from practice; they had discarded the accumulated cultural essence in Chinese language. Whereas in England, seven centuries had separated Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* from twentieth-century modernism, in China, a modern language was created overnight.

Following other intellectuals at the time, Zheng Min further condemned the mode of thought of “over-straightening the crooked” (*jiaowang guozheng*), or the excessive correction of perceived wrongdoings. Whereas Chen Lai had targeted the

⁹⁸² Zheng Min, “Shiji mo de huigu: Hanyu yuyan biange yu Zhongguo xinshi chuangzao,” *ZFL*, 158-186. Originally published in *Wenxue pinglun* 1993:3, 5-20.

⁹⁸³ See William J.F. Jenner, review of *The August Sleepwalker* by Bei Dao, trans. Bonnie McDougall (New York: New Directions Press, 1989), in the *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 23 (January 1990), 193-195; Stephen Owen, “What is World Poetry?: Poets Who Write to be Read in Translation are a Curious Breed, as Bei Dao Shows,” *The New Republic*, 19 November 1990, 28-32.

⁹⁸⁴ Jenner, “Review,” 193-194. Quoted in Lee, *Troubadours, Trumpeters, Troubled Makers*, 104; Owen, “World Poetry,” 31. Quoted in *ibid.*, 99.

⁹⁸⁵ Lee, *Troubadours, Trumpeters, Troubled Makers*, 99.

⁹⁸⁶ Zheng Min, “Shiji mo de huigu,” *ZFL*, 158.

politicization of Confucianism, Zheng Min criticized the politicization of art and literature in particular, both during the May Fourth and Mao eras. Consequently, decisions on language reform had not been based on the value of language, but on political efficacy. Between 1950 and 1979, a whole new *baihua* language was created; although the clarity of language peaked, its richness had nevertheless declined.⁹⁸⁷ It was only after 1979, when young poets came across works that dated from before 1949, that language was reformed amidst the rediscovery of tradition, and that practice became the root of change.⁹⁸⁸

In her argument, Zheng Min did not literally employ the terms “conservatism” and “radicalism,” but she did refer to the struggle of “renewal” (*ge*) versus “preservation” (*bao*); in addition, as will be discussed below, other intellectuals who reacted to Zheng Min’s text availed themselves of the terms “radicalism,” “conservatism” and “neo-conservatism” in the discussion.⁹⁸⁹ What was unique in Zheng Min’s advocacy of historical continuity was her resort to structuralism and poststructuralism. As for structuralism, Zheng Min invoked the theories of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). In his *Course in General Linguistics* (1916),⁹⁹⁰ De Saussure had understood language as a system of signs, in which each sign consisted of a “signifier” (“a sound-image, or its graphical equivalent”) and a “signified” (“the concept or meaning”). De Saussure had contended that meaning was created by the contrast between signifiers, and that the relation between “signifier” and “signified” was arbitrary and merely based on convention.⁹⁹¹

According to structuralism, meaning was constructed instead of natural. Language was not merely the product of the individual; the individual was also the product of language. For this reason, in her criticism of the Literary Revolution, Zheng Min based herself on de Saussure’s claim that a language could not be chosen by its people, because it always inherited elements from a previous historical stage; language was the product of historical growth. Moreover, for Zheng Min, the classical Chinese language contained the characteristics of what de Saussure had defined as a “mother tongue”: it was a social action in which all members of the community participated.

⁹⁸⁷ Ibid., 173-175.

⁹⁸⁸ Ibid., 176-177.

⁹⁸⁹ Ibid., 162.

⁹⁹⁰ The book was published posthumously on the basis of de Saussure’s lectures between 1907 and 1911.

⁹⁹¹ Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 84.

From this respect, May Fourth intellectuals had “killed their own mother.”⁹⁹² Zheng Min gave a special twist to de Saussure’s argument that linguistics should not be concerned with actual speech (*parole*) but with the objective structure of signs, with language as a system (*langue*), by equating the vernacular language pressed for in the Literary Revolution with de Saussure’s “parole.” The advocacies of the protagonists of the Literary Revolution, Zheng Min claimed, showed signs of “vernacular centralism” and “phonocentrism,” or the preoccupation with colloquial instead of written language.⁹⁹³ Although Anglo-American modernist poetry had found inspiration in Chinese characters—Zheng Min referred to Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908), Ezra Pound (1885-1972), and T.S. Eliot (1888-1965)—when modernism came to China in the 1930s and 1940s, it was resisted.

Furthermore, Zheng Min drew on the poststructuralism of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) and the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981). Poststructuralism went further than structuralism in that it treated the text as an endless “play of signifiers” that contained no definite meaning.⁹⁹⁴ According to Lacan, there was always a gap between “signifier” and “signified”; Derrida conceived of language as an unlimited exchange of “traces,” which implied that no “new” language could ever be created *ex nihilo*. Therefore, the theories of both Derrida and Lacan proved for Zheng Min that the design of a clear vernacular language—which was expressed in May Fourth slogans such as “my hand writes what my mouth says”—was but an illusion.⁹⁹⁵

6.2.2 Some Reactions to Zheng Min’s Article

Zheng Min’s text provoked a debate on the Literary Revolution in the pages of the literary journal *Wenxue pinglun* (Literary Review). Although Michelle Yeh has

⁹⁹² Interview with Zheng Min, Beijing, July 6, 2006.

⁹⁹³ According to post-structuralists, Western philosophy in general was “phonocentric” because it preferred colloquial to written language. Western philosophy was also “logocentric” because it believed in, as Eagleton put it, “some ultimate ‘word,’ presence, essence, truth or reality which will act as the foundation of all our thought, language and experience.” See Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 113.

⁹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁹⁹⁵ Huang Zunxian (1848-1905), who is often considered the predecessor of the movement for modern Chinese poetry, coined the slogan “My hand writes what my mouth says, how can antiquity restrain me?” (*Wo shou xie wu kou. Gu qi neng ju qian*). At the same time, intellectuals like Tan Sitong and Liang Qichao launched a “revolution in poetry” (*shijie geming*).

certainly been right in her assertion that the debate exceeded the issue of language proper, as will be discussed below, a considerable part of the reactions to Zheng Min's text did address her views on language proper. An example concerns a response to Zheng Min's argument by Fan Qinlin, an Associate Professor in the Chinese Department of Nanjing University.⁹⁹⁶ Fan Qinlin refuted Zheng Min's accusation of "logocentrism" with respect to vernacular language: since the Song (907-1279) and Yuan (1260-1368) dynasties, both written literary Chinese (*wenyanwen*) and written vernacular Chinese (*baihuawen*) had existed. Moreover, Fan Qinlin claimed, the true "mother tongue" in a Saussurian sense was the vernacular: "Only the vernacular is the sole social action in which all social members participate, and only the vernacular can fully identify with social life."⁹⁹⁷ Zheng Min had simply misunderstood what Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu meant by vernacular language; their modern vernacular was based on vernacular language in the written form (*baihua shumianyu*), to which elements from the vernacular language in the colloquial form (*baihua kouyu*) and from classical Chinese were to be added. Nevertheless, Fan Qinlin also briefly addressed the issue of the broader meaning of language reform by arguing that the transition to vernacular language had been necessary from the perspective of the modernization of Chinese culture.

Yet the rejoinder to Fan Qinlin revealed that Zheng Min's concerns rose far above language. Zheng Min reiterated that for her, both vernacular and literary Chinese were the "mother tongue" of China—her point was to overcome the "logic of dual oppositions," and to demonstrate that they were complementary.⁹⁹⁸ Whereas written Chinese was closer to the "subtext," colloquial Chinese was closer to life. Colloquial language provided written language with vitality; written language provided colloquial language with depth. Zheng Min further declared that language was the expression of a historical spirit, and that the Chinese language was a superior language. Referring to Heidegger's views on language as the "home of Being," Zheng Min claimed that language symbolized the existence of a country and its people. Since the superiority of the Chinese language was situated in its pictographic traits, it was all the more

⁹⁹⁶ Fan Qinlin, "Ruhe pingjia 'wusi' baihuawen yundong?: yu Zheng Min xiansheng shangque," *ZFL*, 187-197. Originally published in *Wenxue pinglun* 1994:2, 112-117.

⁹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁹⁹⁸ Zheng Min, "Guanyu 'ruhe pingjia 'wusi' baihuawen yundong?': shangque zhi shangque," *ZFL*, 198-206. Originally published in *Wenxue pinglun* 1994:2, 118-122.

necessary to move away from the “phonocentrism” that Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu had recommended. Here, we can already see that Zheng Min’s argument contained nationalist traits; the issue of language was crucial for her because she considered language to be the embodiment of a historical Chinese essence or spirit, an issue that we will return to later.

The notion of “radicalism” entered the debate when Xu Ming, a researcher in literature at CASS, asserted that the crux of the discussion between Zheng Min and Fan Qinlin concerned the question of “cultural radicalism.”⁹⁹⁹ Whereas Zheng Min treated it as problematic, Fan Qinlin considered it a progressive force for Chinese modernization. Xu Ming lined up with Fan Qinlin: the movement for vernacular Chinese had not been the concoction of some intellectuals—it had been the rational choice of history. In accordance with his location of the discussion on language reform within the broader framework of “cultural radicalism,” Xu Ming further held that the language reforms had been valuable because they constituted but one aspect of a larger process of ideological change. Xu Ming also engaged with Zheng Min’s language theories proper; he argued that Zheng Min had confused some radical slogans with reality. In practice, the writing style of May Fourth intellectuals had still been immersed with traditional elements.

Two other authors who engaged with Zheng Min’s criticism of May Fourth instead of with language proper were Chen Feng and Zhi Zhong.¹⁰⁰⁰ The authors not only disapproved of Zheng Min’s siding with traditional culture, but they also accused her of a lack of originality in her treatment of May Fourth. A decade earlier, the authors A Cheng and Zheng Yi had also raised the question of why Chinese literature had not been able to reach the first rows of world literature. A Cheng had attributed this to the cultural nihilism of May Fourth, which had caused a rupture with traditional culture.¹⁰⁰¹ Another influence that Chen Feng and Zhi Zhong discerned in Zheng Min’s argument was that of Lin Yü-sheng’s book *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness*, which has been discussed in Chapter Four. Zheng Min’s notion of the “absolute denial” of tradition, so the authors claimed, was reminiscent of Lin Yü-sheng’s “totalistic antitraditionalism,” and, like Lin Yü-sheng, Zheng Min also drew an imaginary line between May Fourth

⁹⁹⁹ Xu Ming, “Wenhua jijin zhuyi de lishi weidu: cong Zheng Min, Fan Qinlin de zheng lun kaiqu,” *ZFL*, 207-218. Originally published in *Wenxue pinglun*, 1994:4, 114-120.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Chen Feng, Zhi Zhong, “Kua shiji zhi jiao: wenxue de kunhuo yu xuanze,” *ZFL*, 219-230. Originally published in *Wenxue pinglun* 1994:6, 121-126, 34.

¹⁰⁰¹ The authors quoted from A Cheng, “Wenhua zhiyue zhe renlei,” *Wenyibao*, July 9, 1985.

and the Cultural Revolution. Both points were invalid for Chen Feng and Zhi Zhong: May Fourth had not been aimed at a total destruction of traditional culture; the Cultural Revolution and the May Fourth Movement could by no means be thought of together. Whereas May Fourth stood for science, democracy, and liberty, the Cultural Revolution represented feudal despotism, hierarchy, and traditional virtues.¹⁰⁰² We have already encountered similar criticism of the perceived link between the two movements in Chapter Five.¹⁰⁰³

Whereas Zheng Min's reliance on postmodernism already marked the coming together of post-theories and revaluations of May Fourth, this interconnection reached a higher level when Zhang Yiwu, a literary critic from Peking University, joined the debate. Zhang Yiwu, who has been dubbed "post-master Zhang" (*Zhang houzhu*) for being one of the main post-theorists on mainland China, read the debate as a debate on Chinese culture since May Fourth, or, more generally, as a debate on "modernity." The creation of a modern Chinese language, Zhang Yiwu maintained, had been a core issue in the creation of a modern Chinese nation and a modern Chinese identity.¹⁰⁰⁴ Zhang Yiwu strengthened the cultural identity claims implicit in Zheng Min's argument for the continuity between classical and modern Chinese language by invoking the theory of postcolonialism. Whereas Zheng Min's argument had been rooted in aesthetic concerns, Zhang Yiwu's reference to the concept of "Chineseness" was based on the belief that modernity along Western lines had been tantamount to cultural colonization.

Zhang Yiwu insisted that the relationship between literary and vernacular Chinese had already been discussed during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s—once more, Zheng Min was stripped of originality claims. Zheng Min's "deconstructionist" approach was novel, but it did not enable her to look at the issue in a broader cultural setting—the black-and-white approach of the debate was a mere reproduction of the "binary opposition" under attack. Zhang Yiwu claimed that his new point of departure, "modernity," allowed him to understand the replacement of "classical" with "vernacular" language as the replacement of the "classical" with "modernity."¹⁰⁰⁵ Zhang Yiwu explained that his notion of "modernity" was both indebted to Habermas'

¹⁰⁰² Chen Feng, Zhi Zhong, "Kua shiji zhi jiao," *ZFL*, 224.

¹⁰⁰³ See Chapter Five, 200.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Zhang Yiwu, "Chonggu 'xiandaixing' yu Hanyu shumianyu lunzheng," *Wenxue pinglun* 1994:4, 107-113, 120; Interview with Zhang Yiwu, Beijing, July 26, 2006.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Zhang Yiwu, "Chonggu 'xiandaixing,'" 109.

understanding of the term as the unlimited progress in the field of knowledge and to Lyotard's notion of "modernity" as a "master narrative" of rationality. "Modernity" in this sense had been the goal of the vernacular movement, because the latter had clearly been aimed at Enlightenment, education, liberty, subjectivity, and "knowledge transformation."

The dilemma that May Fourth intellectuals faced was that a radical denial of native culture—which Zhang called "Otherization" (*tazhehua*)—could fail because it could bring about the obliteration of all traces of subjectivity, whereas the preservation of too many traditional elements could blunt the meaning of "modernity" and prohibit the development of tradition. For "post-master" Zhang, it was obvious that Third World intellectuals were often caught in this dilemma of "Otherization," of which the "binary opposition" of classical and vernacular language was a characteristic.¹⁰⁰⁶ Although Zheng Min believed to have abolished this dichotomy, she rather confirmed one side of it—tradition—and hence still fell prone to "Otherization." To overcome "Otherization," Zhang Yiwu argued instead for a dialogue between multiple culture and language fields, and for the creation of what he called a "post-vernacular," which would dialectically unite the classical and the vernacular, and which would enable the "double continuation and double transcendence of the binary opposition of the classical and the vernacular."¹⁰⁰⁷ However, Zhang Yiwu remained vague on the practical realization of this "post-vernacular."

6.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE DEBATE: THE QUESTION OF "CHINESENESS"

What, then, were the real issues at stake in the debate? In a long criticism of Zheng Min's article, Michelle Yeh, a specialist on Chinese poetry based at the University of California, Davis, addressed both Zheng Min's argument and the wider implications of her views on language. As for the argument proper, Yeh argued against the notion that Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu had engaged in "absolute denial"; they had only employed a "strategic iconoclasm" that was by no means present in their actions.¹⁰⁰⁸ Practice has revealed that those in favor of modern poetry were still branded by tradition; they were also very conscious of this, as for example Hu Shi's mockery of his own poetry as

¹⁰⁰⁶ Ibid., 111.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Ibid., 113.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Yeh, "Chinese Postmodernism," 108.

“bound feet unbound” demonstrates.¹⁰⁰⁹ Moreover, Zheng Min’s equation of the vernacular with colloquial language was mistaken; the vernacular Hu Shi had in mind did not only include spoken language, but it also consisted of vernacular poetry and prose. In her refutation of this argument, Yeh also quoted Wang Hui, who had likewise argued against the application of “logocentrism” to the Literary Revolution.¹⁰¹⁰

Concerning the reference to postmodernism, in general, Yeh claimed, Zheng Min’s application of the theories of de Saussure, Lacan, and Derrida was uncritical and her reading of them simplistic. A case in point was Zheng Min’s reference to Lacan’s theory of the “gap” between “signified” and “signifier”: whereas Zheng Min invoked this theory to contend that clear meaning was non-existent, Lacan’s point had by no means been that no meaning could ever be reached. In addition, Zheng Min’s reference to Derrida’s “traces” led to a contradiction: if there were indeed “traces” of classical Chinese in the vernacular, “Why then worry about classical Chinese not being part of modern Chinese if it is always already there?”¹⁰¹¹ Instead of deconstructing the “logocentrism” she so criticized, Zheng Min upheld it and merely supplanted modern Chinese with classical Chinese. As Yeh put it: “Tradition—with a capital T—is upheld as if it were a self-contained, stable, unchanging entity.”¹⁰¹² Zheng Min envisioned a return to tradition to solve the problem of the lack of “Chineseness” of modern Chinese poetry, but since tradition had been cut off from modern poetry, her argument was a vicious cycle. Yeh further criticized Zheng Min for equating modern Chinese poetry with modern mainland Chinese poetry, thereby excluding poetry from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other Chinese communities that resided outside of China.

The implications of Zheng Min’s argument were, according to Michelle Yeh, that her “reification of Chineseness” reinforced the dual structures of China versus the West rather than eliminating them.¹⁰¹³ Zheng Min’s defense of “Chineseness” against “Westernness,” Yeh claimed, was in fact a reversed “Orientalism.” As such, the real issues at stake in Zheng Min’s criticism of the Literary Revolution included the relation between China and the West, Chinese cultural identity, and the question of what constituted “Chineseness.” Although Zheng Min never used the term “Chineseness” in

¹⁰⁰⁹ Ibid., 107.

¹⁰¹⁰ Ibid., 110. Yeh’s reference to Wang Hui can be found in *Wang Hui zixuanji* (Self-selected works of Wang Hui) (Guangxi: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 1997), 342.

¹⁰¹¹ Yeh, “Chinese Postmodernism,” 112.

¹⁰¹² Ibid.

¹⁰¹³ Ibid., 119-120.

her argument, implicitly, her concern was indeed that modern Chinese poetry had lost its “Chineseness,” which is why Yeh’s analysis is fruitful for a more thorough investigation of Zheng Min’s argument. Nevertheless, as will be argued further, there was more to Zheng Min’s argument than a concern with the relation between China and the West. But first, we have to explore the advocacy of “Chineseness” in Zheng Min’s thesis.

6.3.1 *Cultural Nationalism and the Paradox of “Chineseness”*

Because of her concern with the “authenticity” and “Chineseness” of Chinese poetry and her claim that Chinese language was somehow superior, the cultural identity question might be taken further: one might conceive of Zheng Min’s cry as a manifestation of cultural nationalism. Zheng Min’s goal was clearly the “rediscovery of cultural authenticity” and the “activation of the historical community.” In addition, she took issue with state nationalism and the political nationalism of May Fourth.¹⁰¹⁴ Whereas Guo Yingjie’s identification of a variety of intellectual trends of the 1990s with cultural nationalism in his book on the topic has been criticized in the previous chapter for its reductionism, with regard to the debate on language reform and its interaction with the discourse on postmodernism, the notion of cultural nationalism can be applied. As Guo Yingjie has noted, for most nationalists, “language is a component of national identity and a significant means of ensuring its continuation.”¹⁰¹⁵ Guo has referred to Herder and Fichte, as well as to Stalin and Sun Yat-sen, in this respect, because all of them regarded language as an essential element of the nation.¹⁰¹⁶

Nevertheless, as Guo Yingjie has also noted, language can be utilized both as a medium for nationalism, and as an element of nationalism. In the case of China, political nationalism considers the *baihua* language since May Fourth as a medium, whereas cultural nationalism “finds in language a link between present generations of Chinese and their ancestors and a repository of ‘national essence,’ which constitutes the heart of national identity.”¹⁰¹⁷ In the discussion above, some critics of Zheng Min have objected to her argument from the standpoint of political nationalism: the modernization of Chinese language suited progress and education. Zheng Min disapproved of language

¹⁰¹⁴ Guo, *Cultural Nationalism*, 133.

¹⁰¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁰¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

as a medium for nationalism from the point of view of a cultural nationalism in which language constituted the core of “Chineseness.”

The cultural nationalism argument is even more applicable to Zhang Yiwu’s contribution to the debate, which turned the implicit issue of the relation between China and the West into the main theme. Since Zhang Yiwu mainly drew on postcolonialism, his case demonstrated that Guo Yingjie’s use of the concept of cultural nationalism for the discourse on postcolonialism in China was certainly valid.¹⁰¹⁸ In an article that Zhang Yiwu co-authored with Zhang Fa and Wang Yichuan, the authors put forward the thesis that China had moved from “modernity” to “Chineseness” (*Zhonghuaxing*).¹⁰¹⁹ The authors defined “modernity” as a “knowledge model” used by Chinese culture to define itself since the 1840s. Ever since the end of the First Opium War, China had aimed at reconstructing its center location, but the reference system it had employed remained the West; Chinese modernity was a form of “Otherization” (*tazhehua*). In other words, the process of “self-discovery” was at the same time a process of “self-loss.”¹⁰²⁰

This process of the loss of subjectivity ended after 1989, in the new circumstances of the growing internationalization and marketization of mainland culture. In the cultural realm, the authors claimed that the “new era” had made room for the “post-new era,” an era of new discourse methods and cultural practices that was typified by challenge, revolt, and transcendence.¹⁰²¹ The authors coined the term “being fairly well-off” (*xiaokang*) as both an economic and cultural model that surpassed modernity. This model was concerned with “the extension and transformation of national cultural particularity and a unique civilization.”¹⁰²² The new knowledge model of “Chineseness,” the authors explained, did not deny modernity, but rather continued both “classicism” and “modernity.” It did not adhere to a Western linear view of development, but argued in favor of multiple differences: each nation could follow its own road of development. For the model of “Chineseness,” the issue of “sinification”

¹⁰¹⁸ Guo Yingjie, “Reclaiming the ‘Othered’ China: Nationalist Appropriations of Postcolonialism” in idem, *Cultural Nationalism*, 109-132.

¹⁰¹⁹ Zhang Fa, Zhang Yiwu, and Wang Yichuan, “Cong ‘xiandaixing’ dao ‘Zhonghuaxing’: xin zhishixing de tanxun,” *Wenyi zhengming* 1994:2, 10-20.

¹⁰²⁰ Ibid., 10-14; Interview with Zhang Yiwu, Beijing, July 26, 2006.

¹⁰²¹ For Zhang Yiwu’s view of the concept of the “new era,” see Xie Mian, Zhang Yiwu, *Da zhuanxing: hou xin shiqi wenhua yanjiu* (The big transformation: post-new era culture research) (Ha’erbin: Heilongjiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 1995).

¹⁰²² Zhang Fa, Zhang Yiwu, and Wang Yichuan, “Cong ‘xiandaixing’ dao ‘Zhonghuaxing,’” 14.

versus “Westernization” or whether the “essence” (*ti*) and “function” (*yong*) were Chinese or Western did not exist.

In a final part, the authors proposed the foundation of a “Chinese Culture Rim” (*Zhonghua wenhuajuan*), which, apart from East Asia, might also include South East Asia. China would most probably be the center, not only because of its size and cohesive force, but also, and most importantly, because its profound traditional culture could function as a centripetal force. The authors also reiterated the prediction of economists that the twenty-first century would be the “Pacific century,” which implied the possible rise of a particular cultural-economic rim. The cultural rim would both suit “Chineseness” and variety, but the authors nevertheless perceived of China as the center.¹⁰²³ In a fashion reminiscent of Tu Wei-ming’s “cultural China” theory, the authors distinguished between four different layers in this rim. Mainland China would be the core, followed by Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau. The third and fourth layers would consist of overseas Chinese and countries in East Asia and Southeast Asia that had received Chinese influence.

When the authors discussed the need for a new vernacular language as part of a new identity pattern, they invoked Zheng Min and claimed that “the Chinese language could best reflect the national spirit of the Chinese nation.”¹⁰²⁴ The authors pointed at the vitality of the Chinese language and, like Zheng Min, disapproved of a *baihua* that denied *wenyan*. The “new *baihua*” would unite *baihua* and *wenyan*, as well as simplified and traditional Chinese characters, but its concrete form should still be investigated. Apart from language, the authors reiterated the importance of economics, and the reform of the political and legal systems. Once more, the authors emphasized the plurality of politics, economics, and culture, as well as the need to overcome the opposition between Western and Chinese thought.¹⁰²⁵

In an interview, Zhang Yiwu further noted that the distinction between the cultural stance of the 1990s and the cultural conservatism since May Fourth was that the former revolved around the question of globalization, whereas the latter had focused on the issue of modernity. During the 1990s, China was a part of the global knowledge

¹⁰²³ Ibid., 14-20.

¹⁰²⁴ Ibid., 19.

¹⁰²⁵ Elsewhere, Zhang Yiwu expanded on the specific meaning and form of the modernity discourse in China, as well as on the central position of intellectuals in this discourse. See Zhang Yiwu, “‘Xiandaixing’ de zhongjie: yige wufa huibi de keti,” *ZYG* 1994:3, 104-109.

production; the cultural characteristics that intellectual phenomena such as “national studies”—which Zhang Yiwu referred to as “post-national studies” (*hou guoxue*)—addressed were not particularism or essentialism, but pluralism and variety. Zhang Yiwu also read nationalist pamphlets such as *China Can Say No*, which has been mentioned in Chapter Two in the context of the growing anti-Americanism after 1992, as manifestations of pluralism instead of as markers of the ideological opposition between China and the West.¹⁰²⁶

Regardless of all the postmodern rhetoric of pluralism and variety with reference to “Chineseness,” critics have interpreted this quest for pluralism as a disguised form of essentialism. Guo Yingjie has insisted that the relativism for which postcolonialists argued was a “defense tactic rather than a genuine conviction”; for them, Chinese culture was “unique,” but at the same time it was “absolute” and “universal.”¹⁰²⁷ Moreover, since postcolonialists like Zhang Yiwu maintained that Chinese culture was superior, critics uttered that this “latent Greater China complex” and “Sinocentrism” could set in motion a new “self-imposed isolation” that prevented all forms of dialogue.¹⁰²⁸ Likewise, Rey Chow has interpreted notions of “Chineseness” as expressions of the rise of cultural essentialism in response to a history of humiliation, the result of which was the other extreme of narcissism and arrogance.¹⁰²⁹

The notion of “Chineseness,” then, was at least a paradoxical one. In an article on the concept, Ien Ang has explained this paradoxical nature in connection with Tu Wei-ming’s diasporical notion of “Chineseness,” which has been addressed in Chapter Three. Tu Weiming’s pluralization of “Chineseness” intended to break with standard definitions of what it meant to be Chinese, such as “belonging to the Han race, being born in China proper, speaking Mandarin, and observing the “patriotic” code of ethics.”¹⁰³⁰ Although this cultural conception challenged essentialist interpretations of “Chineseness” on the surface, Ang declared that it paradoxically ended up confirming them. For the aim of the periphery was to become a new center, a cultural China. Whereas the *meaning* of “Chineseness” was questioned, the *category* itself was certainly not; on the contrary, it served to enlarge the global significance of

¹⁰²⁶ Interview with Zhang Yiwu, Beijing, July 26, 2006.

¹⁰²⁷ Guo, *Cultural Nationalism*, 110.

¹⁰²⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁰²⁹ Chow, “Introduction,” 1-25.

¹⁰³⁰ Tu Wei-ming, “Preface,” in *The Living Tree*, vii. Quoted in Ien Ang, “Chineseness,” 285.

“Chineseness.”¹⁰³¹ This paradox can also be invoked to explain why both Zhang Yiwu’s and Zheng Min’s concern with “Chineseness,” though aimed at the deconstruction of binary structures, ended up confirming them. Like Tu Wei-ming, both Zheng Min and Zhang Yiwu merely *redefined* what it meant to be Chinese, but the very fact that “Chineseness” somehow had to be recovered was considered self-evident.

Although both Zheng Min and Zhang Yiwu presented their understanding of “Chineseness” as “pluralism,” their nationalist concerns turned this “pluralism” into a Chinese particularism. For Zheng Min, the classical Chinese language was somehow superior to the modern Chinese language; the Chinese language was also superior to other languages. Zhang Yiwu’s “Chineseness” implied the repudiation of a universal model of modernity that was by and large Western. The recovery of subjectivity inherent in the notion of “Chineseness” was a move toward particularity rather than a manifestation of pluralism. If the model was truly marked by pluralism, then why name it “Chineseness” in the first place? As one critic phrased the issue, the “unwieldy new language of universal significance” only served to “prolong and fortify” old contradictions.¹⁰³²

6.3.2 *Language and Anti-rationalism: Zheng Min’s Argument Unraveled*

How, then, did an argument for “Chineseness” become entangled with postmodernism? At first sight, it seems rather paradoxical that Zheng Min turned to structuralism and poststructuralism to defend the historical continuity of Chinese language. As Eagleton has noted, the method of structuralism was not only based on universalism, it was also “hair-raisingly unhistorical,” clinical, analytical and “anti-humanist”—it was “quite indifferent to the cultural value of its object.”¹⁰³³ Zheng Min’s plea, on the contrary, was a plea in favor of historical continuity that was all but “clinical” or indifferent to the value of the Chinese language. Zheng Min’s advocacy of continuity was based on her conviction that Chinese language was superior and unique. Her argument was also rooted in humanist concerns: as a scholar, she felt responsible for the fate of the Chinese language—it was the mission of intellectuals to rescue a buried cultural tradition.¹⁰³⁴ As

¹⁰³¹ Ang, “Chineseness,” 288.

¹⁰³² Tang Xiaobing, “New Theory,” 281.

¹⁰³³ Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 83, 94-95, 98.

¹⁰³⁴ Zheng Min, “Wenhua, zhengzhi, yuyan sanzhe guanxi zhi wo jian,” *EYS* 29 (June 1995), 120-124. Reference from 123.

already put forward in Chapter One, revaluations of modern Chinese history were closely connected to the question of the role of intellectuals in Chinese society. Intellectuals considered themselves to be endowed both with a moral authority to judge the past and with a cultural baggage that enabled them to lead others out of the predicament of “cultural radicalism.”

Given the fact that Zheng Min had both humanistic and historical concerns, at first sight, her resort to structuralism and poststructuralism appears to be a postmodern *heterotopia*, or a juxtaposition of irreconcilable fragmentary worlds.¹⁰³⁵ As Saussy has also noted, it is indeed “idiomatic” to invoke Derrida and Lacan to argue that “the more traditional a language is, the more deeply it is connected with the unconscious.”¹⁰³⁶ Or, why point at the “correct rules” of language reform to make the point that a language is in fact above its users? Zheng Min’s reference to structuralism and poststructuralism in an argument for the continuity of language was, however, not entirely without grounds. According to Eagleton, the historical conditions under which modernists wrote had brought the problem of language to the foreground. In the environment of industrial society, commerce, and the reign of science, language had been in crisis, and structuralism and poststructuralism offered the extreme solution of focusing on language itself to deal with problems in social reality; it was an escape from history to language.¹⁰³⁷ Given the fact that Zheng Min was a modernist poetess, her turn to these two theories was therefore not particularly strange.

Still, there was a more substantial reason why Zheng Min called upon structuralism and poststructuralism in an argument for the continuity of language. Zheng Min’s seemingly odd move can be explained if we invoke an article by Brian Whitton in which the latter has compared the attitude toward language of the eighteenth-century German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) to that of postmodernists such as Michel Foucault (1926-1984), Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998), and Jacques Derrida.¹⁰³⁸ The reason why Whitton made this comparison was, as he put it:

¹⁰³⁵ Brian McHale applied Foucault’s term *heterotopia* to refer to “incommensurable spaces that are juxtaposed or superimposed upon each other.” See Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 48.

¹⁰³⁶ Saussy, “Postmodernism in China,” 137.

¹⁰³⁷ Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 121-122.

¹⁰³⁸ On Herder, see Isaiah Berlin, “Herder and the Enlightenment,” 143-186.

Their special sensitivity to language, and their shared belief in the infinite creative potential of human linguistic activity, led these thinkers to attack such “totalizing” rationalist discourses as legitimating forms for exclusionary practices which repress the full diversity of discursive interpretations of the real implicit in human linguistic activity in favor of one, repressive discourse.¹⁰³⁹

As Whitton has noted, both Lyotard and Herder highlighted the particularism of the cultural community and placed this against the universality of the Enlightenment and its rationalist conception of history. What Herder and Lyotard had in common was the idea that the “hegemonic status” of modern discourse could only be upheld through the suppression of “its own contingent, culture-relative nature,” which amounted to “an act of denial.”¹⁰⁴⁰

In line with Whitton’s argument, the communality between Herder and Lyotard can be exchanged here for the communality between Zheng Min—whose standpoint in some ways echoes Herder’s—and the postmodernism on which Zheng Min based herself. Both for postmodernists and for Zheng Min, modern language was marked by a lack of diversity. For this reason, the former argued in favor of a return to the plurality of language games and a renunciation of grand narratives. An important element in Zheng Min that was also prevalent in Herder was the idea that the contingent elements in history were in need of preservation.¹⁰⁴¹ Consequently, Zheng Min invoked postmodernism as a way to support her critique of Enlightenment reason from the point of view of linguistic creativity. Zheng Min, like Herder, understood the development of language as a social process; language embedded people in a cultural community. For Zheng Min, as for Herder, the national language transmitted the cultural spirit of a people and connected, in a Burkean fashion, past, present, and future generations.¹⁰⁴² Thus, when abstract and rationalist rules were applied to transform this language that had grown organically, both the particularity and the national spirit were harmed.

However, Whitton has also discerned some important dissimilarities between Herder and Lyotard, which concern us here insofar as they affect the credibility of Zheng Min’s argument. Herder intended to undo the Enlightenment bifurcation between

¹⁰³⁹ Whitton, “Herder’s Critique,” 146.

¹⁰⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁰⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 148-150.

¹⁰⁴² *Ibid.*, 151-152.

reason and emotions; he identified with the cultural community in order to preserve it, for he considered it to be the source of diversity and creativity. For Lyotard, on the contrary, this return to the cultural community was not an objective, because both traditional and modern societies were devoid of the cultural pluralism of the postmodern era. The information revolution and the commodification of information enabled the flourishing of linguistic creativity:

Whereas, for Herder, the flourishing of the diversity of national cultural forms was reliant upon the preservation of the integral connection between the creative human spirit and those naturally evolving traditions of the past through the organic medium of the *Volk* language, Lyotard's postmodern order presupposes the direct opposite—the radical separation of the process of cultural creativity from traditional sociocultural life forms. The maximization of cultural diversity here presupposes the unrestricted proliferation of *artificial*, scientific language games, manifold local narratives formulated within a technological discourse cut free from all constraining influences deriving from the reified traditional perspectives and beliefs pervading modern society.¹⁰⁴³

Zheng Min's choice of poststructuralism to secure the union of modern Chinese language and Chinese tradition, then, was paradoxical: in line with Herder, Zheng Min envisaged a reunion with or a continuation of the traditional community, but for post-structuralists, the "natural" was dead and could not be returned to. For post-structuralists, as Whitton has noted, language games were artificial; they were the very product of modernity. For Zheng Min, on the contrary, language was "the direct expression of the historical life of societies and peoples."¹⁰⁴⁴ Poststructuralism, like postmodernism in a general sense, was a theory that denied all sense of historical continuity and that conceived of history as a mere "continuum of portable accessories."¹⁰⁴⁵ However, as Whitton's argument shows, both the cultural nationalism of Herder and the postmodernism of Lyotard discarded abstract reason. From this perspective, it is understandable why Zheng Min opted for postmodernism to recover "Chineseness": both sided with the particular against universality.

¹⁰⁴³ Ibid., 161. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Berlin, "The Counter-Enlightenment," 252.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 95.

It is here that the conservative aspect of Zheng Min's argument lies: Zheng Min defended the contingency of language and the importance of linguistic practice against the Enlightenment notion of abstract and rational design. Moreover, she argued in favor of the historical continuity of Chinese language on the grounds that linguistic evolution was beyond the control of the individual; it always inherited elements from previous generations. Zheng Min declined a repressive and "rationalist" discourse and "blueprint" aspirations in favor of a particular, contingent, and organically grown language that constituted the soul of the cultural community.

Nonetheless, although Zheng Min made her argument on conservative grounds, it is questionable whether her goal as such was conservative. Her main concern was the aesthetic value of language, and of modern Chinese poetry in particular. The crucial issue for Zheng Min was that modern Chinese poetry had somehow lost its "authenticity"; her praise of tradition was part of an attempt to recover this "authenticity." Zheng Min was not concerned with the values and norms of Chinese tradition as such; her main point of focus was the "Chineseness" of Chinese tradition—the Truth of tradition was subordinated to the fact that it belonged to the Chinese past. More than an intellectual and philosophical engagement with tradition, Zheng Min's goal was the recovery of a "national spirit" that had been eroded by language reforms. In contradistinction to Chen Lai and Yü Ying-shih, Zheng Min's preoccupation with modern Chinese history did not serve to restore a moral Confucian order that had been destroyed by "radicalism."

Following Yü Ying-shih and Chen Lai, Zheng Min's conception of Chinese cultural identity was highly elitist; it envisioned a leading role for the scholar-poet in the transmission of the traditional Chinese language. The nation was embodied in high culture, and the poet was the carrier *par excellence* of this culture; mass and proletarian conceptions of culture had threatened elitist and aristocratic aesthetic values. The political implications of Zheng Min's conception of Chinese identity were that those who had subscribed to a radical break with the past, including Chinese Marxists, had destroyed Chinese culture. It also implied that the liberal and socialist form that Chinese modernity had taken in the twentieth century had somehow been a deviation from "Chineseness"; "authenticity" could only be recovered through a reconnection with Chinese tradition.

6.4 USING “ISMS” TO DISCUSS PROBLEMS: POSTMODERNISM IN CHINA

6.4.1 *Postmodernism: A Non-definition*

The above explains to some extent why Zheng Min put postmodernism into use to make a case for the continuity of the Chinese language. However, other intellectuals who applied postmodernism had other objectives. Zhang Yiwu, for example, drew on postcolonialism in his advocacy of “Chineseness,” which was mostly a spatial concept that was coined to re-conceptualize the relation between China and the West. Although Zhang Yiwu also dealt with the relation between tradition and modernity, the topic of historical continuity was more implicit in his notion of “Chineseness.” Nevertheless, both in the instance of Zhang Yiwu and Zheng Min, the appropriation of postmodernism in a Chinese setting meant that the latter obtained clear nationalist traits.

In order to answer the question of why Chinese intellectuals like Zhang Yiwu and Zheng Min employed postmodernism to speak for an essentialist and particularist stance, we have to investigate how the theory was utilized within its original frame of reference, an analysis that is complicated by the fact that postmodernists, like conservatives, denounce systematization. As several theorists have noted, it would be contradictory to map the disappearance of master narratives into a master narrative.¹⁰⁴⁶ Günter Wohlfart phrased it succinctly when he wrote: “Well, don’t ask me the modern question: What *is* postmodern?”¹⁰⁴⁷ Because of the problem of definition, Fredric Jameson has denounced the use of catchphrases such as “the loss of historicity” or “the end of ‘master narratives’” (*grand récits*)—as the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard put it—to define postmodernism. Instead, Jameson has identified some traits of postmodernism, such as the preoccupation with representation instead of with reality, the transformation of all the “zones of nature” into “culture,” the commodification of culture, the replacement of the temporal with the spatial, a new “depthlessness,” the weakening of historicity, and, finally, the death of the subject.¹⁰⁴⁸

If we do ask the question of what postmodernism entails, it is important to understand the relation between its two main components, namely “post” and “modernism.” Although the “modernism” in “postmodernism”—which denotes the aesthetic revolt against convention that arose during the late nineteenth century—

¹⁰⁴⁶ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, xi-xii; Eagleton, *Illusions of Postmodernism*, 21-22.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Wohlfart, “Modernity and Postmodernism,” 18.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, ix, x, 6, 15, 25.

applies to literature and the arts, it is undoubtedly connected to “modernity” in a more general historical and philosophical sense. David Harvey has rightly claimed that postmodernism should not be understood as a mere reaction to modernism that was distinct from it, but as a continuation of certain elements present in modernism. As McHale put it, the “post” in “postmodernism” contains “an element of logical and historical *consequence* rather than sheer temporal *posteriority*.”¹⁰⁴⁹ Although postmodernists have criticized the Enlightenment reason inherent in the modernity project, they have also picked up its fragmented, discontinuous, and rapidly changing nature, since modernity also involved a “maelstrom of social change in space and time.”¹⁰⁵⁰

Fredric Jameson has asserted that postmodernism is the “cultural logic” of “late capitalism,” a stage he has also referred to as “multinational capitalism.” The division of labor on an international scale and a new media landscape were some of the characteristics of this new stage of capitalism.¹⁰⁵¹ “Postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good,” wrote Fredric Jameson in the early 1980s.¹⁰⁵² Analysts like Daniel Bell have also located postmodern culture within a certain type of social organization, which Bell has termed the “post-industrial society.” Lyotard and others have linked postmodernism to new forms of communication in particular; they have coined the terms “spectacle or image society,” or “media capitalism.”¹⁰⁵³

Given the fact that the exhaustion of modernism and the completion of modernization were not present in 1980s or 1990s China, some have objected to the use of the term postmodernism in a Chinese setting. In response, several theorists have invoked Ernst Bloch’s notion of “the synchronicity of the nonsynchronous”

¹⁰⁴⁹ McHale, “Change of Dominant,” 5. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰⁵¹ Fredric Jameson built his postmodernism theory on Mandel’s “three stages” theory of capitalism, namely “classical capitalism,” “monopoly capitalism” (Lenin’s imperialist stage), and “late capitalism” or “multinational capitalism.” Jameson’s usage of the term “late capitalism” differed from Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s application of the term. They had derived the concept from Grossman and Pollock, who had understood it as bureaucratic control, government and big business. In Jameson’s view, this was a more “Weberian” understanding of the term. In addition, Jameson added, the members of the Frankfurt School lived during the age of the “monopoly stage” of capitalism, whereas he, following Mandel, also discerned a third stage of capitalism, namely “multinational capitalism.”

¹⁰⁵² Quoted in Lu, “Global POSTmodernIZATION: The Intellectual, the Artist, and China’s Condition,” 145-146. From Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism*, iv.

¹⁰⁵³ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 49.

(*Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*), or the coexistence of the premodern, the modern, and the postmodern, to justify the usage of the theory in a Chinese environment.¹⁰⁵⁴ Dirlik and Zhang have claimed that it is precisely this “temporal desynchronization,” together with “spatial fracturing,” that justifies the use of postmodernism in China, a claim that has been echoed by Chinese theorists.¹⁰⁵⁵ A Chinese analyst has vindicated the applicability of postmodernism to China with the statement that “anything can happen at any time; so why not postmodernism?”¹⁰⁵⁶

6.4.2 *Postmodernism in China: A Practical and Nationalist Edge*

Regardless of whether or not the cultural logic of postmodernism corresponded to the Chinese socio-economic structure of the early 1990s, what can be said is that Chinese intellectuals used the theory to interpret social and economic changes. As such, the way the theory was applied in a Chinese context differed considerably from its usage in American and European settings. As Gloria Davies put it, whereas Western critical discourse “reflects on the philosophical implications of contemporary modes of theorizing in relation to universal ‘truths’ whose authority has been greatly undermined,” Chinese critical discourse focuses on “*applying* general formulations derived from these Western modes of theorizing to the resolution of practical issues within the mainland Chinese socio-political context.”¹⁰⁵⁷ Zhang Yiwu has noted the reciprocity of the process: Chinese postmodernists applied theory to explain reality, and if the theory did not suit reality, then reality was utilized to reflect on theory.¹⁰⁵⁸

With regard to Zheng Min’s argument, Davies has noted that Derrida’s deconstruction became “deconstructionism” (*jiegou zhuyi*) in a Chinese context, which shows that it was perceived of as a methodology and a theory. It became a “system” of thinking that could expose the errors of existing truth-claims and replace them with “a better and more rational narrative.”¹⁰⁵⁹ Whereas Derrida had employed “deconstruction” to question the very notion of Truth, for Zheng Min, “deconstructionism” was a method that could be applied to discover a different

¹⁰⁵⁴ Ibid., 307. See Ernst Bloch, “Nonsynchronism and Dialectics,” 22-38.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Dirlik and Zhang, “Introduction,” 3; Lu, “Global POSTmodernIZATION,” 146.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Wang Ning, “Chinese Postmodernity,” 34-35.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Davies, “Chinese Intellectual Praxis,” 3. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Interview with Zhang Yiwu, Beijing, July 26, 2006.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Davies, *Worrying about China*, 22.

Truth.¹⁰⁶⁰ Western thinkers such as Derrida, de Saussure, and Lacan—although all of them had questioned the notion of Truth—were now invoked as spokesmen for an absolute Truth in the service of the critique of the Literary Revolution.¹⁰⁶¹ Davies has attributed Chinese intellectuals' quest for absolute truth both to their feeling of moral responsibility and to the inheritance of the Marxist-Leninist framework of discussion.

Whereas Zheng Min invoked postmodernism to discard the Literary Revolution, other Chinese intellectuals drew on the theory to explain social changes. Given the socialist background against which the market reforms had taken place in China, it is no wonder that they were perceived of as a thorough shift that required new explanatory models. The commercialization of Chinese society increased after Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour (*nanxun*) in early 1992 and after the Fourteenth Party Congress of October 1992, at which economic reform was designated as the focus of policy. Several Chinese theorists have ascribed the acceptance and popularity of postmodernism in China to this climate of commercialization.¹⁰⁶² The mainland intellectual Wang Yuechuan has further declared that in China, postmodernism was conceived of as being related to abrupt political, economic, and cultural transitions. Therefore, Wang Yuechuan thinks it is more suitable to regard the Chinese postmodern as a "problem aggregate" than to treat it as an "ism," a faction, or a fad.¹⁰⁶³ What all these elements indicate, then, is that postmodernism in China was put into use to discuss practical problems and to interpret changing social realities.

Although postmodernism was highly popular in China during the 1990s because of the social transformations described above, it had already been discussed during the early 1980s, against the background of a modernist revival in literature. An important vehicle for the introduction of postmodern theories during the 1980s was the journal *Culture: China and the World*, which featured articles on Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Fredric Jameson, and others.¹⁰⁶⁴ In spite of this, the theory only gained clarity when Fredric Jameson delivered a series of lectures on postmodernism at Peking University and Shenzhen University in 1985.¹⁰⁶⁵ In these lectures, Jameson explained

¹⁰⁶⁰ Ibid., 22, 29, 31.

¹⁰⁶¹ Ibid., 52-53.

¹⁰⁶² Wang Ning, "Chinese Postmodernity," 33; Fan Xing, "Fulu," 282.

¹⁰⁶³ Wang Yuechuan, "Xuyan," 1-3, 6-8.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Xu Jilin, "The Fate of an Enlightenment," 193.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Jameson's lectures appeared under the title *Hou xiandai zhuyi yu wenhua lilun* (Postmodernism and cultural theory) (Xi'an: Shaanxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 1987). Fokkema

his thesis that postmodernism was a manifestation of the “cultural logic” of “late capitalism.” To an audience that was familiar with Marxism and that was caught up in a large social transition, Jameson’s analysis sparked interest. After that, lectures by other famous scholars followed, and the main works of important theorists of postmodernism—among them Jürgen Habermas, Ihab Hassan, Jean-François Lyotard, Linda Hutcheon, and William Spanos—were translated into Chinese.¹⁰⁶⁶ Some Chinese thinkers have pointed out that the characteristics of relativism and language games of postmodernism resembled the Daoism of Laozi and Zhuangzi, which facilitated its reception.¹⁰⁶⁷ Yue Daiyun has further noted that postmodernism in China was also associated with a resistance to authority and with the embrace of a plurality of viewpoints.¹⁰⁶⁸

As already mentioned in Zhang Yiwu’s contribution to the debate on language reform, in China, the debate on postmodernism became intertwined with the debate on postcolonialism. Wang Hui has noted that this happened when Edward Said’s notion of “Orientalism” reached Chinese audiences in 1993.¹⁰⁶⁹ Samuel Huntington’s 1993 article “The Clash of Civilizations?” also triggered debates on Chinese cultural identity vis-à-vis the West. Between 1994 and 1995, Huntington’s article provoked debates on postcolonialism, nationalism, and globalization in journals such as *Dushu* (Reading) and *Tianya* (Horizon).¹⁰⁷⁰ Other Chinese analysts have also claimed that in China, postmodernism was related to the issue of the “‘decolonization’ of Asian indigenous cultures and literary discourses” or to “the question of Chineseness in relation to the

and Bertens’ *Approaching Postmodernism* was translated into Chinese in 1991 as *Zouxiang hou xiandai zhuyi*, trans. Wang Ning (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1991).

¹⁰⁶⁶ Douwe Fokkema gave lectures at Nanjing University and Nanjing Normal University in 1987; in 1993, he held lectures at Peking University. Also in 1993, Jameson lectured in Beijing and Shanghai, and Hans Bertens spoke at a conference on postmodernism in Beijing.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Yue Daiyun, “Western Literary Theory,” 113. In an interview, when talking about the persons who had inspired her, the poetess Zheng Min mentioned Derrida, Laozi and Zhuangzi in the same breath. Interview with Zheng Min, Beijing, July 6, 2006.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Interview with Yue Daiyun, Beijing, July 12, 2006.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Wang Hui, *China’s New Order*, 190, fn. 10. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). For some discussions on Edward Said, see *Dushu* 9 (1993), *Dushu* 10 (1994), *Tianya* 2 (1996), *Tianya* 4 (1996), and *Dushu* 8 (1996). Although the interest in Said only became widespread in 1993, some had discussed the concept of “Orientalism” before that time. Fan Xing, for example, has noted that the concept occurred in a text by Zhang Jingyuan in the first issue of *Wenxue pinglun* in 1990. See Fan Xing, “Fulu,” 297-298.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Wang Hui, *China’s New Order*, 94. For some reactions on Huntington’s theory between 1994 and 1998, see Margaret Sleebloom, *Academic Nationalism*, 33, fn. 43.

Eurocentric narrative of history, modernization, and capital.”¹⁰⁷¹ In Yue Daiyun’s view, postcolonialism became entangled with a debate on cultural identity in which race, language and history formed the basis of “cultural clusters.”¹⁰⁷²

Why, then, did postmodernism and postcolonialism become entwined with nationalism in a Chinese context? Part of the explanation is that in China, postmodernism was not a reflection on modernity as such, but on modernity as a *Western* product. Some authors have also made this argument for Chinese conservatism: Chinese conservatism was not just a criticism of Enlightenment or modernity as a general construct; it criticized a Western modernity. This is why Alitto has insisted that conservatism in China obtained nationalist traits, as discussed in the previous chapter. As Haun Saussy has pointed out, Chinese postmodernists denounced “modernist, *cosmopolitan* legitimation-devices”; “the rejection of existing modes of legitimation is doubled with the identification of these modes as specifically Western.”¹⁰⁷³ The Chinese encounter with modernity was a double-edged sword: from the beginning, it was at the same time a project of anti-modernity—Wang Hui has referred to modern Chinese thought as marked by an “antimodern theory of modernization”—since modernity was perceived as belonging to the West.¹⁰⁷⁴ A similar point was made by Arif Dirlik and Zhang Xudong, who raised the question of the experience of modernity for those “who were compelled into modernity by Euro-American coercion.”¹⁰⁷⁵ Although China was never colonized, the experience of the Opium Wars and the influx of Western ideas explain why some expressed feelings of cultural colonization.

6.4.3 *Beyond Cultural Nationalism: Reflections on Chinese Modernity*

As with manifestations of Chinese conservatism, there was more to postmodernism than nationalist and anti-Western elements. Although the nationalist element was certainly present in Zheng Min’s argument, the fact that she engaged with a reevaluation of May Fourth also meant that she tackled the problem of Chinese modernity and its break with the past. As Gloria Davies has rightly noted, Chinese discourse was nationalistic

¹⁰⁷¹ Wang Ning, “Chinese Postmodernity,” 34; Lu, “Global POSTmodernIZATION,” 151.

¹⁰⁷² Yue Daiyun, “Western Literary Theory,” 114.

¹⁰⁷³ Saussy, “Postmodernism in China,” 130, 131.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Wang Hui, *China’s New Order*, 150.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Dirlik and Zhang, “Introduction,” 2.

because it dealt with core issues related to the national well-being.¹⁰⁷⁶ This, however, did not mean that the only interest of Chinese intellectuals was the relation between China and the West; their concern with the national well-being translated itself into ruminations that surpassed the topic of cultural nationalism proper.

Chinese postmodernism also reflected on a Chinese modernity that had been both liberal and socialist. Concerning liberal modernity, as explained throughout the previous chapters, the 1980s had witnessed a revival of the May Fourth spirit and the quest for science and democracy. After the failure of the “second Enlightenment” in 1989, intellectuals turned to new modes of discourse; they questioned the strategy of direct confrontation of the late 1980s. Consequently, the discourse on postmodernism in 1990s China also needs to be understood as a reaction against the “Chinese Enlightenment” of the 1980s and of the May Fourth era. In his introduction to a collection of debates on postmodernism in 1990s China, Wang Hui has included the response to 1989 as one of the four characteristics of postmodernism in a Chinese context. The other traits were that postmodernism in China was not really concerned with the theory in a Western context, that it was not restricted to mainland China, and that there was no consensus on what it entailed, neither among advocates nor among critics.¹⁰⁷⁷

Especially the fact that postmodernism in China was a response to 1989 needs to be taken into consideration here, because it links the debates on postmodernism to rejections of “radicalism”: both started as reflections on the events of June fourth, 1989, but they also questioned the May Fourth legacy as a whole. For liberal critics, postmodernism abandoned the modernity project of human rights, liberty, and democracy of the 1980s. Nevertheless, reflections on Chinese modernity also partially overlapped with the critique of Western modernity, since the ideals of science and democracy were perceived of as Western ideals. As Liu Kang put it, postmodernist critics accused 1980s intellectuals of “blindly subscribing to the Western Enlightenment discourse of the ‘grand narratives’ about ‘modernity’ and ‘nation-state.’”¹⁰⁷⁸

Both reflections on “radicalism” and the discourse on postmodernism in China also engaged with a Chinese modernity that had been thoroughly revolutionary. As Dirlik and Zhang have noted, “postmodern” also meant “postsocialist” and

¹⁰⁷⁶ Davies, *Worrying about China*, 32.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Sheng, “Traveling Theory,” 122-123. From Wang Hui, “Bianzhe qianyan,” v-vii.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Liu Kang, “Debate About Modernity,” 212.

“postrevolutionary.” As argued above, since the “post” also entailed the inheritance of and the connection with modernity, when applied to China, postmodernism was both anti-revolutionary and the inheritor of socialist traces. Consequently, “postmodernity itself may serve as a site of struggle between the legacy of the past and the forces of the present.”¹⁰⁷⁹ Zhang Yiwu has not labeled postmodernism “anti-revolutionary,” but he has applied the term “de-revolution” (*jie geming*) instead. He has further contended that Chinese postmodernists put the theory into use to reflect on Chinese modernity as a whole; revolution and socialism constituted an important aspect of this whole.¹⁰⁸⁰ From a socialist perspective, both reflections on “radicalism” and postmodernism can be said to have moved away from topics such as revolution, class, and state; they were “culturalist” and “idealist” currents of thought. A good example of the engagement with “revolution” in the discourse on postmodernism was an article by the U.S.-based scholar Guo Jian in which the latter reminded Chinese “post-ists” that Jameson had been inspired by the nightmarish Cultural Revolution.¹⁰⁸¹ For this reason, like the debate on “radicalism,” postmodernism in China also engaged in a dialogue with socialism and revolution.

The debate on postmodernism in China challenged the socialist monopoly on what constituted “Chineseness.” As Dirlik and Zhang have asserted, postmodernism was based on the notion of a global market that challenged the socialist state; different “temporalities” and regional groups threatened this notion of the nation-state further.¹⁰⁸² As Sheng Anfeng has noted, in the debate on postmodernism, “the eager involvement of the overseas Chinese scholars betrayed the tension caused by a different context.”¹⁰⁸³ As discussed in the previous chapters, critics of “radicalism,” such as the overseas intellectual Yü Ying-shih, also confronted socialist and geographically based notions of “Chineseness” by redefining identity in cultural terms.

Both Dirlik and Pickowicz have made use of the term “postsocialism” in relation to postmodernism. Whereas Dirlik has applied the term to denote the official policy of

¹⁰⁷⁹ Dirlik and Zhang, “Introduction,” 7-8.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Interview with Zhang Yiwu, Beijing, July 26, 2006.

¹⁰⁸¹ Guo Jian, “Wenge sichao yu ‘houxue,’” *EYS* 35 (June 1996), 116-122.

¹⁰⁸² Dirlik and Zhang, “Introduction,” 3.

¹⁰⁸³ Sheng, “Traveling Theory,” 123.

“socialism with Chinese characteristics,” Pickowicz understood it as a loss of faith in socialism on behalf of the masses.¹⁰⁸⁴ According to Pickowicz,

The postsocialist condition exists only in cultures that have functioned for significant periods of time as traditional socialist societies. That is, postsocialism presupposes socialism. (...) Postsocialism involves a perception among ordinary people at the bottom that socialism has failed, that it is not the solution to what ails society, but rather the very cause. The general sense is that Leninist parties that have been in power for decades are inherently incapable of reforming society. Postsocialism, in brief, involves a massive loss of faith.¹⁰⁸⁵

What the embrace of commercial culture signified, then, was not a lack of criticism on behalf of intellectuals—as some Leftist critics have suggested—but a way to convey the loss of faith in socialism. Postmodernism, like rejections of “radicalism,” was also a “goodbye to revolution.” Although the official embrace of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” was also a farewell to revolution in practice, as official reactions to rejections of “radicalism” in the previous chapters have demonstrated, there were limits to the official notion of “postsocialism”; revolution was relegated to the past, but it was not banned altogether. “Socialism with Chinese characteristics” was a reworking of socialism, not a denial of it. The embrace of commercial culture by postmodernists, on the other hand, was an implicit criticism of a socialist modernity that was branded by revolution.

As Wang Chaohua has noted, in China, postmodernism did not so much direct itself against capitalism as it had done in Jameson’s account of the “cultural logic” of “late capitalism.” Seen against the backdrop of Chinese socialism, postmodernist culture was perceived of as a “new space of popular freedom.”¹⁰⁸⁶ In a similar vein, Yue Daiyun has stated that some promoted the multiple perspectives in postmodernism on the ground that it was better suited to explain the chaos of the last decades. After the ideological rigidity of the Cultural Revolution especially, it was no wonder that some

¹⁰⁸⁴ Arif Dirlik first used the term in “Postsocialism?: Reflections on ‘Socialism with Chinese Characteristics,’” 362-384. Pickowicz applied the term to analyze three movies of the 1980s by director Huang Jianxin in “Huang Jianxin and the Notion of Postsocialism,” 57-87.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Pickowicz, “Postsocialism,” 63.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Wang, “Introduction,” 21.

turned to a more flexible approach. Especially those who had grown up during the Cultural Revolution were drawn to deconstructionism.¹⁰⁸⁷

All this goes to show that both postmodernism and conservatism in China were not merely united in their “anti-Western” stance, as scholars such as the German political scientist Gunter Schubert have claimed. For Schubert, postmodernism challenged a unilinear Western modernity, and this is how it was connected with the “nationalist conservatism” of the 1990s.¹⁰⁸⁸ Other critics have also related postmodernism to a “neo-conservatism” that was understood as “anti-Westernism” and “nationalism.”¹⁰⁸⁹ Nevertheless, as indicated above, implicit in the debate on postmodernism was an engagement with both 1989 and the revolutionary identity of twentieth-century China. This engagement connected postmodernism in China with the debates on “radicalism,” debates that also constituted a dialogue with both 1989 and with socialism.

6.5 “NEO-CONSERVATISM” AND POSTMODERNISM

6.5.1 *Zhao Yiheng and Mainland “Post-isms”*

In the debate on postmodernism that followed from the arguments as put forward by Zheng Min and Zhang Yiwu, overseas Chinese critics also applied the term “neo-conservatism” as a label to refer to an uncritical outlook that amounted to a confirmation of the cultural and political status quo.¹⁰⁹⁰ In this “commonsense” approach to the concept, none of the participants considered the fact that the theory did engage with Chinese modernity and socialism; participants argued instead that the theory merely suited official interests and ignored Chinese problems.

Zhao Yiheng (b. 1943), also known as Henry Zhao, a senior lecturer in modern Chinese literature at the University of London, launched an assault on the paradox of “post-isms” (*houxue*)—postcolonialism, postmodernism, and poststructuralism—in the service of what he termed the “neo-conservative trend” in Chinese intellectual

¹⁰⁸⁷ Yue Daiyun, “Western Literary Theory,” 112-113.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Schubert, “Neokonservativismus,” 67.

¹⁰⁸⁹ See Yang Chunshi, “Xin baoshou zhuyi yu xin lixing zhuyi,” *ZFL*, 487.

¹⁰⁹⁰ The main texts of the debate were collected in Wang Hui and Yu Guoliang, eds., *Jiushi niandai de houxue lunzheng* (Xianggang: Xianggang Zhongwen daxue, 1998).

circles.¹⁰⁹¹ Zhao Yiheng presented his argument at the 1995 *International Conference on Cultural Studies: China and the West* in Dalian, at which scholars such as Terry Eagleton and Jonathan Arac were present; his contribution to the conference appeared in the February 1995 issue of *Twenty-first Century*.¹⁰⁹² The “neo-conservative” appropriation of postmodernism in a Chinese environment was an oddity for Zhao Yiheng because in the West, critics had accused postmodernism of being “too radical.” Zhao raised the question of whether this reconfiguration in a Chinese context had occurred because the discussants randomly used whatever theories came their way, or whether it could be attributed to some particular traits of postmodern theories.¹⁰⁹³ Although Zhao Yiheng was critical of “post-isms” in general, his fierce critique of the specific circumstances under which mainland critics operated seemed to suggest that the answer contained both aspects.

In his condemnation of “neo-conservatism,” Zhao Yiheng targeted Zheng Min for having made use of “new theories” to strengthen an “old perspective on an old problem,” namely conservative criticism of May Fourth.¹⁰⁹⁴ Zhao also considered “national studies” and the affirmation of popular commercial culture by mainland intellectuals to be aspects of a “neo-conservative trend.”¹⁰⁹⁵ Like other liberals, Zhao Yiheng used the label “neo-conservatism” in an overtly negative sense, although he insisted that the term did not have a negative connotation—“conservatism” was merely the opposite of “critique” (*pipan*).¹⁰⁹⁶ Mainland intellectuals’ abandonment of their elitist stance and the responsibilities it entailed—the concern for the state, the nation, and humanity—Zhao claimed, constituted the main characteristic of “neo-conservatism.” Stated differently, Zhao Yiheng conceived of elite culture as a progressive and “radical” or “critical” force, whereas the embrace of mass culture only signified the decline of culture.¹⁰⁹⁷

¹⁰⁹¹ Zhao Yiheng, “‘Houxue’ yu Zhongguo xin baoshou zhuyi,” *EYS* 27 (February 1995), 4-15. A slightly different version of the article appeared in *ZFL*, 343-356, under the title “‘Houxue,’ xin baoshou zhuyi yu wenhua pipan.”

¹⁰⁹² The papers presented at the conference appeared in *New Literary History* 28:1 (Winter 1997).

¹⁰⁹³ Zhao Yiheng, “‘Houxue’ yu Zhongguo xin baoshou zhuyi,” 5.

¹⁰⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹⁵ See the conversation between Chen Xiaoming, Zhang Yiwu, Dai Jinhua, and Zhu Wei, “Dongfang zhuyi he houzhimin zhuyi,” *Zhongshan* 88 (1994:1), 126-148.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Zhao Yiheng, “‘Houxue,’ xin baoshou zhuyi yu wenhua pipan,” *ZFL*, 344.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Davies, *Worrying about China*, 97-98.

In this context of the criticism of commercialization and the praise of the elitist position of intellectuals of the 1980s, Zhao Yiheng referred to the debate on the “loss of the humanist spirit” that was conducted in journals such as *Shanghai wenxue* (Shanghai Literature) and *Dushu* (Reading) in 1993 and 1994.¹⁰⁹⁸ In this debate, one group of intellectuals, whose main representatives were the literary historian Wang Xiaoming and the literary scholar Chen Sihe, asserted that the 1990s had witnessed the loss of what they called the “humanist spirit” (*renwen jingshen*), or the embrace of “ultimate concerns” (*zhongji guanhuai*) that Zhao Yiheng had lauded in his criticism of “neo-conservatism.”¹⁰⁹⁹ Wang Xiaoming summarized the debate as a debate on the crisis in culture and the loss of existential meaning; the advocacy of the “humanist spirit” or ultimate concerns was thus nothing less than “the self-saving action of intellectuals.”¹¹⁰⁰ These intellectuals fiercely opposed the commercialization of society and argued in favor of the continuation of the ultimate ideals of the 1980s. The works of the “two Zhangs,” the authors Zhang Wei and Zhang Chengzhi, have also been read as expressions of this preoccupation with the “humanist spirit,” although neither of them took part in the debate in *Dushu*.¹¹⁰¹

The opposite standpoint in the debate, that of an embrace of the liberating effects of the market and mass culture, was reflected in the writings of the “two Wangs,” the former Minister of Culture Wang Meng, and the novelist Wang Shuo.¹¹⁰² For these intellectuals, consumer society was good because it meant a departure from the political authoritarianism of the Mao era; it was a move toward economic prosperity

¹⁰⁹⁸ For an overview of the key articles in the “humanist spirit” debate, which, apart from the journals mentioned above, also appeared in the journals *Dongfang*, *Shanghai wenhua*, *Tansuo yu zhengming*, *Xiandai yu chuantong*, and *Wenyi zhengming*, see Wang Xiaoming, *Renwen jingshen xunsi lu* (Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 1996).

¹⁰⁹⁹ Barmé, *In the Red*, 284.

¹¹⁰⁰ Wang Xiaoming, *Renwen jingshen xunsi lu*, 272, 273.

¹¹⁰¹ Both Zhang Wei and Zhang Chengzhi have often been identified as proponents of a “cultural conservatism,” which in this case signified moral idealism and aesthetic romanticism. For an example of the analysis of these authors’ and others’ works as manifestations of “cultural conservatism,” see Ye Fang, *Lun jiushi niandai wenxue zhong de wenhua baoshou zhuyi*, Wuhan daxue, MA thesis, 2001; Lan Aiguo, “Shijimo wenxue: wenhua baoshou zhuyi sichao,” *Wenyi zhengming* 1994:6, 34-37.

¹¹⁰² In 1993, Wang Meng’s article “Shunning the Sublime” was published in *Reading*. In this article, Wang lauded the arrival of the market and the cultural pluralism it had brought. See Wang Meng, “Duobi chonggao,” *Dushu* 1993:1, 10-17. For a collection of the main articles in the debate surrounding Wang Meng’s article, see Ding Dong and Sun Min, eds., *Shiji zhi jiao de chongzhuang: Wang Meng xianxiang zhengminglu* (Beijing: Guangming ribao chubanshe, 1995). On Wang Meng, see Barmé, *In the Red*, 287-296. On the “humanist spirit” debate, see *ibid.*, 283-286, 296-297.

and cultural pluralism. The works of the novelist Wang Shuo showed traits of cynicism, a criticism of authoritarianism, and a repudiation of ideology and ideals; the flawless exemplary figures of the revolutionary era were exchanged for the *liumang*, a term that included “everything from hooligans to alienated youth, individualists, and unscrupulous entrepreneurs.”¹¹⁰³ The stand of Zhang Yiwu and others, then, according to which the commercialization of Chinese society was part of a move toward a “post-new era,” overlapped with that of intellectuals like the “two Wangs” because it also praised the liberating effects of mass culture.

In another article in *Twenty-first Century*, Zhao Yiheng also elaborated on the conformist and non-critical aspect of postmodernism: it preferred quantity to quality and confirmed contemporary culture.¹¹⁰⁴ In this text, Zhao Yiheng also clarified that his point was not to label some people “conservatives,” but to demonstrate that there was a “neo-conservative” trend in 1990s China. Still elsewhere, Zhao explained that poststructuralism for him signified the end of the 1980s’ narrative; postmodernism implied the reign of commercialization, and postcolonialism was a resistance to Western-style discourse.¹¹⁰⁵ Given Zhao Yiheng’s broad conception of “neo-conservatism,” Zhang Yiwu criticized the former because his understanding of “postisms” in fact covered all cultural phenomena of the 1990s.¹¹⁰⁶

6.5.2 *Postmodernism and Conservatism: Friends or Foes?*

According to Zhao Yiheng’s interpretation, postmodernism was a “radical” theory that had miraculously turned “conservative” in Chinese circumstances. Zhao Yiheng’s argument revealed that the tactic of simplistic dualisms was employed once again in order to portray the “neo-conservative” trend, including postmodernism, as a negative phenomenon. Just like Chen Lai had made a simplistic distinction between the “value rationality” of “conservatives” and the “instrumental rationality” of “radicals,” Zhao Yiheng portrayed Chinese postmodernism as a manifestation of an uncritical “neo-

¹¹⁰³ Barmé, *In the Red*, 63-98. Reference from 73.

¹¹⁰⁴ Zhao Yiheng, “Wenhua pipan yu houxiandai zhuyi lilun,” *EYS* 31 (October 1995), 148-151. See 149 in particular.

¹¹⁰⁵ Zhao Yiheng, “Ruhe miandui dangjin Zhongguo wenhua xianzhuang: haineiwai dalu xuezhe de yichang bianlun,” *ZFL*, 357-367. See 359-361 in particular. Originally published in *Wenyi zhengming*, 1996: 5.

¹¹⁰⁶ Zhang Yiwu, “Chaoyue wenhua lunzhan: fansi jiushi niandai wenhua de xin shidian,” 98-103. See 100, fn. 3 in particular.

conservatism,” and he opposed this to the “radical” nature of the theory in a Western setting. Yet Zhao Yiheng’s simplification overlooked the fact that, in its initial context, postmodernism had contained both critical and uncritical aspects; what happened in the Chinese environment was a continuation of these two tendencies.

In its initial context, the critical and radical element of postmodernism had been that it deconstructed meta-narratives and made room for the *petites histoires*, whether in the form of differences in gender, sexuality, or race. But at the same time, this is where its “conservative” aspect was situated: if all that was left was a myriad of variations, there was no room for political engagement, which is why both Marxists and liberals have denounced postmodernism for its political quietism and its rejection of political ideals. In a Chinese context, then, the critical aspect of postmodernism was translated into reflections on both the 1980s and socialism; the main narrative of twentieth-century Chinese history was questioned because it had led to a break with Chinese tradition. Conversely, this made room for the uncritical element of postmodernism, namely the end of political engagement and the conversion of the stress on particularity into an essentialist defense of “Chineseness.”

In the sense of “preserving the status quo,” Marxist critics had applied the label “conservative” to postmodernism long before Zhao Yiheng made use of it to blame mainland Chinese intellectuals in particular. Terry Eagleton, for example, had maintained that postmodernism ended up being conformist, because instead of struggling against the inherent contradictions of modernity, it merely affirmed them and gave them free reign. A “radical epistemology” could result in “conservative politics,” for postmodernists engaged in discourses that had no concrete or direct political results.¹¹⁰⁷ Or, as Harvey has phrased it: “The rhetoric of postmodernism is dangerous for it avoids confronting the realities of political economy and the circumstances of global power.”¹¹⁰⁸ Fredric Jameson has also noted that the “critical distance” needed in cultural politics might have been abolished under postmodernism. Both cultural criticism and political resistance seemed to have become “secretly disarmed and reabsorbed by a system of which they themselves might well be considered a part, since they can achieve no distance from it.”¹¹⁰⁹

¹¹⁰⁷ Eagleton, *Illusions of Postmodernism*, 14.

¹¹⁰⁸ Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, 117.

¹¹⁰⁹ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 48-49.

Arif Dirlik has questioned the “radical” nature of postcolonial criticism in particular; it was “antirevolutionary” for several reasons. Firstly, the “post” relegated both colonialism and its structures to the past, which concealed both its origins and the struggles against it. Secondly, in accordance with the criticism by Eagleton and Jameson, postcolonialism ended up replacing the metanarratives it wanted to abolish with a new metanarrative because it erased structures and therefore differences. Third, by attacking “Eurocentrism” rather than “capitalism” it in fact lined up with the global forces of capitalism. Lastly, Third World postcolonial critics had themselves become part of centers of power.¹¹¹⁰

Whereas these assessments focused on the lack of political engagement and the confirmation of the status quo inherent in postmodernism, some authors have also pointed out the philosophical communalities between postmodernism and conservatism as a “style of thought.” As already indicated above, like conservatism, postmodernism found fault with Enlightenment reason and abstract thought, which is why Zheng Min opted for postmodernism in her plea for the continuity of the Chinese language. In 1980, Jürgen Habermas dismissed both Derrida and Foucault as “young conservatives” because of their disapproval of modernity. In his lectures on modernity, which were published in 1985 as *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Habermas held that both “neo-conservatives” and postmodernists had abandoned the “tradition of reason in which European modernity once understood itself.”¹¹¹¹ The distinction between the two was that postmodernists discarded both social and cultural modernity, whereas “neo-conservatives” only rejected cultural modernity.

Habermas’ point that conservatism and postmodernism shared a common enemy—namely, Enlightenment rationalism—has also been made by Bruce Pilbeam.¹¹¹² In postmodernism, Pilbeam explained, the attack on Cartesian rationalism and its “blueprint aspirations” manifested itself in what Lyotard has termed the “incredulity towards metanarratives”; the relative and the contingent were preferred to the absolute and the universal. Conservative critics from Edmund Burke onwards had also attacked the Cartesian subject as the architect of the ideal society, thereby ignoring the limits of man’s reason and his moral imperfection. Because of this theoretical affinity, it was paradoxical that postmodernism and conservatism denounced each other

¹¹¹⁰ Dirlik, “Reversals,” 274-275. See also Dirlik, “The Postcolonial Aura,” 328-356.

¹¹¹¹ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 4.

¹¹¹² Pilbeam, “Conservatism and Postmodernism,” 42-43.

in practice. The reason why they refused to join forces despite theoretical similarities was, according to Pilbeam, that practically, conservatives regarded postmodern theories as a challenge to traditional values and institutions. Nevertheless, Pilbeam concluded that “postmodern conservatism” was not an oxymoronic project.

Some China specialists have echoed these claims on the common anti-Enlightenment stance of conservatism and postmodernism. Torbjörn Lodén, a Professor of Chinese at Stockholm University, for example, has similarly questioned the “radical” nature of postmodernism in a Western context. Western postmodernism took a stand against the concept of “progress”; it was a response to the Leftist radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s. Authorities such as Heidegger and Lyotard were conservative rather than radical because they stood up to Enlightenment rationalism.¹¹¹³ Guy Alitto, the author of the book on Liang Shuming who has been discussed in the previous chapter, has also contended that postmodernism and conservatism were both anti-modernity theories. After World War Two, the criticism of the Enlightenment spirit of rationalization that conservatives had expressed since the eighteenth century was continued in the form of postmodernism.¹¹¹⁴

The “paradox” of a Chinese postmodernism in the service of “neo-conservatism” is less great than Zhao Yiheng presents it; rather than a “misappropriation” of a theory that was essentially “radical,” the Chinese case can be interpreted as a development of certain tendencies that were inherent in the contradictory nature of postmodernism. In fact, Zhao Yiheng has partly admitted that postmodernism was a conservative theory *in se*: Zhao called cultural theory a form of “tribalism” (*buzuhua*) because it safeguarded group interests.¹¹¹⁵ According to Jonathan Arac, for Zhao Yiheng, postcolonial criticism was an attempt to create a non-Western world that was specified by an “indigenous discourse and values, and a ‘pretourist’ culture in its uncontaminated, fundamental state.”¹¹¹⁶

As to why postmodernism and conservatism managed to join forces at that particular point in time, Pilbeam has remarked that, in a post-communist order, the demise of the Left might arouse more congeniality of conservatives toward

¹¹¹³ Wan Zhi, “‘Houxue’ pipan de pipan,” *EYS* 31 (October 1995), 144-146. Reference from 146.

¹¹¹⁴ Alitto, lecture on “Postmodernism,” Peking University, June 27, 2006.

¹¹¹⁵ Zhao Yiheng, “‘Houxue’ yu Zhongguo xin baoshou zhuyi,” 11.

¹¹¹⁶ Arac, “Postmodernism and Postmodernity in China,” 140.

postmodernism. The old demarcation lines have been eradicated, and conservatism might, in a new strain of self-confidence, feel less threatened by the practical implications of postmodernism.¹¹¹⁷ Against the background of “de-revolution,” it was easier for the theories to merge. As regards Zheng Min, she certainly did not feel threatened by the implications of postmodernism. On the contrary, she perceived of her own stance as pluralist instead of conservative.

6.5.3 *Postmodernism and Official Ideology*

As Saussy has rightly noted, Zhao Yiheng’s evaluation of Zheng Min’s text overlooked the “revisionary force” of her argument.¹¹¹⁸ By interpreting conservatism as a mere defense of the cultural status quo, Zhao Yiheng ignored the fact that Zheng Min’s argument for cultural continuity and her location of Chinese identity in Chinese culture was a move away from a revolutionary identity based on breaks with the past. The focal point of the nature of postmodern theories distracted attention from Zheng Min’s reevaluation of the May Fourth Movement and of Chinese modernity in general. Given this revisionist element in Zheng Min’s argument, *pace* Zhao Yiheng, it cannot simply be dismissed as a manifestation of an uncritical “neo-conservatism” that merely confirmed the status quo and that suited official interests.

Likewise, postmodernism in China was not an uncritical confirmation of commercialism; it was also an expression of “de-revolution,” as Zhang Yiwu has phrased it. Given this state of affairs, the fusion between postmodernism and nationalism in China did not always suit official interests, although there were some elements that came in handy from an official point of view. An example mentioned by both Guo Yingjie and Yue Daiyun concerns the stress on “colonization” in postmodernism, a term that was also utilized in official propaganda.¹¹¹⁹ According to Yue Daiyun, the postcolonialists’ argument that the concepts of democracy, freedom, and human rights had to be denounced because they were part of a Western ideological framework suited the government’s criticism of “peaceful evolution” and spiritual pollution in particular.

¹¹¹⁷ Pilbeam, “Conservatism and Postmodernism,” 35.

¹¹¹⁸ Saussy, “Postmodernism in China,” 138.

¹¹¹⁹ Yue Daiyun, “Western Literary Theory,” 114.

On the other hand, there was also a tension between the cultural nationalism of postmodernists and official nationalism in that, as Guo Yingjie phrased it, “what constitutes Chineseness in the cultural nationalists’ imagination generally excludes socialist ideas and practices.”¹¹²⁰ Moreover, as Guo Yingjie has also pointed out, the “anti-imperialism” in official propaganda differed from the attack on imperialism in postcolonial discourse. Whereas the former’s critique of “colonial culture” went back to Mao Zedong, the latter relied on Western postcolonial theories. Moreover, the former was especially concerned with the negative effects of colonialism, whereas the latter interpreted colonialism first and foremost as a discursive practice.¹¹²¹

This ambiguous relation between postmodernism and official ideology was in accordance with the complex relation between intellectual practice and official policy during the 1990s, as demonstrated throughout the previous chapters. This relation could neither be depicted as a relation of “complicity,” nor as a relation of dual opposition. As Michelle Yeh has remarked, during the 1980s, Western theories were still perceived of as “oppositional” in a Chinese context, whereas during the 1990s, they were interpreted by some overseas critics as supportive of the government. Michelle Yeh has made use of Chen Xiaomei’s theory of “Occidentalism” to illustrate what this perceived shift entailed.¹¹²² In Chen Xiaomei’s analysis, “Occidentalism” was “a discursive practice” of constructing the Western Other that enabled the Orient to “participate actively and with indigenous creativity in the process of self-appropriation.”¹¹²³ Chen Xiaomei has distinguished between two discursive practices during the 1980s: “official Occidentalism,” and “anti-official Occidentalism.” The Chinese government used the former in the service of nationalism and in order to dominate the Chinese people at home. “Anti-official Occidentalism,” on the other hand, was applied by members of the intelligentsia for the purpose of political liberation.¹¹²⁴

The logic of the overseas Chinese critics implies that the usage of postmodern theories in China during the 1990s, because of its nationalist traits, would be in line with Chen Xiaomei’s “official Occidentalism” of the 1980s. Michelle Yeh has rightly asserted that this interpretation is too simplistic; the framework of “official” versus

¹¹²⁰ Guo, *Cultural Nationalism*, 109.

¹¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹¹²² Xiaomei Chen, *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹¹²³ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

¹¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5, 8.

“anti-official” does not apply to 1990s China because of the conditions of commercialization, the rise of popular culture, and the concomitant development of a private sphere.¹¹²⁵ Chen Xiaomei has also noted that she employed the terms “official” and “non-official” in a strategic sense, in order to explain a reality that was much more complex. Both forms overlapped in practice.¹¹²⁶ As demonstrated throughout this study, intellectual trends based on Western concepts or ideas, although at first sight they appeared to be examples of an “official” Occidentalism, more often than not, they also contained elements of an “anti-official” Occidentalism. “Neo-conservatism” can serve as an example of this complexity: although its argument for stability and political centralization certainly served official interests, at the same time, its implicit rejection of revolution posed a challenge to the very legitimacy of the CCP.

Guo Yingjie has also declared that, especially since 1989, there was “a large degree of congruence and convergence” between “official Occidentalism” and “anti-official Occidentalism.”¹¹²⁷ Similarly, Zhang Xudong has noted that some critics of postmodernism had wrongly turned it into “a forced reductionist choice between socialism and capitalism, despotism and liberal democracy, state command and free market, ‘official’ and ‘unofficial,’ popular culture and elitism, right and wrong.”¹¹²⁸ Another objection to Zhao Yiheng’s accusation of the conspiracy between postmodernists and officials was that intellectuals such as Zhang Yiwu, as one critic phrased it, “could be active only within very limited critical and academic circles that are far from the official discourse and mainstream ideology.”¹¹²⁹ As a humanistic scholar based at a university, Zhang Yiwu had little political impact. Moreover, as argued in the introduction, many intellectuals were concerned with transmitting the truth about their object of research rather than with their relation to policy circles.

6.6 FROM HISTORY TO “GEOGRAPHICAL DETERMINISM”

6.6.1 *Uncritical Confirmation of the Present, or Dialogue with the Past?*

Other Chinese scholars who were located both on mainland China and in the United States shared Zhao Yiheng’s conviction that mainland Chinese postmodernism was a

¹¹²⁵ Yeh, “International Theory,” 259, 274.

¹¹²⁶ Chen, *Occidentalism*, 24-25.

¹¹²⁷ Guo, *Cultural Nationalism*, 129.

¹¹²⁸ Zhang Xudong, “Epilogue,” 420.

¹¹²⁹ Wang Ning, “The Mapping of Chinese Postmodernity,” 40, fn. 42.

distortion of “radical” and critical theories. They attributed this misappropriation of the theory to the political circumstances of mainland China in particular, which resulted in a politicized and ahistorical debate on postmodernism, in which the incipient reflections on modernity of Zheng Min and Zhang Yiwu were replaced with accusations of political appeasement. The consequence of the merging of Zheng Min’s reevaluation of May Fourth with the debate on postmodernism was thus that true historical reflections in accordance with Zheng Min’s concern with historical continuity were forestalled. As Davies put it, in this battle between mainland and overseas intellectuals, the physical location of intellectuals became a factor to judge the authenticity of their concerns.¹¹³⁰ In other words, intellectuals fell prone to the logic of what can be called a “geographical determinism.”

Some examples of this focus on the physical location of intellectuals in the debate on “Chineseness” can be found in the contributions to the debate on postmodernism by Zhang Longxi, a Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of California, Riverside, and Xu Ben, an Associate Professor of English at Saint Mary College, California. In an article that appeared in the February 1996 issue of *Twenty-first Century*, Zhang Longxi praised Zhao Yiheng’s analysis for being “modern” and “rational,” for being rooted in modern Western democracy and science, and for continuing the “critical tradition” of May Fourth.¹¹³¹ Zhang Longxi attributed the Chinese usage of postmodernism in the service of the promotion of tradition and national interest to historical and cultural factors, but mostly to the Chinese political system. Like Zhao Yiheng, Zhang Longxi contended that postmodernism in a Chinese setting merely safeguarded the existing order, which prevented the realization of modernization and democratization.¹¹³² Zhang Longxi further condemned the self-contradictory move in the application of Western theories to attack the West, as well as the fact that mainland Chinese intellectuals conceived of overseas Chinese academics as part of the Western academic system.¹¹³³

In the same issue of *Twenty-first Century* in which Zhao Yiheng had launched his attack on “post-isms,” an article by Xu Ben appeared in which the latter found fault

¹¹³⁰ Davies, *Worrying about China*, 99.

¹¹³¹ Zhang Longxi, “Duoyuan shehui zhong de wenhua piping,” *EYS* 33 (February 1996), 18-25. Reference from 19.

¹¹³² *Ibid.*, 24.

¹¹³³ *Ibid.*, 22, 25.

with what he termed “Chinese style ‘third world criticism.’” For Xu Ben, as for Zhang Longxi, the answer to the question of why cultural criticism after 1989 had turned “conservative” on mainland China had to be sought merely in the Chinese circumstances.¹¹³⁴ After 1989, Xu Ben claimed, literary criticism on mainland China had lost its political character; intellectuals only disapproved of “safe” objects, such as commodity culture, the “loss of the humanist spirit,” or the “Orientalism” of Western culture. Xu Ben attributed this de-politicization of literary criticism to the state of affairs of political control, the spread of the commodity economy, and the instrumental use of nationalism by the authorities.

Contrary to postcolonial criticism in the West, which had been an oppositional discourse that aligned with social movements, the theories of Zhang Yiwu and the like were characterized by “nativism.” Consequently, the fight against oppression became the “discursive oppression of the First World against the Third World,” which implied that Chinese intellectuals avoided dealing with the oppression within Chinese society.¹¹³⁵ In brief, Chinese “third world criticism” was marked by the tendency to “reject what is near and seek what is far away” (*shejin qiuyuan*), and “to dwell on the abstract and avoid real issues” (*bishi jiuxu*).¹¹³⁶ Elsewhere, Xu Ben called “Chinese nativist post-ist theory” “a prima facie unlikely union of Western postmodern, postcolonial theories and Chinese concerns about national authenticity and identity.”¹¹³⁷ Since intellectuals were very careful in their attitude towards the official nationalist discourse, mainland cultural criticism and official nationalism could coexist peacefully.

One mainland intellectual whose criticism resembled that of both Zhao Yiheng and Xu Ben was Lei Yi, an intellectual with liberal inclinations who worked for the Institute of Modern Chinese History at CASS. Lei Yi criticized Zhang Yiwu and the like for “gulping down uncritically” a foreign theory without exploring its concrete background.¹¹³⁸ The theories of Foucault and others had been truly revolutionary in a Western context because they stood up to the Enlightenment discourse. Since this discourse had only been marginal in China, both the spearhead and the revolutionary character of the theory had disappeared in a Chinese context. For this reason, Lei Yi

¹¹³⁴ Xu Ben, “‘Di san shijie piping’ zai dangjin Zhongguo de chujing,” *EYS* 27 (February 1995), 16-27.

¹¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹¹³⁷ Xu Ben, *Disenchanted Democracy*, 178.

¹¹³⁸ Lei Yi, “Beijing yu cuowei,” *Dushu* 1995:4, 16-20. Reference from 18.

spoke of a “feeling of ‘dislocation’” with regard to postmodernism and postcolonialism in China.¹¹³⁹ To indicate the danger of the mainland usage of postmodern theories against the West, Lei Yi referred to “Asianism” of the early twentieth century, in which the “yellow race” had been opposed to the “white race.”¹¹⁴⁰

Other mainland scholars addressed the nationalist elements of mainland postmodernism in particular. According to Wang Yuechuan, postcolonialism should reflect on modernity instead of becoming an “oppositional ideology” of East and West, which could create an outmoded “Cold War consciousness.” With nationalism in the back, Wang Yuechuan claimed, China had often bumped into new problems—could the postcolonial and the postmodern truly provide a new value choice to face Western cultural hegemony?¹¹⁴¹ According to the cultural critic Tao Dongfeng, the quest for “Chineseness” of Chinese postcolonialism in particular obscured its cultural-political quest for liberal democracy.¹¹⁴²

For Wang Hui, it was paradoxical that Chinese post-theorists used the postmodernist attack on Eurocentrism to argue for “Chineseness.”¹¹⁴³ Wang Hui noted that, in its context of origin, postmodernism had represented a minority criticism of mainstream culture, whereas in China, after its merger with nationalism, postmodernism strengthened mainstream forces instead of challenging them.¹¹⁴⁴ Another paradox Wang Hui mentioned was that in China, reactions to postcolonialism and to Huntington’s theory of the “clash of civilizations” had become part of the same nationalist trend. In their context of origin, however, they had represented two sides of the political spectrum, namely a minority attack on mainstream culture versus a defense of this culture.¹¹⁴⁵

As can be derived from the above, all discussants of mainland appropriations of postmodernism focused on its non-critical, nationalist, and “dangerous” elements. None

¹¹³⁹ Ibid., 17-18.

¹¹⁴⁰ Lei Yi, “‘Yangjingbing xuefeng’ jufan,” *EYS* 32 (December 1995), 14-18. Reference from 17-18.

¹¹⁴¹ Wang Yuechuan, “Xuyan,” 7-8. In an interview, Wang Yuechuan criticized nationalist and “tribalist” appropriations of postcolonialism. For Wang, it was crucial to have a “global consciousness” at the turn of the century. Interview with Wang Yuechuan, Beijing, June 21, 2006.

¹¹⁴² Tao Dongfeng, “Ershi shiji Zhongguo de baoshou zhuyi,” 253-261.

¹¹⁴³ Wang Hui, *China’s New Order*, 170.

¹¹⁴⁴ Wang Hui, Zhang Tianwei, “Wenhua pipan lilun yu dangdai Zhongguo minzu zhuyi wenti,” *ZYG* 1994:4, 17-20.

¹¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 19.

of the critics investigated the engagement of Chinese postmodernism with both the May Fourth heritage and China's revolutionary identity. Instead, Chinese postmodernism was interpreted as a mere denial of modernity and as an uncritical stance. In this respect, the observations of the liberal intellectual Xu Jilin are useful. Xu Jilin contended that, *pace* Zhao Yiheng, mainland postmodernism could not be labeled “neo-conservative” because it differed from “national studies”; it could also not be linked to popular culture in all instances.¹¹⁴⁶ As in the debate on “conservatism” versus “radicalism,” Xu Jilin claimed, the problem was that critics such as Zhao Yiheng did not clarify what yardstick they applied to measure “neo-conservatism.”¹¹⁴⁷

Although Xu Jilin was very critical of the accusations of overseas Chinese intellectuals concerning mainland appropriations of postmodernism, on the other hand, he also did not spare mainland intellectuals—the theory did indeed contain nationalist elements. Nonetheless, Xu Jilin also pointed out its merits: postmodernism raised questions to which all modern theories should provide an answer. For Xu Jilin, the year 1989, which was comparable to 1968 in the West, was crucial for understanding postmodernism in China. With the repression of the Tiananmen demonstrations, the main discourse of Enlightenment and modernization became exchanged for historical reflections. Criticism of the 1980s occurred in the form of the socio-historical debate on “conservatism” and “radicalism,” as well as in the form of “postmodernism.” The latter did have a critical ability, because it attacked “master narratives,” a factor that distinguished it from modernity, as both Habermas and Lyotard have pointed out.¹¹⁴⁸ Consequently, as distinct from other intellectuals who only interpreted Chinese postmodernism as a reaction to a Western Enlightenment—which explained the nationalist traits of Chinese postmodernism—Xu Jilin also paid attention to the fact that Chinese postmodernism engaged in a dialogue with the Chinese Enlightenment of the 1980s and the 1910s. In addition, whereas other liberal critics conceived of

¹¹⁴⁶ Xu Jilin, “Bi piping geng zhongyao de shi lijie,” *EYS* 29 (June 1995), 130-136. Reference from 130, 133. Xu Jilin distinguished between the “discourse on postmodernism” and the “phenomenon of postmodernism” in China. The former consisted of two layers, namely (1) theoretical research on and the introduction of Western postmodernism to China, which had already started during the 1980s, and (2) the usage of postmodern theories to conduct cultural criticism on Chinese history and reality. The “phenomenon of postmodernism” consisted of (1) avant-garde and experimental literature and art, such as the works of Yu Hua, Ge Fei, Sun Ganlu, Su Tong, Ye Zhaoyan, and others, and (2) mass and commercial popular works, such as the novels of Wang Shuo, MTV, karaoke, popular TV series, songs, and the like.

¹¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 132-135.

¹¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 130-132.

postmodernism as an uncritical and outright rejection of the Chinese Enlightenment, Xu Jilin presented a much more nuanced picture that also left room for a critical attitude. This interpretation did much more justice to the multi-faceted nature of a complex phenomenon.

6.6.2 “Western Centralism” and the “Anxiety to Interpret China”

As already noted above, much energy in the debate on postmodernism was thus devoted to the creation of a division between “mainland” and “overseas” scholars; mainland intellectuals applied the same logic of “geographical determinism” as some of the overseas scholars discussed earlier. Given the fact that postmodernism intended to eradicate all boundaries, this was an ironic twist of fate. Moreover, this division contradicted Zheng Min’s quest for “Chineseness” based on cultural markers; in practice, the boundaries appeared to be geographical rather than cultural in nature. In contradistinction to the 1992 debate on “conservatism” and “radicalism,” in which mainland scholars had very much accepted overseas definitions of “Chineseness” based on cultural markers, as the influence of the theories of Yü Ying-shih and Lin Yü-sheng on mainland China demonstrates, in the debate on postmodernism, mainland intellectuals disparaged overseas intellectuals. Mainland scholars made it clear that they were the only intellectuals who had the right to represent China.

An example mentioned by Michelle Yeh regarding the creation of two “camps” of scholars was an article on “pidgin scholarship” by Liu Dong, a researcher at the Institute of Foreign Literature of CASS. In an article first published in *Twenty-first Century* in 1995, Liu Dong accused overseas scholars of “pidgin scholarship,” a scholarship “produced by deliberate acts of misreading.”¹¹⁴⁹ Liu Dong referred to the usage of the label “neo-conservatism” by some overseas intellectuals as “a strategy of calling things by dramatic names to mislead and whip up public opinion overseas.”¹¹⁵⁰ Those who engaged in Chinese studies abroad lacked “in-depth cultural awareness”; they failed to make sense of the “problematic consciousness” of Chinese people, and

¹¹⁴⁹ Liu Dong, “Revisiting the Perils of ‘Designer Pidgin Scholarship,’” 102. Liu Dong’s article was first published in December 1995 in *EYS*, together with responses from Lei Yi, Cui Zhiyuan, and Gan Yang. See Liu Dong, “Jingtì renwèi de ‘yangjìngbìng xuèfēng,’” *EYS* 32 (December 1995), 5-13. Translated in Gloria Davies, *Voicing Concerns*, 87-108.

¹¹⁵⁰ Liu Dong, “Revisiting the Perils of ‘Designer Pidgin Scholarship,’” 103.

they suffered from a “novelty-seeking” syndrome.¹¹⁵¹ For Liu Dong, as Michelle Yeh has noted, Chinese intellectuals who had emigrated from mainland China were thus seen as having lost their identity and, consequently, their feeling of mission.¹¹⁵²

In Zheng Min’s response to Zhao Yiheng in *Twenty-first Century*, she accused the latter of being unfamiliar with cultural reflections on mainland China; he manifested signs of “Western centralism.” For Zheng Min, Zhao Yiheng’s view represented precisely the traditional view of the politically revolutionary character of the May Fourth Movement that she wanted to do away with. In this view, culture was but a byproduct of politics; language was but a tool. For Zheng Min, on the contrary, based on the language theories of Heidegger and Derrida, language was an infinite system that carried traces of history, culture, and tradition. From this perspective, the May Fourth Movement’s objective to reform language for political purposes was a “violent action.”¹¹⁵³ For Zheng Min, Zhao Yiheng’s use of the label “neo-conservatism” contained a negative political meaning, as had “conservatism” during the May Fourth era.¹¹⁵⁴ Her concern, she reiterated, was the future of Chinese culture in a period of transition, and its appearance on the world stage—was that, she asked, “conservative”?

Zheng Min also attacked Zhao Yiheng’s definition of poststructuralism as a “radical” theory in a Western context, because it was wrongly based on the notion that poststructuralism destroyed everything. In fact, Zheng Min claimed, Derrida had demonstrated that language and culture could not be created, but were always linked to tradition—was that “radical”? For Zheng Min, both a return to tradition and an adoration of Western ideas were signs of centralism; instead, one should, in a hermeneutical fashion, reread and reconstruct Chinese tradition. The “flesh and blood of the cultural heritage” should be transformed into “tomorrow’s living and new-born cultural tradition.”¹¹⁵⁵ This could not be realized through vernacular language alone, because the mother tongue as a whole was the “true carrier” of Chinese culture.¹¹⁵⁶

The logic of a demarcation between “mainland” and “overseas” also ran through Zhang Yiwu’s response to Xu Ben, in which Zhang Yiwu noted that only for overseas

¹¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹¹⁵² Yeh, “International Theory,” 264.

¹¹⁵³ Zheng Min, “Wenhua, zhengzhi, yuyan,” 122.

¹¹⁵⁴ Zheng Min, “Hewei ‘dalu xin baoshou zhuyi,?’” *Wenyi zhengming*, 1995:5, 40-48.

¹¹⁵⁵ Zheng Min, “Wenhua, zhengzhi, yuyan,” 123.

¹¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

critics did postmodernism become a “political problem.”¹¹⁵⁷ For Zhang Yiwu, the attempts of Zhao Yiheng and Xu Ben were manifestations of what he called the “anxiety to interpret China,” which was caused by the complex state in which China found itself after quick social changes, the end of the Cold War, and increased commercialization.¹¹⁵⁸ Both authors sought new explanatory models to make sense of this changed condition; they turned China into an “Other” by treating post-trends as manifestations of nationalism or “neo-conservatism.”¹¹⁵⁹ Both revealed postcolonial traits in their strong identification with the main Western discourse and ideology, as well as in their attack on mainland political life and ideology.¹¹⁶⁰

Important in this respect for Zhang Yiwu was the fact that both authors took cultural “universality” as a point of departure. This enabled them to legitimize Western ideology and to criticize mainland theories for pursuing “particularity,” which was “a repetition of cultural conservatism since May Fourth.”¹¹⁶¹ Zhang denied the fact that postmodernism opted for “particularity”; he outlined three different discourse models in response to marketization and globalization: the pursuit of the humanist spirit, “post-national studies,” and explorations of the “postcolonial” and the “postmodern.” Of these three, only the second was typified by “particularity.” The first chose “universality,” whereas the third attempted to overcome the bifurcation of the “universal” and the “particular.” Postmodernism and postcolonialism tried to reach the viewpoint of “the Other of the Other”; although they denounced Western cultural hegemony, this was not

¹¹⁵⁷ Xu Ben responded to this criticism by arguing that postmodernism was not a political problem on mainland China because it was part of the so-called “forbidden zones” of discourse. See Xu Ben, “Zai tan Zhongguo ‘houxue’ de zhengzhixing he lishi yishi,” *EYS* 39 (February 1997), 132-137.

¹¹⁵⁸ The phrase “chanshi Zhongguo de jiaolü” was originally coined by Tao Dongfeng and Jin Yuanpu in their *Chanshi Zhongguo de jiaolü: zhuanxing shidai de wenhua jieshi* (Beijing: Zhongguo guoji guangbo chubanshe, 1999). The authors explained that the phrase “chanshi Zhongguo de jiaolü” had two different meanings. Firstly, it referred to the anxiety in the intellectual world, which the authors attempted to explain. In this sense, it could be translated as “explaining China’s anxiety.” In a second sense, it expressed that intellectuals did not know how to interpret changing realities and were anxious to do so. Hence, in this sense, it could be translated as “the anxiety of explaining China.” Zhang Yiwu has applied the term in this second sense.

¹¹⁵⁹ Zhang Yiwu, “Chanshi ‘Zhongguo’ de jiaolü,” *EYS* 28 (April 1995), 128-135. Reference from 129.

¹¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 132. However, elsewhere, Zhang Yiwu has clarified that his criticism of “Western centralism” was not based on the simple fact that both authors were merely “part of the Western system”; it was based on the cultural logic they applied. See Zhang Yiwu, “Zaishuo ‘chanshi Zhongguo’ de jiaolü,” *EYS* 34 (April 1996), 121-126. Reference from 122-123.

¹¹⁶¹ Zhang Yiwu, “Chanshi ‘Zhongguo’ de jiaolü,” 132.

tantamount to a “conservative” absolutized native position’; they grasped the state of the context of “hybridity” of China anew.¹¹⁶²

What Zhang Yiwu discerned in the theories of Zhao Yiheng, Xu Ben, and others, was a political and moral criticism of mainland “post-isms”; all treated mainland reflections as politically motivated or linked to official concerns, and all regarded modernity as an absolute value.¹¹⁶³ The political reductionism of a repressive government versus the repressed people as presented in overseas analyses was mistaken because there was a renewed cooperation between China and the West after 1989, the policy of reform and opening up was continued, and China constituted a part of the global capitalist system. In the cultural realm, the degree of liberty had increased, and culture was not tantamount to rule by ideology anymore.¹¹⁶⁴

The creation of artificial boundaries between mainland and overseas Chinese scholars reveals the fact that the debate on “radicalism” had become embedded in new circumstances. After 1994, concerns about “radicalism” and “conservatism” were largely absorbed by concerns of commercialization and globalization, which is why an initially historical debate turned into a politically oriented and largely geographically determined debate about “Chineseness.” Zheng Min’s insistence on the cultural markers of “Chineseness”—language being the foremost of them—was in contradiction with her largely mainland orientation of “Chineseness.” Her argument got lost in a struggle over “Chineseness” that was not based on explorations of “conservatism” and “radicalism,” but on geographical determinism and political bias.

6.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has analyzed the merger of the revaluation of the May Fourth Movement with the debate on postmodernism in China. The poetess Zheng Min triggered a debate on the Literary Revolution of 1917 with a 1993 article in which she asserted that modern Chinese poetry had lost its “Chineseness” because it had been cut off from tradition. On the one hand, Zheng Min’s argument was made on conservative grounds: Zheng Min argued that language was based on experience; it could not be designed according to abstract laws. Also, language was the product of evolution and

¹¹⁶² Ibid., 133-135.

¹¹⁶³ Zhang Yiwu, “Zaishuo ‘chanshi Zhongguo’ de jiaolü,” 123-126.

¹¹⁶⁴ Interview with Zhang Yiwu, Beijing, July 26, 2006.

contingency; it was beyond the control of the individual. However, Zheng Min's goal as such was not conservative: she desired to recover the "authenticity" of Chinese language, and in this situation, tradition was primarily a carrier of "Chineseness." Although Zheng Min was very much against the instrumental use of culture for political purposes, she did not speak on behalf of tradition because it embodied certain norms and values that she identified with.

What was new in Zheng Min's defense of historical continuity and in her critique of binary oppositions was her reliance on postmodern theories. Zheng Min drew on the structuralism of de Saussure to contend that language was always above its users; she invoked the poststructuralism of both Derrida and Lacan to assert that the clarity of language, as the architects of the Literary Revolution envisioned it, was an illusion. Zheng Min's argument, although its focal point was language, surpassed the issue of language proper, since she conceived of language as the embodiment of the historical spirit of a nation. Moreover, in Zheng Min's view, the Chinese language was superior to other languages. This reveals that Zheng Min's engagement with historical continuity was already overshadowed by her concern with the relation between China and the West, and, in relation to this, by her concern with Chinese cultural identity.

Those who responded to Zheng Min's argument did not only attack her views on language; they also located the discussion within the framework of "cultural radicalism," reflections on the May Fourth Movement, and Chinese modernity. Zhang Yiwu, a literary critic based at Peking University, made use of postcolonialism in particular to put forward his version of "Chineseness," a knowledge model that would enable the obliteration of binary oppositions and the end of a modernity that had been tantamount to Westernization. With Zhang Yiwu's participation in the debate, issues of historical continuity became even more repressed by the question of the relation between China and the West. Moreover, since the debate took place in 1994, the new interest in commercialization and globalization meant that the issue of "radicalism" was re-conceptualized in ways that differed radically from the fashion in which mainland intellectuals had discussed the matter in the 1992 debate.

Critics such as Michelle Yeh have claimed that Zheng Min, regardless of her conviction that she overcame binary frameworks, reinforced the dual structure between China and the West; Yeh even called Zheng Min's stance a reversed "Orientalism." In agreement with this stance, it has been argued that both the arguments of Zheng Min

and Zhang Yiwu were marked by a viewpoint of cultural nationalism. For both, language was the reflection of the historical spirit of the Chinese nation, and for both, the question of “Chineseness” was more about the relation between China and the West than about the relation between future, present and past. Paradoxically, although both Zheng Min and Zhang Yiwu had aimed to deconstruct binary oppositions by re-conceptualizing “Chineseness,” they ended up reaffirming them through an essentialist interpretation of what it meant to be Chinese. The relativism that both authors defended ended up becoming a narrow particularism.

It has further been contended that Zheng Min’s resort to structuralism and poststructuralism in support of historical continuity appeared odd at first sight given the fact that neither theory was concerned with historical evolution; on the contrary, both theories were thoroughly unhistorical. Despite this, as Brian Whitton has demonstrated, both postmodernism and the linguistic nationalism of the eighteenth-century philosopher von Herder denounced the totalizing rationalism of the Enlightenment from the angle of linguistic creativity. In a similar vein, Zheng Min drew on postmodernism because she favored diversity, contingency, and creativity against a totalizing May Fourth discourse. What was odd about Zheng Min’s reliance on postmodernism was that the latter did not argue in favor of a return to tradition; for postmodernists, neither traditional nor modern societies had manifested the pluralism that the postmodern era had brought. Zheng Min, on the contrary, wanted to reconnect modern Chinese language with Chinese tradition, a stand that was hard to reconcile with the unhistorical pretensions of postmodernism.

Chinese appropriations of postmodernism have been compared to the application of the theory in its context of origin. Notwithstanding the fact that postmodernism defies definition, it can be said that, both in the United States and in Europe, the theory took issue with Enlightenment reason. Therefore, it has been asserted that postmodernism should be understood in relation with modernity instead of as a product that merely came after modernity. Since theorists such as Jameson have defined postmodernism as the “cultural logic” of “late capitalism,” some have questioned the applicability of postmodernism to the Chinese situation. Yet for Chinese intellectuals, the introduction of market mechanisms against a socialist background and the intensification of reform since 1992 signified a thorough shift, regardless of the fact that China had not gone through several stages of capitalism.

Contrary to the usage of postmodernism in its context of origin, as Davies has claimed, Chinese intellectuals were not concerned with dismantling absolute truths; they applied the theory to explain social changes and to validate opinions relating to these changes. In these circumstances, the distinction between postmodernism and postcolonialism was not so important, since both could be employed in the discussion of practical Chinese problems. Moreover, both theories obtained an explicitly nationalist edge because they were used as reflections on modernity as a Western product. As with some manifestations of Chinese conservatism that had opposed a Western modernity in particular, postmodernism on mainland China was invoked to discuss the century-old problem of the relation between China and the West.

Nevertheless, it has been contended that postmodernism in China was more than a manifestation of nationalism; it was also an engagement with a Chinese modernity that was both liberal and socialist. After 1989, on the one hand, Chinese intellectuals employed the theory to reflect on the May Fourth heritage and the “second Enlightenment” of the 1980s, as the liberal intellectual Xu Jilin has noted. On the other hand, postmodernism was also used to contemplate and to critically engage with socialism and the revolutionary tradition of twentieth-century China. Since postmodernism in China also engaged in a dialogue with both the socialist heritage and the liberal tradition of the May Fourth Movement, in this respect, it overlapped with discussions on “radicalism.” Moreover, both postmodernism and debates on “radicalism” implicitly addressed the question of the role of the intellectual in Chinese society. In both instances, the political engagement and the strategy of direct confrontation of the 1980s were questioned; in both instances, intellectuals turned to scholarship and theoretical debate instead. All these aspects indicate that postmodernism in China was more than an expression of nationalism or an uncritical affirmation of the cultural and political status quo.

The label “neo-conservatism” entered the discussion on postmodernism when the overseas critic Zhao Yiheng accused mainland appropriations of postmodernism of being uncritical in nature. For Zhao Yiheng, “neo-conservatism” signified the abandonment of the intellectual activism of the 1980s. In this context, Zhao Yiheng also referred to the debate on the “humanist spirit,” in which some intellectuals had upheld the continuation of ultimate ideals, where others had argued that popular culture offered pluralism and new liberties. Zhao Yiheng held the conviction that postmodernism had

been a “radical” and critical theory in its context of origin, but when it was transferred to China, it became employed in the service of “neo-conservatism.”

Zhao Yiheng’s argument concerning the conservative turn of radical theories is another example of the dualist and simplified logic in debates that contained the pair conservatism/radicalism. Instead of a “radical” theory turned “conservative,” it has been contended that the appropriation of postmodernism on mainland China was the consequence of some ambiguities inherent in postmodernism. In its context of origin, as Marxist critics have noted, the theory also contained conservative traits—in the sense of the preservation of the status quo—because it shunned political action and merely engaged in abstract discourses. Furthermore, from a philosophical angle, critics such as Habermas have pointed out the similarities between postmodernism and conservatism: both stood up to Enlightenment reason. Other critics have echoed these communalities between conservatism and postmodernism. Likewise, Zhao Yiheng’s accusation that postmodernism suited official interests was also a simplification of matters. Not only were there important differences between the nationalism upheld by intellectuals and the nationalism of official ideology, but also, the notions of “complicity” versus “opposition” did not suit the complexities of the 1990s. Using the terms of Chen Xiaomei, it was hard to distinguish between an “official Occidentalism” and an “anti-official Occidentalism.” As already noted in previous chapters, in intellectual debates of the 1990s, different camps accused each other of complicity with the government; it was considered a positive asset to be independent.

The debate became even more politicized when other overseas intellectuals, such as Zhang Longxi and Xu Ben, reduced the nationalist appropriation of mainland postmodernism to the political circumstances of mainland China. The result of this “geographical determinism” was the creation of artificial boundaries between mainland and overseas intellectuals in a debate in which Zheng Min and Zhang Yiwu also took part. Given this geographical conception of “Chineseness,” the cultural notion of “Chineseness” that both Zheng Min and Zhang Yiwu envisioned was hard to find in practice. Whereas the 1992 debate on “conservatism” and “radicalism” had been marked by the interaction between mainland and overseas intellectuals—mainland intellectuals embraced the theories of Lin Yü-sheng and Yü Ying-shih—the debate on postmodernism moved in opposite directions. In the context of a renewed nationalism, Tu Wei-ming’s cry for a “cultural China” seemed to have receded into the distance.

Instead, questions about the nature of change, and the relation between past, present and future had to make room for political accusations that interfered with historical reflections.

7.

CONCLUSION

BEYOND “ISMS”

What I say today everybody will say tomorrow, though they will not remember who put it into their heads. Indeed they will be right for I never remember who puts things into my head: it is the Zeitgeist.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

7.1 “RADICALISM” AND THE CONTINUUM OF “CONSERVATISM”

As this study has demonstrated, during the early 1990s, “conservatism” (*baoshou zhuyi*) was very much a contested concept. Technocratic intellectuals, historians, intellectual historians, philosophers, and literary critics all defined the concept in such a way that it was congruent with their respective agendas. This research has done justice to that variety of manifestations by taking the concrete use of concepts as a point of departure, and by shifting attention to the sense-making subjects themselves. However, the opposite extreme of ending up with a range of expressions that appear to have nothing in common has also been avoided by asking the question of whether these concrete uses of the concept were indications of a conservative “style of thought.”

In concreto, the use of the concept of “conservatism” in discursive practice has been analyzed in relation to the “counterconcept” of “radicalism” (*jijin zhuyi*). This approach has enabled the study of “conservatism” as a continuum, because all references to “conservatism”—regardless of whether they were part of an argument to boost political legitimacy or whether they were invoked to promote traditional moral values—were made against the background of rejections of “radicalism.” This study has exposed the interaction between official ideology, the “neo-conservatism” of technocratic intellectuals who were close to the power center, and the “conservatism” of humanistic intellectuals based at universities. As argued, the overlap of concepts in official, semi-official and intellectual discourses did not point at an official orchestration of intellectual activity during the 1990s, but at the existence of a shared set of problems to which both officials and intellectuals responded.

A clear example of the interaction between technocratic and humanistic intellectuals has been exposed in the works of the historian Xiao Gongqin. On the one hand, in Chapter Two, it has been examined how both the princelings—relatives of officials who were close to the center of power—and Xiao Gongqin—a Professor at Shanghai Normal University—coined the concept of “neo-conservatism” within the framework of a reform program that consisted of gradual economic reform, centralized rule, political and social stability, and the instrumental use of traditional elements. On the other hand, however, it has been contended that Xiao’s intellectual construction resembled that of other humanistic intellectuals of the time: Xiao based his argument on a discussion of several “stages” of “radicalism” in modern Chinese history, an element that was absent from the princelings’ account.

As explained in Chapters Four and Five, both the historian Yü Ying-shih, who triggered the 1992 debate on the nature of modern Chinese history, and the philosopher Chen Lai, a mainland New Confucian, also divided modern Chinese history into three “stages” of “radicalism.” Although there were some differences pertaining to the division of stages—unlike Yü Ying-shih and Chen Lai, Xiao Gongqin did not include Marxism in his analysis—Xiao’s intellectual framework revealed that he was also indebted to humanistic intellectuals of the time. In addition, Xiao’s thought was typified by the very same “crisis consciousness” as the thought of other intellectuals was; implicitly, Xiao’s works also dealt with the role of intellectuals in Chinese society. For these reasons, it has been contended that Xiao Gongqin could not simply be categorized as a mouthpiece of official reform policies.

By bringing the concept of “radicalism” into focus, it has also been exposed that the relationship between intellectuals and the power center during the 1990s could neither be interpreted as a relationship of “complicity,” nor as a relationship of “opposition.” In addition, it has been put forward that “conservatism” could neither be simplistically associated with a “political” stance, nor could it be understood as a plain “cultural” position. Although some intellectuals clearly made a case for the preservation of elements in Chinese tradition—as discussed in Chapter Five—in general, most advocacies were not “either/or” cases, but they contained a fusion of political and cultural elements instead. The promotion of gradual economic reform on behalf of mainland intellectuals in Chapter Four can serve as an example of this tendency: none of these intellectuals explicitly argued in favor of the continuity of Chinese tradition,

but their advocacy of gradual economic reform could also not be reduced to a “political” position in which a strong central authority or the preservation of existing institutions was upheld.

References to “conservatism” that were invoked in the framework of a political theory of “neo-conservatism” also contained cultural elements, and vice versa. Xiao Gongqin’s plea for social stability and political centralization, for example, was at the same time a promotion of gradual reform in which traditional Chinese elements functioned as “levers.” Similarly, even those who upheld a strictly cultural position, such as the New Confucian Chen Lai, were simultaneously committing a very political act: the identification with Confucian values implied a negation of the Marxist view of revolutionary change and struggle. It has been asserted that, instead of applying the adjectives “cultural” and “political” to debates on “conservatism” in 1990s China, it is more fruitful to concentrate on the nature of the reference to tradition. The princelings and Xiao Gongqin merely invoked tradition because it belonged to the Chinese past, not because it contained ultimate truths. Intellectuals such as Yü Ying-shih and Chen Lai, on the contrary, spoke for Chinese culture because of its intrinsic value: they were convinced that Confucian values could provide moral guidance in times of rapid change.

A final element that has been noted is that the reference to “conservatism” in 1990s China implied much more than a synchronic concern with the preservation of the political status quo, the defense of interests, or manifestations of a cultural nationalism; it was also an intellectual exercise in which the reference to the past was part of a dialogue with Chinese modernity. A case in point is Chapter Six, where the argument has been made that Chinese postmodernism, although it acquired nationalist and even essentialist traits in a Chinese environment, was also a critical engagement with the liberal and socialist conceptions of Chinese modernity, both of which had been iconoclastic in nature. Similarly, in Chapter Five, it has been asserted that Chen Lai’s resort to Confucianism was not an emotional exercise to balance “history” and “value,” as Levenson would have it, but an intellectual attempt to mitigate the negative effects of a narrow conception of modernization.

7.2 HISTORY, LEGITIMACY, AND IDENTITY

Reflections on Chinese modernity took the form of revaluations of modern Chinese history; they were diachronic rather than synchronic in nature. With the exception of the princelings in Chapter Two, all the main intellectuals in this study applied the concept of “conservatism” to discuss events in modern Chinese history—history constituted the object of debate. In addition, however, intellectuals also invoked history to address a wide range of other issues, which implied that history was more than a mere object of research. As such, in this study, two roles of history can be discerned.

The first role of history in debates on “conservatism” and “radicalism” was that of a *vehicle* or *medium* of discussion. History constituted a form of discourse that functioned as an entry point to engage with ethical, political, social, or economic matters that exceeded the scope of history proper. This has clearly been revealed in Chapter Three, in which Xiao Gongqin called modern Chinese history into use to address problems of economic reform during the 1980s. As Xiao made clear, he was convinced that history was like a “code” that could be applied to decipher contemporary problems. In Chapter Four, the 1992 debate on modern Chinese history was also a debate on economic reform during the 1990s. In Chapter Five, Chen Lai turned to the May Fourth Movement to address questions of morality. Finally, in Chapter Six, Zheng Min analyzed the Literary Revolution to tackle the topic of the “Chineseness” of modern Chinese poetry. The fact that history served as a medium to discuss other issues is further illustrated by the fact that most intellectuals who engaged with the topic of “radicalism” were not historians by training.

In some instances, history was brought into play as a medium or vehicle to discuss sensitive political issues in particular, in the tradition of Chinese “allusion historiography.” Nevertheless, the role of this practice should not be overestimated, *pace* the interpretations of some overseas liberal scholars who reduced mainland criticisms of “radicalism” in modern Chinese history to a politically restrictive climate. In addition, and this brings us to the second role of history in the debates, Chinese intellectuals did not merely *refer* to events in modern Chinese history; they also *reinterpreted* these events. This meant that history also constituted the very *object* of discussion and academic research. Because of the element of reinterpretation, the engagement with modern Chinese history cannot just be conceived of as a “safe” and “hidden” means to deliver political criticism—the rewriting of history had important

consequences in connection with conceptions of political legitimacy and national identity.

Rejections of “radicalism” often entailed a denial of the practice of revolution and a criticism of socialism. For a Party whose legitimacy was based on revolution, this signified an important challenge. As also argued, the rewriting of modern Chinese history as the history of modernization instead of the history of the struggle against feudalism and imperialism was interpreted by the CCP as an attack on Marxism. In this context, it was not strange that history was put to use to discuss questions of economic reform, since this issue was directly related to that of political legitimacy: what were the consequences of the fact that a Party whose legitimacy had been based on revolution had diverged from revolution in the present? As Dirlik has put it, the “socialism with Chinese characteristics” of the reform era was in fact a “post-socialism” that had given in to the demands of a capitalist order—how could this be reconciled with socialist ideals?¹¹⁶⁵ In Chapter Four, most participants in the 1992 debate underlined the importance of gradualism and economic reform; their reliance on liberal thinkers revealed that they had moved away from an ideology that existed in tension with the economic reform of the times. Intellectuals did not only denounce revolution in the present—as the CCP had done—but they also questioned its usefulness for the past.

On a more fundamental level, the rewriting of modern Chinese history also signified a reinterpretation of what it meant to be Chinese. Rejections of “radicalism” implied that the class identity of the Mao era and the state-centered conception of “Chineseness” made room for a broader conception of “Chineseness” that was not defined in political and territorial terms, but in cultural terms—it was a call for a “cultural China.” Intellectuals did not express their loyalty to the CCP, but to a cultural Chinese nation that surpassed the limits of the Chinese state. Contrary to the liberal and socialist conceptions of modernity that had been marked by revolutionary breaks with the past, proponents of a “cultural China” envisioned a modernity that was to develop in a gradual manner and continuous with Chinese tradition.

It needs to be noted, however, that the CCP had also adapted its class-based notion of “Chineseness” and its political nationalism to the needs of the times. During the 1990s, the CCP had a “two-tiered” conception of the nation that included the people, on the one hand, and the citizens of the PRC and the descendants of the Yellow

¹¹⁶⁵ Dirlik, “Postsocialism?,” 362-384.

Emperor on the other hand.¹¹⁶⁶ Whereas before, its political nationalism had been a Party-centered “iconoclastic nationalism,” now, it included culture in its conception of nationalism.¹¹⁶⁷ However, in spite of the fact that both Chinese intellectuals and the CCP incorporated culture in their understanding of “Chineseness,” the difference between the two was that the former implicitly supplanted class-based notions of “Chineseness,” whereas the latter merely intended to complement them in order to preserve its political legitimacy.

The cultural vision of “Chineseness” also suggested a reinterpretation of the role of intellectuals in Chinese society. Against the background of the repression of the spring 1989 demonstrations on June fourth, 1989, and the commercialization of Chinese society since 1992, the criticism of an antitraditional liberal and socialist past enabled intellectuals to reconnect with Chinese culture. As Smith has noted, a return to culture can be a means to restore dignity and to offer personal renewal or “status renewal.”¹¹⁶⁸ Although some intellectuals envisioned the continuation of the political engagement of the 1980s, many others turned away from political action; the advocacy of the historical continuity of Chinese culture enabled these intellectuals to underscore their role of guardians and transmitters of this cultural heritage. The highly elitist view of Chinese culture that Chinese intellectuals put forward enabled them to claim an important role for themselves in the definition of “Chineseness.”

For some, this cultural conception of “Chineseness” was tied to the restoration of a lost moral order. In traditional Chinese historiography, the view had existed that the historical process also involved the rise and decline of an ideal moral order—history was the manifestation of a universal cosmological order.¹¹⁶⁹ As such, traditional Chinese historiography was not just a description of events; it was also an exposition of a moral order. Although the arrival of modern historiography in China had set in motion the rise of a historiography that was disconnected from the moral realm, traditional conceptions of historiography nevertheless still influenced Chinese intellectuals. For many, history was not just a discipline—it was the embodiment of past wisdom and Truth.

¹¹⁶⁶ Guo, *Cultural Nationalism*, 24.

¹¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 161-162.

¹¹⁶⁹ Schwartz, “History in Chinese Culture,” 23.

Yü Ying-shih's account of "radicalism" revealed traits of traditional Chinese historiography in that his criticism of "radicalism" was the criticism of the destruction of a moral Confucian order through the eradication of intermediate groups in society. Yü's use of the concept of "radicalism," which had clear negative connotations, underscored both his indignation at the treatment of Confucianism and his normative stance vis-à-vis the cultural policies of the CCP. In addition, in line with traditional concepts of the literati, Yü implied that only Chinese intellectuals had the moral authority to restore this lost order. The New Confucian Chen Lai also implanted his account of "radicalism" in a plea for the restoration of a Confucian moral order. Nevertheless, Chen Lai's advocacy of universal Confucian values did not entail the propagation of the restoration of a universal Confucian civilization. As maintained, for Chen Lai, the Confucian core values were manifested in particular cultures. In addition, Chen Lai did not engage in a political criticism of the CCP; he envisioned pure scholarship as the means to promote the restoration of moral values.

The rewriting of modern Chinese history also had consequences on a more abstract level: it signified a different view of social change and of Chinese modernity. The advocacy of historical continuity and the positive reevaluation of Chinese tradition implied that a Marxist conception of change as the struggle between opposites was now defunct. A gradual notion of reform that had to be partial instead of wholesale substituted for the notion of revolutionary breaks. Intellectuals highlighted the central role of practice instead of blueprint designs, which was in line with the pragmatism of the reform era. These remarks concerning the nature of change lead us back to the question of a conservative "style of thought."

7.3 A CONSERVATIVE "STYLE OF THOUGHT"?

As demonstrated throughout this study, the content ascribed to "conservatism" and "radicalism" greatly varied. In the 1991 document "Realistic Responses and Strategic Options for China After the Soviet Union," the princelings coupled "radicalism" to the "irrationalism" and "utopianism" of both quick political liberalization and an outdated socialism that had placed too much stress on revolutionary struggle. In response, the princelings coined the term "neo-conservatism" as part of an advocacy of rational, orderly, and gradual modernization. The historian Xiao Gongqin also connected

“radicalism” with immediate democratization, but he nevertheless tied the concept to the critique of abstract design and universalism. Xiao’s “neo-conservatism” was also concerned with political stability, but it paid more importance to the role of traditional elements in the modernization process.

Yü Ying-shih conceived of “radicalism” as “progressivism” and “neoterism,” or the blind will to renew. However, Yü also associated “radicalism” with the cultural consequences of this blind will to renew, namely the attitude of “antitraditionalism.” Since Yü emphasized the importance of a stable political status quo to bring a halt to “radicalism,” his conception of “conservatism” included both the preservation of sociopolitical elements and the safeguarding of the Confucian tradition. In the 1992 debate that followed from Yü’s theory of the “radicalization” of modern China, however, mainland intellectuals linked “radicalism” both with the concrete political content of socialism and with the “radical” French tradition of liberalism. “Conservatism” was coupled with the English tradition of liberalism, which, according to proponents, reconciled liberty with order.

For the New Confucian Chen Lai, “radicalism” also meant “antitraditionalism,” but Chen Lai added the extra component of “instrumentalism.” In accordance with the New Confucian criticism of the dominance of “instrumental rationality” at the cost of “value rationality,” two terms borrowed from the sociologist Max Weber, Chen Lai interpreted “cultural radicalism” as a denial of culture based on political and economic standards. As such, Chen Lai did not only locate “radicalism” within the framework of modern Chinese history, but within the broader framework of modernization-as-rationalization. “Conservatism” for Chen Lai entailed the promotion of Confucian values not from the point of view of their efficiency, but from the perspective of their inherent value.

Although the poetess Zheng Min did not rely on the concepts of “radicalism” and “conservatism” in the text that triggered the debate on the Literary Revolution, she did refer to the dual construction of “preservation” versus “renewal.” In addition, the concept of “radicalism” made its entry in the reactions to Zheng Min’s text; it was identified with the denunciation of the Chinese cultural tradition. In his assault on mainland appropriations of postmodernism, the overseas liberal critic Zhao Yiheng understood the term “radicalism” as the critical mode of thought and the intellectual activism of mainland intellectuals during the 1980s. As such, Zhao Yiheng was one of

the few intellectuals in this study who employed the concept of “radicalism” in a positive sense. “Neo-conservatism” for Zhao Yiheng had a clear negative connotation; he applied the label to appropriations of postmodernism that, in his view, uncritically preserved the cultural and political status quo.

On a first level of abstraction, we can say that the study of the concrete use of the concepts of “conservatism” and “radicalism” offers a window on the social changes that occurred during the early 1990s. In 1990 and 1991, in the context of the decline of socialism and the aftermath of the repression of the spring 1989 demonstrations, the focus was on social stability and political centralization. At this point, liberalism in particular was perceived of as a disruptive force, and it was associated with “radicalism.” By 1992, under the effect of renewed reform, only the French type of liberalism was considered “radical,” whereas the British type was regarded as “conservative.”

In addition, “radicalism” was now explicitly related to revolution and socialism. Intellectuals did not plead for centralized rule anymore, which indicates that the major political threats had been overcome, and that the impact of foreign liberal thinkers on Chinese intellectuals had increased. By 1993, new concerns entered intellectual discourse, the most important one of which was the commercialization of Chinese society. Now, some understood “radicalism” as the lack of communal values, whereas others linked it to the critical stance and political engagement of intellectuals during the previous decade.

Rejections of “radicalism” during the 1990s also disclosed what Xu Jilin has called the three “rifts” in the intellectual world of the 1990s.¹¹⁷⁰ Firstly, there was the rift between “thought” (*sixiang*) and “scholarship” (*xueshu*). After the debacle of the 1980s, many scholars turned towards specialized research and shunned political action. The rejection of “radicalism” in this context was also the rejection of the rash academic style and the idealistic social engagement of the 1980s. This denunciation of political engagement was reflected in Chen Lai’s call for a pure scholarship, but it was also present in the embrace of economic reform by intellectuals in the 1992 debate, or in the stance of the postmodernists in Chapter Six. Although the turn to scholarship suggests that the term “intellectuals” is not suited for the 1990s because it involves political engagement, the term has nevertheless been applied throughout this research because

¹¹⁷⁰ Xu Jilin, “The Fate of an Enlightenment,” 194-200.

even those who merely engaged in scholarship were still concerned with the fate of the Chinese nation; they still took part in public debate. Many scholars turned away from political action because they looked for different channels to express their public concern.

The second rift in the intellectual world of the 1990s concerns that between the “humanist spirit” and what Xu Jilin has called “common concerns.”¹¹⁷¹ Whereas some scholars, in the spirit of the 1980s, upheld “ultimate ideals,” others lauded the arrival of commercialism instead. In Chapter Six, it has been analyzed how Zhang Yiwu and others regarded the mass culture of the 1990s as a positive force that heralded cultural pluralism, political openness, and economic wealth, whereas others claimed that commercial culture had eroded the “humanist spirit.” Implicitly, however, the question of the “humanist spirit” also ran through other chapters. The majority of intellectuals in the 1992 debate, for example, relinquished the “ultimate concerns” of the 1980s in favor of a secular pragmatism.

Finally, during the late 1990s, there was the rift between the liberals and the so-called “New Left.” Although this breaking line was not present during the early 1990s, this period nevertheless reflected the rise of interest in liberalism. As Xu Jilin has rightly noted, before the 1990s, Chinese intellectuals embraced the values of science and democracy; after 1989, these terms were replaced with an advocacy of liberalism. In Chapter Three, Xiao Gongqin adopted elements from the liberal discourse by advocating the importance of a middle class for democratization; in Chapter Four, mainland intellectuals spoke on behalf of British liberalism. The popularity of liberal thinkers such as Berlin, Popper, and Hayek also demonstrates that liberalism, as Xu Jilin has phrased it, obtained a “cultural cachet previously enjoyed by such terms as democracy and science, even a certain inviolability.”¹¹⁷²

On a second level of abstraction, and in order to answer the question of whether rejections of “radicalism” were manifestations of a conservative “style of thought,” it can be noted that all those who applied the term “conservatism” in relation to the counterconcept of “radicalism” abandoned abrupt and revolutionary breaks and upheld historical continuity instead. Hence, it can be said that the unifying “style of thought” behind all these manifestations was a different conception of change as gradualism, as

¹¹⁷¹ Ibid., 196.

¹¹⁷² Ibid., 197.

well as the idea that tradition could not be cut off from modern life. However, as has been argued throughout this study, a defense of historical continuity as such is not sufficient to speak of a “conservative” outlook.

Instead, in this research, only those pleas for historical continuity in which conservative *goals* were advocated on conservative *grounds* have been considered manifestations of a conscious conservative position. True conservatives made a case for historical continuity because of a belief in the inherent value of tradition; tradition was not merely invoked because it was part of the Chinese past, but because it contained norms and values that were important for the present. Tradition was the accumulation of wisdom and experience of past generations; it was a historical chain that should not be broken. Regarding the advocacy of conservative goals, as Rossiter has maintained, this included the preservation of religion, habits, customs, intermediate communities, or certain institutions; it excluded a mere defense of the status quo, interests, or property.

7.3.1 *Yü Ying-shih and Chen Lai*

Only Yü Ying-shih and Chen Lai promoted conservative goals on conservative grounds; their conservatism was a philosophical conservatism that surpassed the advocacy of the status quo or of private property. Yü Ying-shih’s goal was the preservation of intermediate groups and institutions in society; he was devoted to the Chinese community. His support for historical continuity was based on the inherent value of Confucianism, which he tied to concrete social institutions. Yü referred to Edmund Burke to emphasize his point that change was needed for preservation, but this change could only be gradual. Consequently, Yü fiercely criticized notions of progressivism according to which tradition had to be destroyed. Yü Ying-shih combined his conservative position with an advocacy of political liberalism, a viewpoint that he by no means considered to be contradictory. On the contrary, a democratic climate offered the best conditions for the flourishing of Confucian values.

More so than other intellectuals in this study, the philosopher and New Confucian Chen Lai addressed the consequences of the modernization process and criticized Enlightenment rationality as instrumental reason. Chen Lai’s conception of Confucianism as a “religio-philosophy” connected him to certain manifestations of American “neo-conservatism” in which moral relativism was countered with the quest for a normative order. Chen Lai did not uphold Confucian values on the ground that

they had been the product of historical growth, but on the basis of their inherent moral quality: Confucian values were needed because they were good. Chen Lai's goal was conservative in that he, like Yü Ying-shih, attempted to reintroduce a sense of community in times of a rampant individualism. In the spirit of Daniel Bell, Chen Lai further held that it was possible to combine a cultural conservatism with an economic socialism and a political liberalism.

7.3.2 *Xiao Gongqin and Zheng Min*

Whereas Chen Lai's argument was conservative, although it did not contain the typical Mannheimian and Burkean traits of the defense of the historically grown, the case of Xiao Gongqin has revealed the exact opposite. Xiao's argument clearly contained all the elements that Mannheim had exposed in his characterization of conservatism: Xiao reiterated that tradition was the product of historical growth and that it was particular to a nation. Moreover, Xiao clearly opposed the abstract rationalism of the Enlightenment and its blueprint aspirations because, in his view, society was an organism that required gradual reform based on experience. As such, Xiao's historical continuity was upheld on conservative grounds.

However, since Xiao Gongqin's "neo-conservatism" was a modernization theory, Xiao was not critical of modern time consciousness. Although Xiao invoked the positive role of the "moral autonomy" of Confucianism, the fact that Confucianism was a "lever" for the introduction of new systems suggests that his reference to tradition was more instrumental than based on its inherent value. Xiao's advocacy of gradual change based on a Burkean reading of Yan Fu has also been questioned because Yan Fu's theory of the social organism was a manifestation of a social evolutionism typified by optimism and the desire to make China strong and prosperous. Xiao's goal was not the preservation of the Chinese community or the safeguarding of Chinese tradition, but the creation of the social, political, and economic foundations for successful market reforms.

Likewise, in the debate on the Literary Revolution and postmodernism in China, Zheng Min's argument for historical continuity contained some conservative grounds, but her goal as such was not conservative. Zheng Min denounced the abstract design of language based on theory; for her, language was the result of practice, historical growth, and contingent factors. Although Zheng Min supported the continuity of Chinese

tradition, this advocacy was based on her belief that the Chinese language was superior. Language, Zheng Min believed, was the main marker of national identity; it was the embodiment of the Chinese spirit, and a social action that united all members of the Chinese community. In a Levensonian sense, for Zheng Min, tradition had to be continued because it belonged to China (*meum*) more than because it contained truth (*verum*).

7.3.3 *The Princelings and the 1992 Debate*

As regards the princelings, both conservative grounds and conservative goals were lacking in their defense of gradualism. The “rational” elements in tradition were only championed for reasons of political legitimacy. The princelings did not base their argument on a disapproval of progressivism and rationalism; on the contrary, they opposed “irrationalism” and “romanticism” in order to put forward a rational modernization program. This emphasis on rationalism was in accordance with the portrayal of the post-Mao reform era as a rational era, in contrast with the dogmatism of the Mao era.¹¹⁷³

Similarly, in the 1992 debate on “conservatism” and “radicalism,” mainland intellectuals did not recommend gradualism based on the notion of historical growth, the opposition to “progressivism,” or the limits of human knowledge. Although participants relied on Edmund Burke, this reference was combined with a selective interpretation of the liberal thinkers Friedrich von Hayek and Karl Popper. This indicates that the goal was not conservative either: historical continuity and gradualism were but elements of a framework of economic liberalism. In this setting of the lack of a critical engagement with modernization as such, “radicalism” was not associated with “progressivism,” but with the evils of a utopian socialism in which the importance of economic development had been ignored. Many participants in the 1992 debate invoked Karl Popper’s notion of “piecemeal change” in their promotion of gradualism. As Benjamin Schwartz has noted, for conservatives, society was an organic whole that had to be preserved or discarded as a whole.¹¹⁷⁴ Even though Burke also embraced piecemeal change, Schwartz argued, he only did so for the periphery, and nevertheless affirmed society as a whole. The reference to Burke in the 1992 debate was thus

¹¹⁷³ Davies, *Worrying about China*, 120.

¹¹⁷⁴ Schwartz, “Notes on Conservatism,” 11-12.

subordinated to a liberal notion of “piecemeal change” in which society was not perceived of as an organism.

In brief, then, it can be said that those who upheld Chinese tradition merely because it belonged to the past, namely Xiao Gongqin, the princelings, and the majority of intellectuals in the 1992 debate, were by no means critical of modernization. They did not question the progressivism and rationalism inherent in the modernization process, but only sought ways to facilitate this process. As Barmé has noted, in 1990s China, “the ideology of progress, national wealth and power continue to inform public opinion.”¹¹⁷⁵ For many Chinese intellectuals, the bright future of a nation that had suffered and struggled was just more important than a concern with the limits of change.

7.4 A THOROUGH SHIFT

At first sight, after about three hundred pages of research on “conservatism” in China, the conclusion that few references to “conservatism” could be tied to a conservative outlook seems rather disappointing. However, at this point, the benefits of a *Begriffsgeschichte* approach become manifest; whereas a “style of thought” approach would end here, the *Begriffsgeschichte* approach can take us one step further. For, as has been analyzed, notwithstanding the fact that a conservative “style of thought” was certainly not omnipresent, the concepts of “conservatism” and “radicalism” were nevertheless widespread. What did this signify?

In order to answer this question, we have to apply the *Begriffsgeschichte* approach to a longer period of time; we have to ask how this positive reference to “conservatism” was related to its usage in previous decades. It is not within the scope of this research to investigate the plethora of usages of the concept of “conservatism” before 1989, but for our purposes, it suffices to say that, in general, the term had an overtly negative connotation. For decades, both Marxists and liberals had applied the label “conservatism” to those who were perceived of as being hostile to their “progressive” beliefs; “conservatives” were die-hard defenders of tradition who obstructed modernization. An example that comes to mind is Lu Xun’s 1922 claim that

¹¹⁷⁵ Barmé, “To Screw Foreigners,” 234.

the scholars around the *Xueheng* journal were but “faked antiques.”¹¹⁷⁶ Up to the 1980s, as exemplified in the documentary “River Elegy,” this perception was still extremely powerful.

In contrast with the negative connotation attributed to the concept of “conservatism” under a Marxist and liberal framework, for most intellectuals of the early 1990s, “conservatism” was a “rational” and “healthy” mode of modernization that enabled historical continuity with the past. “Radicalism,” on the contrary, was mostly perceived of as a blind progressivism that had led to destruction. Here, we can also see the importance of the distinction between “labels” and “banners”: whereas the concept of “conservatism” had mostly been applied as a “label” in the past, now, the positive reevaluation of the concept of “conservatism” led some intellectuals to actively use the term as a “banner.” “Conservatism” was not a verdict that was delivered by political opponents who considered themselves the “winners” of intellectual debates; intellectuals *chose* to make use of the term to denote their own point of view.

The fact that the reference to “conservatism” was often *not* tied to a conscious conservative stance indicates that the conceptual shift of the early 1990s went far beyond the embrace of a new “ism”—it was rather a matter of a new *Zeitgeist* that united people of all political convictions. Regardless of whether they were Marxists, liberals, or conservatives, most intellectuals in this study adhered to the belief that change had to be gradual, and that the relation between past and present should be one of continuity instead of discontinuity. Apart from conservatives such as Chen Lai, liberals such as Liu Junning, and Marxists such as Li Zehou also refuted the belief that progress required the destruction of tradition. Nevertheless, as has been shown throughout this research, the advocacy of historical continuity took shape in a variety of forms, and despite the underlying similarities, there were still important differences between the opinions at hand.

Although one might assert that the widespread reevaluation of tradition was merely an echo of the official stress on economic reform and pragmatism, there was still a difference between the official reference to Chinese traditional culture and the positive reevaluation of the concept of “conservatism.” As shown in Chapters Three and Four in particular, Marxists still linked the term “conservatism” with “culturalist” trends that

¹¹⁷⁶ Schneider, “Bridging the Gap,” 1. From Lu Xun, “Gu ‘Xueheng’” (Evaluation of the *Xueheng*), in *Lu Xun quanji* (Collected writings of Lu Xun) (Beijing: Renmin wenzue, 1989), Vol. 1, 377-381.

were hostile to Marxism. In Chapter Three, it has been noted that Xiao Gongqin's term "neo-conservatism" was supplanted with the term "gradualism" in official media because the concept of "conservatism" was still understood as an embrace of Confucian values. This indicates that, in intellectual circles, the revaluation of tradition was much broader; it did not only include Chinese tradition, but also the reversal of verdicts on historical figures.

Despite this difference, the official revaluation of Confucianism was still a remarkable break with past practices, and it offered the conditions for the flourishing of new intellectual trends. Although, as contended, the CCP's reference to Confucianism was instrumental—Confucianism was invoked because it was part of the Chinese past, not because it contained absolute moral truths—this nevertheless signified a move away from past interpretations of tradition as but the feudal remnants of a backward past. Even the appearance of the term "gradualism" in official media was remarkable for a Party that based its legitimacy on revolutionary breaks with the past. As one Marxist historian phrased it, as long as tradition constituted but one aspect of the construction of a socialist civilization, it was not a threat to socialism, but an asset.

Whereas liberals of previous generations had relegated Confucianism to the dustbin of history because they were convinced that a cultural revolution was needed to modernize China, now, they attempted to reconcile liberalism with conservatism. As Furth has claimed, May Fourth liberalism was an "existential liberalism" in which intellectuals pressed for "individual liberation from the constraints of Confucian ritualism."¹¹⁷⁷ During the 1990s, however, intellectuals posed the question of whether the liberation from tradition and the evolutionary optimism of previous generations—be it in the form of ambitious reform plans or revolutionary struggle—had gone too far. The ubiquitous reference to the "creative transformation" of Chinese tradition, which was a continuation of the advocacy of the liberal Lin Yü-sheng several decades earlier, shows that the cultural iconoclasm of May Fourth liberals was exchanged for a more moderate approach to tradition.

What the 1992 debate in particular demonstrates is that the renewed stress on gradualism—partly due to the influence of overseas figures such as Yü Ying-shih—paved the way for the explosion of interest in Chinese tradition in the form of the

¹¹⁷⁷ Furth, "Intellectual Change from the Reform Movement to the May Fourth Movement," 387.

revival of “national studies” that took off in 1994. As has been noted in Chapter Four, the revival of interest in tradition during the 1990s would have been unthinkable without the reflections on Chinese culture that had occurred during the “culture fever” between 1985 and 1988. The role of the Academy of Chinese Culture in particular was important in relation to the shift in attitude towards tradition.

During the 1990s, the focus of research changed to non-Marxist and non-liberal intellectuals who had been repressed and criticized during both the Mao era and the “New Enlightenment” frenzy. It was the arrival of the reform era and its focus on economic reform and modernization that had created the conditions for the revaluation of these historical figures. The main intellectuals in this study all invoked non-liberal and non-Marxist figures to make their arguments. Examples are Chen Lai’s discussion of the debates on Eastern and Western cultures, Xiao Gongqin’s reference to Yan Fu, Yue Daiyun’s discussion of the *Xueheng* group, and Chen Lai’s articles on Liang Shuming and Feng Youlan. As Schwartz has rightly noted, the neglect of scholars who were associated with an interest in Chinese tradition during the Mao era was “based on the premise that its presumed defeat in 1949 renders its ideas completely uninteresting.”¹¹⁷⁸ That the ideas were now found interesting again indicates that the CCP’s past verdict on modern Chinese history was being questioned; it suddenly seemed much less evident that socialism was the outcome of modern Chinese history.

The return to Chinese tradition and to an elitist perspective on modernization was revolutionary in the modern sense of the word: it was, so to say, a radical new beginning against the background of the overall dominance of the “tradition of antitraditionalism,” as Tu Wei-ming has phrased it. At the same time, however, the renewed interest in Chinese tradition and in alternatives to a liberal and socialist modernity that had turned its back on Chinese tradition was also a revolution in the original sense of the word: it was a restoration, a return to a previous state of affairs in which “radicalism” had not claimed victory yet.

¹¹⁷⁸ Schwartz, “Themes in Intellectual History,” 437.

LIST OF CHINESE CHARACTERS

A Cheng 阿城 (Zhong Acheng, 钟阿城)	<i>bubian de daode</i> 不变的道德
<i>bada shijian</i> 八大事件	<i>bupo buli</i> 不破不立
<i>baihua</i> 白话	<i>buzhou</i> 步骤
<i>baihua kouyu</i> 白话口语	<i>buzuhua</i> 部族化
<i>baihua shumianyu</i> 白话书面语	<i>cengceng dijie</i> 层层递阶
<i>baihuawen</i> 白话文	<i>chansheng</i> 产生
<i>baoshoupai</i> 保守派	Chang Yansheng 常燕生
<i>baoshou qingxiang</i> 保守倾向	Chen Duxiu 陈独秀
<i>baoshou sichao</i> 保守思潮	Chen Feng 沉风
<i>baoshou xingwei</i> 保守行为	Chen Kejian 陈克艰
<i>baoshou zhuyi</i> 保守主义	Chen Kuide 陈奎德
<i>baowei zhengquan, fangzhi heping yanbian</i> 保卫政权,防止和平演变	Chen Lai 陈来
Bei Dao 北岛	Chen Sihe 陈思和
<i>Beijing ribao</i> 北京日报	Chen Tianhua 陈天华
<i>bishi jiuxu</i> 避实就虚	Chen Tongfu 陈同甫
<i>biyaoxing</i> 必要性	Chen Xiaoming 陈晓明
<i>bianhua</i> 变化	Chen Yi 陈毅
<i>bianyuanhua</i> 边缘化	Chen Yizi 陈一咨
<i>biaozhun</i> 标准	Chen Yinke 陈寅恪
	Chen Yuan 陈元

Chen Yun 陈云	<i>Dongfang</i> 东方
Cheng Yi 程颐	<i>Dongfang zazhi</i> 东方杂志
<i>chixu</i> 持续	<i>Dongxi shuo</i> 东西说
<i>chuangxin</i> 创新	Du Weiming (Tu Wei-ming) 杜维明
<i>chuangzao de fazhan</i> 创造的发展	Du Yaquan 杜亚泉
Cixi 慈禧	<i>Dushu</i> 读书
Cui Zhiyuan 崔之元	<i>duoyuan de jinbu guannian</i> 多元的进步观念
<i>cuowei</i> 错位	<i>erlü beifan</i> 二律背反
<i>cuozhi jutigan de miuwu</i> 错置具体感的谬误	<i>Ershiyi shiji</i> 二十一世纪
<i>Dagongbao</i> 大公报	<i>Faguo dagemingshi de lixiang zhuyi</i> 法国大革命式的理想主义
<i>daluàn cai you dàzhì</i> 大乱才有大秩	<i>Faguo dagemingshi de weili zhuyi de jijin zhuyi</i> 法国大革命式的唯理主义的激进主义
Dai Zhen 戴震	Fan Qinlin 范钦林
<i>danxiang yinjin</i> 单项引进	Fan Wenlan 范文澜
<i>dangdai xin rujia</i> 当代新儒家	<i>fan'an</i> 反案
<i>daode zizhuxing</i> 道德自主性	<i>fan daode zhuyi de minzhu</i> 泛道德主义的民主
<i>daotong</i> 道统	<i>fandong</i> 反动
Deng Liqun 邓力群	<i>fan fanchuantong zhuyi</i> 反反传统主义
Deng Xiaoping 邓小平	<i>fan zhengzhi zhuyi</i> 泛政治主义
<i>diyì daode yuánlǐ</i> 第一道德原理	Fang Keli 方克立
<i>ding</i> 鼎	<i>fangquan rangli</i> 放权让利
<i>dingdian</i> 定点	

fangshou 放收

Feibianshi de zhanlüe 费边式的战略

fei jiaowang bu zuyi guozheng 非矫枉
不足以过正

feilixing zhuyi 非理性主义

fenfengzhi 分封制

Feng Youlan 冯友兰

Fu Keng 傅铿

fugu huaijiu 复古怀旧

gaige kaifang 改革开放

gaige youzhibing 改革幼稚病

Gan Yang 甘阳

ganggan 杠杆

Gao Di 高狄

Gaoxiao lilun zhanxian 高校理论战线

gemingdang 革命党

geti 个体

Gonggong luncong 公共论丛

gongju lixing 工具理性

gongxiang 共相

Gu Mu 谷牧

Gu Zhun 顾准

gujin shuo 古今说

Guangming ribao 光明日报

Guangxu 光绪

guiding 规定

Guo Qiyong 郭齐勇

Guocui xuebao 国粹学报

Guoji ruxue lianhehui 国际儒学联合会

guojia zhuyi 国家主义

Guomindang (Kuomintang) 国民党

guoqing 国情

guoxing 国性

guoxue 国学

Han Yu 韩愈

hanjian 汉奸

he (harmony) 和

He Lin 贺麟

He Xin 何新

heli zhuangtai 合理状态

heping yanbian 和平演变

Heshang 河殇

hexu zhuangtai 合序状态

Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全

<i>Hongqi</i> 红旗	<i>jizhi zhuyi</i> 极致主义
<i>hou guoxue</i> 后国学	<i>jiazhi lixing</i> 价值理性
<i>houxue</i> 后学	<i>jianjin zhuyi de baoshou zhuyi</i> 渐进主义的保守主义
Hu Angang 胡鞍钢	<i>jianjin zhuyi de xiandaihua</i> 渐进主义的现代化
Hu Cheng 胡成	<i>jianwang zhilai</i> 鉴往知来
Hu Ping 胡平	Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) 蒋介石
Hu Sheng 胡绳	Jiang Qing 蒋庆
Hu Shi 胡适	Jiang Tao 姜涛
Hu Yaobang 胡耀邦	Jiang Yihua 姜义华
Huang Zongxi 黄宗羲	Jiang Zemin 江泽民
<i>huodong yangshi</i> 活动样式	<i>jiaolügan de jijin zhuyi</i> 焦虑感的激进主义
Ji Xianlin 季羨林	<i>jiaowang guozheng</i> 矫枉过正
<i>jidian</i> 积淀	<i>jie geming</i> 解革命
<i>jiduan minzhuhua</i> 极端民主化	<i>jiiegou zhuyi</i> 解构主义
<i>jijin de gaigeguan</i> 激进的改革观	<i>jieji liyi</i> 阶级利益
<i>jijin fanchuantong</i> 激进反传统	<i>jindaishi yanjiu</i> 近代史研究
<i>jijin gongli zhuyi</i> 激进功利主义	<i>jingji shang de xiuke liaofa</i> 经济上的休克疗法
<i>jijin zhuyi</i> 激进主义	<i>jingyan</i> 经验
<i>jiti jingyan</i> 集体经验	<i>jingyan zhuyi</i> 经验主义
<i>jiti wuyishi</i> 集体无意识	<i>jingyan zhuyi leixing de zhuyi</i> 经验主义类型的主义
<i>jixie tuanjie</i> 机械团结	

<i>jiuwang</i> 救亡	Li Dazhao 李大钊
<i>jiuye shipai</i> 九叶诗派	Li Jinquan 李锦全
Kang Xiaoguang 康晓光	Li Peng 李鹏
Kang Youwei 康有为	Li Ruihuan 李瑞环
<i>kebian de daode</i> 可变的道德	Li Shenzhi 李慎之
<i>keguan buli tiaojian</i> 客观不利条件	Li Zehou 李泽厚
<i>keji lixing</i> 科技理性	<i>linian juedinglun</i> 理念决定论
<i>ke xiandaihua de yinsu</i> 可现代化的因素	<i>lishi tonggouxing</i> 历史同构性
<i>kexingxing</i> 可行性	<i>lixian jiuguolun</i> 立宪救国论
<i>kexue yu renshengguan</i> 科学与人生观	<i>lixing</i> 理性
<i>kongxiang shehui zhuyi</i> 空想社会主义	<i>lixing zhuyi</i> 理性主义
<i>kongxiang zhuyi</i> 空想主义	<i>lixue</i> 理学
<i>kongxiang ziben zhuyi</i> 空想资本主义	<i>liyi jituan</i> 利益集团
<i>kouyu</i> 口语	<i>lizhi</i> 理智
<i>langman de minzu zhuyi</i> 浪漫的民族主义	Liang Qichao 梁启超
<i>langman zhuyi gaigeguan</i> 浪漫主义改革观	Liang Shuming 梁漱溟
Laozi 老子	<i>liangban</i> 两半
Lei Yi 雷颐	<i>liangge genben maodun</i> 两个根本矛盾
<i>leitong zhiti jiegou</i> 类同质体结构	<i>leixing</i> 类型
<i>li</i> (propriety) 礼	Lin Gang 林冈
<i>li</i> (heavenly principles) 理	Lin Yusheng (Lin Yü-sheng) 林毓生
	Lin Zexu 林则徐

Liu Danian 刘大年	<i>minzu texing</i> 民族特性
Liu Dong 刘东	<i>mozhe shitou guohe</i> 摸着石头过河
Liu Junning 刘军宁	Mou Zongsan 牟宗三
Liu Kang 刘康	<i>mubiao</i> 目标
Liu Shuxian (Liu Shu-hsien) 刘述先	<i>nanxun</i> 南巡
Liu Xiaobo 刘晓波	<i>neisheng waiwang</i> 内圣外王
Liu Zaifu 刘再复	<i>neiyuan jichu</i> 内源基础
<i>liumang</i> 流氓	<i>nisi wihuo</i> 你死我活
Lu Xiangshan 陆象山	<i>nongye shehui zhuyi</i> 农业社会主义
Lu Xun 鲁迅	Pan Yue 潘岳
Luo Rongqu 罗荣渠	<i>pipan</i> 批判
Luo Yijun 罗义俊	<i>pipan de jicheng</i> 批判的继承
Ma Yifu 马一浮	<i>pohuaixing siwei</i> 破坏性思维
Ma Yong 马勇	<i>pojiu lixin</i> 破旧立新
Mao Zedong 毛泽东	<i>pozi dangtou, li zai qizhong</i> 破字当头 立在其中
<i>meijie</i> 媒介	<i>pubian benzhi</i> 普遍本质
<i>minben zhuyi</i> 民本主义	<i>qimeng</i> 启蒙
<i>minjian shehui</i> 民间社会	<i>qiyuexing minzhu</i> 契约性民主
<i>Minyue pingyi</i> 民约平议	<i>qiyuexing renji guanxi</i> 契约性人际 关系
<i>minzhu gen ducai de zhengbian</i> 民主跟 独裁的争辩	Qian Mu 钱穆
<i>minzu de liyi</i> 民族的利益	

Qian Zhixiu 钱智修	shejin qiuyuan 舍近求远
qianlima 千里马	shencengci gaige silu 深层次改革思路
qingxiang 倾向	shenceng jiegou 深层结构
qingxu zhuyi 情绪主义	Sheng Hong 盛洪
Qiushi 求是	shi 士
quanpan Xihualun 全盘西化论	Shi Zhong 石中
quanxiang yinjin 全项引进	shifan 失范
qun 群	shifan zonghezheng 失范综合症
ren 仁	Shijie jingji baodao 世界经济报道
Renmin ribao 人民日报	shijie xiandaihua jincheng yanjiu zhongxin 世界现代化进程研究中心
rensheng taidu 人生态度	shisuhua de rujia lunli 世俗化的儒家 伦理
renwen zhuyi 人文主义	shoucheng 守成
renyi 仁义	shouduan 手段
renzhi xianjing 认知陷阱	shoujiupai 守旧派
ruxue 儒学	shouti 受体
sanci geming gaochao 三次革命高潮	shumianyu 书面语
sangang 三纲	shuxiang 殊相
sange jieti 三个阶梯	Shuodang 说党
Shanghai wenxue 上海文学	sixiang 思想
shehui 社会	sixiang jiben yuanze 四项基本原则
Shehui tongquan 社会通论	sixiangjia danchu, xueshujia tuxian 思想家淡出学术家凸显
shehui youjilun 社会有机论	

sixiang jiefang yundong 思想解放运动

*Sulian jubian zhihou Zhongguo de
xianshi yingdui yu zhanlie xuanze* 苏联
巨变之后中国的现实应对与战略选择
Sun Guodong 孙国栋

Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen) 孙中山

tazhehua 他者化

taidu 态度

taiping 太平

taizidang 太子党

Tan Sitong 谭嗣同

Tang Junyi 唐君毅

Tang Yijie 汤一介

Tao Dongfeng 陶东风

Tao Xisheng 陶希圣

teshu de guoqing 特殊的国情

teshu neirong 特殊内容

ti 体

tiyong 体用

tiyong bukelilun 体用不可离论

tizhinei 体制内

tizhiwai 体制外

tian 天

Tiananmen 天安门

tianxia zhuyi 天下主义

Tianya 天涯

Tianyan jinhualun 天演进化论

tianren heyi 天人合一

tiaojianlun 条件论

Tong Shijun 童世俊

tonghua 同化

tongwen tongzhong 同文同种

Tongzhi fuxing 同治复兴

tongzhi geti 同质个体

Wang Fangsen (Wang Fanshen) 王凡森

Wang Fuzhi 王夫之

Wang Guowei 王国维

Wang Huning 王沪宁

Wang Hui 汪晖

Wang Meng 王蒙

Wang Rongzu 汪荣祖

Wang Shan 王山

Wang Shaoguang 王绍光

Wang Shuqian 汪叔潜

Wang Shuo 王朔

Wang Xiaodong 王小东 (Shi Zhong, 石中)	<i>Wenhui bao</i> 文汇报
Wang Xiaoming 王晓明	<i>wenjin zhuyi</i> 稳进主义
Wang Yangming 王阳明	<i>wenshixing zhidu</i> 温室型制度
Wang Yichuan 王一川	<i>Wenxue pinglun</i> 文学评论
Wang Yuanhua 王元化	<i>wenyan</i> 文言
Wang Yuechuan 王岳川	<i>wenyanwen</i> 文言文
Wang Zhaojun 王兆军	<i>Wenyi zhengming</i> 文艺争鸣
<i>wanmei zhuyi</i> 完美主义	Wu Jiexiang 吴稼祥
<i>Wei Zhongguo wenhua jinggao shijie renshi xuanyan</i> 为中国文化敬告世界人士宣言	Wu Mi 吴宓
<i>weiji lun</i> 危机论	Wu Yifu 吴逸夫
<i>weili zhuyi</i> 唯理主义	<i>wusi yundong</i> 五四运动
<i>weili zhuyi leixing de zhuyi</i> 唯理主义类型的主义	<i>wuwei er zhi</i> 无为而治
<i>weixin zhuyi</i> 唯新主义	<i>wuxu bianfa</i> 戊戌变法
<i>wenhua baoshou zhuyi</i> 文化保守主义	<i>Xixue tiyong</i> 西学体用
<i>wenhua jiaolügan</i> 文化焦虑感	<i>xiandaihua de duanlie</i> 现代化的断裂
<i>wenhua linghun</i> 文化灵魂	<i>xiandaihua lishi yanjiu</i> 现代化历史研究
<i>wenhua re</i> 文化热	<i>xiandai xin rujia</i> 现代新儒家
<i>wenhua shiguan</i> 文化史观	<i>xiansheng duoren</i> 先声夺人
<i>wenhua xinli jiegou</i> 文化心理结构	<i>xianshi zhuyi</i> 现实主义
<i>Wenhua: Zhongguo yu shijie</i> 文化:中国与世界	<i>xianyi hounan zhanlie</i> 先易后难战略
	<i>xiao</i> (piety) 孝

Xiao Gongqin 萧功秦	xing 性
xiaokang 小康	Xiong Shili 熊十力
Xie Wujun 谢武军	xiuke liaofa 休克疗法
xin baoshou zhuyi 新保守主义	Xu Ben 徐奔
Xinhai geming 辛亥革命	Xu Fuguan 徐复观
xin jianjin zhuyi 新渐进主义	Xu Jilin 许纪霖
Xin lixue 新理学	Xu Ming 许明
xin qimeng yundong 新启蒙运动	Xu Weicheng 徐惟诚
Xin qingnian 新青年	Xu Youyu 徐友渔
xin quanwei zhuyi 新权威主义	Xueheng 学衡
Xin shilun 新事论	Xueren 学人
xin shiqi 新时期	xueshu 学术
xintaishang de jijin zhuyi 心态上的 激进主义	Xunzi 荀子
Xin weishilun 新唯识论	Yan Fu 严复
xin wenhua yundong 新文化运动	Yan Fu beilun 严复悖论
xin wenxue yundong 新文学运动	Yan Jiayan 严家炎
xinxing zhi xue 心性之学	Yang Fan 杨帆
xinxue 心学	Yang Ping 杨平
xinzheng 新政	yangjingbang 洋泾浜
xin zhixu zhuyi 新秩序主义	yangqi 扬弃
xin zuopai 新左派	yangwu pai 洋务派
	yi pian gai quan 以偏改全

<i>yi ren wei ti, yi he wei yong</i> 以仁为体 以和为用	<i>zaiti</i> 载体
<i>yitu lunli</i> 意图伦理	<i>zaoqi xiandaihua lishi yanjiu</i> 早期 现代化历史研究
<i>yizhi geti</i> 异质个体	Zeng Guofan 曾国藩
<i>yizhong teshu de jingshen zhuangtai</i> 一种特殊的精神状态	<i>Zhanlüe yu guanli</i> 战略与管理
Yin Haiguang 殷海光	Zhang Bingjiu 张炳九
<i>yinzhen zhike</i> 饮鸩止渴	Zhang Fa 张法
<i>Yingmeishi jingyan zhuyi de ziyou zhuyi</i> 英美式经验主义的自由主义	Zhang Haipeng 张海鹏
<i>yong</i> (function) 用	Zhang Hao (Chang Hao) 张灏
<i>you Daoxing zhidu</i> 诱导型制度	<i>Zhang hou zhu</i> 张后主
<i>you huan yishi</i> 忧患意识	Zhang Junmai 张君勱
<i>youji tuanjie</i> 有机团结	Zhang Longxi 张隆溪
<i>youni wuwo</i> 有你无我	Zhang Shizhao 章士钊
Yu Yingshi (Yü Ying-shih) 余英时	Zhang Taiyan 章太炎
Yuan Mu 袁木	Zhang Xudong 张旭东
Yuan Shikai 袁世凯	Zhang Xun 张勋
Yuan Weishi 袁伟时	Zhang Yiwu 张颐武
<i>Yuandao</i> 原道	Zhao Yiheng 赵毅衡
<i>Yuanqiang</i> 原强	Zhao Ziyang 赵紫阳
<i>yuanwang toushe</i> 愿望投射	<i>Zhexue yanjiu</i> 哲学研究
Yue Daiyun 乐黛云	<i>zhenjie</i> 贞节
<i>yueli</i> 阅历	Zheng Jiadong 郑家栋

Zheng Min 郑敏

Zheng Yi 郑义

Zhengzhi jiangyi 政治讲义

zhengzhi langman zhuyi 政治浪漫主义

zhengzhi xingtai 政治形态

Zhi Zhong 志忠

zhidu juedinglun 制度决定论

zhidu wenhua 制度文化

zhijue 直觉

zhiru 植入

zhishi fenzi 知识分子

zhixiang zhengzhi xingwei de wenhua

zhuyi 指向政治行为的文化主义

zhizhengdang 执政党

zhong 忠

Zhongguo qingnian bao 中国青年报

Zhongguo wenhua shuyuan 中国文化
书院

Zhonghua 中华

Zhonghua Kongzi yanjiusuo 中华孔子
研究所

Zhonghua wenhuajuan 中华文化圈

Zhonghuaxing 中华性

zhongji guanhuai 终极关怀

zhongjie 中介

Zhongti xiyong 中体西用

Zhongxue tiyong 中学体用

Zhou Cezong (Chow Tse-tsung) 周策纵

Zhou Zuoren 周作人

Zhu Xi 朱熹

zhuanhua 转化

zhuanzaoxing de chuangzao 转造性的
创造

Zhuangzi pingyu 庄子评语

zhudao jingshen 主导精神

zhuliu wenhua 主流文化

zhuti zhuyi 主体主义

zhuyi juedinglun 主义决定论

ziran gong lilun 自然公理论

zonghe chuangxin 综合创新

zonghe fanying nengli 综合反应能力

Zouxiang weilai 走向未来

zuobiao 坐标

TABLES

Table 1. Xiao Gongqin's Analysis of "Structures" and "System Cultures"¹¹⁷⁹

STRUCTURE (JIEGOU)	HETEROGENEOUS SOCIETIES	HOMOGENOUS SOCIETIES	"PARA-HOMOGENOUS SOCIETY"
	ORGANIC SOLIDARITY DIVISION OF LABOR	MECHANICAL SOLIDARITY NO DIVISION OF LABOR	BY AND LARGE MECHANICAL SOLIDARITY ARTIFICIAL DIVISION OF LABOR
SYSTEM CULTURE (ZHIDU WENHUA)	WESTERN INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY	TRADITIONAL CHINESE SOCIETY	MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY CHINESE SOCIETY
ECONOMY	MARKET ECONOMY → MIDDLE CLASS	NATURAL ECONOMY WITH FAMILY AS BASIS	MARKET ECONOMY AFTER INTERMEZZO OF PLANNED ECONOMY
POLITICS	PLURALIST DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM AND CIVIL SOCIETY	MONARCHICAL AUTOCRATIC SYSTEM WITH EXAMINATION SYSTEM AS BASIS	CONDITIONS FOR PLURALIST DEMOCRACY NOT RIPE → AUTOCRATIC SYSTEM NEEDED
CULTURE	LIBERAL VALUES	rites and CONFUCIAN IDEOLOGY	CONDITIONS FOR LIBERAL VALUES NOT RIPE → RELIANCE ON TRADITION
SOCIAL BASIS	HORIZONTAL CONTRACTUAL RELATIONS	"FEN" (POSITION/ STATUS) TO SAFEGUARD ORDER	HORIZONTAL CONTRACTUAL RELATIONS ON LOWEST LEVEL → STRATEGIES TO SAFEGUARD ORDER

¹¹⁷⁹ Table composed with data from Xiao Gongqin, "Lishi jujue langman," *XGJ*, 111; and idem, "Du'erkaimu, Makesi yu Xunzi," *XGJ*, 14, 16.

Table 2. Overview of Positions of Main Intellectuals

	“RADICALISM”	SOURCES REFERRED TO	CONSERVATIVE GROUNDS	CONSERVATIVE GOALS
PRINCE-LINGS	“ROMANTICISM,” “IRRATIONALISM” “UTOPIANISM” LIBERALISM SOCIALISM	HAYEK POPPER HUNTINGTON	NO: DEFENSE OF “RATIONAL” REFORM	NO: STRENGTHEN LEGITIMACY OF CCP
XIAO GONGQIN	REFORM AND REVOLUTION BASED ON ABSTRACT DESIGN AND “FIRST PRINCIPLES,” UNIVERSALISM, NEGLECT OF PARTICULAR CONDITIONS	BURKE YAN FU HAYEK HUNTINGTON	YES: PARTICULARITY, ANTI- ENLIGHTENMENT THOUGHT, ORGANICISM, HISTORICAL GROWTH	NO: MARKET ECONOMY, INSTRUMENTAL USE OF TRADITION FOR MODERNIZATION
YŪ YING-SHIH	PROGRESSIVISM “NEOTERISM” “ANTI-TRADI- TIONALISM,” ERADICATION OF INTERMEDIATE GROUPS	BURKE	YES: REJECTION OF PROGRESSIVISM, DEFENSE OF INTERMEDIATE GROUPS AS HISTORICALLY GROWN	YES: PRESERVE COMMUNITY, PRESERVE TRADITION BECAUSE IT CONTAINS TRUTH (MORAL NORMS AND STANDARDS)
CHEN LAI	“ANTI-TRADI- TIONALISM” “INSTRUMENTAL REASON”	NEW CONFUCIANS WEBER	YES: CRITICISM OF MODERNITY, DEFENSE OF COMMUNITY	YES: PRESERVE COMMUNITY, PRESERVE TRADITION BECAUSE IT CONTAINS TRUTH (MORAL NORMS AND STANDARDS)

ZHENG MIN	(REJECTION OF DICHOTOMIES, LINGUISTIC DISCONTINUITY)	STRUCTURALISM POST-STRUCTURALISM HEIDEGGER GADAMER	YES: ORGANIC GROWTH, CONTINGENCY, REJECTION OF ABSTRACT DESIGN OF LANGUAGE	NO: PRESERVE TRADITION BECAUSE IT BELONGS TO CHINA (CULTURAL NATIONALISM)
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SAMENVATTING

Dit onderzoek heeft aangetoond dat de betekenis van het concept “conservatisme” (*baoshou zhuyi*) zeer betwist was onder intellectuelen tijdens de vroege jaren 1990. Technocratische intellectuelen, historici, intellectuele historici, filosofen en literatuurwetenschappers definieerden het concept zodanig dat het overeenstemde met hun respectievelijke agenda’s. Door het gebruik van het concept “conservatisme” als uitgangspunt te nemen en door de aandacht te vestigen op hoe Chinese intellectuelen invulling gaven aan dit concept heeft dit onderzoek deze verscheidenheid aan interpretaties tot zijn recht laten komen. Desalniettemin is de vraag gesteld of deze concrete verwijzingen ook manifestaties waren van een algemene conservatieve “stijl van denken,” namelijk de verdediging van conservatieve doeleinden waarbij conservatieve gronden werden aangevoerd. Alleen in die gevallen waarin intellectuelen het behoud van de Chinese gemeenschap beargumenteerden op grond van de inherente waarde van de Chinese traditie is gesteld dat de verwijzing naar “conservatisme” een manifestatie was van een conservatieve “stijl van denken.”

Meer bepaald is in dit onderzoek het concept “conservatisme” bestudeerd in relatie tot het “tegenconcept” (*Gegenbegriff*) van “radicalisme” (*jijin zhuyi*). Dit heeft het mogelijk gemaakt om het begrip “conservatisme” als een continuüm op te vatten, aangezien alle verwijzingen naar “conservatisme”—ongeacht of zij deel uitmaakten van een argument ter bevordering van politieke legitimiteit, dan wel of zij gesitueerd waren binnen een pleidooi voor traditionele morele waarden—plaatsvonden tegen de achtergrond van de verwerping van “radicalisme.” Deze aanpak heeft er ook voor gezorgd dat de interactie tussen officiële ideologie, het “neo-conservatisme” van technocratische intellectuelen dicht bij het machtscentrum en het “conservatisme” van humanistische intellectuelen verbonden aan universiteiten kon worden blootgelegd. De wederzijdse toeëigening van concepten wees in deze context niet op een officiële orkestratie van intellectuele activiteiten tijdens de jaren 1990, maar op het bestaan van een gezamenlijke reeks problemen waarop zowel de CCP als intellectuelen een antwoord trachtten te bieden.

Het “neo-conservatisme” van de historicus Xiao Gongqin kan beschouwd worden als een duidelijk voorbeeld van de interactie tussen technocratische en humanistische intellectuelen. Net zoals het “neo-conservatisme” van de “prinsjes”—familieleden van hooggeplaatste functionarissen—bestond Xiao’s “neo-conservatisme” uit een pleidooi voor graduele economische hervormingen, gecentraliseerd bestuur, politieke en sociale stabiliteit en het instrumentele gebruik van traditionele elementen. Anderzijds is echter aangetoond dat Xiao Gongqin net als andere humanistische intellectuelen drie stadia van “radicalisme” onderscheidde in de moderne Chinese geschiedenis, met name het “mentale radicalisme” van de Honderd Dagen hervormers, het “systeem determinisme” van denkers ten tijde van de Republiek, en de “politieke romantiek” van Vier Mei denkers. De verdeling van de moderne Chinese geschiedenis in drie “stadia” van “radicalisme” was ook aanwezig in de werken van de filosoof Chen Lai en de historicus Yü Ying-shih. Chen Lai duidde respectievelijk de Vier Meibeweging, de Culturele Revolutie en de jaren 1980 aan als stadia van “cultureel radicalisme,” terwijl Yü Ying-shih de laat-negentiende eeuw, de Vier Meibeweging en de komst van het marxisme als stadia van “radicalisering” bestempelde.

Als gevolg van deze interactie tussen technocratische en humanistische intellectuelen is gesteld dat het vaak gemaakte onderscheid tussen een zogenaamd “politiek” “neo-conservatisme” en een “cultureel conservatisme” weinig doeltreffend is voor de analyse van de intellectuele situatie van de jaren 1990. Er is verder geopperd dat het nuttiger is de aandacht te richten op de aard van de verwijzing naar de Chinese traditie in plaats van de adjectieven “cultureel” of “politiek” te hanteren met betrekking tot “conservatisme.” Voor intellectuelen zoals de prinsjes en Xiao Gongqin was de traditie een middel dat gebruikt kon worden voor de realisatie van modernisering. Voor Yü Ying-shih en Chen Lai daarentegen was de promotie van de Chinese traditie gestoeld op het feit dat deze waarden en normen belichaamde die zij onmisbaar achtten in de toenmalige maatschappij.

Het is ook beargumenteerd dat “conservatisme” niet zomaar een manifestatie van “cultureel nationalisme” of een blinde verdediging van belangen was; voor vele intellectuelen maakte de verwijzing naar “conservatisme” deel uit van een kritische en intellectuele reflectie op de liberale en socialistische versies van de Chinese moderniteit. Deze reflectie kon dus onmogelijk gereduceerd worden tot een emotionele reactie op de invloed van een “Westerse” traditie; intellectuelen gingen ook een dialoog aan met het

Chinese verleden. Bovendien werd de terugkeer naar de Chinese traditie niet noodzakelijk ingegeven door het feit dat deze deel uitmaakte van een Chinese identiteit; voor sommige intellectuelen belichaamde de traditie bepaalde normen en waarden die bovenal waardevol waren en niet zozeer “Chinees.” Dat “conservatisme” deel uitmaakte van een reflectie die diachronisch eerder dan synchronisch van aard was kan afgeleid worden uit het feit dat de term “conservatisme” vooral gebruikt werd om gebeurtenissen uit de moderne Chinese geschiedenis te evalueren.

In deze historische debatten fungeerde de geschiedenis niet alleen als een *medium* om economische, politieke, ethische of sociale kwesties te bediscussiëren, maar ook als een *object* van discussie. Omdat intellectuelen niet alleen verwezen naar gebeurtenissen in de moderne Chinese geschiedenis, maar deze ook *herinterpreteerden*, kan gesteld worden dat de geschiedenis niet zomaar een “veilige omweg” was om gevoelige politieke zaken te bespreken, in tegenstelling tot wat sommige liberale critici beweerden. De herschrijving van de moderne Chinese geschiedenis als een proces van “radicalisering” was niet zomaar een voorbeeld van kritiek op het toenmalige beleid aan de hand van historische zinspelingen; de herschrijving van de geschiedenis *in se* had belangrijke gevolgen met betrekking tot de opvatting van politieke legitimiteit en nationale identiteit.

De associatie van “radicalisme” met revolutie en socialisme gaf aan dat intellectuelen de politieke legitimiteit van de CCP in vraag stelden na het neerslaan van de opstand op het Tiananmenplein in 1989 en in de context van de internationale ondergang van het socialisme. De herschrijving van de moderne Chinese geschiedenis als de geschiedenis van modernisering in plaats van de geschiedenis van de strijd tegen feodalisme en imperialisme stelde impliciet de legitimiteit van de CCP in vraag. Hoewel de officiële ideologie de economische hervormingen voorstelde als de voortzetting van de revolutie, terwijl de legitimiteit van de revolutie *in het verleden* niet in vraag werd gesteld, projecteerden intellectuelen de notie van hervorming ook op de moderne Chinese geschiedenis. De verwerping van “radicalisme” was dus geenszins louter een echo van het economische hervormingsbeleid, in tegenstelling tot wat sommige critici beweerden.

Met de verwerping van “radicalisme” stelden intellectuelen ook het alleenrecht van de CCP op de definitie van de nationale identiteit in vraag. Intellectuelen vervingen de nationale identiteit van het Mao-tijdperk waarin klasse en de staat centraal stonden

door een bredere notie van identiteit die cultureel van aard was in plaats van politiek en territoriaal—het was een roep om een “cultureel China.” Het object van loyauteit was niet de CCP, maar een culturele Chinese natie die de grenzen van de Chinese staat overschreed. In tegenstelling tot de liberale en socialistische opvattingen van Chinese moderniteit die waren gekenmerkt door revolutionaire breuken met het verleden, bepleitten de voorstanders van een “cultureel China” een moderniteit die zich gradueel en met respect voor de continuïteit van de Chinese traditie ontwikkelde.

De culturele opvatting van de Chinese nationale identiteit betekende ook een herinterpretatie van de rol van intellectuelen in de Chinese maatschappij. Met het einde van de “Verlichting” van de jaren 1980 en de toegenomen commercialisering van de maatschappij sinds 1992 bood de kritiek op het antitraditionalisme van liberalen en marxisten uit het verleden intellectuelen de mogelijkheid om zich opnieuw te verbinden met de Chinese traditie. Na het falen van het politiek engagement van de jaren 1980 en na decennia van “marginalisering” van Chinese intellectuelen bood de terugkeer naar de traditie een vorm van “statusvernieuwing.” Door de Chinese identiteit op te vatten in termen van een elitaire cultuur waarvan intellectuelen de dragers bij uitstek waren, kenden intellectuelen zichzelf een centrale rol toe in het proces van de herwaardering van de Chinese traditie.

Een cruciale implicatie van de verwerping van “radicalisme” was dat de relatie tussen verleden, heden en toekomst werd herdacht; een nieuwe kijk op hoe veranderingen moesten worden teweeggebracht bood zich aan. De voorstand van historische continuïteit en de herwaardering van de Chinese traditie impliceerden dat een marxistische opvatting van verandering als de strijd tussen tegengestelden had plaatsgemaakt voor een nadruk op harmonie. Intellectuelen bepleitten niet langer revolutionaire breuken met het verleden of totale sociale veranderingen, maar graduele en gedeeltelijke hervormingen. Intellectuelen benadrukten ook het belang van de praktijk in plaats van idealistische plannen gebaseerd op “blauwdruk” ontwerpen. Hoewel de verwerping van “radicalisme” overeenstemde met het pragmatisme van de jaren 1990, was het eveneens in strijd met de ideologie van het marxisme.

Uit de verschillende betekenissen die de zogenaamde prinsjes, Xiao Gongqin, Yü Ying-shih, de deelnemers aan het debat van 1992, Chen Lai, Zheng Min en anderen hebben toegekend aan de concepten van “radicalisme” en “conservatisme” is geconcludeerd dat alleen Yü Ying-shih en Chen Lai de termen gebruikten als deel van

een conservatief argument voor conservatieve doeleinden. Zij verdedigden het behoud van de Chinese gemeenschap op grond van de inherente waarde van de Chinese traditie, die voor hen onmisbare normen en waarden belichaamde. Xiao Gongqin en Zheng Min, daarentegen, hoewel hun argument gebaseerd was op de verwerping van abstracte rede en de historische groei van respectievelijk de traditie en de taal, hadden geen conservatieve bedoelingen. Xiao Gongqin had als opzicht de efficiëntie van economische hervormingen, terwijl Zheng Min's verwijzing naar de taal deel uitmaakte van een positie die kan omschreven worden als cultureel nationalisme. De prinsjes en de meeste intellectuelen die deelnamen aan het debat van 1992 hadden niet alleen geen conservatieve oogmerken; zij voerden evenmin conservatieve gronden aan. De prinsjes verwezen naar "rationalistische" denkers om de politieke legitimiteit van de CCP op te krikken, terwijl de meeste intellectuelen in het debat van 1992 liberale denkers aanriepen om graduele economische hervormingen te promoten.

Hoewel de verwijzing naar "conservatisme" dus lang niet altijd gekoppeld was aan een bewuste conservatieve positie, geeft de wijdverbreide referentie naar de term tijdens de vroege jaren 1990 aan dat er toch een belangrijke verandering had plaatsgevonden in de intellectuele wereld. Het feit dat de term gebruikt werd door intellectuelen met verschillende politieke overtuigingen geeft aan dat de omarming van gradualisme en de continuïteit van de Chinese traditie deel uitmaakten van een nieuwe tijdgeest. Vóór de jaren 1990 had de term "conservatisme" een negatieve connotatie in een Chinese context; het was een etiket dat gebruikt werd door liberalen en marxisten om die intellectuelen te bekritisieren die in hun ogen de traditie hadden verdedigd ten koste van de vooruitgang. Tijdens de jaren 1990 echter kozen intellectuelen er bewust voor om de term met hun positie in verband te brengen. "Conservatisme" werd nu geassocieerd met een "gezonde" en "rationele" vorm van modernisering.

Liberalen, die in het verleden een radicale breuk met de traditie hadden voorgestaan, pleitten nu voor de "creatieve transformatie" van de traditie. Zelfs de CCP, wiens legitimiteit gebaseerd was op een revolutionaire breuk met het verleden, incorporeerde de Chinese traditie in haar "socialisme met Chinese karakteristieken." Niet-liberale en niet-marxistische denkers die onder het socialisme onderworpen waren geweest aan onderdrukking en zelfkritiek werden nu het object van analyse. In de context van de neergang van het socialisme en de tanende morele en politieke legitimiteit van de CCP na 1989 was het minder evident dat socialisme de uitkomst was

van de moderne Chinese geschiedenis. De terugkeer naar de Chinese traditie was een revolutie in de moderne zin van het woord omdat dit een eind maakte aan decennia van “anti-traditionalisme.” Anderzijds was het ook een revolutie in de originele zin van het woord; het was een restoratie, een terugkeer naar een tijdperk waarin “radicalisme” nog niet was doorgedrongen tot in de wortels van de Chinese geest.

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Els van Dongen (Antwerp, June 8, 1979) studied Latin-Greek and Latin-Modern Languages at the Sancta Maria Institute (Deurne, Antwerp) and the Sint-Michielscollege (Schoten, Antwerp) from 1991 until 1997. In 1999, she obtained a BA degree (*kandidaat*) in Sinology from the Catholic University of Leuven (KUL). After having spent one year at Central China Normal University for language training with a scholarship from the Chinese government, she enrolled in the MA program (*licentiaat*) in Sinology at the KUL. She spent the second year of her MA in Sinology as an exchange student at Leiden University and graduated in 2002. After the completion of her MA, she attended a Complimentary Program in International Relations and Conflict Management at the KUL, from which she graduated in 2003. In September 2003, she became a Ph.D. candidate in the VICI research project on *Historical Consciousness and the Future of Modern China and Japan: Conservatism, Revisionism, and National Identity* at Leiden University.