



National Essence, National Learning, and Culture:
Historical Writings in *Guocui xuebao*, *Xueheng*, and *Guoxue jikan*

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Abstract:

This article examines historical writings of early twentieth-century China from the perspective of the nation. In part one, I compare the historical writings in *Guocui xuebao* (Journal of National Essence, 1905-1912) and *Xueheng* (Critical Review, 1922-1933). In current scholarship, historians who published in these two journals are often considered to be cultural conservatives who rejected modernity. To challenge this view, I compare the ways these two groups of historians envisioned post-imperial China. The *Guocui* historians wanted to win the support of Han Chinese to revolt against the Manchu Dynasty. To achieve this goal, they promoted racial nationalism and defined China as the nation-state of the Han race. In contrast, two decades later, historians associated with *Xueheng* envisioned China as based on a communal bond developed over centuries of acculturation and socialization. Instead of racial genealogy, they used “culture” (*wenhua*) to articulate a multi-ethnic identity for twentieth-century Chinese.

In part two, I compare the historical writings in *Xueheng* and *Guoxue jikan* (National Studies Quarterly, 1923-1952). Although much attention has been paid to Hu Shi's (1891-1962) call for a "reorganization of the nation's past" in *Guoxue jikan*, not all historical writings published in that journal were iconoclastic in nature. On the contrary, many of them were similar to those printed in *Xueheng*, particularly in respect to locating the cultural roots of twentieth-century China and combining Chinese learning with Western learning. The main difference between these two groups of historians, I propose, was in their social visions for a pluralistic China rather than their efforts to reorganize the national past.

This study calls into question the conventional practice of dividing early-twentieth century Chinese historians into "radicals," "liberals" and "conservatives," based on their iconoclasm or alleged support of Westernization. To be sure, dividing historians neatly into different groups helps to make the picture of twentieth-century Chinese historiography easier to grasp. However, as this study shows, sometimes the "conservatives" could be as revolutionary in their social and political visions as the "radicals," and in many instances it is hard to tell who were more "liberal" in envisioning post-imperial China. To fully understand the complexity of the historians' debates, we should avoid simple categories and focus on the social-political implications of historians' narration of the past.

關鍵辭：

國粹, 文化, 反傳統主義, 保守主義, 中華民族

摘要：

本文從國族角度探討二十世紀初中國史學。文章分作兩個部分。第一個部分是比較清末《國粹學報》與二十年代的《學衡》，比較目的是指出兩批學者，雖然同被視為“文化守成派”，其實他們對國族的看法並不相同。其中最大的分別，是他們對“中國”所下的不同定義。《國粹學報》學者為了鼓動反清革命，大力提倡大漢主義，以漢族血緣定義中國，並視中國歷史為漢人的歷史。與此相反，《學衡》學者提倡文化融合，視中國為多民族國家，故研究歷史時常常強調中外、歐亞的文化交流。文章的第二個部分是比較《學衡》與《國學季刊》的差異。這兩個期刊出版時期雖同是二、三十年代，但一般認為是敵對刊物，無論是文化情懷或是歷史意識，總是《學衡》保守，《國學季刊》先進。本文指出，在兩個刊物上發表的歷史文章，內容和風格都大同小異，不外是強調中外、歐亞的文化交流，很難分別保守與先進。不過，在如何實現多民族、多元化中國這方面，兩批學者看法實有不同。一方面《學衡》學者強調精英領導和緩變，另一方面《國學季刊》學者強調平民教育和急變。兩相比較，差異是在兩批學者的社會觀，而不在他們的歷史意識。

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Responding to their country's transformation from an empire to a nation, Chinese historians in the early decades of the twentieth-century attempted to define the nature of China and its place in the world. They narrated the past to offer differing answers to the question: "What does it mean to be Chinese in modern times?" This study compares historical writings published in three journals: *Guocui xuebao* 國粹學報 (Journal of National Essence, 1905-1912), *Xueheng* 學衡 (Critical Review, 1922-1933), and *Guoxue jikan* 國學季刊 (National Studies Quarterly, 1923-1952). Focusing on the period between 1905 and 1933, it traces the discourse on China from affirming the uniqueness of the Han race to envisioning China as a nation of many ethnic groups and different walks of life. It shows that despite their common interest in defining the characteristics of their country, these historians offered various social and political visions for twentieth-century China.

This study is comprised of two parts. In part one, I examine the differences between *Guocui xuebao* and *Xueheng*. In current scholarship, historians associated with *Xueheng* are often considered to be an extension of the *Guocui* group. The two groups of historians were viewed broadly as part of Chinese cultural conservatism, which began in the early 1900s and continued in earnest throughout the Republican period. This paper will show that despite their similar perspectives on studying history and many personal links, the two groups of historians were actually quite different in their objectives. For the *Guocui* historians, who were absorbed in the 1900s debate on reform and revolution, their main concern lay with winning the public's support for a political revolution against the absolute monarchy of the Manchu dynasty. To mobilize the Han Chinese in a revolt against the Manchus, they relied on racial nationalism, arguing that China belonged solely to the Han race. In contrast, two decades later, historians associated with *Xueheng* envisioned China as the product of a communal bond developed over a long period of acculturation and socialization. Responding to the needs of the newly established republican government, they replaced racial genealogy with culture (*wenhua* 文化) and articulated the collective identity of the twentieth-century Chinese based on a common commitment to plurality and diversity.

In part two, I compare the social visions of the "cultural iconoclasts" and the "conservatives" of the May Fourth period (1916-1925). Although much attention has been paid to Hu Shi's 胡適 (1891-1962) iconoclastic call for a

“reorganization of the nation’s past” in his 1923 “Inaugural Statement of the National Studies Quarterly” (*Guoxue jikan fakan xuanyan* 國學季刊發刊宣言), this paper will show that not all historical writings published in *Guoxue jikan* were iconoclastic in nature. On the contrary, many of them were similar to those printed in *Xueheng*, particularly in respect to locating the cultural roots of twentieth-century China and integrating Chinese learning with Western learning. This study will demonstrate that the difference between these two groups of historians lay more in their social visions than in their efforts at reorganizing the national past.

As our global discussion on historical writing moves away from the past historiographical frameworks of modernization and the impact of the West, the historical writings in these three journals offer prime examples of how new historical thought has emerged out of a mixture of indigenous and worldwide sources. These historical writings show that we need to re-examine the conventional practice of dividing early-twentieth century Chinese historians into “the radicals,” “liberals” and “conservatives” based on their iconoclasm or alleged support of Westernization. As this study will show, sometimes the “conservative” historians could be as revolutionary in their social and political visions as their “radical” counterparts, and in many cases it is difficult to tell who were the more “liberal” in the early twentieth-century Chinese debate on modernity. To be sure, dividing historians neatly into different groups makes the picture of twentieth-century Chinese historiography easier to grasp. Nevertheless, the classification does not do justice to the complexity of the historians’ debates on the nature of modern China and their attempts to link the past to the present, and the East to the West.

Part I: Guocui and Wenhua

The Meaning of Guocui

As Zheng Shiqu 鄭師渠 has recently pointed out, the term *guocui* 國粹 had a special meaning in the early 1900s. The term might have been a loaned word from the Japanese *kuokusui*, but it referred not only to “the preservation of national essence” in general, but also to preserving a particular kind of Chinese cultural heritage that would help integrate twentieth-century China

into the modern world. The goal of the *Guocui* group, according to Zheng, was not to turn the clock back to a bygone era, but to move China forward by revitalizing a select Chinese cultural heritage.¹

Indeed, in the historical writings published in *Guocui xuebao* from 1905 to 1912, an important theme was to identify the particular kind of Chinese cultural heritage that would usher the country into the twentieth-century. For the *Guocui* historians, that particular kind of Chinese cultural heritage was specific in time and content. Temporally speaking, it was a system of cultural practices developed prior to the formation of bureaucratic empire under the First Emperor of Qin in 221 B.C.E. Viewing Zhou feudalism (1050-256 B.C.E.) as a “golden age” of Chinese history, the *Guocui* historians considered what had happened in China since the Qin unification as a “Dark Age.”² The “Dark Age” of China included two elements. One was the centralization of power in the hands of the emperor who was assisted by bureaucrats trained in Confucian orthodoxy and certified by the civil service examinations.³ The other was the acceleration of this centralization of imperial power when foreign ethnic groups like the Mongols and the Manchus ruled China.⁴ By dividing Chinese history into two parts – one being the norm and the other the deviant – the *Guocui* historians argued that to revitalize the pre-Qin cultural heritage would be to recover the “true” Chinese political system. It would involve the abolition of the imperial system and the expulsion of foreign rulers. Perhaps too broad and racially prejudiced from today’s perspective, the *Guocui* historians’ interpretation of Chinese history was to support their opposition against absolute monarchy and political oppression.⁵

There were reasons for the *Guocui* historians to consider Zhou feudalism as the “golden age” of Chinese history. Known in history as a time when the leaders of feudal states were politically powerful and the men of letters were the custodians of truth, for the *Guocui* historians this period represented a historical precedent where local autonomy and independent thinking were valued and protected amidst efforts to unify China. To drive home their point,

¹ Zheng 1997: 111-139.

² Deng 1905a.

³ Deng 1905b.

⁴ Huang 1905a.

⁵ For discussions of the *Guocui* group’s anti-absolutism and anti-Manchism, see Tang Zhijun 1989: 316-325; Ding and Chen 1995: 341-356.

the *Guocui* historians focused on the competing schools of thought during the Eastern Zhou period (770 - 256 B.C.E.), or the *xianqin zhuzi* 先秦諸子 (various thinkers of the pre-Qin period).⁶ For them, the study of pre-Qin schools of thought was not to question the authority of Confucianism. Although Confucius was now considered one of the many philosophers who made their mark in that intellectually vibrant period, he was still the progenitor of the dominant school of thought that would shape Chinese culture in centuries to come. Rather, their study of pre-Qin schools of thought was designed to prove that there had been a wide variety of intellectual resources in ancient China. In their opinion, these intellectual resources were essential to the twentieth-century Chinese quest for modernity.

In addition, in explaining the rise of these competing schools of thought, the *Guocui* historians focused on the expansion of the educated elite during the Eastern Zhou period, when scholars in the imperial court passed on their textual knowledge to the “masses” (*minjian* 民間).⁷ Certainly, in the context of the 1900s, the *Guocui* historians did not take the “masses” to mean the lower classes or the completely disenfranchised. Rather, what they had in mind were the men of letters who either did not have official positions in the Zhou court or did not come from major aristocratic families. Eager to match events in Chinese history with those in European history, the *Guocui* historians compared this Eastern Zhou expansion of the educated elite with the socio-political changes in fifteenth century Europe, when the Catholic Church lost its monopoly in education to secular universities.⁸ The comparison may be far-fetched; nevertheless the point that the *Guocui* historians wanted to make is clear. They believed that they were part of a drastic social and political change similar to that experienced by European humanists during the Renaissance. Like the Renaissance humanists, they thought that they were witnessing the collapse of the old orthodoxy and the rise of a learned community.

⁶ Liu Guanghan 1905, 1906a, Deng 1905a.

⁷ Liu Guanghan 1906b, Deng 1908.

⁸ Xu 1905, Deng 1905c.

The Rebirth of Ancient Studies

Among the *Guocui* historians, Deng Shi 鄧實 (1877-1945?) made elaborate comparisons between the revival of the pre-Qin cultural practices and the Renaissance humanists' recovery of Greek and Roman literature.⁹ To make the parallel look indisputable, he stressed the theme of "rebirth," the root meaning of renaissance. He called the recovery of pre-Qin cultural practices "the rebirth of ancient studies" (*guxue fuxing* 古學復興). "Just as Europeans underwent their rebirth of ancient studies in the fifteenth century," he wrote, "the Chinese experienced their rebirth of ancient studies in the twentieth century."¹⁰ To make the comparison even more compelling, he took pains to match events in Chinese history with those in European history, assuring that his readers would see a direct correspondence between the Renaissance humanists and the early twentieth-century Chinese thinkers. For example, he compared the pre-Qin thinkers with the Greek philosophers, the burning of books by the First Emperor of Qin with the destruction of Roman libraries by the Arabs, and the rise of Confucianism in the Han Dynasty with the supremacy of Catholicism during the Medieval Period.¹¹ He emphasized that the key to the Renaissance humanists' success in transforming Europe into the land of modern science, technology and industry was their "rebirth of ancient studies." Therefore, he urged twentieth-century Chinese to follow the humanists' footsteps in making the same transformation in their country by recovering the long lost cultural heritage of the pre-Qin period.¹²

Similarly, Liu Shippei 劉師培 (1884-1919) also argued for a rebirth of ancient studies in twentieth-century China. In 1905, in an article serialized over six months in *Guocui xuebao*, he gave an account of various kinds of learning during the Eastern Zhou period. In that article, he examined more than a dozen types of learning that supposedly appeared in pre-Qin China, including psychology, ethics, logic, sociology, religion, law, mathematics, military,

⁹ Besides Deng Shi, Xu Shouwei and Liu Shippei (publishing under the name Liu Guanghan) also drew parallels between pre-Qin China and the Renaissance. See Xu 1905, Liu Guanghan 1906a, 1906b.

¹⁰ Deng 1905c: 1024.

¹¹ Deng 1905c: 1024.

¹² Deng 1905c: 1028-1030.

education, natural science and fine arts.¹³ In describing these different types of learning, he expanded the scope of “learning” far beyond what used to be prescribed in the conventional fourfold division of scholarship – classics (*jing* 經), history (*shi* 史), philosophy (*zi* 子), and belles-lettres (*ji* 集). In addition, he made clear that there was not only a wide variety of intellectual activities in the pre-Qin period, but also a close compatibility between those pre-Qin intellectual activities and modern forms of learning.

This compatibility between the pre-Qin intellectual activities and modern learning led Liu to conclude that China’s modernization relied as much on learning from the West as on reviving the pre-Qin cultural practices. To drive home his point, he did what Deng Shi had done in reminding his readers of the Renaissance humanists’ achievements in recovering classical learning. But unlike Deng Shi, he saw more a parallel between the Renaissance humanists and the pre-Qin thinkers than a parallel between the Renaissance humanists and contemporary Chinese. He wrote: “In the past, in Europe the church had total control over schools. Since the fifteenth century the church lost its power, and the masses [*minshu* 民庶] were given the opportunity to learn. In comparing what happened in Europe with what we find in Chinese documents, we gain a new perspective [on Zhou learning]. During the [Western] Zhou period, officials monopolized learning. But after the capital of the Zhou was moved to the east, the imperial court lost its authority, giving the talented individuals an opportunity to develop their own schools of thought.”¹⁴

Apparently Deng Shi and Liu Shippei did not share the same view on how the Renaissance should be compared with China. Nevertheless, both of them valued the symbolism of the Renaissance as the rebirth of ancient studies triggered by an expansion in the size of the educated elite. For them, the rebirth of ancient studies had to be accompanied by an expansion of the learned community. As mentioned above, for the two historians the “rebirth of ancient studies” meant the revival of the wide range of intellectual possibilities that had existed during the pre-Qin period. To achieve that goal, there had to be a drastic reduction in government control over education, assembly, and the means of circulating ideas. Instead of the government controlling

¹³ Liu Quangan [Liu Shippei], “Zhoumo xueshu shi zongxu,” *Guocui xuebao* 1-4 (1st-4th lunar month 1905).

¹⁴ Liu Guangan 1905: 69.

learning, it should be the scholars who decided what to learn and how to learn. At the same time, for the two historians the “expansion of the educated elite” meant an increase in the opportunity for the lower echelon of the educated class to receive higher education and to participate in public life. They regarded the outburst of intellectual creativity during the Eastern Zhou period as a direct result of knowledge being passed on from the small number of select scholars in the Zhou court to hundreds if not thousands of the educated elite outside the Zhou court.

Hence, by frequently making references to the Renaissance, Deng and Liu expressed implicitly their demand for a new sociopolitical order in twentieth-century China. Similar to the Catholic Church’s loss of its monopoly in education to secular universities in fifteenth-century Europe, they anticipated a transfer of power from the central government to the learned community during their own times. They envisioned a new sociopolitical order in which educated people would have the right to express their views freely, to assemble on their own initiative, and to challenge the government if they so desired. To achieve this goal, they saw the absolute monarchy as an obstacle. In order to build a more open and pluralistic sociopolitical system, they believed that the absolute rule of the Manchus had to go.

National Learning versus Learning for the Emperor

Comparatively speaking, Deng Shi was more forthcoming than Liu Shipai in spelling out his opposition to absolutism and the Manchu dynasty. As a founding member of the Society for Preserving National Studies (*Guoxue baocun hui* 國學保存會), which financed the publication of *Guocui xuebao*, Deng wrote many short essays presenting the views of the Society. Usually appearing at the front of the journal under the title “The View of Society” (*sheshuo* 社說), his essays were full of historical references and classical imagery, but they were sharp and clear in their political messages. For instance, in his essay “On the True Meaning of National Learning” (*guoxue zhenlun* 國學真論), he distinguished “national learning” (*guoxue* 國學) from “learning for the emperor” (*junxue* 君學).

With great pain and regret, I have discovered that there was no national learning in China. By national learning, I mean the kind of learning different from that sponsored by the emperor. Since the Qin and the Han, the goal of learning in our Divine Continent was to serve the emperor. Neither was there a love of the nation, nor a learning to serve the nation. Why was that so? [The reason was that scholars] only knew to serve the emperor. They did not know that they needed to serve the nation.¹⁵

Deng made a categorical distinction between nation and dynasty that was similar to what Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929) had argued for in his famous 1902 essay “The New Historiography” (*xinshi xue* 新史學).¹⁶ For the two historians, dynasties might come and go, but the nation was always the basis upon which the Chinese built their collective identity. Whereas a dynasty was the private possession of the imperial family, the nation was the collective enterprise of all people living in the land. While a dynasty made its presence known through the absolute power of the imperial throne, the nation manifested itself in the loyalty and sacrifice of its citizens.

Despite the fact that Liang Qichao and Deng Shi shared this concern about the need to distinguish nation from dynasty, they employed different strategies in making this distinction. While Liang focused on how history was written to clarify the distinction between dynasty and nation, Deng concentrated on the forms of learning. For Liang, the fundamental difference between dynasty and nation was illustrated clearly in the contrast between dynastic history and national history. The former was a genealogy of the imperial family, and the latter was a history of the collective whole of the entire country.¹⁷ For Deng, the distinction between dynasty and nation was best shown in the difference between the learning for the emperor and the national learning. According to him, the “learning for the emperor” was to lend support to the imperial system, and its goal was to offer legitimacy to the absolute rule of the monarch. In contrast, the “national learning” was a

¹⁵ Deng 1907b: 3291.

¹⁶ Liang 1902. For a discussion of Liang’s new historiography, see Tang Xiaobing 1996: 1-79.

¹⁷ Liang 1902: 3.

crystallization of the critical thinking and creative imagination of the public-minded historians, who articulated the collective identity of the Chinese people through a narration of the past.

Their different strategies notwithstanding, Liang and Deng both used the distinction of dynasty and nation to underscore the need to develop a public spirit (*gong* 公) among Chinese citizens to counter their pursuit of private interests (*si* 私).¹⁸ For Liang, the new national history would be a narrative of the “collective effort” (*qunli* 群力), “collective wisdom” (*qunzhi* 群智), and “collective virtue” (*qunde* 群德) of the Chinese nation. In his mind, this narrative of the collectivity of the Chinese nation would instill its readers with a desire to “love the collective” (*ai qi qun* 愛其群) and to “perfect the interest of the collective” (*shan qi qun* 善其群).¹⁹ In the same vein, Deng argued that the goal of national learning was not merely to recover the long forgotten pre-Qin Chinese cultural practices, but also to change the mode of thinking of the educated elite. According to him, since the establishment of the imperial system in the second century B.C.E., the educated elite had lost their desire to serve the public. Faithfully serving the emperor, they perpetuated the political hegemony of the absolute monarchy in return for wealth and power. As an attempt to call on the educated elite of his time to change their mode of thinking, Deng compiled the writings of those few lone souls in history who had made a tremendous sacrifice for the collective interest. Beginning in 1906 and continuing for over two years, he serialized their writings in *Guocui xuebao* under the title “The Collected Writings of Those with a Sense of Righteousness” (*zhengqi ji* 正氣集).²⁰ Included in this “collected writings” were those by military generals like Yue Fei 岳飛 (1103-1142) and Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236-1283), who made the ultimate sacrifice in fighting against the Mongols during the Song period.

History of the Yellow Race

In contemporary studies of the 1911 Revolution, much attention has been paid to Huang Jie’s 黃節 (1873-1935) highly controversial *History of the Yellow*

¹⁸ On the meaning of *gong* during the late Qing period, see Cheng 1976.

¹⁹ Liang 1902: 3.

²⁰ Deng 1906-1908.

Race (*huangshi* 黃史), which was serialized in *Guocui xuebao* from 1905 to 1908. Thus far the discussion of his work has focused on his unabashed racial prejudice.²¹ Certainly there is no doubt that Huang intended his work to be a history of the Yellow race (namely, the Han), who, he believed, were the true masters of China by virtue of being the descendents of the Yellow Emperor. It is also true that Huang intended his work to be a call to arms against the Manchus and other non-Han ethnic groups in China. For this reason, in Huang's historical narrative, one finds ample evidence of extreme racial nationalism. For instance, he regarded everything that had happened in China since the fall of the Han dynasty as pathetic. Misery arose not only because of the rise of the absolute monarchy, but also because of the subjugation of the Yellow race by alien rulers from the steppe. According to Huang, since the fall of Han, the Yellow race had been badly treated by the Xianbei during the Wei-Jin period (220-589), the Mongols during the Yuan period (1276-1368), and the Manchus since the seventeenth century.²² At times, Huang's racial nationalism led him to speak disparagingly against non-Han races, such as when he described the people in countries surrounding China as descending from animals.²³

Huang's extreme racial nationalism notwithstanding, his *History of the Yellow Race* was also a call to oppose absolute monarchy by recovering pre-Qin cultural practices. In this respect, *History of the Yellow Race* was indeed part of the "rebirth of ancient learning" to bring China forward through recovering the past. Divided into ten books (*shu* 書), three charts (*biao* 表), eight essays (*ji* 記), ten investigative essays (*kaoji* 考紀), one hundred and eighty biographies (*lie-zhuan* 列傳) and two appendixes (*zaiji* 載記), *History of Yellow Race* was massive and only portions of it were published in *Guocui xuebao*. Yet, in those parts that were published, we have a glimpse into what Huang wanted to achieve in writing this massive work.

In his "Book on Rituals and Customs" (*lisu shu* 禮俗書), for instance, we find Huang making skillful use of historical evidence to oppose absolute monarchy. On the surface, the title of this chapter appeared to suggest that its subject matter was merely the rituals and customs of the Yellow race. But, in

²¹ Laurence Schneider 1976, Dikötter 1992: 119-120.

²² Huang 1905b.

²³ Huang 1905c.

actuality, much of Huang's discussion on rituals and customs was directed toward contemporary political practice. For instance, in the section on "putting an emperor on the throne" (*lijun* 立君), he argued that in the pre-Qin period, the procedure for putting an emperor on the throne was rather open, not unlike that advocated by Montesquieu and Rousseau in eighteenth-century Europe. In contrast, according to Huang, the accepted rigid Chinese procedure was a late creation, founded after the imperial autocracy had been established during the Han period. With this comparison, he made the point that "the disappearance of the ancient rituals was the main reason for the rise of absolute monarchy and the separation between the ruler and the ruled."²⁴ Another example is the section on "kneeling before the emperor" (*baigui* 拜跪). In that section, Huang was even more explicit in criticizing absolute monarchy. He argued that during the Zhou period, there was no practice of officials kneeling before the emperor to receive imperial orders. What the officials did was to stand in front of the imperial chamber to make a bow to the emperor. According to Huang, the accepted procedure of officials kneeling before the emperor appeared during the Qin period. This change of practice led him to conclude that "the change of rituals and customs" was due to the rise of the "absolutist system."²⁵ In these two examples, while Huang's description of the alleged pre-Qin practices may not be historically accurate, nevertheless his intention is clear. He used the alleged cultural practices in the pre-Qin period to critique the system of absolute monarchy.

The Xueheng and the Southeastern University

In current scholarship, historians associated with *Xueheng* are considered to be an extension of the *Guocui* group. The two groups are viewed as part of Chinese cultural conservatism, which began in the 1900s and continued in earnest in Republican China.²⁶ Certainly both groups had much in common, such as their admiration for ancient Chinese literary culture, their stress on continuity within change, and their close personal ties. Nevertheless, they were different in four

²⁴ Huang 1905d: 304-306.

²⁵ Huang 1905d: 308-312.

²⁶ Furth 1976.

areas. These differences deserve our special attention today as we re-examine the social and intellectual changes in early twentieth-century China.

The first difference between the *Guocui* group and the *Xueheng* group was in their vision of the Chinese nation. For the *Guocui* group, as mentioned above, their main concern was to win the public's support to topple the system of absolute monarchy symbolized by the Qing dynasty. To mobilize the Han Chinese, the *Guocui* group advocated a rebirth of ancient studies of the pre-Qin period and a sharp racial consciousness against alien rulers. In contrast, in the 1920s and 1930s, the *Xueheng* group envisioned "China" as the product of a communal bond developed over a long period of acculturation and socialization. Responding to the needs of Republican China, the abiding concern of the *Xueheng* group was no longer to mobilize the masses to revolt against the monarchical system, but to articulate a common identity for all Chinese. Instead of racial nationalism, culture (an ambiguous but inclusive category) became the primary basis for the *Xueheng* group to define the Chinese nation.²⁷ A prime example of this shift from racial nationalism to cultural nationalism was the writing of the cultural history of China, which we will discuss in a moment.

Another important difference between the two groups was the discourses in which they participated. While the *Guocui* group was involved primarily in a political debate on ending the absolutism of the Qing dynasty, the *Xueheng* group was engaged in a cultural and literary debate on defining China's uniqueness in her quest for modernity. Beginning in 1917 with Hu Shi's call for the replacement of the classical language (*wenyan* 文言) with the vernacular language (*baihua* 白話), the May Fourth New Culture Movement ushered in cultural iconoclasm, subjecting all aspects of Chinese culture to micro-

²⁷ Dikötter (1992) exaggerates the role that race played in the modern Chinese discourse on the nation. By tracing a "discourse on race" in China from 1793 to 1949, he seems to suggest that race was consistently the focus of the Chinese debate for close to two centuries. Certainly, Dikötter is correct in pointing out that race was crucial to the revolutionary discourse before and shortly after the 1911 Revolution. But by the mid-1910s, race was no longer as important to Chinese leaders and intellectuals in contemplating a nation based on multi-racial coalition. In this regard, Liu and the *Critical Review* group are good counter-examples to Dikötter's picture of a modern Chinese discourse on the nation.

scopic scrutiny.²⁸ Following the eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophes, the New Culture intellectuals (such as Chen Duxiu (陳獨秀, 1879-1942) made a categorical distinction between modernity and tradition.²⁹ They regarded modernity as a distinct epoch characterized by the triumph of Reason and the spread of Democracy. They understood modernity as both a self-awakening of human beings in their power of critical reason, and a social-political emancipation that allowed the individual to make decisions for his or her benefit. In contrast, tradition was seen as a prison-house where human rationality was debilitated and the cult of subordination was promoted. With its hierarchical, patriarchal, and elitist social structure, tradition crippled human creativity and destroyed individuality. For the New Culture intellectuals, the march to modernity had to be accompanied by a rejection of tradition. To be modern, one had to overcome one's past in order to join the *Esprit General* – the universal principle of humanity based on Reason.³⁰

Responding to the New Culture iconoclasts' attack on the Chinese tradition, the *Xueheng* group argued that twentieth-century Chinese should join the modern world by linking the past to the present. For them, the Chinese tradition was a complex body of learning that could not be summarized in a few abstract terms like hierarchy, patriarchy, and elitism. Nor could Western culture be described in such abstract terms as Reason and Democracy. Instead of making an unreflective categorical distinction between past and present, East and West, and the traditional and the modern, the scholars of *Xueheng* urged their readers to take time to learn more about the diverse elements in both cultures.³¹

This balanced approach to learning was given a concrete expression in "A Statement by the Critical Review" (1923), in which the editors of the journal explained in elegant English the benefits of having an equal command of Chinese and Western learning.

²⁸ Hu Shi 1917.

²⁹ Tse-tsung Chow 1960: 269-370, Lin 1979: 3-55, Schwarcz 1986: 12-54.

³⁰ Schwarcz 1986: 1-11, Lee 1991, Li 1987: 7-49.

³¹ Shen 1984: 1-121.

There is a vast storehouse of Chinese philosophy, literature, art, etc., produced by our people in the course of thousands of years, a monument to the glory and achievement of our race. But the material of this great body of learning is deplorably so scattered that it is by no means easy for any average modern man to find his way through the labyrinth and to comprehend it as a whole. ... The Chinese learning, if it is to be preserved, must be intelligently studied and treated with the methods of modern scholarship and with reference to the civilization of the West. Many foreign scholars have done admirable work along this line; but, it is believed, the chief burden rests upon the Chinese people of this generation, who are the inheritors of that treasury of learning. However, this kind of work could not be done without direct acquaintance and profound erudition, a well-trained and critical mind, and a delicate and painstaking care, added to a true love and devotional enthusiasm for our civilization.³²

In responding to the challenge of May Fourth iconoclasm, the *Xueheng* approach to learning was substantially different from that of the *Guocui* group. On the surface, in reference to the need for studying the great body of Chinese learning, the *Xueheng* editors appeared to be harking back to the *Guocui* theme of preserving the national essence. They seemed to be arguing for the need to study the ancient classics in order to highlight China's cultural uniqueness. But the "study of the great body of Chinese learning" in *Xueheng* was quite different from the "rebirth of ancient studies" in *Guocui*. First, for the *Xueheng* group, the scope of the great body of Chinese learning was broader, encompassing not just the pre-Qin period but all periods in Chinese history. Moreover, this study would be carried out with modern methods and informed by current Western scholarship. More than a rekindling of interest in ancient practices, the *Xueheng's* study of Chinese learning was in effect an integration of what the East and the West could offer to twentieth-century Chinese.

The third difference between the two groups was their social role as an educated elite. As a result of the changes in the educational arena after the 1911

³² "A Statement by the Critical Review," *Xueheng*, no. 13 (January 1923), 1814.

Revolution, most of the members of the *Xueheng* group were professional teachers associated with the newly established National Southeastern University (*Guoli dongnan daxue* 國立東南大學) in Nanjing. They were members of an academic institution recognized by the Beiyang government in Beijing and financed by local communities in Jiangsu (particularly the Jiangsu Provincial Educational Association).³³ With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that their new status as professional teachers was both a blessing and a curse. Comparing to the *Guocui* group, they were blessed with the opportunity to have a direct impact on generation after generation of bright students enrolled in Southeastern University. They could disseminate their ideas quickly through teaching and publication. Among the younger members of the *Xueheng* group, many were former students of the university or its predecessor, Nanjing Normal High School (*Nanjing gaodeng shifan xuexiao* 南京高等師範學校). The prime examples are Miao Fenglin 繆鳳林 (1898-1959), Zhang Qiyun 張其昀 (1901-1985) and Jing Changji 景昌極 (1903-1982), all of whom graduated from the university in the early 1920s. At the same time, however, by confining their activities to campus, the *Xueheng* group had limited contact with non-academic communities, which hurt them in terms of fund-raising. Unlike the *Guocui* group, who raised funds from social celebrities in Shanghai and neighboring areas, the *Xueheng* group had to rely on the resources generated by Southeastern University. The *Guocui* group, in addition to publishing their journal, was able to support an academy for classical learning and the publication of a book series.³⁴ By contrast, the fortunes of the *Xueheng* group were directly tied to the top administrators at Southeastern University. When the university administrators supporting the *Xueheng* cause lost power, the *Xueheng* group had difficulty in continuing to publish its journal. Unfortunately, this happened in 1925 when the university president Guo

³³ Schwintzer 1992: 583-590, Yeh 1990: 119-120.

³⁴ In 1907, the Society for Preserving National Studies planned to establish the *Guocui xuetang* 國粹學堂 (Academy for National Studies) offering courses on classical studies, philology, ethics, psychology, philosophy, religion, laws, sociology, history, archaeology and so on. See Deng 1907a. For the lists of donors in support of the Society for Preserving National Studies, see *Guocui xuebao* 38 (1st lunar month 1908): 137-138, 39 (2nd lunar month 1908): 269, 40 (3rd month 1908): 391, 41 (4th lunar month 1908): 517, 42 (5th lunar month 1908): 647. The Society for Preserving National Studies also published or re-printed books under the title “Shenzhou guoguang ji” 神州國光集 (Collection of works on the national glory of the Divine Continent). See the inaugural statement on launching the “Shenzhou guoguang ji” in *Guocui xuebao* 38: 139.

Bingwen 郭秉文 (1880-1969) lost his job due to a campus dispute. After Guo's forced departure, many leading members of the *Xueheng* group left the university, and following their exodus, the editorial headquarters of the journal was moved to Beijing.³⁵

The fourth difference between the two groups was the educational backgrounds of their members. While the *Xueheng* group suffered from their limited financial autonomy, they were superior to the *Guocui* group in their cosmopolitanism. During Guo Bingwen's tenure as the first president of Southeastern University (1921-1925), the university was blessed with the arrival of a number of foreign-trained returned students, including Mei Guangdi 梅光迪 (1890-1945), Tang Yongtong 湯用彤 (1893-1964), Wu Mi 吳宓 (1894-1978), Hu Xiansu 胡先驕 (1894-1968), and Li Sichun 李思純 (1893-1960). Mei, Tang, Wu and Hu were all returned students from the United States, with Master's or Ph.D. degrees from major universities like Harvard and the University of California at Berkeley. Li Sichun had studied in Paris and specialized in European historical and literary theory. Even school administrators like Guo Jingwen and Liu Boming 劉伯明 (1887-1923, the first dean of academic affairs of Southeastern University), were returned student from the United States. Guo majored in education at Columbia University, and Liu studied philosophy at Northwestern University. These returned students had first-hand experience of the Western world and a solid command of current Western scholarship. A far cry from the members of the *Guocui* group, who could not read any Western languages and had to rely on translation to learn about the West, these returned students knew several European languages, and some of them spoke and wrote English fluently. In January 1923, to give their journal a cosmopolitan appearance, the editors of the *Xueheng* published "A Statement by the Critical Review" in English. From then on, a table of contents in English appeared in every issue.

Among these returned students, Wu Mi was the leader in introducing Western scholarship to China. A student of the New Humanist scholar Irving Babbitt (1865-1933) at Harvard University,³⁶ he was a specialist in European

³⁵ Schwintzer 1992: 667-673, Zhuge 1989.

³⁶ Born in Dayton, Ohio, Irving Babbitt was a leader of New Humanism from the 1910s to the 1930s in opposition to the changes in higher education in the United States, including the elective system, vocationalism, the service ideal, and the German

classical studies and literature. After returning to China in 1921, he devoted himself to introducing New Humanism into China.³⁷ As the chief editor of *Xueheng*, he frequently published translations of Babbitt's writings, including his own translation of Babbitt's introduction to *Democracy and Leadership*.³⁸ He also published translations of major European classics, including the Platonic dialogues, Aristotle's *Ethics* and Dante's *Inferno*, which were the basis for Babbitt's New Humanism.

Along with these returned students, many members of the *Xueheng* group were steeped in late Qing classical studies. Reflecting the education philosophy of Guo Bingwen and Liu Boming, the *Xueheng* group professed to study both the most advanced learning in the West and the important legacies of Chinese culture. As a testament to this balanced approach to learning, the *Xueheng* circle was a mixed group of scholars, consisting of both experts of Western arts and science and experts of Chinese classical scholarship and poetry. A prime example of the latter group was Liu Yizheng 柳詒徵 (1880-1956). A protégé of the bibliographic scholar Miao Quansun 繆荃孫 (1844-1919), he wrote in 1904 one of the earliest history textbooks for the new Chinese school system, *A Brief Historical Account of Different Periods* (*Lidai shilue* 歷代史略). Basing his book on *A General History of China* (*Shina tsushi*) by the Japanese sinologist Naka Michiyo 那珂通世 (1851-1908), he gave an account of Chinese history as a continuous growth from a tribal society to a multi-ethnic empire. He joined the history faculty at Nanjing Normal High School in 1915, and stayed on to teach after the Normal School was turned into the Southeastern University in 1921. As an assistant editor of *Xueheng*, his writings appeared in every issue of the journal, covering a wide range of topics from the uniqueness of Chinese culture to the social and political problems of 1920s China.³⁹

tradition of research institutions. Along with Paul Elmer More, Norman Foerster and Stuart Pratt Sherman, Babbitt raised an intellectual battle against what he considered to be the rise of plutocracy and materialism in the United States at the expense of permanent humanistic value. Specializing in the world of ancient Greek and Buddhism, he taught at Harvard University for decades and shaped the views of many of his students, including Chinese students like Wu Mi, Mei Guangdi and Tang Yongtong. For a summary of New Humanism, see Hoeverler 1977. For a biography of Babbitt, see Panichas 1981: vii-xxxix.

³⁷ Shen 1984: 122-210.

³⁸ Wu 1924.

³⁹ For a biography of Liu Yizheng, see Sun 1993.

To a great extent, the diverse background of the two editors of *Xueheng* exemplified the goal of the journal. As a returned student, Wu Mi personified the need for learning the most advanced knowledge of the West. As a classical scholar trained in the Qing philological tradition, Liu Yizheng symbolized the need for learning the best of the Chinese tradition. The mutual admiration of these two men and their enduring partnership in editing *Xueheng* showed that a balanced approach to Chinese and Western learning was not only desirable but also plausible.⁴⁰

History of Chinese Culture

In terms of historical writings, a key work published in *Xueheng* between 1925 and 1929 was the serialization of Liu Yizheng's *History of Chinese Culture* (*Zhongguo wenhua shi* 中國文化史). Liu wrote his work first as lecture notes and then turned them into a book manuscript. Like the years-long serialization of Huang Jie's *History of the Yellow Race* in *Guocui xuebao*, the serialization of Liu's *History of Chinese Culture* gave *Xueheng* a sense of continuity. This sense of continuity was particularly needed after the headquarters of *Xueheng* was relocated to Beijing in 1925, and the publication of the journal became increasingly irregular after 1927. Despite these changes and interruptions, readers would always find a portion of Liu's *History of Chinese Culture* printed in each issue of the journal.

One way to see the difference between the *Guocui* group and the *Xueheng* group is to compare their historical visions. As discussed above, the *Guocui* historians divided Chinese history into two parts – the “Golden Age” of the pre-Qin China and the “Dark Age” of post-Qin China. To serve the purposes of political propaganda, they deliberately utilized a black-and-white picture in narrating the past, idolizing the pre-Qin period on the one hand and demonizing all the other periods on the other. In contrast, Liu Yizheng adopted a tripartite periodization that was patterned after the European division of history into ancient, medieval, and modern periods. As a whole, *History of Chinese Culture* was divided into three sections. Section one began with the “three founders of

⁴⁰ To express his admiration for Liu Yizheng, Wu Mi (1998, 2: 275) wrote a poem in 1924 in classical Chinese detailing his friendship with Liu. Beginning in 1925, Wu addressed Liu as “Liu Gong” 劉公 (Illustrious Master Liu) in his diaries. See Wu 1998: 2:250.

early China” (Yao, Shun, and Yu), with special attention paid to the great flood that Yu allegedly stopped. The section ended with the collapse of the Han Dynasty in 220 and focused on how the people of China established a unique culture by creating a self-conscious community out of tribal states. Section two covered the period from the second century to the fourteenth century, describing how Indian Buddhism was introduced into China and how it became part of the fabric of Chinese religious and social life. Section three began with the fourteenth century and ended with the 1911 Revolution. It described the introduction of Western science and technology into China during the Ming and Qing periods, emphasizing the need for the Chinese to learn from the West and the necessity to endure cultural conflicts in the modern age.

Liu’s adoption of this tripartite periodization might well be a sign of his Westernization, but historiographically his attempt at dividing time into three equal portions indicates his interest in narrating the past as a continuous process of change. Certainly, in his narrative, pre-Qin China was still the model that all Chinese should emulate. But unlike the *Guocui* historians, he realized that time moved on. In his mind, regardless of how splendid the country was under the “three founders of early China,” China had changed since then and it was pointless to turn back the clock. An example of Liu’s notion of progress is his view on post-Qin China. Quite different from the *Guocui* historians, Liu did not see what had happened after the Qin’s unification as totally wretched. Instead, he saw innovation and creativity in many areas, particularly in respect to mixing foreign and indigenous elements. For him, there might have been an original form of Chinese culture in the period of the “Three Dynasties” (Xia, Shang, and Zhou), but since then new and foreign elements had been integrated into that culture in response to the new circumstances in the country. For instance, the first major dialogue between the Chinese and foreigners occurred when Indian Buddhism was introduced into China from the second to the eighth century. This “Indianization of China,” according to Liu, exposed a major weakness in Chinese culture, namely, its lack of religious sentiment.⁴¹ Challenged by Indian culture, the Chinese had to develop their religious views and expand their aesthetic sensibility while preserving their this-worldly approach to life.⁴² The second dialogue took place when the Jesuits arrived in China in the fourteenth

⁴¹ Liu Yizheng 1988: 345.

⁴² Liu Yizheng 1988: 390-421.

century. Armed with their advanced knowledge in astronomy and armaments, they exposed yet another weakness in Chinese culture – its by then technological underdevelopment. This “European technological challenge,” according to Liu, forced the Chinese to re-examine their educational system and socio-political order in order to keep pace with global developments.⁴³

What Liu presented in this narrative of cultural dialogue was a dynamic picture of the Chinese constantly engaged in recreating themselves. On this score, it is clear that he was responding to the New Culture movement of the 1910s and 1920s rather than resuscitating the *Guocui* movement of the 1900s. In discussing the uniqueness of Chinese culture, for instance, he did not imply that it was the best culture in the world. On the contrary, on many occasions he pointed out the weaknesses in Chinese culture and hinted at the need for learning from abroad. In highlighting the special nature of Chinese culture, his goal was not to promote extreme racial nationalism as Huang Jie had done in the 1900s. Instead, his goal was to remind his fellow countrymen of the 1920s that besides looking to the West as a source of inspiration, they should also look for positive elements in their own culture.

The Great Flood and the Beginning of the Chinese Nation

As for what the twentieth-century Chinese should learn from the past, Liu’s answer was clear and simple: the symbolism of *Zhongguo* 中國 (Middle Kingdom). He observed that before the great flood around the time of “the three founders of early China,” there were only tribes in China with separate identities, some perhaps even with different ethnic backgrounds. But a collective consciousness developed when widespread flooding occasioned a “big grouping” (*daqun* 大群) bringing formerly disparate tribes into a confederation of communities to organize human labor, distribute resources, and regulate the transmission of property.⁴⁴ Due to the colossal task of taming the Yellow River and the constant need to maintain the system of irrigation, the confederation later expanded and became a permanent form of social and political organization in China. Over time, that tribal confederation, originally set up temporarily for flood control,

⁴³ Liu Yizheng 1988: 675-695, 749-897.

⁴⁴ Liu Yizheng 1988: 20-24.

turned out to be the foundation of the “Chinese national character” (*guomin xing* 國民性).⁴⁵

For Liu, this human saga of taming the “great flood” of the Yellow River elucidated the meaning of *Zhongguo*.⁴⁶ According to him, since the Chinese collective identity arose from a loose confederation combating river flooding, the communal bond reflected that historical fact. Hence, the “character of the Chinese nation” must be a commitment to both collective unity and local autonomy.⁴⁷ Seemingly contradictory, this dual nature of the “character of the Chinese nation” played itself out in accordance with the needs of the times. In times of flooding or war, the commitment to unity would take precedence over the commitment to autonomy. In times of peace and prosperity, the commitment to autonomy would prevail over the commitment to unity. Like *yin* and *yang*, the two commitments are co-existent and inter-dependent; they give rise to each other and each exists because of the other. For Liu, there nothing better encapsulated this dual commitment to both unity and autonomy than the name given to the nation, *Zhongguo*.

At the time [of taming the river], Tang and Yu [i.e., Yao and Shun] named the nation with the word *zhong*. The word was used to check the human propensity to adopt extreme positions. It served as a reminder that human beings ought to find the middle ground in dealing with things at hand. ... Now whenever we utter the name of our nation, we remind ourselves of our national character.⁴⁸

In contrast to Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 (1868-1936), who gave a restrictive racial and territorial definition of *zhongguo* in the essay “On the Meaning of the Republic of China” (*Zhonghua minguo jie* 中華民國解) (1907), Liu developed a

⁴⁵ Liu Yizheng 1988: 32-37.

⁴⁶ Liu Yizheng was not the only one interested in the historical meaning of the “great flood.” Since the “great flood” is closely related to the “three founders of early China” and the geographic boundaries of ancient China (e.g., the concept of “nine realms,” *jiuzhou*), many scholars in the 1920s (including Gu Jiegang and Ding Wenjiang) paid special attention to the authenticity of the “great flood” and the classical text that allegedly depicted the “great flood,” *Yugong* 禹貢. See Gu 1923: 206-230.

⁴⁷ Liu Yizheng 1988: 32-33.

⁴⁸ Liu Yizheng 1988: 33.

more flexible definition of the term.⁴⁹ Instead of rendering *zhongguo* as the hegemonic kingdom located at the center of the universe with well-defined boundaries, he took it to mean more broadly a collective commitment to balancing competing claims. For him, *zhong* meant finding the middle ground between two opposite positions, rather than being at the center of things as Zhang Taiyan had suggested.⁵⁰ To prove his point, Liu offered a number of examples. In government, he found the ancient rule by social distinctions an effective way to teach moderation. Known as “ruling the world by allowing the upper and lower garments to hand down” (*chui yishang er tianxia zhi* 垂衣裳而天下治), the rule by social distinctions assigned different names and clothing to people of different social roles. With a specific role to play in society, each person knew his or her limits and the room to maneuver.⁵¹ In transmitting political power, Liu found the story of Yao and Shun yielding power to the most capable person illuminating. For him, the story suggested an ideal ruler who kept the country’s best interests in mind.⁵² In social control, he found the rule of ritual (as opposed to the rule of law) an effective means of regulating rural villages. Because everyone knew each other in a remote village, the rule of ritual encouraged accountability within the village, and at the same time protected the villagers from the unnecessary intrusion of the central government. Furthermore, the rule of ritual provided order to village life through persuasion rather than coercion, common consensus rather than bureaucratic control. It created a congenial yet structured environment in which different walks of life participated in public life.⁵³

⁴⁹ See Zhang Taiyan 1907. For a recent discussion of Zhang Taiyan’s racial definition of China, see Kai-wing Chow 1997.

⁵⁰ By rendering *zhong* as “finding the middle ground,” Liu Yizheng follows Zhu Xi’s 朱熹 (1130-1200) reading in his commentary on the Confucian classic *Zhongyong* (Centrality and Commonality). According to Zhu Xi, *zhong* means “what is not one-sided” (Chan 1963: 97). According to Zhang Qiyun (1925), Liu was one of the first scholars in modern China taking *zhong* to mean the middle ground.

⁵¹ Liu Yizheng 1988: 38-43.

⁵² Liu Yizheng 1988: 49-54.

⁵³ Liu Yizheng 1988: 131-137.

Rule of Ritual and the Autonomy of the Village

In the *History of Chinese Culture* as well as in articles published in *Xueheng*, Liu did not hide his disappointment with the 1911 Revolution. For him, despite the abolition of absolute monarchy, the revolution had created many “anomalies” (*qihuan zhishi* 奇幻之事).⁵⁴ With the establishment of a republican government after the overthrow of the “Manchu autocrats,” the revolution did not bring about a “new China” as the revolutionaries had claimed it would. In fact, things seemed to be getting ever worse. In the *History of Chinese Culture*, Liu pinpointed two phenomena. First, in changing the political system, instead of satisfying the needs of their country, the new Chinese leaders competed to keep pace with recent political development in Europe and America. Simultaneously, they introduced mutually conflicting models such as the presidential system (which gave power to a strong leader) and the parliamentary system (which emphasized consensus). They could not decide whether China needed a political structure based on a strong center or a political structure based on provincial autonomy. As a result, the more political reform took place in the name of protecting the rights of the Chinese citizens, the more dictatorial the Chinese government became.⁵⁵ Second, in transforming Chinese society, the Chinese leaders did not consider whether their changes were compatible with Chinese practice. For example, they introduced the rule of law that went against the Chinese practice of the rule of ritual. Consequently “anomalies” occurred, according to Liu, when the new system made no sense to many ordinary Chinese and quickly turned into a breeding ground for “bureaucratic control” (*guan zhi* 官治) that usurped citizens’ rights.⁵⁶

Liu was particularly concerned about the spread of bureaucratic control. In an article published in *Xueheng*, “Local Government in Ancient China: Government by Moral Character” (*Zhongguo xiangzhi zhi shangde jingsheng* 中國鄉治之尚德精神), he discussed the ancient practice of village self-rule.⁵⁷ He argued that China had for centuries been practicing the rule of ritual (*lizhi* 禮治) based on the morality of human relationships. Such a long tradition of the rule

⁵⁴ Liu Yizheng 1988: 870-871.

⁵⁵ Liu Yizheng 1988: 821-830.

⁵⁶ Liu Yizheng 1988: 831-844.

⁵⁷ *Xueheng* 17 (May 1923), 2305-2315.

of ritual (which Liu also called the rule of virtue, *dezhi* 德治) had created in China both a society without litigation and a collective predilection for compromise. More importantly, despite much discussion about the autocracy of the Chinese emperors and the paternalism of Chinese officials, he argued that the rule of ritual had given many local villages the opportunity to practice self-rule. Certainly the rule of ritual reaffirmed hierarchy, patriarchy, and elitism. Yet, Liu argued, supported by close human relationship and public opinion, the rule of ritual gave rise to a uniquely Chinese way of local governance that was characterized by the rule by elders and a society based on compromise.

In stressing the advantages of the rule of ritual, Liu not only underscored the special characteristics of China, but also identified what he considered to be the main problems of post-1911 China. Accepting that European technological advance had revolutionized the social and political life of humankind, he welcomed changes that had taken place since the 1911 Revolution. For him, the revolution was indeed epoch-making because it replaced the dynastic system with the modern political institution of a nation-state.⁵⁸ But he was disheartened to find that after the 1911 Revolution China had become a nation of extremes. In making changes, the Chinese leaders had been one-sided in almost every respect – privileging central government over local community, the rule of law over the rule of ritual, global trade over economic self-sufficiency, Western ideas over indigenous practices. As a result, according to Liu, imbalance appeared in almost all sectors: the state dictating policy to society, bureaucrats making decisions with no regard to local interests, and resources being directed from the hinterlands to coastal trading ports.⁵⁹

Taking into account of Liu's dissatisfaction with the 1911 Revolution, it is clear that his rendering of *zhongguo* as a nation of moderation was in effect a political statement. In prescribing what he considered to be the Chinese national character, he reminded his countrymen that in modernizing the country's political institutions, they needed to adopt a more balanced approach. Like their ancestors who had striven for a balance between unity and diversity, or centralization and local autonomy, they should do the same in building a new political system. Although there was no need to resurrect

⁵⁸ Liu Yizheng 1988: 821-830.

⁵⁹ Liu Yizheng 1988: 831-874.

the tribal confederation of Yao's and Shun's times, Liu counseled his countrymen not to abandon the ancient goal of forming a union of diverse groups and governance based on consensus. For him, the biggest problem in building a modern nation-state was that the state apparatus ended up subjugating the nation and suppressing its citizens' rights. For this reason, Liu found it imperative to protect village self-rule by reaffirming the Confucian rule of ritual. In describing the rule of ritual, probably Liu idealized an ancient practice found only in books. But, by idealizing the rule of ritual, he called his readers' attention to another way of structuring the society that was less coercive, bureaucratic, and totalizing. By elevating the rule of ritual as an expression of "the psychology of the nation" (*minzu xinli* 民族心理),⁶⁰ he made clear that political modernization in post-1911 China should include the preservation of village autonomy.

PART II: Reorganization of the Nation's Past

"North-South" Competition

In 1923, exactly one year after the inception of *Xueheng* at Southeastern University, a group of historians at Beijing University founded a new journal, *Guoxue jikan* (National Studies Quarterly). Similar to their counterparts in Nanjing, these historians in Beijing enjoyed the privilege of spreading their views quickly to students through teaching. A well-known example is Gu Jiegang's 顧頡剛 (1893-1980) conversion to Hu Shi's historical method after attending his lecture on Chinese philosophy. In his autobiography, Gu tells us that he and other students at Beijing University were "greatly shocked" by Hu Shi's new interpretation of Chinese philosophy, so much so that they "could not even close their mouths."⁶¹ Besides Gu, other younger members of *Guoxue jikan* like Wei Jiangong 魏建功 and Rong Zhaozu 容肇祖 were students or former students at Beijing University.

Similar to their counterparts at Southeastern University, the historians at Beijing University had to rely on their academic institution for financial

⁶⁰ *Xueheng* 17 (May 1923), 2305.

⁶¹ Gu 1926 "zixu" 自序, 36.

resources, and their fortunes were closely tied to the administrators who lent support to their cause. But being in the capital made the Beijing scholars even more vulnerable to political turmoil. Each time a political crisis occurred locally or nationally, faculty members of Beijing University were the first to be affected. The impact could be an abrupt change in the university administration or the loss of funding (including faculty salaries) from the Beiyang government. As a result, the publication of *Guoxue jikan* was very irregular when compared to *Xueheng*. For five years, from 1922 to 1927, *Xueheng* was published monthly and all sixty issues were published on time. By contrast, the publication of *Guoxue jikan* was interrupted a couple of times during the first seven years of its existence. For instance, after publishing its first four issue of 1923 on time, its fifth issue (volume 2 no. 1) appeared a year late in December 1924. Worse still, no more new issues were published for five years until December 1929.

Yet, in comparison, historians at Beijing University had access to primary sources that were not easily available to historians in other parts of the country. They could read, for instance, the Dunhuang materials that had recently been transported from the northwest to the capital.⁶² If they were specialists in Ming-Qing history, they had the opportunity to consult the imperial collection of primary documents that was moved to Beijing University in 1923.⁶³ Partly because of the abundance of primary sources at the capital, the scholars who contributed to *Guoxue jikan* were more eclectic in interests and background than those who contributed to *Xueheng*. Most of the *Xueheng* group were either returned students or scholars trained in late Qing classical and poetic tradition. But the *Guoxue jikan* group, besides returned students (e.g., Hu Shi, Liu Fu 劉復, and Lin Yutang 林語堂) and scholars trained in Qing philology (e.g., Luo Zhenyu 羅振玉, Wang Guowei 王國維, Ma Heng 馬衡, and Zhu Xizu 朱希祖), included Western sinologists who lived in China (e.g., Barion von Staël-

⁶² Western scholars such as Aurel Stein and Paul Pelliot took most of the Dunhuang manuscripts to London and Paris. But a small number had remained in China and were later moved to Beijing during the 1920s. For a list of Dunhuang manuscripts kept in Beijing, see Chen (1932).

⁶³ See the May 22, 1923 news report “Qing neige daku dangan yijiao beida yangjiu suo guoxue men” 清內閣大庫檔案移交北大研究所國學門 (The Transfer of the Qing Imperial Documents to National Learning Division of Beijing University Research Institute), *Guoxue jikan*, 1, 1 (January 1923), 198-201.

Holstein) and specialists in foreign religions and frontier studies (e.g., Chen Yuan 陳垣 and Yi Fengge 伊鳳閣).⁶⁴

In the 1920s, there were stories about the rivalry between Beijing University and Southeastern University in competing to set the nation's academic agenda and to recruit Western trained scientists and scholars.⁶⁵ This “north-south” competition between the two universities, as the stories went, also took place in journals that were affiliated with the institutions. While these stories may not be entirely reliable, the “north-south” distinction was more ideological than geographical and there was a popular perception at the time that the relationship between scholars in Beijing and Nanjing was tense.⁶⁶ Even today, if we read the articles published in *Xueheng* and *Guoxue jikan*, it is not difficult to find evidence to support this. This animosity between the two groups of scholars is particularly clear if we look at the first few issues of *Xueheng*. Here we find an array of articles criticizing the New Culture movement (which was led by students and faculty of Beijing University) and its major leader Hu Shi (who was then teaching at Beijing University). With respect to the New Culture iconoclasts' attack of the past, we find Chen Boming's comments on how some “recent scholars” (*jìnren* 近人) gained popularity by selectively introducing Western learning, and Mei Guangdi's comparison of the scientism of the New Culture iconoclasts with the careerism of the civil service examination candidates.⁶⁷ Regarding Hu Shi as a major leader of the New Culture movement, we find Mei Guangdi's critique of his attempts to use social Darwinism to interpret Chinese literature, Hu Xiansu's forty-page review article on his vernacular poems, and Liu Yizheng's defense of Confucianism with a point-by-point attack against his writings.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ For a study of these historians' achievements in *Guoxue jikan*, see Zhang Yue 1998.

⁶⁵ Schwintzer 1992: 559-590. Guo 1971: 62-101. Peng 1995: 32-33.

⁶⁶ The “north-south” distinction was more ideological than geographical because of the constant movement of scholars between Beijing and Nanjing. For instance, Wu Mi, the editor of *Xueheng*, left Southeastern University to join Qinghua University in Beijing in 1925. As a “southerner,” he became a leader of the Beijing-Tianjin academic community for the next two decades until 1949.

⁶⁷ Liu Boming 1922, Mei 1922b.

⁶⁸ Mei 1922a, Hu Xiansu 1922, Liu Yizheng 1922.

Reorganization of the Nation's Past

What had led to this tit-for-tat debate between the *Xueheng* group and the *Guoxue jikan* group? Although there is no proof that scholars at Beijing University had the *Xueheng* in mind in founding the *Guoxue jikan*, we find Hu Shi reiterating the historical vision of the New Culture movement in his 1923 “Inaugural Statement” (*fakan xuanyan* 發刊宣言) of *Guoxue jikan*. Long regarded by contemporary scholars as one of the key documents in the New Culture movement, Hu’s “Inaugural Statement” offers a lucid summary of the New Culture iconoclasts’ view on history and a candid assessment of its significance to twentieth-century China.⁶⁹ In many respects, one may view the “Inaugural Statement” as a response to the criticism of the New Culture movement aired in *Xueheng* the previous year. More importantly, for our purposes, the “Inaugural Statement” provides a stark contrast to the *Xueheng* editors’ “A Statement by the Critical Review,” both published in January 1923.

In the “Inaugural Statement,” Hu Shi began with a new definition of national learning (*guoxue* 國學). Unlike the *Guocui* historians who took national learning to mean narrowly the cultural heritage of the pre-Qin period, he understood it more broadly and loosely as the “studies of national past” (*guogu xue* 國故學).⁷⁰ Clearly aiming his comment at the *Guocui* historians, he likened “national past” (*guogu* 國故) to “national essence” (*guocui* 國粹). But he hastened to add that the scope of his “national learning” was broader than that of the *Guocui* group. In a deliberate effort to parody the narrow view of the *Guocui* people, he stressed that his “national past” contained not only national essence but also “national rubbish” (*guozha* 國渣). He believed that the national culture should include the elite and popular cultures, the canonized classics and the unorthodox writings, lofty ideas and folk music. It would be a “total history of the past” (*yiqie guoqu de lishi* 一切過去的歷史) in which every individual – male and female, rich and poor, powerful and powerless – was included.

Besides expanding the scope of national learning, Hu also assigned a different function to it. For him, the goal of national learning was not to glorify the achievements of the country as the *Guocui* historians had advocated. Instead,

⁶⁹ For a study of Hu Shi’s “Inaugural Statement” and his call for “reorganizing the national past,” see Eber 1968.

⁷⁰ Hu Shi 1923a: 7.

it was to “reorganize the nation’s past” (*zhengli guogu* 整理國故) so that readers would have a clear sense of how their modern era differed from previous ages. Stressing the discontinuity between past and present, he described the goal of “the study of the nation’s past” as “returning the Han Dynasty to the Han Dynasty, the Wei-Jin period to the Wei-Jin period, the Tang Dynasty to the Tang Dynasty.”⁷¹ By stressing the difference between past and present, he wanted his readers to immerse themselves fully in the modern age— a new epoch when one was free to use Reason to make judgements and to reevaluate tradition. With an acute awareness of living in the Age of Reason, he urged his readers to distance themselves from the previous ages by discovering the “real picture” (*benlai mianmu* 本來面目) of the past based on critical reason. To clarify what he considered to be the urgency of gaining a sense of living in the modern age, he gave his readers the following advice: “Without discovering the real picture of the past [based on critical reason], we would misjudge historical figures. Without giving a critical assessment of the contributions and limitations of each historical figure, we would mislead our contemporaries.”⁷²

In Hu Shi’s plan for “reorganizing the nation’s past,” we find a historical vision not only substantially different from that of the *Guocui* group, but also from that of the *Xueheng* group. Compared to the *Guocui* group of the 1900s, both the Beijing and Nanjing historians were more broad and flexible in defining the scope of national learning. Yet, while the *Xueheng* group emphasized the need to link the past with the present, Hu Shi regarded the past as passé. For the *Xueheng* historians, China today was a result of a long process of change and transformation. Hence, they believed that one could only fully understand the characteristics of twentieth-century China by first understanding the complex forces that had led her to her present form. For this reason, in “A Statement by Critical Review,” the editors of *Xueheng* stressed the need to come to grips with the huge body of Chinese cultural artifacts aided by modern scholarship. In contrast, Hu Shi believed that tradition and modernity were two distinct entities. As such, Hu’s goal in studying the past was not to understand the past in its own right, but to use it as a contrast to the present to help readers develop a consciousness of time.⁷³

⁷¹ Hu Shi 1923a: 8.

⁷² Hu Shi 1923a: 8.

⁷³ Hu Shi 1923a: 9.

History for the Common Man

In his “Inaugural Statement,” Hu suggested his readers do three things to develop their consciousness of living in the modern age. First, they should give equal attention to all historical figures in history, regardless of class, gender, and family background. Second, they should organize and popularize historical data by compiling indexes and producing summaries of current scholarship. Third, they should participate in the global discourse on China by engaging in a dialogue with Western sinologists.⁷⁴ In the first five issues of *Guoxue jikan* (January 1923 to December 1924), when Hu Shi served as the journal’s chief editor, it is clear that attempts were made to publish articles that reflected these three proposed changes for studying the past. In broadening the scope of studying the past, there were Wang Guowei’s essay on a newly discovered “Poem by a Woman of Qin” (*qinfu yin* 秦婦吟) during the Huang Chao Rebellion (875-884), Chen Yuan’s essays on foreign religions in medieval and early modern China, and Hu Shi’s essay on the “scientific method” of Cui Shu 崔述 (1740-1816).⁷⁵ In systemizing and popularizing historical data, there were reports and bibliographies of the Dunhuang collections in London and Paris, and summaries of Stone Age artifacts. In introducing foreign scholarship on Chinese history, there were writings (some in translation) by Western sinologists such as Barion von Staël-Holstein (*Gang he tai* 鋼和泰), Bernhard Karlgren (*Kelo juelun* 珂羅倬倫), and P. Pelliot (*Bo xi he* 伯希和).

Among the first five issues of *Guoxue jikan*, the present use of history was particularly clear in issue number one of volume two, published in December of 1925. As a special issue devoted to the early Qing thinker Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724-77), there were only three long essays in this issue, as opposed to seven or eight shorter essays in other issues. As expected, all three essays were about Dai Zhen: Hu Shi’s article on Dai’s philosophy, Wei Jiangong’s essay on Dai’s biography, and Rong Zhaozu’s study of Dai’s interpretation of *li* 理 (principle). Despite their different emphases, the three authors stressed the contemporary relevance of Dai Zhen. They discussed Dai’s “scientific spirit” and considered it to be his major contribution to twentieth-century China. Among the three authors, Hu Shi was

⁷⁴ Hu Shi 1923a: 16.

⁷⁵ Wang Guowei 1923, Chen 1923, Hu Shi 1923b.

explicit in spelling out the contemporary relevance of Dai. To help his readers appreciate Dai's significance, he located him in the rise of the Qing philology, which he claimed already contained the key elements of modern scholarship, including historical perspective, development of tools, comparative studies, and stress on primary sources. Because of this, he concluded that Dai had used "the scientific way of learning to tackle practical problems in life," and thereby well deserved to be called "a personification of scientific spirit."⁷⁶

Although seemingly scholastic and idealistic on the surface, there was a social vision in Hu's "reorganization of the nation's past." The three things that Hu suggested his readers do in his "Inaugural Statement" – expand the scope of studying the past, systemize historical data, and participate in the global discourse on China – were not merely academic suggestions. In essence, they were aimed at forming a more equal society in China where social class, gender role, and family background would no longer be factors in determining one's life. For instance, in expanding the scope of studying the past, Hu wanted to give a voice to the disenfranchised, the lower classes, and women. "From lofty ideas to a single word or a folksong," he said, "all are historical materials and part of the national learning."⁷⁷ In reality, China still had a way to go to make every citizen equal; but in historical narrative, that national goal of equality was given a concrete manifestation in the narration of the past. In the same vein, the goal of systemizing historical data was to empower the have-nots by giving them access to knowledge. With the compilation of indexes, Hu hoped that "everyone could use ancient texts." With academic information readily available to the public, he wished that "everyone could read ancient texts."⁷⁸ Eventually the study of the past would not be a hobby pursued by a few arm-chair professors in the ivory towers. Rather, it would be a "History for the Common Man," as James Robinson would have put it, which gave ordinary citizens an opportunity to make sense of their contemporary lives.⁷⁹ Similarly, by participating in the global

⁷⁶ Hu Shi 1925: 48.

⁷⁷ Hu Shi 1923a: 9.

⁷⁸ Hu Shi 1923a: 12.

⁷⁹ Although much attention has been paid to John Dewey's impact on Hu Shi, judging from what he wrote in "fakan xuanyan" (1923a) one can make an argument that he was also informed by James Robinson's *New History* and the new American progressive history in general. Other evidence of Hu Shi's awareness of Robinson's historical perspective was his encouragement of He Bingsong to translate Robinson's *New History*

discourse on China, Hu wanted the Chinese to develop a sense of their collectivity based on rational thinking and their relation with the world. When foreign scholars could achieve a high standard of scholarship on China based on Reason, Chinese should invest more time and energy in studying their own country and figuring out their role in the global system of nation-states.

Certainly, throughout the 1920s and the 1930s, Hu Shi's dream of a more equal society based on the systematization and popularization of historical knowledge did not materialize. Higher education was still limited to a few young bright students, rather than readily available to all high school graduates. Even his attempt to systematize and popularize historical knowledge did not produce a huge body of knowledge accessible to the educated elite. Yet, even as an ideal, it is clear that his social vision was drastically different from Liu Yizheng's. While Liu emphasized hierarchy, leadership, and mediation of power in re-structuring early twentieth-century Chinese society, Hu advocated the "History for the Common Man" to bring about a more equal society. Due to this difference, it is not surprising to find the two men in dispute.

History Makes a Nation

Hu published his negative review of Liu Yizheng's *History of Chinese Culture* in the June 1933 issue of the *Qinghua xuebao* 清華學報 (Qinghua Journal). Hu stressed two points. First, stemming from his belief in the rupture between past and present, he criticized Liu for spending too much time on early China and too little time on the modern period. Reiterating his faith in Reason and material evidence, he told his readers that there was little value in the first quarter of the book, because it discussed early China based on myths rather than recent archaeological facts. Second, and directly related to our discussion of Hu's social vision, he complained that the second half of the book was written primarily based on the writings of the educated elite. He found Liu's approach to history very problematic because it privileged the cultural activities of the ruling class over the poor and the illiterate.⁸⁰

into Chinese. For a study of James Robinson's *New History* and the new American progressive history, see Novick 1988: 92-108.

⁸⁰ Hu Shi 1933.

Their differences in social vision notwithstanding, we should not overlook their common interest in making a nation by writing history. Obviously they did not share the same view on what the early twentieth-century Chinese should do to join the modern world. Nor did they share the same opinion on what the Chinese nation should look like. But in their own ways, they made known their visions of the nation in response to the social and political environment of post-1911 China. Unlike the *Guocui* historians who were pre-occupied with the abolition of absolute monarchy and the expulsion of the “Manchu autocrats,” these two historians focused on how to create a fairer government and a more open society based on a republican system. Contrary to the *Guocui* group who saw history writing as part of political propaganda, they wrote history primarily for pedagogical purposes in higher education. Of course, they also wanted to reach general readers, but they adopted a more pragmatic approach. Taking advantage of the newly established national school system, they disseminated their views through teaching and publication. Then, through their students and readers (many of whom became high school and college teachers), they spread their views to the rest of the society. For the two later historians, education was their venue to mould the nation and to change society. Rather than express their views by demonstrating on the streets or setting up political organizations, they wrote and taught history to inform their fellow countrymen about how to make China a better country.

In this regard, despite their differences, Liu and Hu were responding to the social and political problems of post-1911 China. In the 1920s, after the euphoria about the abolition of absolute monarchy had subsided, the 1911 revolution appeared to create more problems than it resolved. For Liu, post-1911 China had become a nation of extremes, with the state dominating the nation, the bureaucrats bullying the citizens, and the coastal cities taking advantage of the hinterlands. While he agreed with the *Guocui* group that the absolute monarchy had been a stumbling block to Chinese modernity, he found that the republican government in post-1911 China was equally hegemonic in political control and in suppressing dissent. He considered the source of China’s political problems to be the lopsided relationships between the center and the periphery, and the top and the bottom. As a historian, Liu’s response was to reaffirm the rule of ritual to give local communities and rural villages the right to protect their autonomy.

In contrast, Hu Shi appeared to be unconcerned with the lopsided relationship between central authority and the local community in post-1911 China. Believing in the rupture between past and present, he saw a need for his countrymen to develop a collective sense of living in the modern age. In language, he proposed the replacement of the classical Chinese with the vernacular to give the twentieth-century Chinese a sense of newness. With a new medium of expression, he hoped that twentieth-century Chinese would develop a strong feeling of belonging to a new epoch and thereby the newly formed nation-state. In history, he pushed for the “History for the Common Man” so that the past would be given meaning from the contemporary perspective. By making historical documents and historical interpretations available to the public, he believed that his fellow countrymen would develop an acute sense of living in the modern era as citizens of the Chinese nation. Both in revolutionizing the medium of expression and cultivating a new historical consciousness, he was determined to challenge hierarchy, patriarchy, and elitism in China.

Historical Reflections and Sociopolitical Changes

In bringing to the foreground the social and political visions of early twentieth-century Chinese historians, it is not my intention to reduce their historical writings to political commentaries. In stressing the historians’ social and political visions, I want to draw attention to the complex relationship between historical reflection and the broad social and political changes in twentieth-century China. Judged by today’s standards, the writings of the historians discussed above are full of problems. As I have pointed out above, they made misleading parallels between Chinese history and European history, they used hyperbole in advancing a cause, and they forced arguments to fit the facts into a preconceived view. Yet despite these problems, their writings give us a glimpse into what Chinese historians were debating during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Like other sensitive souls, these historians attempted to give meaning to their lives and to the world in which they lived. In their attempt to render the past for their readers, we see their differing responses to the momentous changes of their times.

More importantly, my comparison of these historical writings is intended to be a corrective to the current practice of dividing twentieth-century Chinese historians artificially into distinct groups like “radicals,” “liberals,” and “conservatives.” In this study, I have demonstrated fundamental differences between the *Guocui* group and the *Xueheng* group, despite the fact that they are both widely considered by contemporary scholars to be part of Chinese cultural conservatism. Also in this study, I have shown how the two “conservative” groups were in dialogue with the New Culture iconoclasts, even though on the surface they were at odds with one other.

In many respects, what I have found in this study is not new. In recent years, in part due to the interest in post-modernism, path-breaking research has been done on the incipient modernity in China. For instance, David Der-wei Wang’s study of late Qing novels shows that there could be other forms of modernity in China besides the scientism and iconoclasm of the New Culture movement.⁸¹ In addition, in her study of translingual practices, Lydia Liu demonstrates that the *Xueheng* group was as cosmopolitan and radical as the New Culture iconoclasts.⁸² In China, partly driven by an intense interest in national learning in the 1980s and 1990s, many works have been published on the *Guocui* group and the *Xueheng* group.⁸³ This renewed interest in the “conservatives” has given impetus to some contemporary Chinese scholars, such as Yue Daiyue 樂黛雲, Wang Yuanhua 王元化 and Liu Mengxi 劉夢溪, to ask for a new interpretation of the intellectual history of modern China.⁸⁴

While I am not the first to uncover the interrelationships between “radicals,” “liberals” and “conservatives,” I add a new dimension to our current rethinking of Chinese modernity. Thus far, the challenge to this artificial division of Chinese intellectuals has come primarily from scholars in the literary field. There have not been many studies that examine the responses of historians who, in narrating the past, also attempted to give meaning to new developments in their country. Based on this study, I propose

⁸¹ David Der-wei Wang 1997.

⁸² Lydia Liu 1995.

⁸³ Axel Schneider (2001) has studied the new national studies in 1980s and 1990s China.

⁸⁴ Yue 1989, Wang Yuanhua 1998, Liu Mengxi 1996.

a re-examination of the historical debates in early twentieth-century China. Rather than divide Chinese historians artificially into groups based on the degree to which they appeared to be iconoclastic or supportive of modernization, we should examine their visions of China. Instead of focusing on whether they were radical in proposing changes, we should concentrate on the solutions that they brought forward in resolving the pressing problems of their times. What we will gain from this new approach is not merely a more complex picture of modern Chinese historiography, but also a deeper understanding of how historical reflection and sociopolitical change are related.

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