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Cover illustration Photo no.5 from Hedda Morrison's 'Jehol album 1', Hedda Morrison Collection, Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University (© President and Fellows of Harvard College, Bequest of Hedda Hammer Morrison)

BRIDGING THE GAP: ATTEMPTS AT CONSTRUCTING A “NEW” HISTORICAL–CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

史 Axel Schneider

In 1922 Lu Xun attacked the intellectuals publishing the journal *Critical Review* (Xueheng zazhi 學衡雜誌)¹ as “faked antiquities,”² as insincere and outdated. However, at that time the *Critical Review* was not a unique publication. It was part of a considerable revival of interest in China’s traditional history and culture that had developed during the 1920s and 1930s partly in reaction to the pro-Western iconoclasm of the May Fourth movement. Starting with the journal *National Past* (Guogu yuekan 國故月刊),³ the revival manifested itself in the cultural debates of the 1920s, the flourishing of “national studies” (*guoxue* 國學),⁴ and the publication of many journals⁵ and monographs on *Chinese* culture and history as differentiated from *Western* culture and history.⁶ However, after 1949 these intellectual currents were thoroughly marginalized.⁷

I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to Paul Cohen and Alexander Mayer who commented in detail on an earlier version of this paper. In addition I would like to thank Hsi-yuan Ch’en, Joseph Fewsmith, Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, and Margherita Zanasi for their comments and encouragement.

¹ Nanjing, Jan.–July 1933, published by Wu Mi 吳宓.

² Lu Xun, “Gu ‘Xueheng’” [An evaluation of *Xueheng*] (1922), in *Lu Xun quanji* [Collected works of Lu Xun] (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1989), vol.1, pp.377–81.

³ Beijing, Mar. 1919–Oct. 1919, published by Liu Shiwei 劉師培, Huang Kan 黃侃, and Ma Xulun 馬敘倫. During 1919 the *Guogu yuekan* was the main anti-May Fourth journal. Although it carried mainly academic articles in the field of classical studies, some of its authors were involved in a debate with Mao Zishui 毛子水 and Fu Sinian 傅斯年, which centered around the question of historical continuity and the relation between Chinese and Western culture. For a short summary of this debate, see Axel Schneider, *Wahrheit und Geschichte: zwei chinesische*

Historiker auf der Suche nach einer modernen Identität für China [Truth and history: two Chinese historians in search of a modern identity for China] (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997), pp.151–3.

⁴ On the revival of “national studies” as a cultural nativist movement, see Wang Fanshen, *Fu Ssu-nien: a life in Chinese history and politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.152–6, and Schneider, *Wahrheit und Geschichte*, pp.100–12.

⁵ *Huaguo yuekan* 華國月刊 (Shanghai, 1923–26), published by Zhang Taiyan 章太炎; *Jiayin zhoukan* 甲寅周刊 [The tiger magazine] (Beijing and Tianjin, 1925–27), published by Zhang Shizhao 章士釗; *Guofeng banyuekan* [National customs semi-monthly] 國風半月刊 (Nanjing, 1932–36), published by Liu Yizheng 柳詒徵.

⁶ Examples of monographs on Chinese culture and history are Liu Yizheng, *Zhongguo wenhua shi* [History of Chinese culture], first published in *Xueheng*, nos 49–56, 58, 61, 63–4, 67, 70, 72, 75 (Jan. 1926–Mar. 1931), published as a monograph (Nanjing: Zhongshan Shuju, 1932). Lu Moude, “Zhongguo wenhuashi” [History of Chinese culture], in *Xueheng* 41, 55 (May 1925 and July 1926).

⁷ Until very recently this marginality was also reflected in Western historiography on China. For the only monograph on one of these intellectuals, see Guy Alitto, *The last Confucian, Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese dilemma of modernity* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1979). See also Charlotte Furth, ed., *The limits of change: essays on conservative alternatives in Republican China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976). Conservative intellectuals like Du Yaquan 杜亞泉, post-May Fourth Zhang Shizhao 章士釗, Chen Huanzhang 陳煥章, the *Xueheng* group including Wu Mi, Mei Guangdi 梅光迪, Liu Yizheng, Miao Fenglin 繆鳳林 and others are still not very well known in the West.

⁸ On the TV series *Heshang*, see Christina Neder, *Flußelegie: Chinas Identitätskrise. Die Debatte um die chinesische Fernsehserie Heshang 1988–1994* [River elegy: China's identity crisis. The debate on the TV series *Heshang*] (Dortmund: Projekt-Verlag, 1996); and Chen Xiaomei, "Occidentalism as counterdiscourse: 'He shang' in post-Mao China," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (Summer 1992): 686–712.

⁹ On the "culture fever" of the 1980s, see Wang Jing, *High culture fever. Politics, aesthetics, and ideology in Deng's China* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1996).

¹⁰ For short introductory surveys of this trend, see Jean Phillippe Béja, "Nationalism: intellectuals divided," *China Perspectives* 5 (May/June 1996): 6–9; and Chen Yan, "Intellectual trends in China since 1989," *China Perspectives* 7 (Sept./Oct. 1996): 6–12.

¹¹ Joseph Fewsmith, "Neoconservatism and the end of the Dengist era," *Asian Survey* 35.7 (July 1995): 625–51; Gu Xin and David Kelly, "New conservatism: intermediate ideology of a new elite," in *China's quiet revolution, new interactions between state and society*, ed. David S. G. Goodman and Beverly Hooper (Melbourne and New York: Longman Cheshire St. Martin's Press, 1994), pp.219–33; Gunter Schubert, "Was ist Neokonservatismus? Notizen zum politischen Denken in der VR China in den 90er Jahren" [What is Neoconservatism? Notes on political thought in the PRC during the 1990s], *Asien* 65 (Oct.1997): 57–74; Tsai Wen-hui, "New authoritarianism, neo-conservatism, and anti-peaceful evolution: mainland China's resistance to political modernization," *Issues & Studies* 28.12 (Dec. 1992): 1–22; Xu Ben, "From modernity to Chineseness: the rise of nativist cultural theory in post-1989 China," *Positions* 6.1 (Spring 1998): 203–37; Zhao Suisheng, "Chinese intellectuals' quest for national greatness and nationalistic writing in the 1990s," *China Quarterly* 152 (Dec. 1997): 725–45.

¹² *New Guoxue* is sometimes also called "Guoxue-fever" in contrast to the "culture fever" of the 1980s.

¹³ Xu Ben, "From modernity to Chineseness," pp.203–4.

When, after several decades of isolation, Deng Xiaoping initiated the reform process in the late 1970s, Chinese intellectuals were eager to catch up with the West. A plethora of Western academic theories and intellectual currents found their way into China. Heated discussions on the defects of the Chinese national character that might be responsible for the inability of the Chinese to catch up with the West culminated in 1988 in the TV series "River Elegy" (*Heshang* 河殤).⁸ The makers of this series depicted the Chinese as being as "backward" as the Australian aborigines or African tribes and prescribed as the only possible remedy for China a course of only slightly disguised Westernization and market orientation. However, during the late 1980s and finally after 4 June 1989, intellectual discourse in China again underwent a far-reaching shift from the predominantly Western-oriented, anti-traditional "culture fever"⁹ of the 1980s to a more tradition-oriented and sometimes even aggressively nationalistic approach.¹⁰

In Western research¹¹ a rather gloomy picture has been painted of these changes, one that depicts the mainstream of this "neo-conservatism," made up of the sub-currents of neo-humanism, *New Guoxue*,¹² neo-Confucianism and postcolonial nativist theory,¹³ characterized by a neo-conservatism, which can partly be traced back to the neo-authoritarianism of the late 1980s,¹⁴ that stressed the indigenous sources of modernization. It advocates a gradualist approach to development¹⁵ and castigates the radicalism of the May Fourth tradition for its political romanticism and cultural sell-out to the West. Neo-conservatism is said to be in favor of a strong central government as the major agent of gradual modernization and thereby legitimizes the authoritarian status quo.¹⁶ This rather élitist approach is combined with a strong nationalistic and anti-Western mood that sometimes assumes an even xenophobic stance, at least in its popularized versions.¹⁷

¹⁴ On the neo-authoritarianism of the 1980s, see Gong Ting and Chen Feng, "Neo-authoritarian theory in mainland China," *Issues & Studies* 27.1 (1992): 84–99; Ma Shuyun, "The rise and fall of Neo-authoritarianism in China," *China Information* 5.3 (Winter 1990–91): 1–18; Mark P. Petracca and Mong Xiong, "The concept of Chinese neo-authoritarianism. An exploration and democratic critique," *Asian Survey* 30.11 (Nov. 1990): 1099–1117; Stanley Rosen and Gary Zou, eds, "The Chinese debate on the neo-authoritarianism," *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology* (Winter 1990/91); and Barry Sautmann, "Neo-authoritarianism in recent Chinese political theory," *China Quarterly* 129 (Mar. 92): 72–102.

¹⁵ An important advocate of this thesis is Xiao Gongqin, who depicts Yan Fu as a prominent example of gradualism. See his "Dangdai Zhongguo xin baoshou zhuyi de sixiang

/yuanyuan" [The intellectual origins of contemporary Chinese new conservatism], *Ersbiyi sbiji* [21st century] 40 (Apr. 1997): 126–35.

¹⁶ One example is "Sulian jubian zhi hou Zhongguo de xianshi yingdui yu zhanlue xuanze," reprinted in *Zhongguo zhi chun* [China spring] (Jan. 1992): 35–9, translated in David Kelly, "Realistic responses and strategic options: an alternative Communist ideology and its critics," *Chinese Law and Government* 27:1 (Spring 1994).

¹⁷ The point of reference for this verdict is the well-known best-seller by Song Qiang et al., *Zhongguo keyi shuo bu* [China can say no] (Beijing: Zhonghua Gongshang Lianhe Chubanshe, 1996). For an analysis of this growing anti-Western attitude, see Geremie R. Barmé, *In the Red: on contemporary Chinese culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp.255–80.

These conservative and nationalistic trends are described as going hand-in-hand with a renewed stress on China's traditional culture and the rejection of what is perceived as Western cultural imperialism and universalism (e.g. the rejection of Western notions of human rights). A new East–West dichotomy seems to confront an essentialized East with a negative, colonialist West. In addition, it is sometimes claimed that these intellectual positions serve the government in its overall suppression not only of dissidents in favor of Western democracy, but of all opposition and dissent.¹⁸ The future of such an approach to China's modernization is assessed as not very promising—in the first place, because neo-conservatism is described as lacking a clearly expressed theoretical basis which would enable it to address pressing economic and social problems,¹⁹ secondly, because in the long run it will be undermined by the political consequences of economic liberalization.²⁰

All in all, these trends are depicted as an attempt to underpin the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), whose socialist ideological foundation, already weakened by decades of ideological struggles, has been further undermined by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Tiananmen incident of 1989. At the same time, they give expression to a new pride in being Chinese in the wake of the considerable economic successes of the 1980s and 1990s.

This image is not completely mistaken, yet it clearly is one-sided and has to be supplemented and corrected by a more differentiated interpretation. My analysis of one type of neo-conservatism, i.e. the so-called *New Guoxue*, will show that it does not fit neatly into the above characterization and that elements of neo-conservative discourse are more pluralistic and less supportive of the CCP than hitherto assumed.

More importantly, I will show that the neo-conservative discourse of recent years inherits a discussion dating back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that centers on the question of historical-cultural identity and the socio-political role of the gentry and its successors. To be sure, it would be wrong to claim that neo-conservatism is nothing but the revival of an old discussion. Due to the very different social, political, and economic context of the 1980s and 1990s, arguments brought forward much earlier can assume a wholly different meaning. Yet, the discussion, as will be shown in the following, consciously inherits and refers to earlier debates. The issues that are at stake in neo-conservatism are thus not only rooted in history, but are also, due to the use of historical reference and allusion, disguised behind seemingly pure academic research on history.

These issues—the political role of the intellectuals and the question of national and/or cultural identity—have to a considerable extent long been discussed through the medium of historiography and the philosophy of history.²¹ Views on how China should situate itself in the world and what role intellectuals and scholars should play in formulating a correct worldview are presented through competing interpretations of history and conceptions of historiographical methodology. Intellectuals try thereby to gain influence *vis-*

¹⁸ Xu Ben, "From modernity to Chineseness," p.208; and Schubert, "Was ist Neokon-servatismus?," pp.67, 73.

¹⁹ Fewsmith, "Neoconservatism," p.649.

²⁰ Barrett McCormick and David Kelly, "The limits of anti-liberalism," *Journal of Asian Studies* 53.3 (Aug. 1994): 804–31.

²¹ I have argued elsewhere that this outstanding function of historiography is a characteristic feature of Chinese culture. See Axel Schneider, "Between *dao* and history: two Chinese historians in search of a modern identity for China," *Chinese Historiography in Comparative Perspective, History and Theory*, Theme Issue 35 (Oct. 1996): 54–73. For a brilliant discussion of the characteristics of traditional Chinese historiography, see Yves Chevrier, "La servante-maîtresse: condition de la référence à l'histoire dans l'espace intellectuel chinois" [The servant-mistress: the condition of reference to history in the intellectual space of China], *Extrême-Orient—extrême-Occident, cahiers de recherches comparatives IX—la référence à l'histoire* (1987), pp.117–44.

²² For the concept of “cultural memory,” see Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* [Cultural memory. Scripture, recollection and political identity in early high cultures] (München: Beck Verlag, 1997).

²³ Chevrier analyses this close interrelation between historiography and politics at length. See his “La servante-maitresse.”

²⁴ It hardly needs to be pointed out that the last-mentioned attitude is of course—especially in a previously totalitarian, now authoritarian political environment—highly political.

²⁵ “Modernity” is characterized by the decline of all-encompassing, unitary philosophical systems (a finite world) and the rise of worlds of possibilities (a probable world) and with them competing worldviews. The term “worldviews” aptly refers to this reflexivity of modern consciousness and hints at the cultural plurality and historical relativity, which is so characteristic for modernity. On the modernity of “worldview,” see Martin Heidegger, “Die Zeit des Weltbildes” [The era of worldview], in Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege* [Wooden paths] (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1980), pp.73–110. For a definition of the typical modern view of culture, see Karl Mannheim, *Über die Eigenart kulturosoziologischer Erkenntnis* [On the peculiarities of cognition in cultural sociology], in Karl Mannheim, *Strukturen des Denkens* [Structures of thought] (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980), pp.44–50.

²⁶ For a recent example of such an interpretation with regard to China, see Arif Dirlik, “Chinese history and the question of Orientalism,” *Chinese Historiography in Comparative Perspective, History and Theory*, Theme Issue 35 (Oct. 1996): 96–118. With regard to Japan see Sakai Naoki, “Modernity and its critique: the problem of universalism and particularism,” in Sakai Naoki, *Translation & subjectivity: on “Japan” and cultural nationalism* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), and Stefan Tanaka, *Japan’s Orient: rendering pasts into history* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1993).

²⁷ This allegedly conservative juxtaposition of China and the West or of the East and the

à-vis China’s cultural memory²² and—willingly or not—they legitimize or delegitimize that political force, which justifies itself by reference to the predominant cultural memory. No wonder, then, that these interpretations are always highly contested and—more often than not—rehearsed in order to play an important role in politics.²³ Yet, to conclude that these interpretations can therefore be labeled “apologetic” would be an oversimplification. Not only are there at least as many interpretations running counter to the prevalent cultural memory as there are interpretations trying to legitimize the ruling political élite, we also find some advocates of neo-conservatism trying to seek independence from any kind of political control and to define a new social and political role for the intellectual.²⁴

With the latter case, we can often observe views of history that amount to implicit attacks on the CCP’s monopoly on the correct worldview. Yet again, not all interpretations critical of the CCP are in favor of parliamentary democracy, i.e. of political Westernization. Although most take the Western experience into consideration, none of these intellectuals opts for modernity²⁵ exclusively modeled along Western lines. They rather try to develop a modern view of history and culture that is based on China’s particularity without abandoning the quest for the Universal. However, to conclude that the definition of a particular China in juxtaposition to a universal modernity of Western origin amounts to the hidden approval of the very (Western) values underlying modernity²⁶ is a lopsided argument. There is sufficient reason to take the possibility into consideration that the attempt to cope with the Western challenge may lead to a definition of identity conceiving of China not primarily as the Other of the West,²⁷ but rather trying to re-conceptualize and pluralize the Universal by either including elements from Chinese tradition or by elevating the Universal to a more abstract level of common structures of human existence.²⁸

To argue, as I do, that the present *New Guoxue* discourse should be interpreted within the context of at least a century of discussion on the challenge of modernization, of course implies that this discourse cannot be properly understood without historical contextualization. Not only had certain options already been formulated and discussed before 1949, but recent contributions to the ongoing discourse are more often than not brought forward in an indirect way by the writing of articles and books on

/West did of course occur in manifold ways. However, to proclaim that this dichotomist approach was the only conservative reaction to the Western challenge, as Guy Alitto does, is simply not true. See Guy Alitto, *Wenbua sboucheng zhuyi lun* [On cultural conservatism] (Taipei: Shibao Chuban Gongs, 1986). Examples of alternative conservative reactions are, just to mention a few, scholars from the *Xuebeng* group such as Chen Yinke

陳寅恪, Tang Yongtong 湯用彤, Wu Mi, and Mei Guangdi. See Shen Songqiao, *Xuebengpai yu wusi xin wenbua yundong* [The *Xuebeng* group and the New Culture movement of May Fourth] (Taipei: Taida Wenshi Congkan, 1985).

²⁸ Within the *New Guoxue* discourse, I have found no signs of a conception that completely abandons the quest for something universal.

these historical precedents. Yet, this caveat against an unhistorical approach does not amount to historical determinism, i.e. the assumption that the present discussion is predetermined by and restricted to what has been written before. In a second step of contextualization, the neo-conservative discourse has to be interpreted by taking into account its location in the present situation in China. It is not only an attempt at reconstructing a historical and cultural memory as part of an effort to heal the wounds a century of turmoil and revolution has inflicted on Chinese identity. It is also an attempt to solve problems inherent in the contemporary situation—a situation that is characterized by the decline of socialism as one important source of the legitimacy of the CCP, the unprecedented scope of China's incorporation into the world market, and the ensuing commercialization of the intellectual field.²⁹ In order to show how these issues are discussed by so-called neo-conservatives, the *New Guoxue* discourse is most suitable, because it includes two different approaches to making use of historical predecessors in order to define China's position in the world and the role of intellectuals in contemporary politics.

The New Guoxue of the 1990s—the Example of the Xueheng revival

The so-called *New Guoxue* is neither a clearly-defined intellectual position, nor a clear-cut academic current. The term is used to refer to a widespread renewal of interest in non-Marxist, non-liberal academics and journalists from the Republican period, who opted for a non-revolutionary approach to change based on a respect for tradition. The roots of this *New Guoxue* reach back to the 1980s, but it was not until the early 1990s that this current moved to the center of intellectual and academic interest.

This extraordinarily broad field of *New Guoxue* covers interest in and research on:

- National Essence scholars like Liu Shipei and Zhang Taiyan³¹;
- the opposition to the May Fourth movement as expressed in debates on cultures of the East and West and polemics on science and metaphysics;
- the conservative political and cultural stance of previous reformers like Yan Fu 嚴復 and Liang Qichao 梁啟超;
- the opposition against the May Fourth Movement known as the *Xueheng* group; and
- the neo-Confucianism that developed from the 1920s to the 1940s.³²

One focus of this *New Guoxue* fever—the *Xueheng* group—needs to be singled out, not only because this group was the most influential conservative opposition against the May Fourth Movement, but also because of its prominence within the *New Guoxue*.

The interest in the *Xueheng* group started with an article by Yue Daiyun

²⁹ On the influence of the market economy on the situation of Chinese intellectuals, see Richard Kraus, "China's artists between plan and market," in Deborah S. Davis et al., eds, *Urban spaces in contemporary China: the potential for autonomy and community in post-Mao China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.173–92.

³⁰ For an early example of this trend, see Wang Yongxing, "Lüe tan Chen Yinke xiansheng de zhishi fangfa" [Brief discussion of Mr. Chen Yinke's historical method], *Qinghua daxue xuebao* [Qinghua University Journal] 1.1 (1986): 26–32.

³¹ The National Essence school (Guocui pai, 國粹派), most active in the decade before the revolution of 1911, argued for a racially motivated revolution against the Manchus, who were accused of having suppressed the Chinese National Essence. Culturally conservative as this might look, in their own approach to Chinese history and the classics the National Essence scholars were themselves rather revolutionary in their introduction of social-Darwinism and their re-evaluation of the importance of the various schools of thought during the later Chou period (*Zhu zi baijia* 諸子百家). See Zheng Shiqu, *Wanqing guocui pai—wenhua sixiangyanjiu* [The National Essence school of the late Qing period—studies in cultural thought] (Beijing: Shifan Daxue, 1993), and Lawrence Schneider, "National Essence and the new intelligentsia," in *The limits of change: essays on conservative alternatives in Republican China*, ed. Charlotte Furth, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp.57–89.

³² The number of publications covered is far too numerous to be listed here. Suffice it to refer to the plethora of publications of selected and collected writings, of biographies, and volumes of collected articles from the above-mentioned debates: one example of the biographies of these intellectuals is the multi-volume series *Guoxue dashi congshu* [Collected writings of great scholars of national studies] (Nanchang: Baihuazhou Wenyi Chubanshe, 1992–). An example of the re-publication of selected and collected writings is *Zhongguo xiandai xueshu jingdian* [Academic classics of modern China], published under the general editorship of Liu Mengxi (Shijiazhuang: Hebei Jiaoyu Chubanshe, [OVER]

/1996–). For selected and collected writings of modern Neo-Confucians, see Fang Keli, ed., *Xiandai xin ruxue jiyao* [Abstracts from modern new Confucianism] (Beijing: Zhongguo Guangbo Dianshi Chubanshe, 1990–); *Dangdai xin ruxue badajia ji* [Collected writings of eight great scholars of contemporary new Confucianism] (Beijing: Qunyan Chubanshe, 1992–93); and Fang Keli and Zheng Jiadong, eds, *Xiandai xin rujia renwu yu zhuzuo* [The personalities and writings of modern new Confucianism], (Tianjin: Nankai Daxue Chubanshe, 1995). Several examples of the collected writings from a wider range of the intellectuals who were involved in the cultural debates of the twentieth century are Tang Yijie, ed., *Ersbi shiji Zhongguo wenhua lunzhu jiyao congsbu* [Collection of writings and abstracts of twentieth-century Chinese culture] (Beijing: Zhongguo Guangbo Dianshi Chubanshe, 1994–); Xie Xialing, ed., *Zhongguo jinxiandai sixiangjia lundao congsbu* [Collection of discussions on the Dao by Chinese thinkers of modern times] (Shanghai: Yuandong Chubanshe, 1994–); Luo Rongqu, *Cong “wusi” dao xiandaihua* [From “May Fourth” to modernization] (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 1990); and Chen Song, *Wusi qianhou dongxi wenhua wenti lunzhan wenxuan* [Collections from the debates on the question of Eastern and Western culture around the time of the May Fourth movement] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 1989).

³³ Yue Daiyun, professor at the Institute for Comparative Literature and Culture, Beijing University, is the wife of Tang Yijie 湯一介, the son of Tang Yongtong, who was an early sympathizer of the *Xueheng* group.

³⁴ Yue Daiyun, “Chonggu ‘Xueheng’—jian lun xiandai baoshou zhuyi” [A re-evaluation of *Xueheng*—on modern conservatism], in *Lun chuantong yu fan chuantong—wusi qisbi zhounian jinian wenxuan* [On tradition and anti-tradition—collection in commemoration of the seventeenth anniversary of the May Fourth movement], ed. Tang Yijie (Taipei: Lianjing, 1989), pp.415–28.

³⁵ Zhang Zige, *Xinxiang lejiju ji Wu Mi* [Sincere commemoration of Wu Mi] (Guangzhou: Guangzhou Chubanshe, 1997); Zhongshan Daxue, ed., *Jinian Chen Yinke jiaoshou guoji xueshu taolunhui wenji* [Proceedings

樂戴雲³³ first published in May 1989 in Taiwan and then in late 1989 in the newly-established journal *Chinese Culture* (Zhongguo wenhua 中國文化) in Beijing.³⁴ She claimed that the conventional judgment on the *Xueheng* group as part of the “reactionary” National Essence movement was completely mistaken. In the years following, a plethora of articles and several conference volumes and monographs were published.³⁵ This new interest in the *Xueheng* group reached a climax with the publication by Lu Jiandong 陸鍵東 of *The Last Twenty Years of Chen Yinke* (Chen Yinke de zui hou ershi nian 陳寅恪的最後二十年),³⁶ which became a best seller in 1995, causing the *New Guoxue* interest in the *Xueheng* group to spill over to a wider public.

The interpretations of the *Xueheng* group presented in these publications are of course neither uniform nor do they focus on the *Xueheng* group as a whole. At the center of re-evaluation is on the one hand Wu Mi, the editor of *Xueheng*, and on the other hand, scholars who are rather loosely linked to the *Xueheng* group like Chen Yinke, Tang Yongtong, and Wang Guowei

/of the International Conference in Commemoration of Professor Chen Yinke] (Guangzhou: Zhongshan Daxue, 1989); Hu Shouwei, ed., “Liu Rusbi biezhuanyu Guoxue yanjiu” [“The alternative biography of Liu Rushi” and research in National Studies] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1995); Li Funing et al., eds, *Di yi jie Wu Mi xueshu taolunhui lunwen xuanji* [Proceedings of the first academic conference on Wu Mi] (Xi’an: Shaanxi Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1990); Li Funing et al., ed., *Di er jie Wu Mi xueshu taolunhui lunwen xuanji* [Proceedings of the Second Academic Conference on Wu Mi] (Xi’an: Shaanxi Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1992); Liu Yihuan, *Guoxue dashi Chen Yinke* [The great National Studies scholar Chen Yinke] (Chongqing: Chongqing Chubanshe, 1996); Liu Mengxi, *Chuantong de wudu* [The misinterpretation of tradition] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1996); Tang Yijie, *Lun chuantong yu fan chuantong*; Wang Yongxing, ed., *Jinian Chen Yinke xiansheng bainiandanchen xueshu lunwenji* [Academic collection in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Mr Chen Yinke] (Nanchang: Jiangxi Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1994); and Wu Xuezhao, *Wu Mi yu Chen Yinke* [Wu Mi and Chen Yinke] (Beijing: Qinghua Daxue, 1992).

³⁶ Beijing: Xinhua Shudian, 1995.

³⁷ Founded in 1922, the *Xueheng zazhi* became the most influential conservative journal of the 1920s and 1930s, continuing for eleven years until it ceased publication in 1933. For this

/period, when many journals did not survive for more than a few months, this was quite an achievement. The *Xueheng zazhi* was replaced and partially continued by the *Guofeng banyueka* which was edited by Liu Yizheng and appeared from September 1932 until December 1936. The best summary of the intellectual positions of the *Xueheng* group can be found in Shen Songqiao, *Xuehengpai*. See also Richard B. Rosen, “The national heritage opposition to the New Literature and New Culture movements of China in the 1920s,” PhD diss. (University of California, Berkeley, 1969), and Hou Jian, “Irving Babbitt in China,” PhD diss. (State University of New York, 1980). The following summary is based on Shen Songqiao and my own ongoing research project, “Genesis and Structures of Chinese Conservatism, 1900–1937.”

³⁸ Good summaries of American New Humanism can be found in David J. Hoeveler, Jr., *The New Humanism, a critique of modern America, 1900–1940* (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1977), and Thomas R. Nevin, *Irving Babbitt, an intellectual study* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

³⁹ For the historical genesis of this position, see Lawrence A. Schneider, “National Essence and the new intelligentsia,” in Furth, *The limits of change*, pp.57–89.

⁴⁰ Alitto, *The last Confucian*.

王國維. Before discussing these different contemporary interpretations of the *Xueheng* group, it is necessary first to introduce this group.

The Republican Period—a Classification of the Xueheng Group

The *Xueheng* group can be roughly classified as consisting of three different circles of intellectuals, who were united in their opposition to the New Culture movement.³⁷

The core group of syncretistic Neo-humanists consisted of Mei Guangdi, Wu Mi, Hu Xiansu 胡先驕 and others, who focused on literature and literary criticism. Their basic arguments can be traced back to their student days in the USA under the influence of Irving Babbitt, one of the leaders of American New Humanism.³⁸ Babbitt argued against the materialistic and utilitarian aspects of modernity and envisioned a universal humanistic civilization that was a combination of the European classical tradition of Greek philosophy, Indian Buddhism, and Chinese Confucianism.

The scholars of this core group contended that the Chinese national essence could be found in classical literature,³⁹ which had to be protected against modern materialism, romanticism and utilitarianism. But in contrast to many other conservatives of this period like Liang Shuming 梁漱溟,⁴⁰ they did not equate these “isms” with the West, but rather emphasized the basic similarity of Chinese and Western classical civilization. Nowhere can we find a hint in their writings that they conceived of Confucianism as a *Chinese* remedy to the *Western* illness of modernity, but rather as one part of a classicist answer to the problems of modernity.

They opposed the May Fourth movement not because it advocated a new culture, but because of what they perceived as its romanticism and utilitarianism and, last but not least, its iconoclasm; in other words, the May Fourth movement stood from their point of view for the wrong “new culture.” They argued instead that the clear-cut juxtaposition of *old* and *new*, *East* and *West*, was misleading,⁴¹ because the *new* cannot be conceived of as independent of the *old*, but rather develops on the basis of what has been before. Any radical opposition against tradition must lead to a total deracination and, hence, cultural and social anomie. They consequently pleaded for a literature that would express new content within traditional forms (classical Chinese and traditional narrative and poetic forms).⁴²

The ideal culture was to be based on Confucianism and, simultaneously, to embody the principles of neo-humanism. Only those foreign elements which were of universal value *and* were adequate to Chinese culture were to be adopted.⁴³ The task of the scholar-poet was to represent this humanistic culture and to lead society. Although Wu Mi and his colleagues seldom addressed questions of China’s future political organization, it is obvious that they opposed modern mass democracy as well as a return to traditional

⁴¹ In this they are comparable to Du Yaquan, the authors of the *Guogu zazhi* [National Past] and post-1919 Zhang Shizhao. Du Yaquan is one of those who is now being discussed again in the context of *New Guoxue*. See Gao Like, “Du Yaquan de zhongxi wenhuaguan” [Du Yaquan’s view of Eastern and Western culture], *Ersbiyi shiji* 34 (April 1996): 53–62. Liu Runzhong, “Du Yaquan de wenhua sixiang” [The cultural thought of Du Yaquan], *Chuantong wenhua yu xiandaihua* 1994.2: 73–81. Wang Yuanhua, “Du Yaquan yu dongxi wenhua wenti lunzhan” [Du Yaquan and the debate on Eastern and Western culture], *Xueren* 5 (1993): 1–24. The most comprehensive study especially on Zhang Shizhao’s post-May Fourth reversal of his previous attitudes can be found in Shen Songqiao, “Wusi shiqi Zhang Shizhao de baoshou sixiang” [The conservative thought of Zhang Shizhao during the May Fourth period], *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo jikan* [Bulletin of the Institute for History and Philology of the Academia Sinica] 15 xia 下 (Dec. 1986): 163–250. For Zhang’s influence on the New Culture movement before 1919, see Timothy B. Weston, “The formation and positioning of the New Culture community 1913–1917,” *Modern China* 24.3 (July 1998): 255–84.

⁴² Mei Guangdi, “Ping tichang xin wenhua zhe” [A critique of those in favor of a New Culture], *Xueheng* 1 (Jan. 1922): 1–8; Hu Xiansu, “Ping Hu Shi *Wushi nian lai Zhongguo zhi wenxue*” [A critique of Hu Shi’s *Chinese literature in the past fifty years*], *Xueheng* 18 (June 1923): 1–26; Hu Xiansu, “Ping *Changsbiji*” [A critique of the *Changsbiji*], *Xueheng* 1 (Jan. 1922): 1–23; Wu Mi, “Lun jinri wenxue chuango zhi zhengfa” [On the correct method of literary creation in present times], *Xueheng* 15 (March 1923): 1–27; and Wu Mi, “Shixue zonglun” [General treatise on poetics], *Xueheng* 9 (Sept. 1922): 1–20. See Shen Songqiao, *Xuehengpai*, pp.152–7.

⁴³ What ultimately was “adequate” to Chinese culture, however, remained rather ill-defined throughout their writings.

⁴⁴ Mei Guangdi, “Humanism and modern China,” *The Bookman* (June 1931), reprinted in *Mei Guangdi wenlu* [Writings of Mei Guangdi] (Taipei: Lianhe Chuban Zhongxin), 1968, pp.9–25. See Rosen, *The national heritage opposition*, pp.77–87.

⁴⁵ The most comprehensive study of this academic field of historical geography during the Republican period is Peng Minghui, *Lishi dilixue yu xiandai Zhongguo shixue* [Historical geography and modern Chinese historiography] (Taipei: Dongda, 1995).

⁴⁶ They published not only in the *Xueheng zazhi*, but also in journals like the *Shidixuebao* [Historical geography] (Nanjing, Nov.1921–Oct.1926); *Shixue yu dixue* [Historiography and geography] (Shanghai, Dec.1926 onwards), and *Shixue zazhi* [Historiography] (Nanjing, Mar.1929–Apr. 1931). They had their institutional base at the South-Eastern University in Nanjing, the later Central University, which developed into an antipode against the May Fourth camp at Peking University.

⁴⁷ That is, the theories of the “doubters of antiquity” (Yigupai 疑古派) led by Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, and Hu Shi’s 胡適 movement “to order the national past” (*zhengli guogu 整理國故*). On the doubters of antiquity, see Lawrence A. Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang and China’s New History: nationalism and the quest for alternative traditions* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1971); Peng Minghui, *Yigu sixiang yu xiandai Zhongguo shixue de fazhan* [The thought of the doubters of antiquity and the development of modern Chinese historiography] (Taipei: Shangwu, 1991); Peng Minghui, “Gu Jiegang yu Zhongguo shixue xiandaihua de mengya—yi shiliaoxue wei zhongxin de tantao” [Gu Jiegang and the sprouts of the modernization of Chinese historiography—an investigation focused on the study of historical material], *Guosbiguan guankan* [Academia Historica Journal] 12 (June 1992): 9–24; and Wang Fansen, *Gushibian yundong de xingqi, yi ge sixiangshi de fenxi* [The rise of the movement to discuss Chinese ancient history: an analysis of intellectual history] (Taipei: Yunchen, 1987). On Hu Shi see Irene Eber, “Hu Shih and Chinese history, the problem of Cheng-li Kuo-ku,” *Monumenta Serica* 27 (1968): 169–207; and Li Moying, “Hu Shi and his Deweyan reconstruction of Chinese history,” PhD diss. (Boston University, 1990).

⁴⁸ They tried to achieve this by translating and introducing Western books on historiography, as for example Seignobos’ introduction to the study of history (Langlois Ch.V., Seignobos Ch. trans. by Li Sichun, *Shixue yuanshun*, French: *Introduction aux études historiques* (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1926); and Lamprecht’s concept of a history of world culture (Chen Xunci, “Lishi zhi

political forms, i.e. the restoration of a monarchy. Instead they preferred a highly élitist form of state with the Confucian scholar-poet at the top of the social and political hierarchy.⁴⁴

The second group within the *Xueheng* camp, which later became known as the school of historical geography,⁴⁵ consisted of scholars like Liu Yizheng, Miao Fenglin, Zheng Hesheng, Zhang Qiyun and others, who had not studied in the West.⁴⁶ Mostly professional historians, this group stood for a China-centered universalism. Although they agreed with most of the neo-humanistic principles of their above-mentioned colleagues, they did not participate in the dissemination of Babbitt’s ideas in China. They rather concentrated on the refutation of May Fourth historiography⁴⁷ and defended the traditional, ethical view of history. Despite this rather traditional approach to history they tried to realize their aims by using new forms and methods of historiography and were actively engaged in the reception of Western theories of historiography.⁴⁸

During the 1920s Liu Yizheng and Lu Moude 陸懋德 published in the *Xueheng* in serialized form two of the first monographs on cultural history. Liu’s aim in writing his *History of Chinese Culture*⁴⁹ was to analyze the exchange between China and foreign people throughout history in order to discover the “causality”⁵⁰ of cultural change. He reached the conclusion that although China had several times been heavily exposed to foreign cultures it had always succeeded in assimilating these influences. According to Liu this was due to the particularity of its culture and national spirit, which he saw as embodied in the Confucian rites. But, as becomes abundantly clear in his *History of Chinese Culture* as well as in other articles, Liu assumed that China with its superior Confucian ethics will again take the lead over Western civilization or at least make significant contributions to the badly shaken materialistic culture of post-war Europe.⁵¹

/shehui de jiazhi” [The social value of history], *Shidixuebao* 1.2 [1921]: 1–2. For a list of their translations, see Zhang Wenjian, “Xuehengpai de shixue yanjiu” [The historical studies of the *Xueheng* group], *Jindaishi yanjiu* 1994.2 (June 1994): 37–8.

⁴⁹ Liu Yizheng, *Zhongguo wenhua shi*.

⁵⁰ Liu uses this term rather vaguely. It sometimes connotes a strict causality as implied in evolutionary scientism, but most of the time Liu uses “causality” to refer to mutual influence. His basic theoretical position was that history mostly is too pluralistic to be subject to strict causality. See Liu Yizheng, “Lishi zhi zhishi” [Historical knowledge], *Shidixuebao* 3.7 (May 1925): 19–21, reprinted in *Liu Yizheng shixue lunwenji* [Collection of Liu Yizheng’s historiography] (Shanghai: Guji Chubanshe, 1991), pp.80–4.

⁵¹ Liu Yizheng, “Zhongguo wenhua xibei zhi shangque” [A consideration of the Western ex-

/pansion of Chinese culture], *Xueheng* 27 (March 1924): 1–7, reprinted in Liu Yizheng, *Liu Yizheng shixue lunwen xujii* [Second collection of Liu Yizheng’s historiography] (Shanghai: Guji Chubanshe, 1991), pp.224–30.

⁵² For an analysis of Chen Yinke’s historiography, see Schneider, *Wahrheit und Geschichte*. For a summary of my findings, see Schneider, “Between *dao* and history,” pp.54–73. On Wang see Joey Bonner, *Wang Guowei, an intellectual biography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986); and Hermann Kogelschatz, *Wang Guowei und Schopenhauer: eine philosophische Begegnung. Wandlung des Selbstverständnisses der chinesischen Literatur unter dem Einfluß der klassischen deutschen Ästhetik* [Wang Guowei and Schopenhauer: a philosophical encounter. Changes in the self-image of Chinese literature under the influence of German classical aesthetics] (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 1986). No Western stud-

A third type of intellectual belonging to the *Xueheng* group consisted of historians like Wang Guowei, Chen Yinke, Tang Yongtong and Zhang Yinlin, who were linked to *Xueheng* rather loosely.⁵² They did publish a few articles in *Xueheng* and although it is obvious that they shared some basic humanistic convictions of the *Xueheng* scholars, they never actively participated in the publication and editing process of the journal.⁵³

Whereas Wu Mi stressed a universal neo-humanistic civilization consisting of Western, Chinese and Indian elements, Liu Yizheng from the historical geography group emphasized the particularity of Chinese culture, sometimes even implying that it was superior to Western culture. Chen and Tang chose an intermediate position that can best be described as stressing cultural particularity and assuming that all cultures are—relative to world culture—of equal standing, thus implying a universalistic perspective.

Chen's research was based on the assumption that Chinese history is characterized by the gradual development of its particular national spirit. He identified the basic Confucian ethical principles of the Three Bonds and Five Relationships (*sangang wuchang* 三綱五常) as its core, but he did not go so far as to hypostatize it as an unchanging essence. He rather focused on the history of Chinese Buddhism and the exchange between China and foreign peoples, in order to show that the national spirit has always been subject to changes, has adapted to new circumstances and assimilated non-Han influences. His major claim was that only receptivity to external stimulants had guaranteed the persistence of Chinese cultural identity by preserving the core idea of the Three Bonds and Five Relationships, though in different historical guises. Any notion of an unchanging National Essence contradicts Chen's concept of continuity by change in the same way as the unqualified reception of foreign ideas alien to the Chinese national spirit contradicts it.⁵⁴

According to this concept Chen Yinke and Tang Yongtong strongly opposed the direct and unqualified transplantation of foreign ideas into China.⁵⁵ What guarded them against cultural relativism was the notion of "the universality of abstract ideals" (*chouxianxiang lixiang zhi tongxing* 抽象理想之通性).⁵⁶ Chen seems to recover the lost universal ground not by proclaiming a humanistic Chinese civilization superior to the West, but by assuming the universality of human attachment to "abstract ideals," which do vary from culture to culture and have to be protected in order to safeguard the identity of this culture.⁵⁷

/ies on Tang Yongtong and Zhang Yinlin are available yet.

⁵³ Chen and Tang were linked to Wu Mi and Mei Guangdi because they studied together at Qinghua University and at Harvard and were introduced to Irving Babbitt by Mei Guangdi.

⁵⁴ Chen Yinke, "Feng Youlan *Zhongguo zhe xueshi* xiace shencha baogao" [Report on the inquiry into the second volume of Feng You-

lan's *History of Chinese philosophy*] (1933), in *Chen Yinke xiansheng wenji* [Collected works of Mr. Chen Yinke, hereafter *CYKWJ*] 2.3 (Taipei: Liren Shuju, 1981), pp.250–2. In the context of the *New Guoxue* discussion, it is interesting to note that in this report Chen refers to Soviet Marxism and American Liberalism as two examples of teachings that do not fit Chinese conditions.

⁵⁵ Two typical texts are Chen Yinke, "Yu Liu Shuya jiaoshou lun guowen shiti shu" [Letter to Professor Liu Shuya discussing the question of Chinese language examinations], *Xueheng* 79 (July 1933): 1–8, in *CYKWJ* 2.3, pp.221–8; and Tang Yongtong, "Ping jinren zhi wenhua yanjiu" [A critique of present cultural studies], *Xueheng* 12 (Dec. 1922): 1–4.

⁵⁶ The modern *locus classicus* of this topic of cultural identity based on a particular culture and its relation to universal ideals is Chen Yinke's obituary poem commemorating Wang Guowei's suicide and his foreword to the collected writings of Wang Guowei. Here Chen opposes the widespread explanations for Wang's suicide as a reaction to the threat the Northern Expedition posed for Pu Yi 溥儀, the last emperor of the Qing dynasty, or as the result of a quarrel with his long-time mentor Luo Chenyu 羅振玉. Instead, Chen argues, Wang Guowei killed himself because he could not endure seeing the decline of Chinese traditional culture. See Chen Yinke, "Wang Guantang xiansheng wanci bingxu" [Poem with foreword commemorating Wang Guantang] (Beiping, 1927), in *CYKWJ* 1.1, pp.6–11; and Chen Yinke, "Wangling'an xiansheng yishu xu" [Foreword to the posthumous writings of Mr. Wang Guowei] (3 June 1934), in *CYKWJ* 2.3, pp.219–20. Passages from this poem and especially the foreword to the poem are quoted in probably one out of every two articles on the question of cultural identity published during the past several years. For a translation of the foreword into German, see my *Wahrheit und Geschichte*, pp.233–4.

⁵⁷ Chen Yinke's concept is in some ways reminiscent of Feng Youlan's 馮友蘭 notion of "abstract inheritance" that is supported by the fact that both Chen and Feng referred to Plato's concept of "ideas," and that Chen held Feng Youlan's *History of Chinese philosophy* in high esteem. However, Chen emphasizes the concrete contents of "abstract ideals" that have to be inherited. He refers to the concept of "abstract ideals" only in order to clarify that every culture does adhere to certain abstract ideals. In contrast, Feng develops the notion of "abstract inheritance" in order to justify the inheritance of universally applicable principles as detached and abstracted from their concrete cultural particularity. It is interesting to note that Feng's concept is not mentioned within the *New Guoxue* discourse. For Feng's concept of "abstract inheritance," see Feng Youlan, *The Hall of Three Pines: an account of my life*, trans. by Denis C. Mair (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), pp.287–300.

⁵⁸ This methodology is most clearly expressed in Chen Yinke, "Feng Youlan *Zhongguo zhexueshi* shangce shencha baogao" [Report on the inquiry into the first volume of Feng Youlan's *History of Chinese Philosophy*] (n.p., 11 June 1930), in *CYKWJ* 2.3, pp.247–9. For a detailed discussion of Chen's methodology, see my *Wahrheit und Geschichte*, pp.126–46, 177–94, and 209–26.

⁵⁹ Chen Yinke, *Qinghua daxue Wang Guantang xiansheng jinian beiming* [Commemorative stele inscription for Mr. Wang Guowei from Qinghua University] (Beiping, 1929), in *CYKWJ* 2.3, p.218.

⁶⁰ On the close relation between historiography and historiology in traditional Chinese historical writing, see Chevrier, "La servante-maitresse," pp.117–44. See also Benjamin I. Schwartz, "History in Chinese culture—some comparative reflections," in *Chinese Historiography in Comparative Perspective: History and Theory*, Theme Issue 35 (Oct. 1996): 23–33.

⁶¹ Of course the boundaries between these two approaches are fluid and both of these distinct focal points do play a role in nearly all texts analyzed here.

⁶² Yue Daiyun, "Chonggu 'Xueheng'."

⁶³ Sun Shangyang, "Zai qimeng yu xueshu zhi jian: Chonggu 'Xueheng'" [Between enlightenment and learning: a re-evaluation of *Xueheng*], *Ersbiyi sbiji* 22 (Apr. 1994): 35–45. Sun refers to a text by Liu Boming, "Gonghe guomin zhi jingshen" [The spirit of the citizens of a republic], *Xueheng* 10 (Oct. 1922): 1–6, and *Guofeng banyuekan* 9 (24 Nov. 1932): 1–6. Some texts on Wu Mi come to similar conclusions. See Fang Hanwen, "Beiju yingxiong yu wenhua chonghe—jianlun Wu Mi de zhongxi wenhuaguan" [A tragic hero and cultural conflict and harmony—on Wu Mi's view of Eastern and Western culture], in Li Funing et al., *Di er jie*, pp.47–54. This critique of the May Fourth movement referred to by *New Guoxue* scholars is reminiscent of Lin Yü-sheng's notion of "iconoclastic totalitarianism." See Lin Yü-sheng, *The crisis of Chinese consciousness: radical antitraditionalism in the May Fourth era* (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin University Press, 1979).

⁶⁴ This is normally referred to as Chen Yinke's "theory of Chinese culture as the basis" (*Zhongguo wenhua benweilun*). The most outspoken expression of this approach

The historian's task is to contribute to the recollection of the national spirit and its core values. He has to achieve this aim by adopting a historicist, hermeneutic methodology. His research should be based on the meticulous examination of historical sources and an accurate knowledge of the past, aiming at the empathetic understanding of the historical manifestations of the national spirit. Then, and only then, may the historian venture to evaluate Chinese history from a contemporary perspective.⁵⁸

The correlate of this historicist methodology was a requirement that the historian should stay aloof from politics.⁵⁹ Because history is no longer the manifestation of absolute principles the historian correspondingly loses his previous political position to actualize the universal *Dao* through historiography, thereby legitimizing the emperor's claim to political power.⁶⁰ Chen Yinke thus dissolves the traditional unity of knowledge and action and assigns to the historian the *new* role of being a mere guardian of historical memory and cultural identity.

Back to the 1990s—the Xueheng Revival

In the years following the appearance of Yue Daiyun's article a multitude of publications on the historiographical methodology and cultural theory of the *Xueheng* group appeared. Besides publications on the *Xueheng* group in general and its status in the context of modern Chinese conservatism, most of the articles focused on either the historians belonging to the third group within the *Xueheng* or on Wu Mi. The interpretations brought forward are of course manifold, but by and large two different approaches can be discerned: those publications that focus on Tang Yongtong's, Wang Guowei's, and Chen Yinke's view of history, their historical methodology and the implications for the role of the intellectual; and those publications that laid greater stress on the position of the *Xueheng* group, especially that of Wu Mi, Mei Guangdi, and Liu Yizheng, within the topography of modern Chinese conservatism and their attitude towards the nation-state and nationalism.⁶¹

The first type of interpretation places the *Xueheng* group within the broader context of the New Culture movement and emphasizes its predominantly modern character.⁶² This interpretation stresses that scholars like Chen Yinke and Tang Yongtong did not negate the achievements of the New Culture movement *in toto*, but criticized its neglect or radical rejection of indigenous sources of change,⁶³ in order to revitalize Chinese tradition and preserve its particularity by infusing fresh blood, i.e. Western ideas, into Chinese culture.⁶⁴ Their research on the influx of Buddhism into China and the resulting Buddho-Confucian synthesis is seen as showing how even far-reaching cultural transformation can be achieved without leading to a rupture within cultural identity.⁶⁵ Yue Daiyun argues that any attempt to hypostatize and essentialize tradition would eventually neutralize and thereby musealize that very tradition.⁶⁶ To be sure, Chen's frequent reference to the Three Bonds

and Five Relationships as the core of the national spirit, that has to be preserved, is seen as evidence of his ultimate ethical goal. But this concern with an ethical anchor in times of change is paired with Chen's concept of continuity through change and seems to be of only secondary importance for the advocates of this interpretation. Closely related to this concept of continuity and the relativity of values previously held as absolute is the emphasis on the shift of the intellectual's role. Repeated reference is made to Chen's conviction that the scholar should be free from political interference and detach himself from his own political inclinations.⁶⁷

By way of comparing Wu Mi's rather political and Chen Yinke's more cultural explanation of Wang Guowei's suicide,⁶⁸ Liu Mengxi 劉夢溪 makes clear that from his point of view it is precisely the attachment to Chinese culture in combination with the lack of freedom that drove Wang Guowei to commit suicide. According to Liu it was the unqualified adoption of Western ideas by the New Culture movement as well as the Chinese tradition of statecraft which bound the scholar to politics, against which Wang Guowei fought in vain.⁶⁹ The message conveyed in most of these texts is abundantly clear: only scholars, who are independent from politics, are able to protect and develop the national spirit.

The political implications of this theme of one part of the *New Guoxue* writing were made known to a wider public by Lu Jiandong's biography of Chen Yinke's last twenty years, i.e. his life under Communist rule.⁷⁰ The main theme of this book is the harsh and unjust treatment of intellectuals by the CCP and long passages read like a reckoning. Especially telling is a long quot-

/shu lunwenji [Academic collection in commemoration of the 100th birthday of Mr. Chen Yinke] (Beijing: Xinhua Shudian, 1989), pp.20–31. Liu Mengxi, "Xueshu duli yu Zhongguo xiandai xueshu chuantong" [Academic independence and the tradition of China's modern learning], in Liu Mengxi, *Chuantong de wudu*, pp.78–105; "Wang Guowei yu Zhongguo xiandai xueshu de duli" [Wang Guowei and the independence of China's modern learning], in Liu Mengxi, *Chuantong dewudu*, pp.105–130; and "Chen Yinke wei he bu jiu lishi di er suo zhang" [Why did Chen Yinke not accept the position of Director of the Second Institute of History], in Liu Mengxi, *Chuantong de wudu*, pp.154–159. Tang Zhenchang, "Duli zhi jingshen, ziyou zhi sixiang" [Independent spirit, free thought], in *Ersbiyi shiji* 13 (Oct. 1992): 6–8.

⁶⁸ In 1927 Wang Guowei, a brilliant scholar and professed traditionalist, who is regarded not only as the founder of modern Chinese literary studies, but also as one of the foremost transitional figures of modern Chinese historiography, killed himself. Immediately various explanations for the suicide were discussed. By and large three different interpretations were brought forward: a personal explanation tracing the suicide back to a conflict between Wang Guowei and his long-time mentor Luo Chenyu. Various political interpretations centered on the question of Wang Guowei's political convictions. Wu Mi, for example, argued that Wang Guowei—the Qing loyalist—was shocked by the imminent humiliation of the last Qing emperor Pu Yi by warlord armies threatening to occupy Beijing; a cultural explanation proffered by Chen Yinke proclaimed that Wang—the cultural loyalist—could not bear the decline of Chinese traditional culture. For a collection of articles commemorating Wang Guowei, see Chen Pingyuan and Wang Feng, *Zhuiyi Wang Guowei* [Commemorating Wang Guowei] (Beijing: Zhongguo Guangbo Dianshi Chubanshe, 1997).

⁶⁹ Liu Mengxi, "Xueshu duli," and "Wang Guowei yu Zhongguo xiandai xueshu de duli."

⁷⁰ Lu Jiandong, *Chen Yinke de zui hou ershi nian*. Ten thousand copies of the first edition of this book were printed, and new print runs have been published.

/can be found in Chen Yinke, "Feng Youlan *Zhongguo zhexueshi xiace shencha baogao*."

⁶⁵ In particular Yue Daiyun, "Wenhua gengxin de tansuozhe" [Explorer of cultural rejuvenation], in Wang Yongxing, *Jinian Chen Yinke*, pp.346–51, and "Changming Guocui, ronghua xinzhì—Tang Yongtong yu 'Xueheng' zazhi" [To expound the National Essence, to adopt New Knowledge—Tang Yongtong and the *Critical Review*], in *Guogu xinzhì: Zhongguo chuantong wenhua de zai quanshi—Tang Yongtong xiansheng danchen bai zhou nian jinian wenji* [The national past and New Knowledge: the reinterpretation of China's traditional culture—collection in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Mr. Tang Yongtong] (Beijing: Beijing Daxue, 1993), pp.30–6. Another example is Wu Liyu, "Shilun Chen Yinke xiansheng de wenhua jicheng yu weixin shikuan" [On Mr. Chen Yinke's cultural inheriting and reformist view of history], in Wang Yongxing et al., *Jinian Chen Yinke*, pp.506–20. Liu Mengxi discusses

/this problem in one of his less academic articles that addresses the problems of cultural continuity and the changing role of the intellectuals under circumstances of the process of globalization and rapid economic change in the PRC today. See Liu Mengxi, "Jieguo yu chongjian, wenhua yu jingji yu zhengzhi de sanchong bianzou" [Deconstruction and reconstruction, the triple variation of culture, economics and politics] (March 1993), in Liu Mengxi, *Chuantong de wudu*, pp.391–404.

⁶⁶ Yue Daiyun, "Wenhua gengxin." The metaphor of the "museum" is reminiscent of Levenson's usage of that term. See Levenson, *Confucian China and its modern fate*, vol.3, pp.76–82.

⁶⁷ Sun Shangyang, "Zai qimeng." Yue Daiyun, "Wenhua gengxin," and "Changming guocui, ronghua xinzhì." Zhou Xunchu, "Chen Yinke xiansheng de 'Zhongguo wenhua benweilun'" [Mr. Chen Yinke's "Theory of Chinese culture as the basis"], in Ji Xianlin et al., ed., *Jinian Chen Yinke xiansheng bainian danchen xue-*

⁷¹ In 1949 Chen Yinke refused Fu Sinian's invitation to go to Taiwan and stayed in Canton for the rest of his life. He first taught at Lingnan University and later at Zhongshan University.

⁷² Chen Yinke, "Wang Guantang xiansheng wanci bingxu."

⁷³ *Sudi* 俗諦

⁷⁴ Lu Jiandong, *Chen Yinke de zuihou ershi nian*, pp.109–13.

⁷⁵ Texts belonging to this second category are: Zhang Liping, "Qianping Wu Mi de zhongxi wenhuaguan" [Superficial critique of Wu Mi's view of Eastern and Western culture], in Li Funing et al., *Diyi jie*, pp.176–88; Zhao Lingyang, "Chen Yinke xiansheng yu minzu wenhuashi zhi yanjiu" [Mr. Chen Yinke and research on the history of national culture], in Hu Shouwei, "*Liu Rusbi biezhuann*," pp.16–22; Ji Xianlin, "Chen Yinke xianshengde aiguo zhuyi" [Mr. Chen Yinke's patriotism], in Hu Shouwei, "*Liu Rusbi biezhuann*," pp.1–7; Kuang Xinnian, "Xuehengpai dui xiandaixing de fansi" [Reflections of the *Xueheng* group on modernity], *Ersbi yi sbiji* 22 (Apr. 1994): 46–55; and Wu Fang, "Wu Mi yu 'Xueheng' de wenhua baoshou zhuyi" [Wu Mi and the cultural conservatism of *Xueheng*], *Xueren* 4 (July 1993): 109–27.

⁷⁶ Ji Xianlin, "Tianren heyi' caineng zhengjiu renlei" [Only the unity of heaven and men can rescue humanity], *Dongfang* [The East] 1 (1993): 6.

⁷⁷ Most outspoken in this regard is Ji Xianlin, "Chen Yinke xiansheng de aiguo zhuyi," who interprets Chen Yinke's emphasis on the *Sangang wuchang* as an expression of Chen's patriotism. In order to validate this interpretation Ji explains the relationship between ruler and servant (*jun* 君 and *chen* 臣) as a traditional antecedent to patriotism.

⁷⁸ A text referred to in this context is Chen Yinke, "Lun Han Yu" [On Han Yu], *Lishi yanjiu* 2 (1954), in *CYKWJ* 1.2, pp.285–98.

⁷⁹ Kuang Xinnian, "Xuehengpai dui xiandaixing de fansi."

⁸⁰ Ji Xianlin, "Chen Yinke xiansheng de aiguo zhuyi" and Zhang Liping, "Qianping Wu Mi."

ation from one of Chen's letters. In 1954 the State Council decided to establish the Second Institute for Historical Research in Beijing and sent a representative to Canton to invite Chen Yinke to become its first director.⁷¹ Chen's response was straightforward. He refused and—referring to his obituary for Wang Guowei⁷²—explained that his basic attitude had not changed since Wang's suicide: the scholar had to remain independent from political constraints and free from "the shackles of common truth." He goes on to explain that "common truth"⁷³ in the 1930s referred to the KMT's "Three Principles of the People" (*Sanmin zhuyi* 三民主義) and, he hastens to add, that today it of course refers to Marxism-Leninism. As if this would not have been enough to antagonize the CCP, Chen appends two stipulations: he states that he will accept the post only if, firstly, research at the institute is not subject to Marxism-Leninism, and second, if Mao Zedong and Liu Shaoqi write a letter guaranteeing this independence from politics.⁷⁴

A second type of interpretation⁷⁵ situates the *Xueheng* group within the broader context of modern Chinese conservatism and assigns to it the function of a transitional group from National Essence thought to the conservatism of the Neo-Confucians of the 1930s. Although the contribution of the *Xueheng* group to the development of China's particular national culture and specific socialist spiritual civilization is often referred to, this interpretation tends to stress the universal leanings of Wu Mi's, Mei Guangdi's and Liu Yizheng's cultural theory, sometimes even combined with claims about Chinese superiority.⁷⁶

This interpretation approves of the theory of "Chinese culture as the basis," acclaims the *Xueheng's* criticism of May Fourth radicalism and pledges the cautious and gradual development of China's national culture. But it seldom refers to Chen Yinke's demand to free scholars from political constraints. The scholar's patriotic duty is to enhance the glory of the national culture, the development of which through the principle of continuity by change is less important than its potential to serve as a means to foster social cohesion and patriotism.⁷⁷ Accordingly, representatives of the first interpretation quote from those texts that center on historical examples of intercultural exchange, whereas advocates of the second type of interpretation prefer those texts that focus on the result of this exchange, i.e. the orthodoxy of Sung Neo-Confucianism brought about by such cultural heroes as Han Yu 韓愈.⁷⁸

Representatives of the second interpretation correspondingly seldom refer to the relativistic elements of historicist methodology. Chen's cautions against judgments on the past from a politically or philosophically motivated perspective unrestricted by historical investigation and unharnessed by empathetic understanding, which play such an important role in the first type of interpretation, are here subordinate to the contemporary attention paid to the *Xueheng's* concern for the survival of the national spirit. Wu Mi's and Mei Guangdi's political blueprint of leadership by the cultural élite⁷⁹ is consistent with the stronger political cast and clearer emphasis on present needs espoused by this type of interpretation.⁸⁰

All participants of the present *New Guoxue* discourse agree that the ultimate concern of the *Xuebeng* group was to realize a universal culture based on tradition. But they stress that China must never abandon its cultural particularity. In the case of the second interpretation, and especially scholars like Ji Xianlin 季羨林, the emphasis on China's specific culture and history seems to be directed *against* the West and in some cases ultimately aimed at Chinese superiority, that is, they try to define Chinese culture as the Universal. In the case of Yue Daiyun, Liu Mengxi and others, the notion of a Chinese particularity seems to be one of China being situated on an equal footing and in constant exchange *with* the West. Yet the question of how to combine the preservation of one's particularity with the aim of achieving a universal culture remains unanswered.⁸¹

Another similarity between the two interpretations is that they overlook the fact that wider social and political issues did not play a role in the writings of the *Xuebeng* group.⁸² That Tang Yongtong's and Chen Yinke's distance from power led to their silence on urgent problems of their time does not seem to trouble the *New Guoxue* scholars belonging to the first interpretation. Similarly, the conservative social and political implications of leadership by the élite of scholar-poets envisioned by Wu Mi, Mei Guangdi and Liu Yizheng, obviously do not raise concerns among those who adhere to the second interpretation.

Comparison with the Neo-Conservative Mainstream of the 1990s

From my analysis of the *Xuebeng* revival, it becomes evident that both interpretations share important characteristics with the neo-conservatism of the 1990s as described in Western research: they both underscore the need to establish a particular Chinese historical and cultural identity, and question, at least implicitly, the alleged universality of modern Western values. They want to achieve this by taking up again the thread of Chinese tradition and by developing it gradually, consciously avoiding what they perceive as the errors of May Fourth radicalism.⁸³ They participate in a search for Chinese social values which could serve as a spiritual and ethical bulwark against the negative consequences of modernization, but as their subject of research, they too fail to combine this with a distinct and feasible social and political program.⁸⁴

Despite these similarities, the differences between the general neo-conservative discourse and the first type of interpretation of the *Xuebeng*

/combined discussion of the cultural thought of Tang Yongtong, Feng Youlan, and Chen Yinke, *Beijing shehui kexue* 1994.1: 62–72.

⁸² This, again, can probably be attributed to the predominantly academic character of these texts. One rare exception is He Xiaoming, "Jindai Zhongguo wenhua baoshou zhuyi shulun" [Description and discussion of modern Chinese cultural conservatism], *Jindaishi yanjiu* 1996.5 (Sept. 1996): 40–66.

⁸³ This position is clearly expressed in a debate Yu Yingshi initiated in 1992, which involved many intellectuals from mainland China. Jiang Yihua, "Jijin yu baoshou: Yu Yingshi xiansheng shangque" [Radical and conservative: a discussion with Mr Yu Yingshi], *Ersbiyi sbiji* 10 (April 1992): 134–42; Chen Lai, "Ershi shiji wenhua yundong zhong de jijin zhuyi" [Radicalism in cultural movements of the twentieth century], *Dongfang* 1 (1993): 38–44; He Minghong, "Ershi shiji: jinbu zhuyi yu baoshou zhuyi zhi jian" [The twentieth century: between progressivism and conservatism], *Dongfang* 13 (1995): 90–4; Xu Jilin, "Jijin yu baoshou de mihuo" [The puzzle of radicalism and conservatism], *Ersbiyi sbiji* 11 (June 1992): 37–40; Li Liangyu, "Jijin, baoshou yu zhishi fenzi de zeren" [Radicalism, conservatism and the responsibility of the intellectuals], *Ersbiyi sbiji* 12 (Aug. 1992): 132–4; Sun Guodong, "Du Jiang Yihua 'Jijin yu baoshou' shu hou" [After reading Jiang Yihua's "Radical and conservative"], *Ersbiyi sbiji* 11 (June 1992): 141–3; Wang Zhaoguang, "'Baoshou' yu 'baoshou zhuyi'" ["Conservative" and "conservatism"], *Ersbiyi sbiji* 12 (August 1992): 135–8; Wang Rongzu, "Jijin yu baoshou zhuiyan" [Unnecessary talk on radicalism and conservatism], *Ersbiyi sbiji* 11 (June 1992): 133–6; Yu Ying-shih, "The radicalization of China in the 20th century," *Daedalus* 122.2 (Spring 1993): 125–50; and "Zai lun Zhongguo xianandai sixiang zhong de jijin yu baoshou—da Jiang Yihua xiansheng" [Again on radicalism and conservatism in modern Chinese thought—answering Mr. Jiang Yihua], *Ersbiyi sbiji* 10 (Apr. 1992): 143–9.

⁸⁴ It is telling, in this context, that the *New Guoxue* scholars avoid any reference to that part of Chen's foreword to his poem commemorating Wang Guowei's death that unmistakably declares the hopelessness of any attempt to protect a culture that is doomed to decline due to overall changes in social and economic structures.

⁸¹ This is in part due to the fact that most of the texts presented here are rather academic, hiding the discussion of this seemingly self-contradictory goal within references to the discussions of the 1930s. One text that explicitly discusses this question of the relationship

/between particularity and universality is Chen Junmin, "Zhongguo jinshi 'sanjiao ronghe' yu 'zhongxi huitong'—Tang Yongtong, Feng Youlan, Chen Yinke wenhua sixiang helun" [The "fusion of the three teachings" and the "melding of East and West" in modern China—

⁸⁵ As can be seen from the success of Li Jiandong's book on Chen Yinke.

⁸⁶ In Chen Yinke's case, for nearly twenty years.

⁸⁷ As, for example, Tang Yongtong, who in the few general, non-academic texts he published, displayed a firm grasp of Western philosophical discourse. See Tang Yongtong, "Ping jinren," and "Guanyu Yingguo jingyan zhuyi" [On English empiricism] (1949), in Tang Yongtong, *Lixue, foxue, xuanxue* [Neo-Confucianism, Buddhism, and metaphysics] (1992), pp.347–60, and "Wenhua sixiang zhi chongtu yu tiaohé" [Conflict and mediation in cultural thought], *Xueshu jikan* 1:2 (Jan. 1943), reprinted in Tang Yongtong, *Tang Yongtong xuanji* [Selected writings of Tang Yongtong] (Tianjin: Tianjin Renmin Chubanshe, 1995), pp.314–19.

⁸⁸ The phrase cited most often in this context is from the charter of the *Xuebeng zazhi*, i.e. "to expound the National Essence, to adopt new knowledge" (*changming guocui, ronghua xinzhì* 昌明國粹，融化新知). See "Xuebeng zazhi jianzhang" [General guidelines for the *Critical Review*], *Xuebeng* 1 (Jan. 1922): 3.

⁸⁹ Xu Ben, "From modernity to Chineseness," pp.218.

⁹⁰ It goes without saying that in the context of the 1990s this is a highly political position.

group are most striking—especially if we take into consideration that this approach seems to be more influential than the second type of interpretation.⁸⁵

The first type of interpretation is by no means anti-Western or excessively nationalistic; on the contrary, most of the *Xuebeng* scholars referred to studied in the West for a long time.⁸⁶ They were familiar with recent Western philosophical and cultural debates,⁸⁷ and advocated a balanced adoption of those ideas and institutions they deemed adequate to China and its cultural traditions.⁸⁸ Their research is depicted by Yue Daiyun and others as an exemplification of Sino-foreign cultural exchange, and there is no doubt that this is not only a reaction to the pro-Western "culture fever" of the 1980s, but is also directed against the excessive, sometimes xenophobic nationalism of certain strands of neo-conservative discourse.

Correspondingly Chinese culture is portrayed as anything but static. Despite the repeated emphasis on the Three Bonds and Five Relationships as the core of China's national spirit, the constant adaptation to new circumstances Chen Yinke and others had stressed contradicts any attempt at defining a national cultural essence. There are no signs, that the intellectuals standing behind the first type of interpretation conceptualize Chinese culture as something fixed and homogenous or legitimize a hegemonic sphere of Chinese culture.⁸⁹

Deviating even more from mainstream neo-conservatism is their attitude towards politics. In the predominantly academic texts analyzed here, there are of course no direct comments on contemporary politics, but the implications of the first type of interpretation are abundantly clear: not only does it implicitly resist any attempt by the CCP to control or direct the intellectuals and the academic élite, but more importantly, it opposes control by *any* kind of political force. The scholar as the guardian of Chinese culture is depicted as standing above politics. He influences the course of history by his research, but this does not amount to any kind of direct involvement in politics.⁹⁰

Conclusion

Since the abolition of the examination system in 1905, intellectual history can in part be understood as the struggle of intellectuals for a new self-image and a new role in society following the demise of that system and the ensuing decline of the traditional scholar-official. Both types of *New Guoxue* try to establish the intellectuals as a social stratum of highly specialized keepers of the historical and cultural memory of Chinese society. But one crucial difference between these two interpretations is to be seen in the way they conceptualize this role.

Those scholars who refer to Wu Mi's and Mei Guangdi's New Humanism adhere to the idea of the intellectual as spiritual leader in close connection

to politics. Although they leave space for historical change through the selective adoption of new ideas, the bulk of their writings conveys a rather static vision of Chinese culture. Their approach—which can be called “foundational”⁹¹—aims at freezing change, at least change exceeding the limits of national culture as defined by them, or, as Guo Lanfang 郭蘭芳 expresses it, socialist spiritual civilization.⁹² It is precisely the classicism of the *Xueheng* core group that attracts them. Classicism defines models for imitation⁹³ that leave space for legitimate change and adaptation to new circumstances, but simultaneously limit its scope by setting up principles that cannot be transgressed.⁹⁴ The “classical” is assumed to define the content of recollection without pretending to supply norms of absolute fixity.

In contrast to that, the other type of interpretation can be called a “counter-presentive”⁹⁵ form of memory. It promotes intellectuals as guardians of culture, detached from politics, albeit not politically irrelevant. Although they too adhere to the Three Bonds and Five Relationships as the core of the Chinese national spirit, they put much more emphasis on change over time. They can be called classicist and post-canonical at the same time: classicist insofar as they establish models for emulation, however, predominantly on the abstract level of the structures of historical change and cultural influence; post-canonical and critical because they no longer endorse unchanging principles or political ideologies. This evidence points out that the above-mentioned notion of an overall suppression of dissenting voices⁹⁶ cannot be maintained. Undoubtedly, the CCP’s claim to *political* power is not directly challenged by the *New Guoxue* discourse. But some intellectual groups do contest the CCP’s claim to *ideological* supremacy in a threefold way: by presenting an alternative view of history; by devising a methodology of historical research that contradicts the hitherto dominant historical materialism; and by claiming a new space for the intellectuals that relieves them of political constraints. It is this new role of the intellectual, which—together with the question of Chinese identity—is at the center of this version of *New Guoxue* discourse. In this case and in the context of present-day China, memory becomes an act of resistance and a very subtle attack on the *ideological* leadership of the CCP. That these intellectuals are nevertheless able to express their views in an only slightly disguised way clearly indicates that currently the CCP is either not willing or no longer able to suppress and antagonize these forces. It seems that as long as intellectuals defend China’s particularity against Western claims of universality, the CCP or certain forces within the CCP are at present willing to tolerate if not to support them, at least for the time being.

In the case of both interpretations, however, it is the phobia of unrestrained cultural arbitrariness—the loss of identity and meaning, and the threat of social degradation—that motivates their rationalizations. That these attempts to overcome the cultural phobia try to build a bridge into the future by way of reinterpreting the past surely is nothing particular to China. But that

⁹¹ Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, pp.78–83.

⁹² Guo Lanfang, “Wu Mi xiansheng de wenhua guandian” [Mr. Wu Mi’s view of culture], in Li Funing et al., *Di yi jie*, pp.189–205.

⁹³ “Imitation [of the ancients]” *mofang guren* 摹仿古人 is an important part of Wu Mi’s and Mei Guangdi’s theory of literature.

⁹⁴ The differentiation of “canonical,” “classical,” and “post-canonical” or “critical” draws on Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, pp.103–29.

⁹⁵ This term refers to a way of recollection that does not legitimize the existing order (i.e. the foundational mode of recollection), but goes back to history in order to construct a counter-image directed against the present order. See Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, pp.78–83.

⁹⁶ Xu Ben, “From modernity to Chineseness,” p.208. Schubert, “Was ist Neokonservatismus?,” pp.67, 73.

⁹⁷ See Chevrier, "La servante-maitresse." For an analysis of recent Chinese historiography corroborating this central position of history-writing in China, see Susan Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, "On 'shi' and 'lun'. Toward a typology of historiography in the PRC," in *Chinese Historiography in Comparative Perspective, History and Theory*, Theme Issue 35 (Oct. 1996): 74–95.

⁹⁸ Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and its modern fate, a trilogy*, vol. 1: *The problem of intellectual continuity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif.: University of California Press [first combined edition], 1972), p. xxvii.

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they focus to a large degree on the ideas of earlier historians reminds us of the very special role historiography and the strategy of historical reference played and still attempt to play in China.⁹⁷ If there is a specific Chinese culture of memory it can be found in the exceptional role historiography played and plays in defining what and how it has to be recollected. However, does this mean that nothing changed? Certainly not. Not only are the proponents of *New Guoxue* aware of and take into account new developments, but even more important is the change of environment. As Joseph Levenson once stated the problem: "An audience which appreciates that Mozart is not Wagner will never hear the eighteenth-century *Don Giovanni*."⁹⁸ Meaning is not independent from context, and the 1990s are dramatically different from the 1920s. When Chen Yinke demanded the independence of the intellectual, he was admonishing his colleagues to renounce their claim to power. When Yue Daiyun and others demanded the same in the 1990s, they were fighting a war on two fronts: against the CCP's ideological domination, and against the leveling and marginalizing effects of the market that not only threatened the intellectual's cultural influence, but also the privileged position of history as a discourse where central questions of political and philosophical importance are being discussed.