2 Revolution
Awakening New China (1915–1935)

Fig. 2. Propaganda poster shortly after the May Thirtieth Movement. Shows an "imperialist" and a "warlord" torturing a Chinese patriot. The imperialist is in classic cartoon capitalist garb with top hat, and the patriot looks like a workingman, not a scholar. The caption on the top left reads, "Warlord and Imperialist Oppression of the Chinese People [*Zhongguo renmin*]" and at the bottom, "Recruiting for the China Disaster Committee" (a Communist-led organization in Shanghai that raised funds for imprisoned demonstrators and their families).

On the morning of May 30, 1925, some 2,000 students and local protestors pressed on the Louze police station on Nanjing Road in the International Settlement of Shanghai. They wanted fifteen student leaders recently arrested in labor disputes with Japanese cotton mills to be released. It was a Saturday morning, and the police chief was at the Shanghai Race Club. It was left to a junior and jittery officer, Inspector Edward Everson, and a dozen Sikh and Chinese policemen to handle the protest. They did badly, panicked and shot. A handful of Chinese protestors were killed; a nationwide wave of strikes, protests, and boycotts followed. No one, foreign or Chinese, had seen such public mobilization before. Students, workers, and merchants in colleges, factories, and chambers of commerce rallied to protest foreign privilege and domestic misrule. Revolution had come to the streets of more than twenty-eight Chinese cities.

A year later in the winter of 1926–7, as the momentum of these urban protests galvanized the coalition of revolutionary forces based in Guangzhou, a young activist, Mao Zedong, returned to his rural community in the central province of Hunan to prepare for the coming joint Nationalist–Communist armies set to reunify China in the name of Sun Yat-sen's revolution. Mao was a Communist but worked for the Nationalist Party, as did all his compatriots at the time. What he saw in the rural counties of Hunan inspired him—the energy of China's rural poor, their ability to organize and overturn village government and redistribute landlord wealth to poor farmers. Mao had seen the future and it was violent revolution based on class antagonism. And it could work. He famously enthused, "Revolution is not a dinner party!" Revolution was not a gift of the urban elite; revolution was growing out of China's countryside itself.

Voices from the 1920s

MAO ZEDONG (1893–1976): *REPORT ON THE PEASANT MOVEMENT IN HUNAN* (1927)

Many of the arguments of the peasant movement were the exact opposite of what I had heard from the gentry class in Hankou and Changsha. I saw and heard many strange things of which I had hitherto been unaware. I believe that the same is also true of every province in all of China. Consequently, all criticisms directed against the peasant movement must be speedily set right, and the various erroneous measures adopted by the revolutionary authorities concerning the peasant movement must be speedily changed. Only thus can the future of the revolution be benefited. For the present upsurge of the peasant movement is a colossal event. In a very short time, several hundred million peasants in China's central, southern, and northern provinces will rise like a fierce wind or tempest, a force so swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to suppress it. They will break through all the trammels that bind them and rush forward along the road to liberation. They will, in the end, send all the imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, local

(*cont.*)

bullies, and evil gentry to their graves. All revolutionary parties and all revolutionary comrades will stand before them to be tested, to be accepted or rejected as they decide. To march at their head and lead them? To stand behind them, gesticulating and criticizing them? Or to stand opposite them and oppose them? Every Chinese is free to choose among the three, but by the force of circumstances you are fated to make the choice quickly.[1]

HU SHI (1891–1962): *FAILURE OF LAW IN NATIONALIST CHINA* (1929)

If there is a real desire to protect the rights of man and to have a true government by law the first prerequisite should be a Constitution of the Chinese Republic. The least ... should be the promulgation of a Provisional Constitution for the period of tutelage.

Dr. Sun Yat-sen in his work entitled *Revolutionary Tactics* [1906] divided his national construction program into three distinct periods: (1) the Military Era, scheduled to last for three years, (2) the era of the Provisional Constitution, which is to last six years during which all the rights and obligations of the military government towards the people as well as the people's rights and obligations towards the government shall be definitely fixed by the Provisional Constitution. This law should be rigidly obeyed by the military government and the local assemblies as well as private citizens, [and] (3) the era of Constitutional Rule ...

What we want to-day is a Provisional Constitution or convention, the kind which, in the words of Dr. Sun, "would define the rights and obligations of the people as well as the governmental powers of the revolutionary government." We want some law to fix the proper limits of the government beyond which all acts become illegal. We ask for a convention that will define and safeguard man's person, liberty, and property. Any violator of these rights, be he the Chairman of the National Government, or the Colonel of the 152nd Brigade, may be prosecuted and adjudicated by law.[2]

The ideological moment: revolution

The verities of reform had disappointed. The Republic was a sham, the vaunted, feared, and admired Western powers no longer a source of challenge and inspiration but rather a cause of resentment and an object

[1] Mao Zedong, "Hunan nongmin yundong kaocha baogao," trans. in Stuart R. Schram and Nancy J. Hodes, eds., *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912–1949*, Vol. II, *National Revolution and Social Revolution* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), pp. 429–30; reprinted in Timothy Cheek, *Mao Zedong and China's Revolutions: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2002), p. 42.

[2] Hu Shi, "Failure of Law in Nationalist China," *North China Herald* (Shanghai), June 22, 1929, reprinted in Cheng and Lestz, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 274–5.

of disillusionment and scorn for the terrible carnage of their Great War (1914–18). China was in the eyes of its educated leaders worse off than it had been a decade before, yet there was no going back. The Western powers, and now Japan, were an inescapable part of life in China—with their smug superiority, treaty port privileges, and dominant military and economic position. The pathetic warlord governments that constituted the shambles of the Republic of China gave no answer to the horrors of the Great War and the betrayal of Chinese interests in the Treaty of Versailles.[3] Reform had not worked. It was time for revolution. By the end of the 1910s a new ideological moment had emerged.

The revolutionary moment in China in the 1920s was most fundamentally a question of *how to awaken the Chinese people in order to save themselves* from the clear and present danger of foreign domination and domestic misrule. Military rearmament to support the Confucian dynasty had failed; constitutional monarchy had been subverted by crass Manchu political interests; and the republican revolution had been suborned by warlords. The Chinese people had failed to save themselves by these external means. Something more drastic was needed: a revolution. Most of China's intellectuals embraced one overriding idea: national revolution. But what kind of national revolution? Answers varied.

Revolution seeks to overthrow one system and put in place a new and radically different one. In China from the mid-1910s to the 1930s this involved a fundamental critique of Confucian family and social values—a *cultural revolution*—and a search for new political ideologies—a *political revolution*. Both aimed to deliver on the failed promise of 1911—a *nationalist revolution*. At the same time, the growth of the modern urban sector, based in but not limited to the concession areas of the treaty ports, created a *social revolution* that saw the articulation of new urban classes, an industrial proletariat, a more mature capitalist class, and a vibrant urban middle class. All of these revolutions can be seen as part of modernization, the recent restructuring of culture, politics, economics, and society in ways that fundamentally change the way people live in industrialized society. Thus the revolution that describes this ideological moment is a revolution in the sense we would use to describe "the modern revolution" rather than a particular political orientation. In these terms, the nuclear family, privileging the technical specialist as a professional, and defining political legitimacy as representation of the people were key revolutionary changes of these decades. The incarnation of this

[3] We, of course, know this as the First World War or World War I, but it was known at the time as the "Great War."

comprehensive revolution in China in the 1920s was Sun Yat-sen's reorganized Nationalist Party, the Guomindang.

China's thinkers and writers filled the new commercial press with articles, manifestos, and their own newspapers and radical journals calling for one sort of revolution or another. They trained as scientific and social-science professionals in the missionary colleges and new Chinese universities, as well as going abroad for advanced degrees, creating a social revolution in the natural sciences and modern professions. Despite reservations about first Yuan Shikai's administration and then a later series of increasingly craven and corrupt "national governments" run by militarists, many educated Chinese served the Republican administration in Beijing, trying to make the government serve these revolutions. China's most famous man of letters, Lu Xun, served a number of years in the 1910s in the Education Ministry of the Beijing administration. Also, China's most famous university, Peking University, was run under these woeful governments yet managed to attract the talents of great intellectuals, such as Cai Yuanpei to serve as president of the university, as well as dozens of fine scholars. Universities like Peking University provided a focal point and a public perch for China's leading intellectuals interested in public commentary and increasingly social activism.[4] These two institutions—the commercial press and modern colleges and universities—were the heart of the public sphere that provided the framework for China's New Culture Movement, generally dated from 1915 to 1925, that takes its name from the May Fourth Movement and the demonstrations against the Treaty of Versailles on May 4, 1919. Most of the intellectuals we will meet in this chapter worked in these universities or published in journals such as *New Youth* (*Xin qingnian*) or newspapers like *Shibao*.

All participants in this public conversation accepted the earlier changes in public life captured by Liang Qichao—that China is a nation-state and not a cultural empire and that the Chinese people as a group (*qun*) were the key to the nation-state's survival; that governments should represent the people and the people's interests more directly than via the traditional "mandate of Heaven"; and, more importantly, that the people themselves had to be active citizens rather than passive subjects. The people had to be remade in order to save China. The range of ideas, ideologies, and religious movements we will meet in this chapter all addressed these questions of what sort of

[4] Weston, *The Power of Position*. Beijing daxue itself renders its name into English as "Peking University" and I follow that translation.

fundamental revolution was called for to save China and how to bring about that revolution.

Awakening China

Lu Xun famously captured in 1922 the disillusionment with the Republic felt among China's new intellectuals—scholars born to the Qing examination system who now found themselves either serving a motley crew of corrupt politicians and fractious warlords or cut off from public service, at best teaching in the new universities or schools or paid to write for the periodical press, or at worst scratching out a living as tutors or clerks. Asked to contribute to a radical journal in order to inspire younger intellectuals, Lu Xun replied,

> Imagine an iron house without windows, absolutely indestructible, with many people fast asleep inside who will soon die of suffocation. But you know since they will die in their sleep, they will not feel the pain of death. Now if you cry aloud to wake a few of the lighter sleepers, making those unfortunate few suffer the agony of irrevocable death, do you think you are doing them a good turn?

Still, even the famously ambivalent Lu Xun couldn't simply give up, "I could not blot out hope, for hope lies in the future."[5] He wrote prolifically in support of literary and social revolution for the next fifteen years. The younger generation of students raised in the new schools were more enthusiastic in their efforts. They read their radical elders and took up new approaches to public life in missionary universities, YMCAs, student unions, and soon Bolshevik political parties.

Recent events had given Lu Xun cause to have doubts about the future. The combination of domestic failure of the Republican government and international disillusionment at the carnage of the Great War gave political urgency to the cultural revolution that had been brewing in the discussions and debates of the New Culture Movement since 1915. The progress of political life was marked by ongoing disasters, due to domestic and foreign causes. Finally, there was a revival of the Republic in an explicitly revolutionary form under Sun Yat-sen in 1922 in the southern province of Guangdong, followed by the military–political reintegration of the middle provinces of China in the Northern Expedition of 1926–7. This culminated in the establishment of a much more functional national government in Nanjing by 1928 under Sun's military successor, Chiang Kai-shek. Meanwhile, the Nationalists' fundamental

[5] Lu Xun, "Preface to *Call to Arms*," p. 24.

competitors, the Chinese Communist Party, made their own social and political revolution, first in the cities through a United Front with the Nationalists that Sun Yat-sen had engineered in 1923, and then, after being ruthlessly (and successfully) purged by Chiang Kai-shek in 1927, in the countryside. Revolution in both cases began with breaking down old systems, devising new systems, and then installing and institutionalizing a new order.

Two forces in international affairs shaped this ideological moment: increasing Japanese imperialism in China and the impact of World War I. Japan's response to the weak new Chinese republic was to press its advantages from the concessions of the 1895 war with China. In 1911 Japan formally annexed Korea as part of its empire. Japanese business interests, followed by military protection under the terms of extraterritoriality, extended bit by bit into China's northeastern provinces. Throughout the 1920s, Japan pushed its control into North China and the environs of Beijing. This culminated in the Japanese seizure of these northeastern provinces, collectively known as Manchuria, and the creation of a puppet state, Manchukuo, in March 1932 (ironically, the Japanese installed the last Qing emperor, Pu-yi, as head of state). Japan, which had been a model of modernization in the opening decade of the 1900s, now became the prime imperialist. "Resisting Japan" would be a constant call of Chinese nationalists until the final reunification of the country and expulsion of all foreign powers (except the Soviet Union) in 1949.

World War I had a profound effect on China. In terms of the economy, the distraction of the European powers between 1914 and 1919 gave Chinese capitalists and industrialists a window to grow, and they did. In terms of culture, China's elites were dismayed at the vicious self-destruction that these global paragons of civilization inflicted upon themselves (and a number of Chinese saw this firsthand as support troops sent to the European theater, since China was an ally to the Allied Powers). Real doubt about Western civilization began. Politically, Chinese elites were outraged by the cynical terms of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 which gave German concession areas in China (particularly large parts of Shandong province) not back to China as a member of the winning side, but to Japan. The outrage drove Chinese students to the streets in Beijing on May Fourth. They succeeded in pressuring the government of the day not to sign the treaty. China never did.

Violence framed this ideological moment. The fighting almost never stopped and natural disasters, including horrific famines in north China in 1922 and again between 1928 and 1930, added to the misery and to the determination of the revolutionaries that harsh measures were called for. Northern warlords had nearly annual "wars" through the 1920s. In

May 1925 crowd violence erupted in Shanghai involving Chinese and British police forces, as we have seen in our opening image for this chapter. Similarly, labor agitation at several Chinese mines, with strong Communist participation but not limited to CCP organizers, endured violent repression from warlord troops—especially the brutal suppression of the CCP-led railway strike on the Wuhan–Beijing line in 1923 and the crushing of the Anyuan workers' organization in 1926. As we have seen in our voices selection for this chapter, rural violence emerged when some version of "the revolutionary message" met the frustrations of farmers in central China; Mao, according to his account, was present at the "Hunan Peasant Uprisings" in 1926 and early 1927 but he was not leading them. A generation of anarchists and "enlightened gentry"peddling rural uplift had been stirring the pot, leading protests and providing new ideas and education to farmers—some of a conservative nature, some of a more radical bent.

On top of this social violence were three kinds of political violence. The first was fighting between the various regional warlords and between the forces of Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary government in Guangzhou (which operated as a "United Front" between GMD and CCP organizations) and these warlords, most notably in the Northern Expedition of 1926–7, but carrying on endemically throughout the period. Second was the fighting between Nationalist and Communist forces after their 1927 split. This struggle continued for two decades—pausing only for a few years of mutual nonaggression in the "Anti-Japanese United Front" between 1937 and 1941—and culminating in the CCP victory in 1949, expulsion of the Nationalist forces to Taiwan, and the Cold War tensions of the 1950s and 1960s. Third was, as we have seen, Japanese aggression. Indeed, the date of the Mukden Incident that began the takeover of Manchuria, September 18, 1931, became a national rallying cry for popular anti-Japanese agitation. Boycotts were organized to avoid buying Japanese products and students across China formed "national salvation" organizations. The tone of the 1930s was, indeed, national salvation. Chiang Kai-shek, China's leader at the time, took this shame and this responsibility to heart. He stepped down briefly as the chairman of the National Government, but most tellingly for the next fifteen years he began his daily diary with "sweep away the shame" (*xue chi*).[6]

[6] Chiang Kai-shek's diaries are now stored at the Hoover Institution archives at Stanford University, where I consulted them in May 2011. The theme of national shame in twentieth-century China has been explored in Cohen, *Speaking to History* and Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); and Schell and Delury, *Wealth and Power*.

Nonetheless, Chiang felt that the challenge from the Communists was a greater threat to China than even that of the Japanese, and he spent his time chasing Communists rather than resisting Japanese encroachments. Continued Japanese aggression, however, turned public opinion even in the Nationalist areas against Chiang's "fighting with Chinese instead of against Japanese." Zou Taofen (1895–1944), a leading journalist in Shanghai, and his colleagues formed the "Seven Gentlemen" who led the National Salvation Association in Shanghai in 1934 to protest Nationalist government failure to resist Japan. This nationwide movement peaked in massive student demonstrations known as the "December 9th Movement to Resist Japan and Save the Nation" in 1935. Zou and the others in the Seven Gentlemen were arrested and jailed by Nationalist authorities, further weakening Chiang Kai-shek's authority amongst intellectuals.[7] By late 1935, a decimated Communist force had made it to the relative safety of northwest China. Chiang's final push to destroy them—which quite possibly could have succeeded—was aborted by mutiny among his regional forces, and he was forced to make peace with the Communists and turn his attention primarily to the Japanese threat (this was the Xi'an Incident of December 1936). The upshot was a second United Front between the Nationalists and Communists. Six months later, the Japanese attacked central China in force and the Nanjing government was compelled to flee further inland.

Social changes during the warlord imbroglios of the 1920s and fighting between the GMD and CCP in the 1930s were equally revolutionary. We can think of these social revolutions in two parts: urban and rural. The *urban revolution* was the growth of modern Chinese society in all its complexities, self-doubts, consumerism, and promise cut short by war and political revolution. This is the famed Republican society of the 1920s and 1930s much studied by scholars inside and outside China as a repository of modern Chinese culture independent of the now much discredited Maoist alternative. It is also the object of popular nostalgia and aesthetic interest—from clothing to restaurant styles—in the People's Republic today. Shanghai and other modern cities with treaty ports or foreign enclaves moved from electricity and trams to commercial publishing and coffee shops, to new jobs and identities as factory workers, white-collar workers, and independent intellectuals.[8] Women

[7] Parks Coble, "The Anti-Japanese Movement in China: Zou Tao-fen and the National Salvation Movement, 1931–1937," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (1985), esp. p. 305.

[8] Well covered in Wen-hsin Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor: Economic Sentiments and the Making of Modern China, 1843–1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

came into the public arena as never before. And in these modern sectors the imprint of foreignness was everywhere. Some found the efficiency, the wealth, the modern literature, and even the fashions of Westerners attractive, but others found these to be a challenge to their identity. No one was neutral on the Western origins of modern urban life.

Equally revolutionary, though negative, changes were happening in the *rural* districts of China. The energy and intellectual leadership seen in urban China had been sapped from rural society. The sons and daughters of the gentry elite had departed in droves from their rural lineage estates, warlord armies and rural rebels had devastated many areas, terrible famines and floods wrecked others, and there was no state that could ease the suffering or repair the damage effectively. Finally, rural leadership devolved into the hands of toughs and incompetents. These were the famous "local bullies and evil gentry" mentioned in Mao's "Report on the Peasant Movement in Hunan," the shadow self of the glories of Shanghai or of the Academy of Sciences in Nanjing. The Guomindang's focus on the Communists not only required them to postpone dealing with Japan, it also forced the Nationalists to rely on these degraded local elites. Thus Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary party, dedicated as part of Sun's Three People's Principles to securing the people's livelihood, had to give Guomindang membership to these local toughs and unscrupulous gentry to staff their county-level government.[9]

The result was a fundamental break in Chinese statecraft of revolutionary proportions: the central state in Nanjing stopped focusing on the administration of the rural majority. Rural reform was left to independent activists willing to ally with the local Nationalist administrations, such as James Yen's Mass Education Movement or Liang Shuming's new Confucian Rural Reconstruction Movement, or to the Communists. This not only had dire consequences for the Nationalists as a regime, but also systematically divorced the countryside from the monumental social and ideological changes going on in China's vibrant urban centers. The economic, as well as social, chasm between China's cities and countryside widened as never before.

The three revolutionary challenges of this ideological moment were revolutions in culture (what matters in Chinese civilization), in national identity (what it means to be Chinese), and in politics (how to achieve a new culture and polity). We can trace something of how intellectuals responded to each by following a New Culture scientist, Ding Wenjiang; a new-style Confucian, Liang Shuming, who sought a robust modern

[9] Lloyd Eastman, *The Abortive Revolution: China under Nationalist Rule, 1927–37* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990; first published in 1974).

Chinese culture rooted in its Confucian and Buddhist heritage; and a radical feminist writer, Ding Ling, who combined social and political revolution in service to the Communist Party.

Ding Wenjiang and China's revolution in science

Revolution was not limited to political change. The May Fourth generation explored revolutions in family life (in the critique of Confucian patriarchal "family values"), economic order (through anarchist collectives and peasant mobilization), and cultural order (through a revolution of literature in the vernacular and new forms of advocacy, particularly through the European-style novel). However, one of the most fundamental revolutions of the period was the embrace of modern science. Natural science and its attendant impact on technology were widely embraced by the elder opinion leaders and the enthusiastic new youth of the 1910s and 1920s. Science not only was power—the source of the West's steamships, armaments, railroads, industrial production, and electricity—but it also equaled civilization, the hallmark of a superior civilization able to produce wealth and public health. Debates on constitutionalism waxed and waned, different political solutions held sway and retreated, and no one agreed on what the new literature should look like exactly, but over the first decades of the twentieth century, two ideas, two worldviews, took root in all but the most recalcitrant minds: the social Darwinism embraced by Liang Qichao's generation and the power of the natural sciences embraced by the May Fourth generation. These became part of the operating system on which various ideological and political software ran, including the neo-traditional "new Confucians" of the 1920s. That Heaven (the natural *tian* of inherited Chinese cosmology) ordained this "struggle for survival" was seen as sensible, obvious, a given. Anarchists offered communitarian solutions, New Confucians revived the self-controlling and community-building rituals and rites of the classics, revolutionaries espoused militarized political parties, and liberals counseled education and democracy.

Science was the shared value of all sides. It was the *method* by which one could respond to the challenges of a social Darwinist world. The hundreds and then thousands of Chinese students who studied first in Japan and then in Europe and America absorbed the confidence of Victorian and Edwardian society, not to mention the can-do attitude of the Americans. All believed that science as method, as practice, and as product was the root of modern civilization and the guarantor of its future. Science in the popular mind became the correct, accurate, and penetrating study of the material world that produced clear and effective

solutions to current problems of wealth and power. For those students who trained in the natural sciences and modern medicine this became the scientific method. This gave a new role to China's thinkers and writers as scientists (*kexuejia*). Natural science, the tenets of the laboratory experimental method, and the organization of scientists as professionals in self-regulating public societies with the authority of experts in medicine, engineering, and agricultural sciences together offered a new way for China's intellectuals to participate in public life.

The most noted spokesman for the methods of empirical science was Ding Wenjiang (1887–1936). He articulated these values in public in a debate in 1923 on "science and the philosophy of life." Already of a new generation, Ding Wenjiang went to study in Japan in 1902 and then to the United Kingdom, majoring in zoology and geology. He graduated from the University of Glasgow in 1911. Back in China he taught in one of the new schools, Nanyang Public School (which later became Shanghai Jiaotong University). Ding served the new Republic, like many May Fourth intellectuals even under the troubled militarized Republic of Yuan Shikai. In 1913 Ding became the geological section chief in the Mining Administration of the new Republic. He conducted field surveys in the interior provinces from Shanxi to Yunnan. He also served in other new organizations. In 1921 he became the general manager of the Beipiao Mining Company and he founded a scholarly society, the Chinese Geological Society, where he served as editor of a professional journal, *Chinese Paleobiology*. In 1925 Ding took up work in Shanghai, even concluding a preliminary renegotiation with foreign powers of Chinese rights in Shanghai. Later Ding served as professor of geology at Peking University, joining colleagues in producing new maps, along scientific lines, of the Republic and of each province. He became one of the leaders of the Republic's Academia Sinica (the top government research institution in the new capital, Nanjing) in 1934. On a field trip to Hunan, Ding Wenjiang died in an accident in a coal mine in January 1936.

In 1923, at the height of the cultural debates following the actual May Fourth demonstrations of 1919, Ding published a polemic, "Mythology and Science," in which he made fundamental civilizational claims for the scientific method and scientists, and explicitly attacked those intellectuals who felt that science had nothing to do with "the philosophy of life." His sparring partner, to whom Ding's essay was a rejoinder, was Zhang Junmai (1886–1969),[10] who had made an earlier attack on the universal claims of science. Zhang Junmai himself was a noted Chinese

[10] Roger Jeans, *Democracy and Socialism in Republican China: The Politics of Zhang Junmai (Carson Chang)* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997).

philosopher, public intellectual and later democratic politician. Known for his "Third Force" democratic party during the Nationalist era and as an early theorist of human rights, Zhang had both traditional training, having passed the first of the Confucian state exams, and foreign experience as a student in Japan. He traveled with Liang Qichao to Europe in the aftermath of World War I in 1919 and became deeply influenced by German political philosophy, particularly that of Henri Bergson and Rudolf Eucken. He came to favor German-style social democracy that opposed both capitalism and communism. Later in life he opposed both Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong and moved to America in 1949, where he was known by his English name, Carson Chang. Zhang was a lecturer in philosophy at Tsinghua College in Beijing when he crossed swords with Ding Wenjiang.

Zhang Junmai's lecture in February 1923 on the philosophy of life kicked off the public debate. His point was direct: human life in its spiritual and moral dimensions cannot be guided by the scientific laws of the material world. Human life was, Zhang said, "subjective, intuitive, freely willed and unique to the individual."[11] Zhang drew from the German philosophy he had been studying, and in particular the German counter to Anglo-American empiricism. Thus his attack on the broader social pretensions of the scientists drew as much from Kant's epistemological skepticism as from the intuitive tradition in Confucianism represented by Wang Yangming. Zhang's stance is a good example of the alternatives that presented themselves to Chinese intellectuals as they encountered Western political philosophy: Anglo-American pragmatism and faith in science, German Romanticism and focus on moral philosophy, and Soviet revolutionary ideology, or "science of society." There were traditions familiar to Chinese intellectuals from China's own rich storehouse of traditional political thought as well—from Zhu Xi's "investigation of things," to Wang Yangming's moral intuition, to the totalistic claims of imperial Confucian doctrine and its competitor, ongoing redemptive societies (often known as folk Buddhist sects or secret societies). These indigenous thoughtways made foreign imports comprehensible and attractive, bringing new solutions through approaches that were more or less familiar. At the same time, Chinese habits of the mind shaped the imports. Even the most ardent "Westernizers" among Chinese intellectuals were more adapters than adopters. Whether it was liberalism, socialism, or even

[11] Zhang Junmai, quoted in Benjamin Schwartz, "Themes in Intellectual History: May Fourth and After," in Goldman and Lee, *Intellectual History*, p. 130.

today's academic postmodernism, Chinese versions have always been distinctly different from the Western (or global) original.

Zhang Junmai's humanism thus reflected less an import of German Romanticism than a synthesis of neo-Kantian doubts about the scope of natural science as a form of philosophical knowledge that could drive political policy and the moral intuition of Wang Yangming's Confucianism. Zhang would go on to embrace a tolerant form of political liberalism that reflected these doubts about anyone finding the "total truth" for "all people." His humanism led to a belief in the need to accept that people would be unlikely to agree on all things, and thus would have to have a mechanism by which to negotiate a reasonable compromise. Like Hu Shi, the leading Chinese liberal, Zhang found democracy to be the most sensible form of political compromise.

Ding Wenjiang's science, on the other hand, embraced the British empiricism he absorbed as a graduate student in Edinburgh. As a geologist, his science was based on Baconian inductionism, which focuses on experience, observation, and experiment. This form of science was congenial to the pragmatic statecraft tradition in Qing China that drew from the philosophical confidence of Zhu Xi (whose version of Confucian doctrine had formed the core of the imperial examination curriculum) that the human mind could know the natural world and that the forces that ordered the cosmos were the same for the natural world and for humans and society.

Ding Wenjiang went after Zhang Junmai's philosophy of life with gusto. First, he called Zhang's approach "metaphysics" (*xuanxue*), which smacks of ancient Daoist mysticism, instead of "philosophy" (*zhexue*), the modern term for academic thought. Ding makes a daring rhetorical move: he blames Zhang's approach on a discredited European example, while claiming science as a proven universal method:

> Metaphysics is a bewildered spectre that has been haunting Europe for twenty centuries. Of late it has gradually lost it treacherous occupation and all of a sudden has come swaggering to China, full of pomp and circumstance, to deceive and swindle. If you don't believe me, look at Zhang Junmai's 'Philosophy of Life'! Zhang Junmai is my friend, but metaphysics is an enemy of science. The spectre of metaphysics has attached itself to Zhang Junmai, so we scientists cannot but strike out at it. But the reader should make no mistake: we strike out against the spectre of metaphysics and not Zhang Junmai.[12]

[12] Ding Wenjiang, "Xuanxue yu kexue: Ping Zhang Junmai de 'Rensheng guan'" (Metaphysics and Science: A Critique of Zhang Junmai's "Philosophy of Life"), *Nuli zhoubao* (Working Hard Weekly), Nos. 48 and 49, April 12, 1923, reprinted in *Kexue yu renshengguan* (Science and the Philosophy of Life) (Shanghai: Shanghai yadong tushuguan, 1923). Part of this opening paragraph to the essay is translated in de Bary

This metaphysics is so harmful, Ding maintains, because it causes Zhang Junmai to claim that there are no universal standards for right and wrong. Ding demurs and insists, "To find right and wrong and truth and falsehood, what other method is there aside from the scientific?" This is because "whatever cannot be studied and criticized by logic is not true knowledge." So, to Zhang Junmai's claim that a philosophy of life is personal and interior, Ding declares, "Science replies: Psychological phenomena are at bottom materials of science. If the phenomena you are talking about are real, they cannot go beyond the sphere of science . . . the scientific method is all-mighty in the realm of knowledge." Ding concludes by reaffirming "as truth is revealed, metaphysics becomes helpless."[13] The reader is left to conclude that Ding Wenjiang eagerly awaits the recovery of his friend, Mr. Zhang.

Science and politics: Hu Shi's liberal revolution

Hu Shi (1891–1962), a leader of the new generation, studied at Columbia University under John Dewey and became a major spokesman for science as method—including the need for patient, step-by-step research. He famously said, "diligently hypothesize; carefully demonstrate."[14] Like Ding Wenjiang, Hu Shi felt that science should shape the scholar's approach to public life, but, unlike Ding, he applied science directly to politics. Hu Shi felt that the scientific attitude was the root of British and American liberalism and should be adopted by the Chinese. Hu Shi defined the pragmatic basis of his liberalism clearly in the "problems and -isms" debate of 1919. "Study More about Specific Problems, Talk Less about General Theories (-Isms)" was the title of Hu's article that kicked off the debate.[15] For Hu Shi "problems" were always concrete, specific things—like the working conditions of Beijing's rickshaw pullers, standards of public health, school textbooks and curricula, customs and prejudices that affected women—and they were each and all susceptible to scientific investigation. The patient

and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, Vol. II, p. 372, though I have modified the translations in minor ways to capture in the Chinese text the image of metaphysics as a swaggering demon.

[13] De Bary and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, Vol. II, pp. 372–3.

[14] The best biography in English remains Jerome Grieder, *Hu Shih and the Chinese Renaissance: Liberalism in the Chinese Revolution, 1917–1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970). Hu wrote a fair bit in English, collected in *English Writings of Hu Shih: Literature and Society* (New York: Springer, 2013), Vol. I, where a version of Hu Shi's motto, *yongxin jiashi, danxin zhengming*, appears on p. 89.

[15] This famous debate is well covered by Hu Shi's biographer in short compass in Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State*, pp. 327–31.

pursuit of an investigation of such a problem required the specialized knowledge of an expert.

Hu Shi's sparring partner was Li Dazhao (1888–1927), Peking University's librarian and China's first true Marxist. Li defended the "-isms" that Hu Shi maligned. Li's faith in a comprehensive solution to the whole set of social problems facing China, rather than a piecemeal approach, was based on two assumptions. First was the importance of collective action. "The solution to any social problem," Li Dazhao argued, "must depend upon the concerted actions of the social majority." This social majority will identify and solve whatever social problem there is. This, of course, contradicted the individualism of the expert in Hu Shi's approach. Second, Li Dazhao had his version of cosmopolitan, or universal, science: Marxism–Leninism. Comprehensive solutions were necessary because social and political problems are interrelated; they must be addressed as a package or not at all. Improving textbooks hardly helps when farmers are hungry. It is hard to feed them when the economy is in a shambles. Indeed, the root of Li's comprehensive analysis is the economy, specifically Marxist historical materialism, which argues that all of social life (the superstructure) is determined by fundamental economic realities (the base). "The solution of the economic problem is the fundamental solution. As soon as the economic problem has been solved, then whatever problems there may remain concerning politics, the legal system, the family system, the liberation of women or the liberation of laborers, can all find their solution." The economic problem for Li was capitalism. The fundamental solution was the class struggle of proletarian revolution.[16]

This was the heart of the difference between the liberals and the Bolshevik parties. While Li Dazhao's approach was embraced by the Chinese Communist Party when it was formed a few years later in 1921, the Nationalists under Sun Yat-sen would embrace a similar "total solution" under Sun's "Three People's Principles," with their "political tutelage"—the "ism" in the Sunism espoused by Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalist government after 1927. Hu Shi could not have disagreed more. He reaffirmed his liberal, step-by-step approach in 1929 in a major article, "Which Road Are We Going?":[17]

[16] Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State*, pp. 328–30. Still the major study of Li Dazhao is Maurice Meisner, *Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967; reprinted as an ACLS e-book in 2008).

[17] Hu Shi, "Women zou na yitiao lu?", *Xin yue*, Vol. 2, No. 10 (December 1929); the English version appears in *Pacific Affairs*, the journal of the Institute of Pacific Relations, Honolulu, in Vol. 3, No. 10 (October 1930), pp. 933–46. Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State*, p. 330, gives a slightly different translation.

> Our real enemies are Poverty, Disease, Ignorance, Corruption, Anarchy. These five devils are the real opposites to revolution, and every one of them cannot be destroyed by any violent revolution. There is only one revolutionary road by which we can destroy them and that is by clearly recognizing our enemies, clearly recognizing our problems, gathering together all the ability and wisdom of the nation, making full use of the world's science and knowledge and the concomitant methods, and proceeding step by step to carry out a conscious revolution, so achieving the success of a ceaseless revolution which moves on under the detailed direction of a conscious will.[18]

This was Hu Shi's idea of revolution, the revolution of thought and government by the tenets of modern science. It is an inspiring vision, but many in China faulted the liberal approach for precisely its failure to address the problem of violence; that is, political power. Through the 1940s Hu Shi and other liberals pushed for constitutional reform to prepare for democratic elections. However, their fundamental idea of limited government—the heart of the liberal democratic system in which the power of the state is limited by laws that protect the individual and are enforced through the power of open, free, fair, and regular elections—did not "take" in China. In part, the focus on the individual and the presumption to limit state power had, as Jerome Grieder argues, "no precedent, no cultural resonance," in Chinese political thought.[19] Both neo-traditional collective solutions, like Liang Shuming's village compacts, and the Bolshevik leadership of the Nationalists and Communists could draw on long-standing traditions of state activism and the Confucian tradition to "transform the people through the rites" under state supervision. While the individualism and limits to state power in liberalism may have been uncongenial to inherited assumptions in Chinese political thought, they were not incomprehensible. Hu Shi and other liberals made a cogent case in plain language with plenty of Chinese examples. But it was a new way of looking at politics. It is reasonable to conjecture that in time this liberalism would "take," just as a form of democratic liberalism has taken root in Chinese society in Taiwan since the 1980s. The real enemy of liberalism in China was the historical moment—of fundamental social breakdown, endemic warfare, and cultural anxiety—what Hobsbawm has called "the age of extremes." It is exceedingly difficult to try something new when you are down on your luck, tired, and fighting to survive. In the end, it was the violence that doomed liberalism in China at mid-century: Hu Shi's models and methods could not corral the armies of the contending

[18] Hu Shi, "Which Road Are We Going?" pp. 944–5.
[19] Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State*, pp. 348 ff.

Bolshevik parties. Liberalism *was* a sensible answer to the question of this ideological moment—how to awaken the Chinese people to save themselves? It simply failed to address the question of power.

Science, so much a part of our worldview, carries at least two dangers. First is the link with technology. For governments, the technological wonders that science can produce in energy, transport, communications, production, and, of course, weapons are far more compelling than the pure knowledge produced by basic research. There is always the danger of the tail wagging the dog, of scientific research becoming a handmaiden to immediate policy goals. This has been a challenge for all modern governments, but it has particularly bedeviled China's revolutionary regimes. Instead of serving as a source of enlightenment and a school for democratic toleration, scientific research in China in the twentieth century has largely been a compliant servant of authoritarian states. The second problem is scientism, the political philosophy or ideology that assumes that the methods of natural science can explain how society and individuals work and can determine infallible policies for better government. In China, the rhetoric of revolution came to co-opt science from the 1930s as a panacea with emphasis on "correct" knowledge, ideas, and even thought, as well as an elitist approach to the science of society. Sun Yat-sen would claim a special foreknowledge for "those who awaken first" (*xian juezhe*): "People of superior wisdom who take one look at a thing and see numerous principles involved, who hear one word and immediately perform great deeds, whose insights into the future and whose achievements make the world advance and give mankind its civilization."[20] Sun's invitation to serve the party-state as an awakened functionary proved to be attractive to many Chinese intellectuals, whether under Chiang Kai-shek or Mao Zedong.

Ding Ling (1904–1986): women's revolutions on the national scene

The siren call of the pedagogical state that would teach the people how to be free offered China's intellectuals the chance to become once again the teachers of the people. The differences from the role of the traditional Confucian scholar-official were several. These differences are captured in the life and struggles of one of China's most noted women writers, Ding Ling, as she came up from the provinces to join the literary revolution in Shanghai in the 1920s, committed herself to revolutionary literature in

[20] Sun Yat-sen, quoted in John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 45.

the 1930s, and served the new party-state under the CCP from the 1940s. In the ideological moment of May Fourth China, Ding Ling explored the thrill of literary and social revolution and came to see the solution to her frustrations in service to a disciplined Bolshevik party.

China's twentieth century brought many nonelite actors like Ding Ling more fully into the public arena. Ding Ling was born as Jiang Bingzhi into a declining gentry family in the rural center of Hunan province, some 200 miles northwest of Changsha (she took her famous pen name later, after going to Shanghai). Ding Ling's mother moved to the local county town, Changde, after her husband's early death when Ding Ling was a small child. The mother trained herself in the modern schools there and became a schoolteacher. Ding Ling followed in her mother's footsteps and enrolled in the progressive Zhounan Girls' School in Changsha, the provincial capital. There she became active in street demonstrations around the May Fourth Movement in 1919. Radicalized, Ding Ling declined the arranged marriage her clan planned for her and fled to Shanghai in 1920.[21]

The social experience of women cuts across the other worlds of intellectual life according to the fundamental social category of gender. Women were treated differently among the examination elite (entirely excluded), the provincial elite (excluded from the public realm, but central to the private society of the family and clan), and in local worlds (still subordinated but with powerful roles in the rural family and exciting new opportunities in professional and public life in the city), as well as in popular culture (depicted as paragons of virtue or as wicked temptresses). But articulate women in each world of life pushed against the bounds of social convention, some in search of meaningful private lives, but some in public affairs—Qiu Jin in 1904 was a fighter. Ding Ling would become the voice of liberated Chinese women in Republican China.[22]

Revolution for Ding Ling and her colleagues involved a fundamental critique of Confucian family and political values, a search for new political ideologies, and finally an embrace of Bolshevism (communism). After decades of foreign intervention and domestic failure, the Soviet Union and Lenin's successful Bolshevik revolution offered a modern solution to China's problems that was not tainted by imperialism.

[21] Ding Ling's biography is covered in Yi-tse Mei Feuerwerker, *Ding Ling's Fiction: Ideology and Narrative in Modern Chinese Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

[22] Also, women as a topic became a powerful metaphor for reformist and revolutionary men—so one needs to be careful to distinguish between the metaphorical women of men's political discourse and the voice of actual women.

Marxism–Leninism promised it all: modernity and a Chinese identity that fit its conditions. In the writings of Chinese Marxists, such as Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao, and Li Da, revolution turned a backward China into a vanguard example for the whole world.[23] China's suffering at the hands of foreign imperialists and domestic militarists no longer made her a failure, it made her more revolutionary than thou. Revolution promised to overthrow a repressive Confucian tradition, overcome the rapacious militarists, and throw out the meddling foreigners. All one had to do was follow Marx's map and Lenin's directions. Ding Ling lived this revolution, from its opening stages in the 1920s and 1930s, to its bitter fight for national success in the late 1930s and 1940s, to the unexpected joys of success by 1950 and equally dumbfounding failures in the late 1950s and the 1960s. Throughout, Ding Ling struggled to serve the public good, especially as a woman engaged in public life.

Ding Ling was an intellectual, a *zhishifenzi*, or an independent intellectual in the 1920s and 1930s.[24] She was a writer for the new commercial media—newspapers and magazines—the public world created by print capitalism. In Shanghai she could make a living as a writer—earn money, get an audience, have some influence. Nonetheless, new intellectuals of the May Fourth era like Ding Ling were alienated from both government service and the common cultural world of Confucian norms and texts and even the traditional language. With this alienation came considerable freedom of action, opportunity to try new things, and profound personal and employment insecurity. If 1895 had seen the greatest intellectual challenge of modern China—the unprecedented requirement to abandon the verities of their upbringing and to shake their worldview to its core—then the 1920s saw the largest social challenge to scholars wanting to serve China: they lost their traditional jobs, their inherited family roles (as patriarchs and submissive wives), and their shared cultural codes. They did not like it. Very few embraced the new role as preferable to some more socially honored, politically effective, and financially secure role. But they had little choice. So they wrote and published. There was income, but it was erratic. There was a public, an audience, but it was of limited scope. There was a social place—in part inherited from the esteem in which scholars had traditionally been held in public—but it was insecure. Thus these new intellectuals sought ways to address these uncertainties, marginalization, and insecurities,

[23] Each man has been the subject of English-language biographies, and the Chinese Marxist response in this period is covered in Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State*, pp. 280–325.

[24] Xu Jilin, *Ling Yizhongde Qimeng* (Another Kind of Enlightenment) (Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 1999), p. 2.

some through university appointments, some in business, many through the press and in new-style novels, and others in service to the new ideological political parties and their states.

Ding Ling is famous for her 1927 novel, *Miss Sophie's Diary*. A diary of a "modern girl" living free and unmonitored by family, the story was a shocking and exhilarating example of the "literary revolution" of the day.[25] The novel was popular among the new, young urban readership and it exposed the limitations of "free love." The story's protagonist fritters away her freedoms with directionless experimentation and ends up in a dead end. Ding Ling's medium was part of her message—easy-to-read colloquial Chinese. The literary revolutionaries promoted this *vernacular language*. This meant writing as you speak. China, like medieval and early modern Europe, had used a literary language for scholarly and government writing. Latin for Erasmus, literary Chinese for Liang Qichao. The new generation denounced this literary language as linguistic chains that imprisoned free thought and expression. Nonetheless, this *baihua*, or "plain language," was still more formal than everyday conversational language, and reflected class differences. Early *baihua* writings were quite intellectual and peppered with foreign terms from Europe (*demokelexi*) and Japan (terms for "society" and "economy" that we have seen were borrowed in the 1890s), not readily comprehensible when read aloud, especially to workers or villagers. A slew of famous scholars and writers made this modern Chinese come to life in the new press with essays, short stories, and novels in the European style by Hu Shi, Lu Xun, Mao Dun (1896–1981), and, down the line, Ding Ling.

The stage Ding Ling took up to engage in public life was the media, but media distinct from Liang Qichao's newspaper editorials and essays. Ding Ling mostly wrote fiction. While the liberal West had besmirched itself by the carnage of World War I, nonetheless the European idea of the power of literature, and particularly the revolutionary role of novels and fiction, captured the imagination of Ding Ling's generation. The slogan in the 1920s changed from "literary revolution" to "revolutionary literature." Literature was going to answer China's question of the day—how to overcome traditional culture and *really* change society to fulfill the failed promise of the 1911 Revolution. Literature was going to do this by

[25] Chinese texts are collected in *Ding Ling wenji* (Writings of Ding Ling) (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1983). Translations include Ding Ling, *Miss Sophie's Diary and Other Stories*, trans. William J.F. Jenner (Beijing: Chinese Literature Press, 1985); Tani E. Barlow, *I Myself Am Woman: Selected Writings of Ding Ling* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989). Ding Ling's feminist writings are selected and translated with some of Lu Xun's in Ding Ling and Lu Xun, *The Power of Weakness* (New York: Feminist Press at CUNY, 2007).

awakening China's people, changing how they looked at the world, how they related to each other, and what they fought for. Revolutionary literature would save China. This is the spiritual awakening of literature for which Lu Xun declared he had abandoned medical studies, and it was the project to which Ding Ling dedicated her life.

Ding Ling, understandably, took women's liberation as a key part of China's revolution. Part of the attack on "old China" since 1915 had been a rejection of the traditional, patriarchal family and its subjugation of women. Ding Ling's early stories turn around the conflict between men and women. Miss Sophie was a wild child, putting into print the sexuality and wild emotions of women previously hidden from "serious literature." But Ding Ling's characters also illustrated women's intelligence, strength, and integrity. In the novella "Shanghai, Spring 1930," Ding Ling captures the transition from personal liberation of the "literary revolution" to the social radicalism of "revolutionary literature" with a woman, Meilin, in the lead:

> "I wonder why my life shows no sign of improving," Meilin said to herself. It was true. They had endured a life without pleasure or hope into mid-spring, Shanghai's most exciting season. Pot-bellied businessmen and blood-sucking devils wizened and shriveled from overwork on their abacuses were going at full tilt in the careening money market, investing and manipulating to increase their exploitation of the laboring masses and to swell their astronomical wealth. Dozens of newspapers being hawked in the street carried banner stories about antagonists on various battlefronts, but the news was contradictory and unreliable. Beautiful young aristocratic ladies, faces rouged and eyes radiant, strolled through the streets wearing their new spring outfits ... As for the workers, although they had endured winter's rigor, their lives got harder with spring's arrival because rent and the price of grain were up, and working hours lengthened. They worked harder and got weaker ... The workers suffered so much that they simply had to resist. And so struggle began. Every day brought news of strikes and the beating and killing of workers. Subsequently, revolutionary young people, students, and members of the [Communist] Party found themselves extremely busy ... It was mid-spring. The wind was soft and the weather intoxicating! But every evil, pain, agony, and struggle unfolded under the soft clear sky.[26]

In short, and in a time of confusing and changing social norms, Ding Ling led the charge to bring women into the public sphere as independent actors. As the 1930s progressed, Ding Ling's stories became more social, focusing on the social conditions that shaped women and men. She, like her generation, also became more patriotic, as Japanese armies occupied more and more Chinese territory. Revolution became intertwined with

[26] Ding Ling, "Shanghai, Spring 1930," trans. in Barlow, *I Myself Am Woman*, pp. 128–9.

national defense. This was called "National Salvation." China's leader, Chiang Kai-shek, tried to fend off the Japanese with diplomacy, knowing that his armies were not yet up to facing the Japanese war machine. Meanwhile, he would not brook the public criticism of these self-righteous patriots. Ding Ling, amongst other urban writers and intellectuals, spent her share of time in Nationalist prisons for her agitation.[27] The Chinese Communist Party, illegal and embattled after 1927, made a good case as an anti-Japanese leader, willing to face the invaders. Many younger Chinese were inspired by the Communists' approach and disillusioned with intellectual repression under the Nationalists. Ding Ling went to their rural capital, Yan'an, in northwest China in the late 1930s.

China's "other" intellectuals: local, everyday, rural, and ordinary

Ding Ling's early life is really a history of a provincial student and local intellectual. China's locals are not generally subjects of intellectual history. Yet our view of intellectual life has to be broader than famous writers, certified scholars, and noted thinkers. We need to keep in mind something of *all* significant mental activity, not least because this undercurrent of local, daily, and "unimportant" mental life also shaped our metropolitan and provincial intellectuals, but also because local life is what these intellectuals aimed to shape, wished to uplift, or retreated to for solace. The humble opera stage in a Chinese village is as much a part of modern China's intellectual history as Liang Qichao's newspapers or Lu Xun's short stories and barbed *zawen* ("polemical") essays. Ordinary intellectuals and local intellectual life have only recently begun to appear in historical studies. Scholars of the Republican period have opened up the lives of petty intellectuals in Shanghai and other cities, particularly in journalism, the publishing houses like the massive Commercial Press, and amongst the ranks of the "white-collar workers" in banks and other offices. They were the audience to which our famous intellectuals played, and from which some notable intellectuals emerged. Their urban lives in the 1930s and 1940s began to shape what "Chinese modernity" looked like—nuclear families; an interest in hygiene; a taste for both Western fashions and "traditional" Chinese styles that mixed business suits with *qipao* dresses; and a love of films, radio, and of course trains, trams, cars, and aeroplanes.[28]

[27] Li-hsin Ting, *Government Control of the Press in Modern China, 1900–1949* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

[28] This arena of "everyday life" has been the focus of newer social and cultural histories: see Madeline Yue Dong and Joshua Goldstein, eds., *Everyday Modernity in China* (Seattle:

In the 1910s China's rural elite provided the alienated Confucian scholars and idealistic students who led and staffed the May Fourth Movement. This rural elite suffered the dislocations of economic disruption from the influx of industrial products from foreign trade and endemic warfare after 1911. Even the most prominent lineages had lost the promise of the path to government service and local status with the end of the imperial exams in 1905. Their children were being trained, even in rural towns, increasingly by "modern" schoolteachers like James Yen in Sichuan or Ding Ling's mother in Hunan, and even more radical teachers in major cities like Changsha and Hangzhou. As Wen-hsin Yeh has documented in the case of Zhejiang counties and the local metropolitan city of Hangzhou in southeast China, there was a strong link between the cultural life of such rural "middle counties" and the emerging literary and social revolution in China's cities. China's regional elites were cultured but local in their focus. Prosperous agricultural counties, such as Jinhua county well up-river from Hangzhou, were social worlds built around dense clusterings of social ties remembered over centuries in lineages, Confucian academies, and Buddhist temples. This world was sustained by stable kinship organizations rooted in landed interests, distinguishing themselves from neighboring communities by regional dialects and often their own popular opera.[29] That culture generally embraced a confident, conservative, family-oriented (patriarchal) Confucianism. When that world fractured in the 1910s, the sons (and a few daughters) of this local elite abandoned both the space and the customs of their fathers. They studied new, foreign topics, and they moved to the exciting major cities to attend new high schools and colleges.

In the cities of May Fourth China the descendants of the rural Confucian elite made revolution. But the way they made revolution was shaped by their fathers' Neo-Confucian faith. In addition to the factors we have seen, the rise of new schools, the leadership of the older generation of reformers, and access to new ideas, the particular family backgrounds of these youths shaped their approach to revolution. "The sons of these northern progressive gentry liberals often matured into liberal

University of Washington Press, 2006); Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor*; Robert Culp, *Articulating Citizenship: Civic Education and Student Politics in Southeastern China, 1912–1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007); Eugenia Lean, *Public Passions: The Trial of Shi Jianqiao and the Rise of Popular Sympathy in Republican China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); and Helen Schneider, *Keeping the Nation's House: Domestic Management and the Making of Modern China* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011).

[29] Yeh, *Provincial Passages*, esp. p. 29.

progressives themselves," writes Yeh of her Zhejiang student activists, while "those who became radicals were instead sons of conservative fathers and students of progressive teachers."[30] Ding Ling was of this generation. From a conservative family, but with the powerful example of her progressive mother, Ding Ling's commitment to radicalism over liberalism no doubt stemmed in part from her experience as a woman of the rural gentry.

Since the 1910s there have been two versions of local society in each ideological moment—the urban and the rural. Treaty port cities led in the creation of new *urban publics*. The journalists and their readers in treaty port China had a wide range of newspapers—missionary, elite, tabloid, and pictorial—as well as magazines of all sorts. The novel (from Lin Shu's translations of European novels at the turn of the century onward) and fiction as the new literature of modern life filled these pages. An older generation produced sappy romances and adventures, what would be scorned as "mandarin duck and butterfly" literature, but these stories built a considerable reading public.[31] A younger generation, including Ding Ling, availed themselves of these technologies and distribution networks to produce a new literature evoking the pedagogical ideals of their Confucian fathers but filled with the European revolutionary content of their progressive schoolteachers. In the cities a new elite arose to parallel the traditional provincial elite. These were the new capitalist class and their educated managers and white-collar employees. Theirs was the voice of business, as we saw in the chambers of commerce active in the constitutional debates before 1911. Print capitalism, modeled by the Western powers in their treaty port concessions but enthusiastically taken up by Chinese entrepreneurs, provided the sinews of this new public sphere. China's intellectuals leapt into it with gusto.

Meanwhile, *rural publics* continued, but were transformed tragically in the early twentieth century. The exit of the rural elite left localities economically disengaged (or disfavored as industrial imports, such as British textiles and kerosene, laid waste to local handicraft incomes) and socially crippled by the exodus of the gentry youth. Less savory characters, the local bullies and evil gentry (*tuhao lieshen*) of the day, came to fill the roles of local leaders. Misrule and periodic warfare added to the misery of economic privation. Lu Xun's story "My Old Home" paints a depressing picture of rural decline and intellectual alienation from it. Returning from his life in urban centers to move his aging mother from

[30] Yeh, *Provincial Passages*, p. 193.
[31] Perry Link, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Cities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

their hometown to his new job in Beijing, Lu Xun's narrator encounters his childhood friend, Runtu:

> The newcomer was Runtu. But although I knew at a glance this was Runtu, it was not the Runtu I remembered. He had grown to twice his former size. His round face, once crimson, had become sallow and acquired deep lines and wrinkles; his eyes too had become like his father's, the rims swollen and red, a feature common to most peasants who work by the sea and are exposed all day to the wind from the ocean. He wore a shabby felt cap and just one very thin padded jacket, with the result that he was shivering from head to foot. He carried a paper package and a long pipe, nor was his hand the plump red hand I remembered, but coarse and clumsy and chapped, like the bark of a pine tree.
>
> Delighted as I was, I did not know how to express myself, and could only say: "Oh! Runtu—so it's you? . . ."
>
> After this there were so many things I wanted to talk about, they should have poured out like a string of beads: woodcocks, jumping fish, shells, [that mysterious animal, the] *zha* . . . But I was tongue-tied, unable to put all I was thinking into words.
>
> He stood there, mixed joy and sadness showing on his face. His lips moved, but not a sound did he utter. Finally, assuming a respectful attitude, he said clearly, "Master! . . ."
>
> I felt a shiver run through me; for I knew then what a lamentably thick wall had grown up between us. Yet I could not say anything.[32]

Nonetheless, a handful of metropolitan and local elites would, from the 1920s, spend a good portion of their time trying to redeem local China from this dismal fate. Most famously after 1927, the Communists pushed rural revolution, but a number of Chinese intellectuals, from Liang Shuming to James Yen, promoted rural reconstruction on Confucian or liberal terms.

Localities were not simply the object of elite reforms or revolution. Worlds of popular culture blossomed in the twentieth century. While the urban publics of business circles and readers of elite newspapers comprised a wider circle than the locally oriented provincial elite, there were worlds of popular culture in both city and countryside that shaped the environment of elite conversation and deeply influenced elite debates mostly in the primary colors of collective expressions or social movements. The tabloids and pictorials were the newsprint media of this commercialized pop culture, as were the "mandarin duck and butterfly" romance novels. Urban elites read translations of European novels; broader publics enjoyed racy news, pictorial magazines on romances, scandals and sensational murders, and thrilled to the salacious news of

[32] Lu Xun, "My Old Home," in *Selected Stories of Lu Hsun*, trans. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, p. 60.

misbehavior by opera stars and theater performers. Meanwhile, radical theorists from Qu Qiubai to Zhou Yang would insist on "national forms of literature" in the 1930s to bring the radical content of the cities to the conservative worlds of village China.

Finally, China's intellectuals often affiliated with other circles on the basis of local language, ethnicity, and belief. The role of Buddhism was particularly important in the Republican period. We have seen how Zhang Binglin, back in the first years of the century, found solace and guidance in esoteric and intellectual Buddhism. Throughout the Republican period, middle-class urbanites, some intellectuals, more office workers or professionals, turned to various forms of Buddhism, particularly lay Buddhist associations, to make sense of their lives in a time of rapid social change and deteriorating personal safety.[33] For example, according to James Carter, Tanxu, an activist Buddhist monk during these years, "believed that foreigners had succeeded [in modernization] primarily because of a stable, united society and strong spiritual foundation. A reassertion of China's traditional culture—for Tanxu, grounded in Buddhism—would enable the nation to succeed both at home and abroad."[34]

The cross-cutting role of popular culture defines the twentieth century; it was not limited to local China but became part of the life of metropolitan and provincial elites, not only as their own entertainment but as the actually existing form of the public arena, most commonly through the newspapers and novels of print capitalism (and later film and today the Internet). Thus, as we look at worlds of intellectual life, we have not only three spatial worlds of metropolitan, provincial, and local, but also three cross-cutting social worlds: popular culture, women's worlds, and worlds of affinity. This matrix of spatial interaction and social experience is the framework of intellectual life in modern China.

Liang Shuming's moral revolution

Liang Shuming (1893–1988) was not interested in the role of the urban independent intellectual, nor was he attracted to the role of party or government cadre proffered by either the Nationalists or the Communists. Born to a Mongolian family in Beijing, Liang was the scion of an illustrious line of scholar-officials dating back to the Yuan Dynasty in the

[33] Brooks Jessup, "The Householder Elite: Buddhist Activism in Shanghai, 1920–1956," PhD dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 2010.

[34] James Carter, *Heart of Buddha, Heart of China: The Life of Tanxu, a Twentieth-Century Monk* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 114.

fourteenth century that had since fallen on hard times. Liang's father, Liang Ji, was a noted scholar and degree holder and had served in the early 1900s as a secretary in the Qing's Grand Secretariat. Although trained in modern schools, Liang Shuming grew up a neo-traditionalist and identified with Confucianism, the very object of Ding Ling's and May Fourth intellectuals' ire. In truth, Liang Shuming's approach was a new Confucian, or progressive conservative, response. He is most famous for his focus on the countryside, what he called rural reconstruction. The awakening Liang wanted for the Chinese people was moral, communitarian, and drawn from the rich and varied resources of Chinese culture, from Neo-Confucian rural administrative ideas of "community compacts" (*xiangyue*) to Buddhist ideas of service, all inflected inevitably by his engagement with the foreign presence in China. Though he considered Western culture doomed to eventual failure for its lack of morality, he appreciated and plumped for scientific and technological modernization, particularly in agriculture. This was always in the service of a "true" Chinese character, one represented by what Liang felt was the authentic Confucian world buried under centuries of corruption and distortion and surviving only in the countryside. He was a conservative rather than a simple traditionalist, as he criticized his own tradition. Liang was also critical of Marxist class theory, and famously met with Mao Zedong in the autumn of 1938 in Yan'an, where he told him so. Liang would later help to found the Democratic League during the Anti-Japanese War to help mediate between the GMD and the CCP.

In all, Liang worked for an ethics-based society that he felt was congruent with China's family-centered, face-to-face social order in rural China, in contrast with the interest-based society dominant in the individual-oriented and impersonal legal social order of Western nations and China's cities. Still, even as a Buddhist at heart, Liang was very critical of Chinese folk religion—considering it venal and superstitious—and he promoted Confucianism as China's answer to the West's Christianity. Thus Liang Shuming was the quintessential dissident or intellectual concerned with *criticizing society*. We tend to think of dissidents as liberals under a socialist state or Communists under a traditional or authoritarian state. But Liang Shuming shows that a self-identified Confucian can be a dissident in modern China. Of course, political dissent has always been a part of public life in China and an option for China's literati since Confucius in the fifth century BCE. Dissenters fundamentally take issue with the status quo and say so. Some may speak up with the aim of reforming the current regime; some in order to overturn it. Either way, dissidents are generally outspoken, are not given to compromise, and—if successful—touch a nerve of political legitimacy.

That is why states usually repress dissent. Dissent, importantly, is in the eye of the beholder, especially the state. At several moments in our story we will encounter cases of "manufactured dissent" where the state sees dissent in the words and actions of people who did not think of themselves as dissidents, or at least not as implacable foes of their regime. Ding Ling had been imprisoned for leftist writings in Shanghai. Wang Shiwei in Yan'an and Wen Yiduo in Nationalist areas would both pay with their lives for their criticisms in the 1940s.

The model of dissidents that we carry probably comes from the Cold War and especially the famous Soviet dissidents, Sakharov the scientist and Solzhenitsyn the writer. These are courageous and important intellectual models and China has had her share, under the Qing and the Nationalists, as well as under the CCP. It is well to remember, however, that dissidents are defined by their relation to power—they pick a fight with it for reasons of higher value—not by the content of what they propose. It may be unpleasant to contemplate, but from a scholarly perspective Islamic theorists who publicly criticize the state in Egypt or in England in 2014 were as much dissidents as Soviet or PRC Chinese democrats dissenting from their authoritarian governments. That some Islamic dissent was connected with terrorism reminds us that not all dissent necessarily corresponds with your or my political values. Qiu Jin's dissent and social organization against the Qing in 1906 extended to participation in a failed rebellion and assassination attempts. Mao Zedong, after all, was a dissident in the 1920s.

Liang Shuming's public life shows that the role of the critical intellectual could include a neo-traditional figure. From his tradition, and the example of Confucius himself, Liang took the role of ideological leadership. As his biographer, Guy Alitto, documents, Liang Shuming without embarrassment saw himself as a modern sage, the man with the correct philosophy to save China.[35] Liang felt he inherited this mission to save China by reviving the Confucian tradition for modern times from his father, Liang Ji, himself a reformist official whose suicide as a martyr to this lost tradition in 1918 stirred public debate. Based at Peking University, Liang Shuming's role as a critical intellectual was foremost in the controversy over Chinese and Western cultures in the early 1920s, while his status as an aspiring ideological leader and social mobilizer came in his Rural Reconstruction Movement in Shandong in the 1930s and his co-operation with James Yen's Mass Education Movements.

[35] Guy Alitto, *The Last Confucian: Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

The debate over Chinese and Western cultures, like the debate over science and philosophy of life that Ding Wenjiang and Zhang Junmai led a few years later, was an artifact of the new public sphere of this ideological moment. All participants could get into print fairly easily and they clearly read each other because their next essay would hammer on their opponent's most recent rejoinder. Liang Qichao led off the debate over Eastern and Western cultures with his reflections on visiting war-torn Europe in 1919. Liang Qichao, as we saw in Chapter 1, had lost faith in the West and was turning to a renewed faith in the enduring powers of China's rich and diverse traditions beyond the sterile Confucianism of state exams and hidebound lineage elders. In this, he found strong support from Liang Shuming, who penned one of the most famous books of modern Chinese intellectual life, *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*, in 1921.[36] Liang Shuming compares China, India, and the West. In short, he finds the West too aggressive and materialistic and India too passive and spiritualistic. "The fundamental spirit of Chinese culture," in contrast, he writes, "is the harmony and moderation of ideas and desires."[37] While he acknowledges the vigor and achievements of science and democracy of the West, Liang points both to the disasters of the Great War and to China's fundamentally different worldview to make the point that China should not and indeed cannot simply copy the West. He accepts that China can learn from the West, but "we must change the Western attitude somewhat" from a focus on the intellect to traditional Chinese intuition. Similarly, "we must renew our Chinese attitude and bring it to the fore, but do so critically."

Liang's commitment to renewing China found expression in his self-appointed role as ideological leader in rural reconstruction. Liang ran his own Rural Reconstruction Movement based in Zouping in central Shangdong province from 1931 to 1936, and in 1934 joined forces with James Yen to lead the Rural Work Discussion Society, which held three national meetings over the next two years.[38] This was Liang Shuming's revolution. He intended to redeem not only China's suffering rural majority in the villages but also China's troubled intellectuals:

> If the intellectuals still loll about in the relaxed atmosphere of the cities and the foreign concessions, then they will not make revolution. Only if they go to the

[36] Liang Shuming, *Dong-Xi wenhua ji qi zhexue*, published in many editions in the 1920s and since. Covered in detail in Alitto, *The Last Confucian*, Chapters 4 and 5.
[37] Liang Shuming, *Dong-Xi wenhua*, trans. in de Bary and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, Vol. II, p. 380.
[38] Covered in Hayford, *To the People*, pp. 154 ff.

countryside, where the problems are the greatest and the suffering the most intense, will they be certain to make revolution.

This revolution was nothing less than "the final awakening in the Chinese people's self-salvation movement."[39] Liang's revolution set out to

> [c]ombine the [peasants'] motive force with that [of the intellectuals] to form one united force ... In other words, the revolutionary intellectuals must go down to the countryside and merge with the inhabitants ... Each side will transform the other ... All that needs to be done is for the peasants to train and transform the revolutionary intellectuals and for the revolutionary intellectuals to shift the direction of and transform the peasants. Ultimately, there will be no difference between the two: then the problem of China can be considered solved.[40]

Not many intellectuals in the 1930s felt inclined to abandon their "lolling" in the universities and the modern amenities of Shanghai and Beijing to "merge with" the impoverished and dispirited peasants of China's distressed rural society. But some did and Liang's Rural Reconstruction Movement trained hundreds of young intellectuals, many coming up from the villages. Liang's vision is astounding in its moral absolutism: cities are bad; villages are noble; the redemption of both the intellectual and the peasant depends on their co-operation and, ultimately, their unification. This ideal is all the more momentous in modern Chinese history because it brings to mind the vision proclaimed by Mao Zedong a few years later and enforced by the Chinese Communist Party.

Liang Shuming's rural renovation, however, was significantly different from Mao's. It was both earlier (and, indeed, there is some indication that Liang's meeting with Mao in 1938 may have had some influence on Mao's evolving thinking),[41] and, most significantly, based on a revival of Confucian statecraft traditions of community building and not on Marxism or class struggle. The form and approach—moral renovation of the countryside and re-engagement of the intellectuals in rural society—were similar but the content was significantly different and Liang knew it: he used harmony and community building; Mao used struggle and class warfare. Like Sun Yat-sen, Liang Shuming felt that the problem besetting China was that "Chinese have always lacked a group life," and so Liang set out to "construct new customs" through a relational ethics congruent with what he felt was Chinese spirit and culture.

[39] Drawn from Liang's appropriately titled 1934 book *Zhongguo minzu zijiu yundong zhi zuihou juewu* (Final Awakening of the Chinese People's/Nation's Self-Salvation Movement), quotations translated by Alitto, *The Last Confucian*, p. 194.

[40] Liang Shuming, *Zhongguo minzu zijiu yundong zhi zuihou juewu*, quoted in Alitto, *The Last Confucian*, p. 199.

[41] Alitto, *The Last Confucian*, pp. 283 ff.

Liang found the mechanism for cultural renewal at the village level in utopian rural models from the Song Dynasty. "This new organization," Liang writes of his proposal, "is just the supplementation and transformation of what earlier Chinese called 'the community compact' (*xiangyue*)." Its goal was to mobilize China's peasantry, educate them in the best morals of their civilization, help them "form producing and marketing cooperatives" and, in general, promote "an upward movement of human life, the stirring up of aspiration."[42] Two themes were central to Liang's model of intellectual–farmer reformation. First, participation had to be voluntary and safely distant from the corrupting influence of political parties or government officials. This is why Liang favored the Song model of the Lü Brothers from the eleventh century (popularized by Zhu Xi) over the Ming and Qing versions that had become mere tools of the autocratic state. Second, the "community compacts" relied on moral-improvement village meetings in which community members would scrutinize and perfect each other's moral character. These would be sessions of mutual criticism and self-criticism, under the moderating guidance of an elected village elder, and following the moral injunctions of a stern and somewhat puritanical version of Neo-Confucianism. This focus on morality in the community compact system, Liang felt, "aimed at making *junzi* [moral exemplars] of the masses."[43] Liang Shuming's revised Neo-Confucian community compact system in Zouping offered a total ideology, from personal moral improvement to community organization, including local granaries, schools, and militia self-defense. To this traditional model Liang added the goals of modernization—mass mobilization, political participation, and economic and technological development.

Liang's neo-traditional model of rural reconstruction gained traction beyond his disciples. Cato Young (Yang Kaidao), an American-trained sociologist at the National Central University in Nanjing, took up community compacts along the lines of Liang's model. Yang, who received his PhD in sociology from the University of Michigan in 1927, had taught in the prestigious Sociology Department of Yenching University in Beijing until his move in 1930 to Nanjing, and had worked in the Yenching field stations.[44] That such a Westernized modern professional academic embraced Liang Shuming's vision, and did so in the premier

[42] Liang Shuming, trans. in de Bary and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, Vol. II, pp. 382–3, and covered in detail in Alitto, *The Last Confucian*, pp. 206 ff.
[43] Quoted in Alitto, *The Last Confucian*, p. 207.
[44] Yung-chen Chiang, *Social Engineering and the Social Sciences in China, 1919–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 52.

scholarly journal, *Sociology World* (*Shehuixue jie*), reflects the breadth of Liang's influence. Like many of his American-trained sociologist colleagues, Cato Young was interested in bringing the benefits of modern education to rural China through social engineering. He found these traditional community compacts a suitable tool for this modern project. In his 1931 article on community compacts, Young gives concrete suggestions on how to write your own village compact. Although he liked the integrated services of a Ming Dynasty model (of Lu Shiyi), Young stresses that the voluntary spirit of the Lü Brothers' Song Dynasty original must be the core. In fact, "if someone in your local area cannot write a Community Compact," Young writes, "I think Zhu Xi's corrected version of the Lü Brothers' Community Compact can still serve."[45]

There were two other revolutions on offer for China's countryside, and Liang Shuming had some contact with both. James Yen, our transpacific liberal and Chinese Christian from Sichuan whom we met in Chapter 1, led the Mass Education Movement in the 1920s to bring basic literacy to China's villages as the first step in modernizing China. By 1930 this had shifted to a Rural Reconstruction Movement based in Ding county, or Dingxian in Chinese, in Hebei province. Where Liang Shuming sought to revitalize the Confucian tradition to make it relevant to the modernizing needs of rural China, James Yen sought to make modern medicine and technology serve village China through a Chinese adaptation of social science, or what his biographer Charles Hayford calls "the sinification of liberalism." James Yen's model had material support from the Rockefeller Foundation and intellectual support from the Sociology Department of Yenching University. Progressive Westerners saw a future for China in Dingxian. The noted journalist Edgar Snow (who would introduce Mao Zedong to the world in 1937) was deeply impressed by Yen's work in Dingxian in 1933 and coined the term "Dingxian-ism."[46]

James Yen's sinification of liberalism can be seen in the work of one of his team, Dr. C.C. Ch'en (Chen Zhiqian), a 1929 graduate of Peking Union Medical College with an MA in public health from Harvard.[47] Chen moved to Dingxian with his family in 1932. He confronted a core issue in public health for rural China: the catastrophic lack of trained

[45] Yang Kaidao (Cato Young), "Xiangyue zhidu de yanjiu" (Research on the Community Compact System), *Shehuixue jie* (Beijing), Vol. 5 (1931), pp. 40–2.

[46] Hayford, *To the People*, quoting James Yen, p. 118; Edgar Snow's term in the romanization of the day was "Ting Hsien-ism" and it quickly entered into the Chinese press as *Dingxianzhuyi*, p. 141.

[47] Material on C.C. Ch'en from Hayford, *To the People*, pp. 134–41.

personnel. There was, in short, no way to provide modern, Western-trained doctors for China's masses. Chen came up with a novel system of village health workers in which locals were given mini courses of just a few weeks in basic hygiene and diagnosis of the most common killing diseases, along with a simple first-aid kit. These village health workers would be supervised by better-trained staff at the nearest market town (often serving a population of some 10,000 people in surrounding villages). Finally, the local headquarters for public health would have university-trained staff at the county seat. However, even this very modest and simplified medical service turned out to require more staff than the Dingxian project could train. Nonetheless, the Dingxian village health worker was one of the singular successes of James Yen's project and the model certainly calls to mind the famous "barefoot doctors" of rural China in the Mao period.

The third form of rural revolution was explicit political revolution on the Bolshevik model based on class conflict. Mao Zedong's version, finalized in Yan'an in the late 1930s and early 1940s, is the most famous and certainly the model that dominated China at mid-century. But, as we have seen, aspects of the Yan'an model of rural revolution were already being tried out by Liang Shuming and James Yen a decade earlier. In fact, in 1929 Mao had recommended James Yen's *Thousand Character Primer* in his regulations for training Communist Red Army soldiers. Rural renovation on the Marxist model, however, had started earlier, before James Yen started his literacy campaign.

The first prominent Chinese Communist leader to devote himself to rural revolution was Peng Pai (1896–1929). Born to a wealthy landlord family in the southernmost province of Guangdong, Peng Pai grew up in the generation that benefited from new schools and foreign study (having studied at Waseda University in Tokyo from 1918 to 1921). After returning to China from Japan, Peng joined the newly established CCP, returned to his home area in Guangdong, and set about organizing peasant associations. His own reminiscences mock his urban ways—for his first efforts to engage the peasants were thwarted by his sleek white suit and snappy hat: the local farmers assumed he was a rent collector. Slowly he managed to engage a few willing locals and from there built up a series of peasant unions to resist local abuses (extra rents, local bullies, pettifoggery by local elites).[48] These peasant associations on the outskirts of Guangzhou grew in power in the mid-1920s as the Nationalist–Communist United Front brought the revolutionaries together in

[48] A portion of Peng Pai's account is translated in Patricia Ebrey, ed., *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook*, 2nd edn. (New York: The Free Press, 1993), pp. 364–72.

Guangzhou to plan a national campaign. Peng Pai, like the younger Mao Zedong, served in both parties. Peng led the Nationalists' Peasant Training Institute, and participated in the Northern Expedition. After the violent split of the Nationalists and Communists in April 1927, Peng Pai returned to his peasant associations and, radicalized by the violence, formed the Hailufeng Soviet, leading an armed peasantry and a few Communist-led military units in battling the Nationalists. In January 1928 the soviet was crushed.

Mao's engagement with rural revolution began as a student in Peng Pai's Peasant Training Institute and in his 1926 trip home to Hunan, during which Mao wrote his famous "Report on the Hunan Peasant Movement." However, while James Yen and Liang Shuming were carrying out their village reform movements in northern provinces, Mao was a fugitive roaming the mountains of south-central China with a military force almost always on his tail. Thus the rural revolutions first in Jinggangshan and then in the Jiangxi Soviet (1931–4) were strongly colored by the violence of warfare. The rural policies were straight-up class warfare—peasant appropriation of landlord land and property occasioned frequently by violent struggle. This early land reform did not fear alienating local elites; it disposed of them and it killed those who resisted. Land was redistributed to the tiller. Other radical policies, such as measures allowing women to own land and to initiate divorce, were also enforced, for a while.[49] The promises for women that Ding Ling saw in Marxism were beginning to be implemented.

In all cases, however, the exigencies of war overwhelmed policy. The land reform was more violent because of the brutalizing effects of the ongoing warfare, as well as the bitter shock of the slaughter of Communist personnel by the Nationalists in 1927 and after—it was palpably a life-and-death struggle. Women's liberation for peasant women soon came to a halt because many village wives divorced their husbands at the first opportunity, but this depressed the morale of the Red Army's peasant conscripts. The fighting had to come first. Chiang Kai-shek's forces greatly outnumbered the rural Communist forces in men and matériel. By October 1934 Chiang had succeeded in forcing the Communists out of their rural soviet and put them on the run on the brutal retreat known as the Long March. The full version of Chinese Communist rural revolution would have to wait until the survivors had regrouped in Yan'an later in the decade. That same violence, culminating in the full-scale

[49] Ilpyoong Kim, *The Politics of Chinese Communism: Kiangsi under the Soviets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); and Stephen C. Averill, *Revolution in the Highlands: China's Jinggangshan Base Area* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

invasion of central China by Japan's Imperial Army in the summer of 1937, put an end to Liang Shuming's and James Yen's peaceful rural revolutions—only those with an army could continue in China's age of extremes.

Enduring ideas in the 1920s

The people, by 1925, meant *renmin*, working people both well-off and poor. The word and the image appear on the poster that starts this chapter. The people moved from being the object of Liang Qichao's "renovated or new people," *xinmin*, through being the object of radical cultural reformation in the New Culture Movement from 1915, to being the putative objects of mobilization under both Sunism and Communism. Under Sun's "political tutelage" the people were to be educated in the ways of democracy. Under communism, the people were to be organized and mobilized to throw off the shackles of capitalists, militarists, and reactionaries (called "feudal forces"). The people in the 1920s were seen as capable of acting in the public arena, something not believed by most Chinese thinkers and writers twenty or thirty years before. But the people could not be trusted to act on their own without suitable guidance by those who had already "awakened." Liang Qichao lived in this ideological moment and moved from trusting the people to deploring the weaknesses of Chinese national character. Lu Xun, a major voice for the next generation in his famous short stories around 1920, called out to "save the children" from despicable aspects of Chinese tradition. Chen Duxiu and leaders of the Chinese Communist Party adopted Soviet agit-prop to educate and mobilize the proletariat. For James Yen and Liang Shuming there were important differences between urban and rural people, but both were Chinese and needed each other. They were to save each other by social engagement, modern technology, and moral uplift. For all but the most doctrinaire Marxists among the May Fourth intellectuals, the people were everyone who lived in China (thus including, with some ambiguity, Mongols, Manchus, Tibetans, and other "minorities"), bar a few bad eggs and evil militarists. For the Communists the people were the proletariat, progressive national bourgeoisie, and revolutionary intellectuals, *not* the capitalists, traitors, or reactionaries—a good deal more Chinese fell outside this definition of "the people."

Chinese became distinct culturally and racially and was explicitly contrasted with Western culture and white people. The Republic was called "the Republic of *Zhonghua*," the term coined by Zhang Binglin in 1906. It combined the older terms of *hua* for Chinese civilization and *zhong* for the central states. The racial, bloodline definition of Chinese

identity took root in these years: it was the culture of yellow people, sons and daughters of the Yellow Emperor. These are the Han, an ethnicity or *minzu*. What about all the non-Han? The Manchus who had ruled "China" since 1644? The Mongols, the Tibetans, Chinese Muslims (called the Hui), and dozens of tribal groups in the southwestern provinces? In the early 1920s, Sun Yat-sen advocated an inclusive assimilation—everyone could become Chinese, if they adopted Chinese cultural ways. The flag for the Republic until 1925 was the five-color flag representing the five major *minzu*—Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui, and Tibetan—and claiming all were "Chinese" or part of *Zhonghua*. Sun's replacement of that flag with the "Blue Sky and White Sun" flag that is still the national flag of the Republic of China was meant, in Sun's thinking, to correct the old Republican flag. Instead of identifying the five "nationalities" in China, the new flag—which put the blue and white motif of the Guomindang in the top left corner of a red flag—would treat all people in China as Chinese without distinction.[50] Thus culture and race existed in an uneasy relationship in discussions about Chinese identity. In addition, intellectuals of this time debated the character and value of "the Chinese." Liang Qichao had become a pessimist, despairing of the slavish habits and self-destructive tendencies of the Chinese. Lu Xun thought ordinary Chinese people were asleep at the wheel of history. Liang Shuming and other conservatives saw Chinese culture as a needed contribution to world culture, with China's "spiritual" qualities counterbalancing the self-destructive "material" prowess of Western culture. In all, "Chinese" (now generally rendered as the quality, *zhongguode*, "of the [nation-state] China," or the person, *zhongguo ren*) was seen as the *identity* of the culture and peoples living in the old areas of the Qing empire, the same area claimed by the Republic. "Chinese" was predominantly cultural, but for many was also strongly racial, but in either case it was—or with rectification or revival should be—an object of pride.

Democracy was half of the most famous slogan of the New Culture Movement that advocated "Mr. De and Mr. Sai" (De standing for "democracy" and Sai for "science," here taking the phonetics from the European terms). This formulation is telling. First, the reference to the European pronunciations of these two key ideas suggests the Western provenance of the ideas. Early articles, indeed, referred to democracy phonetically as *de-mo-ke-la-xi*. Second, however, that these two ideas are even jokingly referred to as "Mr.," as if these funny, foreign strings of meaningless characters were the transliteration of a barbarian's name,

[50] Fitzgerald, *Awakening China*, pp. 180 ff.

indicates how strange the ideas were to a broader reading public. This ideological moment saw all these new ideas reach out from a tiny elite to a broader urban public, and even to parts of a rural public. The transition was not easy, nor smooth. Liberals, and Chinese who had traveled, worked, and studied extensively in Japan or the West, understood democracy in ways quite close to ours today—liberal democracy with secret-ballot elections, an independent judiciary, freedom of association, and a free press. This they had seen in Europe and America and, more or less, in Japan. But the failure of the first Republican government, the assassination of the elected leader of the parliament (Song Jiaoren), and dismissal of parliament by Beijing strongman Yuan Shikai in 1913, showed that democracy was not going to work in China quickly or easily. In part, this stimulated thinking about "the people" and "Chinese," as we have seen. But it also prompted some Chinese thinkers and writers to question the applicability of Western-style liberal democracy to China and it set off a search for alternative versions of "people's rule" (*minzhu*, the literal translation for "democracy"). Liberals accepted that it would take time.

Sun Yat-sen articulated a path to democracy through autocratic political tutelage led by himself and his party. This was Sun's pedagogical state that was taken up with enthusiasm by both Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong. This was the "other side" to Sun's new flag for the Republic—the blue and white ensign of the Guomindang on the flag signaled that the Republic would be led by Sun's party, a party above petty political competition in elections. Anarchists sought to empower ordinary people through their place of work—farm or factory—without the trappings of repressive state structures or formalities of liberal democracy. The new Communist Party took this "guided democracy" further, declaring democracy to be class-based, for the benefit of a specific economic class, the workers or proletariat, in Karl Marx's model of political economy, and led by its representative, a Bolshevik party, in Lenin's model. They fought for democracy for the proletariat and not for the capitalists or militarists, though pragmatic Communists allowed that "bourgeois democracy" could be a historical stage on the way to socialism and communism. In Yan'an, they came to call this "democratic centralism." In any event, the awakened elite, the Party, would lead the common people though a pedagogical state in which the people would be pupils to be educated, guided, and mobilized for their own good. In China's age of extremes only a tightly organized Party with a strong army stood a chance of implementing their form of democracy.