

THE FAN OF THE AIR-CONDITIONING UNIT droned on in the corner, drowning out the noises from the courtyard below that doubled as a makeshift foundry for the work unit. The ubiquitous fluorescent light flickered, bathing the shiny gray painted walls in an odd greenish light to the point that you could not tell what time of day or night it was without opening the window. Soon the design institute was moving—or so they were told—into better, more modern quarters. In the meantime, even in their preliminary design discussions, they were continuing to tread familiar ground. All three of them—Zhang Shaoshu, Lu Hui, and Wu Feng—had graduated from Beijing’s top school, though some years apart, and all, remarkably, now found themselves in a position of relative design responsibility. Unlike earlier times, when invariably they would have joined an established studio within the design institute and worked their way up, they were now given a comparatively free hand, at least before their boss started issuing them explicit instructions from on high. These days, there was so much design work to be done and very little in the way of a specific doctrine or style to be followed. So much freedom made some of their older colleagues think it was a moment of crisis in Chinese architecture; and even if this sentiment was exaggerated, it was certainly a time for experimentation and, hence, a chance for them to show what they could do.

“It is a civic building, after all,” interjected Lu Hui, somewhat taken aback by the slightly younger Wu Feng’s flight of fancy in the direction of colliding volumes and planes, as he sketched out a basic concept for the project. “Surely it must reflect some sort of Chineseness!” she continued forcefully.

“And tell me—if you can—what exactly is that?” responded Feng sarcastically. “We are, after all, finally living in the modern world,” he continued, mimicking Hui’s cadence.

“Yes, that’s undoubtedly true,” said Zhang Shaoshu, the oldest of the three, also in an ironic tone, as he was also becoming somewhat exasperated with Wu Feng’s constant striving for fashionable design novelty as an architect. “But Hui has a point. Otherwise we might as well be doing this for—I don’t know—Hong Kong!”

“I wish!” Feng shot back, who since his return from the design institute’s branch office in the south was sporting a punk hairdo and spending his money on the hippest clothes he could find, frequenting foreign bars, and even sprinkling his Mandarin speech with a Cantonese twang.

“Your trouble is, you have no sense of tradition!” Hui blurted out, again becoming frustrated with Wu Feng’s persistent avant-gardism. “Just look at yourself,” she added more for rhetorical effect than to be nasty, as she liked Feng and thought that he was probably the most talented designer in their group.

“Like I’ve said before, what good is it?” Feng replied emphatically. “It hasn’t got us anywhere in the past, why should it now?”

“That’s not true!” interjected Shaoshu indignantly; “besides, surely what has happened before should not invalidate our continuing efforts to try to find a way of being both modern and Chinese at the same time.”

TRADITIONALISM VERSUS MODERNISM IN CHINA emerged strongly as an issue of cultural development, though not for the first time, in the aftermath of the Opium War of 1840 to 1842. The ceding of the treaty ports to foreign powers, which accompanied the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842, forcefully opened China to the West in an unprecedented manner. This Anglo-Chinese conflict followed on the heels of failed diplomatic efforts to open China to the West during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; although opium was a factor, the deeper and more central issue was trade. Laws banning opium then in force in China led to the destruction of supplies from foreign warehouses and resulted in a blockade of Chinese ports by the British. After the siege of Guangzhou and the occupation of Shanghai in 1842, which also prevented supplies from traveling along the Grand Canal to the Chinese capital, the Qing government, under duress, finally acceded to British demands. Following the Treaty of Nanjing, five treaty ports were opened for foreign trade—Shanghai, Ningbo, Fuzhou, Xiamen, and Guangzhou—together with land use rights; in those areas foreign powers began to establish their own communities, under their own extraterritorial rule and modeled on life in their home countries.¹ Eventually, these “Concessions” or “Settlements,” as they were called, in places like Shanghai, became the centers of modern cities from which contemporary Western ideas and technologies were propagated.

There was, however, little overt cultural response by the Chinese at the time, largely in the hope that the treaty could be annulled and the foreign influence dismissed. More fundamentally, this inaction can also be attributed to the traditional cosmological Chinese view of

harmonious balance and to the classical Confucian and Neo-Confucian legacy that flowed from it and remained entrenched in Chinese family life, education, and state institutions. These gave the Chinese a sense that they were superior in civilized behavior, ethical conduct, and minding their own business, a response that sprang up immediately in the face of unvarnished Western expansionism. In brief, harmony was achieved by striking a balance by conceptualizing an oppositional binary—the *yang* (expansion) and the *yin* (concentration) of a given set of relations—as exemplified in the central values of Chinese civilization, passed on down through the ages via the *Analects*, the *Mencius*, and other works. These writings stressed concepts of noble virtue, the need for rites and rituals and propriety in their performance, and filial respect and reverence.²

Noble virtue, for its part, promoted a depth of practical wisdom, enabling the past to be appreciated and the present understood through active learning and scholarship: the result was personal autonomy, responsibility, and a capacity both to deal with specific situations and to transcend a particular walk of life. Indeed, the scholarly class ultimately created was largely meritocratic and was entered into solely through rigorous examination. Rites and rituals were understood as necessary to nourish the much-appreciated appetites of life in a manner that would avoid conflict and disorder, rather than to transcend such appetites altogether—as, for instance, Buddhists and Taoists would have it. More specifically, the Confucian notion of *li* (adhering to what is correct) applied to that which was used to influence social outcomes and to bring forth good fortune; from it the *li* of propriety, etiquette, protocol, and courtesy were formed, defining a model social order and an effective system of interpersonal relations.³ Furthermore, filial respect and reverence were seen as a cornerstone of life's renewal, family perpetuation, and, by extension, dynastic precedents—and ultimately claims to sovereignty.

As teaching and as code of conduct, Confucianism, in its various incarnations, often proved well-suited to the governance and cultural cultivation of a vast expanse of an otherwise disparate people, where a more personalized form of administration and adjudication was preferable to impersonal top-down bureaucratic procedures. It was, as William Theodore de Bary described it, a “decentralized enfeoffment system,” unlike the more centralized feudalism encountered earlier in the West and in Japan.⁴ Moreover, its orientation toward matters immediately at hand, within personal grasp and therefore within the internal affairs of China, was essentially civil rather than militaristic, nationalistic, and expansionist. This is not to say that the institutional conduct and

mind-set of the Qing dynasty measured up fully to the Confucian mandate—it did not, and the regime ultimately fell because of that failure. Certainly, many transactions were marred by favoritism and corruption, often including the sense that admission into the scholarly or “nobly virtuous” class was a prize in itself, rather than a stepping-stone toward doing well by others and the country at large. Those who ruled could and often did become despotic. Also, a certain sense of xenophobia and a fear of radicalism, especially with regard to the future, undermined the prescribed harmonious balancing of the power of positive thinking (*yang*) against the power of negative thinking and arbitrary sanctions (*yin*).⁵ Nevertheless, the Chinese elite undoubtedly felt, at the time of the Opium War, that they came closer to meeting the standards of their own complex mandate, developed over the centuries, than did the Western powers who were invading them. Small wonder, then, that they thought they were right and would prevail.

Yet mounting pressure from the West only exacerbated the situation, culminating in the Second Opium (or *Arrow*) War of 1856 through 1860, which pitted Britain and France against China over matters of trade and diplomatic representation. The conflict started on October 8, 1856, when Chinese troops boarded the *Arrow*, a ship sailing under a British flag on the Pearl River in the vicinity of Guangzhou; the British and French retaliated by shelling the city. Under the Treaty of Tianjin in 1858, the Chinese officially conceded to demands for opening further treaty ports and for providing foreign diplomats the right to reside in Beijing, as well as offering free access by foreign missionaries and traders to China’s vast interior. In spite of an attempt by the Chinese to renege on the agreement, it was again forcibly imposed on Prince Gong through the Convention of Beijing in 1860—though not before Lord Elgin’s troops had burned down the Summer Palace (*Yuanmingyuan*).⁶ In all, ten treaty ports were opened. Among them were Tianjin, Zhenjiang on the Yangtze River (*Changjiang*) near Nanjing, Jiujiang and Hankou farther upriver, and Shantou on the southern coast near Guangzhou.

The impact of the West’s military prowess had a lasting effect on at least certain prominent segments of the Qing dynasty court. One result was a program of military modernization and advancement, broadly referred to as the Self-Strengthening Movement (*Ziqiang yundong*) or sometimes as the Westernization Movement, which was to last through the 1860s and 1870s, and even, in its later phases, well into the 1890s. During the Tongzhi Restoration of 1861 (*Tongzhi zhongxing*), which symbolized a revival of the flagging Qing dynasty, officials, deeply aware of

how far behind the West China had fallen, made strenuous efforts to acquire Western military technology and scientific knowledge. Later, under what was referred to as the Foreign Matters Movement (*Yangwu yundong*) within the idea of self-strengthening, applications from a wider range of Western technology and industry were copied, such as techniques of shipbuilding and mining, the telegraph, and railways.⁷ The slogan “Self-Strengthening” itself had a classical and therefore nonforeign ring to it. It eventually became identified with the doctrine of “Chinese learning for essential principles, Western learning for practical functions” (*Zhongxue weiti, xixue weiyong*), and particularly with the binary concepts of *ti* (referring to body, essence, or foundation) and *yong* (standing for use, function, application, or form).⁸ More specifically, the phrase “self-strengthening” came from a sentence in the Book of Changes (*Yijing*): “Heaven moves on strongly; the gentlemen, therefore, incessantly strengthen themselves.”⁹ The statement coincides with a primary tenet of Confucian thinking and conduct, whereby learning and self-reflection, guided again by the aim of reaching harmonious balance in changed circumstances, through virtuous nobility, institutional respect, filiality, and so on, were to be both admired and put into action.

This was not the first time that China had confronted an influx of new ideas or of foreign pressures. After the relative decline of Buddhism in the ninth century C.E., the Neo-Confucians, who became well-established during the Song Dynasty, called for a new kind of learning in which the “solid,” “real,” and “practical” would replace the “emptiness” of Buddhism and Taoism, which they regarded as having no useful principles for dealing effectively with human problems.¹⁰ Indeed, the terms *ti* and *yong* were drawn from Song metaphysics, where they stood for the ontological and functional aspects of the same reality.” Identified within a longer view of Chinese history as the “early modern period,” the Song dynasty saw intensive internal development and the need for numerous teachers, scholars, and administrative officials. It was also a period during which new agricultural methods flourished, technology was deployed, paper money was used, and industry, commerce, and urbanization expanded rapidly—all ostensible hallmarks of modernization.

Furthermore, this mass of new knowledge and technique required a new model of education: the School of Hu Yuan (993–1059) combined classical study with practical learning and specialization in such areas as civil administration, engineering, and mathematics. There, the

“substance,” “function,” and “literary expression” of Confucian teaching were emphasized, where “substance” referred to ethical principles, “function” to practical application, and “literary expression” to explicit communication.¹² Rather than being inflexible, or resistant to modernization, the Confucian classics provided values and principles for structuring and giving priority to new technical knowledge and applications. Indeed, their study proved so flexible that during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the invading Mongols quickly adopted and institutionalized this approach as a basis for their educational system and as a way of reaffirming universal, as distinct from Chinese, values. Therefore, the application of the concepts of *ti* and *yong* during the Self-Strengthening Movement should be viewed not as some novel way of seeing the world but as a continuation of Neo-Confucian thought: the interaction of the two terms could be broadened, contracted, and balanced depending on the situation at hand—namely, the introduction of foreign technology. It also provided the basis for something of an intellectual tug-of-war, supplying the rationale for conservatives and progressives alike to pursue and promote their own scholarly views of this changing world, with the result that a dominant and consistent sense of direction was often hard to come by.

In other ways the Self-Strengthening Movement took place largely within the cordial atmosphere between China and the Western powers that followed closely on the heels of the Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864). The successful defense of Shanghai against the Taiping was a joint effort between loyalist troops—*Huaiyong*—under the command of Li Hongzhang (1823–1901) and foreign detachments, all armed with Western weapons.¹³ A number of sources have attributed the first use of the phrase “self-strengthening” to Feng Guifen (1809–1874), an official, scholar, and proponent of Western reforms who authored a series of essays that he presented to Zeng Guofan (1811–1872), a loyal statesman of the late Qing. In one, Feng wrote, in connection with foreign humiliation, that “our inferiority is not something allotted us by heaven, but is rather due to ourselves. . . . And, if we feel ashamed, there is nothing better than Self-Strengthening.”¹⁴ Zeng, in turn, immortalized the term.¹⁵ Essentially, Feng argued for selectively adopting Western learning. “If we let Chinese ethics and famous [Confucian] teachings serve as an original foundation,” he said, “and let them be supplemented by the methods used by various nations for the attainment of prosperity and strength, would it not be the best of procedures?”¹⁶ More subtly, such writings as his 1860 “Protests of the Jiaobin Studio” (*Jiaobinlu kanyi*) formed

a substantial part of the theoretical underpinnings of the Self-Strengthening Movement.¹⁷ Feng, who taught for about twenty years in Shanghai, Nanjing, and Suzhou, also argued for limited institutional reforms to advance his program of Western learning; if that learning were recognized by being incorporated into the civil services examinations, students would be encouraged to study it.

Over time the Self-Strengthening Movement broadened from a focus on strictly military matters to a general sentiment embracing outside influences. That sentiment was expressed by the *Yangwu* faction of the Qing court under the leadership of Prince Gong, the founder of the *Zongli yamen* or Office of Foreign Affairs, in a further illustration of *yong* being expanded though still guided by *ti*. It also saw practical application by Zeng Guofan and Li Hongzhang, who collaborated to successfully create a number of arsenals, shipyards, and steel mills in southern and coastal China. In addition to being a statesman, Zeng Guofan was also a scholar and a general, as well as the inspiration for Li Hongzhang's Huai army. Not coincidentally, Li's father was a fellow student with Zeng, who, in turn, extended patronage to the son. Li Hongzhang, for his part, provided distinguished service to the Qing court in a number of important positions; he eventually fell into disfavor because he was seen as partly responsible for the abject Chinese defeat during the Sino-Japanese War of 1894 to 1895.¹⁸

In the final analysis, however, the Self-Strengthening Movement was essentially an effort to compartmentalize Western influences and Western expertise in the collective Chinese mind, to prevent interference with local laws and institutions; it was to fail precisely because of this unreasonable selectivity and its inability to bring both frameworks together.¹⁹ Western arms and industries, after all, are not just products but artifacts of ways of life and of ideologies. As John King Fairbank puts it, "in retrospect we can see that gunboats and steel mills bring their own philosophy with them."²⁰ One cannot halfway Westernize. There were also strategic failures: Vietnam was lost by China to the French by force of arms in 1885, and the humiliating defeats suffered at the hands of the Japanese during the Sino-Japanese conflict of 1894 to 1895 only highlighted the lopsided comparison between the modern advances made during the Meiji Restoration in Japan, beginning in 1868, and those accomplished in China under its own far more shaky Tongzhi Restoration. Under the 1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki, China was forced to cede Taiwan, the Pescadores, and the Liaodong Peninsula to Japan; to recognize the independence of

Korea, which in 1910 was annexed to Japan; and to allow Japanese citizens into China to trade. Soon after, the Liaodong Peninsula became the beachhead for the development of Japanese mining and railway interests in Manchuria; this influx, together with competition from the Russians that eventually led to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 to 1905, was to have a strong influence (as described later) on the urban character of such emerging cities as Harbin, Changchun, and Mukden (now Shenyang). Finally, the Self-Strengthening Movement lacked the full support of the Qing administration. Certainly it was resisted by members of the entrenched scholarly class, whose fortunes were directly connected to traditional forms of Chinese learning.²¹ But probably more important, the diffusion of ideas among intellectuals about appropriate courses of action led to factionalism at court and also prevented the emergence of a sharper or more distinct national focus. In contrast to Japan, which in the Meiji Restoration immediately shifted to a vigorous outward-oriented policy reflecting a new mode of thinking—albeit partly Confucian in origin—China remained mired in its assumptions about dynastic rule and lacked the alternative form of leadership needed to effectively halt and reverse the damage to its prestige.

At about the same time that Li Hongzhang was negotiating the Treaty of Shimonoseki, two erstwhile reformers—Kang Youwei (1858–1927) and Liang Qichao (1873–1929)—were in Beijing to take the Metropolitan Examinations that, once passed, would grant them the highest degree and award them lofty positions in the officialdom of scholars. Together they organized a protest among some twelve hundred other candidates, asking for the rejection of the peace terms with Japan and portraying Li as a traitor. After receiving his *jinshi* degree, Kang Youwei returned to Guangdong province to complete a book titled *The Study of Confucius as a Reformer* (*Kongzi gaizhi kao*, 1897), in which he suggested that Confucius was not just a self-admitted transmitter of ancient knowledge but an innovator who used the cloak of antiquity to advance more radical ideas about life and moral experience. This proved to be yet another provocative work by Kang; the first, *Study of the Forged Xin Classics* (*Xinxue weijingkao*), had rocked the scholarly Chinese world when it was published in 1891.

Kang's theory of progress and the idea of a "grand commonality," for which he is well known, was set out in *The Book of Great Harmony* (*Datongshu*, 1898) in terms of three ages: the Age of Disorder, into which Confucius was born; the Age of Order; and, finally, the Age of Great Peace, which was yet to come. As he put it, "the course of humanity progresses according to a

fixed sequence. From the clans come tribes, which in turn are transformed into nations. And from nations the Grand Unity comes about.” Idealistically, he then went on to say that at the final juncture, “there will be no longer any nations, no more racial distinctions, and customs will be everywhere the same.” For him, the present was the Age of Order, although he admonished those around him “to propagate the doctrines of self-rule and independence, and to discuss publicly the matter of constitutional government. If the laws are not reformed, greater disorder will result.”²² Kang then went on to write about the Meiji Reform Movement in Japan. In 1898, amid the Western powers’ scrambling for still further concessions in China—including Qingdao, sought by the Germans; Lüshun, by the Russians; and the Kowloon New Territories, by the British—he returned to Beijing to once again petition the emperor to start a reform movement modeled after those in Russia and Japan. After two more attempts, including meetings with high officials like Li Hongzhang, Kang Youwei finally gained an audience with the Guangxu emperor; the result was the Hundred Days’ Reform (*Wuxu bianfa*).²³

During the summer months that followed—spanning 103 days, from June 11 until September 21, 1898—more than two hundred rescripts, decrees, and edicts were handed down from the throne: they called for modernization of practically all aspects of the Chinese government and institutional structure. The reformers’ aim was to drag China forward to meet world standards, using the time-honored albeit here dangerous tactic of “truth from the top.”²⁴ Liang Qichao, a younger compatriot and former pupil of Kang Youwei in Guangzhou, was also a part of the reform group from the outset. In 1898 he wrote an influential paper, “Proposals for Reform” (*Bianfa tongyi*), urging radical institutional reform and the introduction of a constitutional monarchy modeled loosely on Western precedents.²⁵ Unfortunately for those involved, the empress dowager, at the instigation of the conservative faction at court, effectively brought the reform movement to an end. Zaitian (Guangxu) was placed under house arrest; Kang and Liang fled, warned in advance by the emperor. Kang, traveling via Shanghai and Hong Kong to Japan and then on to Canada and Britain, remained throughout much of the rest of his life in loyal opposition, opposing Republicanism after 1911 and, instead, attempting to restore the monarchy. Liang also escaped to Japan with Kang; he remained there and established the *Xinmin congbao*, an intellectual review through which he carried on the reformist cause. In 1912, after the downfall of the Qing regime, he returned with his family to China, taking up an

appointment as minister of justice in 1913.²⁶ Six others, however, were summarily executed for their role in the movement.²⁷

Again the reforms threatened vested interests, especially among the large conservative faction of the scholarly class who wished to perpetuate their version of traditional Chinese culture and its way of life. The reformers were supported by the emperor, but his power base, especially in comparison to the empress dowager Cixi's grasp on the throne and the Qing court, was weak.²⁸ Indeed, real reform would at last come only with the downfall of the Qing dynasty—the Boxer Rebellion and foreign retaliations by the Eight Power invasion force of 1900 and then outright revolution in 1911—and not, as their Confucian backgrounds might have led Kang and Liang to imagine it, through the emperor.

Taken together, proponents of both the Hundred Days' Reform and the Self-Strengthening Movement shared certain philosophical concepts. All were more or less strongly committed to some essential set of Chinese values, embodied in traditional thought and scholarship. Similarly, they all identified the threat of modernization with Westernization and attempted to avoid this conflation by somehow putting Chinese principles and Western know-how into distinct and compatible realms. A striking example is provided by Zhang Zhidong, a moderate scholar during the Hundred Days' Reform who coupled gradual reform with adherence to Neo-Confucianism. While he borrowed the terms *ti* and *yong* from Neo-Confucian doctrine, his essay of 1898, titled "Exhortations to Learn" (*Quanxuepian*), made it clear that the survival of Chinese culture required active engagement with Western knowledge. As he put it (rather prophetically, as events turned out), "If we wish to make China strong and preserve Chinese knowledge, we must study Western knowledge. Furthermore, if we do not use Chinese knowledge to consolidate the foundation first and, therefore, get straight in our minds what our interests and purposes are, then the strong will become rebellious leaders and the weak will become slaves of others."²⁹

In China, unlike in other modernizing countries, the underlying sense of nationalism was not necessarily attached to some specific political program; it was more often part of the scholarly tradition of *youhuanyishi*—the general anxiety with which intellectuals regarded their civilization.³⁰ In effect, this was an independent scholarly habit of mind; not only did it produce an intellectually uncoordinated and often factionalized attitude at court that was quite un-

like the sharper focus seemingly required for nationalism, but it also tended to lose contact, in its idealism, with local realities and interests.

But there were also significant differences between the programs of the Self-Strengthening Movement and the Hundred Days' Reform and between their attitudes toward *ti* and *yong*. First, they were dissimilar in orientation and degree. By taking a narrowly technological view, naively unencumbered by much of a conscious ideological perspective, those in the Self-Strengthening Movement could with relative ease detach questions of essence from those of form. Some thirty years later, after much more contact with the West and a rapidly modernizing Japan, supporters of the Hundred Days' Reform no longer had such naïveté; their emphasis shifted much further toward their institutional setting and they called for reform—albeit often gradual—largely by way of adopting and emulating available Westernized models, while maintaining a core of Chinese values and essential principles. Their view of the interaction between *ti* and *yong* was, therefore, often dynamic and expansive, at least among the more radical group. Kang Youwei, as noted above, went so far as to cast Confucius in the role of a reformer, with the clear implication that his writings should be interpreted from this perspective and that at another time he might have had different things to say.

Second, the groups differed in how they regarded Western and Chinese knowledge. For those in the Self-Strengthening Movement, the two forms of thought were like separate mental compartments with relatively clear boundaries and uses. By contrast, the later reformers, while clearly putting Chinese knowledge first, argued for active engagement with Western knowledge to sharpen and update the sense of Chinese essence. This attitude of self-reflection, so strong in the Confucian tradition, is of course not uncommon when different knowledge and value systems substantially engage. Such encounters can lead, for example, in the direction of intermingling and broader pluralistic attitudes, as seen recently in the West—and, for that matter, at times during the Roman Empire. They can also lead in the opposite direction, encouraging a further congealing or muddled combining of more closely held traditional beliefs, as is frequent in beleaguered authoritarian regimes. China and the Qing generally tended more toward the latter than the former.

Undoubtedly the collective mission of both movements was heightened and given direction by the defeats suffered in the Opium and Sino-Japanese Wars; the need for new strength

and direction, in turn, strongly influenced the dualistic logic inherent in the defensive stand taken by many toward Chinese culture, deemed necessary for the *ti*, or essence, of China to survive. Their stand was also influenced by the mounting presence of modern foreign powers on Chinese soil, resulting in a state of affairs that not only was semifeudal but was also verging on semicolonial. Since 1842, the foreign foothold in China had grown to numerous treaty ports in addition to the earlier fifteen; by 1911 more than thirty Aihun ports were opened along most of China's navigable waterways and there were at least six extensive leasehold areas along the coastal regions, including the French-controlled Guangzhou Bay, almost opposite Hainan Island.

Following the failure of the Hundred Days' Reform, the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion, and the return of the Qing court from largely self-imposed exile in Xi'an in 1901, steps were taken to institute constitutional and administrative reforms, amid broadening anti-Qing sentiment and revolutionary activities abroad. But again, the "Constitutional Movement," as it generally became known, was led by scholars and wealthy landowners whose opposition to the imperial court reflected more a desire for power sharing and the ascendancy of local interests than a hope for the radical overturn of Chinese society. Modern-thinking though many of the reformers were, they also enjoyed relatively entrenched positions and were mindful of the continuing imperial presence. Indeed, the conservatives among them continued to insist on ancestral institutions and believed, in a Confucian manner, that good government depended on men and not on laws. Consequently, too much institutional change too quickly not only threatened them but also was antithetical to their fundamental position—an attitude that was certainly revealed in the diffidence of many of their actions over the next ten years.

The first real change occurred in 1905 and 1906, when the imperial examination system was abolished, Ministries of Education, Police, and War were established, and the idea that China should move to a constitutional form of government—based on the Japanese model—was publicly discussed. An outline of the new constitution was published in 1908, and the death of the empress dowager and the Guangxu emperor that year seemed to clear the way for more rapid reform. The following year, provincial assemblies met to discuss the constitutional provisions; in 1910 they called for a parliament to be convened, with a cabinet of high officials and Manchu nobles to be appointed in April 1911 and a parliament promised for 1913. As events turned out,

this was too little reform and too late, as anti-Qing feelings and revolutionary activities strengthened.³¹ Sun Yat-sen (or Sun Zhongshan, 1866–1925), for example, then in exile in Japan, in 1905 became the head of the United League (*Tongmenghui*), an alliance of radicals from about seventeen different provinces in China; in 1912, it became the Guomindang.³²

Exercising its assumed authority, the Qing government decided to nationalize all railroads in 1911 and borrowed heavily from foreign banks to do so; local officials in Sichuan province, who were trying to establish their own system, were especially outraged by what they saw as a local affront and an unpatriotic sellout. Shortly thereafter, events snowballed out of Qing control, with local takeovers, strikes, attacks on government offices, and declarations of independence in several areas sympathetic to the United League.³³ On October 10, 1911, units of the new regular army stationed in Wuchang, a suburb of Wuhan, mutinied and, a day later, torched the city. Other units in Hanyang and Hankou also broke away, and a new independent military government was declared. From then on, the hopes for Qing imperial rule—constitutional or otherwise—deteriorated quickly; the Republic of China was declared at the end of 1911, with Sun Yat-sen as its president. Matters did not end there, however, as threats to split the country led Sun to resign in 1912 in favor of Yuan Shikai (1859–1916).³⁴ In 1913 Yuan, who had a military background, suppressed the “Second Revolution” of the southern republics; in 1915 he had himself declared emperor, but he died in 1916 before he could be truly enthroned. China then slid into an often tumultuous period of factionalism and partial rule by warlords.³⁵

Although not very effectively and certainly well behind the rising popular tide of anti-Qing sentiment and events, those in the Constitutional Movement had tried to put into effect sweeping institutional changes similar in orientation to those attempted by proponents of the Hundred Days’ Reform. In fact, many were involved in both movements. Certainly, the new Chinese society was commingling essence and form to a higher degree, with external models of governance and recently arrived modern and foreign technologies, as it confronted and tried to shape a more modern world. In this regard, application, use, and outward form (*yong*) were uppermost in the reformers’ minds and were beginning to take precedence over the essence, body, or inner structure (*ti*) of Chinese culture.

For one thing, geographical differences in development and in decentralized power sharing were beginning to surface. The semicolonial and outright colonial foreign influence in the coastal

concessions and, to the north, in Manchuria created a very real disparity in modes of economic production and wealth between these areas and regions of central and western China, as well as areas outside the larger modernizing cities near the coast and to the north. For another, those living in many of the same developing areas were undoubtedly beginning to question the necessity of the established imperial and Confucian cultural mold of life. Quite apart from having an ideological source, as indisputably was true at certain points along the sociopolitical spectrum, such questioning also reflected the decreasing utility and applicability of older ways of conducting daily life; other, modern systems of valuation and social intercourse seemed to be needed. Like many other modernizing societies at the time, although much more gradually, China was beginning to banish essential, traditional cultural rites and rituals to less public realms of life, where they were performed more selectively. Nevertheless, most of those in the Constitutional Movement ultimately opted for privilege over suffrage, choosing in spite of modern appearances to preserve their conservative intellectual positions, entrenched interests, and essentially traditional way of life.

Yet the Constitutional Movement did provide a transition to the revolutionary movements of Sun Yat-sen and, later, of Mao Zedong. Sun, like Kang, projected the idea of a “grand commonwealth”—or, as classical scholars would have it, “all under heaven shared in common”; but under greater Western influence, he moved further outside the Confucian orbit in rejecting the evolutionary aspect of Chinese culture in favor of revolution. Indeed, he saw China as resistant to modern nation building precisely because of such Neo-Confucian traits as individualism, which he considered to have become excessive, and loyalty to family and clan. On both points he went so far as to say that “even though we have four hundred million people gathered together in one China, in reality they are just a heap of loose sand.”³⁶ His remedy was a three-stage revolutionary process: it began with military government, went on to a provisional constitution granting local self-government, and ended in a full constitutional government under a republican system. Key to this process was what he called “the necessity of political tutelage”; he explained, “as a school boy must have good teachers and helpful friends, so the Chinese people, being for the first time under republican rule, must have a far-sighted revolutionary government for their training.”³⁷ Again like Kang Youwei, he saw the alternative to his three-stage process as “unavoidable disorder.” Seen in hindsight, Sun’s doctrine of political and hence party tutelage,

first enunciated in 1905, represents perhaps the first conscious advocacy among the leaders of Asian nationalism of “guided democracy.”

Sun Yat-sen differed from the other reformers discussed in that he was taught almost entirely in Western schools and lived for a long time outside of China. He was not classically trained and initially saw the task of bridging the gap between China’s past and his Western-oriented future as being relatively straightforward. This opinion was to change quickly, however, as he was forced to reevaluate his position and to turn toward Chinese tradition as the source of national solidarity. Not only was this tradition already in place, and therefore readily at hand, but Sun was also growing critical of Western materialism; like others before him, he sought a more steadfast Chinese essence on which to base his movement. In other ways as well, Sun Yat-sen’s doctrine seems to have been formed within a Confucian framework, albeit in opposition to it. As noted earlier, he largely blamed two bedrock tenets of Confucian conduct for the presumed Chinese malaise: excessive individualism, stemming from the habits of mind of the autonomous scholar, and fealty to family or clan. He thus aimed his critique more directly at the essence (*ti*) of Chinese culture than his predecessors had done.

Many long-held convictions about the integrity and enduring capacity of Chinese culture were to change dramatically during these upheavals, precipitating the May Fourth Movement (*Wusi yundong*) of 1919 and its immediate predecessor, the New Culture Movement (*Xinwenhua yundong*) of 1917.³⁸ Ostensibly, the May Fourth Movement began on a Sunday afternoon when some 3,000 students assembled in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, in front of the Gates of Heavenly Peace, specifically to demonstrate against the decision of the Paris peace conference to award Japan the treaty rights previously held by the Germans in Qingdao and parts of Shandong Province, and more generally to awaken the masses to the impending threat of further dismemberment at the hands of foreign powers.³⁹ A subsequent march toward the foreign legation quarters was deflected by police, with the assistance of foreign guards; the students then headed toward the home of the Chinese minister of communications, which they ransacked in protest of his direct negotiations with the Japanese and his role in the Versailles agreement. During the ensuing violence, one student was killed and thirty-two others were arrested.

In the days that followed, broad-based student unions spread from Beijing to Shanghai, Tianjin, Wuhan, and beyond, and in June 1919 the Student Union of the Republic of China was

formed. Shop owners, industrial workers, and others supported the students, and the resulting sympathy strike in Shanghai involved some 60,000 workers from forty-three enterprises. The press also became involved: numerous May Fourth journals sprang up, such as *The Dawn*, *Young China*, and *New Society*, all proclaiming the arrival of a new and better era.⁴⁰ As the historian Jonathan Spence observes, “it was as if far off events at [Paris and] Versailles and the mounting evidence of the spinelessness of corrupt local politicians coalesced in people’s minds and impelled them to search for a way to return meaning to the Chinese culture.”⁴¹

Like participants in other broad-based movements of this kind, the reformers followed different avenues and predilections, although they were all in some way attempting to redefine Chinese culture as a valid part of the modern world; in particular, they strove to bring new ideas of science and democracy, as well as their newfound patriotism, into a stronger common focus. Indeed, they were unified around the idea of a rejuvenated China capable of coping successfully with such chronic ills as warlordism, a feudal landlord system, and foreign imperialism.⁴² As it turned out, the institutional setting most important to the movement was Peking University (Beida), which, with its first modern chancellor, Yan Fu (1854–1921), who took office in 1912, had earlier played a vital role in the New Culture Movement. Yan Fu was also a renowned translator, who with Lin Shu and others was responsible for providing wide access to numerous important foreign texts. In 1916–1917 Yan Fu was succeeded as chancellor at Beida by Cai Yuanpei, who, together with Chen Duxiu, the dean of the university, and Hu Shi (Hu Shih), a professor of philosophy, was to rise to special prominence in the May Fourth Movement.⁴³

Cai Yuanpei (1868–1940) was something of a prodigy, passing his *jinsi* exam in classical studies in 1890, at age twenty-two, and then going on to study philosophy in Germany. Conspicuously anti-Qing, Cai served as minister of education under Sun Yat-sen during the early Republican era; he was chancellor of Beida from 1916 until 1926. Throughout his academic life, Cai was a staunch advocate of intellectual freedom and helped position Peking University as the leading center in China for the propagation of new social, literary, and political ideas emanating from the May Fourth Movement.⁴⁴

Chen Duxiu (1879–1942) was more intuitive and less classically skilled than Cai, passing his more lowly civil service exam in 1896. Under the influence of the 1898 reformers he then began to engage with Western ideas, and between 1900 and 1910 he periodically studied overseas in

France and Japan. In 1915 he founded *New Youth* or *La Jeunesse* (*Xinqingnian*), a magazine that arguably became the most influential intellectual journal of its time in China, actively pressing for “scientific content” and the use of everyday language; it ceased publication in 1921.⁴⁵ An opponent of Confucianism, Chen urged that liberal concepts of science and democracy were essential for China’s future progress.⁴⁶ For him, notes Spence, “the basic task [of reform] is to import the foundation of Western society, that is the new belief in equality and human rights. [In so doing] we must [also] be thoroughly aware of the incompatibility between Confucianism and the new belief, the new society and the new state.”⁴⁷ By 1920, Chen Duxiu was gravitating toward Marxism; he became one of the first members of the Chinese Communist Party in Shanghai and served as its general secretary until 1927.

Much younger than the other two men, Hu Shi (1891–1962) attended a new-style school in Shanghai in 1904; he traveled to Cornell University in the United States on a scholarship in 1910, graduating with a bachelor of arts in philosophy in 1914. He then completed a doctorate at Columbia University under the supervision of the philosopher John Dewey, whom he greatly admired; he remained a lifelong advocate of pragmatism. Relatively early in his career Hu made a pioneering social interpretation of Cao Xueqin’s classic novel *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Hongloumeng*, ca. 1760). Hu consistently believed in Western interpretive and analytical methodology; unlike Chen the Marxist, he was a political conservative, continuing his association with the Guomindang during the 1920s.⁴⁸

Others, such as Li Dazhao (1888–1927) and Lu Xun (1881–1936), also rose to prominence and helped shape the May Fourth Movement. Li Dazhao was the librarian at Peking University and another member of the philosophy department. Like Hu, he studied abroad, at Waseda University in Japan; he wrote on Marxism for *New Youth*—Chen’s journal—in 1918, arguing for a synthesis of Eastern and Western values, as well as rather disconcertingly advocating violent overthrows of ruling regimes when necessary. During this period he hired Mao Zedong as a temporary office assistant, Mao apparently having been attracted by Li’s leftist rhetoric and ideas about reform.⁴⁹ Lu Xun, who also taught at Peking University and Peking Normal University, was unquestionably the most brilliant author to emerge from the May Fourth Movement, publishing numerous stories between 1917 and 1921. One of these, “The True Story of Ah Q,” parodied the 1911 revolution, to paraphrase Jonathan Spence, as both a muddled and inconclusive

event.⁵⁰ Serialized in the *Beijing Morning Post* in 1920, “Ah Q” told the story of a self-deluding and cowardly bully, humiliated by people more powerful than himself though simultaneously thinking himself the victor, who in his greed for status attempts to intimidate and harass those who are weaker. It eventually ends in his execution. In the “Diary of a Madman,” an earlier work published in *New Youth* in 1918, Lu Xun launched a similar attack on the cruelty, backwardness, and hypocrisy of Chinese society, as the “madman” sees his fellow countrymen as cannibals.⁵¹ In fact, Lu Xun was the pen name of Zhou Shuren, who went to Japan in 1902 to study medicine at Sendai University, returning to China in 1909. In 1930, shortly before his death of tuberculosis in Shanghai, he founded the League of Left-Wing Writers.⁵² Like many of his colleagues, Lu Xun advocated something equivalent to a Chinese “enlightenment.”

At this juncture, it seemed that nothing short of the replacement of traditional Chinese learning by modern Western knowledge and intellectual practices would suffice. Prior attempts to mediate and circumscribe some sense of a Chinese “essence,” by applying modern institutional and technological principles, were being abandoned. To put it another way, the focus of the May Fourth Movement’s cultural program shifted away from trying to do things in a modern way (*yong*), while leaving intact more closely held beliefs, to seeking an apparently fundamental reform of the structure of Chinese thinking per se (*ti*). Moreover, the particular liberal scientific, or positivist, brand of knowledge and social practice being proposed was almost completely at odds with the battered but still reigning paradigm of traditional moral discourse combined with classical learning, tied in practice at least to an exclusive system of acquisition and dissemination.

Despite the rhetoric, however, the May Fourth Movement’s proposals were not all-encompassing. The emphasis was still largely on matters of application and methodology and the replacement of one form of reasoning with another. Presumably, over time, such replacement could have resulted in a sweeping change of essential values, since how one thinks and what one thinks are thoroughly intertwined—although that outcome is not inevitable, because as thinking takes place the “what” and “how” influence one another. Nevertheless, while the intellectuals involved probably entertained thoughts of this kind, their writings demonstrate that they were rather more interested in undertaking broad-based social reform by mounting a critique relying on a certain form of Western intellectual apparatus—moving also, in short, in the direction of *yong*. Yet the May Fourth Movement did result in a substantial change of intel-

lectual consciousness in China; it created greater openness to modernism in the Western sense, principally, as stated, through science and practical reasoning. It also resulted in a critique of entrenched traditional hypocrisy; for instance, its arguments for women's emancipation led to the first female students being admitted to Peking University in 1920. Politically, the Shandong problem that started it all was finally settled at the Washington Conference of 1922, and the twenty-one punitive demands that had previously been placed on China were effectively eradicated with the signing of the Nine Powers Act at the close of the conference.⁵³

As was perhaps predictable, given the historical vacillation that had taken place between advocacy of traditional and modern forms of cultural enterprise, as well as the more pressing issue of the need for national solidarity and identity, during the later 1920 and 1930s a reaction set in to the Western tide of thought, inspired once again by Neo-Confucianism. Those leading it hoped to find a spiritual basis that would enable them to meet the evident challenges of modernization, joining a radical questioning of the inner truth of humankind and a philosophy of the mind and heart (*Xinxue*) together with a call for collective action.⁵⁴ Proponents like Liang Shu-ming, a professor of philosophy at Peking University who later became director of the Shandong Rural Research Institute, tried, as Jonathan Spence describes, "to obviate the need for class struggle" and called for "a synthesis of Chinese and Western cultures which, nevertheless, would be distinctively Chinese."⁵⁵ More directly, the New Life Movement, also referred to as the National Rejuvenation Movement, was officially launched in 1934 by Chiang Kai-shek (or Jiang Jieshi, 1887–1975), the leader of the Guomindang and the Nationalist Government. Chiang called for greater adherence to traditional Confucian values of politeness, righteousness, integrity, and self-respect; reflecting the sense of national crisis, he emphasized sacrifice, a capacity to endure hardship, a love of country, and a loyalty to national ideals.⁵⁶ He declared that "a new national consciousness and mass psychology have to be created and developed": "It is to this end that peoples' thoughts are now being directed to the ancient high virtues of the nation for guidance namely propriety, justice, integrity and conscientiousness, expressed in *li*, *i*, *lien* and *ch'ih*. These four virtues were highly respected by the Chinese people in the past, and they are vitally necessary now if the rejuvenation of the nation is to be effected."⁵⁷

As played out in everyday life, this ideology in many ways mirrored contemporary fascist movements in Europe and Japan, which often placed considerable and violent emphasis on

social decorum and meddled incessantly in citizens' private lives.⁵⁸ Thus the first two campaigns concerned "good manners" and "cleanliness"; and all instruction related to the regular life of citizens flowed from the New Life Movement Headquarters through local associations, which were responsible for inspections. A militarist, Chiang had joined Sun Yat-sen's army in 1924, and after Sun's death in 1925 he gained political power; in 1926 he won leadership of the Guomindang. He went on to lead the military expedition that reunified China in 1927, bringing to an end more than a decade of unruly factionalism, and he established the capital of the Nationalist Government in Nanjing. He deployed this Neo-Confucian line of thought, wrapped in a sense of nationalism (or vice versa), as a response to "the unpreparedness of the [Chinese] people for the responsibilities of public life," hampered as they were "by the age-long influences of apparently sanctified customs" of the late Qing dynasty;⁵⁹ he used it as a tool in the nation-building process.

Despite its fascist tendencies, however, this reaction proved to be relatively short-lived in the culture. It displayed no real theoretical engagement with the essential problems of Chinese modernity at the time—unlike the May Fourth Movement, with its emphasis on sweeping institutional reform and a radical change in the collective mind-set. Instead, Chiang's program returned to a belief that earlier, venerable aspects of Chinese culture could be called on as a defense in current circumstances and, by implication, that China's long, relatively uniform history produced a strength that could be marshaled to resist an encroaching Eurocentric view. Thus the essentialism of Chinese culture was again emphasized for protective and nationalistic purposes, even as the proverbial modern genie was already coming out of the bottle.

Finally, in the period before the end of the War of Resistance against Japan in 1945 and the civil war in 1949, Mao Zedong (1893–1976), the leader of the Chinese Communist Party, formulated a syncretic framework for dealing with tradition and modernism that also turned in the direction of *ti* and *yong*. Mao, who became actively involved in politics during the May Fourth Movement and rose in the Communist Party during the 1930s, had also enjoyed a classical education, sometimes writing poetry. In his 1940 treatise on cultural theory, *On New Democracy* (*Xinminzhuzhuyilun*), he introduced two terms: *jinghua*, loosely translated as "quintessence," or that which can be boiled down, and *zaopo*, loosely interpreted as "sediment."⁶⁰ While advocating an idea of a socialist nation and an objective and materialist culture for China, free from the fetters of religion and social class, Mao was mindful that China could also benefit by drawing on

ideas and achievements from the West and from China's own feudal past. As he put it, "anything foreign is like food to us; we must digest it, to separate the *jinghua* from the *zaopo*, release the *zaopo* and absorb the *jinghua*."⁶¹ More specifically, Mao's distinction turned on the repression in feudalistic practices and the liberation in democratic practices, as he stressed that one must discard the feudalistic *zaopo* and absorb the democratic *jinghua* when confronting culture from a different time or place. But this was not to say that *jinghua* could not be found in a place like feudal China. On the contrary, Mao reasoned that many of the creations of the people were non-exploitative and were therefore worthy of potential cultural emulation. Mao approached the concept of a socialist-materialist culture for China in a dialectical manner by initially placing Chinese and foreign cultural practices on a more or less equal footing and then pitting one against the other, with the intent of formulating a new set of liberating social and political practices. He could also be seen as implicitly conflating *ti* and *yong*, though more likely he disregarded the earlier distinction altogether in favor of a process aimed directly at addressing essential social action and cultural features together.

Thus intellectual circles in China between about 1860 and 1940 underwent an episodic process of change, usually pushed and mandated by both internal and external agents; through that process, the traditional edifice of Chinese knowledge, together with practices stemming from it, was incrementally and then more thoroughly (although still selectively) modified to accommodate China to the exigencies of modernization and China's ambitions to a changing world. As described, change did not move uniformly forward. For instance, the Republicans and Nationalists reinstated a traditionally inclined Confucian scheme through the New Life Movement, though clearly their aim was control and the essentially modern purpose of nationalism. Nor were the episodes focused entirely at a core of essential values and beliefs; they were concerned instead with how such values, from a profoundly unitary initial starting position, would or could play out in modernizing Chinese life and in philosophically reframing modernization in Chinese terms. This episodic process can therefore also be regarded as an important part of an evolving "master narrative" that helped orchestrate responses to outside challenges as well as to internal needs for change, preparing the nation to face further modern incursions without abandoning its (admittedly dwindling) essential Chinese characteristics.

Altogether there were five shifts that occurred. First came the initial detachment of form and application (*yong*) from essence, body, and structure (*ti*) during the Self-Strengthening Movement, as a way of reorganizing and actively taking up foreign modern technology by casting it as essentially nonideological. Second, this distinction was further enlarged to encompass social and political institutions during the Hundred Days' Reform and the Constitutional Movement, when it became much more ideologically charged. Third, this expansion culminated in the May Fourth Movement, which advocated a thoroughgoing embrace of largely positivist Western thinking and modern practical reasoning. Fourth, the Republican and Nationalist period of the 1920s and '30s brought a reaction back in the direction of the primacy of traditional culture and a belief in its enduring robustness and appropriateness, while still viewing modernization as necessary. Finally, Mao's reformulation in a new direction—once again unitary—obliterated many of the earlier distinctions almost entirely, or blurred the once-sharp lines between tradition and modernism and between *ti* and *yong* as they were drawn into the same process.

By the early years of the twentieth century, the binary concepts of *ti* and *yong*, which surfaced during the Self-Strengthening Movement, had well and truly moved in the direction of a strong practical emphasis on modern and, thus, Western application, use, and form, especially when it came to modern technology and institutions, despite rearguard actions in favor of Chinese essence and structure. Yet even with the later radicalism, the role of traditionalism in China's project of modernization still remained in contention in many walks of life.

“WHAT’S THE CONNECTION WITH ARCHITECTURE? I don’t see it,” said Wu Feng rather emphatically, having listened impatiently to another one of Zhang Shaoshu’s diatribes about the past. *“Those old guys were all philosophers or writers. They didn’t design things, like we do,”* he went on.

“In fact, they probably wouldn’t have been caught dead getting their hands dirty, or making something,” Lu Hui interjected, for once agreeing with Feng. *“You have to remember the Confucian scheme of things was pretty much hierarchical. Master builders and craftsmen might not have been as low-grade as merchants, but they weren’t exactly at the top of the tree either!”* she added emphatically.

“Why does she keep doing that?” hissed Feng.

“Who? Doing what?” inquired Shaoshu, somewhat confused by Feng’s sudden digression.

“Her, the tea lady!” replied Feng, gesturing in the direction of an old woman, with a kerchief around her hair, who had shuffled into the conference room and was quietly filling a new set of cheap porcelain cups from a thermos and carefully replacing their domed lids.

“Doesn’t she know by now that we don’t drink the stuff?” Feng continued indignantly.

“The pause that refreshes—ahh!” intoned Hui, sardonically.

“I hadn’t noticed,” Shaoshu said. “Besides, I like tea from time to time. It helps keep your throat from getting too dehydrated from the dry air.”

“The pollution, you mean,” interjected Hui.

“Yes, I suppose so,” Shaoshu responded quickly, eager to get back to the topic at hand. He had certainly learned, during his recent graduate studies abroad, that architecture could be regarded as an autonomous discipline in which the design of successive projects drew on prior works as precedents, allowing it to remain relatively self-contained. “But that doesn’t explain very well the big changes that have occurred here at various times along the way,” he thought to himself. “Like all forms of cultural production, architecture reflects what’s in the air. It is part of what is going around at the time,” Shaoshu proffered out loud, perhaps a little too authoritatively, as Feng began to make a face.

“Oh, here we go again!” said Feng, disparagingly.

“We must remember that as time went on, China became more and more open to the rest of the world and especially to the West,” Shaoshu continued, ignoring Feng’s comment. “Also, architecture couldn’t help but be a part of the general discussion,” he went on emphatically, “especially with all the modernization that was taking place in the big cities and the need there for new types of buildings. . . . Not to mention the stamp the Guomindang wanted to put on things,” he added, almost as an afterthought.

“And let’s not forget all those guys like you who came back from America,” interjected Hui once again, making a momentary sideways reference to Shaoshu, but also thinking of a much earlier time and her architect father’s teacher at Central.