

# Realistic revolution : contesting Chinese history, culture, and politics after 1989

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# 1 Goodbye Radicalism

## The Early 1990s

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What is the foundation stone of contemporary Europe which lies so brilliantly before us? It is the gift of revolutions.

Chen Duxiu, “Wenxue geminglun” (On the Literary Revolution)

In the twenty-first century, we must no longer wage revolution. We must not once again yearn for, eulogize, and worship revolution as if it were sacred.

Li Zehou and Liu Zaifu, *Gaobie geming* (Farewell to Revolution)

Revolution, according to Mao Zedong, cannot be compared to “writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery” because it cannot be “so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous.” Revolution is an “act of violence.”<sup>1</sup> During the decade after the death of the Great Helmsman, Chinese intellectuals began to question not only the necessity of violent revolution but also the notion of radical change. The belief that there was “no making without breaking” (*bupo buli*) had permeated not only Chinese socialist modernity, they argued, but also China’s famous twentieth-century political-cum-cultural movement, the May Fourth Movement (1917–21).<sup>2</sup> In the historical, cultural, and political discourse of the early 1990s, intellectuals said goodbye to the radicalism of twentieth-century China.

Between 1989 and 1993, in a series of debates in leading academic journals, Chinese intellectuals engaged in the unmaking of twentieth-century radicalism, the specter of which loomed large. Why did Chinese intellectuals feel a need to unwrite the recent past at this historical juncture? This book seeks to answer

<sup>1</sup> Mao Tse-tung, “Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan,” in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 1.44–46.

<sup>2</sup> I follow the periodization of Tse-tung Chow because this is when the main events of the movement took place. In 1917, new thought and literature gained thrust, whereas after 1921, the movement was more oriented toward political action. See Chow, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 6. On the complex transition from cultural action to political mobilization during May Fourth, see Shakhrah Rahav, *The Rise of Political Intellectuals in Modern China: May Fourth Societies and the Roots of Mass-Party Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

that question. A series of political and socioeconomic developments render the early 1990s a pivotal period in the history of post-Mao China. The end of the Cold War and the implosion of the Soviet Union between 1989 and 1991 raised profound questions about the legacy of socialism and the legitimacy of the Chinese Revolution. The repression of the student democracy movement in the spring of 1989 ended the already severed alliance between Chinese intellectuals and the state in the service of modernization. The launch of the second reform period, with Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour in early 1992 and followed by the Fourteenth Party Congress in October of the same year, created formidable economic, political, social, and cultural changes that existed in tension with the narratives of revolution and socialism.

In her influential work *Translingual Practice*, Lydia Liu asks, "Does theory travel? If so, how? . . . Indeed, who does the traveling?"<sup>3</sup> Japan had been a crucial node in the trajectory of Western theory traveling to China during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as were Europe and the United States thereafter, or the Soviet Union in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> Throughout, however, Chinese intellectuals abroad served as interpreters of the foreign theories. During the early 1990s, different generations of Chinese émigrés in the United States attracted the attention of mainland Chinese intellectuals. In addition to those who left China before or after 1949 and who were educated in Hong Kong, Taiwan, or the United States, they also included a new generation of Chinese intellectuals who had participated in the reform era. In the case of the former, they had left China decades earlier and were eager to bring Chinese culture back from the "periphery" to the "centre" in the new economic and political climate.<sup>5</sup> Critical of the Maoist attitude toward Chinese tradition, these Chinese intellectuals traced the radical rejection of Chinese tradition back to the decades following the First Opium War (1839–42) and connected this period of radicalism with that of May Fourth and the Cultural Revolution (1966–76).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China 1900–1937* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 21.

<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that Europe, the United States, and Japan were the only places from where or through which theory traveled. See, for example, Rebecca Karl's work on the role of colonized nations in China's identity formation and conceptions of nationalism at the turn of the century. Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002). Also, as Liu notes, the traveling of theory was not merely one-directional or merely involving actors outside of China. Examples include China-Japan-China trajectories and trajectories involving Jesuits and Protestants based in China. See Liu, *Translingual Practice*, 32–39.

<sup>5</sup> Tu Wei-ming "'Cultural China': The Periphery as the Center," *Daedalus* 120.2 (1991), 1–32.

<sup>6</sup> This is the official Chinese periodization. Others use 1966–69, corresponding to the Red Guard movement. Guobin Yang, *The Red Guard Generation and Political Activism in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 6. On the Cultural Revolution, see Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2006); Frank

After 1989, with China's self-identity and the identity of Chinese intellectuals both in disarray, mainland Chinese intellectuals explored novel narratives of modern Chinese history and reworked some of the ideas of Chinese intellectuals in the United States for a mainland environment. They were hence also intermediaries or "mediators" in their own right.<sup>7</sup> Newly launched journals, lecture tours, international conferences, and visiting professorships beginning in the 1980s, in both China and abroad, allowed for interactions among scholars in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore, Chinese émigrés in the United States, and scholars in Europe and the United States. In addition to the decline in travel restrictions on mainland China, the reforms in Taiwan allowed visits from mainland travelers after 1987. Publications in Taiwan of works that had first appeared on the mainland led one scholar to refer to 1987 as Taiwan's year of "mainland fever." In addition, the New York-based journal *Zhishi fenzi* (The Intellectual), which was established in 1984 and published in Chinese, functioned as a bridge among scholars based on the mainland, in Taiwan, in Hong Kong, and overseas.<sup>8</sup>

In 1988 Yü Ying-shih, a prominent intellectual historian of China based in the United States, delivered a lecture on radicalism and conservatism in modern Chinese history at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. But it was only after 1989 that reflections on radicalism began to extend to mainland China. Also noteworthy was a 1991 conference held in New York on Chinese intellectuals during China's transitional period that brought together scholars from mainland China and elsewhere. This was followed by the publication of polemical articles by Yü Ying-shih and the mainland Marxist historian Jiang Yihua in *Ershiyi shiji* (Twenty-First Century) in 1992.<sup>9</sup> The latter, a Hong Kong-based scholarly journal, was founded in 1990 and served as a bridge among the various groups of scholars. Thus, a discourse that spread across Chinese-language media and that included a "China" not limited to the geopolitical boundaries of the People's Republic of China but also including Chinese communities globally began to unfold. The participants were part of the "Sinophone world" of intellectuals who made use of "China-originated languages and dialects" in attempts to make sense of the changes that were

Dikötter, *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History, 1962–1976* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); Joseph W. Esherick, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Andrew G. Walder, eds., *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Peter Burke notes that, next to those who emigrate and bring back new knowledge, "stay-at-home scholars" at universities in major cities are also "mediators" in the sense that they gather and process knowledge. See Peter Burke, *Exiles and Expatriates in the History of Knowledge, 1500–2000* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2017), 21.

<sup>8</sup> John Makeham, *Lost Soul: "Confucianism" in Contemporary Chinese Academic Discourse* (Cambridge, MA: Asia Center, Harvard University, 2008), 51.

<sup>9</sup> Chen Xiaoming, "Antiradicalism and the Historical Situation of Contemporary Chinese Intellectuals," *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 29.2 (Winter 1997–98), 31.

taking place in China.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Chinese intellectuals in the United States simultaneously published for Anglophone audiences, and Chinese translations of these works also helped shape the Sinophone discourse of the early 1990s.

During this period, radicalism not only was rejected in its cultural and historical manifestations but, following the crisis in the Soviet Union, infiltrated political discourse about the economic reforms in China. In all cases, discussions were structured around a binary of radicalism (*jijin zhuyi* 激进主义) and conservatism (*baoshou zhuyi* 保守主义). In this milieu of such rapid change, however, what did it mean to speak about conservatism? Such discussions highlighted the question of conservatism in China, which had been repressed, together with liberalism, after the victory of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1949. The significance of the debates in the early 1990s is that they raised the issue of alternative paths to Chinese modernity in the face of the “end of history.” In debates on radicalism, Chinese intellectuals dealt with questions such as Enlightenment, modernity, morality, legitimacy, and reform, themes that were investigated in relation to modern Chinese history during the 1990s.<sup>11</sup> Such discussions were a continuation of the reflections on socialism that had commenced after the end of the Cultural Revolution but took on a new form after 1989 and 1992.

### The Meaning of 1989 and 1992

The early 1990s functioned as a hinge between the New Enlightenment Movement of the mid- to late 1980s and the period after the mid-1990s that witnessed a transformation of the intellectual landscape into two major factions of liberals and the “New Left,” even if this distinction omits many of the involved complexities. It stood between the overall optimistic belief in modernization that marked the 1980s, as reflected in the 1983 Chinese translation of Alvin Toffler’s *The Third Wave*, and the more dystopian climate of the 1990s, often known as the “second reform decade.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Geremie R. Barmé, “Worrying China and New Sinology,” *China Heritage Quarterly* 14 (June 2008), [www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/articles.php?searchterm=014\\_worryingChina.inc&issue=014](http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/articles.php?searchterm=014_worryingChina.inc&issue=014). The term “Sinophone” has been used in various ways across different disciplines. I am using it here in the broader sense, namely to refer to Chinese-speaking communities inclusive of those in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. See the reference to a “Sinophone Sphere” in Timothy Cheek, “The Worlds of China’s Intellectuals,” in Timothy B. Weston and Lionel M. Jensen, eds., *China In and Beyond the Headlines* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 155, 158–60.

<sup>11</sup> Geremie Barmé, “The Revolution of Resistance,” in Elizabeth J. Perry and Mark Selden, eds., *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 56.

<sup>12</sup> Chaohua Wang, “Introduction: Minds of the Nineties,” in Wang, *One China, Many Paths* (London: Verso, 2003), 11; Jing Wang, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng’s China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 41.

An important marker between the two periods is the June 4, 1989, crackdown on the Tiananmen demonstrations. However, some of the trends that became dominant after 1989 had already been present during the 1980s. Furthermore, the New Enlightenment Movement of the mid- to late 1980s was an outgrowth of the Movement to Liberate Thinking of the late 1970s.<sup>13</sup> At the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Party Congress in December 1978, Deng Xiaoping reiterated the need to “emancipate thinking” and to move away from the ideological rigidity of the Mao era by “seeking truth from facts.”<sup>14</sup> The party also declared that “socialist modernization” was part of the official agenda. During the early 1980s, these changes paved the way for a more fundamental criticism of the utopian socialism of the Mao era and a move from class as a category of analysis to an emphasis on the subject. In 1983, at the commemoration of the centenary of Karl Marx’s death, Zhou Yang, the literary critic and deputy head of the CCP Propaganda Department, delivered a speech on “socialist humanism,” in which he criticized the dogmatism and class determinism of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>15</sup> The controversial claim that alienation could also exist under socialism led to the Campaign Against Spiritual Pollution in late 1983 and early 1984. After the campaign, criticism of utopian socialism continued, but this time it was in the form of a call for “Enlightenment” that included characteristics of Western modernity.

The Democracy Wall Movement and other political campaigns of the late 1970s and early 1980s that were initiated by Chinese youth preceded the cultural movement of the 1980s. Before the Campaign Against Spiritual Pollution of 1983–84, the “antiliberal” campaign of 1981 had already targeted authors of the late 1970s “scar literature” that had repudiated the Cultural Revolution but had also laid bare the tragedies of socialism. During the 1980s, editorial committees such as *Towards the Future* (Zouxiang weilai) and *Culture: China and the World* (Wenhua: Zhongguo yu shijie), independent from

<sup>13</sup> Xu Jilin, “The Fate of an Enlightenment: Twenty Years in the Chinese Intellectual Sphere (1978–1998),” tr. Geremie Barmé and Gloria Davies, in Edward Gu and Merle Goldman, eds., *Chinese Intellectuals between State and Market* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 183.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Baum, *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 63. Deng referred to emancipating thinking in his December 13, 1978, speech, titled “Emancipate the Mind, Seek Truth from Facts, and Unite as One in Looking to the Future,” in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (1975–1982)* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), 151–63, which marked the beginning of the reform period.

<sup>15</sup> Wang Ruoshui, deputy editor of *Renmin ribao* (People’s Daily), and Wang Yuanhua drafted the speech. A revised version was published in *Renmin ribao*, March 16, 1983. See Xu, “Fate of an Enlightenment,” 186 and 200n4. For an overview of the debate on “humanist Marxism,” see Wang, *High Culture Fever*, 9–36; David A. Kelly, “The Emergence of Humanism: Wang Ruoshui and the Critique of Socialist Alienation,” in Merle Goldman, Timothy Cheek, and Carol Lee Hamrin, eds., *China’s Intellectuals and the State: In Search of a New Relationship* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1987), 159–82.

publishing houses but affiliated with research units or working with official patrons, were central in this New Enlightenment Movement.<sup>16</sup> The mid-1980s witnessed the zenith of media interest in the spread of a “culture fever” (*wenhua re*), or an obsession with comparative research on the pros and cons of Chinese and Western cultures, in the form of debates, lectures, and editorials.<sup>17</sup> This culture fever culminated in the 1988 documentary *Heshang* (River Elegy). Although the makers of the documentary series upheld liberation from tradition through modernization and Westernization, the documentary also reflected the “apocalyptic anxiety” of a society caught in rapid transformation.<sup>18</sup>

A review of the intellectual landscape of the 1990s reveals a very different picture. Before 1989, different generations had passed down the “talismans” of May Fourth; they had accentuated various elements of the May Fourth legacy, but by the 1990s the legacy itself was being questioned.<sup>19</sup> Because of this retreat from the May Fourth agenda after 1989, both the leading New Leftist Wang Hui (b. 1959) at Tsinghua University and the liberal Xu Jilin (b. 1957) at East China Normal University have compared the 1990s to the period between the late 1920s and the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, when a departure from idealism and a fragmentation of the intellectual landscape substituted for the “explosive energies” of the May Fourth era.<sup>20</sup> The liberal Zhu Xueqin (b. 1952) at Shanghai University has further stated that the 1990s were characterized by a shift toward “neo-authoritarianism,” the use of foreign discourses, and the discarding of a “critical spirit” or a “sense of intellectual responsibility,” accompanied by a growing impact of market forces.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup> On the organizational structure of the editorial committees, see Wang Xiaoming, “The Politics of Translation: Modes of Organization in the Chinese Translation Movement of the 1980s,” tr. Kenneth Dean, in Naoki Sakai and Yukiko Hanawa, eds., *Specters of the West and the Politics of Translation* (Ithaca, NY: Traces Editorial Office, Cornell University, 2001), 269–300; see also Chen Fong-ching, “The Popular Cultural Movement of the 1980s,” in Gloria Davies, ed., *Voicing Concerns: Contemporary Chinese Critical Inquiry* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 71–86.

<sup>17</sup> Especially crucial was the lecture series organized by the Academy of Chinese Culture in Beijing. For a detailed overview of the main events, see Wang, *High Culture Fever*, 48–56.

<sup>18</sup> Wang, *High Culture Fever*, 119.

<sup>19</sup> Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 273–74.

<sup>20</sup> Wang, “Introduction: Minds of the Nineties,” 11. On Tiananmen as a watershed event, see Joseph Fewsmith, *China since Tiananmen: The Politics of Transition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Jean-Philippe Béja, “Introduction: 4 June 1989: A Watershed in Chinese Contemporary History,” in Béja, ed., *The Impact of China's 1989 Tiananmen Massacre* (London: Routledge, 2011), 1–12.

<sup>21</sup> Zhu Xueqin, “For a Chinese Liberalism,” tr. Wu Shengqing, in Wang, ed., *One China, Many Paths*, 98–99.

The politics of the intellectual discourses during the 1990s were “overdetermined by how they simultaneously came to terms with 1989 and 1992.”<sup>22</sup> The intellectuals were responding to the relevant social, political, and economic shifts, but this is not to say that the context determined all the content.<sup>23</sup> The Tiananmen demonstrations in the spring of 1989 emerged from the social effects of the economic reforms, such as inflation, income inequalities, and corruption among the political elite. The government sought to redress some of the imbalances caused by the transition from plan to market through the urban reforms and the 1988 price reforms, but without success.<sup>24</sup> After the violent suppression of the Tiananmen demonstrations during the following year, intellectuals began struggling with the issues of their place in the reforms and their alliance with the state. Reflections on the 1980s naturally led to reflections on socialism, and such reflections were further strengthened by the decline of socialism internationally, the end of the Cold War, and the advance of global capital. The “prolonged postmortem assessment” of what had caused the implosion in the Soviet Union so as to avoid the same fate in China became an important topic of research.<sup>25</sup> Henceforth, the official emphasis was on stability and gradual reforms, as reflected in the formula of “crossing the river by feeling for the stones” (*mozhe shitou guohe*).<sup>26</sup>

Internally, Deng Xiaoping’s Southern Tour in January and February 1992 also triggered reflections on revolution and on the socialist identity of a country that had turned to reform. It was during his Southern Tour that Deng called for a more forceful reform and opening up. The tour thus ended the period of uncertainty after the June 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, the string of upheavals in Eastern Europe, and the implosion of the Soviet Union in December 1991. The October 1992 Fourteenth Party Congress political report, which Joseph Fewsmith calls “the most liberal economic document in CCP history,” approved the foundation of a “socialist market economy.”<sup>27</sup> Following this landmark transformation, foreign direct investment (FDI) from

<sup>22</sup> Zhang Xudong, “The Making of the Post-Tiananmen Intellectual Field: A Critical Overview,” in Zhang, ed., *Whither China? Intellectual Politics in Contemporary China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 9.

<sup>23</sup> Benjamin A. Elman, “The Failures of Contemporary Chinese Intellectual History,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 43.3 (2010), 378.

<sup>24</sup> Timothy Cheek, *Living with Reform: China since 1989* (London: Zed Books, 2003), 68, 82. On the broader causes and the impact of Tiananmen, see David S. G. Goodman and Gerald Segal, eds., *China in the Nineties: Crisis Management and Beyond* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991).

<sup>25</sup> David Shambaugh, *China Goes Global: The Partial Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 51.

<sup>26</sup> See Kalpana Misra, *From Post-Maoism to Post-Marxism: The Erosion of Official Ideology in Deng’s China* (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Fewsmith, “Reaction, Resurgence, and Succession: Chinese Politics since Tiananmen,” in Roderick MacFarquhar, ed., *The Politics of China: Sixty Years of the People’s Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 505–6.



Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Chinese in Southeast Asia began to transform China's economy and society. These changes triggered a "consumer revolution" that even led to the commercialization of Chairman Mao's legacy in the form of a "Mao fever."<sup>28</sup>

In spite of this paradigm shift, however, there was no clear-cut break between the two decades. During the 1980s, a number of intellectuals had already been critical of the May Fourth Movement and the Enlightenment project. The philosopher Li Zehou (b. 1930), for example, famously argued that the "salvation" (*jiuwang*) "nationalist" element of May Fourth had repressed its "Enlightenment" (*qimeng*).<sup>29</sup> The "utopian" mood of the 1980s had already suffered vital setbacks prior to the 1990s. At the beginning of 1987, General Secretary Hu Yaobang was forced to resign because, due to his permissive cultural and political policies, he had allowed "bourgeois liberalization" to flourish.<sup>30</sup> Also in 1987, the new party general secretary, Zhao Ziyang, drawing on the ideas of theorist Su Shaozhi and faced with the challenges of inflation and corruption, stated that the country was only at the "primary stage of socialism."<sup>31</sup> In addition, the 1988 documentary *Heshang*, in which the filmmakers press China to embrace Western civilization, became subject to fierce criticism and brought about disputes on the reforms.<sup>32</sup> Amid the reform setbacks, prior to 1989 a sense of crisis had already engulfed the intellectual world. In fact, this sense of crisis had been lurking under the surface ever since the start of the reform era.<sup>33</sup>

### Unmaking Radicalism: Realistic Revolution

Even though China's rapid transformation led to many stimulating academic and cultural debates, intellectual discourse during the reform period remains

<sup>28</sup> Ralph Litzinger, "Theorizing Postsocialism: Reflections on the Politics of Marginality in Contemporary China," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101.1 (Winter 2002), 38. On Mao fever, see Ross Terrill (whose own study of Mao played a role in the fever), *The Life of Mao*, [www.overdrive.com/search?q=E32A112B-2D31-482A-A8AA-16A00E298663](http://www.overdrive.com/search?q=E32A112B-2D31-482A-A8AA-16A00E298663); Geremie R. Barmé, *Shades of Mao: The Posthumous Cult of the Great Leader* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1996).

<sup>29</sup> See Li Zehou, "Qimeng yu jiuwang de shuangchong bianzou" (The Double Variation of Enlightenment and Salvation), in Li, *Zhongguo xiandai sixiangshi lun* (On Modern Chinese Intellectual History) (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 1987), 7–49.

<sup>30</sup> Geremie Barmé, "History for the Masses," in Jonathan Unger, ed., *Using the Past to Serve the Present: Historiography and Politics in Contemporary China* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 265.

<sup>31</sup> Wang, *High Culture Fever*, 37. In fact, the term "primary stage of socialism" had been used even earlier by Mao Zedong, but now it was being employed to justify the reform policies. See Henry Yuhuai He, *Dictionary of the Political Thought of the People's Republic of China* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), 385–87.

<sup>32</sup> On *Heshang*, see Chapter 4 of this volume.

<sup>33</sup> Bill Brugger and David Kelly, *Chinese Marxism in the Post-Mao Era* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 3.

relatively understudied. Scholars such as Geremie Barmé and Gloria Davies have made pioneering efforts to bring Chinese voices to international audiences.<sup>34</sup> A number of studies address the broader intellectual and cultural discourse of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, but few pay attention to interactions among scholars in mainland China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and elsewhere.<sup>35</sup>

Scholarship on the “conservative turn” of the early 1990s, referring to the rise of political neoconservatism and nationalism and a renewed interest in Chinese culture and tradition, can generally be divided into political and cultural discussions. For the political debates, scholars have studied neo-conservatism as part of the elite struggles over reform and in relation to questions of political legitimacy and the crisis of Marxist ideology.<sup>36</sup> “Cultural conservatism” refers to arguments about the preservation and continuity of Chinese culture, including debates on New Confucianism, revisionist historiography, and postmodernism and language reform. Some authors have also interpreted these cultural debates as manifestations of cultural nationalism, which refers to an understanding of the nation in cultural rather than political-territorial or civic terms.<sup>37</sup> This distinction between political and cultural developments overlooks the fact that in actuality the two coexisted as products of the changing domestic and international environments. In contrast with the 1980s, when intellectual views were a “weathervane” about the reform policies, during the 1990s a “curious set of parallels” existed between the political and cultural discourses, such as those on radicalism, civil society, and the public sphere.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Davies, ed., *Voicing Concerns*; Wang, ed. *One China, Many Paths*. For dissenting voices of the 1980s, see Geremie Barmé and John Minford, eds., *Seeds of Fire: Chinese Voices of Conscience* (New York: Noonday Press, 1989) and Geremie Barmé and Linda Jaivin, eds., *New Ghosts, Old Dreams: Chinese Rebel Voices* (New York: Times Books, 1992). For English translations of more recent writings by Chinese intellectuals, see the Reading the China Dream website and the accompanying project run by David Ownby, Timothy Cheek, and Joshua Fogel. [www.readingthechinadream.com](http://www.readingthechinadream.com).

<sup>35</sup> Representative studies on reform-era intellectual discourse include Xiaomei Chen, *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-discourse in Post-Mao China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Gloria Davies, *Worrying about China: The Language of Chinese Critical Inquiry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Min Lin, with Maria Galikowski, *The Search for Modernity: Chinese Intellectuals and Cultural Discourse in the Post-Mao Era* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999); and Wang, *High Culture Fever*. For an example of a study that pays much attention to this interaction, see Makeham, *Lost Soul*.

<sup>36</sup> Fewsmith, *China since Tiananmen*; Gunter Schubert, “Was Ist Neokonservatismus? Notizen zum Politischen Denken in der VR China in den 90er Jahren” (What is Neoconservatism? Notes on Political Thought in the PRC during the 1990s), *Asien* (Asia) 65 (October 1997), 57–74; Brugger and Kelly, *Chinese Marxism in the Post-Mao Era*; Misra, *From Post-Maoism to Post-Marxism*.

<sup>37</sup> Yingjie Guo, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary China: The Search for National Identity under Reform* (London: Routledge, 2004), 18.

<sup>38</sup> Wang, “Introduction: Minds of the Nineties,” 15, 16–19, 36.

Although some authors have conducted research jointly on cultural and political developments, they have nevertheless suggested that the former merely serve the latter, as in the case of the Confucian revival.<sup>39</sup> Studies that think of the cultural, political, and economic developments of the reform era together do not specifically discuss the early 1990s. Arif Dirlik, for example, has analyzed the rise of New Confucianism and “national studies” (*guoxue*) in relation to global changes, but this critical intervention is mainly about the meaning of 1992—capitalism—for the Chinese intellectual world.<sup>40</sup> Other studies that include both cultural and political developments remain oriented toward the political aspects. Peter Moody’s study of conservatism includes “traditionalism,” nationalism, populism, and “neo-conservatism,” but does not move beyond political thought.<sup>41</sup> Fewsmith’s *China since Tiananmen*, a wide-ranging and impressive analysis of political and intellectual changes since 1989, nevertheless mostly centers around the political-reform issue.<sup>42</sup>

This book analyzes the historical, cultural, and political debates of the early 1990s through the lens of the paradigm shift of “anti-radicalism” that connected these debates. In intellectual debates, the term “radicalism” refers not only to China’s socialist modernity but also to its liberal past in the form of the May Fourth Movement, often considered modern China’s most influential intellectual and political movement. This critique of radicalism was not only a critique of revolution per se but also a critique of a progressivist mode of thought, according to which destruction was a prerequisite for development. The rise of anti-radicalism was directly related to the broader sociopolitical and socio-economic changes heralded by the implosion of the Soviet Union, by June Fourth, and by the acceleration of the economic reforms. Engagement with the Chinese revolutionary past not only was related to economic reconfigurations in East Asia but also was part of the global challenges to the universalism of Enlightenment in the framework of what Dirlik calls “Global Modernity.”<sup>43</sup>

After 1989, reflections on radicalism were more than manifestations of self-censorship. There were certainly limits on the objects of inquiry, the methodology, and expression of discussions during the reform era.<sup>44</sup> The blacklisting,

<sup>39</sup> Werner Meissner, “New Intellectual Currents in the People’s Republic of China,” in David C. B. Teather and Herbert S. Yee, eds., *China in Transition: Issues and Policies* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1999), 18–19.

<sup>40</sup> Arif Dirlik, *Culture and History in Postrevolutionary China: The Perspective of Global Modernity* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2011).

<sup>41</sup> Peter Moody, *Conservative Thought in Contemporary China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 14.

<sup>42</sup> Fewsmith, *China since Tiananmen*.

<sup>43</sup> Dirlik, *Culture and History in Postrevolutionary China*, x–xi.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Schoenhals, *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics: Five Studies* (Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies, Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1992), 106–9.

sudden “transfers,” dismissals, or demotions of academics had continued under the reforms, with the difference that those affected could now continue to write as freelance writers and under pseudonyms or could publish in Hong Kong and, beginning in the late 1990s, on the Internet.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, some journals, such as the literary periodical *Tianya* (Frontiers), published in the southern province of Hainan, were less restricted than those in Beijing. Journals could also receive private funding. The ideological climate of the time allowed for discussions that were more abstract and theoretical, but more than political quietism, the debates on radicalism were an engagement with socialism. The methodology behind the debates, which involved a highlighting of the function of ideas in twentieth-century history, also brought up Marxist responses, in which the debates were criticized for manifesting “idealist” tendencies.

However, many of the relevant texts in the debates were not published on mainland China. Those who criticized revolution explicitly, such as the philosopher Li Zehou and the literary critic Liu Zaifu in their famous 1995 account *Gaobie geming* (Farewell to Revolution), were published in Hong Kong.<sup>46</sup> Second, the debates appeared primarily in the Hong Kong journal *Ershiyi shiji* or in other more independent journals, such as *Dongfang* (Orient), which were less constrained by mainland censorship. In addition, academic publications were generally less sensitive than more public outlets such as newspapers because the number of readers was more limited.<sup>47</sup> Even though *Ershiyi shiji* was a highly influential journal and a vital medium for the debates, it was a scholarly journal with a circulation of only about 3,500, as compared to, at its peak, a circulation of up to 120,000 for *Dushu* (Reading).<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, some of the intellectuals who took part in the debates of the early 1990s still faced censorship or had to publish outside of mainland China.

Debates about radicalism involved questions of legitimacy, relations between the state and the individual, the role of intellectuals, and the very nature of Chinese modernity. In several respects, they constituted what I refer to as a “realistic revolution.” First, “realistic” refers to the fact that Chinese intellectuals, following the official turn to pragmatism, advocated common-sense approaches to change. This was a move away from the utopianism of the Mao era. Second, intellectual reflections on radicalism were also revolutionary

<sup>45</sup> Émilie Frenkiel, *Conditional Democracy: The Contemporary Debate on Political Reform in Chinese Universities* (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2015), 19–23; Merle Goldman, “Repression of China’s Public Intellectuals in the Post-Mao Era,” *Social Research* 76.2 (July 2009), 682.

<sup>46</sup> Li Zehou and Liu Zaifu, *Gaobie geming: Huiwang ershi shiji Zhongguo* (Farewell to Revolution: Looking back at Twentieth-Century China) (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1995).

<sup>47</sup> Frenkiel, *Conditional Democracy*, 18.

<sup>48</sup> Wang, “Introduction: Minds of the Nineties,” 28, 56. This was before the journal became available online, as it is today.

in that they did not shy away from challenging the need for revolution in the past. This was different from the official solution, which firmly preserved the status of the revolution in the past (as will be further explained below). Third, the term “realistic revolution” also refers to the practice of juxtaposing revolutions and identifying the most realistic revolution to rewrite China’s past and future course. This juxtaposition of revolutions need not surprise us, for revolutionaries are often familiar with previous revolutions. They can serve as “models or counter-examples,” or, in the words of Keith Michael Baker and Dan Edelstein, as “scripts” to be transformed: “Marx rewrote the script of the French Revolution; Lenin revised Marx; Mao revised Lenin; and so on and so forth.”<sup>49</sup> Rather than comparing revolutions, as in the sociological tradition, Chinese intellectuals looked upon revolutions as scripts that had to be rewritten in order to improve an unsatisfactory reality.

Whereas the French Revolution and its ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity were invoked positively in China of the 1980s, both the French and Russian revolutions were criticized after 1989 when several Chinese intellectuals identified the Glorious Revolution (1688–89) as the only realistic revolution. During the Glorious Revolution, King James II of England was overthrown by the Dutch stadtholder William III and British parliamentarians. It resulted in the establishment of a constitutional monarchy and an English bill of rights. The traditional view in historiography is that the revolution was “glorious” and “bloodless” because allegedly it was a peaceful, gradual, and evolutionary transition, unlike the violent revolutions on Continental Europe. In Whig history accounts, the victory of the revolutionaries represented a victory over the old England, divided by, among others, class and religion, and the new England of liberty.<sup>50</sup> Recent scholarship has challenged the notion of a “sensible” revolution and instead has placed the Glorious Revolution in a broader European perspective and in a longer time frame. Seen from this perspective, the Glorious Revolution was no less violent or modern than its French counterpart.<sup>51</sup>

Relying on the conventional view, a reference to the Glorious Revolution as a model in China in the 1990s was the expression of a will to progress in a more rational and stable manner. It was perceived as having avoided the violence of the French Revolution, now used as a counter-model that represented the irrational course of the Chinese Revolution, and as a belief in the transformational power of the human will. Chinese intellectuals henceforth utilized the

<sup>49</sup> Keith Michael Baker and Dan Edelstein, “Introduction,” in Baker and Edelstein, eds., *Scripting Revolution: A Historical Approach to the Comparative Study of Revolutions* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 2.

<sup>50</sup> Stuart E. Prall, *The Bloodless Revolution: England, 1688* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), x.

<sup>51</sup> Steven C. A. Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

modern meaning of the Chinese term *geming* (revolution). Before the modern period, *geming* had referred to dynastic change, the overthrow of the Mandate of Heaven (*tianming*), and the existence of cosmically determined cycles. Therefore, it was tied to political and moral legitimacy.<sup>52</sup> In its modern meaning, however, after having gained momentum following the failure of the 1898 Reform Movement, through the Japanese use of *geming* (*kakumei*) to denote “revolution,” the origin of the character *ge* (革) was relevant. The character “philologically originated from the act of peeling off skin from a beast, designating a break or a drastic detachment.”<sup>53</sup> During the 1990s, even though intellectuals challenged the modern meaning of revolution as drastic and radical change, the original meaning of *geming* was also present in that the debates were about morality, legitimacy, and the loss of “ultimate concerns.”<sup>54</sup>

Fourth, realistic revolution refers to the tensions between the intellectuals’ advocacy of a more rational, objective, and moderate course, and idealism, moralism, and future-oriented visions. I argue that, in spite of the ubiquitous references to conservatism, intellectuals continued to project change into the future and integrated conservatism into a vision of modernization that was no less linear. Also, arguing for a “detached” scholarship instead of political activism, the debates reveal a continuation of the idea that the Chinese intellectual was a moral guardian responsible for the fate of the nation. As for the form of the discussions in which this belief was expressed, the discourses of the early 1990s were highly evaluative and prescriptive, with, in spite of calls for an “objective” scholarship, a continuation of what Davies and Cheek have referred to as the “moral extremism” and “black-and-white judgements” of the Mao era.<sup>55</sup> In brief, we cannot make sense of reform China without relating it to both its “traditional” and its more recent radical past.<sup>56</sup>

### Projecting Change into the Future

Amid the rapid modernization and the transition to globalization, conservatism was a framework in which to discuss the long-standing conundrum of how to modernize yet remain Chinese. For over a century, this question had been at

<sup>52</sup> Jin Guantao and Liu Qingfeng, *Guannianshi yanjiu: Zhongguo xiandai zhongyao zhengzhi shuyi de xingcheng* (Studies in Conceptual History: The Formation of Key Modern Chinese Political Terms) (Hong Kong: Dangdai Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu zhongxin, Chinese University Press, 2008), 18–19, 585–86.

<sup>53</sup> Chen Jianhua, “World Revolution Knocking at the Heavenly Gate: Kang Youwei and his Use of *Geming* in 1898,” *Journal of Modern Chinese History* 5.1 (June 2011), 91, 94.

<sup>54</sup> Jin and Liu, *Guannianshi yanjiu*, 19, 357–61.

<sup>55</sup> Davies, *Worrying about China*, 3, 118; Cheek, *Living with Reform*, 50–51.

<sup>56</sup> Catherine Lynch, Robert B. Marks, and Paul G. Pickowicz, “Introduction: Chinese Radicalism in Historical Context,” in Lynch, Marks, and Pickowicz, eds., *Radicalism, Revolution and Reform in Modern China: Essays in Honor of Maurice Meisner* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2011), 8–9.

the heart of the endeavors of Chinese intellectuals, and it had found expression in formulas such as *tiyong*—borrowing foreign technology for “application” but relying on Chinese learning for the “essence.” During the May Fourth era, intellectuals had vigorously debated the place of Chinese culture in modernization, followed by a continuation of these discussions in the form of the topic of “cultural construction” during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>57</sup> The issue became most pressing when the twentieth-century narratives about China’s progress, namely Marxism and the Chinese “Enlightenment” of May Fourth, lost their appeal after 1989 and 1992. It was at this historical juncture that a re-evaluation of the past gained urgency. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, debates on Chinese modernity emerged amid feelings of national humiliation and the transition from empire to nation-state. During the 1990s, the debates were prompted by China’s changing self-identity within the broader ideological landscape of the “end of history,” China’s economic rise following the “East Asian miracle,” and the nation’s integration into the global economy.

Modernity, in the words of Arif Dirlik, is “the fluid product of a changing topography of economic, political, social, and cultural relationships” and its very fluid nature means that it is difficult to define. Dirlik distinguishes between three “phases” of modernity, namely “Eurasian modernities,” “Euro-modernity,” and “contemporary Global Modernity.” Euromodernity, characterized by Europeans relying on slavery and colonization to spread the values of science and capital, had been the prominent global form since the eighteenth century. Euromodernity is relevant here because it was also the modernity that Chinese intellectuals encountered during the late nineteenth century and led them to rewrite the past based on modern ideas of time.<sup>58</sup> This modern interpretation of the relation between past, present, and future also became the object of discussions on twentieth-century radicalism, which marked the period of China’s transition from modernization to “Global Modernity.” However, in spite of this transition, discussions remained trapped in the modernization framework, and conservatism was interpreted within this linear perspective. Even when, in the mid-1990s, the discussions moved from the issue of modernization to the issue of modernity, intellectuals continued to search for a better path to Chinese modernity.

According to the German conceptual historian Reinhart Koselleck, under modernity the past is perpetually re-created in terms of new explanations of the present, whereas the present is interpreted in light of future possibilities. Modernity opens up new “horizons of expectations” (*Erwartungshorizont*) that

<sup>57</sup> On *tiyong* and the debates on “cultural construction,” see Q. Edward Wang, *Inventing China through History: The May Fourth Approach to Historiography* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011).

<sup>58</sup> Dirlik, *Culture and History in Postrevolutionary China*, 20–22.

exist in tension with experience; it is marked by new “temporalizations” of history.<sup>59</sup> In the 1990s, Chinese intellectuals questioned the fascination with progress and linear development that had been dominant under the May Fourth and revolutionary paradigms, but this challenge was limited because it occurred under conditions of China’s integration into the global capitalist system. Here it is useful to refer to Koselleck’s concept of “past future” (*Vergangene Zukunft*), more commonly translated as “futures past.” In China, futures imagined by past generations, and the May Fourth generation in particular, were reclaimed, but the relation between past, present, and future under modernity remained unchanged. In this sense, history, as Keith Tribe puts it, is not about “simple facticity” but rather about “possibilities.”<sup>60</sup>

The binary of radicalism and conservatism that was prominent in the debates of the early 1990s, as an *-ism* (*zhuyi*), also reflected a fixation on the future that had underpinned the *-isms* in China ever since they were introduced through Japan in the early twentieth century. As with *-isms* elsewhere, they were the product of an age of revolution and nationalism.<sup>61</sup> The *-isms* in early twentieth-century China, as Ivo Spira explains, were, referring to Koselleck, “concepts of movement” (*Bewegungsbegriffe*): “History came to be seen as something that progressed purposefully and that could and should be shaped by the human will.”<sup>62</sup> This reflected a new historical consciousness of change projected into the future, as opposed to the cyclical cosmology of the Chinese dynastic periods. The latter contained references to a “Golden Past” but not to a “Golden Future.”<sup>63</sup> In Maoist China, a “Marxist-inspired utopianism” had given the future further purpose and meaning and had justified sacrifice and hardship by an “accentuation of the future.”<sup>64</sup> During the debates of the early 1990s, in spite of rejections of drastic historical ruptures, the reconception of the relation between past and present still served to make the past more useful in the present.

<sup>59</sup> Keith Tribe, “Introduction,” in Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, tr. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), xviii; Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 10, 258.

<sup>60</sup> Tribe, “Introduction,” xi.

<sup>61</sup> Ivo Spira, *A Conceptual History of Chinese -Isms: The Modernization of Ideological Discourse* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 2; Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 222–54.

<sup>62</sup> Spira, *Conceptual History of Chinese -Isms*, 6.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 47–48. This is not to say that the cyclical view of history was the only view of history that existed in dynastic China, as has been noted by, among others, Michael Puett and Prasenjit Duara. See Michael Puett, “Classical Chinese Historical Thought,” and Prasenjit Duara, “Empires and Imperialism,” in *A Companion to Global Historical Thought*, ed. Prasenjit Duara, Viren Murthy, and Andrew Sartori (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 34–46 and 384–98.

<sup>64</sup> Jiwei Ci, *Dialectic of the Chinese Revolution: From Utopianism to Hedonism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 3–4. On utopianism and Mao’s “voluntarism,” see also Maurice Meisner, *Marxism, Maoism, and Utopianism: Eight Essays* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982). On the emphasis on voluntarist or Marxist elements in Maoism, see Nick Knight, *Rethinking Mao: Explorations in Mao Zedong’s Thought* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2007).



The only book-length study in English on modern Chinese conservatism is the 1976 volume *The Limits of Change*, edited by Charlotte Furth.<sup>65</sup> This volume, the outcome of a 1972 conference at Harvard University on “Intellectuals and the Problem of Conservatism in Republican China,” was widely referred to in the discussions of the early 1990s.<sup>66</sup> This was the case because it dismissed the argument put forward by historian Joseph Levenson that after China’s encounter with the West, its resort to tradition could have arisen only from emotional and psychological needs.<sup>67</sup> For Levenson, the arrival of the West had distorted the balance between Chinese “history” and universal “values,” and the embrace of Chinese tradition served to restore this balance. Levenson’s “traditionalism” is reminiscent of how the term was used by sociologists Karl Mannheim and Max Weber, namely as an unreflective and psychological clinging to tradition.<sup>68</sup> *The Limits of Change* argues that the resort to tradition in modern China was instead a modern phenomenon based on conscious choice and reflection. In addition, whereas Chinese conservatives had previously been evaluated as being obstacles to modernization under the impact of the revolutionary paradigm, the 1976 volume argues that conservatives in China had not opposed change.

Two centuries after it was published, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) by Edmund Burke (1729–97) figured prominently in debates on modern Chinese history and culture.<sup>69</sup> Whereas Burke cared about historical particularity and the natural and gradual growth of institutions, during the 1990s intellectuals both within and outside of mainland China invoked Burke’s works to advocate reform. This brings us to the wider question of conservatism in China, a topic that remains understudied given China’s dominant narrative of revolution and the spread of modernization theory and Marxism internationally during the Cold War period. In this environment, conservatism meant opposing change. Mary Wright, in her 1957 book on the

<sup>65</sup> Charlotte Furth, ed., *The Limits of Change: Essays on Conservative Alternatives in Republican China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976) (hereafter cited as *LOC*).

<sup>66</sup> Most of the essays in *The Limits of Change* are translated in Zhou Yangshan and Yang Suxian, eds., *Jindai Zhongguo sixiang renwu lun: Baoshou zhuyi* (Modern Chinese Thought and People: Conservatism) (Taipei: Shibao wenhua chuban shiye youxian gongsi, 1980).

<sup>67</sup> Joseph R. Levenson, “‘History’ and ‘Value’: The Tensions of Intellectual Choice in Modern China,” in Arthur F. Wright, ed., *Studies in Chinese Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 146–94.

<sup>68</sup> Karl Mannheim, “Conservative Thought,” in Kurt H. Wolff, ed., *From Karl Mannheim* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 152–56; Max Weber uses the term in both *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, tr. Stephen Kalberg (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011) and his studies on religious sociology.

<sup>69</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event: In a Letter Intended to Have Been Sent to a Gentleman in Paris* (London, 1790), reprinted in Frank M. Turner, ed., *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

Tongzhi Restoration (1862–74), titled *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism*, argues that conservatism had unique traits, such as the belief in a rational natural order and the innate goodness of man, the importance of group interests and customs, and the concept of the universal state. In other words, Wright's conservatism was the preservation of a Confucian order.<sup>70</sup> In his 1969 book *Chinese Intellectuals and the Revolution of 1911: The Birth of Modern Chinese Radicalism*, Michael Gasster associates the term “radicalism” with the birth of a new intelligentsia and the quest for rapid and profound modernization. Gasster contrasts this “modern radicalism,” marked by the creation of utopian goals in the future and reformist and revolutionary optimism, with the “traditional conservatism” that was not so keen about innovation.<sup>71</sup>

In their introduction to the volume, Charlotte Furth and Benjamin Schwartz argue that a Western interpretation of conservatism, based on the accounts of the German sociologist Karl Mannheim and the “founding father” of conservatism Edmund Burke, can also be applied to modern China. Mannheim had asserted that conservatism in Germany could be portrayed as a “style of thought” that opposed the rationality and abstract thought of the Enlightenment and replaced it with an embrace of particularity and the historically grown. Whereas the progressive movement was marked by a belief in the “consciousness of the possible,” conservatism clung to the concrete and the qualitative.<sup>72</sup>

Basing her argument on Mannheim, Furth proposes that modern Chinese conservatism was characterized by a “style of thought,” or a historical consciousness, according to which change through individual action could have only limited bearing on the environment.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, Furth and Schwartz both argue that modern Chinese conservatism was primarily a “cultural conservatism”; it was not a Burkean conservatism aimed at preserving the entire sociopolitical status quo.<sup>74</sup> The decline of the “mystique of the imperial monarchy” since the 1890s had separated the political order from the moral and cultural orders.<sup>75</sup> Apart from this distinction between culture and politics, Furth also divides conservatives into “nativists,” for whom Chinese culture was particular, and “universalists,” for whom Chinese values were primarily

<sup>70</sup> Mary Clabaugh Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The T'ung-Chih Restoration, 1862–1874* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957).

<sup>71</sup> Michael Gasster, *Chinese Intellectuals and the Revolution of 1911: The Birth of Modern Chinese Radicalism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969), viii, xvii.

<sup>72</sup> Mannheim, “Conservative Thought,” 132, 155.

<sup>73</sup> Charlotte Furth, “Culture and Politics in Modern Chinese Conservatism,” in *LOC*, 51.

<sup>74</sup> Benjamin Schwartz, “Notes on Conservatism in General and in China in Particular,” in *LOC*, 16.

<sup>75</sup> Furth, “Culture and Politics,” 25.

universal. Using this framework, the book includes articles on scholars who embarked on a search for a “national essence” (*guocui*), such as Liu Shipei (1884–1919), on political modernizers such as Yuan Shikai (1859–1916) and the Kuomintang (KMT), on “New Confucians,” who based their reading of Confucianism on the Neo-Confucianism of the Song (907–1279) and Ming (1368–1644) dynasties, and on “modern historicism.” The latter refers both to the social evolutionism of historian Tao Xisheng (1899–1988) and to the cyclical view of history of writer Zhou Zuoren (1885–1967) and his retreat from the public sphere.

Furth argues that these different manifestations of conservatism, including that of modernizers such as Yuan Shikai, were united by what she terms “presumptions of continuity.”<sup>76</sup> Schwartz poses the question, “Can people who are wholeheartedly committed to modernization ever be considered conservative?”<sup>77</sup> For Schwartz, the answer is positive, since modernization is a process independent of human will, a process that requires stability and an awareness of the unique nature of Chinese historical culture.<sup>78</sup> For Furth, both a subscription to continuity for practical reasons and a defense of continuity based on the belief that things are historically grown are manifestations of conservatism. As Arif Dirlik’s article on Tao Xisheng demonstrates, it was perfectly possible to combine an advocacy of historical continuity with the promotion of progress and voluntarism.<sup>79</sup> But in this sense was conservatism really a belief in the “limits of change”?

In addition, interpretations of conservatism differ widely in the various chapters of this volume. Guy Alitto, for example, in his chapter on Liang Shuming (1893–1988), one of the scholars critical of Western civilization after World War One, treats Chinese conservatism as part of a global reaction against modernization as rationalization.<sup>80</sup> In late-modernizing countries such as China, Alitto argues, modernization was perceived of as a Western product; the result was a cultural conservatism that joined hands with nationalism.<sup>81</sup> In the same volume, Tu Wei-ming and Chang Hao posit that New Confucianism was either an intellectual construct or a reaction to an intellectual crisis that in actuality was a crisis of meaning.<sup>82</sup> Finally, Lloyd Eastman’s article on the KMT defines conservatism as a backing of the status quo, and relying on

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 50. <sup>77</sup> Schwartz, “Notes on Conservatism,” 12. <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 14, 18–19.

<sup>79</sup> Arif Dirlik, “T’ao Hsi-sheng: The Social Limits of Change,” in *LOC*, 305–31.

<sup>80</sup> Guy Alitto, “The Conservative as Sage: Liang Shu-ming,” in *LOC*, 213–41.

<sup>81</sup> Alitto also formulates this argument in *The Last Confucian: Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987 [1979]). See also Guy S. Alitto [Ai Kai], *Shijie fanwei nei de fan xiandaihua sichao: Lun wenhua shoucheng zhuyi* (Anti-modernization Thought in the Global Spectrum: On Cultural Conservatism) (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1991).

<sup>82</sup> Tu Wei-ming, “Hsiung Shih-li’s Quest for Authentic Existence,” in *LOC*, 242–75; Chang Hao, “New Confucianism and the Intellectual Crisis of Contemporary China,” in *LOC*, 276–302.

Clinton Rossiter's argument that there is no conservatism in rapidly modernizing societies, Eastman argues that the KMT created a new and modern order and hence it was not conservative.<sup>83</sup>

In spite of these limitations, *The Limits of Change*, which also includes writings by China-born intellectuals in the United States, became a reference work for Chinese scholars who conducted research on the topic in later decades. In reform China, which reached its peak in the 1990s, there was a renewed interest in scholars of the Republican period who had engaged in various forms of *guoxue*, or national studies, as part of cultural and historical construction.<sup>84</sup> This "new *guoxue*" included research on those scholars who congregated around *Guocui xuebao* (Journal of National Essence, 1905–12), such as Deng Shi (1877–1945?), Liu Shipai, Huang Jie (1873–1935), and Zhang Taiyan (1869–1936).<sup>85</sup> It also involved those who had expressed criticism of May Fourth in the debates on Eastern and Western cultures and in the 1923 Debate on Science and Metaphysics. In the latter, critics such as Zhang Junmai (Carsun Chang, 1887–1969) opposed the all-powerfulness of science in favor of a perspective of human life (*renshengguan*) or *Weltanschauung*.<sup>86</sup> Among the critics of May Fourth who engaged in the debates on Eastern and Western cultures, especially after 1921, were the late Liang Qichao (1873–1929), Zhang Shizhao (1881–1973), Du Yaquan (1873–1933), and Liang Shuming, who took issue with the materialism, utilitarianism, progressivism, and scientism of Western modernity. These thinkers instead looked to the philosophers Bergson, Eucken, and Russell.<sup>87</sup> After traveling to Paris for the Paris Peace Conference and visiting several other European countries, Liang Qichao recorded, in his *Ouyou xinying lu* (Impressions on a Trip to Europe, 1919), his findings about the ruins of

<sup>83</sup> Lloyd Eastman, "The Kuomintang in the 1930s," in *LOC*, 191–212; Clinton Rossiter, *Conservatism in America* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1955), 219.

<sup>84</sup> See Axel Schneider, "Bridging the Gap: Attempts at Constructing a 'New' Historical-Cultural Identity in the PRC," *East Asian History*, no. 22 (December 2001), 129–44.

<sup>85</sup> *LOC*, 57–89, includes a chapter on "national essence" by Laurence A. Schneider, titled "National Essence and the New Intelligentsia." On national essence, see Tze-ki Hon, *Revolution as Restoration: Guocui Xuebao and China's Path to Modernity, 1905–1911* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); on Zhang Taiyan, see Viren Murthy, *The Political Philosophy of Zhang Taiyan: The Resistance of Consciousness* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

<sup>86</sup> The 1923 Debate on Science and Metaphysics, also referred to as the Debate on Science and the Philosophy of Life (*Kexue yu renshengguan*), took place between February and December 1923. The main participants were Zhang Junmai, Ding Wenjiang, Liang Qichao, Hu Shi, and Wu Zhihui. For an overview of this debate, see D. W. Y. Kwok, *Scientism in Chinese Thought, 1900–1950* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965), 135–68.

<sup>87</sup> Chow, *May Fourth Movement*, 327. Liang Qichao is most famous for his involvement in the 1898 Reform Movement, but he was also a journalist and scholar. Zhang Shizhao is primarily known for establishing *Jiayin zazhi* (Tiger Magazine) in 1914 and *Jiayin zhoukan* (Tiger Weekly) in 1925. Du Yaquan was the founder and editor of the journal *Dongfang zazhi* (Eastern Miscellany).

postwar Europe. Research by scholars of the Republican period also includes work on the New Confucians of the 1920s and 1930s, such as Liang Shuming, who, in his *Zhong Xi wenhua ji qi zhexue* (Chinese and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies, 1921), famously criticizes Western civilization.<sup>88</sup>

One group that received much attention in the “new *guoxue*” of the 1990s was the group of scholars congregating around the journal *Xueheng* (Critical Review, 1922–33). Even though these scholars, the most prominent to criticize May Fourth, were subject to various interpretations in China during the 1990s, what is relevant for our purposes is that the discussions concentrated on the position of *Xueheng* in modern Chinese conservatism. In addition, some *Xueheng* scholars became associated with the ideal of independent scholarship of the early 1990s.<sup>89</sup> Part of the discussion on May Fourth radicalism included a reassessment of the *Xueheng* scholars as modern scholars whose ideas, it was argued, had emerged from intellectual exchanges. They had not rejected Western culture in toto, it was now claimed, but rather had tried to selectively integrate it with Chinese culture.

Even though the interpretation of conservatives as moderns was not a new argument, its meaning was significant in the early 1990s. It represented a re-evaluation of “conservative” Republican figures, such as the *Xueheng* scholars, who had been dismissed by their contemporaries, such as Hu Shi and Lu Xun, and later repressed during the Mao period. By the 1990s more nuanced perspectives portrayed these scholars as supportive of the May Fourth project and as advocates of the integration of Chinese and Western learning.<sup>90</sup> The re-evaluation of May Fourth conservatives formed part of the broader re-examination of the Republican period that took place after China’s 1978 reform and opening up, and especially after the 1989 Tiananmen events, with a

<sup>88</sup> I include in the “new *guoxue*” those scholars in Schneider, “Bridging the Gap,” 133.

<sup>89</sup> Drawing on Shen Songqiao and his own research on *Xueheng*, Axel Schneider divides the scholars involved in the *Xueheng* journal into three groups. They are (1) the “New Humanists” who studied with Irving Babbitt in the United States, namely Mei Guangdi, Wu Mi, Hu Xiansu, and others; (2) the school of historical geographers, including Liu Yizheng, Miao Fenglin, Zheng Hesheng, Zhang Qiyun, and others; and (3) those historians loosely associated with *Xueheng*, including Wang Guowei, Chen Yinke, Tang Yongtong, and Zhang Yinlin. One interpretation of *Xueheng* involves the first group and analyzes the position of *Xueheng* within Chinese conservatism and survival of the national spirit. Culture in this instance was static and the scholar was seen as a spiritual leader who was not separate from the political realm. Another interpretation regards the historians and the scholarship loosely associated with *Xueheng* as an example of Sino-foreign exchanges and the dynamism of Chinese culture. This interpretation, with its emphasis on historiographical methodology, regards the scholar as the guardian of Chinese culture. See Schneider, “Bridging the Gap,” 135–38. On Chen Yinke, see Axel Schneider, “Between *Dao* and History: Two Chinese Historians in Search of a Modern Identity for China,” *History and Theory* 35.4 (December 1996), 54–73.

<sup>90</sup> Yü Ying-shih, with Josephine Chiu-Duke and Michael S. Duke, eds., *Chinese History and Culture, Volume Two: Seventeenth Century through Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 210–11.

resort to nationalism and increased attention to reunification with Taiwan.<sup>91</sup> What concerns us regarding the 1990s' reassessment of Republican conservative figures is the argument that these Republican figures had global and cosmopolitan outlooks. In discussions of the May Fourth conservatives, mainland Chinese scholars argued that their ideas were no less formed by international currents and scholarship outside of China than had been the ideas of the May Fourth progressives.

Beginning in the 1990s, scholars outside of mainland China also deconstructed the simplistic distinction between Chinese conservatives, liberals, and radicals and emphasized the former's worldly outlook. In a 1994 article on "national history" in the early twentieth century, intellectual historian Yü Ying-shih depicts the *guocui* (national essence) scholars as pioneering modernizers who were receptive to new ideas. Lydia Liu analyzes the *Guocui* and *Xueheng* scholars from the perspective of how they related themselves to the West discursively rather than as conservatives. In a more recent volume on the *Guocui* scholars, Tze-ki Hon continues to argue for an interpretation of these scholars beyond the confines of the "teleology of revolution." In a study on cultural and political thought in Republican-era China, Edmund Fung draws on Schwartz's chapter in *The Limits of Change* to argue that the advocates of conservatism, liberalism, and socialism all operated within the same framework: all were responding to the "crisis of modernization" and all were preoccupied with saving the nation.<sup>92</sup> Singling out the global dimensions of the ideas of the May Fourth intellectuals went hand in hand with the new explorations in scholarship on the meaning of May Fourth in places such as Hong Kong and Singapore and other studies on the transnational dimensions of the May Fourth Movement.<sup>93</sup>

The volume *The Limits of Change* therefore is relevant in two respects. First, it paved the way for a reinterpretation of Republican conservatism as modern and global, which would continue both inside and outside of

<sup>91</sup> Qiang Zhang and Robert Weatherley, "The Rise of 'Republican Fever' in the PRC and the Implications for CCP Legitimacy," *China Information* 27.3 (2013), 277–300. I thank William Sima for bringing this article to my attention.

<sup>92</sup> See Yü Ying-shih, "Changing Conceptions of National History in Twentieth-Century China," in Erik Lönnroth, Karl Molin, and Ragnar Björk, eds., *Conceptions of National History: Proceedings of Nobel Symposium 78* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1994), 155–74; Liu, *Translingual Practice*; Hon, *Revolution as Restoration*; Edmund S. K. Fung, *The Intellectual Foundations of Chinese Modernity: Cultural and Political Thought in the Republican Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>93</sup> Chen Xueran, *Wusi zai Xianggang: Zhimin qingjing, minzu zhuyi ji bentu yishi* (May Fourth in Hong Kong: Colonial Context, Nationalism and Local Consciousness) (Xianggang: Zhonghua shuju, 2014); David L. Kenley, *New Culture in a New World: The May Fourth Movement and the Chinese Diaspora in Singapore, 1919–1932* (London: Routledge, 2003); Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

mainland China in later decades. Second, it exposed some of the topics involved in the use of conservatism amid rapid change. The question was one of how a critique of modernity and an embrace of historical continuity could be relevant for the early 1990s. Paradoxically, the rejection of progressivism could be part of an effort to advocate a Chinese modernization theory. In addition, it argued that conservatism in Republican China was not about defending the sociopolitical order as a whole; some Chinese intellectuals would reiterate this argument during the 1990s as part of their efforts to protect Chinese culture from political and commercial intrusions.

### The Crisis of the Intellectual

The unmaking of radicalism was also a realistic revolution because of the tensions between advocacy of a “pure” scholarship and the continuation of the tradition of public and politically engaged intellectuals responsible for the fate of the nation. Unmaking radicalism was a strategy to criticize the political engagement of intellectuals during the 1980s. Here we see an overlap with the *Xueheng* debates that centered on intellectuals as scholars detached from politics. The highlighting of scholarship served to reinstate the cultural and moral authority of intellectuals in response to their political and social “marginalization.”<sup>94</sup> In the Maoist period, numerous intellectuals had been persecuted during the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957–58), or during the mass campaigns of the Cultural Revolution when intellectuals were designated as the “Stinking Ninth” category. It was not until after 1976 that intellectuals were finally treated as valuable partners in the reform project. However, after Tiananmen and with the rise of experts, specialization, and professionalization in the 1990s, intellectuals were once again marginalized.

What do we mean by “intellectuals” in the setting of the early 1990s? The Western term “intelligentsia,” which emerged in Russia in the 1860s, refers to public engagement and service to the nation.<sup>95</sup> The modern Chinese term for “intellectual,” or “knowledgeable elements” (*zhishi fenzi*), was allegedly derived from the Russian reference. Earlier classical Chinese only had terms such as “literati,” “scholar,” and “gentry.”<sup>96</sup> Before the abolition of the examination system in 1905, scholars were directly linked to the power-holders

<sup>94</sup> Gloria Davies, “The Self-Made Maps of Chinese Intellectuality,” in Davies, ed., *Voicing Concerns*, 18.

<sup>95</sup> Zhidong Hao, *Intellectuals at a Crossroads: The Changing Politics of China's Knowledge Workers* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 377–85.

<sup>96</sup> Shiping Hua, *Scientism and Humanism: Two Cultures in Post-Mao China, 1978–1989* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 28.

because they were trained to serve the bureaucracy.<sup>97</sup> During the May Fourth period, such scholars would become independent intellectuals. Under Mao, when they served as intellectual cadres or “establishment intellectuals,” they were both institutionally and discursively controlled by assignments to administrative work units, or *danwei*, and the need to engage in permanent “ideological work.”<sup>98</sup> It was during this period that the term *zhishi fenzi* was widely used in official discourse to refer to mental workers. However, the term was expansive and included a range of various social groups, and it also contained ambiguities.<sup>99</sup> During the 1980s, intellectuals were partially rehabilitated and considered as valuable as workers, peasants, and soldiers, as reflected in the dictum “Respect knowledge, respect talent” (*zunzhong zhishi, zunzhong rencai*).<sup>100</sup>

With the repression of the 1980s’ “New Enlightenment” after June 4, 1989, relations between intellectuals and the state once again underwent a dramatic change. The period between 1989 and 1991 was marked by oppression and ideological controls, with many intellectuals seeking refuge in the United States or elsewhere. Those who remained in mainland China refrained from direct confrontation with the state and engaged in self-reflection. As Timothy Cheek argues, the “ideological moment” of the period was one of “correcting revolutionary errors” and discussing systemic reform that could avoid the disasters of the Cultural Revolution and the state socialism of the Soviet Union.<sup>101</sup> After Tiananmen and the end of the Cold War, this issue gained new urgency.

During the early reform period, intellectuals were party-state public officials. As the reforms unfolded, the “disaggregation” of intellectuals signified the emergence of a broader variety of intellectuals and the loss of their public impact; they could not be defined simply as critics or supporters of the

<sup>97</sup> This claim requires some nuance because the majority of degree holders did not obtain positions within the bureaucracy; instead, they played active roles in local communities. In addition, serving the state did not mean that the traditions of professionalism or of critical intellectuals were absent. See Merle Goldman and Timothy Cheek, “Introduction: Uncertain Change,” in Goldman, Cheek, and Hamrin, eds., *China’s Intellectuals and the State*, 1–20.

<sup>98</sup> Timothy Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 89, 129–30; Litzinger, “Theorizing Postsocialism,” 36–37. Litzinger draws on Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, “Postmodernity, Popular Culture, and the Intellectual: A Report on Post-Tiananmen China,” *Boundary 2* 23.2 (1996), 139–69. On “establishment intellectuals,” see Carol Lee Hamrin and Timothy Cheek, eds., *China’s Establishment Intellectuals* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1986).

<sup>99</sup> Eddy U, “The Making of Chinese Intellectuals: Representations and Organization in the Thought Reform Campaign,” *China Quarterly*, no. 192 (2007), 971–89. The category “student” was no less ambiguous. On the formation of this category during May Fourth, see Fabio Lanza, *Behind the Gate: Inventing Students in Beijing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

<sup>100</sup> Wang, *High Culture Fever*, 113.

<sup>101</sup> Cheek, *Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, 217, 221.



Chinese state.<sup>102</sup> It was during this period that some established their own organizations, think tanks, and business and consulting firms that were independent of the state, and others forged alliances with social groups outside of the political establishment. What did not change, however, was a meandering between political commitment and a quest for intellectual autonomy.<sup>103</sup> Even those intellectuals who were not “establishment intellectuals” did not necessarily criticize the government; rather, they sought “to discover and transmit the truth” about the objects of their research.<sup>104</sup>

Mannheim and others divide intellectuals into several generations with a common consciousness. However, as Mannheim notes, this common consciousness came into being only following exposure to drastic change, and it was by no means uniform. Instead, we see the emergence of “generation units.”<sup>105</sup> Wang Gungwu famously devised the notion of six generations of intellectuals, which was then introduced into China by the liberal intellectual Xu Jilin.<sup>106</sup> In this study, most mainland Chinese intellectuals belong either to the Cultural Revolution generation, born in the 1950s, whose education was interrupted when they became sent-down youths to the rural areas (*zhiqing*), or to the following generation, those born in the 1960s. The Cultural Revolution was, so to speak, “a birthmark for those of the Tiananmen generation.”<sup>107</sup>

Even though the Cultural Revolution was the defining formative event for the generations born in the 1950s and 1960s, there are considerable differences in how Chinese intellectuals responded to these experiences due to factors such as class and/or geographic location.<sup>108</sup> The idea of a Cultural Revolution generation is hence insufficient to explain the diversity of intellectual thought in the early 1990s. In addition, the main voices of the anti-radicalism with which this generation engaged belonged to an older generation that was born in the 1930s and that had left China around 1949. The main representatives of this generation relevant for our discussion on radicalism are Yü Ying-shih (b. 1930), Lin Yü-sheng (b. 1934), and, slightly younger, Tu Wei-ming (b. 1940). Having received their educations in Hong Kong, Taiwan, or the

<sup>102</sup> Cheek, *Living with Reform*, 95–96; Timothy Cheek, “Xu Jilin and the Thought Work of China’s Public Intellectuals,” *China Quarterly*, no. 186 (June 2006), 406.

<sup>103</sup> Goldman and Cheek, “Introduction,” 3.

<sup>104</sup> Edward Gu and Merle Goldman, “Introduction: The Transformation of the Relationship between Chinese Intellectuals and the State,” in Gu and Goldman, eds., *Chinese Intellectuals between State and Market*, 12.

<sup>105</sup> Karl Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations,” in Paul Kecskemeti, ed., *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge and Paul, 1952 [1927–28]), 306.

<sup>106</sup> See Wang Gungwu, *The Chinese Intellectual: Past and Present* (Singapore: Faculty of Arts and Sciences, National University of Singapore, 1983); Xu Jilin, *Xu Jilin zixuanji* (Self-Selected Works of Xu Jilin) (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 1999).

<sup>107</sup> Rowena Xiaoqing He, *Tiananmen Exiles: Voices of the Struggle for Democracy in China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 118.

<sup>108</sup> Frenkiel, *Conditional Democracy*, 50.

United States, these intellectuals had been exposed to both liberalism and the movement to preserve Chinese culture and Confucianism outside of mainland China following the destruction of Chinese culture under the Communist regime after 1949. Paying attention solely to the Cultural Revolution denies the relevance of the interactions that took place between this older generation and the Cultural Revolution generation in the discourses of the 1990s.

Zhidong Hao makes a further distinction between “humanistic” and “technocratic” intellectuals based on their professional orientations.<sup>109</sup> Humanistic intellectuals, in Schumpeter’s words, “talk or write about subjects outside their professional competence.”<sup>110</sup> Whereas during the 1990s both professionalization and commercialization impacted the role of intellectuals in society, their self-perception as moral agents in the tradition of the Confucian literati (*shi*) remained unchanged. These “humanistic” intellectuals raised their voices from within universities and government think tanks, such as the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), in contrast to the publishing houses and editorial committees that had played a significant part in the 1980s cultural discourse.<sup>111</sup> In this study, we primarily examine humanistic intellectuals, but the discussion on neoconservatism also includes some technocratic intellectuals as well as those who continued to serve as intellectual cadres during the reforms.

Most of the humanistic intellectuals were male, despite the fact that at that time there was an increase in the number of women pursuing education and entering academia. By the 1990s, even though over 30 percent of students in higher education were women, at the doctoral level the figure was as low as about 10 percent. Without graduate degrees, women remained among the lower ranks of the academic system, accounting for only about 9 percent of the some seventeen thousand full-time professors.<sup>112</sup> Nevertheless, some of these women were highly influential and were major actors in debates on radicalism. For example, Chapter 6 discusses the role of poetess Zheng Min (b. 1920) in the debate on the literary revolution.

During the 1990s, those in scholarly circles identified themselves as scholars (*xuezhe*) instead of as intellectuals (*zhishi fenzi*), the latter of which had the more “radical” connotation of political engagement. Philosopher Li Zehou has famously stated that the 1990s was an era in which “thinkers fade out,

<sup>109</sup> Hao, *Intellectuals at a Crossroads*, 1–72.

<sup>110</sup> Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, 5th ed. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1976 [1942]), 146.

<sup>111</sup> Wang, “Introduction: Minds of the Nineties,” 14. On the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences during the reform era, see Margaret Sleeboom-Faulkner, *The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS): Shaping the Reforms, Academia and China (1977–2003)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

<sup>112</sup> Ruth Hayhoe, *China’s Universities 1895–1995: A Century of Cultural Conflict* (Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, University of Hong Kong, 1999), 130–31.

scholars protrude” (*sixiangjia danchu, xueshujia tuxian*).<sup>113</sup> The heroes of the 1990s included the historians Chen Yinke (1890–1969) and Wang Guowei (1877–1927), who came to be celebrated as advocates of intellectual independence and guardians of Chinese culture, unlike the more politically engaged May Fourth thinkers such as Hu Shi, Lu Xun, and Chen Duxiu. This change is also reflected in the popularity of the 1995 volume *Chen Yinke de zuihou ershi nian* (Chen Yinke’s Last Twenty Years), which discusses Chen Yinke’s struggle for intellectual freedom under the CCP between 1949 and 1969.<sup>114</sup> Nonetheless, advocacy of autonomy was by no means apolitical: a goal of scholarly excellence now turned to political reform. For this reason, the present study refers to the self-proclaimed scholars of the 1990s as intellectuals who were publicly engaged and passionate about the nation.

With the resort to scholarly endeavors, the attention to the quality of knowledge production, and the establishment of “academic norms” (*xueshu guifan*), new academic journals, such as the independent *Xueren* (The Scholar)<sup>115</sup> and *Yuandao* (True Way), ran articles on topics related to Chinese culture.<sup>116</sup> *Xueren*, for example, aimed to “retrieve the history of modern Chinese scholarship (*xueshushi*).”<sup>117</sup> In response to the scholarship of the 1980s, in journals such as *Xueren* and *Zhongguo shehui kexue jikan* (China Social Sciences Quarterly), scholars discussed the matter of “academic standardization.”<sup>118</sup> Discussions on radicalism were directly related to efforts to create a new knowledge through a critique of existing epistemologies. Radicalism, it was argued, had wrongly been based on romanticism and abstract rationalism; what was needed instead was knowledge based on empiricism and experience.

Apart from the question of what constitutes an intellectual in these circumstances, there is also a related question: what is a *Chinese* intellectual? In the words of Timothy Cheek, “When is a Chinese intellectual Chinese and when

<sup>113</sup> Li Zehou, “Li Zehou dawen” (Li Zehou Answers Questions), *Yuandao* (True Way) 1 (1994), 1.

<sup>114</sup> Lu Jiandong, *Chen Yinke de zuihou ershi nian* (Chen Yinke’s Last Twenty Years) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1995). Historian Chen Yinke had been trained in Berlin, Paris, and the United States, and he was loosely associated with *Xueheng*. His research is concerned with the development of the Chinese “national spirit” between the third and tenth centuries. Also see Schneider, “Between *Dao* and History,” 54–73.

<sup>115</sup> Sometimes also translated as “Scholars.”

<sup>116</sup> Davies, “Self-Made Maps,” 19. *Yuandao* came out in book form; the first volume (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, October 1994) was edited by Chen Ming. Other academic journals that were established during the early 1990s include *Xueshu jilin* (Scholarship Collection) and *Yuanxue* (Original Studies).

<sup>117</sup> Wang, “Introduction: Minds of the Nineties,” 17. *Xueren* is a book series published under the editorship of Chen Pingyuan, Wang Hui, and Wang Shouchang (Jiangsu: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1991–2000).

<sup>118</sup> Tang Yijie, “Some Reflections on New Confucianism in Mainland Chinese Culture of the 1990s,” tr. Gloria Davies, in Davies, ed., *Voicing Concerns*, 125.

does one become foreign?”<sup>119</sup> In the early 1990s, this question was highly relevant given that Chinese intellectuals who had left China during various periods—before or after 1949, during the reform period, or before or after 1989—left their mark on discourses in China. In addition, Chinese scholars in China and those based at universities abroad argued about who had the right to represent China. Therefore, discussions on radicalism also reflected the impact of transnational forces in the transformation of Chinese intellectual identity. This occurred due to increasing global connectivity, due to the influence of the Chinese communities outside of mainland China, and due to the growing mobility of Chinese academics, many of whom were receiving their education abroad, working at foreign universities, or spending time at foreign institutions.

Especially Taiwan and Hong Kong, as part of the economic, political, and cultural geographies of what has been referred to as “Greater China,” occupied a unique space in the intellectual exchanges of the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>120</sup> During the Cold War, Taiwan and Hong Kong served as places of refuge for those fleeing the Communist regime. However, seeking to revive Chinese culture in Taiwan and Hong Kong was challenging because they both had been under colonial rule and resident Chinese scholars had been cut off from the mainland. In addition, under the Cold War binary of capitalism versus Communism, their writings had an anti-Communist agenda.<sup>121</sup> During the reform period, however, these places became central capitalist nodes in a network of economic and cultural exchanges, which brought to the surface questions about Chinese identity. In addition, terms such as “Cultural China,” which imagined a China beyond geopolitical boundaries and inclusive of Chinese communities globally, reflected the new realities of capitalist development and the redefinition of Chineseness from the margins.

### Concepts and “Counter-Concepts”

This study centers around Chinese understandings of the terms “radicalism” and “conservatism” in the early 1990s. Despite its importance in Chinese

<sup>119</sup> Cheek, *Living with Reform*, 97.

<sup>120</sup> There is no consensus on the meaning of the term “Greater China,” but because of the connotations of expansionism, scholars such as Wang Gungwu have expressed skepticism toward the term. For different interpretations of the term, including a “weaker” definition of “Greater China” as various processes of interaction between mainland China, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and, for some, also Chinese overseas, see *China Quarterly*, no. 136, Special Issue: Greater China (December 1993).

<sup>121</sup> Tze-ki Hon, “Introduction: Confucianism for the Contemporary World,” in Tze-ki Hon and Kristin Stapleton, eds., *Confucianism for the Contemporary World: Global Order, Political Plurality, and Social Action* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017), xiii.

political and academic discourse, few studies have placed language at the center of analysis. Nevertheless, in the *Analects* we already find a connection between “rectifying names” (*zhengming*) and putting the affairs of state in order.<sup>122</sup> Paying attention to the relevance of language in political, cultural, and historical Chinese discourse, this study adopts a conceptual history approach. The merit of the approach of Reinhart Koselleck and others in their monumental work *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (Basic Historical Concepts) is that it connects the history of concepts with social and political history and treats concepts as contested constructions.<sup>123</sup> Koselleck is especially interested in notions of time under modernity and how past, present, and future relate to one another. His term of “future expectations” is particularly relevant to the 1990s and explains the paradox of historical re-evaluations that were utterly unhistorical. In other words, Koselleck’s “historico-conceptual comprehension” is suited to an analysis of the changing engagements with the past during a period of rapid transition.<sup>124</sup>

These conceptual changes reflect the broader sociostructural changes in the making of a postsocialist China amid global capitalism. It was precisely during periods of rupture that old words gained new meanings and that neologisms appeared.<sup>125</sup> The meaning of the term “conservatism,” as Wang Hui notes, changed rapidly in the environment of reform. During the late 1970s, to be “conservative” meant to support Mao Zedong, as opposed to the “reformers” who were supporters of Deng Xiaoping. Those who were dubbed “reformers” during this period, however—such as Deng Liqun and Hu Qiaomu—became “conservatives” during the 1980s. After Tiananmen, the distinction between conservatives and reformers was difficult to uphold.<sup>126</sup> A principal change, however, was that intellectuals consciously identified with the terms “conservatism” and “neoconservatism.” Conservatism could refer to a positive and healthy attitude toward gradual reform.

<sup>122</sup> See, for example, Schoenhals, *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics*, 2, where he refers to the *Analects*. Another study that pays attention to discourse in Chinese politics is David E. Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

<sup>123</sup> Otto von Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, eds., *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (Basic Historical Concepts: A Dictionary on Historical Principles of Political and Social Language in Germany) (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972–97). For an introduction to Koselleck and his works, see Niklas Olsen, *History in the Plural: An Introduction to the Work of Reinhart Koselleck* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012).

<sup>124</sup> Tribe, “Introduction,” xiv.

<sup>125</sup> Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 79. On the formation of neologisms in China, see Liu, *Translingual Practice*; Spira, *Conceptual History of Chinese -isms*.

<sup>126</sup> Wang Hui, “The New Criticism,” in Wang, ed., *One China, Many Paths*, 57–58.

Another reason why Koselleck's conceptual history is particularly useful for a study of China in the early 1990s is because of his idea of "counter-concepts" (*Gegenbegriffe*).<sup>127</sup> As Koselleck explains, counter-concepts are utilized for self-definition; those who apply counter-concepts are attempting to create unity through a reliance on simplistic dualisms. In some instances, such dualisms are unequally antithetical or asymmetric, and those who establish the dualism present their own stance in such a way that readers cannot but identify with their stance and negate the counter-concept. Moreover, those who are associated with a certain counter-concept generally do not identify with this position.

During the early 1990s radicalism functioned as a counter-concept against which the concepts of conservatism and neoconservatism (*xin baoshou zhuyi*) were projected. This is reflected in the title of the volume in which the main texts in the debate are collected, namely *Zhishi fenzi lichang: Jijin yu baoshou zhijian de dongdang* (Intellectual Positions: The Turbulence between Radicalism and Conservatism).<sup>128</sup> Instead of the triangle of liberalism, the New Left, and New Confucianism that was not yet present during the early 1990s, there was an engagement with "totalistic iconoclasm," a moderate preoccupation with socialism's negative effects, and a nativist turn.<sup>129</sup> Radicalism was one of the themes on which establishment intellectuals and humanistic intellectuals "initiated discussions separately, yet converged pragmatically."<sup>130</sup>

### Sources and Overview of the Chapters

This study relies on journal articles, official newspapers, monographs, and edited volumes published in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and the United States. The sources were obtained from the Harvard-Yenching Library, the Sinological Institute of Leiden University, the National Library in Beijing, the library of Peking University, the Humanities and Social Sciences and Chinese libraries of NTU in Singapore, and Academia Sinica in Taipei. The study also draws on a series of interviews, conducted in Beijing and Shanghai, with the main scholars involved in the debates.

<sup>127</sup> For an explanation and some examples of "counter-concepts," see Reinhart Koselleck, "The Historical-Political Semantics of Asymmetric Counterconcepts," in *Futures Past*, 155–91.

<sup>128</sup> Li Shitao, ed., *Zhishi fenzi lichang: Jijin yu baoshou zhijian de dongdang* (Intellectual Positions: The Turbulence between Radicalism and Conservatism) (Changchun: Shidai wenyi chubanshe, 1999) (hereafter cited as *ZFL*).

<sup>129</sup> See Davies, "Self-Made Maps"; Gan Yang, *Tong santong* (Unifying the Three Traditions) (Beijing: Shenghuo, dushu, xinzhi sanlian shudian, 2007); Geremie Barmé, *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

<sup>130</sup> Wang, "Introduction: Minds of the Nineties," 16–17.

Journal articles include those published in newly founded academic journals, such as the leading Hong Kong academic journal *Ershiyi shiji* and the newly founded mainland journals, such as Hainan-based *Tianya*, *Dongfang*, and *Zhanlüe yu guanli* (Strategy and Management). It also includes articles in older journals, such as *Dushu*, which was established in 1979. Some discussions were conducted in more specialist journals, such as *Zhexue yanjiu* (Philosophy Research) or *Wenxue pinglun* (Literary Review). Edited volumes in which relevant articles from the debates are collected constitute another type of primary source. Apart from the main edited volume *Zhishi fenzi lichang* referred to above, these include volumes on May Fourth published in Taiwan and Hong Kong, and collections of Chinese debates on modern Chinese history or on specialized topics, such as neo-authoritarianism or postmodernism. Finally, collections of writings by Chinese intellectuals served as relevant primary sources.

Debates on radicalism reached a peak between 1989 and 1993, so these are our central years of concern. But both the formation and outgrowth of these debates transcend this narrow time frame. Based on the major political transitions, Wang Chaohua divides the 1990s into three distinct periods, namely, the period from June 4, 1989, to the international decline of socialism (1989–91), the period beginning with Deng's Southern Tour and ending with his waning power (1992–95), and, finally, the period when Jiang Zemin was unchallenged leader (1995–2003).<sup>131</sup> This book analyzes the debates during the former two periods. Chapters 2 and 3 cover the period from 1989 to 1991 and revolve around the dominant theme of politics. The defining contexts in which these discussions took place were the repression of the Tiananmen demonstrations and the implosion of the Soviet Union. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 center on the 1992–95 debates that followed the deepening of the economic reforms in 1992. The chapters demonstrate the changes in thinking about the economic, political, cultural, and historical aspects of Chinese modernity throughout the main periods of 1989–91 and 1992–95.

Chapter 2 discusses the political theory of neoconservatism in relation to its perceived counterpart of radicalism during the 1989–91 transitional period. The chapter compares use of the theory as a “label” with two main “banners,” or advocacies, of the theory. The first advocacy is that of neoconservatism by the political theorist and historian Xiao Gongqin. The second advocacy is a 1991 policy document titled “Realistic Responses and Strategic Options for China after the Soviet Upheaval,” which has been connected to the ideas of a group of “princelings,” or the offspring of highly placed officials with vast networks in the CCP, government, or business, in response to the failed Soviet

<sup>131</sup> Wang, “Introduction: Minds of the Nineties,” 14–15.

coup of August 1991. The chapter argues that these advocacies were linked in their rejection of radicalism and in their resort to non-Marxist theories of legitimation. However, Xiao Gongqin's theory of neoconservatism was coined in relation to problems of modernization and the Tiananmen demonstrations, whereas "Realistic Responses" was drafted in response to the Soviet coup of 1991 and the crisis of socialism. Furthermore, only Xiao's theory of neoconservatism can be considered the continuation of the theory of neo-authoritarianism and, more specifically, of the version of the so-called Southern School.

Chapter 3 looks at Xiao Gongqin's theory of neoconservatism from the perspective of its rejection of radicalism in modern Chinese history. Xiao Gongqin is a central figure in this chapter because it was he who first coined the term *xin baoshou zhuyi* in the post-Tiananmen situation to refer to a theory of modernization. This historical take on neoconservatism elaborates on the argument in this chapter, namely that we need to understand it more broadly as part of the discourse on modernization in China. The chapter questions Xiao's indebtedness to Edmund Burke in his advocacy of historical continuity because it was mediated through the figure of Yan Fu (1854–1921), who is known for his flirtations with Social Darwinism. The chapter argues that in spite of Xiao's reference to the social organism and his defense of a strong state, his reading of Burke manifested elements of both Friedrich Hayek and Karl Popper. In addition, his conservatism was about preserving the past for the future. The chapter, and Xiao Gongqin in particular, forms the bridge between the political theory of neoconservatism from 1989 to 1991 and the historical and cultural debates between 1992 and 1995 that are represented in the following chapters.

Chapter 4 discusses one of the main debates on history in the early 1990s, that is, the debate on radicalism and conservatism in modern Chinese history. The main vehicle for this debate, which peaked in 1992, was the influential Hong Kong journal *Ershiyi shiji*, which is indicative of the growing interactions between intellectuals in mainland China and Chinese intellectuals in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and the United States. The chapter outlines the transformation of the latter's liberal and moral critique of mainland China, where the discussion revolved around economic reform by reference to two revolutionary models—the "realistic" Glorious Revolution versus the "utopian" French Revolution (1789–99). In the discussion, participants evaluated the merits of the Cultural Revolution and a century of change in China through the lens of Edmund Burke's criticism of the French Revolution. The chapter also discusses the broader implications of the debate by linking it to the issue of a "Cultural China" impacted by the economic rise of East Asia. After renewed economic reform, conservatism as the advocacy of a strong state gradually became replaced with a conservative liberalism or the advocacy



of partial and gradual economic reform and the idea that the market was a stabilizer.

Chapter 5 shows how the debates on radicalism were transformed after renewed economic reform in 1992 and the perceived cultural radicalism of the May Fourth Movement. The chapter looks into the formation of debates on May Fourth during the period of its seventieth anniversary and during the 1989 protest movement. It shows the entanglement of the debates on May Fourth radicalism with the reassessment of Confucianism on mainland China amid the increasing commercialization and growing moral vacuum in society. The key figure in the chapter is the philosopher Chen Lai because of his prominence in these discussions. Furthermore, he indicates that he was intellectually influenced by Tu Wei-ming, which, as shown in Chapter 3, illustrates the trajectory of Chinese thought during the reform period, making its way to mainland China through China-born scholars based in the United States. The chapter argues that advocacies of New Confucianism were no less a manifestation of the realistic revolution of the time in their attempt to demonstrate the place of Confucianism in modernization and to redefine the role of the intellectual. In this chapter, these questions are discussed through the lens of Max Weber.

Continuing the reassessment of the May Fourth Movement in Chapter 4 and the impact of commercialization on intellectual life between 1992 and 1995, Chapter 6 looks at the engagement with radicalism and neoconservatism in discussions on the literary revolution, which was part of the May Fourth Movement. The assessment of the May Fourth legacy took the form of engagement with Chinese language and modernity to raise questions about cultural identity. Amid globalization, rapid commercialization, and the Marxist crisis of faith, postmodernist theories entered the debate as part of a broader effort to rethink Chinese modernity and the Chinese knowledge model. Specifically, the chapter discusses the role of the poetess Zheng Min in the discussion, as well as her exchanges with intellectuals in China and abroad. Behind these exchanges we discover anxiety about the place and identity of Chinese intellectuals during reform. The chapter argues that post-theories became part of a conservative argument about historical continuity because both postmodernism and reflections on radicalism engaged with socialist and liberal manifestations of modernity in China. Paradoxically, post-theories also became incorporated into a modernization narrative.

Chapter 7 concludes by revisiting the theme of realistic revolution from the perspective of the three main tensions in the debates: that between radicalism as a criticism of change that was made in the service of modernization; that between the quest for a more “objective” scholarship and the continued inherent moralism; and that between the self-proclaimed “scholars” and the remaining public engagement of intellectuals. It further evaluates the

meaning and implications of the unmaking of radicalism. The debates, in spite of their limitations, questioned the merits of violent and permanent revolution, reflected a new divide among intellectuals with respect to the meaning of reform, and signified a crucial step in the transformation of Chinese academic discourse from the uncritical embrace of modernization in the 1980s to the more thorough criticism of Chinese modernity after the mid-1990s. The conclusion further engages critically with the field of Chinese intellectual history as an exercise in moral evaluation and offers some reflections on the function of history in Chinese intellectual debates. The chapter ends with a brief overview of intellectual developments after the mid-1990s and some final thoughts on the debates from the angle of developments in global intellectual history.