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THE RELATIONSHIP OF CHINESE TRADITIONAL CULTURE TO THE MODERNIZATION OF CHINA

An Introduction to the Current Discussion

Zi Zhongyun

In recent years, the question of Chinese traditional culture versus Western culture as related to the modernization of China has become a subject of heated discussion in academic circles in China. The original question which triggered the discussion was: What are the causes of China's backwardness in science and technology in modern times? Once the discussion started, it attracted strong interest among Chinese scholars in a wide range of disciplines including history, philosophy, literature, psychology, sociology, and political science, as well as the natural sciences. In a short period of time, many articles were published in a great variety of journals and periodicals, and several nationwide conferences and seminars were held at which world-famous professors in their eighties sat together with middle-aged scholars and young graduate students, all airing with equal enthusiasm their views on the subject.¹ The

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1. In October 1982, a conference was convened in Chengdu, Sichuan province, by the editorial board of the journal, *Ziran Bianzhengfa Tongxun* (Newsletter of Natural Dialectics), to discuss the question, "The Causes of China's Backwardness in Modern Science and Technology." This might be considered the first important nationwide activity on this issue. Soon after that, in December 1982, a Seminar of Scholars of Chinese Cultural History was convened in Shanghai, sponsored by Fudan University. In 1985 and 1986, two series of important lectures under the title "Comparative Study of Chinese and Western Culture" were organized by Zhongguo Wenhua Shuyuan (Study Society of Chinese Culture). Many famous scholars lectured on a variety of subjects covering the essence and history of Chinese, Indian, and Western cultures and the interflow between them. Overseas scholars such as Du Weiming, Zou Dang, Chen Guing, and others also took part in these lectures. After that, a number of conferences and activities based on the same subject were carried out in Beijing,

discussions soon developed into an overall reevaluation of the essence of Chinese traditional culture, its role in China's modernization, comparative studies of Chinese and Western culture, and a general study of the history of human civilization.

When one attempts to define "culture," one finds there may be a hundred versions and an equal number of interpretations of "Chinese traditional culture" and "Western culture." Fortunately, the discussants did not waste time on semantics. There seemed to be a tacit general understanding that "culture," in its broad sense, implies both material and spiritual civilization, including ways of life, ways of thinking, social customs, generally accepted criteria for behavior, etc., as perceived by the man in the street; and in its narrow sense, implies mainly intellectual creations such as art, literature, religion, philosophy, ethics, etc., with philosophy as its core. "Chinese traditional culture" means, in general, the culture that prevailed in China from the pre-Qin Shi Huang days until the Opium War, a culture with Confucianism at its core, mixed first with Taoism and later with Buddhism. By "Western culture" one means, in general, the main stream stemming from the European Renaissance that found its roots in ancient Greek civilization. Of course, this is a very loose concept, but it serves as an adequate basis for discussion.

The discussion started spontaneously without much organization. Different participants approached the same subject from different angles. For example, some talked in terms of ethical values, some talked in terms of ways of thinking, and some others discussed the object and contents of philosophical studies. No single focal point of debate can be identified as yet, hence the difficulty in summing up and classifying the different views expressed. Yet one can already sense the far-reaching significance of this event, which is a natural result of the in-depth development of the current reforms in China and is an integral part of the effort being made to build

Shanghai, and many other cities, sponsored usually by universities, local academies of social sciences, and journals relevant to the disciplines concerned. Articles mushroomed in magazines and journals all over the country.

For reports on part of the events see Pang Pu, "The Seething Wave of Cultural Studies," *Lilun Xinxibao* (Theory Information), March 24, 1986; Han Chen, "A Reflection on the Chinese Traditional Culture—A Summary of the First International Conference on Chinese Culture," *Guangming Ribao*, February 17, 1986; "A Summary of the National Conference on Comparative Studies of Oriental and Western Cultures," *Shanghai Social Sciences*, No. 1, 1985; "New Trends in Recent Years in the Studies of Characteristics of Chinese Traditional Philosophy," *Wenhui bao*, Shanghai, January 14, 1986; Wang He, "Traditional Culture and Modernization—Summary and Comments on the Studies of Chinese Culture in Recent Years," *Social Sciences in China*, No. 3, May 1986.

“two civilizations”—material and spiritual. This article intends to outline the discussion and comment on its significance in historical perspective.

The Essential Features of Chinese Traditional Culture

The consensus regarding the essential difference between Chinese traditional culture and Western culture is by and large the following:

In terms of the purpose of study and focus of attention, Chinese philosophy concentrates on man and man's self-reflection rather than on nature, as is the case in Western philosophy. Chinese tend to emphasize human society as opposed to the emphasis on the individual in the West. Chinese academic studies have a strong inclination to serve reality and are closely connected with political life, unlike those of the West that stem from detached observation of nature. All these account for the fact that Chinese classic academic works show far more achievement in the social sciences and humanities than in the natural sciences. Besides, what is called Chinese classic science and technology is, in fact, technology rather than science. For instance, agronomy, military science, medicine, and arts and crafts were relatively developed in ancient China, while there was almost no development of theories of pure natural science that were independent of practical application. Related to this tradition, Chinese philosophy is conspicuously marked by its “this-worldliness,” which is embodied in its respect for reason and reality and preference for moral ethics to religion. This was why China as a nation never indulged in religious fanaticism as did other nations.

In terms of methodology of thinking, dialectics developed very early in ancient China, while formal logic was comparatively weak. A system of logic with strict processes of reasoning as represented by Aristotle and Euclidean geometry was never formulated in China. The Chinese way of thinking is good at understanding the world in a comprehensive way through the study of opposites, changes, and the processes of moving. It contrasts sharply with that of western philosophers who attach great importance to detailed analysis of the objective world and who are good at deduction and reasoning.

In terms of ethical values, the core of Confucianism is “rite,” which in concept is highly hierarchical and parochial. It stresses blood ties and requires an almighty authority on top. This concept infiltrated all fields of life of the Chinese people and had far-reaching influences on the develop-

ment of Chinese history. Western values treat man as an individual, from which derives the western concept of human rights and obligations.²

Regarding the causes of the above-mentioned features, the prevailing opinion is that they had their roots in a social system that stemmed from the primitive clan society and went right up through the slave and feudal societies of China. This course of development is very different from that of ancient Greece, which entered the slave society through the overthrow of the aristocracy of the clan society by the democratic wing of the slave owners. The characteristics of the soil in which grew the Chinese traditional culture is summed up in an article as follows: clan system, agricultural society, and a closed continental geographical environment.³

There are some different opinions in the general interpretation. For instance, the term "humanistic" is used to characterize Chinese traditional culture in the sense that it is "the learning of man" and takes ethics and politics as its core, heeding nature less and lacking a theological system. This provokes much controversy over whether "humanism" is a term born of Europe's Renaissance, which has its special connotation and is wrongly applied here. There is also disagreement over whether Confucianism is for or against utilitarianism.⁴ Some argue that Confucianism should also be regarded as an influential religion in China, together with Taoism and Buddhism, because the Confucian ritual codes actually play the same role in the Chinese people's conduct as religious codes do with other peoples. Some others feel, however, that Confucianism lacks a God and an "other world," which, to them, are essentials for any religion.

There are also opinions which deny altogether the premise that Confucianism mixed with Taoism and Buddhism can be regarded as Chinese traditional culture, although these views are based on entirely different arguments. One point of view is that the ideas, sentiments, and values expressed in classic works available now should not be equated with the whole cultural system to which the authors belonged. It is highly questionable how much influence they had on the social life of their time. Philosophers and intellectuals always constitute a small minority of the population and their ideals and thinking cannot be regarded as representa-

2. These views are expressed in many analyses. A good summary is provided in Huang Weiping's "A Tentative Exploration on the Traditional Chinese Mode of Thinking," *Ji-anghaixuekan*, No.1, Wuhan, 1985.

3. Feng Tianyu, "An Analysis of the Soil on Which Grew the Chinese Ancient Culture," *Guangming Ribao*, February 16, 1986.

4. Pang Fu, "The Humanistic Spirit of the Chinese Culture (An Outline)," *Guangming Ribao*, January 1, 1986; Bai Gang, "A Controversy About 'the Humanistic Spirit of the Chinese Culture'"; and Li Ming, "Is There a 'Humanistic Spirit' in the Chinese Traditional Culture?," *Guangming Ribao*, March 3, 1986.

tive of the great majority of people at any time, even less so in ancient times when education was much less popularized. Rather, it is precisely because these ideas were not practiced in reality that scholars found it necessary to stress them. Therefore, a one-dimensional approach to traditional culture, which fails to examine in the context of practical social life at large the ideas expressed in classic written records by a small number of elite intellectuals, can be very misleading. The characteristics thus attributed to the traditional culture may not reflect a true understanding of its essence.⁵ Another argument which leads to the same conclusion is that all tradition changes with time, and that it is a question of on which "latitude of time" the axis of discussion is placed. For instance, if one puts the "latitude of time" at the year 1919, then the May 4th movement spirit should be regarded as the main spirit of Chinese traditional culture.⁶

The Role of Traditional Culture in China's Modernization

The real question lies in the reevaluation of Chinese traditional culture from the perspective of the modernization of China. Herein lie the major differences of opinion. The current often-used expressions in China are the "anti-tradition school" and "anti 'anti-tradition' school," the former indicating those who hold a more or less negative view of Chinese traditional culture and the latter those who give more credit to it. This, however, is an over-simplified classification. For on the spectrum between these two extremes, a wide variety of nuances often overlap and mix with each other. Moreover, there is a fundamental difference between the current discussion and the previous well known debates on the same subject that lasted from the 1860s through the 1920s between the conservatives on the one hand and reformists or radicals on the other. The difference is that all present day discussants agree that the key issue is how to better promote China's modernization. All agree that modernization does not include only the material aspect but also that of people's minds. Yet, one group of people feels more keenly the obstacles to the reform arising from Chinese feudalistic legacies, while the other is more worried about China losing its national identity if modernization should be wrongly regarded as equivalent to "westernization." It might be because of the underlying agreement on the need for modernization that, unlike in previous debates, diametrically opposed schools of thought have not appeared. Nevertheless, one can still

5. These points of view are expressed by Jin Kemu in his books, *On Comparative Studies of Culture* and *On Indian Culture*. A review of the two books by Zhang Ruijun entitled "Reflections on Culture" was published in *Duxhu*, December 1986.

6. Gan Yang, "Tradition, Time, and Future," *Dushu*, No.2, 1986.

discern from the views so far expressed two different tendencies, a comparatively positive attitude towards Chinese traditional culture and a more negative one. In the following exposition, the terms "positive school" and "negative school" will be employed for convenience sake with full awareness of their inadequacies and arbitrary nature.

Views of the Positive School⁷

The Chinese nation, having survived countless ups and downs, internal upheavals as well as foreign aggression, remains independent and unified and possesses the world's longest uninterrupted, integrated culture. This very fact proves that there must be strong elements in the Chinese national heritage with lasting values. For the sake of China's modernization, these elements should and can be brought into play and adapted to new conditions.

One of the fine traditions of Chinese values is the importance attached to morality and man's spiritual world. Ancient Chinese philosophers advocated a preference of "yi" (righteousness) over "li" (profit), which today would mean "public" versus "private." While the implications of "righteousness"—i.e., moral standards—may change with time, the principle of upholding righteousness is always there. In opposition to the individualism advocated by the West, the Chinese conceive of the value of a human being as realized only in his relationship with his fellow beings. This concept integrates benevolence, righteousness, tolerance, harmony, sense of duty, and contribution into a great consensus of collectivity in which the destiny of the individual is closely related to that of the society.

Unlike Christianity and Buddhism, which advocate freeing oneself from the sins or sufferings of this world and pursuing ultimate happiness in another, Chinese traditional culture takes a positive attitude toward both nature and existence and believes that a state of supreme happiness *sans souci* can be reached in this world. The Chinese do not entertain the notion that man is created by a god. This non-religious rationalist attitude was highly praised by Western philosophers of the enlightenment movement such as Voltaire. Besides, Confucianism advocates "the identification of man with the Universe," which means that man should follow the law of nature and

7. The points of view summarized below are taken in part from the following: Views expressed by Feng Youlan, Chang Dainian, Ding Shouhe, and Pang Pu under a "Special Report: Scholars Conversing by Pen," Part I, *Liaowang*, overseas edition, Feb. 10, 1986; Feng Youlan, "Kongqiu, Kongzi, How to Study Kongzi," *Tuanjiebao*, Jan. 19, 1985; Pang Pu, "The Humanistic Spirit"; Chang Dainian, "Chinese Culture and Chinese Philosophy," and Li Zehou, "On Chinese Wisdom," lectures in the "Comparative Study of Chinese and Western Culture" series.

be the master of nature. This is an optimistic attitude toward life based on the belief in the development of society.

While "rite" or "ritual system," which is the core of Confucian ethical values, does have a negative effect in suppressing individuality and upholding hierarchy, it has the merit of creating a solid base for Chinese patriotism by integrating the perfection of the individual, the family, and the state. The unification of China under one emperor since Qin-Shi-Huang and the fact that Confucianism was singled out as the ruling philosophy after the Han Dynasty, did hamper academic freedom and restrain people's thinking. However, these same factors also became the spiritual mainstay of a strong cohesive force in the Chinese nation. And it is precisely due to this cohesive force that the Chinese nation and Chinese culture were able to survive for more than two thousand years.

The ancient Chinese dialectical method of thinking, a treasure left by our ancestors, laid down a very good basis for the present thinking. The principles of *liuxing* (proceeding) and *duidai* (contradiction) already existed in the *Yi Jing* (Book of Changes). Complemented by the principle of "development" in Marxist dialectic materialism, they together form a perfect dialectical "cosmic algebra." This should be regarded as a great merit of Chinese culture.

In general, the positive school is of the opinion that there are many fine traditions in Chinese culture which, instilled with new content, can be re-invigorated and developed today and can play a positive role in the reconstruction of China. All the more so in view of the weaknesses and evils manifested by Western capitalist society, which China should seek to avoid by strengthening the good qualities of what is traditionally Chinese.

*Views of the Negative School*⁸

The main stream of traditional Chinese thinking is based on absolute imperial authority. On the one hand, the *Li Zhi* ("rule according to rite") upheld by Confucianism created a relationship of personal dependence, which in essence is one of "slave and master"; on the other hand, the "self-

8. Views expressed by Tang Ijie, Jen Jiyu, Bao Zuenxin, and Gan Yang under "Special Report: Scholars Conversing by Pen," Part II, *Liaowang*, overseas edition, Feb. 24, 1986; Bao Zuenxin, "Self-adjustment of Traditional Culture—A Challenge on the Thesis of 'Ming-Qing Renaissance,'" *Dushu*, No. 4, 1986; Chen Bohai, "A New Understanding of the Chinese Society and Culture," *Quarterly of Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences*, No. 1, 1986; Yeh Xiaoqing, "Chinese Traditional Culture in Modern Times," *Yanjiu*, No. 1, 1985; Chen Xiaoming, "Whither Go the Modes of Chinese Traditional Thinking?," *Fujian Forum*, Pages of Literature, History & Philosophy, No. 3, 1985; Yao Shuping, "A Study of the Influences of Different Cultural Values on the Development of Science by Looking at the Roads to Success of American Scientists of Chinese Origin," *Guangming Ribao*, July 17, 1985.

transcendency" of Taoism and Buddhism suppressed from within the development of individuality. Therefore, the fundamental spirit of the traditional educational political system runs counter to the spirit of modernization, which should bring into full play individual creativity, and its design for man is basically wrong.

The special pattern of Chinese scholarship formulated more than two thousand years ago lacked at its very origin the tradition that existed in ancient Greece of studying the philosophy and science of nature. Throughout these two millenia, the theoretical study of natural sciences was heavily suppressed and shunned in favor of the study of Confucian classics. While the royal examination system appeared to be offering equal opportunities, it succeeded in attaching by enticement and coercion generations of fine intellectuals to lifelong studies of Confucian classics, which basically contributed very little to the furtherance of knowledge and the transformation of nature. Confucianism is by nature extremely conservative and resistant to change, and its legacy, if not broken, will make all new types of scientific scholarship impossible.

One discussant calls Chinese culture before the May 4th Movement of 1919 "pre-modern culture" as distinguished from the "modern culture" already in place in certain developed countries and "post-modern culture," which is the concern of certain Western scholars at present. According to him, the values put forward by "pre-modern culture" are based on the "first stage of human relationship," i.e., blood ties and kinship, whereas "modern culture" is based on the "second stage of human relationship," i.e., working relationship, legal relationship, etc. The former is called an "ethic system" and the latter a "knowledge system." Modernization requires a turn from "rule by man" to "rule by law." Major social changes are inevitably accompanied by major cultural changes whether one likes it or not. Precisely because the "pre-modern" culture of China was so perfectly developed, the process of modernization of the Chinese nation has to be more painful than that of other nations. Here one needs to take a detached approach rather than a sentimental one, and the question of who is superior to whom is irrelevant.⁹

Some scholars further point out that in the past—e.g., in the Tang Dynasty—China could easily absorb, transform, or reject foreign cultures in a selective way while still maintaining its traditional essence. This was because the Chinese agricultural society and clan system had not exhausted their vitality and were still able to develop. Moreover, Chinese society then was more advanced than most of the societies in which the foreign

9. This point of view is especially held by Gan Yang, *Liaowang*, overseas edition, Feb. 24, 1986.

cultures originated. But the situation after the Opium War was reversed. Therefore, the new culture enhanced by the May 4th Movement was based entirely on new concepts imported from abroad such as "democracy," "rule by law," "social evolution," and even "class struggle." It was not by any means an extension of the old Confucian concepts augmented by some foreign ideas.

The lofty moral values and humanistic spirit mentioned by the "positive school" only existed in the ideals pursued by a few philosophers and intellectual elites and not in the sustained practice of the Chinese people at large. Moreover, these ideals were bound to remain a chimera during the two thousand years when the docility of the people was regarded as the law of heaven. Therefore, according to this argument, these high moral values cannot be regarded as the essence of Chinese traditional culture.

The once quite popular thesis among Chinese historians that sprouts of capitalism started to show in the late Ming Dynasty at the beginning of the 17th century, is also challenged by the negative school. So is the assertion that there was a period of enlightenment more or less similar to the European Renaissance marked by a trend of incisive criticism of authoritarianism by great scholars of that period. The proponents of this school argue that it was impossible for capitalism to grow in China's closed feudal system and that the mere development of trade cannot be taken as a sign of capitalism. Furthermore, conditions were simply not ready for capitalism in 17th century China. Culturally, according to these arguments, Confucianism by nature is unable to renovate itself through self-criticism, and the scholars of the critical school of the 17th century did not aim at developing science or emancipating people's minds. On the contrary, they wanted to reorient the society, which they thought had deviated from the orbit of feudal ethics, to the norms of the classic interpretation of Confucianism.

In terms of methodology of thinking, the ancient Chinese dialectic has an intuitive, empiric, and speculative character. It tends to use in a simplified way the law of "unity of opposites" and to treat matters abstractly without a thoroughgoing study of the specific contradictions of the objective world. Therefore, it is entirely different from modern dialectics (which is based on fully developed formal logic) and is apt to serve as "a bridge to sophistry."

In conclusion, according to this school, since Chinese traditional culture was a flower that bloomed on the soil of the ancient aristocratic clan system of an agricultural society, it cannot survive alone when that society has come to a historic end. Therefore, with all its glory, beauty, and great contribution to human civilization in the past, it has become, on balance, a

burden for China today as the country marches on to a modern society. Instead of inheriting it, modern China should break away from it. What should be inherited today is the new culture advocated by the May 4th Movement.

As was mentioned at the beginning of this section, the classification of views into two schools is rather arbitrary. Most discussants do not go to either extreme. There is a general realization that whether one regards it as a treasure or a burden, a national traditional culture that has lasted for several thousands of years cannot be just thrown away, nor is it possible or desirable to keep it intact. Nobody any longer advocates "complete westernization" or "complete restoration." The question is how to create a new culture which is at the same time modern and Chinese. The only way seems to be to take an analytical attitude towards both the Chinese and the Western cultures. The experience of *zhong ti xi yong* (Chinese learning as essential principle and Western learning as practical application) has been proven by history to be a failure. Some scholars today venture to turn the *ti* (essential principle) and *yong* (practical application) the other way around and make it *xi ti zhong yong* (Western learning as essential principle and Chinese learning as practical application). Western learning here is interpreted to imply modern material civilization, modern methods of scientific management, etc., including Marxism which was also introduced from the West. This formula calls for the application of all these things in combination with specific Chinese conditions. The example of Japan is cited in this context to show that the successful running of enterprises in Japan is due first and foremost to the strictly scientific modern method of management which came from the West and that such Asian ethics as "treat your factory like your family," etc., can only be applied on this basis. Here, scientific management is *ti* and the concept of family ethics is *yong*. In this sense, the Japanese experience can also be called *xi ti zhong yong*. It would be inconceivable to reverse the two and make family ethics the essential principle for running a modern factory.¹⁰

Another scholar suggests the term "mutual infiltration," that is, instead of replacing one with the other, Chinese traditional culture and Western culture should mutually absorb each other's merits to make up for each

10. Li Zehou advocates *xi ti zhong yong* in his book, *Zhongguo Gudai Sixiangshi* (Intellectual History of Ancient China), and also in his articles, "Some Remarks on the Chinese Intellectual History," *Fudanxuebao*, No. 5, 1985, and "Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism," *Liaowang*, overseas edition, Feb. 20, 1986. The example of Japan in this context is cited in Chen Bohai's article, "A New Understanding."

one's shortcomings.¹¹ So far, very little has been said about this aspect of the question as compared with the extensive discussion on the analysis and evaluation of Chinese traditional culture. Much is left for further exploration.

Historical Background of the Current Discussion

The debate over Chinese and Western cultures is a century-old one among Chinese intellectuals. It started in the mid-19th century after China's doors were blown open by the guns of Western powers and the Chinese suddenly awakened from the euphoria of a supreme kingdom to the stark reality of a backward and weak China. The debate reached its height by the time of the May 4th Movement, from 1916 to the 1920s. In this sense, the current discussion seems to be picking up the threads of the old debate after an interruption of several decades. The process of the past ten years bears certain similarities to what happened in modern history. When China's doors were opened after years of seclusion—partly imposed by outside forces, partly self-inflicted—the Chinese people painfully realized that the once-narrowed gap between China and the advanced countries in the world had again widened considerably. The first reaction to this was an urgent sense of necessity to import advanced science and technology from the West to help China's modernization. Then, people gradually realized that this was not enough and that modernization required a whole series of reforms in management, the judiciary, education, etc. When reforms in these fields with all their complexities developed to new heights, they inevitably entered the intellectual and ethical domains, hence rose again the question of comparison between the advantages and disadvantages of Chinese and Western cultures, and of positive or negative influences of national traditions on China's modernization. Once more, people found themselves talking about *ti* and *yong*.

However, those are only similarities on the surface. It is not true that the course of thinking in the past ten years is simply a condensed version of what happened over the last century, for this time the discussion represents a new searching under new historical conditions. The starting point is much higher than that of the past and the aspects involved much broader. Above all, the current discussion takes place against the background of China's endeavor to build socialism with Chinese characteristics, and is also a reflection of the deep ongoing reforms carried out on an

11. Zhou Gucheng, "The Interflow and Merge Between Chinese and Western Culture," *Renmin Ribao*, March 14, 1986.

unprecedented scale among a billion people. Among others, the following points stand out as special features of the present time as compared with the past:

First, the debate over the old and new cultures before and at the time of the May 4th Movement was prompted, and soon after interrupted, by the then national crisis due to both internal and external causes. Under the circumstances of internecine wars among warlords and invasion by foreign enemies, the question of culture gave way to preoccupation with national salvation and revolution. Many intellectuals either joined the resistance army or went out to mobilize the masses of people, and they had no time for continuing the debate over cultural questions. Besides, Marxism was introduced into China and exercised tremendous influence on intellectuals. Integrated with China's specific conditions, it gave birth to Mao Zedong Thought, which guided China's new democratic revolution to victory. The program of New Democracy was thoroughly anti-feudalistic and anti-imperialistic. Indeed, for the first time in history, the slogan "opposition to the authority of the clan system" was put forward. Actually, both in the revolutionary base areas before 1949 and on the Chinese mainland as a whole during a period after 1949, Chinese society, built on the old clan system that had lasted for several thousand years, was shaken up more forcefully than ever before and the old traditional concepts, ideologies, customs, as well as ethics were to a large extent replaced by new ones. For a certain time, therefore, it was considered that the question of relationship between traditional and alien cultures was solved by the integration of Marxism with China's specific conditions.

However, during the reconstruction of the New China the application of Marxism, having made certain achievements in the early days, did not produce satisfactory results. In some cases Marxist principles were greatly distorted. For instance, the basic Marxist theory that there must be a suitable relationship between production and the level of development of the productive force went unheeded, replaced by wishful thinking that the higher the level of public ownership the better for the development of the productive force. In some other cases, a rigid dogmatic attitude was taken towards certain specific conclusions reached by Marx or Engels according to conditions in Europe a hundred years ago. The pattern of building socialism in the Soviet Union was copied mechanically. All this naturally led to serious setbacks in China's construction. Confronted with the particular problems arising from specific Chinese conditions in the 1980s, the Chinese keenly felt the necessity of restudying and reinterpreting Marxism as well as making new theoretical breakthroughs. Since there are no ready answers to these complex questions, the Chinese people will have to reach

their own conclusions by summing up experiences of present practices and also by resorting to the existing treasure of knowledge left to them both by their ancestors and mankind as a whole.

Second, in the decade from the mid-1960s to mid-1970s, a catastrophic storm called the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution raged over the Chinese mainland. It denied all cultural heritage, national and foreign, old and new, including revolutionary traditions. Ironically, under the most revolutionary slogans such as "opposition to restoration," "sweeping away the four olds" (old ideas, customs, habits and culture), the most backward, conservative, and decadent elements in Chinese tradition were revived. So were some of the unhealthy popular customs that had been reformed after the revolution. One witnessed autarchy on the one hand and anarchism on the other; strict hierarchy on the one hand and absolute egalitarianism on the other; actual obscurantism in the name of repudiating the old culture; practice of the supremacy of blood relationship in the name of class relationship; a return to the policy of self-seclusion and indiscriminate rejection of everything foreign in the name of patriotism. Yet, as fortune rises out of disaster, the Chinese nation as a whole emerged from this chaos and absurdity much more mature and more conscious of the necessity of reform. This consciousness and strong desire deeply rooted in the personal experiences of a billion people constitute the most powerful motivation and surest guarantee for China's persistence in today's reform. On the other hand, looking back on those crazy years now that the storm is over, people begin to ask how it is that a trend of thought so obviously absurd today could have grasped such broad masses of people for so long and carried such great, albeit destructive power. In addition to the mistakes made at the top and the disturbances stirred up by a group of careerists, there must have been something that prepared the soil for its growth. Although the Cultural Revolution is often qualified as "unprecedented in history," its roots can be found in some of the psychological elements accumulated through thousands of years in the minds of Chinese people. All this evokes deep meditation.

Third, politically China is now completely independent and is master of its own destiny. Its historic mission today is to strive for development and prosperity as distinguished from the past struggle for independence and survival. If its door was blown open by imperialist guns in the 19th century, this time it is opened voluntarily. While previously only a minority of upper class elites and intellectuals had access to Western culture, today people of an unprecedentedly broad social strata are exposed to it. Under these circumstances the two cultures, in the broad sense of the word, encounter each other on surfaces larger than ever before, and painful fric-

tions and clashes are bound to happen along with happy exchanges. All of a sudden, all kinds of foreign things, material and intellectual, good and evil, come rushing in at the same time. How are the Chinese going to deal with them and, more importantly, deal with themselves? What should be the relationship between the traditional Chinese culture, the Western culture, and the modern culture that China intends to create? These are the questions that exist consciously or unconsciously in the practices of millions of people every day. Intellectuals, who are by nature highly sensitive, reflect upon them and search for answers. Now that China is no longer in the humiliating position of the past and is reasserting itself as an equal member in the world community of nations, the Chinese are more able to approach this question with a cool, scientific, and objective attitude, free from a national inferiority complex mixed with undue pride. Participants in the current discussion, therefore, can deal with different schools, ancient and modern, Chinese and foreign, more open-mindedly and dispassionately.

Fourth, China finds itself in a world where a scientific and technological revolution is proceeding at an unprecedented pace. The earth has shrunk considerably and men have reached the moon. The present situation is one of both intense rivalry and close interdependence among nations and regions of the world. All Chinese with vision realize that this represents both a serious challenge and a rare opportunity for the Chinese nation. The present challenge is different from that faced by China in the past in that there is no threat of loss of territory or paying war indemnities, nor the danger of subjugation by foreign powers. Yet, this challenge will exert far-reaching influence on the future of China as a nation, and the kind of response that China is able to make to it will determine the rise or decline of the nation. The question confronting every Chinese is: will the Chinese fall again into the status of second class citizens in the world community or will they once more make brilliant contributions to human civilization worthy of a great nation? It is instructive that the discussion outlined in this article originates from the question: what are the causes of China's backwardness in science and technology in modern history?

A Reflection on Culture, Specifically Chinese

The Chinese are not the only people who have engaged in reflective thinking about their own culture. Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* appeared in 1918–1920, about the same period as the May 4th Movement in China. These volumes constitute one of the early considerations of culture in the West. Since the end of World War II the problems appearing

in highly developed capitalist societies have produced a great variety of trends of thought, ranging from old-fashioned conservatism to "counter-culture." Some Westerners, disillusioned with their own civilization, turned toward Asian philosophies, hence the interest in studies of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Islamic and Hindu religions. However, cultural reflection in China bears special Chinese features that are different from those of the West and, in a way, are also an expression of certain aspects of the Chinese intellectual tradition. These features are to be found in both the "positive school" and the "negative school." The following are some of them:

Strong goal orientation and close connection with reality. Throughout the discussion, all views expressed are relevant to the question of China's modernization. This is very characteristic of Chinese intellectual tradition, marked by its "this-worldliness" and attaching importance to serving reality. The discussion itself also continues the age-old tradition of Chinese intellectuals who have always been deeply concerned with the destiny of their country and their people. They are not individualistically seeking something to fill their own intellectual void, nor do they indulge in the luxury of "culture for culture's sake." Rather they approach the discussion with a deep sense of historical mission—the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Historical optimism. This permeates all the views expressed, whether they stress the inferiority or superiority of Chinese culture compared to Western culture. While there is a keen realization of China's backwardness, there is no feeling of decline. There are virtually no pessimistic points of view or sentiments, but rather a great deal of confidence in the Chinese nation and mankind at large. To a certain degree, this spirit is also inherited from ancient Chinese philosophers. But today there is something new, and that is the confidence built on the basis of extremely rich experience, both positive and negative, accumulated by the Chinese people through the ups and downs in modern and contemporary history.

An endeavor to seek national identification. In its broad sense the current discussion represents the endeavor of a great nation of a billion people seeking self-identification under new conditions. It takes the form of reviewing the past, summing up the history of thousands of years and analyzing the gains and losses in the past in order to define the road to the future and reidentify China's place in world culture. Whatever the difference of views, the object around which the discussion takes place is a particular national culture with its own independent system. The search itself

reflects the fact that China is a big nation with a long history. The case of a smaller nation with a shorter history would be very different.

In conclusion, the current discussion embodies both the spirit of the May 4th Movement and the spirit particular to our times. It is related to the cultures of the world and yet bears striking features particular to the Chinese nation. As the discussion is only in its initial stage, understandably it has not reached the depth expected of it, and many fields have not yet been touched. Relatively speaking, the question of "what" (i.e., the characteristics of Chinese and Western cultures) has been explored more extensively than the question of "how," which of course is a much more difficult question. It remains to be seen whether the present differing points of view will develop into more clear-cut schools of thought or, on the contrary, move toward a point of convergence. So far, the discussion is a purely intellectual event of nonpolitical character. While it is a result and a reflection of the in-depth development of the current reform in China, it has not yet influenced in an immediate way either policy-making or the masses of people. However, in the long run it will certainly bring to bear far reaching influence on China's road to modernization in general and the building up of moral civilization in particular.

It is noteworthy that the same subject has been chosen for research by Chinese scholars in Taiwan and Hong Kong, as well as overseas. Remarkable achievements in this field have been made by some of them—Mou Zongsan, Du Weiming, Tang Junyi, Yu Yingshi, Ying Haiguang, Ling Yusheng, Xu Fuguan, Chen Guying, Bo Yang, and Li Ao, to cite a few names. Despite obvious differences, there are many similarities between their works and those on the mainland in the questions asked, the angle of approach, and even some of the arguments of "negative" and "positive" points of view. This is by no means accidental and reflects the underlying strength of a common Chinese culture and the fact that the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is a subject of common concern to Chinese scholars, both on the mainland of China and elsewhere. Ever closer exchanges between scholars on the mainland and elsewhere on this topic are taking place, and an increasing number of works of the above mentioned scholars are being republished or reviewed on the mainland.

Parallel to and a part of these discussions is a big surge of interest in modern Western schools of thoughts. The names of Max Weber, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Jean Paul Sartre, and others have become quite popular in certain circles of young people. A whole series of works by modern and contemporary authors is being translated, published, and extensively referred to in China. This is both a result of China's opening

up to the outside world and a conscious effort by Chinese intellectuals to further promote this opening up in the cultural field.¹²

Understandably, the creation of a new modern Chinese culture has been the long cherished ideal of all Chinese intellectuals. The present contention between a hundred schools of thought and the continuous and sometimes painful absorption and rejection of both traditional and foreign culture, will certainly contribute positively to this great, long-range endeavor.

12. One of the important events in this context is a large-scale project initiated by a group of young scholars associated with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Beijing University. The project includes a series of publications under the general title, *Culture: China and the World*, which contains compilations of selected works written on the subject by both Chinese and foreign scholars and the translations of a whole series of classic and contemporary works from all over the world. See *Guangming Ribao*, December, 1986.