Features

Historical Memories of May Fourth: Patriotism, but of what kind?

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The following essay by Xu Jilin, a leading Shanghai-based intellectual historian of modern China, was written to commemorate the ninetieth anniversary of the May Fourth demonstrations of 1919. The original Chinese text will appear in the May 2009 issue of the Beijing journal Reading (Dushu 读书). With the author's kind permission we offer a translation of that essay in advance of its publication in Chinese.

In a mood of sombre reflection, Xu considers the original significance and historical resonances of a demonstration, and an era, that enjoy iconic status in China's political, social and cultural life. In particular, the author reminds readers of the views of some of the key historical figures involved with that original demonstration and how vastly they differ from contemporary interpretations of the past.

Xu Jilin's meditation is in stark contrast to the populist intellectual promotion of a kind of patriotism that featured in particular during the global Chinese protests of March-April 2008. Such sloganising nationalism has been celebrated by outspoken intellectual patriots like Gan Yang as marking what he calls the '19 April Movement', a new form of anti-American Chinese 'worldism', the significance of which he avers is more important that of the original May Fourth.

The Global Financial Crisis has put wind in the sails of Chinese intellectual patriots. See my essay 'China's Flat Earth: History and 8 August 2008', The China Quarterly, 197, March 2009, pp.1-23; and, Gan Yang, 'Dakai guomen, fang tamen jinlai' (Open the nation's door and let them come in), 21 Shiji jingji daobao (21st Century Economic Herald) , 29 April 2008, online at: http://www.douban.com/group/topic/3051862/; as well as Gan Yang's more recent 'Cong diyici sixiang jiefang, dao di'er ci sixiang jiefang' (From the first liberation of thought to a second liberation of thinking), 21st Century Economic Herald, 27 December 2008, also online at: http://www.21cbh.com/HTML/2008/12/29/HTML_B6C0648HH5A0.html. Similar effusions can readily be found on the Chinese-language Internet in essays and blogs.

For Xu Jilin's 1989 observations on earlier commemorations of the May Fourth, see 'The May Fourth Spirit, Now and Then', also in the Features section of this issue.—The Editor

With the growth of China's economy, patriotism has flourished across this ancient country's vast terrain to become a powerful and widespread ideology. In textbooks and in the mainstream media, the May Fourth Movement of ninety years ago has likewise settled into a collective nation-loving memory. And yet, returning to the archive, one begins to overhear a variety of other voices.

Distant Echoes

This is what Fu Sinian 博斯年, the student marshal of the May Fourth demonstrations, for instance, had to say not long after the events of 1919:

Were you to say that this May Fourth Movement was simply a patriotic movement, I would find that I could not agree at all. The reason that I place so much importance on this movement is rather because its starting point was a moment of direct action and because it became a movement that summoned forth a sense of public responsibility.[1]

On the first anniversary of the event, another student leader, Luo Jialun 羅家倫, the man who had drafted the 'Manifesto of All the Students of Beijing' (Beijing xuejie quanti xuanyan) concluded:

When the 'May Fourth Movement' was at its most intense, amidst the cacophony of shouts of 'patriotism' and 'traitor', I for my part reflected that the true spirit of our 'May Fourth Movement' was actually somewhere else entirely.[2]

To Luo's mind, that spirit is one best represented by phrases such as: 'the spirit of sacrifice on the part of the students', the 'spirit of social sanctions', and the 'spirit of mass consciousness'.

Even Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀, the man eventually lauded by Mao Zedong as the supreme commander of the May Fourth Movement, held views that are broadly similar to those cited above. He believed that, although the May Fourth Movement was indeed a patriotic movement for national salvation, it differed from previous patriotic movements

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in that it was unique in spirit and was, besides, an instance of both 'direct action' and of the 'spirit of sacrifice'.[3] Is this unexpected difference of understanding over the extent to which the May Fourth Movement was a patriotic movement simply an example of an insight vouchsafed us by hindsight?

Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism

In Hao Chang’s analysis, the May Fourth Movement embodied two complicated and divergent tendencies: that of a nationalistic fervour (minzuzhuoyide guanhuai 民族主義的情懷) and a spirit of cosmopolitanism (shijiezhuyide jingshen 世界主義的精神). These tendencies were bound together in a complex and paradoxical relationship.[4] If, on the surface, the May Fourth Movement was expressive of a patriotic spirit, precisely what kind of patriotism was involved? What was the relationship between this patriotism and the cosmopolitanism inspired by the New Culture Movement [of 1915 and after]? In order to answer such questions, perhaps we should return to the historical arena of that time and examine carefully the trends of modern Chinese thought and prevailing historical discourses.

In traditional Chinese thought there was no modern concept of the nation-state (minzu guojia 民族國家), only of dynasty (wangchao 王朝) and of All-Under-Heaven (tianxia 天下). A consciousness of the nation-state arose only during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, once China had been forced into a competitive world order in which the law of the jungle prevailed and the weak, invariably, fell prey to the strong. Janus-like, the modern nation faced in two directions, inwards and outwards: internally, it faced the individual and the citizenry (guomin 國民), whilst externally it faced the world. What is of particular significance here is that, in modern China, the concepts of the nation and of the individual, of the nation and of the world, had arisen at one and the same time.

The late-Qing dynasty concept of nation was essentially that of the nation as organism. Although individualism (represented in the Anglo-American context by Herbert Spencer) and collectivism (typified within continental European thinking by Rousseau and Johann K. Bluntschli) differed in the emphasis they placed on, respectively, the individual and the collective, both ideologies understood the relationship between the individual and the nation to be the tightly-bound one of the parts to the whole. Of even greater influence on the contemporary concept of the nation than ideas received from the West, however, was the impact of modern Japanese thought. According to the Japanese intellectual historian Matsumoto Sannosuke 松本之介, the prevailing national spirit of Meiji Japan was expressive of the ‘emphasis given to the integration of the individual and the nation’. Although the spirit of the Meiji era did make a contradiction between a ‘top downwards nationalism (guojiazhuyi 國家主義)’ at the heart of which stood the nation and a ‘bottom upwards nationalism’ that took the citizens as its core, both concepts understood the citizen and the nation to be inseparable, constituting a whole characterized by a high degree of integration.

Alike in the extent to which they were influenced by the spirit of the Meiji Reformation, both the reformers such as Liang Qichao 梁啟超 and the revolutionaries of the CITIZENS’ GAZETTE (Guomin bao 國民報) and the Peoplesh Report (Minbao 民報) regarded the nation as a living organism, the nation and the citizens as being two sides of the same coin.

Cosmopolitanism

As articulated by both Liang Qichao and Yang Du 楊度, this late-Qing concept of nation was also that of a ‘cosmopolitan nation’ (shijieguojia 世界的國家). The world, as understood by modern Chinese, was no longer the universe of the Confucian moral order with its Mandate of Heaven (tian Dao 天道), its Way of Heaven (tiandao 天道), and its Principles of Heaven (tianti 神聖). It was rather a world unfamiliar to Chinese and which had power at its core, a materialist world that operated according to the principles of the struggle for existence. Darwin’s theory of evolution had provided the overall blueprint of this cruel new world: survival of the fittest by means of natural selection. It was in such an intellectual amebience that the modern Chinese concept of the nation-state was born. Whereas tradition had been expressive of a number of traditional Confucian ideals of humanity, of benevolence, of propriety and of wisdom wherein the criterion for evaluative judgment was the extent to which the ruling dynasty maintained their legitimacy, the supreme law controlling the modern world was that of a struggle for existence that was devoid of either value or ideals. It was understood as being a world underpinned by the universal truths of modernity. To the extent to which China wished to strengthen itself, then it would first need to rid itself of those traditional utopian ideals of the universality of All-Under-Heaven and become a ‘nation within the world’, a modern nation-state adapted to an international order based on power. In such perilous dog-eat-dog circumstances, the late-Qing period witnessed a paroxysm of nationalism, of patriotism, and of education for military citizenship (jun guomin jiaoyu 軍國民教育). The period between 1895 to the early years of the Republic proved to be an age of extreme jingoism.

Changes, however, took place within the intellectual world during the early decades of the Republic. Several decades of jingoism had contributed to the establishment of the Republic of China, yes, but this polity certainly was not the ideal as envisaged by the intellectuals of the time. The individual had been sacrificed at the alter of the nation, only to be rewarded with a Yuan Shikai intent on proclaiming himself emperor and who had signed, in secret, the Twenty-one Demands with Japan. The first person to raise doubts about patriotism was Chen Duxiu, in an article entitled ‘Patriotism and Self-Consciousness’ (Aiguxin yu zijuexin 愛國心與自覺心) published in The Tiger Magazine (Jiaxin zazhi 甲寅雜誌). In this article, Chen distinguished between a Chinese brand of patriotism and that to be found in Europe and America: whereas Chinese regarded the nation as akin to the Altars of the Land and of Grain (sheji 社稷) and patriotism as analogous to loyalty to the sovereign, Europeans and Americans saw the nation as the guarantor of the peoples’ rights, as a collective entity devoted to the pursuit of their welfare. ‘The nation’, Chen Duxiu declaimed, ‘is that which protects the rights of the people and...
which devotes itself to their wellbeing. The continued existence of a nation that does not devote itself to such
tasks is without glory, its death occasions no regret…. Appropriately it is, then, to love a nation that safeguards its
people—nothing is to be gained from loving a nation that mistreats its people’ [7] The article provoked a storm.
Zhang Shizhao 蔣士對, for his part, declared: ‘Chen Duxiu alone is our “Rooster of Runan” (Runan chenji 汝南驚 響), the first to raise the alarm’,[8] but readers’ letters flooded in accusing Chen of being a madman who
‘misunderstands patriotism’. However, before long the news of Yuan Shikai’s betrayal leaked out, and public
opinion began to shift and there was a baleful realized that Chen had been prescient in his warnings about the
perils of blind patriotism. Even Liang Qichao, that most powerful advocate of nationalism during the late-Qing
and early Republican periods, admitted the error of his beliefs in ‘Confessions Painfully Arrived At’ (Tongding
zuoyan 真定罪言), wherein he examined the bitter suffering resulting from blind nationalism:

The present government encourages the people to love their country but how is this different from
others? The people will say: If the nation is to be loved then the authorities should be the ones
who initiate such love. Whether or not the authorities start the present age share the weal and woe
of the nation with the people is a moot point, but nonetheless they point an accusing finger at the
people. How are we to know, however, whether our people lack patriotism or that the authorities
are exploiting patriotism for their selfish ends?[9]

Individualism

In contrast to the fanaticism of the late-Qing and early Republican periods, from 1915 onward, as a result of the
New Culture Movement, an age of individualism unfolded. Although the concept of the individual freighted with
modern connotations was born along with that of the nation during the last years of the Qing dynasty, the late-
Qing conceptualization of the individual was more, it implied that a citizen’s identity merged with that of the
nation. By the time of the New Culture Movement, however, a concept of the individual in contradiction to the
nation—even at odds with it—appeared. And the moment that the interests of the individual and the nation
diverged, with the former becoming a notion of a separate, self-aware entity with its own internally generated
sense of importance, the idea of the nation as an organism lost its basis for existence. If the citizens and the
nation were no longer part of an indivisible organism, then the relationship between the two became one of
ends and means. The nation was no longer a supernatural entity, imbued with sacred or heavenly-given
properties, nor was it the historical product of a natural process of evolution; the nation was simply a man-made
structure, a tool established in order to protect individual freedoms and innate human rights. This utilitarian view
of the nation as tool became extremely prevalent during the period of the New Culture Movement and, in turn,
attributed the new mainstream concept of the nation.

Nation as Tool

During the May Fourth era, the concept of nation as a utilitarian tool continued to garner support, none more so than from those who idealised the nation, or the nihilists. Anarchism was the most prominent ideology of the time, believed in not only by anarchists such as Wu Zhuhui 吳稚暉, Li Shizeng 李石曾 and Liu Shipei 劉時培, but also profoundly influencing the thinking of men such as Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培, Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi 胡適 and Fu Sinian. To a greater or lesser extent, an anarchist-influenced contempt for the nation coloured the thinking of all the intellectuals of the
Enlightenment era. Chen Duxiu, for instance, called upon people to destroy all human idols, claiming (with contempt) that the nation was nothing but an idol designed with
the purpose of fooling the people and quite without any substantive functions of its own. Were one to remove the people from the equation, the nation would be nothing
more than a particular territory. Fu Sinian was even more blunt:

I recognize the authenticity only of, in general terms, humanity, and, in lesser
terms, the 'self', and all the distinctions of class, clan, locale, or nation that
stand between this 'self' and humanity are but idols. For the sake of humanity,
we need to foster our 'true selves'.[10]

Remarkably, Fu Sinian, this marshal of the May Fourth Movement and a leader of the students’ patriotic movement, believing as he did only in humanity and the self,
regarded the nation as simply a vainglorious idol. This is a stance inconceivable in
terms of our usual understanding of the nature of patriotism today. But such a view
was not merely the province of Fu Sinian, for his argument was later cited by Zhou
Zuoren 周作人, in the course of a famous lecture, a record of which was widely
circulated at the time.[11]

The Dangers of Nationalism

May Fourth was not simply a patriotic movement; its particular brand of patriotism was
underpinned by the ideal of cosmopolitanism. During the late Qing dynasty, along with
nationalism, a view of the salvation of the nation through industry and commerce had
also developed, the two combining to produce the Gold-and-Ironism (金鐵主義)
advocated by Yang Du as a means to enrich the people and strengthen the nation.[12]
And yet, the violence and suffering of WWI shocked Chinese intellectuals out of their
materialistic and nationalistic illusions. During a lecture tour of Europe at the end of the
war, when Liang Qichao discovered that former lands of plenty had been laid to waste,
he was moved to exclaim: ‘The material progress of the past 100 years is several
times greater than that of the preceding 3000 years, but far from having achieved our
own well-being, humanity has actually brought catastrophe after catastrophe upon
itself’. [13]

Confronted with such perilous circumstances, China could not but become nationalist, but nationalism was a
Yet, with the war in Europe only recently concluded and the various powers intent upon the expansion of their interests, would not the rejection of nationalism and adoption of cosmopolitanism in its place have appeared both quixotic and naïve? As cosmopolitan ideas flooded into China during the May Fourth era, many intellectuals raised precisely such doubts. Liang Qichao admitted: ‘We must recognise that it is as yet too early to hope for the Grand Unity of the world, and that for the moment the nation will not be eradicated’. At the same time, he altered the late-Qing slogan of ‘cosmopolitan nationalism’ (shijie guojia zhuyi) to read ‘nation committed to cosmopolitanism’ (shijiezhuyide guojia) in the hope of finding a way to combine nationalism and cosmopolitanism. This new type of nationalism differed from the patriotism of the past that had placed the nation-state on a pedestal:

Our patriotism is neither one of the nation without the individual, nor of the nation without the world. While we place ourselves under the protection of a specific nation, we should hope that the natural-given talents of every individual in the nation can be realised so that they can make the greatest possible contribution to the betterment of global civilisation.

For Chinese intellectuals, cosmopolitanism implied the ideal of the Grand Unity of the world, an ideal that stood in a direct genealogical relationship with traditional Confucian ideals of universalism, but which now acquired the modern guise lent it by a kind of mutual aid theory of evolution. When, during the late Qing, Liang Qichao had advocated for the creation of a ‘cosmopolitan nation’, he had been influenced by the theory of the ‘Three Ages of the Gongyang Commentary to the Spring and Autumn Annals’ (Gongyang san shi 公羊三世) and had continued to hold that the Grand Unity of the world represented the highest realm to be reached by mankind sometime in the future. He had also maintained that:

Cosmopolitanism pertains to the realm of the ideal, nationalism to the realm of the actual. Cosmopolitanism belongs to the future, nationalism to the present. Today, China’s very existence is precarious and it is not the time for us to speak of the future or of ideals. This is why I no longer dare speak in the way I did previously in the Journal of Disinterested Discussion (Qingyi bao 清議報) for to do so is commit the crime of harming the nation.

The deployment of cosmopolitanism was a clever move, but it did not accord with the needs of a contemporary world that worked according to the principle of the survival of the fittest, thus the necessity for the ‘cosmopolitan nation’. Yang Du held similar views, maintaining that his ‘Gold-and-Ironism’, equally, was a form of ‘cosmopolitan nationalism’.

As soon as the war in Europe had revealed the hypocrisy of ‘cosmopolitan nationalism’, Chinese intellectuals, susceptible as they were to Confucian ideals of the Grand Unity of the world, hurried to change their way of thinking, moving from ‘cosmopolitan nationalism’ towards a ‘nation committed to cosmopolitanism’. However similar the words ‘cosmopolitan’ and ‘cosmopolitanism’ might appear, their significance was very different. ‘Cosmopolitan’ connoted a world as jungle which worked to the principles of the struggle for existence and dog-eat-dog, whereas ‘cosmopolitanism’ referred to an ideal that implied a world of Grand Unity and mutual aid for all mankind. ‘Cosmopolitan’ was a physical entity, without either value or morality; ‘cosmopolitanism’, by contrast, was an humanistic and evaluative orientation underpinned by universal properties and the rule of justice.

May Fourth Patriotism

This then was the patriotism of the May Fourth era, a patriotism that was at once both steadfast in its defence of the priority of the individual but which also strived for the betterment of civilisation. Both the individual and mankind were things of real substance; as an intermediary, as a necessary tactic and tool of the era of the struggle between the various powers, the nation acquired value only in accordance to the extent that it served towards the realisation of the individual and the betterment of civilisation.

Liang Qichao, once an enthusiastic advocate of nationalism, now believed that: ‘The nation is not mankind’s highest form of collective entity. Citizens of a particular nation should be aware of the extent to which they are a part of all mankind and take responsibility for it. For this reason, I for one dare believe in that narrow and persistent patriotism of old.’ Fu Sinian, again, was even blunter: ‘In this world, we are not simply people of a particular nation—we are also citizens of the world. For the present, it so happens that the common denominator of world unity is the public at large are twofold: we are at once both citizens of a nation and citizens of the world’. As Wang Guangqi, the founder of the Young China Association, stressed in his explanation of the aims of the association: ‘This word China should be understood as a place name—not a reference to a nation. I am someone who dreams of the Grand Unity of the world and I take this place China to be just one part of this world. If we wish to reach a stage where we have created a Grand Unity of the world, then the boundaries between nations will need to disappear. In our efforts to promote the welfare of mankind, we must certainly not restrict ourselves to working only within the boundaries of China’. It was precisely this concept of an ‘nation committed to cosmopolitanism’, born on the eve of the May Fourth Movement and in explicit response to WWI, that helped this patriotic movement launched in opposition to Western aggression, to transcend the narrow interests of the nation-state and to embody both universal values of justice and idealistic aims.
During the May Fourth era, cosmopolitanism won out over nationalism and was considered the ‘New Tide’ for the ‘New Century’. This was a view held not just by individuals such as Liang Qichao, Chen Duxiu, Fu Sinian and so on, but proved to be one commonly shared one throughout the May Fourth era. On the eve of the May Fourth demonstrations of 1919, a group of patriotic students at Peking University established a journal entitled The Citizens’ Magazine (Guomin zazhi 國民雜誌). They received strong support from their Vice-Chancellor, Cai Yuanpei, who contributed both financial aid and a preface to the first issue. Cai affirmed the ardour of the students’ patriotism, but warned them that beyond the nation there lay a higher aspiration:

That which we refer to as the nation is also, at the same time, an element of the mankind of the entire world, and although to advocate an absolute nationalism at the expense of humanism may well result in a feeling of moral superiority, will it not inevitably lead to defeat, quite apart from anything else? My hope is that The Citizens’ Magazine will not advocate a narrow nationalism.[21]

Cai Yuanpei’s wise counsel influenced a generation of young people. The Peking University students of the May Fourth era proved to be a broad-minded cohort who considered the interests of mankind to be of higher value than the interests of the nation. The ‘Foreword to the Inaugural Issue’ of the Peking University Students’ Weekly (Beijing daxue xuesheng zhoukan 北京大學學生周刊), founded early in 1920, stated: ‘China is a unit of the world… and so we hereby declare explicitly that we will not undertake any activity that is of benefit only to the nation but not to the world’.[22] The ‘Foreword to the Inaugural Issue’ of the Zhejiang New Tide (Zhejiang xinzhao 浙江新潮) read: ‘This journal is opposed to nationalism and to localism, and as the people of Zhejiang are but part of the mankind of the entire world, our circumstances require that we cannot but seek for the advancement of one part of mankind for the purpose of the advancement of all of mankind’. In this manner, the youth of the May Fourth era did not regard distinctions of nation or of place as barriers, but rather, in a spirit of cosmopolitanism and with entire humanity in their field of vision, took this cause to be their idealistic aim. They devoted themselves to a movement for both national salvation and cultural reform.

### Individualism and Cosmopolitanism

Once the emotional hold of the nation as intermediary between individual and world had loosened somewhat, a direct connection between May Fourth individualism and cosmopolitanism became possible. Zhou Zuoren, a man famous for his advocacy of a ‘humane literature’ (rende wenxue 人間的文學), argued thus: ‘This literature is of all mankind, but it is also of the individual, not of race, of nation, of locality or of clan’.[24] Like Fu Sinian, Zhou Zuoren regarded the various intermediaries that stood between mankind as a whole and the individual (race, nation, locality) as no more than illusory idols. To his mind, the only realities were the individual and mankind. The individual was a part of mankind, whereas mankind comprised all sorts of individualised selves. This relationship between mankind and the individual produced a view of ‘greater selves’ (dawo 大我) and ‘lesser selves’ (xiaowo 小我) that proved particular to the May Fourth era: there was no way that the individual, in search for his or her sense of worth, could seek to cultivate their own moral selves alone. It was only within mankind as a whole (the ‘greater self’) that the individual (the ‘lesser self’) could achieve perfection and could hope to realise their full value. Although these concepts of ‘greater self’ and ‘lesser self’ derived, distantly, from the traditions of ancient Chinese thought, the ‘greater self’ of those traditions constituted a transcendent and moral cosmos (the Mandate of Heaven, the Way or Heaven, or the Principles of Heaven). By the time of the May Fourth era, however, they had been transformed completely into the secular and worldly concepts of mankind and history: it was only by means of merging oneself into the history of the evolution of mankind that the ‘lesser self’ of the individual could finally hope to have access to the eternal, and achieve significance. When Hu Shi once essayed an explanation of his own outlook on life, he said: ‘This “lesser self” of mine has no independent existence, but stands in direct or indirect relationship with countless other lesser selves; it stands in a relationship of mutual influence with the entirety of society and the entirety of the world; it stands in a causal relationship with the past and the future of world society’.[25]

### New Village-ism

Although as ‘greater self’, the world was made up of individuals (‘lesser selves’) and sought to encourage the development of individual freedom, at the same time it both stood on a higher plane of value than the individual and served to constrain the development of individuality. During the May Fourth era, Zhou Zuoren advocated a New Village-ism (新村主義) that sought to promote the free association of young people through the formation of communities based on shared ideals. As he imagined these communities, ‘the ideal human life of the New Village will be a world of Grand Unity and little difference’, ‘on the one hand it will be of mankind, on the other, its emphasis will be on the individual’. Every individual, regardless of place of origin or family background, would be able to develop their own individuality within the New Village, ‘all that was required will be that the minor differences of their individualities did not run counter to the personality of the Grand Unity’.[26] The individualism of the May Fourth era was not the ‘anything goes’ of postmodernism, for behind individuality was to be found a common understanding of human feelings and a global value given the Grand Unity of All-Under-Heaven, this being the ideal world of ‘Grand Unity and little difference’. The ‘lesser self’ could develop freely, partaking of the one and the same world, the one and the same sense of value, the one and the same moral cosmos (the Way of Heaven, the Principles of Heaven).

### Might and Right

Let us then consider exactly what the cosmopolitanism of the May Fourth era signified. At its conclusion, both the Chinese intelligentsia and general public opinion in China greeted the outcome of WWI with joy, a common saying of the time being ‘Right has overcome might’. It was underpinned by a universal recognition of global value—a concept of right. From the late-Qing dynasty onwards, nationalism in China had encompassed the two divergent ideologies of right and might. According to Wang Zhongjiang 王中江, Yan Fu 嚴復 was representative of a nationalism founded in the ideology of right, believing as he did that the evolutionary processes of the survival of the fittest by means of natural selection was not simply a matter of the (power) struggle for wealth and might, but was also a matter of the progress of civilization (wisdom and morality). Liang Qichao, on the other hand, represented a nationalism...
based on an ideology of might. He believed that both freedom and rights derived from power, from might, and that might in fact equated with right.[27]

Speaking in 1901, Liang Qichao had said:

> Ever since the theory of evolution we have had competition, and with competition has come the distinction between superior and inferior. With this distinction in turn has developed a distinction between winners and losers. In this way, might come to be right, although this is not at all what it actually means. As soon as nationalism develops to a certain point the desire to improve the wellbeing of that particular race becomes insatiable, and when such desire is fully satisfied internally, the wish to extend beyond will inevitably arise. Thus it is said: when two equal forces encounter each other the issue of power disappears as reason becomes power but when two unequal forces collide, on the other hand, reason disappears and power becomes reason.[28]

The tides of statism that were rampant throughout China during the late-Qing and early Republican era were in large part a realisation of this brand of the ideology of might. This was reflected in the advocacy of power, the advocacy of the enriching of the state and strengthening of the army, and the advocacy of education for military citizenship. Underpinning this statism was a brand of nihilism that denied all value. Between nations, there were no commensurate values, just as none existed between cultures and between civilizations. Human society lacked any universal sense of value. The only comparable thing between nations was their power, something that was in itself a denial of all value. In such circumstances the clash of cultures was simply the struggle for power. By the early years of the Republic, this ideology of might, based as it was on materialism, had gradually begun to reveal its drawbacks. Ever since the establishment of the Republic, the national plight had been such that the material had taken precedence over all else. Naked power ran riot. Morality and a sense of value weakened. Within society, the law of the jungle ruled supreme. In the pages of The Eastern Miscellany (Dongfang zazhi 東方雜誌), Du Yaquan 杜亞泉 lamented:

> Society presently has become purely one of material force; in the realm of the spirit there is no force to be spoken of... Ever since materialism entered our hearts, it seems, the cosmos has had no gods, the human world no soul. The material is omnipotent. Speaking about the cruel and merciless processes of elimination through competition that are now advocated...there is now no time to enquire into the ultimate aim of human life or cosmological concepts of beauty. The sole concern is how to preserve existence and how to avoid being eliminated. Such are the pressing questions of the philosophy of life. In essence, then, it is just a matter of how to ensure that one is a winner by virtue of one's superiority, and others are losers by virtue of their inferiority. A world such as this contains superior and inferior, but is quite without good and evil; it has winners and losers, but is without right and wrong.[29]

The Critique of Statism

An important theme of the New Culture Movement starting in 1915 was a rethinking of this tide of statism. It was a trend that proved particularly critical of the nihilistic denial of value that underpinned the exercise of naked power. The most important explanation for the sway of cosmopolitanism during the May Fourth era was a reconstructed concept of right, a renewed recognition of the universality of global values. Such concepts were to serve as the common basis for the order of both China and of the world itself. In the context of the late-Qing tides of rabid nationalism, right as a modern worldview's substitute for the Principle of Heaven of tradition was more often than not explained as an outcome of the evolutionary theory of survival of the fittest by means of natural selection. By the May Fourth era, however, right was again accorded a moral value that served to connect it with Enlightenment thought.

What constituted right? Chen Duxiu answered this question in his 'Foreword' to the inaugural issue of the Weekly Critic (Meizhou pinglun 每周評論): 'Right is whatever accords with equality and with freedom'.[30] That Chinese intellectuals understood victory in the war in Europe as being the triumph of right over might implied also that they now no longer believed in the ideology of might that had prevailed since the late Qing. They had reconfirmed right as the proper measure of value. In this context, the disparity between China and the various Western nations was no longer a matter of respective material force or national power, but was rather a matter of degrees of civilization, of whether or not a culture of freedom and equality had been established. The enlightenment concept of value that was promulgated by the New Culture Movement took deep root in the inner recesses of patriotism.

By the May Fourth when the students of Peking took to the streets, gathering in the square outside the Gate of Heavenly Peace to demonstrate, what they were striving for was not the narrow rights and interests of a nation but rather that which was universally right. They opposed foreign power for the purpose not only of defending the rights and interests of a nationality, but they fought a battle on behalf of a universal and global sense of value. This point is made explicit in the 'Manifesto of All the Students of Beijing', a document that is representative of the core spirit of the May Fourth Movement:

> When the Paris Peace Conference was convened, was it not our hope and happy anticipation that right, humanitarianism, and justice would prevail in the world? To return Qingdao to us and to abolish the Sino-Japanese secret treaties and military conventions and other unequal treaties are right and just; to surrender right to might, to place our territory at the disposal of the five Great Powers, and to treat us like the defeated Germany and Austria are not right and are unjust.[31]

Although Chen Duxiu was profoundly disappointed by the arrogance and selfishness of the Five Powers at the Paris Peace Conference, understanding it to be a case of might triumphing over right and no longer believing that Wilson was 'the best man in the world' for his defence of what was right, he nonetheless did not retreat back to the late-Qing ideology of power, or into a nihilistic denial of all sense of value. He abandoned the illusion of right as promoted by the various Western powers, but not the concept of right itself. What Chen Duxiu took from the defeat at the Paris Peace Conference was the need to avoid a repetition of conflagration in which dog-
China Heritage Quarterly

Chen Duxiu's advocacy of 'the use of brute force to defend right' was in fact an extension of Yang Du's thinking. During the late Qing, Yang Du had acutely observed that: 'The nations that China encounters in this present age are all civilised nations, but the world in which China finds itself situated is a savage one'. Moreover, there existed a contradiction between the internal and external policies of these civilised Western nations:

Today, there exist civilised nations but the world is an uncivilised one; today, every country is civilised internally but savage externally; internally, reason prevails, externally only force matters. Thus, from the perspective of the nation, one may call it civilised, but from the perspective of the world one must label it savage. What evidence can I offer in support of such a view? My view is confirmed by the differences that exist between the laws that obtain internally in these nations and international law.

In order to stand up to the various civilised powers, Yang Du advocated a twofold policy that was at once both civilised and savage (powerful): 'As the nations that China encounters are all civilised, then if China itself is not civilised, it would not be worthy of engaging with them; as the world in which China finds itself situated is a savage one, if China itself is not savage, then it could not hope to continue to exist.'[34] In Yang Du's dualistic approach to civilisation and savagery, the one to be deployed internally and the other externally, neither had priority over the other. Although Chen Duxiu too had experienced the shattered illusions of the Paris Peace Conference, such was the depth of his support for Enlightenment values that he continued to believe in the value of right, to believe in the eventual aim of freedom and of equality, to believe that the exercise of power was not an end in itself but rather simply a means towards the realisation of that which was right. This post-May Fourth brand of nationalism took cosmopolitanism as its objective and differed markedly from the 'cosmopolitan nationalism' of the late Qing. At the same time, it was equally cognisant of the extent to which the contemporary world was a jungle where power ran rampant, and it continued to hold fast to the ideal objectives of right and Grand Unity, in the belief that statism was no longer an aim in and of itself of the present circumstances, but was rather simply the tactical means for the realisation of right.

A Rational Patriotism

As the tide of the patriotic movement opposed to the Five Powers and their deliberations at the Paris Peace Conference grew in strength, Chen Duxiu published an article entitled 'Ought We Be Patriotical or Not?' in the pages of the Weekly Critic. In this article he extended the argument made in his article 'Patriotism and Self-Consciousness' that he had written five years earlier, reminding his readers that patriotism ought be neither blind nor unconditional, but rather that its emotional impulse needed to be given a rational basis. He argued:

In asking whether or not we ought to be patriotic, we need first to ask ourselves what the nation is…. What we love is a nation that inspires people to patriotism in its defence against others, not a nation the government of which makes use of patriotism to oppress the nations of others. What we love is a nation that devotes itself to the wellbeing of its people, not a nation for which the people need sacrifice themselves.[36]

The rationalism that underpinned this concept of 'rational patriotism' of Chen Duxiu was a concept of right that took equality and freedom as its evaluative yardstick.

The May Fourth was a romantic and idealistic age and although the intellectuals of the time encountered repeated setbacks, they nonetheless remained steadfast in their defence of both that which they considered right and the true spirit of the age: the ideal of the Grand Unity of the world. In his speech on the square beyond the Gate of Heavenly Peace [Tiananmen] at the meeting held in celebration of the victory of the Allies, Cai Yuanpei argued that the victory of the European nations marked: 'the annihilation of the reactionary theory of power, the annihilation of the progressive theory of mutual aid, 'the annihilation of reactionary racialist discrimination, the development of the ideology of Grand Unity'.[36] A brilliant world of Grand Unity appeared before their eyes, causing the intellectuals of the May Fourth to redouble their efforts. Their optimism flowed from their belief that a 'new epoch', a 'new age', a 'new tide' had arrived.

On New Year's Day, 1919, Li Dazhao 李大钊 announced with great enthusiasm the arrival of this new epoch: the blood split during WWI, the Russian Revolution and the German and Austrian Revolutions, 'surging to and fro, has brought forth a new epoch and this new epoch has brought with it new life, new civilisation, a new world'. 'From today onwards we realise the gross error of a belief in the survival of the fittest, that the weak are prey for the strong, for we now know that material evolution does not rely upon competition, but rather mutual aid. The weakness of mankind is that they wish for survival, wish to enjoy happiness and wellbeing, for which purpose the relationship between us should be fraternal love, we should not slaughter each other by force of arms'.[37]

Suddenly, Piotr Kropotkin's Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution, hitherto a somewhat neglected text, found a new and interested market. The ancient Confucian ideal of the Grand Unity of the world, coloured now by the idea of evolution through mutual aid, developed into an ideal of a modern cosmopolitan utopia. For May Fourth intellectuals, the prospects for the world continued to be determined by evolutionary theory, but in contrast to the views held during the years of the late Qing and early Republic, the
significant factor of evolution was no longer competition but rather mutual aid, no longer gold and iron, but rather morality and spirit. The ideal of the Grand Unity of the world had now been reinforced with the legitimacy of the modern order.

In a fit of enthusiasm, Liang Chia-chao declared:

The people of our nation have never recognised the nation as the highest form of mankind's collectivity, claiming always that a high form must exist, a suzerain of all nations, that which we call All-Under-Heaven.... This type of broad-minded internationalism constitutes, in actual fact, the nucleus of Chinese political theorising for the past several thousand years.[38]

It was not just the theory of mutual aid that was granted a connection with the Grand Unity of the world, but too was the hottest topic of discussion during the May Fourth era: democracy. Li Dazhao warned the youth of the age: 'Sacred youth, know that the Democracy of the present age is not only the manner in which a nation organises itself, but is also the way in which the world organises itself. This Democracy is not just a point in the history of the life of mankind, but also the complete journey long which we progress, step by step, towards the Grand Unity of the entire world'.[39] The roads towards all the various values sought during the May Fourth era —freedom, equality, democracy, and justice—all led to Rome, it seemed, all rivers flowed into one and the same grand ocean. All found their source in that highest of ideal realms, the Grand Unity of the world.

Utopias

By the end of the twentieth century, as a result of the severe damage caused by revolutionary utopias, Chinese thinking people readily reflected on and critiqued utopian ideas. And yet we recognised that although the proximate source of such revolutionary utopias were the forms of May Fourth idealism and romanticist longings, it was clear that which later degenerated into that cruel and merciless 'dictatorship of the proletariat' could not be mentioned in the same breath as the cosmopolitan utopia of the May Fourth era. This cosmopolitan utopia was totally opposed to the blood and iron principles of the politics of power and transcended the narrow aims of nationalism. It had embodied global values that were the common quest of all races, all nations, and all peoples. The 'Eternal World Peace' envisaged at the time by Kant was also a form of cosmopolitan utopia, inspiring the greatest political philosopher of the twentieth century, John Rawls, to argue for his 'realistic utopia' in The Laws of the People as a way of achieving global justice. With the rise of nationalism and statism in the modern period, human society required a cosmopolitan utopia to manage global justice, to constrain the tensions and clashes that result from the overdevelopment of statism. Utopian ideals present a global sense of values that are universal and provide the common stipulations for the existence and development of human society. How remarkable was the broad-mindedness of those May Fourth intellectuals, possessed as they were of that brand of cosmopolitan longing, never for a moment seeing the interests of a particular nation or nationality as a gulf to be crossed, seeking always for that 'nation committed to cosmopolitanism', basing the rise of a particular nationality solidarity on global human values. This was the patriotic movement of the May Fourth, a patriotism that was possessed of cosmopolitan ideals.

Nationalism Returns

Yet the kind of patriotism infused with cosmopolitan sentiment that was characteristic of the May Fourth period withered almost as soon as it had bloomed. After 1922, the illusion of a cosmopolitan utopia was progressively shattered. Nationalism again reared its head. The concept of the 'nation committed to cosmopolitanism' that had once held sway lost its appeal, replaced by a tide of oppositionist nationalism that rallied around anti-imperialist slogans. Taking advantage of both the support of the Third International and the recently negotiated cooperation between the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party, an hitherto somewhat downcast Sun Yat-sen once again took control of the nationalist discourse. He criticised the cosmopolitanism of the May Fourth as being equivalent to the universalism of ancient China, with the implication that, just as the commitment to precisely this kind of universalism on the part of the scholars of the Ming dynasty had paved the way for the occupation of China by the Manchus, so too would such cosmopolitanism in present circumstances lead both to the loss of the nation and the extinction of the Chinese race.[40]

Sun Yat-sen's brand of nationalism was one deeply coloured by both racial identity and national culture, standing in a relationship of some fracture and distance from the theoretical basis of the democratism (minquanzhuyi 民權主義) that he also advocated. But a nationalism that appealed to both race and to national essence (guocui 祖國) happened to accord precisely with the needs of an internal political movement that grew stronger by the day. The great revolution that was soon to come needed both common enemies and shared beliefs. An oppositional nationalism provided the ideological framework for the political zeal of all classes of people. The tragic May Thirtieth Incident of 1925 initiated the great nationalist revolution.

And so, the May Fourth came to an end, replaced by a new age of nationalism. Like a wild horse, jingoism, once unbridled, could no longer be restrained, thus laying the foundations for the eventual outcomes of the history of China during the first half of the twentieth century.

Translator's Note: The subheadings have been added, and I would like to acknowledge the extensive assistance of the editor of China Heritage Quarterly, Professor Geremie Barmé, in preparing this translation.

Notes:

[1] Fu Sinian, ‘Zhongguo gou he zhongguoren’ [Chinese Dogs and Chinese People], Xin qingnian [New Youth], vol.6, no.6 (1 November, 1919).

[2] Luo Jialun, ‘Yinianlai women xuesheng yundongde chenggong shibai he jianglai ying qu de fangxiang’ [Successes and Failures of Our Student Movement over the Course of the Past Year, and the Policy to be Adopted in the Future], Xinchaon [New Tide], vol.2, no.4.


[8] Qiu Tong (Zhang Shizhao), ‘Guojia yu wo’ [The Nation and I], *Jiayin zazhi* [The Tiger Magazine], vol.1, no.8 (10 August, 1915).

[9] Liang Qichao, ‘Tongding zuiyan’ [Confessions Painfully Arrived At].


[19] Fu Sinian, ‘Qingniande liangjian shiye’ [The Two Tasks of Youth], *Fu Sinian quanji*, vol.1, p.386.


[25] Liang Qichao, ‘Ou you xinyinglu’ [Record of My Impressions of My Travels in Europe] [Ouyou mengying lu], *Liang Qichao quanji*, vol.4, p.2978.


[39] Li Dazhao, 'Guoti yu qingnian ba' [A Colophon to State System and Youth], Li Dazhao quanji, vol.3, p.131