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POLARITIES AND THE MAY FOURTH POLEMICAL CULTURE: PROVENANCE OF THE “CONSERVATIVE” CATEGORY

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This essay argues that the conservative/radical polarity by which we classify May Fourth intellectuals originated in the New Youth group's polemical stratagem of depicting the intellectual landscape in terms of a “New Culturalists vs. the rest” divide. In this stratagem, those who later became “the conservatives” were lumped together for dissenting from the New Culture movement and largely defined by who they were not. Historiographically, the establishment of this polarity scheme sidelined alternative mappings of the intellectual scene. Drawing on the case of the *Critical Review* (1922–1933)—a journal of “cultural conservatism”—and its polemics against the New Culture, this essay explores one such alternative mapping that grouped “conservative” thinker Liang Shuming (1893–1988) with the New Culturalists. Taking this paradigm as one of many that existed before the mid-1920s, the essay discusses the juxtaposition of multiple schemes of grouping as a strategy for superseding the polarity mode of classification.

KEYWORDS: Chen Duxiu, “the conservative,” *Critical Review*, polarity, scheme of grouping

One of the major changes in recent historiography of the Republican period has been the rediscovery of the May Fourth “conservatives.” In both English- and Chinese-language scholarship, publications on Du Yaquan (杜亞泉 1873–1933), Lin Shu (林紓 1852–1924), Liang Shuming (梁漱溟 1893–1988), and the Research Clique (研究系 Yanjiu xi) of Liang Qichao and Zhang Dongsun (張東蓀 1886–1973), among others, have increased since the 1990s.¹ This change reflects academia's attempt to

1 For a summary of works in Chinese on this subject, see Zheng Dahua and Jia Xiaoye, “Ershi shiji jiuling niandai yilai Zhongguo jindaishi shang de jijin yu baoshou yanjiu pingshu” [Review of studies on radicalism and conservatism in modern Chinese history since the 1990s], *Jindaishi yanjiu*, 2005, no. 4, 289–314; Axel Schneider, “Bridging the Gap: Attempts at Constructing a ‘New’ Historical-Cultural Identity in the People's Republic of China,” *East Asian History* 22 (December 2001): 129–33. English publications include monographs such as Xiaobing Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996);

redress the imbalance and bias of previous scholarship upon entering the postsocialist era. After the epoch-making “farewell to revolution” in the People’s Republic of China (PRC),² a total reorientation ensued in studies of China’s twentieth-century history. Radicalization no longer occupied center stage in the new historiography. Rather, attention turned to figures previously marginalized in historical scholarship. The impact of this reorientation has been far-reaching and continues to unfold. Students of modern China today learn about the New Culture’s dissenters as actors and thinkers on their own and not merely as opponents of an alleged grand movement of history. Conservatism no longer signifies an antimodern outlook. Instead, it attests to the diversity of Chinese modernity—antitraditionalism and neotraditionalism thrived side by side in a shared space and time.³ Awareness of the conservatives’ coequality with May Fourth radicalism, finally, gives rise to a fundamentally different point of departure for May Fourth studies. The commonality across the “conservative vs. radical” divide offers a new basis for reassessing what May Fourth meant.⁴

There is, however, a paradox. The recharacterization of the May Fourth intellectual world came with a reinforcement of the established categories of grouping. To highlight commonality across the board, narratives often started with the most conventional delineation of who the radicals and conservatives were.⁵ Most academics in the field are aware of and even overtly acknowledge the cosmopolitan and innovative nature of the latter’s outlooks. Some conservatives, as we now know, published in the vernacular, participated in the discourse of cultural reform, advocated Westernization, and embraced socialist positions. Yet, in spite of mounting evidence proving otherwise, they continue to be labeled

Michael Gibbs Hill, *Lin Shu, Inc.: Translation and the Making of Modern Chinese Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), and chapters in Theodore Hutters, *Bringing the World Home: Appropriating the West in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2005) and in Edmund S.K. Fung, *The Intellectual Foundations of Chinese Modernity Cultural and Political Thought in the Republican Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), as well as other publications cited in this article.

2 See Wang Hui, “The Year 1898 and the Historical Roots of Neoliberalism in China,” in *The End of the Revolution: China and the Limits of Modernity* (London: Verso, 2011), 19–66; Schneider, “Bridging the Gap”; Tze-ki Hon and Kristin Stapleton, eds., *Confucianism for the Contemporary China: Global Order, Political Plurality, and Social Action* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017).

3 Chen Lai, “Huajie ‘chuantong’ yu ‘xiandai’ de jinzhang—Wusi wenhua sichao de fanxi” [Dissolve the tension between “the traditional” and “the modern”: reflections on May Fourth cultural currents], in Lin Yusheng, ed., *Wusi: duoyuan de fansi* [May Fourth: reflections on multiplicity] (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1989), 151–185; Ying-shih Yü, “Neither Renaissance nor Enlightenment: A Historian’s Reflections on the May Fourth Movement,” in Milena Doleželová-Velingerová and Oldřich Král, eds., *The Appropriation of Cultural Capital: China’s May Fourth Project* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 299–324.

4 For two recent examples of this new approach, see Wang Hui, “The Transformation of Culture and Politics: War, Revolution, and the ‘Thought Warfare’ of the 1910s,” *Twentieth-Century China* 38, no. 1 (January 2013): 5–33; Leigh Jenco, “Culture As History: Envisioning Change Across and Beyond ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ Civilizations in the May Fourth Era,” *Twentieth-Century China* 38, no. 1 (January 2013): 34–52.

5 For example, Wang Hui’s analysis of commonality between Chen Duxiu and Du Yaquan described how Chen and Du, respectively, represented radical and conservative voices at the time. Wang Hui, *Wenhua yu zhengzhi de bianzou—yizhan he Zhongguo de “sixiangzhan”* [Variation between culture and politics: the First World War and China’s “thought war”] (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 2014), 6–10.

“conservative” or *baoshou* (保守). The persistence of the epithet is remarkable particularly because of the repeated caveats against it. In 1976, Benjamin I. Schwartz astutely noted conservatism’s “limited explanatory power.” As a defender of the status quo, the conservative’s commitment shifts with time and place. Calling someone a conservative thus does not offer a sharp insight into the substance of that person’s thought.⁶ According to Ying-shih Yü (Yu Yingshi 余英時), this slipperiness is magnified in the case of China. Conservatism never developed a sustainable position in early twentieth-century China because rapid changes continuously demolished the status quo and destabilized the foundation for any conservative thinking.⁷ Lydia He Liu also warned against unreflective adoption of the label, because its implicit evocation of the imported triad “radical-liberal-conservative” reinforces the tendency to “reduce modern China’s history into a localized version of universal (European) narrative of progress.”⁸ These criticisms highlighted the problematic nature of the concept. Subsequently, the use of the epithet underwent a change. Shedding inherently negative connotations, “conservative” in current scholarship carries a more neutral sense and functions to mark out those who held a critical position toward the late 1910s and early 1920s agenda of all-out cultural reform. This agenda of all-out cultural reform, as the general consensus holds, emanated unambiguously from the journal *New Youth* (新青年 *Xin qingnian*; also known as *La Jeunesse*) and its associates at Peking University. In contrast, “conservative” refers to an assortment of “others” who dissented from the New Culturalists’ vision of reforms.

This essay problematizes this scheme of grouping by probing the provenance of the “conservative vs. radical” polarity. Throughout the twentieth century, a polarity model has continuously framed May Fourth intellectual history. The model’s several incarnations, from “reactionary (反動 *fandong*) vs. progressive (進步 *jinbu*)” to “restorationist (復古 *fugu*) vs. revolutionary (革新 *gexin*)” to “conservative vs. radical (激進 *jijin*),” each drew on unique ideological frameworks, yet they were unified in deploying polarized categories to register intellectual positions. Incidentally, they also signify largely unchanged groupings.⁹

6 Benjamin I. Schwartz, “Notes on Conservatism in General and in China in Particular,” in Charlotte Furth, ed., *The Limits of Change: Essays on Conservative Alternatives in Republican China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 3–21.

7 Yu Yingshi [Ying-shih Yü], “Zhongguo jindai sixiangshi shang de jijin yu baoshou” [Radicalism and conservatism in intellectual history of modern China], in *Youji fengchui shuishang lin: Qian Mu yu xiandai Zhongguo xueshu* [Still remembering the ripples on the water when the breeze passes: Qianmu and modern Chinese scholarship] (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1991), 199–242.

8 Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900–1937* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 241. The three-way division “radical-liberal-conservative” continued to be evoked in the PRC in the 1990s. See, for example, Yue Daiyun, “Shijie wenhua duihua zhong de Zhongguo xiandai baoshou zhuyi” [Modern Chinese conservatism in the dialogue of world cultures], *Zhongguo wenhua* 1 (December 1989): 132–36; Fang Keli, “Lue lun xiandai Xin-rujia de deshì” [Brief comment on how to assess modern New Confucianism], in Fang Keli, ed., *Xiandai Xin-rujia yu Zhongguo xiandaihua* [Modern New Confucianism and China’s modernization] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1997). It seems to have faded away after the turn of the new century.

9 Ouyang Zhesheng proposed replacing the label “conservative” with “nonmainstream.” Leigh Jenco similarly attempted to substitute “moderate” for “conservative.” In both cases, the new appellations reinforced the same polarity of grouping (“nonmainstream/mainstream” and “moderate/radical”). Ouyang Zhesheng, *Xin wenhua de chuantong: Wusi renwu yu sixiang yanjiu* [Traditions of the New Culture: researches on May Fourth figures and their thoughts] (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2005), 66n3; Jenco, “Culture As History.”

Coming at the end of a long historiographical convention, the “conservative vs. radical” scheme employed today signifies a more balanced appraisal of the critics of the New Culture project. But it continues to replicate a New Culturalist outlook on the May Fourth intellectual world. This outlook deliberately simplified the intellectual positions of New Culturalists’ contemporaries. More relevant to my purpose here, its long-term ascendancy has skewed our understanding of the contemporaneous intellectual scene by unduly privileging certain players’ readings of the times and suppressing those of others. In the following pages, I first analyze the unique polemical culture of the May Fourth era by looking into Chen Duxiu’s 1920 campaign against the Research Clique led by Liang Qichao. I then use the Nanjing-based journal *Critical Review* (學衡 *Xueheng*; published 1922–1933) as my primary example, discussing how the same polemical culture was shared by some of those opposed to the New Culture movement. Positioning itself as the forum of true cognoscenti of the West, the review based its polemics on a particular mapping of the intellectual world. They highlighted the convergence of both sides in the “East vs. West” debate and grouped the proponents and opponents of the New Culture movement together for their similar understanding of Western culture. In conclusion, I discuss the necessity to resuscitate not only the review’s classificatory scheme but also all other alternative schemes of grouping, so as to stimulate a nonpolarized understanding of the world of May Fourth intellectuals.

CHEN DUXIU AND THE POLEMICAL CULTURE OF THE ERA

The May Fourth era has long been distinguished by the polemical intensity of debate among its intellectuals. As scholars have increasingly recognized over the past two decades, the intensity of this polemical strife was driven as much by the urge to dominate the cultural and intellectual field as by the sense of urgency for reform that previous scholarship emphasized.¹⁰ Private writings often provide more telling testimonies to this competitive mentality than public enunciations. A set of 15 private letters, dated between 1920 and 1932, exchanged among Hu Shi, Chen Duxiu, Qian Xuantong (錢玄同 1887–1939), Gao Yihan (高一涵 1885–1968), and Tao Menghe (陶孟和 1887–1960) surfaced in Beijing in 2009. In them, one finds clear expression of the “us vs. them” mentality that motivated the group’s polemics.¹¹

These letters touch on various historical subjects, among them the split within the group of authors behind *New Youth*. The assembled material proves that when Chen Duxiu moved to Shanghai no clear decision had been made about the fate of the journal.¹² Ac-

10 See Doleželová-Velingerová and Král, *Appropriation of Cultural Capital*; Kai-Wing Chow, Tze-ki Hon, Hung-yok Ip, and Don C. Price, eds., *Beyond the May Fourth Paradigm: In Search of Chinese Modernity* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2008).

11 Huang Xingtao and Zhang Ding, “Zhongguo renmin daxue bowu guan cang ‘Chen Duxiu deng zhi Hu Shi xinzhazhuanwen zhengli zhushi’” [Notes and original texts of “Letters from Chen Duxiu etc. to Hu Shi” in Renmin University of China’s museum], *Zhongguo renmin daxue xuebao*, 2012, no. 2, 25–32; Ouyang Zhesheng, “Xin faxian de yizu guanyu *Xin qingnian* de tongren lai wang shuxin” [Newly discovered set of letters among colleagues associated with *New Youth*], *Beijing daxue xuebao* (*Zhexue shehui kexu ban*) 46, no. 4 (July 2009): 34–39, 161.

12 Ouyang Zhesheng, *Wusi yundong de lishi quanshi* [Historical interpretations of the May Fourth movement] (Taipei: Xiuwei zixun keji gufen youxian gongsi, 2011), 228–33; Luo Zhitian, “Chen Duxiu yu ‘Wusi’ hou *Xin qingnian* de zhuanxiang” [Chen Duxiu and the reorientation of *New Youth* after May Fourth], *Tianjin shehui kexue*, 2013, no. 3, 116–30.

cording to Luo Zhitian, Chen Duxiu grew increasingly impatient with the indecision in late 1920 and started to allege that some of his former colleagues (Hu Shi and Tao Menghe, specifically) seemed to have been “bought” by the Research Clique.¹³ Chen’s allegations provoked a series of responses. Hu Shi wrote back with indignation, reprimanding Chen for his “rashness” (鹵莽 *lumang*). Hu emphatically stressed that the difference between the New Youth group and the Research Clique was one between “us and them,” a division that defined the New Youth group. By insinuating that some of his Beijing colleagues had been doing the bidding of the Research Clique and trying to undermine the cohesion of the group, Chen, in Hu’s view, insulted them by questioning their loyalty and thus their moral and intellectual integrity. Others expressed similar criticisms of Chen’s conduct and agreed that it undercut group cohesion.¹⁴

Both Chen’s accusation and Hu’s indignation hinged on a profound enmity against the Research Clique led by Liang Qichao. The enmity not only united the New Youth group but also deeply colored their view of themselves and their undertakings. What had caused this deep enmity? The Research Clique’s active support of *New Youth*’s initiatives, such as the literary revolution, has long been noted by scholars, as it was by their contemporaries.¹⁵ Yet the New Youth group maintained an attitude of jeering contempt and aloof antagonism against the Research Clique.¹⁶ Earlier in the same year that he made his paranoiac accusation of “treason” against his associates, Chen had launched a rhetorical crusade against the Shanghai-based Research Clique. In a public speech in Changsha, Hunan, in early 1920, Chen claimed that his “New Culture movement comrades in Shanghai” had no comprehension of the true spirit of science and unwittingly perpetuated the outdated fallacy of “Chinese learning as the essence, Western learning for its utility” (中學為體西學為用 *Zhongxue wei ti, xixue wen yong*).¹⁷ In “What is the New Culture Movement?” published in *New Youth* in April, Chen referred to Liang Qichao’s ambivalence after the First World War about Western modernity as “inauspicious voices” (不祥的聲音 *buxiang de shengyin*) within the New Culture movement.¹⁸ On both occasions, Chen adopted an inclusive definition of the New Culture movement and acknowledged the Research Clique’s contributions to the movement. At the same time, he made a subtle differentiation between the authentic New Culturalists and the muddleheaded ones who appeared to be incapable of shedding old ways of thinking.

13 Chen’s letter to Tao Menghe has not been found. Its content is extrapolated from the responses of those who had seen it. Chen’s letter to Gao Yihan in which he voiced a suspicion of Hu Shi’s position is cited in Ouyang, *Wusi yundong de lishi quanshi*, 228.

14 Ouyang, *Wusi yundong de lishi quanshi*, 229.

15 Liang Shuming, *Dong-Xi wenhua ji qi zhexue* [Eastern and Western cultures and their philosophies] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937), 6; Zhen Shiqu, “Liang Qichao yu xin wenhua yundong” [Liang Qichao and the New Culture movement], *Jindaishi yanjiu*, 2005, no. 2, 1–37.

16 Zuo Yuhe, *Zhang Dongsun zhuan* [Biography of Zhang Dongsun] (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 1998), 85–96; Zhou Yuefeng, “Cong piping zhe dao tongluren: Wusi qian *Xuedeng* dui *Xin qingnian* taidu de zhuanbian” [From a critic to a comrade: *Learning Lamp*’s change of attitude toward *New Youth* on May Fourth’s eve], *Shehui kexue yanjiu*, 2015, no. 6, 197–204.

17 Chen Duxiu, “Gao xin wenhua yundong de zhu tongzhi” [To the comrades of the New Culture movement], in *Dagong bao* (Changsha), 11–12 January, 1920, repr. in *Chen Duxiu zhuzuo xuanji* [Selected works by Chen Duxiu] (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 2009), vol. 2, 171.

18 Chen Duxiu, “Shenme shi xin wenhua yundong?” [What is the New Culture movement?], in *Xin qingnian* 7, no. 5 (April 21, 1920), repr. in *Chen Duxiu zhuzuo xuanji*, vol. 2, 217.

The intellectual divergence Chen highlighted in his public onslaughts, however, occupied no place in the private exchange among group members. Instead, there are indications that the enmity was utterly unrelated to intellectual differences.¹⁹ The most revealing evidence can be found in a letter by Qian Xuantong. Mediating between Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu, Qian Xuantong wrote to Hu at the turn of 1921 pleading for the latter's understanding of the reason for Chen's "rash" behavior. Qian traced Chen's "us vs. them" enmity against the Research Clique back to political strife in the first years of the Republic of China. Calling Chen Duxiu an "Old [member of the] Alliance" (老同盟會 Lao Tongmenghui), he made reference to Chen's pre-1915 career.²⁰ Although he never officially joined the organization led by Sun Yat-sen (孫中山 1866–1925), Chen supported its cause and had close associations with many revolutionaries. The revolutionary camp, however, was crushed by Yuan Shikai (袁世凱 1859–1916), in whose cabinet Liang served as a minister. Because of this history, according to Qian, Chen could not keep a cool head when it came to the Research Clique, leading to his imprudent and offensive remarks about his own colleagues. In his letter, Qian made only brief reference to this history. The brevity made clear that a shared understanding existed between him and Hu about what separated the New Youth group from the Research Clique. In this understanding, the ill feelings of the New Youth group toward the Research Clique did not result from a manifest incongruence in intellectual outlook. Nowhere in the exchange about the Research Clique was there mention of Liang Qichao's post-1919 "conservative" turn as the cause for this deep sense of rift.

Compared with the deep-rooted nature of the New Youth group's partisan antagonism toward the Research Clique, the framework within which Chen critiqued Liang Qichao's intellectual position was of much more recent origin. Since the launch of *New Youth*, Chen had consistently deployed an "East vs. West" dichotomy to carry out a double move of "position-taking"²¹ and "opponent-framing." In each wave of polemics, Chen framed his opponents as endorsing the morbid culture of the East and failing to embrace cultural reform wholeheartedly. The act of framing afforded him the authoritative position of knowing the essence of modern civilization from the West. Notably, Chen's position-taking entailed a constant reinterpretation of his opponents' positions according to his preconceived categories and thus an accusation of dissimulation. In *New Youth*'s 1916–1917 campaign against establishing Confucianism as the national religion, one powerful ploy that won the journal publicity and sympathy was its accusation that Kang Youwei was plotting a restoration of the imperial institution (復辟 *fubi*). As historian Peng Chunling convincingly demonstrated, the accusation deliberately ignored Kang's Western inspiration and open support of the Republic and dramatized the difference between the outlooks of Kang

19 For an explanation of the tension in terms of the rivalry for the leadership of the New Culture movement, see Gao Bo, "Xinjiu zhi zheng yu xin wenhua yundong de zhengtong wenti" [The fight between old and new and the question of orthodoxy in the New Culture movement: on the controversy between Zhang Dongsun and Fu Sinian et al.], *Tianjin shehui kexue*, 2014, no. 4, 139–44.

20 Huang and Zhang, "Zhongguo renmin daxue," 29–30.

21 I borrow the Pierre Bourdieu-inspired notion of "position-taking" through "double disavowal" from Michael Hockx's study of the literary field of the Republican era. *Questions of Style: Literary Societies and Literary Journals in Modern China, 1911–1937* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 11–12; "Playing the Field: Aspects of Chinese Literary Life in the 1920s," in Michael Hockx, ed., *The Literary Field of Twentieth-Century China* (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 1999), 61–78.

and the Beijing clique.²² Chen Duxiu deployed a similar tactic in his 1918–1919 quarrel with Du Yaquan. As Leo Ou-fan Lee’s blow-by-blow analysis revealed, Chen exercised his discursive dexterity by projecting his own reading of Du’s “real” intention and alleged that Du tried to defend the indefensible ethics of Three Rules and Five Constants (三綱五常 *Sangang wuchang*).²³

In 1920, the campaign against the Research Clique followed the established pattern. In “To the Comrades of the New Culture Movement” Chen singled out a commentary published in *China Times* (時事新報 *Shishi xinbao*), a newspaper of the Research Clique, and attacked its narrow understanding of science. By interpreting science merely in terms of material sciences, the author, according to Chen, denied its overarching and far-reaching impact on the human sciences. The compartmentalized conception of science, as such, was a throwback to the outmoded outlook of the late Qing era, in which science was appreciated as a set of practical knowledge to be adopted for the purpose of safeguarding the cultural essence of China. Chen’s attack was swiftly shown to be full of fabrications. Zong Baihua (宗白華 1897–1986), the editor of *China Time*’s literary supplement, *Learning Lamp* (學燈 *Xuedeng*), pointed out in his riposte that Chen had misread the actual piece published in the newspaper.²⁴ Yet, through his much-publicized polemic, Chen seized a position as the authentic leader of the New Culture movement and disqualified his opponents of the Research Clique as fake New Culturalists.

With Chen’s repetition of the same polemical ploy, a scheme of grouping emerged in the early 1920s for mapping intellectuals’ positions. The self-aggrandizing nature of Chen’s polemics and the heavy reliance on the “East vs. West” binary meant that the scheme was characterized by a polarity. On the one hand, *New Youth* stood alone as the modern, progressive, and cutting-edge forum. On the other, there were all the others, who failed to throw off the shackles of tradition and were, consciously or unconsciously, attached to the morbid culture of the past. Liang Qichao and Du Yaquan might have been a world apart from each other on the question of cultural reform. Yet they were grouped together because they questioned Chen’s reform agenda. The polarity, as such, highlighted one and only one aspect of the intellectual traits of those being classified. Other aspects, those that might have allowed more complexity in these figures and blurred the “us vs. them” division, were rendered secondary or even historically irrelevant.

THE *CRITICAL REVIEW* AND ITS POLEMICAL CAMPAIGN

The appearance of the *Critical Review* in January 1922 marked the first frontal contestation of *New Youth*’s vision of “the new culture.” The journal immediately began a polemical campaign against the group associated with *New Youth*. Addressing different subjects, three leading editorial pieces in the inaugural issue converged

22 Peng Chunling, “*Xin qingnian* Chen Duxiu yu Kang Youwei kongjiao sixiang lunzheng de lishi chongtan” [A new study of the debate between Chen Duxiu and Kang Youwei in *New Youth* about Confucianism], *Beijing daxue xuebao* (*Zexue shehui kexu ban*) 51, no. 3 (2014): 117–31.

23 Leo Ou-fan Lee, “Incomplete Modernity: Rethinking the May Fourth Intellectual Project,” in Doleželová-Velingerová and Král, *Appropriation of Cultural Capital*, 31–65, esp. 42–43.

24 Zong Baihua, “Da Chen Duxiu xiansheng” [Reply to Chen Duxiu], in *Zong Baihua quanji* [Complete works of Zong Baihua] (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994), vol. 2, 136.

in their disgruntlement over the current state of affairs in the cultural realm. All maintained that a fundamental overhaul of Chinese culture through Westernization was absolutely necessary. Yet the self-styled New Culture movement constituted no genuine reform. The movement collected momentum merely through manipulation of media and institutional power. It took advantage of the gullibility of youth and spread shallow misinformation. By setting a detrimental example, it corrupted the moral fabric of society and led the nation astray. An essay by Mei Guangdi (梅光迪 1890–1945), “On the Advocates of the New Culture” (評提倡新文化者 Ping tichang xin wenhua zhe), provocatively accused the New Culture movement’s leaders of being sophistic, docile, phony, and self-serving.²⁵ The language was so malevolent that Hu Shi mockingly referred to the journal as a platform for *xuema* (學罵), “the study of scolding.”²⁶

Like the rift between the New Youth group and the Research Clique, the Critical Review group’s enmity had multiple roots. As scholars in past decades pointed out,²⁷ the vision of modernity and “new culture” presented by the review differed from that of *New Youth*. For Mei Guangdi and Wu Mi (吳宓 1894–1978), the review’s two cofounders, the modern encounter with the West brought unprecedented stimuli and opportunity for China’s self-transformation. Yet they insisted that this self-transformation required the assertion of cultural subjectivity, not its negation. Only an acute sense of what China was and needed would ensure propitious absorption of the new knowledge imported from the West. Under the influence of Irving Babbitt (1865–1933), known for his reinterpretation of the Western humanistic tradition in the name of New Humanism, Mei and Wu were aware of the internal diversity among different cultural streams in the West. Not all of them were suitable for China, and not all of them were benign. This awareness made them circumspect about the New Culturalists’ totalistic account of what the West stood for. Most

25 Mei Guangdi, “Ping tichang xin wenhua zhe” [On the advocates of New Culture], *Xueheng* 1 (January 1922): 16–23. For an English translation, see Mei Guangdi, “A Critique of the New Culturalists,” trans. David Y. Ch’en, in Kirk A. Denton, ed., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893–1945* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 218–27.

26 Hu Shi, “Ti *Xueheng*” [Dedicated to the *Critical Review*], in *Changshi houji* [Later collections of experiments] (Taipei: Yuanliu chuban gongsi, 1988), 80. Hu Shi made this mockery in his diary entry of February 4, 1922. See Hu Shi, *Hu Shi riji quanbian*, vol. 3, 1919–1922 (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001), 549.

27 The literature on the *Critical Review* is large and continues to grow. The view of the journal as a forum for alternative visions of Chinese modernity is found in the following works: Shen Songqiao, “*Xueheng*” pai yu Wusi shiqi de fan xin wenhua yundong [Critical Review clique and opposition to the New Culture movement during the May Fourth period] (Taipei: Guoli Taiwan daxue chuban weiyuanhui, 1984); Yue Daiyun, “Chong gu *Xueheng*” [Reassessing the *Critical Review*], in Li Zhonghua, ed., *Lun chuantong yu fanchuantong* [On tradition and antitradition] (Jinan: Renmin chubanshe, 1989), 313–22; Shen Weiwei, Huimou “*Xueheng* pai”: wenhua baoshou zhuyi de xiandai mingyun [Retrospect on the “Critical Review clique”: the modern fate of cultural conservatism] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1999); Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 151–75; Yi-Tsi Mei Feuerwerker, “Reconsidering Xueheng: Neo-Conservatism in Early Republican China,” in Kirk A. Denton and Michael Hockx, eds., *Literary Societies of Republican China* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2008), 137–69; Tze-ki Hon, “From Babbitt to ‘Bai Bide’: Interpretations of New Humanism in Xueheng,” in Hon, Ip, and Price, *Beyond the May Fourth Paradigm*, 253–67.

fundamentally, the encounter with New Humanism convinced Mei and Wu that Eastern and Western civilizations possessed overlapping humanistic components. Modernity as a global crisis of humanism connected the East and the West in an unprecedented way. This belief in East–West connectivity inspired Mei, Wu, and others to reinterpret Confucianism in a humanistic light.²⁸ It also stimulated the conception of the *Critical Review* as a forum dedicated to cross-cultural comparison and studies.

The difference in intellectual outlook and taste, however, does not fully account for the pronounced antagonism that the *Critical Review* evinced. Just as the New Youth group's hostility toward the Research Clique was animated by a partisan prejudice about Liang Qichao's personality, personal grudges also lay behind the review's livid rhetoric. Important contributors to early issues of the journal—Wu, Mei, Liu Boming (劉伯明 1887–1933), and Hu Xiansu (胡先驕 1894–1967)—shared a background similar to Hu Shi's and had also studied in the United States. Mei Guangdi and Hu Xiansu both knew Hu Shi well. They arrived in the United States at about the same time. Hu Xiansu was acquainted with Hu through the activities of Chinese student associations. Mei Guangdi had even been a personal friend of Hu Shi since their overlapping years at Tsing Hua Preparatory School (清華預備學校 Qinghua yubei xuexiao).²⁹ When Hu Shi published his proposal for the “literary revolution” in *New Youth*, however, he cited Mei and Hu as negative examples. Mei was portrayed as a pedantic skeptic opposed to the vernacular, whose opposition goaded Hu Shi into a full-fledged revolt against classical Chinese poetry.³⁰ Hu, a relatively renowned poet of the Jiangxi school, was cited as an illustration of how old-style poetry failed to convey true individual emotions.³¹ Hu Shi's public derision of his fellow students not only alienated Mei Guangdi and Hu Xiansu but also shaped the opinions of others. Wu Mi was junior to both Hu and Mei, and never formed part of Hu Shi's circle. After meeting Mei at Harvard in summer 1918, he quickly signed on to the countercampaign against Hu Shi's language proposals. A sense of moral indignation about Hu's behavior probably accounted for his swift decision. In any case, the personal grudges meant the polemics were not fueled simply by intellectual disagreements. Partisan bias, in the form of a preconceived “us vs. them” discrimination, gave them their intensity.

Like Chen Duxiu's rhetorical crusades against Kang Youwei, Du Yaquan, and the Research Clique, the *Critical Review*'s polemical campaign against the New Culture movement in 1922 was a move of “position-taking.” The position the *Critical Review* group carved out for themselves was not the defender of Chinese tradition, however,

28 Zhang Ke, “‘Ruxue renwen zhuyi’ gainian yuanliu lun” [Manufacturing “Confucian humanism” in China], in Shiwei Pan, Renwei Huang, and Zhaohong Qiao, eds., *Zhongguo xue* [China studies], vol. 4 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2014), 252–71. On the *Critical Review*'s reinterpretation of Chinese tradition, see Q. Edward Wang, “Towards a Humanist Interpretation of Tradition: The Hermeneutics of the ‘Critical Review Group,’” in Ching-I Tu, ed., *Interpretation and Intellectual Change: Chinese Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2004), 257–74.

29 Yü, “Neither Renaissance nor Enlightenment.”

30 Hu Shi, “Wo weishenme yao zuo baihua shi (Changshi ji zixu)” [Why do I want to write vernacular poems (preface to *Collection of Experiments*)], *Xin qingnian* 6, no. 5 (May 1919): 44–55.

31 Hu Shi, “Wenxu gailiang chuyi” [Tentative proposal for literary reform], *Xin qingnian* 2, no. 5 (January 1917): 26–36. In *New Youth* in 1917, Hu quoted Hu Xiansu's verse without naming the author; in his 1921 collection of essays, he referred to Hu Xiansu by name.

but the genuine cognoscenti of the West. In the journal's initial stage,³² the New Culture movement's "phony Europeanization" (偽歐化 *wei Ouhua*)³³ formed a recurrent theme that connected contributions by various authors. Mei Guangdi's "On the Advocates of the New Culture" thus opened with a comment that "the education, philosophy, literature, and arts [of the West] have deep and distant roots in history and their 'national character' (民性 *minxing*)."³⁴ It followed that "to gain a quick comprehension of them is improbable. To decide what to adopt for China requires even more shrewdness. That is why... the so-called 'New Culture movement,' after its recent start, has already brought about numerous malpractices and disastrous effects."³⁴ The piece went on to declare that leaders of the movement had "no breadth or depth in their knowledge. What they know is shallow, and what they select [for the Chinese audience] makes no sense. Calling what they promote Europeanization would be a gross injustice to the name of Europeanization."³⁵ Wu Mi's "On the New Culture Movement" (論新文化運動 "Lun xin wenhua yundong") followed Mei's attack on the New Culture movement's shallowness with a criticism of its narrowness and absurdity. "What they have selected to promote is the most current thought and some peculiar schools of works. They took what has been deemed rubbish and spleen in the West as representative of the whole culture of the West."³⁶ Other authors, such as Liu Boming and Hu Xiansu, made similar comments.³⁷ Like Chen Duxiu's attacks on the Research Clique in 1920, the polemics allowed the review's authors to seize a position as authoritative commentators on the question of Westernization. The denigration of the New Culturalists' understanding subtly reminded readers that, after all, these authors had firsthand experience with Western society and had spent years studying the West's history, literature, and philosophy at renowned universities in the West. Unlike the majority of the New Culturalists, authors associated with the review truly knew the West.

THE *CRITICAL REVIEW*'S ALTERNATIVE GROUPING

The *Critical Review*'s position-taking through polemics had implications for the way they framed other intellectuals active at the time. Designated themselves China's only true knowers of the West, they operated on a grouping scheme similar to that used by the New Culturalists. At one end, the review placed itself as the one entity that valued intersubjective dialogues between East and West based on cultural insights from both. On the other end were all others who functioned with an essentialist conception of West and East. Even those who later would be placed in the "conservative" camp, from their perspective, fell into the same snares of viewing East and West in terms of stark dichotomy.

32 The operation of the *Critical Review* relied on contributions from subgroups. Only in the initial stage of the journal, roughly 1922–1924, did these subgroups work together to form a coherent platform. On internal differences among the review's authors, see Hon, "From Babbitt"; Axel Schneider, "The One and the Many: A Classicist Reading...and Its Role in the Modern World—An Attempt on Modern Chinese Conservatism," *Procedia Social and Behavioural Sciences* 2 (2010): 7218–43, esp. 7223–24; Shen Weiwei, *Huimou*, 43–52.

33 Mei, "Ping tichang xin wenhua zhe," 23.

34 Mei, "Ping tichangxin wenhua zhe," 16.

35 Mei, "Ping tichang xin wenhua zhe," 19.

36 Wu Mi, "Lun xin wenhua yundong" [On the New Culture movement], *Xueheng* 4 (April 1922): 36.

37 See Shen Weiwei, *Xueheng pai*, 142–43.

Throughout the 11 years of the review's operation, there was no sense of comradeship with these other "conservatives." Its disapproval of the New Culture movement and its pledge to recuperate tradition never became a reason for the review to ally with Liang Qichao or Liang Shuming. As program coordinator from 1925 to 1929 for the Research Institute at Tsing Hua College, Beijing (清華學校研究院 Qinghua xuexiao yanjiu yuan), Wu Mi worked closely with Liang Qichao, one of four professors at the institute. Upon Liang's death, Wu commissioned and printed two commemorative pieces in the review. Rather than celebrating Liang's "conservatism," the two obituaries, by Miao Fenglin (繆鳳林 1899–1959) and Zhang Yinlin (張蔭麟 1905–1942),³⁸ both stressed Liang's political career and cultural impact in the late Qing period. While sympathetic and affectionate, the tone of both was respectfully distant and at times critical.³⁹ Commenting on Liang's pioneering role in introducing Western philosophy and thinkers to China, Zhang, for example, did not forget to remind readers that information provided by Liang was often secondhand and erroneous.⁴⁰ Wu Mi himself, reminiscing later in his notes on a poem composed to commemorate Liang, confessed that he had become quite disillusioned with Liang in the late 1910s because of the latter's weak leadership in speaking up against the New Culture movement.⁴¹

The same respectful distance can be observed in the *Critical Review's* assessment of Liang Shuming. After *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies* (東西文化及其哲學 *Dong-Xi wenhua ji qi zhexue*) was released in late 1921, the review reviewed it in March 1922. Reviewer Liu Boming⁴² concurred with Liang that China, India, and the West each had a distinct and incommensurable cultural ethos and praised this idea as a refreshing corrective to the popular monist view of world cultures. Yet, in Liang's proposition of "cultural mediation" (調和 *tiaohe*), a point some scholars today see as a defining feature of the conservatives,⁴³ Liu saw nothing but problems. Not opposing mediation per se, Liu pointed his primary critique at Liang's simplistic knowledge of Western culture. The conception that science and democracy alone defined the core of Western civilization was simply false. By excluding the medieval period, Liang, according to his reviewer, conveniently constructed a continuum between the classical and modern periods. The falsity was twofold: the book overlooked some important elements in the making of Western modernity and suppressed the complexity of both classical and modern histories.

38 Miao and Zhang both had close working relationships with Wu Mi. Miao was Wu's best student at Southeast University in Nanjing. Zhang studied at Tsinghua and through Wu published many translated works in the review.

39 See Richard B. Rosen, "The National Heritage Opposition to the New Culture and Literary Movements of China in the 1920's" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1969), 82–84.

40 Su Chi [Zhang Yinlin], "Jindai Zhongguo xushu shi shang zhi Liang Rengong" [Liang Qichao in the modern history of Chinese scholarship], *Xueheng* 67 (January 1929): 18.

41 Wu Mi, *Wu Mi shihua* [Poetic commentary of Wu Mi] (Beijing: Shanghu yinshubuan, 2005), 200.

42 Liu Boming, "Shuping: Ping Liang Shuming *Dong-Xi wenhua ji qi zhexue*" [Book review: Liang Shuming, *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*], *Xueheng* 3, 123–31. A native of Nanjing, Liu received his PhD in philosophy from the University of Chicago and served as the deputy chancellor at Southeast University from 1920 to 1923. He played a key role in recruiting Mei Guangdi and Wu Mi to Nanjing and was a firm supporter of and steady contributor to the review.

43 Fung, *Intellectual Foundations*, 84–90.

Rather than endorsing Liang Shuming's rebuke of Chen Duxiu's idea of the New Culture, two-thirds of Liu's piece was devoted to exposing the triteness of Liang's representation of the West. The tradition of Western philosophy, according to Liu, comprised three equally important threads: the scientific, the mystic, and the humanistic tendencies. Liang's comment that the Greeks' methodical observations represented a thorough dedication to the phenomenal world was to Liu merely a half-truth (一偏之論 *yì piān zhī lùn*).⁴⁴ From Homer through German idealism, elements of romanticism and mysticism evolved side by side with a rationalist approach to life questions. Even in contemporary Europe and America, many still embraced their modern variants. Liang's comment that, due to its intellectualism, the West had proved to be more cunning and utilitarian was to Liu also only a half-truth. Liu pointed out that philosophical countercurrents to utilitarian thinking had existed in the West for as long as moral philosophy itself. One proof of such a countercurrent was the accumulation of theoretical works on intuition and its nature, formation, and function throughout the history of Western philosophy, from Socrates to James Martineau (1805–1900). Even those with a strong utilitarian proclivity, such as David Hume, assumed a resonance between ethics and human nature. This controversy between utilitarianism and intuitionism continued into the modern era, and the debate went on.

Liu concluded his review with a statement that Liang's book suffered from a largely "biased and incomplete" (偏而不全 *piān ér bù quán*) view of the culture of the West, as a consequence of overlooking its internal complexity and historical richness.⁴⁵ He then cautioned, "When commenting on Western culture, to merely take the fashionable as the norm is insufficient."⁴⁶ This disparagement of Liang's undertaking echoed Liu's general assessment of his contemporaries in China. "Most scholars today," Liu opined at the beginning of his review, "indulge themselves in pompous talk about Westernization. Still, what they take as 'Westernization' is mostly limited to the newest trends."⁴⁷ Such a comment reiterated the charge that Mei Guangdi and Wu Mi had made in their polemics against the New Culturalists. By making the same complaint about *Eastern and Western Cultures*, Liu subtly but firmly grouped Liang Shuming with the New Culturalists on the basis of a lopsided and superficial view of culture.

Liu thus took a critical distance from both sides of the "East vs. West" debate. Addressing the question of whether cultural mediation meant to occidentalize or orientalize, he expressed a pronounced indifference. Using Liang's vocabulary, Liu enunciated: "To use Westernization (西方化 *xī fāng huà*) to mediate sinicization (中國化 *Zhōngguó huà*) is permissible; to use sinicization to mediate Westernization is also not wrong."⁴⁸ For him, neither the West nor the East could be considered particular in an absolute sense. Cultural mediation had to proceed with a recognition of the cross-cultural commonality. Both the East and the West were, for example, rich in humanistic tradition, a specific character that connected them internally.⁴⁹ For Liu and his coterie, such cross-cultural connectivity based on specific, overlapping substance offered better ground for meaningful mediation. Liang

44 Liu Boming, "Shuping," 126.

45 Liu Boming, "Shuping," 129.

46 Liu Boming, "Shuping," 130.

47 Liu Boming, "Shuping," 123.

48 Liu Boming, "Shuping," 124.

49 Liu Boming, "Shuping," 124.

Shuming might have positioned himself in opposition to the New Culturalists in the “East vs. West” debate. Yet, from Liu’s viewpoint, inasmuch as both sides spoke in unison of the absolute disparity between East and West and unreflectively upheld “the normative East–West dichotomy,”⁵⁰ they belonged to each other and had to be grouped together. Jointly, they represented what the *Critical Review* strove to distinguish themselves against.

THE NEW CULTURALISTS’ COUNTERCAMPAIGN

The *Critical Review*’s choice to stand above the fray between the all-out Occidentalists and their critics, however, is barely reflected in historical memory. As a corollary, its particular reading of the 1920s intellectual scene is largely forgotten. The suppression of memories started with the immediate reactions to the launch of the review.

After the release of the inaugural issue, the counterpunch from the New Culturalists was swift. Zhou Zuoren (周作人 1885–1967) published the first rebuttal on February 4, 1922, and raised three counterpoints against Mei Guangdi’s and Hu Xiansu’s arguments against the vernacular literature.⁵¹ Lu Xun quickly followed. His “Assessment of the *Critical Review*” (估“學衡” “Gu Xueheng”), printed five days later in the same literary supplement to the Beijing-based *Morning Post* (晨報 *Chenbao*), opened with a jibe at his brother for taking the Nanjing-based journal too seriously. Instead, Lu Xun’s piece adopted a facetious tone and focused on the journal’s classical prose as his main point of derision. Singling out poorly constructed sentences from seven different pieces, including the journal’s mission statement, Lu Xun disparaged the writers’ level of cultural knowledge.⁵² How could the *Critical Review* keep a balanced standard of criticism, he asked, when it demonstrated no capacity to perform the simple cultural task of communication? This failure, in itself, sufficiently proved the muddleheadedness of the Nanjing group. Lu Xun remained obdurately silent about the juxtaposition of styles and subjects in the review and its proclamation of aims. Passing over the review’s self-representation, he acknowledged none of its authors’ expertise in Western subjects and mentioned nothing about their credentials. The silence, together with his admonition against taking it too seriously, reveals Lu Xun’s determination not to allow the adversary’s claims any publicity. Instead, by gleaning isolated sentences in archaic language from various compositions and calling the journal a forum for “fuddy-duddies” (老古董 *lao gudong*), Lu Xun painted the undertaking as a botched attempt to resurrect the bygone culture of the imperial elite and rendered it an anachronistic endeavor of antiquarianism. Robbing the journal of its own voice, Lu Xun dragged it back into the “East vs. West” paradigm. Drawing on the “either-or” logic built into that dichotomy, he mapped out a fictional position and imposed it on the review, turning it into yet another proof of the menacing and recalcitrant power of the Chinese tradition.

50 Jenco, “Culture As History,” 34.

51 Shifen [Zhou Zuoren], “Ping ‘Changshi ji’ kuangmiao” [Corrections to ‘Review of *Collection of Experiments*’], *Chenbao fukan*, February 4, 1922, 3.

52 Lu Xun, “Gu Xueheng” [Assessment of the *Critical Review*], *Chenbao fukan*, February 9, 1922, 3, repr. in Lu Xun, *Re feng* [Hot wind], in *Lu Xun quanji* [Complete works of Lu Xun] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005), vol. 1, 397–402.

Lu Xun's essay set the tone for a larger campaign whose participants included almost all iconic figures in today's historiography of the New Culture movement. Zhou Zuoren, writing in the April 23, 1922, supplement to *Morning Post*, called the review a current that strove to "revive the past" (復古 *fugu*).⁵³ Hu Shi responded and concurred with the designation.⁵⁴ In the following month, Chang Yansheng (常燕生 1898–1947), future leader of the Chinese Youth Party (中國青年黨 *Zhongguo qingnian dang*) and then a high-school teacher in Shanghai, adopted a different derogatory term, "reactionary," to title his essay that addressed various recent events, including the founding of the review.⁵⁵ Shen Yanbing (沈雁冰 1896–1981) followed suit. In early 1924, he composed a piece that lined up all those who opposed vernacular literature under the rubric "reactionary movement" (*fandong yundong*).⁵⁶ About the same time, the young Communist activist Deng Zhongxia (鄧中夏 1894–1933) incorporated the New Culturalists' representation of the intellectual scene into a broader scheme of classification. All major "conservatives" of the 1920s, i.e., Liang Qichao, Liang Shuming, and Zhang Shizhao (章士釗 1881–1973), were lumped together as phony modernists and classified as "the School of Oriental Culture" (東方文化派 *Dongfeng wenhua pai*). Only Hu Shi and the Marxists were celebrated as champions of modern science.⁵⁷ In a follow-up essay, Deng called for a systematic mapping of all known figures of arts and letters according to the same scheme. The expanded "School of Oriental Culture," now including Mei Guangdi, was then relabeled "the reactionary thinking force" (反動的思想勢力 *fandong de sixiang shili*) and set in contradistinction to "the progressive thinkers" (進步的思想家 *jinbu de sixiang jia*) who were in the vanguard of history.⁵⁸

Drawing on the precedents set by Chen Duxiu, the New Culturalists after 1922 continued to evoke polarities such as "East vs. West" and "past vs. future" to mark their own position and to frame their opponents. The *Critical Review's* platform was in the process reduced to a furtive attempt to defend China's traditional culture. The reduction not only muffled the review's voice of self-representation but also erased its alternative reading of the May Fourth intellectuals. Concomitantly, the New Culturalists naturalized their centrality in the cultural transformation of modern China and positioned themselves to shape historical memories according to their perspective.

53 Zhongmi [Zhou Zuoren], "Sixiangjie de qingxiang" [Intellectual currents], *Chenbaofukan*, April 23, 1922, 3–4; repr. in Zhou Zuoren, *Tan huji* [Speaking of tigers] (Shanghai: Beixin shuju, 1936), 137–39.

54 Q. V. [Hu Shi], "Du Zhongmi jun 'Sixiangjie de qingxiang'" [Upon reading Zhou Zuoren's "Intellectual currents"], *Chenbaofukan*, April 27, 1922, 1–2; repr. in *Hu Shi wenji* [Collected writings of Hu Shi] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1998), vol. 11, 64. See also Hu Shi, "Wushinian lai Zongguo zhi wenxue" [Chinese literature of the past 50 years] (March 3, 1922), repr. in *Hu Shi wenji*, vol. 3, 262.

55 Yansheng [Chang Yansheng], "Fandong zhong de sixiangjie" [Reactionary realm of thought] in *Xuedeng*, May 9, 1922, 1–2, repr. in *Shenbao fujuan*, May 25, 1922, repr. in *Chang Yansheng xiansheng yiji* [Posthumous collection of Chang Yansheng] (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1967), 11.

56 Yanbing [Shen Yanbing], "Wenxue jie de fandong yundong" [Reactionary movement in the realm of literature], *Wenxue yunkan* [Literary trimonthly] 121 (May 12, 1924).

57 Zhongxia, "Zhongguo xianzai de sixiangjie" [Current state of China's realm of thought], *Zhongguo qingnian* 6 (November 1923): 91–95.

58 Zhongxia, "Sixiangjie de lianhe zhanxian wenti" [The question of united front in the realm of thought], *Zhongguo qingnian* 15 (January 1924): 239–42.

CONCLUSION

In this essay, I argue that the scheme of grouping by which we classify May Fourth intellectuals according to a “conservative/radical” polarity owes its origins to the New Youth group’s polemical stratagem. The prevalent way of dividing intellectuals into “conservative” and “radical” camps implicitly perpetuates a partisan depiction of the intellectual landscape that pivots on a “New Culturalists vs. the rest” divide. “The conservatives,” being lumped together for their otherness vis-à-vis the New Culture movement, are largely defined by who they were not. The New Culturalists thus continue to occupy the center stage of historical memories, for they alone represent the complexity and momentum of the era.

During and after the 1920s, through the Chinese Communist Party’s apparatus as well as the utility of the commercially driven print media,⁵⁹ the New Culturalists’ polemical positioning was turned into the basis for a historical narrative. The systematic dissemination of a much-streamlined interpretation of the intellectual scene of the May Fourth era sidelined alternative readings. The *Critical Review*’s attempt to connect Liang Shuming, Liang Qichao, and the New Culturalists on the basis of their essentialist understandings of both East and West exemplified one such alternative that was muzzled by the establishment of an orthodoxy. And it was not a singular case. In 1924, Shen Yanbing, for instance, still bundled the review and Hu Shi together as two representatives of “the reactionary movements in literature” and argued that the former’s opposition to the vernacular directly inspired the latter’s advocacy of “streamlining the national heritage” (整理國故 *zhengli guogu*).⁶⁰ After his extremely testy review of it in 1923,⁶¹ Hu Shi himself cited *Eastern and Western Cultures* as one of the best examples of China’s new spirit of “the transvaluation of all values,” which had always been his definition of the New Culture.⁶² In his *New History of Chinese Philosophy*, Feng Youlan (馮友蘭 1895–1990), who studied philosophy at Peking University in the late 1910s, grouped Hu Shi and Liang Shuming together and crowned them “the right wing” of the New Culture movement.⁶³

59 For an example of how print media perpetuated the New Culturalists’ scheme of grouping, see Zheng Zhenduo’s introduction to the volume on Literary Controversies (Wenxue zhenglun ji) of *A Compendium of China’s New Literature*. Zheng lumped the *Critical Review* together with others that criticized the literary revolution into a school of “reviving the past” and thus perpetuated the line of analysis initiated by Lu Xun, Zhou Zuoren, and Shen Yanbing. Zheng Zhenduo, “Daoyan” [Introduction], *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* (Compendium of China’s new literature) (Hong Kong: Wenxue yanjiu she, 1963), vol. 2, 11–13 (429–31). Representing the party line, Deng Zhongxia’s two pieces continued to be part of the supplementary material for history teaching at high schools in the PRC until the early 1980s. See Fudan daxue lishi xi Zhongguo sixiang wenhua shi yanjiu shi [Office of the History of Chinese Thought and Culture, History Department, Fudan University], “*Bianxuan shuoming*” [Selection and compilation explanations], in Cai Shangsi, comp., *Zhongguo xiandai sixiang shi yanjiu ziliao jianbian* [Concise collection of research material for modern Chinese intellectual history] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 1980), vol. 1, unpaginated.

60 Yanbing, “Wenxue jie de fandong yundong” [Reactionary movement in literature], *Wenxue* [Literature] 121 (May 12, 1924): 1.

61 Hu Shi, “Du Liang Shuming xiansheng de *Dong-Xi wenhua ji qi zhexue*” [Reading Mr. Liang Shuming’s *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*], *Dushu zazhi* 8 (April 1923): 1–4.

62 Hu Shi, “The Renaissance in China,” *Journal of the Royal Institution of International Affairs* 5, no. 6 (November 1926): 265–83, esp. 273.

63 Feng Youlan, *Zhongguo zhexue shi xinbian* [New history of Chinese philosophy] (Taipei: Landeng wenhua shiye gufen youxian gongsi, 1991), vol. 7, 53–54, 66–69.

Never having been systemized into a historiographical convention, these alternative readings highlighting connections between thinkers and scholars across the widely accepted polarity divide have been routinely dismissed as unorthodox, baseless, and erroneous.⁶⁴ As I demonstrate in this essay, these alternative readings, when examined on their own, were motivated by an outlook that was no less partisan than that of the New Youth group. Wrapped up in the same debating culture that the New Culturalists epitomized, authors associated with the *Critical Review* used similar binary categories for rhetorical effect, and their readings of their contemporaries followed a similar pattern of polarity fueled by similarly self-aggrandizing prejudices. Yet these alternative schemes of grouping deserve our attention, not because of their individual idiosyncrasies but because collectively they illuminate the multiple angles from which May Fourth intellectuals read each other. This multiplicity attests to a richly ambiguous and messy time prior to the establishment of orthodoxy, when those sharing radical and left-leaning views, such as Shen Yanbing and Chen Duxiu, still held divergent positions on how to group their peer intellectuals.⁶⁵ At a time when many in the field have become increasingly aware of the long shadow cast by the New Culturalists' self-narratives on May Fourth historiography,⁶⁶ the resuscitation of this multiplicity is strategically important. Rather than replacing the New Culture-centered scheme with any of these alternative schemes, the juxtaposition of multiple possibilities of grouping brings into focus the need to supersede the polarity mode of classification with a more fluid and multidimensional model for the study of May Fourth intellectuals and how they related to one another.

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64 Ouyang Zhesheng, for example, dismissed Feng Youlan's grouping of Liang Shuming and Hu Shi as groundless. See Ouyang, *Xin wenhua de chuantong*, 66n2.

65 Shen Yanbing was one of three assistant editors of *New Youth* when Chen Duxiu left Shanghai for a temporary position in Guangzhou in 1920.

66 See Milena Doleželová-Velingerová and David Der-wei Wang, "Introduction," in Doleželová-Velingerová and Král, *Appropriation of Cultural Capital*, 1–3.