

Beyond the May Fourth Paradigm

In Search of Chinese Modernity

EDITED BY
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Preface

When did China make the decisive turn from tradition to modernity? For decades, the received wisdom would have pointed to the May Fourth movement, with its titanic battles between the champions of iconoclasm and the traditionalists, and its shift to more populist forms of politics. A growing body of recent research has, however, called into question how decisive the turn was, when it happened, and what relation the resulting modernity bore to the agendas of people who might have considered themselves representatives of such an iconoclastic movement. Having thus explicitly or implicitly "decentered" the May Fourth, such research (augmented by contributions in the present volume) leaves us with the task of accounting for the shape Chinese modernity took, as the product of dialogues and debates between, and the interplay of, a variety of actors and trends, both within and (certainly no less importantly) without the May Fourth camp. This is the task to which the present anthology is addressed.

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Chapter Ten

From Babbitt to “Bai Bide”: Interpretations of New Humanism in *Xueheng*

Tze-ki Hon

For more than half a century, the journal *Xueheng* (Critical Review, 1922–1933) has been considered “culturally conservative,” symbolizing the “limits of change” in a rapidly modernizing China.¹ A stronghold of opposition to the May Fourth New Culture movement (1915–1922), the journal represents the other side—and the side that lost—in the early twentieth-century debate on Chinese modernity. For some scholars, the journal was “backward looking” because it published articles in classical Chinese rather than in vernacular language, and promoted Confucianism to counter the industrialized West.²

Since 1990, *Xueheng* has received more positive assessment. As part of de-centering the “May Fourth” in the study of modern Chinese history, many scholars (especially those in the PRC) re-examine the journal to look for an alternative vision of Chinese modernity.³ These studies reveal important dimensions of the journal that have long been ignored or suppressed. From Yue Daiyun’s redefinition of conservatism to Lydia Liu’s studies of “translingual practice,” and from Shen Weiwei’s biographical accounts to Zheng Shiqu’s critical analysis of the journal’s articles, recent research makes it clear that the contributors to *Xueheng* were as cosmopolitan, progressive, and present-minded as the *New Youth* iconoclasts.⁴ Many of the *Xueheng* contributors were recently returned students from Europe and America, sharing a similar educational background with the *New Youth* iconoclasts. Yet they approached the question

of Chinese modernity differently and reached opposite conclusions. Instead of viewing modernity as a complete break with the past, they considered it as a dynamic process which did not require a violent attack on Chinese tradition. Rather than seeing modernity as an uncritical acceptance of the supremacy of the industrialized West, they understood it as a dialogue between the local and the global in which both sides played an equal role. This "discovery" of *Xueheng* not only calls into question the singular form of Chinese modernity that the "May Fourth" supports, it has also prompted some contemporary Chinese scholars to call for a wholesale re-thinking of the social and cultural history of modern China.⁵

Thus far, inspiring as it is, the discovery of *Xueheng* has not touched upon one critical aspect of the journal, namely, its promotion of a social-political agenda by selectively presenting its own distinctive image of the West. While it is clear that the journal's major contributors were Western trained and well informed regarding the contemporary scholarship of Europe and America, little attention has been paid to their appropriation of Western knowledge as a form of "cultural capital"—an asset that would make them legitimate players in intellectual debate and would provide them a strong position in shaping the cultural field.⁶ As with the *New Youth* iconoclasts, the *Xueheng* contributors went abroad to acquire foreign academic credentials, and came home to use those credentials to lend authority to their views of Chinese modernity. Similar to the *New Youth* iconoclasts' creative use of John Dewey's pragmatism in advancing their social-political agenda,⁷ they re-invented Western knowledge to bolster their position in the debate on Chinese modernity. Given their cosmopolitanism and their experience abroad, the question for us is not their knowledge of the West; rather, it is their vision of Chinese modernity in appropriating the West.

To answer this question, we need to examine closely the intellectual milieu of 1920s China. In what follows, I focus on a returned student, Wu Mi (1894–1978), who became the champion of New Humanism in China. A student of Irving Babbitt (1865–1933) at Harvard University, Wu was a specialist in European literature and classical studies.⁸ While teaching at Southeastern University (*Dongnan daxue*) in Nanjing in the early 1920s, he made sustained efforts to introduce Babbitt's New Humanism into China as an alternative to John Dewey's pragmatism.⁹ As the chief editor of *Xueheng*, he frequently published articles about New Humanism, including his own translation of Babbitt's *Democracy and Leadership* (1924). He also published translations of Plato's dialogues, Aristotle's *Ethics*, and Dante's *Inferno*—the major texts that informed Babbitt's New Humanism. My goal here is not to ascertain Wu Mi's accuracy in presenting Babbitt's thoughts. Instead, I want to identify the ways in which he transformed Babbitt's New Humanism into a doctrine that provided answers to the modernity debate in 1920s China. This transformation, which included turning Babbitt from a literary theorist in America into a China expert known as "Bai Bide" (white jade virtue), indicates the range of possibilities in the Chinese debate on modernity. Explicitly and implicitly, this appropriation of New Humanism offers a perspective on what the twentieth-century China should

look like, and how educated elites would contribute to China's quest for modernity.

This article consists of two parts. In part one, based on recent scholarship on Irving Babbitt and Wu Mi's diary of his American years (1917–21), I discuss how Babbitt's New Humanism offered Wu a critical perspective on industrialization, urbanization, and scientism of the modern world. In part two, based on Wu Mi's published writings in *Xueheng* while teaching at Southeastern University (1922–1925), I examine how his reading of New Humanism offered him a vision of Chinese modernity categorically different from that of the *New Youth* iconoclasts. To highlight Wu's unique understanding of Babbitt's New Humanism, I end the article with a comparison of his writings with those of his fellow *Xueheng* writers, Mei Guangdi (1890–1945) and Liu Boming (1887–1923), both of whom also studied in the United States and were avowed supporters of New Humanism. This comparison serves two purposes. First, it highlights the polyphony of voices within the *Xueheng* group in interpreting New Humanism, underscoring the fact that the so-called "*Xueheng* school" (*xueheng pai*) was by no means monolithic. Second, it calls attention to the complexity of the Chinese debate on modernity in the 1920s which, until now, is still inadequately understood.

New Humanism in Early Twentieth Century America

Born in Dayton, Ohio, Irving Babbitt was a leading exponent of New Humanism from the 1910s to the 1930s, in opposition to the changes in higher education in the United States. He objected to changes in the curriculum of American colleges such as the elective system, vocationalism, the service ideal, and the adoption of the German model of research institution. Along with Paul Elmer More (1864–1937), Norman Foerster (1887–1972), and Stuart Pratt Sherman (1881–1926), Babbitt mounted an intellectual offensive against what he considered the rise of plutocracy and materialism in the United States at the expense of permanent humanistic value. Specializing in ancient Greek philosophy, French literature and Buddhism, he taught at Harvard University for decades and shaped the views of many of his students. A high point of his career as a New Humanist was the publication in 1930 of *Humanism and America: Essays on the Outlook of Modern Civilization*, edited by Norman Foerster, in which he spelled out cogently and forcefully the meaning of New Humanism.¹⁰

However, owing to his opposition to mass society, popular democracy, and functional scientism, Irving Babbitt did not win popular support in the United States.¹¹ A persistent critic of the industrialization, urbanization, and commercialism that took place in turn-of-the-century America, Babbitt spent much of his academic career on the periphery of the American cultural arena.¹² Except for a small group of his followers (e.g., Paul Elmer More and Stuart Pratt Sherman) and his critics (e.g., Ezra Pound), he was basically unknown to the American public. Partly because of his strong opposition to replacing liberal arts

colleges with research-based universities as the pinnacle of American higher education, he was known in some circles as a "counterrevolutionist."¹³

Despite his unpopularity in his times, Babbitt offered his students and followers an alternative vision of modernity. The New Humanism, as David Hoeveler points out, "sprang from a profound disaffection with the modern age."¹⁴ The modern age that Babbitt faced was the rapidly industrialized America at the turn of the twentieth century—the consolidation of capital in the hands of a few capitalists like Rockefeller and Carnegie, the massive influx of immigrants from Europe to keep the labor cost low, the growth of cities with increasing urban problems and labor riots, and the democratization of the political process to suit the needs of a mass society.¹⁵ Although not an economist or a sociologist by training, Babbitt was quick to point out the heavy human toll of this unprecedented socio-political change. First, it caused agony among those American citizens whose lives were disrupted by rapid industrialization and urbanization. Second, it caused anxiety among the poor and the unskilled who had to adjust to the new job market. Somehow, the cohesion of the country and the welfare of its citizens—supposedly the dual goals of American democracy—were forgotten in the nation's quest for economic prosperity, industrial productivity, technological efficiency, and a bigger consumer market.¹⁶

Drawing upon the examples of the Renaissance humanists and the Scottish and British tradition of liberal arts education, Babbitt countered the industrial age by arguing that classical studies, philosophy, and literature must be the basis of an "education of governors." The purpose of education, according to him, was to produce an "aristocracy of character and intelligence" who, unlike an "aristocracy of birth" and an "aristocracy of money," would have the necessary skills and the moral mission to govern the world for the interest of all.¹⁷ Speaking with a strong sense of irony, he proclaimed that the goal of education in the twentieth century "must be in a quantitative age to produce men of quality."¹⁸ Upholding the Jeffersonian "aristocratic democracy" as the model of American government, he wanted to connect the past with the present, and to give direction to the seemingly random developments. He wanted members of the educated elite to bear the responsibility for guiding the country when it was in the midst of drastic changes.

In a time when the economic, social, and political orders of America were undergoing drastic change, Babbitt's call for direction and leadership was inspiring to a small group of his followers. For example, for the young T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) who was a graduate student at Harvard in 1909–1910, going to Babbitt's class was a spiritual event which awakened his moral conscience to serve the nation. Eliot recalled: "Superficially, [Babbitt's] lectures were almost without method. . . . What held the lectures or talks together was his intellectual passion, one might say intellectual fury; what made them cohere was the constant recurrence of his dominant ideas; what gave them delight was their informality, the demand which they made upon one's mental agility, and the frankness with which he discussed the things which he disliked, and which his pupils came to dislike too."¹⁹ With this "intellectual fury," Babbitt infused his students with a moral passion to serve and to lead when the country was at a crossroads.

Wu Mi's Reception of New Humanism

Wu Mi, who arrived at Harvard in 1918 after spending a year at the University of Virginia, felt the same magic when attending Babbitt's classes. Although turn-of-the-century China did not experience the same rapid industrialization and urbanization as Babbitt's America, Wu quickly developed an affinity with New Humanism. Introduced to Babbitt's writings by Mei Guangdi in 1918, he spent the following year reading every piece of Babbitt's writings.²⁰ During his three years at Harvard, he took all the courses that Babbitt offered: Rousseau and his influences, Literary Criticism since the Sixteenth Century, the Romantic Movement in the Nineteenth Century, and Literary Criticism in France.²¹ After he returned to China in 1921, he kept in touch with his former teacher through correspondence and by regularly sending him copies of *Xueheng*.²² As the chief editor of *Xueheng*, he published altogether eight articles on Babbitt—the greatest amount devoted to a foreign thinker. Among them, six were translations of Babbitt's writings, ranging from his 1921 speech at the annual meeting of the Chinese Students Association in Boston, to chapters from his *Literature and the American College* (1908) and *Democracy and Leadership* (1924).²³ The rest were a general introduction to Babbitt's New Humanism, one written by Mei Guangdi and another (in translation) by the French writer Louis J. A. Mercier.²⁴

Wu Mi's attraction to Babbitt's New Humanism was special because he knew very little about his teacher's motives in promoting New Humanism. As shown in his diary and autobiography, like many Chinese students of the time, Wu lived outside of American society when he was in Charlottesville and Boston. Spending most of his time with Chinese students, he was more interested in learning about current events in his native country than in America. He admitted that, aside from the year in Charlottesville where he stayed with American schoolmates at a boarding home, he practically "lived in China" (*shen zai zhongguo*) for the rest of his time in America.²⁵ Consequently, his understanding of New Humanism proceeded from the narrow and bookish perspective of aesthetics, rather than from its socio-political setting. As the self-proclaimed disciple of Babbitt, Wu knew his teacher's scholarly writings inside out, particularly those on Greek literature, Rousseau's thought, and Buddhism.²⁶ But he had no knowledge of the educational debate that consumed much of his teacher's energy; nor was he aware of the socio-economic context that shaped the educational debate.²⁷

Given Wu Mi's limited knowledge of New Humanism, the question for us is why he was attracted to New Humanism, particularly its aesthetic perspective. In his writings, Wu offered no explanation as to why he was so fond of Babbitt's New Humanism. However, based on the ways in which he presented Babbitt's ideas, it is clear that he was attracted to New Humanism for two reasons. One was that New Humanism offered a powerful counterargument against the cultural iconoclasm of the *New Youth*. In the 1920s battle over how to modernize China, New Humanism provided Wu Mi with the *raison d'être* for linking

China's past with her present based on classical language and a refined form of poetry. Better yet, New Humanism was a school of thought from an advanced industrialized country, the United States of America, which had seen both the benefits and harms of modernization.

A case in point was the first article on New Humanism published in *Xueheng*—Hu Xiansu's translation of Babbitt's essay "Humanistic Education in China and in the West."²⁸ In the editor's preface, Wu Mi tried to make Babbitt (known to his Chinese readers as "Bai Bide") relevant to 1920s China. He ignored Babbitt's role in the American debate on higher education; instead, he depicted him as a foreign expert who had answers to Chinese questions. First, he stressed that despite Babbitt's inability to read Chinese, he was well informed regarding the recent development in China. He told his readers, "[Mr. Bai Bide] is particularly concerned with the affairs of our country, and he reads all the published works on our country."²⁹ Second, he pointed out that as "a leading literary critic in America," Mr. Bai Bide offered a vision of society fundamentally different from that of other Western thinkers. While other Western thinkers stressed the benefits of scientism and materialism in producing more consumer goods, Mr. Bai Bide focused on the role of religion and morality in shaping an individual's spiritual life. As other Western thinkers saw modern Europe as the apex of human development, Mr. Bai Bide combined the learning of "East and West, and past and present."³⁰

Certainly Wu Mi's comments can be interpreted as part of the "conservative critique" of industrialization and scientism after the end of the World War I. They can also be seen as a prelude to the Chinese debate on science and morality in 1923. But by describing Babbitt as a thinker of a fast growing industrialized country who considered Eastern philosophy a spiritual foundation for the twentieth-century world, Wu had a specific goal in mind. His "Bai Bide" was not merely a thinker battling the industrialization and scientism of the modern world; rather, he was an opponent of the May Fourth New Culture movement in China. Through the mouth of Bai Bida, Wu found a voice to admonish his readers against the cultural iconoclasm of the *New Youth*.³¹

In addition to providing intellectual ammunition to counter the cultural iconoclasm of the *New Youth*, Babbitt's New Humanism was also attractive to Wu Mi because it gave China a role in the global discourse on modernity. By the standards of his time, Babbitt was truly "transcultural" in the sense that he attempted to articulate a global culture drawn from resources in Europe, India, and China. Babbitt's "transculturalism" arose from his deep interest in world cultures. Having studied Sanskrit and Pali with the French orientalist Sylvain Levi in Paris in 1893, he developed a lifelong interest in Indian Buddhism and wrote a book, *The Dhammapada: Translated from the Pali with an Essay on Buddha and the Orient*, published posthumously in 1936.³² He was married to Dora Drew, who was born in China when her father was the Commissioner of Imperial Customs in Tianjin. Because of his personal interest, Babbitt explored Daoism and Confucianism—something that New England "genteel gentlemen" seldom did. To his Chinese students, particularly Wu Mi, Babbitt's "globalism"

must have been a breath of fresh air and a source of inspiration at a time when Europe was universally regarded as the birthplace of modernity.

In the *Xueheng* articles on New Humanism, Babbitt's globalism was constantly on display. It appeared, as mentioned earlier, in Wu Mi's preface to Hu Xiansu's translation of Babbitt's essay "Humanistic Education in China and in the West." There, Wu told his readers that from Babbitt's perspective, there was an oneness in the teachings of Plato and Aristotle in the West, and those of Siddhartha Guatama and Confucius in the East.³³ Babbitt's globalism appeared again in Wu Mi's translation of chapter five, "Europe and Asia," of *Democracy and Leadership*.³⁴ In that chapter, Babbitt compared four thinkers: Jesus of Nazareth, Siddhartha Guatama of India, Aristotle of Athens, and Confucius of China. Crossing geographical and cultural boundaries, Babbitt first compared Jesus with Siddhartha on religious grounds, and then he compared Aristotle with Confucius on the basis of moral philosophy. Showing the oneness in learning in all corners of the world, Babbitt concluded the chapter with a plea: he wished all the modern people to learn from the "spiritual civilizations" in Asia to counter the rapid growth of materialism in Europe and America.³⁵ Apparently Wu Mi took Babbitt's view seriously. In Wu Mi's recently discovered lecture notes on aesthetics, we find him summarizing Babbitt's view by drawing a rectangle, full of crisscrossing lines, indicating how Ancient Greek thought, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity are linked together on the basis of rationality and religiosity.³⁶

Aristocratic Democracy

In current scholarship, Wu Mi's rendition of New Humanism is considered the definitive mode shared by all *Xueheng* contributors.³⁷ This picture is problematic when we compare Wu Mi's writings with those of other *Xueheng* contributors. What one finds is that while Wu Mi emphasized aesthetic taste and philosophical globalism as the two defining characteristics of New Humanism, other *Xueheng* contributors stressed Babbitt's idea of aristocratic democracy. This discrepancy reveals different strategies among the *Xueheng* contributors in using New Humanism to address the problems of 1920s China. It also shows that as a school of thought with multiple dimensions, New Humanism offered different things to different people.

As mentioned earlier, Babbitt was deeply concerned with the stability of American society in the midst of its tremendous economic and social changes at the turn of the twentieth century. For him, the prosperity and wealth from the 1880s to the 1910s had created an aristocracy of money (e.g., Rockefeller and Carnegie) that cared little about the public interest. In addition, he worried that rapid industrialization and urbanization had created a mass society which valued quantity over quality, efficiency over shared identity. If unchecked, these social and economic changes would lead to unrestricted freedom and uncontrolled individualism, weakening the foundation of American democracy. In *Literature and the American College* (1908), for example, Babbitt called for the creation of

an aristocracy of character and intelligence through a revival of the liberal arts education. He argued that this British form of moral education was superior to the German form of research institutions, because it provided an "education of governors." "Whatever the shortcomings of this system [i.e., liberal arts education]," he wrote, "it did produce a body of high principled and literate young men to be the leaders of the American democracy."³⁸ For this reason, Babbitt readily admitted that the goal of the liberal arts education was to produce an aristocracy—the rule by an elite. But he argued that this aristocracy of character and intelligence was categorically different from the aristocracy of birth, who became members of the elite based on blood rather than on worth. And this aristocracy of character and intelligence would be different from the aristocracy of money, because of their public spirit and readiness to serve the country. In defense of elitism in the liberal arts education, he wrote, "If our definition of humanism has any value, what is needed is not democracy alone, nor again an unmixed aristocracy, but a blending of the two—an aristocratic and selective democracy."³⁹ Although Babbitt stressed the role of educated elites in leading democracy, his New Humanism had no relationship with the "democratic elitism" of Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto, Robert Michels, and Antonio Gramsci that was introduced into America from Italy in the early 1940s. First, Babbitt focused on education rather than politics, let alone mass mobilization orchestrated by a professional political party. Second, Babbitt's New Humanism had long lost its appeal before democratic elitism became popular in America in the early 1940s, with no attempt on either side to link their schools of thoughts together.⁴⁰

Despite the fact that the situation in 1920s China was quite different from turn-of-the-century America, some *Xueheng* contributors shared Babbitt's concern about ensuring stability and direction amid rapid changes. Having witnessed the collapse of political order after the 1911 Revolution and the rise of warlordism since the death of Yuan Shikai in 1916, some *Xueheng* contributors found that in order to establish an open political system, it required a long process of training the Chinese citizenry to participate responsibly in the democratic process. While they accepted that popular democracy was indeed the ideal form of government for twentieth-century China, they argued that to achieve that goal, China first had to produce a group of educated elites to serve as leaders. With the patient guidance of these educated elites, gradual change would take place first in the educational and social arena, and then in political leadership.

Among the *Xueheng* contributors, Mei Guangdi was one ardent supporter of aristocratic democracy.⁴¹ In his article "Humanism of the Contemporary West,"⁴² he discussed New Humanism as a "valuable doctrine" with direct relevance to contemporary China. He praised Babbitt for his attempt to counter populism by stressing the need for discipline, restraint, and leadership.⁴³ Like Wu Mi, Mei turned Babbitt into "Bai Bide"—a foreign expert who offered answers to Chinese questions. Inspired by a reading of Babbitt's writings, Mei found that although political discussions in China often claimed to include the masses into the political process, few people had paid attention to the danger of equating quantity with quality. While he admitted that populism was indeed part

of "the global current" (*shijie chaoliu*), he reminded his readers that only the well-educated elites could appreciate the "permanent truth" (*jiuyuan zhi zhenli*) of humanity.⁴⁴ For him, only these high-minded elites could uphold the social and moral standards of society, and serve as the model for other citizens.

Liu Boming also argued for an aristocratic democracy in his article on "Republican Spirit."⁴⁵ Without mentioning Babbitt, Liu spelled out the importance of school education in cultivating the republican spirit. Clearly aiming his article at the *New Youth* iconoclasts, he argued that democracy did not only mean freedom from dictatorship and oppression; it also meant the freedom of assuming the duties and responsibilities of a citizen.⁴⁶ For him, the goal of aristocratic democracy was not to perpetuate the paternalism, hierarchy, and elitism of the *ancien regime*. Rather, its goal was to establish a "republic of letters," an elite who would shoulder the responsibility for educating their fellow citizens. The 1911 Revolution failed, according to Liu, because the revolutionaries established a republic without cultivating a republican spirit. The revolutionaries succeeded in abolishing the absolute monarchy, but they did not set up a school system to train responsible citizens. Using the Greek city-state as a model (the same model that Babbitt employed to support the revival of liberal arts education), Liu argued that there would not be a true Republic of China until every Chinese citizen knew his or her rights and responsibilities. He believed that the Republican Revolution in China had entered a new phase: it was no longer a political revolution, but a revolution in school education and social practices.⁴⁷ To drive home his point, Liu painted a gloomy picture of the Chinese educational system at the end of the article. He stated that given the poor development of the Chinese educational system, offering free education to every Chinese citizen would be a distant goal. Hence, the immediate concern was to provide adequate training to elementary and secondary teachers, who would be at the front-line of educating young Chinese citizens.⁴⁸

If we take seriously Liu Boming's concern about the inadequate training of the elementary and secondary teachers, it explains why he wanted to create a republic of letters to lead the country. For him, educated elites would be the "teachers of the nation" who trained future citizens of the republic at public schools. In the same vein, Liu's concern about the inadequate training of teachers also explains why he supported the *Xueheng* policy of publishing articles only in classical Chinese, despite the fact that the vernacular language had been officially accepted by the Beiyang government in 1921 as the medium of pedagogy in elementary school. For him, classical Chinese was not merely a written language, but also an expression of the commitment to public service, similar to the mission that the literati professed to carry out in imperial China. There were, of course, major differences between the literati in imperial China and the republic of letters in Republican China. One difference, for example, was that the literati in imperial China professed to serve the public by serving the emperor, and the republic of letters in Republican China professed to serve the public by serving the nation. Nevertheless, despite the differences, the republic of letters in post-1911 China was expected to be as public-minded and self-sacrificing as the literati in imperial China.

Education and Democracy

Like other schools of thought, there were many dimensions to New Humanism. It offered a literary alternative to Romanticism and Naturalism. It stressed the importance of religious beliefs in countering the excessive materialism of the industrial age. It provided a socio-political vision based on Jeffersonian aristocratic democracy. It called attention to the value of liberal arts colleges as higher education in the United States became increasingly specialized, impersonalized, and utilitarian. Offering an array of intellectual resources, New Humanism was at its root a critique of the modern age, especially of its unchecked industrialization, urbanization, populism, and commercialism.

While the translations and interpretative summaries of the *Xueheng* writers successfully introduced many of these core ideas of New Humanism to the Chinese audience, they appear to have missed its socio-political vision and its educational goal. Their failure to grasp the educational goal of New Humanism is particularly revealing. Unlike John Dewey, the archrival of New Humanism in the American debate on educational reform, Irving Babbitt was never known in China as a philosopher of education. Certainly, there were many reasons for this lack of interest in Babbitt's educational philosophy. One reason was the *Xueheng*'s over-investment in New Humanism as an opposing theory to the May Fourth New Culture movement. In this regard, Wu Mi might have miscalculated in casting New Humanism purely as a literary theory and a moral philosophy. Another reason was the missing link between Babbitt's America and 1920s China. As China was struggling to create a national school system, there was little need to have a debate on whether the Chinese universities should adopt the German model of research institutions or the British model of liberal arts colleges. Furthermore, even when some coastal cities like Shanghai underwent rapid industrialization during the World War I, industrialization in China was still at too early a stage to create a "mass society" throughout the country that would destabilize the social and political order. No matter how important the educational debate was from the perspective of pedagogy and educational philosophy, it seemed to be premature to have one in 1920s China.

Nevertheless, despite these missing links, Babbitt and his Chinese followers shared one common concern—the need for direction and leadership amidst drastic changes. Elitist and old-fashioned as it might seem to its critics, New Humanism stressed the continuity amidst change in school curriculum and in the leadership of educated elites in managing the social-political transformation. On this score, in contrast to Wu Mi, Mei Guangdi and Liu Boming appear to have had a better sense of how New Humanism might fit the needs of 1920s China. Emphasizing the role of education in shaping the citizens, the two writers rendered New Humanism as an educational theory, rather than as a theory of aesthetics and a moral philosophy. More importantly, with reference to the centuries-old literati tradition in China, the two writers called upon educated elites to shoulder their responsibility to be "the teachers of citizens." In calling on edu-

cated elites to lead the country, Mei Guangdi and Liu Boming might have been preaching to the choir, as most of the *Xueheng* readers were self-identified educated elites devoted to "saving the nation through education" (*jiaoyu jiuguo*).⁴⁹ Yet, by underscoring the importance of gradual change through education, they made New Humanism directly relevant to the pressing issues of 1920s China.

It is, of course, pointless to speculate whether New Humanism would have gained more support in China had it been consistently presented as an educational theory. After 1922, owing to personal reasons and premature death, Mei Guangdi and Liu Boming, respectively, stopped contributing articles to *Xueheng*. With their departure, Wu Mi became the sole interpreter of New Humanism, continuing to render it as a theory of aesthetics and a moral philosophy. As the journal continued to lose its appeal to younger readers in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the *Xueheng* vision of Chinese modernity was increasingly marginalized and trivialized.⁵⁰ In hindsight, however, the *Xueheng* vision of Chinese modernity was far more subtle and complex than what the term "conservatism" conveys. Despite its limited impact in its times, it was undoubtedly part of the Chinese participation in the global discourse on modernity. It proved that in the quest for modernity, it is possible to embrace and critique the West at the same time.