Cultural Identity and Local Self-Government

A Study of Liu Yizheng's *History of Chinese Culture*

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Until recently, the study of Chinese historical writings of the 1920s and 1930s has centered on "the May Fourth approach to history," especially the Doubting Antiquity Movement (yigu yundong) led by Gu Jiegang. By privileging their historical writings as modern or progressive and labeling their opponents' as traditional or regressive, we fail to see the full scope of the modern Chinese historical debate and overlook its social and political underpinnings. In this article, based on a close reading of History of Chinese Culture *(Zhongguo wenhua shi) of Liu Yizheng (1880-1956), the author seeks to contextualize the historical debate in terms of the political and social change in post-1911 China. Written in the early 1920s when intellectuals still could express different views of the nation without the fear of state censorship, Liu's* History of Chinese Culture *gave renewed emphasis to local self-government, thereby challenging the expansion of the state.*

Keywords: Liu Yizheng; cultural identity; local self-government; Doubting Antiquity Movement.

Decades ago, Benjamin Schwartz (1972, 1983) warned us about the danger of considering the May Fourth New Culture Movement (1915-1923) to be the key turning point in the history of modern China. Recently, Lydia Liu (1995) and David Der-wei Wang (1997) have shown that in literature, the picture of China's entry to the modern age is far more complex than is presented by those who focus

primarily on May Fourth. As more information about Republican China has become available, it is clear that the May Fourth iconoclasts did not monopolize the Chinese discourse on modernity. Rather than voicing the dominant view of the time, they were only one strain in the chorus of those transforming China from a dynasty into a nation-state (Sang Bing, 2001; Gimpel, 2001). Innovative as they might have been, their view became hegemonic partly because their strategies to silence opponents succeeded and partly because creating orthodoxy was politically expedient (Doleželová-Velingerová and Wang, 2001b; Lee, 2001; Wagner, 2001). In the past few years, armed with new information and a fresh perspective, scholars have started to reexamine the history of modern China to uncover the multiple possibilities of Chinese modernity, and some of them have called for recasting May Fourth as one of the many voices in the debate (Lee, 1999; Yeh, 2000; Shih, 2001; Sun, 2002).

In the study of modern Chinese historiography, the need to shift the focus away from May Fourth is even greater (A. Schneider, 2001). Until recently, the study of Chinese historical writings of the 1920s and 1930s has been centered on "the May Fourth approach to history," especially the Doubting Antiquity Movement (*yigu yundong*) led by Gu Jiegang (1893-1980), Hu Shi (1891-1962), Qian Xuantong (1887-1939), and Fu Sinian (1894-1950). In the name of science, democracy, and progress, these May Fourth iconoclasts questioned the traditional historical genealogy and the Confucian orthodoxy. And their approach to history—summarized succinctly by Hu Shi as "returning the past to the past"—was considered by much late-twentieth-century scholarship to be the paradigm of modern Chinese historiography against which other historical writings of the same period are judged (L. Schneider, 1971; Xu Guansan, 1986; Peng Minghui, 1991; Wang Fan-sen, 1987, 2000; Q. E. Wang, 2001).

Certainly, these historians were significant in breaking new ground in historical research, particularly with respect to employing Western methods to give meaning to the past. They were also instrumental in broadening the scope of historical inquiry and introducing new forms of historical writing—to the point that their "new history" was dramatically different from the dynastic histories. Yet by privileging their historical writings as modern or progressive and labeling their opponents' as traditional or regressive, we lose sight of the contributions of those historians who did not share the assumptions of the May Fourth agenda. More important, in viewing the historical discourse of modern China exclusively from the perspective of the May Fourth iconoclasts, we fail to see the full scope of the modern Chinese historical debate and overlook its social and political underpinnings.

In this article, I focus on the historian Liu Yizheng (1880-1956), who wrote one of the first complete accounts of Chinese culture. Because of his alleged conservatism (e.g., writing in classical Chinese, emphasizing textual support, and arguing for the superiority of Chinese tradition), in current scholarship, he has not received the attention that he deserves. In the few biographical accounts available, he is depicted as a dispassionate scholar specializing in classical texts, ancient history, and bibliography (Boorman, 1967: 400; Qin Xiaoyi, 1985: 227). He is credited for his dedication to teaching, expertise in classical scholarship, and broad historical knowledge, but he is not viewed as an innovative historian or a penetrating thinker (Qiao Yanguan, 1971; Sun Yongru, 1993; Zhenjiang shi, 1986: 82-226). In some Western literature, he is described as a narrow-minded and old-fashioned scholar who, in opposing the May Fourth New Culture Movement, refused to let go of a dying tradition (Furth, 1983: 350-54; L. Schneider, 1976: 73-89).

Missing from this picture is Liu Yizheng's contribution to creating a new historical genre—the cultural history (*wenhua shi*). Since 1911, reflecting the changes in the political atmosphere of postrevolution China, historians had begun to write histories of Chinese culture (Zhou Jiming, 1997: 124). In narrating the past, they replaced race (*zhongzu*) with culture (*wenhua*) as the primary category in envisioning the collective identity of the Chinese. In doing so, they attempted to shift the political debate from focusing on racial differences (e.g., anti-Manchuism, Great Hanism) to finding a common ground among

different ethnic groups in China. Concentrating on a wide range of human activities that brought the diverse groups of Chinese people together, they demonstrated that there was a way to articulate the collective identity of the Chinese without hiding their ethnic, linguistic, and geographical differences.[1]

After a decade of trials and errors, the publication of Liu Yizheng's *History of Chinese Culture* (*Zhongguo wenhua shi*) in 1932 represented, in the words of Hu Shi, "the founding of the genre of History of Chinese Culture" (Hu Shi, 1933a: 1). By offering a complete and informed account of Chinese culture from time immemorial to the 1920s, Liu established the theme, the style, and the vocabulary for discussing China as a cultural entity for a broad audience. Other historians, such as Miao Fenglin (1898-1959), Qian Mu (1898-1990), Chen Dengyuan (1899-1975), and Zhang Qiyun (1916-1985),[2] might disagree with him regarding what constitutes Chinese culture. Nevertheless, they followed his example in focusing on the development of a Chinese collective identity over time, as it incorporated significant political, social, and economic change.

Equally important, with the publication of the *History of Chinese Culture*, Liu helped to make history by writing a part of the discourse on the *cultural nation* that dominated much of the Republican period (Moloughney, 2000). Described by James Townsend (1996) as "culturalism as identity," this discourse on the cultural nation was intended to strike a balance between promoting China's participation in the global march to modernity, on one hand, and enunciating its particular nature in the community of nations, on the other. In many respects, this discourse was integral to the Chinese quest for national identity, and Liu's case illustrates the close relationship between history and nationalism that has recently been closely scrutinized (Duara, 1995; Fitzgerald, 1997; Bulag, 1997; Lie, 1997). But what separates Liu from other so-called nationalist historians is that his presentation of "culturalism as identity" was to lend support to a movement that countered the bureaucratic centralization of the state.

Instead of complying with the demand for nation building that was being orchestrated by the Beiyang and Guomindang governments, Liu wrote the *History of Chinese Culture* in part to revive the late Qing discussion of local self-government (*difang zizhi*).[3] Although he played no part in the federalist movement of the 1920s, he is

significant because he gave priority to local self-government when many of his contemporaries considered centralization and unification under a strong state as the only way to save the country. Admittedly, his view of the nation was not popular in his times; nevertheless, it was an option that the Chinese could have chosen in reshaping their sociopolitical order. More important, it demonstrates the wide range of possibilities in the debate on Chinese modernity that are often overlooked in current scholarship.

In what follows, I draw on a close reading of Liu Yizheng's *History of Chinese Culture* as I seek to answer two questions. First, how did he articulate a collective identity for contemporary Chinese by defining Chinese culture and writing a history of Chinese culture? Second, how did his "culturalism as identity" offer a vision for political and social change in post-1911 China that gave renewed emphasis to local self-government, thereby challenging the expansion of state control? To answer these two questions, I begin with a sketch of Liu's biography, situating him in the intellectual context of post-1911 China. Next I analyze the multifaceted nature of the *History of Chinese Culture*. And finally, I assess Liu's *History of Chinese Culture* in the context of the 1920s Chinese discourse on the nation. Central to my analysis is Liu's distinction between nation (*minzu*, *guojia*) and state (*zhengfu*). For him, the former denoted the collective consciousness of a people, and the latter referred to a political structure that carried out the functions of a government.[4] On the grounds of this distinction, he considered the 1911 Revolution a failure—not only because it was ill planned and hijacked by warlords but also because it ushered in bureaucratic centralization of the state at the expense of the nation. Written in a time when intellectuals still could express different views of the nation without fear of state censorship, Liu's *History of Chinese Culture* offered both a historical perspective and a sociopolitical vision.

LIU YIZHENG: THE MAN AND HIS TIMES

Ten to twenty years senior to the May Fourth generation, Liu Yizheng was raised in a cultural milieu in which classical learning was still the ladder to success. To pass the civil service examinations and

thereby enter into officialdom, members of the educated elite had to memorize the Five Confucian Classics and familiarize themselves with the voluminous commentaries written on them. Classical learning was so important in defining social status that even those who did not have luck in the examinations did not waste the time and effort spent in learning the classics. As members of the gentry (*shisheng*), they became involved in managing local affairs such as education, disaster relief, and annual festivals. In short, for Liu's generation, classical learning was not only a link to the past, but it was also their "cultural capital" (à la Pierre Bourdieu), the foundation of their social and political status.[5]

Born in 1880 in Dantu county of Jiangsu province, Liu spent his early years preparing for the civil service examinations. The son of a poor scholar who died when he was only age five, Liu became a *shengyuan* (licentiate) student on a government stipend in 1895. At the same time that late Qing officials were contemplating a drastic reform of the civil service examination system to address its shortcomings, the system appears to have made it possible for Liu to attain a formal education and to hope for social mobility. Beginning in 1900, with little prospect for passing the advanced levels of the civil service examinations, he capitalized on his classical learning by working for the philologist Miao Quansun (1844-1919) at the compilation and translation bureau of Jiangsu and Hubei provinces. As it turned out, his shengyuan status landed him a job that was socially respectable and intellectually challenging. As Miao's protégé, he was sent to Japan in 1902 as a member of the Qing mission to study the Japanese school system. During his two-month tour, he was impressed by the country's swift introduction of a Western school system. He was also fascinated by the Japanese adoption of Western genres of history (Sun Yongru, 1993: 9-13).

After returning home, Liu participated in building the new Chinese school system, which was intended by 1905 to replace the civil service examinations as a means of selecting officials. Fate thus put him in the position of using his classical learning and historical knowledge to end an institution that had been the vehicle for his own upward mobility. His role in building the new school system was mainly confined to the compilation of textbooks.[6] The most important of these was *A Brief Historical Account of Different Periods* (*Lidai shilüe*, [1902]

1905).[7] Although it was primarily an adaptation of *A General History of China* (*Shina tsūshi*, 1899) by Naka Michiyo (1851-1908),[8] Liu's work differed significantly from the Japanese writer's text in three areas. First, Liu changed the tone of the book, from one that saw China from afar to one that discussed China from the Qing perspective. Second, in keeping with the Qing ethnic policy of emphasizing Manchu-Han collaboration, he downplayed—sometimes even deleted—Naka's discussion of the ethnic differences in China. Third, he added three new chapters, extending Naka's account to include the history of the Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties (Sun Yongru, 1993: 50; Wu Ze, 1989: 155).[9]

Liu's involvement in the educational reform movement exposed him to late Qing local self-government. From 1905 to 1911, as it prepared for constitutional monarchy, the Qing government invited the educated elite to participate in administrating their districts. One of the areas on which these men focused their attention was education—a domain that had traditionally been under their control as part of their service to society. Respected local leaders, such as Zhang Jian (1853-1926) and Huang Yanpei (1878-1965), led the charge in forming local educational associations to finance new schools and shape a new curriculum (Bastid, 1988: 53-57; Schwintzer, 1992: 8-11). Some of these local education associations, most notably the Jiangsu Provincial Education Association (Jiangsu sheng jiaoyu hui), were so influential in national politics that they became the unofficial forum for demanding local representative government (Bastid, 1988: 57-77; Bailey, 1990: 101-20; Schwintzer, 1992: 130-214). During this period of political decentralization, Liu taught at a number of primary and middle schools founded by local educated elite, including Zhang Jian's Mid-level Academy of Commerce of Jiangnan (Jiangnan zhongdeng shangye xuetang) (Zhenjiang shi, 1986: 4; Sun Yongru, 1993: 12). As will be shown, Liu's exposure to late Qing local self-government shaped his perspective on social and political development in post-1911 China.

From 1915 to the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, Liu worked mainly in Nanjing. He first taught at Nanjing High Normal School (Nanjing gaodeng shifan xuexiao) and later at National Southeastern University (Guoli dongnan daxue). In 1922, while teaching at National Southeastern University, he joined a group of American-

trained scholars—including Mei Guangdi (1890-1945), Tang Yongtong (1893-1964), and Wu Mi (1894-1978)[10]—in founding the journal *Critical Review* (*Xueheng*).[11] For more than a decade until it folded in 1933, this journal was devoted to publishing articles discussing the uniqueness of Chinese culture (e.g., Confucian ethics and Chinese philosophy), introducing Western classics and literature (e.g., Plato's dialogues and Dante's *Inferno*), and comparing Chinese with European cultures. At the time, it was considered a counterforce to such May Fourth publications as *New Youth* (*Xin qingnian*) and the *Symposium of Ancient History* (*Gushi bian*), edited by Gu Jiegang (Shen Songqiao, 1984). As a founder of the journal and for many years its assistant editor, Liu was a regular contributor. Some of his pieces in the *Critical Review* were long articles about classical scholarship and historical events, but many were short commentaries on contemporary affairs. In the latter, Liu showed his talents as a social and political commentator. Covering a wide range of topics, he expressed his concerns about the social and political changes in post-1911 China, including corruption in elections (*Xueheng* 4 [1922] 1971: 513-19), the moral responsibility of college students (*Xueheng* 6 [1922] 1971: 783-95), the spread of commercialism (*Xueheng* 30 [1924] 1971: 4043-45), and corruption in government (*Xueheng* 44 [1925] 1971: 5979-84).[12] Later, we will see how some of the views revealed in these social and political commentaries found their way into Liu's *History of Chinese Culture*.

To register his displeasure with the Doubting Antiquity Movement, Liu publicly criticized Gu Jiegang in 1924. A year earlier, Gu had published an article reevaluating the ancient historical figure Yu. Yu was one of the "three founders of early China" in the traditional genealogy of rulers, following Yao and Shun. He was particularly honored for his role in stopping the great flood of the Yellow River, founding the Xia dynasty (usually dated prior to 1800 B.C.E.), and starting the practice of hereditary succession of political power. Occupying a prominent position as a subject of pre-1911 Chinese historiography, Yu was one of "the Three Emperors and the Five Kings" (*sanhuang wudi*), who were collectively described as creating the river valley civilization, the dynastic system, and the patrilineal family structure in China (Xia Zengyou, [1904] 1994: 22-25; Liu Shipei, 1904: 217-18). Calling into question this traditional view of Yu, Gu set out to prove that Yu

originally was not a human being but a ritualized symbol of a worm found on sacrificial caldrons (Gu Jiegang, 1926: 105-33). In support of his argument, Gu cited a number of ancient texts, particularly the first-century dictionary *Shuowen jiezi* (*Analytical Dictionary of Characters*), where he found *Yu* as being taken to mean *worm* (Gu Jiegang, 1926: 118-21).

In his review of Gu's findings, Liu Yizheng sought partly to defend the traditional view of Yu as the hero of the great flood and partly to take Gu to task for his historical skepticism. Liu acknowledged that philology and textual criticism were indeed valuable tools in learning about the past. But, he suggested, to apply them effectively and responsibly to the study of ancient China, Gu should gain a greater familiarity with classical scholarship. Liu was particularly concerned about Gu's misuse of the *Shuowen jiezi* (Gu Jiegang, 1926: 217-22; Liu Yizheng, 1970: 196-203, 1991a: 66-71).[13] Although the dictionary clearly indicated that the character for *yu* means *worm*, Liu found that Gu did not realize its compiler was treating the character as a word, not as the name of a historical figure. Liu argued that in a dictionary whose purpose was to elucidate the meaning of words, the compiler of the *Shuowen jiezi* had good reason for making such a distinction and that plentiful examples indicated that he was conscious of what he was doing. As a scholar, Liu concluded, Gu should have known the purpose and conventions of the *Shuowen jiezi* before using it to support his iconoclastic claims. In his 1926 response to Liu, Gu Jiegang acknowledged his mistake in using the *Shuowen jiezi* and dropped his claim that Yu was a ritualized symbol (Gu Jiegang, 1926: 224-27).

A high point of Liu's intellectual career was the serialization of his *History of Chinese Culture* in the *Critical Review* in the late 1920s. It took him many years to prepare and publish the work. He began lecturing on the history of Chinese culture at National Southeastern University in 1919, at the height of the May Fourth New Culture Movement. At that time, many of his colleagues and students already regarded his well-received lectures as direct responses to the movement (Zhenjiang shi, 1986: 142-46; Zhang Qiqun, 1968: 41). Drawing on his lecture notes, he completed the first draft in 1921 and spent the next four years revising the manuscript (*Xueheng* 70 [1929] 1971: 48). When it was serialized from 1925 to 1929, he won national

recognition as an important historian of Chinese culture. While the serialization was still under way, so many pirated copies of his manuscript were circulated in Nanjing that the editors of *Critical Review* warned their readers three times not to purchase the illegal copies (editor's note in *Xueheng*, nos. 50, 51, 52 of 1926). To stop the pirates, the full text of the *History of Chinese Culture* was published in 1928 in Nanjing before the serialization was completed. In response to huge demand, the Zhongshan Bookstore reissued the book twice, in 1932 and 1935 (Sun Yongru, 1993: 104-7).

In 1932, the *History of Chinese Culture* was favorably reviewed in *Tushu pinglun* (*Reviews of Books*), as Ying Shi (1932) described it as "a monumental work" representing "the best of today's professional historians." In the following year, Hu Shi published his review in *Qinghua xuebao* (*Journal of Qinghua University*), in which, as mentioned earlier, he credited Liu for founding the genre of "cultural history" (*wenhua shi*). But Hu was critical of Liu's methodology, particularly his stress on antiquity and his lack of interest in material sources (Hu Shi, 1933a: 2-4). Despite Hu's lukewarm review, *History of Chinese Culture* continued to be popular reading among scholars and college students throughout the 1930s and 1940s, and a third reprinting by the Zhengzhong Bookstore was necessary in 1947 (Zhenjiang shi, 1986: 190).[14]

During the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), Liu made tremendous efforts to save the collection at the Jiangsu Library for National Studies, a private library built by his mentor Miao Quansun. During the war, he frequently transported books (including thousands of local records) to remote villages for storage. After suffering a severe stroke in 1942, he moved to the wartime capital, Chongqing, and taught at the relocated Central University (formerly National Southeastern University). There he wrote *The Principles of National History* (*Guoshi yaoyi*) (Liu Yizheng, [1948] 1984), in which he explicated the basic rules of writing history. At the end of the war, he devoted himself to restoring the Jiangsu Library for National Studies to its former glory. Despite the great difficulties he encountered, he brought most of the books back to the library from storage (Zhenjiang shi, 1986: 5-6). From 1949 until his death in 1956, he was a member of the Shanghai Committee Overseeing Historical Artifacts (Shanghai wenwu guanli weiyuan hui).

CHINESE CULTURE AS AN OPEN SYSTEM

At first glance, the periodization employed by Liu in the *History of Chinese Culture* seems conventional by the standards of the 1920s.[15] He divides the history of Chinese culture into three periods—ancient (*shanggu*), medieval (*zhonggu*), and recent (*jinshi*)—lasting, respectively, from classical antiquity to the second century C.E., from the second to the seventeenth centuries, and from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. Such tripartite periodization had been popular in China since the turn of the twentieth century, partly because of the Japanese influence (Moloughney, 2001) and partly because of its stress on linear progression (Green, 1992). In fact, in 1902, Liu himself was among the first to introduce this form into China in *A Brief Historical Account of Different Periods*, in which he also divided the Chinese history into three periods: ancient (*shangshi*), medieval (*zhongshi*), and recent (*jinshi*). But because of its wide circulation and its prestige among scholars, *The Newest Study of Chinese History: A Textbook* (*Zuixin Zhongguo lishi jiaokeshu*, 1904) by Xia Zengyou (1863-1924) is commonly accepted as the work that began to make this tripartite periodization popular among Chinese readers. Although in the main body of the text, Xia stops at the seventh century, in the preface he presents a three-stage scheme of Chinese history: (1) the creation of a unified empire based on Confucian humanism in the second century B.C.E., (2) the rise and fall of the Confucian empire from the second century B.C.E. to the seventeenth century C.E., and (3) the efforts to revive the glory and power of the Confucian empire during the Qing dynasty (Xia Zengyou, [1904] 1994: 5-6).[16]

Yet Liu Yizheng's *History of Chinese Culture* did more than offer a familiar *temporal* narrative of the country's development from the past to the present: his tripartite periodization also included a *spatial* narrative relating what was happening in China to the rest of the world. Stressing cultural interactions, Liu underscored the fact that China had always been part of the world, and hence its history intertwined with the history of other countries. In short, with a tripartite periodization, Liu participated in developing "a global historical logic" that had become fashionable in China since the turn of the twentieth century (Karl, 2002: 1-25; Tang, 1996: 1-10). In the first section, he concentrates on the ancient period (Liu Yizheng, 1928

[1988]: 1-342).[17] He opens the section with a lengthy discussion of the "three founders of early China," paying special attention to the "great flood."[18] The section ends with the collapse of the Han dynasty in the second century C.E., focusing on the independent establishment by the people of China of a self-conscious community based on a confederation of tribes.

The second section covers the medieval period from the second to the seventeenth centuries. Here Liu describes how Indian Buddhism was incorporated into Chinese religious practices and how the long period of division of the country into north and south brought central Asians and many other ethnic groups into China (343-617). He stresses "the spread of Indian culture to China" (*Yindu wenhua donglai*) and the complex ethnic background of the Chinese during this period.

The third section deals with the recent period from the seventeenth century to the 1911 Revolution, chronicling the introduction of Western technology into China by missionaries and Western traders (808-74). Liu describes "the rise of technology" (*jiqi zhi qing*) in eighteenth-century Europe that eventually forced China to transform itself technologically and economically. He closes the section with an examination of the response of the Chinese to the challenge of modernization since the Opium War.

In Liu's tripartite periodization, only during the ancient period did the Chinese make their history in isolation. He argues that since the second century C.E., the Chinese have been active members of the global community, constantly in dialogue with people outside of China. The first major dialogue between the Chinese and foreigners occurred when Indian Buddhism was introduced into China in the second to eighth centuries. This "spread of Indian culture to China," according to Liu, exposed a major weakness of the Chinese—lack of religious sentiment (345). Challenged by the Indians, the Chinese had to develop their religious views and expand their aesthetic sensibility while preserving their this-worldly approach to life. The second major dialogue took place when European missionaries arrived in China in the fourteenth century. Armed with advanced knowledge in astronomy and armaments, Europeans exposed what had become another weakness of the Chinese—technological underdevelopment. This "European technological challenge" forced the Chinese to reexamine their priorities regarding education and learning (675-95). Liu

discusses how the Chinese, suffering repeated foreign defeats in the nineteenth century, restructured their political institutions while attempting to preserve local self-government in the villages (749-807).

By devoting two-thirds of his book to narrating the mixing of indigenous and foreign elements, Liu sent two messages to his 1920s readers. First, he gave them a picture of "Chinese culture" (*Zhongguo wenhua*) as an open system that never rejected things from abroad: "Chinese culture is indeed flexible, and from the past to the present it has been constantly renewed and rejuvenated" (preface, 1). Second, he urged his readers to fully appreciate the creative interplay in such combination. He wanted them to be aware that "even during the second and third periods when [their ancestors] were absorbing Indian and European cultures, they did not totally abandon their own culture; instead, they mixed indigenous with foreign elements, so that one would enhance the other" (preface, 1).

But how can the "Chinese culture" be open to change and yet remain a constant? If indeed "Chinese culture" has always accepted foreign elements, what makes it distinctively "Chinese"? In current scholarship, it has been widely accepted that the Chinese term for *culture—wenhua—*is a version of the Japanese kanji, *bunka* (Liu, 1995: 239-40). The Chinese term itself was not new, but in nineteenth-century Japan, it came to connote a particular way of life separating one group of people from the other. It was this new understanding that influenced the modern Chinese interpretation of the term (Moloughney, 2000). As it became popular in the 1920s, the redefined *wenhua* was often used in contradistinction with *wenming* (civilization), a process of materialist advance commonly shared by all human beings.[19] As Douglas Howland has pointed out, this separation of *wenhua* from *wenming* was intended "to stress the need for a more Germanic and spiritual *kultur*, as a deliberate alternative to the objectionably materialist 'civilization'" (Howland, 1996: 247).

Despite his exposure to Japanese scholarship, Liu Yizheng did not take *wenhua* to mean *kultur*.[20] Instead, he preferred the ancient Chinese usage of *wenhua* as a combination of two concepts—the civil (*wen*) and the transformation of human behavior (*hua*). For him, *wen* (the civil) had to be distinguished from *wu* (the military). While the former connotes a system of social practices offering different groups

in society the opportunity to negotiate their interests through a system of rituals, the latter suggests coercion based on brute force.[21] For this reason, he liked to discuss wen in light of *wenjiao* (civil teaching), *wenwu* (civil artifacts), and *wenxue* (civil writing). For instance, in examining the wenhua (civil learning) of the Song and Yuan dynasties (960-1368 C.E.), he focused on the schools, private academies, and arts and literature (560-99).

In the same vein, *hua* (to transform) had to be distinguished from *zhi* (to administer). While the former refers to a gradual process of education, persuasion, and negotiation that ends in consensus, the latter suggests the direct control of the rulers without any regard for the interests of the ruled. Hence, Liu often discussed hua as a transformative process in terms of four categories—*zheng* (government), *jiao* (education), *feng* (local preference), and *su* (social custom). The first two (*zheng* and *jiao*) give precedence to the rulers and the central authority; the latter two (*feng* and *su*) promote the interest of the ruled and the local community. Together, the four categories suggest the give-and-take between the rulers and the ruled, as well as between the central authority and the local community. For instance, in examining the wenhua (transformation based on civil practices) of the ancient Xia dynasty, Liu concentrated on how the Xia political institution and educational system nurtured a belief in self-sacrifice (*zhong*) and filial piety (*xiao*) (71-82). In explaining the wenhua of the Shang dynasty, he stressed the practice of worshipping "deities and ancestors" (*gui shen*) as a way of developing a sense of loyalty among the Shang people to their government and their families (95-111).

Thus, putting *wen* and *hua* together, Liu took *wenhua* to mean a gradual and civil process of transformation whereby originally disparate individuals become a self-conscious group. A case in point is Liu's discussion of the "composite system of civil learning" (*hunhe kefang zhi wenhua*) in medieval China (365-66). In the historical writings of the 1920s, that period (roughly from 200 to 1300) was often depicted as a time of decline and disintegration. There were three reasons for such a reading of medieval China. First, repeated invasions of Central Asians and nomads from the north forced the Han Chinese to move south of the Yangzi River, and therefore they lost control of their ancient homeland—the Yellow River Valley. Second, the massive migration of Central Asians into northern China that pushed the Han

Chinese to relocate to the south added greatly to the complexity of China's ethnic landscape. Third, Indian Buddhism became popular in China, successfully competing with indigenous religions such as Daoism.[22]

Chaotic as the medieval period might seem, Liu nonetheless found a number of positive elements in it (361-66). In his mind, that "chaos" had two aspects. Politically speaking, the Han Chinese were indeed in deep trouble because half of their land was under foreign control. But in terms of wenhua (gradual transformation based on civil learning), the Han Chinese loss of political control was compensated for by the emergence of a more diverse China in which old and new, indigenous and foreign elements were combined and integrated. Liu regarded the Central Asians and the Han Chinese as equal partners in this development. While the Central Asians brought Indian Buddhism and the military ethos into China, the Han Chinese provided the educational tools and social mechanism to spread the new religion and the new customs to all corners of the country. As the co-creators of a new China, both the Central Asians and the Han Chinese accepted and learned from one another. On one hand, the Central Asians "sinicized" (*tonghua*)[23] by adopting the Chinese educational tools and social practices, including the civil writing (*wenxue*), the school system (*jiaoxue*), and the imperial rituals (*fayi*). On the other hand, the Han Chinese enriched their religious life and aesthetic taste by adopting Indian Buddhism.

In short, Liu presents in his reading of medieval China a dynamic picture of the Chinese constantly engaged in re-creating themselves. His understanding of "Chinese culture" can be considered, at least in part, as a response to May Fourth iconoclasm. Unlike the May Fourth intellectuals, who assumed that the past was passé in the global march to modernity, Liu saw a genuine dialogue between past and present, East and West—opposing forces that were engaged in *co-creating* modern China. With the "spread of Indian culture to China" in the medieval period as an example, Liu saw the possibility of the "Europeanization of China" in his times. This Europeanization would entail a mixture of elements from Europe and China. For example, the Chinese would combine Western technology with Eastern ethics or mix the Western form of the centralized state with the local self-government of Chinese villages.

Although one might wish that Liu had been more specific (especially in the last three chapters of the book) in describing what this Europeanization of China might look like,[24] he continued what Liang Shuming (1898-1988) had begun in 1921 in pointing out the possibility of mixing Eastern and Western elements. In recounting the past, he sent the same message to his readers as was found in Liang's *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*: the Chinese needed to accept Western technology, on one hand, and reexamine their own tradition, on the other (Alitto, 1979: 82-125). Equally important, by presenting Chinese culture as an open system, Liu helped to define the subject of inquiry for a group of younger scholars such as Chen Yinke (1890-1969) and Feng Youlan (1895-1990), whose works in the 1930s and 1940s were to demonstrate the constant mixing of indigenous and foreign elements in Chinese history.[25]

THE COLLECTIVE SPIRIT OF THE NATION

Liu devoted one-third of the *History of Chinese Culture* to discussing the "three dynasties" (the Xia, the Shang, and the Zhou)—a great deal more space than he spent on other "great" dynasties such as the Han, the Tang, the Song, the Ming, and the Qing. This disproportionate treatment gave some of Liu's critics cause to complain about his preference for antiquity over the more recent past, as well as his interest in mythology rather than history (Hu Shi, 1933a: 2-4). At first glance, his lengthy discussion of the three great dynasties appears to be unwarranted. First, at the time when he was writing, there was not much hard evidence for the existence of these ancient dynasties, especially the Xia. Although some historians such as Wang Guowei (1877-1927) appealed to archaeological findings to defend their historicity,[26] the material evidence was nevertheless scarce. Second, the social and political system of these dynasties is best described as predynastic, meaning that it was drastically different from that of the centralized empire founded in 221 B.C.E. Even if transformation in modern China depends on an assessment of the country's dynastic heritage, studying the precursor of that dynastic system seems not to merit much effort.

A closer look, however, shows that in his lengthy discussion of the three dynasties, Liu had a larger goal than defending their historicity.

He focused less on historical events than on the period's special meaning, which he could not find in other parts of Chinese history. A key to his purpose can be found in his interpretation of the "great flood" (*hongshui*) in antiquity. Citing a variety of sources ranging from the *Book of History* (*Shujing*) to the *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji*), he argues that the great flooding of the Yellow River—around the time of the mythical figures Yao, Shun, and Yu—was the beginning of the "Chinese nation" (*minzu*) (10-15).[27] He observes that before then, China held only tribes with separate identities, some perhaps even with different ethnic backgrounds; a collective consciousness developed when widespread flooding occasioned a "big grouping" (*daqun*), bringing formerly disparate tribes into a confederation to organize human labor, distribute resources, and regulate the inheritance of property (20-24). Because of the colossal task of taming the Yellow River and the constant need to maintain the system of irrigation, the confederation—originally formed as an ad hoc response to a crisis—became a permanent form of social and political organization in China, and over time a collective identity developed among its members. For Liu, that collective identity became the foundation of the "Chinese national character" (*guomin xin*) (32-37).

Putting aside for the moment the question of historical evidence, Liu's dating of the Chinese nation looks perplexing on theoretical grounds. He seems to go too far back into prehistory to locate an identity that can be found only in modern time. If one accepts Ernest Gellner's argument that national identity is a result of social homogenization and political totalization in the industrial age (Gellner, 1983: 53-87), then Liu clearly is completely mistaken. He seems to ignore one important social and political precondition for national identity to arise—the emergence of a centralized political structure, which we call the state. In Gellner's words, "Not only is our definition of nationalism parasitic on a prior and assumed definition of the state; it also seems to be the case that nationalism emerges only in milieux in which the existence of the state is already very much taken for granted" (Gellner, 1983: 4). Furthermore, as Benedict Anderson points out, the emergence of national consciousness was a product of the print culture. Without the easy availability of newspapers and books made possible by the printing press and a consumer market, modern people would not have been able to "imagine" a common identity based on "a

homogeneous, empty time" (Anderson, 1991: 24). If indeed national consciousness is primarily a function of modern capitalism and printing technology, then Liu was totally off the mark in dating the "Chinese nation" to an ancient great flood.

However, if the nation is understood as resulting not from loyalty to a sovereign state but from a self-conscious commitment to a group, then Liu's argument is not as far-fetched as it first appears. Defending the "historical-cultural approach" to nation against the Gellnerian "modernist approach," Walker Connor explains, "Since the nation is a self-defined rather than an other-defined grouping, the broadly held conviction concerning the group's singular origin need not and seldom will accord with factual data. . . . This is a matter which is *known* intuitively and unquestionably, a matter of attitude and not of fact" (Connor, 1994: 94).[28] If the nation is understood in Connor's sense— as an intuition, an attitude, and a communal bond—then it can manifest itself in different sociopolitical institutions: a tribal society, a feudal system, or an empire. Therefore, the modern nation-state is at best one possible political expression of the nation. Nor is the nation necessarily a product of print culture. According to Prasenjit Duara, "The exclusive emphasis on print capitalism as enabling the imagining of a common destiny and the concept of simultaneity ignores the complex relationship between the written and spoken word [in agrarian communities]" (Duara, 1995: 53). The inability of a preindustrial people to disseminate information rapidly in printed form does not mean that they lacked a common identity. On the contrary, in many cases, our records reveal premodern societies that had a strong sense of community not unlike that of modern people (Duara, 1995: 51-82).

If we accept Liu's approach to nation as theoretically valid, then why was the great flood so important in shaping the Chinese collective identity? An answer to this question is found in Liu's discussion of the meaning of "China"—*zhongguo*. According to him, since the common identity of Chineseness was born out of a loose confederation to combat river flooding, the communal bond should reflect that historical fact. Hence, the "character of the Chinese nation" had to be a double bond—a commitment to collective unity, on one hand, and a commitment to preserving local autonomy, on the other. In times of flooding or war, the commitment to unity would take precedence over the commitment to autonomy; in times of peace and prosperity, the

latter would prevail. For this reason, Liu took *zhong* in *zhongguo* to mean "finding the middle ground between opposing positions" (*shi yu zhong dao*), rather than being at the center of things (33-34).[29] He wrote,

> At the time [of taming the river], Tang and Yu [i.e., Yao and Shun] named the nation with the word *zhong*. The word was used to check the human propensity to adopt extreme positions. It served as a reminder that human beings ought to find the middle ground in dealing with things at hand. . . . Now whenever we say the name of our nation, we evoke the characteristic of our nation. [33]

To prove his point, Liu offered a number of examples. For instance, he devoted considerable attention to the ancient rule by social distinctions, known as "ruling the world by allowing the upper and lower garments to hang down" (*chui yishang er tianxia zhi*).[30] Liu argued that assigning different names and clothing to people with different social roles was an effective way to teach moderation (42-43). With a specific role to play, he explained, each person in the society both knew his or her duty to the group and had the opportunity to fulfill individual aspirations. Liu stressed that rule by social distinctions, despite promoting hierarchy and elitism, should be understood as a pedagogical system for collective growth. On one hand, it offered encouragement to "the wise and the talented" (*xian zhi zhe*) to continue what they were doing as responsible members of society. On the other hand, it issued a stern warning to "the fools and the delinquents" (*yu buxiao zhe*) to stop disrupting social harmony. Either way, rule by social distinctions enabled people with different predispositions to grow on their own terms.

Another example that Liu gave to illustrate the practice of moderation was the transmission of political power in ancient China (44-53). For him, the story of Yao yielding the throne to Shun and then Shun to Yu suggested high expectations regarding rulers' personal ethics. Instead of passing the throne to their children as later Chinese rulers did, Yao and Shun preferred to pass it to the most capable individuals. What this story described, according to Liu, was a "lofty and pure ideal person" (*gaoxiang er chunjie zhi ren*) who valued the public good above his private interest (54). Yao's and Shun's decision to give

up the throne exemplified the selflessness of the ideal rulers in ancient Chinese history, men who saw the right to rule as a public duty reserved only for the best and the brightest.

A NATION OF MODERATION VERSUS A NATION OF EXTREMES

In reading Liu's discussion of the great flood, one certainly has reason to question his gross generalization about "the character of the Chinese nation." By identifying that character with a commitment to moderation, he seems to reduce the Chinese people to a single dimension. Instead of writing a history of China that fully accounts for the multiple facets of its people's activities, he appears to be interested in essentializing it as a "nation of moderation." But recall Walker Connor's (1994) definition of the nation. If the nation entails a communal bond, an intuition, or a sense of belonging, it has to be contrasted with something outside that bond. A "we-they" distinction is assumed.

In Liu's case, China's being a "nation of moderation" is contrasted with Europe's being a "nation of extremes." In the *History of Chinese Culture*, he made this point clear when he discusses the alleged ancient practice of yielding power to the most capable person:

> From the teaching of our ancient sages and our received wisdom, yielding is often considered to be a virtue. However, people of the countries in the distant West do not have this practice of yielding. Even in their languages, there is no word comparable to our word *rang* [to yield]. Those who devote themselves to studying Chinese culture should notice the origin of this practice of yielding. [49]

When considering Liu's generalizations about China and Europe, we must keep in mind their context. Undoubtedly, Liu's knowledge of Europe was limited. He also took for granted the binary distinction between China and Europe (or the East and the West) that had become popular in 1920s China. Nonetheless, his impression of the China-Europe distinction was shaped by more than half a century of European military conquest and colonization in China, beginning with the

Opium War (1839-1842). For him, Europe was associated with gunboat diplomacy, treaty ports, indemnities, and extraterritoriality. The European domination of China suggested that Europeans were aggressive, assertive, and self-centered. They were determined to pursue their own interests at the expense of others'. For this reason, in Liu's mind, Europe collectively was a "nation of extremes." In addition, Liu's impression of Europe was shaped by a series of discussions in China in the early 1920s that set it against China on such poles as "science" versus "metaphysics" and "materialism" versus "spiritualism" (Kwok, 1965: 133-60). For him, Europe was the home of modern technological advance, providing the material conditions for Western expansion. But Europeans were clearly deficient with respect to balancing nature with human needs and individual interests with the public interest. They were materialists and selfish through and through, showing no concern for spiritual and ethical matters (808-20).

Thus, the importance of Liu's contrast between the nation of moderation and the nation of extremes lies not so much in its historical accuracy as in the message it sent to Chinese readers in the 1920s. Accepting that European technological advances had revolutionized the social and political life of humankind, Liu did not object to the changes taking place in post-1911 China. For him, the 1911 Revolution was indeed epoch making because it replaced the dynastic system with a modern political institution, the centralized state (821-30). But he was disheartened to find that after the revolution, many "strange phenomena" (*qihuan zhishi*) had occurred (870-71). With the establishment of a republican government and the expulsion of the "Manchu autocrats," the 1911 Revolution did not bring about a "new China," as the revolutionaries had promised; on the contrary, conditions seemed to be worsening. In politics, the Chinese leaders introduced mutually conflicting models, such as both a presidential system (which gave power to a strong leader) and a congressional system (which emphasized consensus) or a political structure based on a strong center and a political structure based on provincial autonomy. As a result, China's ongoing political reform in the name of advancing the interests of the Chinese people simply was making the government increasingly dictatorial (838-40). In economics, international trade was favored over self-reliance, and coastal treaty posts received

the lion's share of resources at the expense of small rural towns in the hinterland. Consequently, resources were directed unceasingly from the hinterland to coastal cities and from the coastal cities to the global market monopolized by foreigners (845-63).

From Liu's perspective, the development in China since the 1911 Revolution had been thoroughly one-sided. By defining China as a nation of moderation, in contrast with European extremism, he reminded his 1920s readers that in modernizing the country, they needed to learn from both their own history and Europe's because the global process of modernization could incorporate local traditions. He suggested that the Chinese, as they built a new political and social system in the modern age, should learn from their ancestors in striving for a balance between unity and diversity, centralization and local autonomy, and public good and private interest (49-54). Although there was no need to resurrect the tribal confederation of Yao and Shun, he counseled his countrymen not to abandon the ancient goal of forming a union of diverse groups and a government based on consensus. He declared, "We can change the institutions and methods [to suit the needs of our time], but we cannot change the fundamental principle of the nation" (69). For him, the biggest fear in building a modern centralized state was that the state apparatus might end up subjugating the nation, the collectivity. By reminding his readers of the intended meaning of "China," he called on them to balance the competing claims of building a centralizing state, on one hand, and preserving the autonomy of local communities, on the other.[31]

THE RULE OF RITUAL AND LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

In the 1920s, Liu's fear that the state would subjugate the nation was not unwarranted. As John Fitzgerald has shown, momentum was building in 1920s China to reduce "one nation" to "one state" (Fitzgerald, 1996: 147-79). In political debates, the demand for provincial federation was dismissed as feudalism, and the quest for self-government was replaced by an emphasis on local administration. A similar attempt at centralization, as Prasenjit Duara has explained (1988, 1995: 85-114), was carried out in the government's campaign against religion. In the name of modernization, the state asserted its power

over local communities by controlling temples and religious establishments. Although the Guomindang had yet to unify China when Liu was writing the *History of Chinese Culture*, Liu had observed the warlords' attempt to expand the state's power through centralization and bureaucratization and had already sensed that "one nation" would quickly be turned into "one state."

Take, for instance, Liu's comments on the adoption of the 1922 constitution. Known as the "Drafted Constitution Made at the Temple of Heaven" (Tiantan xianfa caoan), it consisted of clauses specifying the power of the central government and provincial governments, as well as the rights and duties of citizens. In 1923, it became the official constitution of China under the presidency of Cao Kun (1862-1938). Liu agreed that the adoption of the constitution was an important step toward the establishment of the "rule of law" (*fazhi*) in China. But he had serious doubts about whether the rule of law would give the Chinese people, particularly those in the rural areas, genuine power to protect themselves (838-43). Although the rights and duties of citizens were clearly specified in the constitution, he found that it did not take into account the "rule of ritual" (*lizhi*) practiced for thousands of years in local villages. Consequently, he feared that the "ideals" (*lixiang*) of the government leaders would not match the "facts and reality" (*shishi*). First of all, people in the rural areas had no idea what the government was doing, and the government did not get the support it wanted from them. Worse yet, bureaucrats took advantage of this gap to expand their power over local villages in the name of promoting local autonomy. The adoption of the 1922 constitution, in Liu's view, would very likely breed greater "bureaucratic control" (*guanzhi*), enabling the central government and the bureaucrats to impose their views on the people in rural villages (842-43).

Given Liu's fear of the state's subjugating the nation, it becomes clear why he repeatedly argued that the rule of ritual was part of "the psychology of the nation" (*minzu xinli*). In an article published in the *Critical Review*, "Local Government in Ancient China" ("Zhongguo xiangzhi zhi shangde zhuyi"),[32] he offered a portrait of ancient Chinese villages as self-contained and self-governed (*Xueheng* 17 [1923] 1971: 2305-15; Liu Yizheng, 1991b: 178-223). Many villages were practically out of reach of government officials, and thus for centuries,

the rule of ritual had provided order to villages through persuasion rather than coercion, general consensus rather than bureaucratic control. Because everyone knew everyone else in a given village, the rule of ritual encouraged local accountability and unity. The villagers had developed a strong sense of collective identity by performing a common set of ceremonies, enabling them to rule themselves without the central government. And Liu called this village autonomy *xiangzhi*—the self-government of the village.

To fully comprehend what Liu meant by the self-government of rural villages, we have to come to grips with the complexity of *lizhi* in Chinese thought. First, we need to remember that unlike *ritual* in English, *li* connotes a broad range of meanings, including *ceremony*, *propriety*, *respect*, and *honor*. It refers to the ceremonial forms of human behavior that support a social and political structure. Hence, in using the term *lizhi*, Liu had in mind a body of social customs and etiquette, a system of ethical values, and a set of cultural institutions that gave meaning to human relationships. For him, the goal of lizhi was to establish a society based on "compromise and warm human relationship" (*qinmu hele*), so that people of different generations, sexes, and social distinctions would understand their roles in the community and find the body language to communicate with one another (Liu Yizheng, 1991b: 180).[33] Also, at the heart of lizhi was the moral system and social structure built on Confucian thought's five bonds of relationship—emperor and minister, father and son, husband and wife, older brother and younger brother, and friend and friend. For this reason, Liu often used *lizhi* and *dezhi* (rule of virtue) interchangeably to underscore the moral dimension of the ceremonial forms of social behavior (Liu Yizheng, 1991b: 178-80). It was in these two senses of lizhi that he argued for the village self-government.

Furthermore, to fully understand Liu's purpose in focusing on the village self-government, we need to go back to the "New Policy" (*xinzheng*) of the late Qing. To prepare for constitutional monarchy, the Qing government encouraged the local elite to participate in governing their districts. At that time, village self-government was considered to be one means of improving local administration, and for their model, the leaders of the New Policy pointed to the ancient system of "village-district" (*xiang sui*). For instance, in Yuan Shikai's

(1907) *Regulations for Local Self-Government* (*Difang zizhi zhang-cheng*), the village-district system discussed in the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhouli*) was cited as the locus classicus for delegating power to the local elite. Yuan suggested that the Qing government revive the Western Zhou system "to let the people help one another and to let nothing be unattended" (Yuan, 1907: 1a). What Yuan had in mind was a system in which neighborhood, precinct, town, county, district, and village would have locally elected officials, who would be directly accountable to the residents.[34]

Although it is hard to tell whether this village-district system really was in place during the Western Zhou period, from the late Qing to the early 1920s, it served to motivate many local elites to participate in local administration. Zhang Jian, for example, made his name by building factories, schools, and social services in Nantong county, Jiangsu province. In *Achievements of Nineteen Years of Local Self-Government in Nantong* (*Nantong difang zizhi shijiu nian zhi chengji*, 1915), Zhang offered an impressive list of accomplishments, ranging from setting up textile industries and wineries and building kindergartens and primary schools to offering free medical care and funeral services to local residents. In the late 1910s and the early 1920s, when the warlords were fighting over the rule of China, the village-district system became even more relevant to the local elite, as nobody but the local residents could defend their homes and carry out public works. Whatever name their local action might take, it was practically the only form of government then functioning. In 1920, at an advanced age, Zhang Jian again used the village-district system as a historical metaphor to call on his fellow Jiangsuese to bring order to their province. This time he gave the ancient system a more contemporary name, calling it "village-ism" (*cunluo zhuyi*) (Zhang Jian, 1931: *zizhi lu* 3, 1a-1b, 14b).

Owing in part to his early exposure to late Qing local self-government and in part to the political realities of post-1911 China, Liu Yizheng decided to devote one-third of a chapter in the *History of Chinese Culture* to discussing local self-government. There he traced the steps by which the late Qing government delegated power to the local elite through local self-government (840-42). On the whole, he did not think that the revival of the village-district system in the late Qing had

been completely faithful to its original intent, yet he was quick to point out that significant progress had been made toward political decentralization and administrative accountability (842-43). He regarded the late Qing's revival of the Zhou system, despite its shortcomings, as important evidence that delegation of power to the local elite could lead to effective local self-government in China (121-37). It also showed that there was a way to structure society that would be much less coercive, bureaucratic, and totalizing than was a centralized state on the European model. In the 1920s, when momentum toward centralization and standardization was building, Liu's discussion of local self-government clearly conveyed a political message. By stressing the importance of local self-government and elevating the lizhi as an expression of "the psychology of the nation," he made a strong statement that political modernization in China should include the preservation of village self-government as a buffer between the nation and the state.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LIU YIZHENG

The goal of this study is not to uncover the modernity in Liu Yizheng's traditionalism. On the contrary, by focusing on his ideas of "nation," "ritual," and "culture," I wish to call attention to the limits of viewing post-1911 Chinese historiography as the triumph of what is modern (represented by the May Fourth iconoclasts) over what is traditional (symbolized by their opponents). Once we cease to assume that modernity supersedes tradition and iconoclasm triumphs over classicism, the picture of post-1911 Chinese historiography becomes far more dynamic and complex. Rather than being a simple story of the radicals winning the battle against the conservatives, we see historians of different stripes participating in an intense debate about the nature of China in the past—a debate they believed had great relevance to the social and political future of the country. Obviously, like other groups of intellectuals, historians disagreed on what was best for their country, but they agreed that they should debate by offering different visions of China in their narratives of the past. To some of them, China meant a definite geographical territory or a race. To others, it

stood for a sociopolitical system. To yet another group, it was an abstract idea suggesting a set of moral values or a commonly shared goal. Nonetheless, in their historical studies, they presented different views of the nation by giving different meanings to the past.

If we focus on historians' visions of China rather than on the degree to which they appear to be modern or Western, Liu Yizheng deserves our special attention. At first glance, his *History of Chinese Culture* seems to fall into the category of "nationalistic history" that "depict[s] the nation as a self-same ancient entity evolving into the collective subject of the modern nation-state" (Duara, 1995: 229): Liu did stress one collective identity, one national goal, and one cultural predilection among the Chinese through the ages. But as I have argued above, he was also a voice of protest against the intrusion of the centralized state into rural villages. Side by side with his narration of "China" as a country governed by an unbroken genealogy of rulers, we find him separating the nation (as a group of people) from the state (as a political structure), giving the local elites and the villagers the power to control their lives. Even as he assesses the 1911 Revolution as a political revolution replacing the imperial system with the centralized state, he promotes the rule of ritual as the model for local self-government.

Liu's duality in his narration of China draws our attention to an aspect of post-1911 Chinese historiography that has not received careful study. Rather than being confronted with an either/or question— "Are you for or against nation building?"—many Chinese historians saw themselves as participants in a discourse in which they attempted to find middle ground between centralization and local autonomy, unity and diversity, and part and whole. Instead of viewing unity and diversity, part and whole, and centralization and local autonomy as mutually exclusive, they saw them as codependent and mutually reinforcing. For them, the discussion of the whole did not hinder their advocacy of the local perspective because one side would not exist without the other. Even if they were determined to advance the local perspective, they believed that by discussing the collectivity, they could find better ways to express their demands. As this study has shown, some Chinese historians, such as Liu Yizheng, took seriously the distinction between nation and state. This distinction gave them not only the moral authority to use the nation (meaning the collective

identity of a people) to speak for local interests and village autonomy but also the legitimacy to challenge the state as it expanded its power in the name of modernization.

NOTES

1. For a list of histories of Chinese culture published from 1914 to 1947, see Zhou Jiming (1997: 124). One of the early advocates of cultural history was Liang Qichao. He discussed the goal of writing a history of Chinese culture in "Zhongguo lishi yanjiu fa" (Method of studying Chinese history, 1922, in Liang Qichao, [1936] 1989: *zhuanji* 73, 35-36, 46). In "Zhongguo wenhua shi: shehui zuzhi pian" (History of Chinese culture: chapter on social organization, 1927; *zhuanji* 86, 1-100)—his aborted attempt to write a full history of Chinese culture—Liang demonstrated the possibility of discussing the Chinese as a group without ignoring their internal differences.

2. All four wrote histories of Chinese culture from the 1930s to 1980s. In 1933, five years after Liu published the *History of Chinese Culture*, Chen Dengyuan followed with a work by the same title. While sharing many themes with Liu, Chen nonetheless added a new dimension by interjecting women's history into his account of Chinese culture (Chen Dengyuan, [1935] 1998: 350-55, 559-63, 728-32). Miao Fenglin and Zhang Qiyun were Liu's students at Southeastern University (Dongnan daxue), and both wrote historical accounts of Chinese culture in the 1940s and 1950s. Qian Mu was interested in cultural history throughout his life and published his first account of Chinese culture in 1947. In his 1977 inaugural lecture for a lectureship set up under his name at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Qian Mu (1979) summarized his approach to cultural history.

3. The list of publications on *difang zizhi* is long. The major ones include Kuhn's (1975) classic statement on the subject, Schoppa's (1977, 1982) study of Zhejiang elites, and Fewsmith's (1985) study of Shanghai merchant organizations. In recent years, Chinese scholars have also produced solid works on difang zizhi. They include Ding Xuguang's (1993) historical survey of the concept of *difang zizhi* and Hu Chunhui's (1983) study of provincial federation.

4. Liu's distinction between nation and state is similar to that between what Harris (1997: 123-25) calls *ethnic* and *state* nationalisms. According to Harris, there is an *ethnic* or *popular* nationalism that stresses the collective identity of a people based on common history, culture, language, and territory. A *state* or *civic* nationalism, in contrast, describes how a government (or the state) constructs and enforces a homogeneous identity among its citizens. What is crucial in this distinction between ethnic and state nationalisms is the separation of nation from state. While *nation* connotes a collective identity that arises among a group of people, *state* refers to a political structure that polices human identity.

5. Calling the cultural arena "the field of cultural production," Bourdieu looks at it as a dynamic field full of movement. An important force that drives the cultural field is its participants' competition to dominate it with their symbolic capital, accrued in such areas as educational credentials, taste, and lifestyle. Like capital in the financial market, one's symbolic (or cultural) capital is an asset that bestows better standing in the competition for resources (Bourdieu, 1984: 9-244; 1993: 29-111).

6. According to Sun Yongru (1993: 12), Liu wrote a number of textbooks, including the *History of Chinese Education* (*Zhongguo jiaoyu shi*), the *History of Chinese Commerce* (*Zhongguo shangye shi*), and the *Lecture on Ethics* (*Lunli kouyi*).

7. According to Sun Yongru (1993: 47), Liu began to compile *A Brief Historical Account of Different Periods* in January 1902, finishing it in September. Upon its completion, Zhang Zhidong immediately asked the Jiangchu Bookstore to publish it. Zhang republished the textbook in 1903, and the Zhongxin shuju reissued it in 1905. The Zhongxin shuju edition is the one I use in writing this article.

8. The relationship between Liu's *A Brief Historical Account of Different Periods* (Liu Yizheng, [1902] 1905) and Naka Michiyo's *A General History of China* (Naka Michiyo, 1899) is an intriguing illustration of how differently authorship was understood in early twentieth-century China. By our current standards of academic honesty, Liu can be charged with plagiarism. Except for a few editorial changes, he copied word for word (including the charts) from many parts of Naka's book and issued the resulting book as if it were his own work. Since Naka wrote his book in classical Chinese, Liu cannot be considered a translator. The ambiguity lies in how Liu described his authorship. He did not claim he wrote (*zhu*) *A Brief Historical Account of Different Periods*; he said only that he "compiled and edited" (*bianzuan*) it. Without mentioning Naka's name anywhere, Liu treated Naka's text—which had been published in Shanghai in 1899 with a preface by Luo Zhenyu (1866-1940)—as property in the public domain. To be fair to Liu, however, he did make major changes in adapting Naka's work. I will discuss some of these major changes later.

9. I have found various versions of the *General History of China*, including a 1938 translation of the book into modern Japanese, and Naka appears to have been able to finish only four chapters, covering the history of China from ancient times to the eleventh century. In Liu's *A Brief Historical Account of Different Periods*, three chapters were added detailing the history of China from the eleventh to the seventeenth centuries.

10. Mei Guangdi, Tang Yongtong, and Wu Mi were all students at Harvard University in the late 1910s. In the summer of 1915, while visiting Cornell, Mei engaged in an intense debate with Hu Shi on the replacement of classical Chinese (*wenyan*) with the vernacular (*baihua*) (Hu Shi, [1933b] 1992: 97-132), taking the position that classical Chinese should be preserved as a medium enabling contemporary Chinese to connect with the past. Mei was the first among the trio to go back to China to teach, and he later recruited the other two to join him at Southeastern University. Wu Mi studied with Irving Babbitt at Harvard and majored in literature. After returning to China in 1921, he devoted himself to introducing Babbitt's humanism as an alternative to John Dewey's pragmatism (mediated through Hu Shi's writings). As the chief editor of *Critical Review*, he published translations of Babbitt's writings, including his own rendering of the introduction to *Democracy and Leadership* (*Xueheng* 32 [1924] 1971: 4317-39). He also published translations of major European classics, including Plato's dialogues, Aristotle's *Ethics*, and Dante's *Inferno*. Like Wu Mi, Tang Yongtong was influenced by Babbitt. Because of their common interest in Babbitt's humanism while they were students at Harvard, Tang, Wu, and the historian Chen Yinke (1890-1969) were known among Chinese students in Boston as "the three talents at Harvard" (*hafo sanjie*) (Sun Shangyang, 1993: 3). After earning a master's degree in philosophy in 1922, Tang began teaching at Southeastern University. From 1922 to 1925, he was an assistant editor of the *Critical Review* along with Liu Yizheng.

11. Throughout this article, all references to the *Critical Review* cite the 1971 reprint and follow its pagination. See Luo Shishi (1970) for a discussion of Liu Yizheng's relation with other *Critical Review* editors.

12. The editors of the three collections of Liu's writings (Liu Yizheng, 1970, 1991a, 1991b) have inadvertently made him appear to be a scholar in the ivory tower by printing only his long scholarly writings and excluding his short essays published in the *Critical Review*.

13. The title of Liu Yizheng's article is "A Discussion of the Necessity of Knowing the Rules of the *Shuowen jiezi* before Using It as Historical Evidence" ("Lun yi Shuowen zhengshi bixian

zhi Shuowen zhi yili"). Although the main argument is the same, there are minor textual differences between the versions of Liu's article reprinted in *Gushi bian* (Gu Jiegang, 1926: 217-22) and *Liu Yizheng xinsheng wenlu* (Liu Yizheng, 1970: 196-203), on one hand, and in *Liu Yizheng shixue lunwen ji* (Liu Yizheng, 1991a: 66-71), on the other. The latter is partially misprinted.

14. For other reviews of the *History of Chinese Culture*, see Liu Zengfu and Liu Jia (2002: 223-24).

15. Periodization was only one aspect of Liu Yizheng's narrative technique in the *History of Chinese Culture*. For a discussion of Liu's intertextual method and its significance in modern Chinese historiography, see Moloughney (2002).

16. Reprinted many times since its first publication in 1904 and reissued under the new title, the *Ancient History of China* (*Zhongguo gudai shi*), in 1933, Xia's book was for four decades the standard presentation of this complex, tripartite historical narrative of the changes in China (Zhou Yutong, 1983: 535-37; Wu Ze, 1989: 132-52).

17. All subsequent parenthetical references to Liu Yizheng's writing will be to this work, unless otherwise noted.

18. One can see how greatly Liu Yizheng's approach was shaped by Naka Michiyo's interpretation of Chinese history. Although he made many changes in his adaptation, Liu began his narrative with the "three founders of early China"—exactly as Naka had done in *A General History of China*. For Naka's influence on modern Chinese historians, see Zhou Yutong (1983: 534-36).

19. In 1920s China, the most persuasive argument for this distinction between spiritual *kultur* and universal materialist advancement was made by Liang Shuming (1898-1988). In his *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies* (*Dongxi wenhua jiqi zhexue*, 1922), Liang distinguished three cultures according to the direction taken by the human will: (1) the Western culture of material acquisition, based on the will to conquer the environment; (2) the Chinese Confucian culture of moderation, based on the will to harmonize with the environment; and (3) the Indian Buddhist culture of withdrawal, based on the will to negate desires (Alitto, 1979: 82-85). By 1923, the dichotomy between wenhua and wenming was so widely accepted among Chinese intellectuals that there was a "debate on science and philosophy of life" (*kexue yu renshengguan lunzhan*). Zhang Junmai (also known as Carsun Chang, 1887-1969) urged the Chinese to embrace the Confucian humanistic tradition, which he viewed as the embodiment of the Chinese kultur, to regain a sense of spirituality in an increasingly amoral and technological world. In defense of universal materialist advance, Ding Wenjiang (also known as V. K. Ting, 1887-1936) coined the phrase "the omnipotence of science" (*kexue wanneng*) and asked his readers to adopt the rational thinking of science as a universal principle of life (Kwok, 1965: 133-60).

20. Not every Chinese scholar in the 1920s accepted the dichotomy of wenhua and wenming, despite its popularity. In particular, the *Xueheng* group, to which Liu Yizheng belonged, was lukewarm toward it. Wu Mei, for instance, did not differentiate between the two terms. He translated the title of Lu Maode's book *Zhongguo wenhua shi* into English as *A History of Chinese Civilization* (*Xueheng* 42 [1925] 1971: table of contents), and he similarly rendered *wenhua* as "civilization" in his English translation of the title of Zhang Yinlin's article on Oswald Spengler (*Xueheng* 61 [1928]: table of contents). To differentiate culture as a particular way of life from civilization as a universal process of material advance, some *Xueheng* writers (e.g., Zhang Yinlin) added the adjective *jingsheng* (spiritual) to *wenhua* or *wenming* to refer to culture and added *wuzhi* (material) to refer to civilization (*Xueheng* 61 [1928] 1971: 8383-8417).

21. This understanding of *wen* in contradistinction to *wu* was particularly popular among the literati from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries (see Bol, 1992: 1-32).

22. For an example of this reading of the history of medieval China, see Xia Zengyou (1904 [1994]: 385-33). Notice that most of the chapters in which Xia discusses the division of China

into north and south include the word *luan* (chaos) in their titles. Although Xia's book was written in 1904, it was popular among scholars and college students in the 1920s and 1930s.

23.   In light of the recent discussion between Evelyn S. Rawski and Ping-ti Ho on sinicization (Rawski, 1996; Ho, 1998), it is worth noting that in referring to the dynamic historical process of transforming many different peoples in China into one self-conscious group, Liu Yizheng used the term *tonghua* (literally, "transformed into the same") rather than *huahua* (transformed into hua) or *hanhua* (transformed into Han). Much like Ho in his "defense of sinicization," Liu did not regard this transformation of many groups into one as a conversion of the non-Han Chinese into Han Chinese. On the contrary, Liu saw it as a complex historical process in which different ethnic groups learned from one another and created a new collective identity for all.

24.   In the final three chapters of the *History of Chinese Culture*, Liu offers his readers many historical facts but little inspiring analysis. In a note published in the *Critical Review* in 1929, he told his readers that as late as 1926, he had planned to add a few chapters to the final section of the *History of Chinese Culture* but, regrettably, other commitments had prevented him from doing so (*Xueheng* 70 [1929] 1971: 48). Apparently, Liu realized that his book was incomplete.

25.   Specializing in Buddhist texts and the history of Sui and Tang dynasties, Chen Yinke made a name for himself by examining the intricate cultural interaction among Indians, Central Asians, and Han Chinese. One important example of Chen's study of cultural interaction was his 1934 article, "Three Questions Concerning the Four Tones" ("Sisheng sanwen"). To show the foreign origins of what appears to be a Chinese practice, he argues that the four-tone system in China was modeled on the pitch accent used by the Indians in reciting the Vedas (Chen Yinke, 1980: 328-41). In the 1930s, Feng Youlan published an influential history of Chinese philosophy, *A History of Chinese Philosophy* (*Zhongguo zhexue shi*), based on the Western philosophical framework. Although he admitted that much of Chinese thinking did not accord with the Western notion of "philosophy," he argued that there was a great deal to be said about its "philosophical dimension" (see Feng Youlan, 1934: 1-27).

26.   With archaeological finds such as the oracle bones and the bronze vessels, as well as more accurate comparisons of archaeological and textual evidence, many Chinese historians in the 1920s believed that at least the Shang and the Zhou dynasties, if perhaps not the Xia, were historical. In 1923, Liu Jinren was among the first to suggest that Gu Jiegang look at archaeological finds for evidence of the "three dynasties" (Gu Jiegang, 1926: 95). Wang Guowei, the first scholar to verify historical events in the Shang dynasty by cross-referencing inscriptions on the oracle bones and the conventional historical texts, appealed to the academic community in 1925 to turn its focus from doubting antiquity to verifying it with the help of newfound archaeological evidence (Gu Jiegang, 1926: 264-66; Bonner, 1986: 164-90).

27.   Liu's insistence that the "great flood" was the origin of the Chinese communal bond explains his sensitivity to Gu Jiegang's questioning of Yu's authenticity. If Gu is right in claiming that Yu was a totemic image created in the eleventh century B.C.E. by southern people far away from the Yellow River, then Liu's entire argument about the Chinese communal bond collapses. One may even say that the bone of contention in the Liu-Gu debate was not so much the method of reading ancient texts but the status of "the three founders of early China." Despite their disagreements, both Liu and Gu rejected the traditional accounts that began Chinese history with mythical figures such as the Yellow Emperor and the Divine Farmer (as recorded in the *Records of the Grand Historian*). On Gu's position, see Hon (1996).

28.   For an insightful comparison between the "modernist" approach to the idea of the nation (Ernest Gellner) and the "historical-cultural" approach (Anthony Smith, Walker Connor), see Gutierrez (1997). In general, the modernist approach stresses industrialization, science and

technology, and social homogenization as the key factors in the rise of the nation-state system. Because the nation-state system is a new sociopolitical structure, the modernists argue that there was neither nation nor state before modern times. In contrast, the historical-cultural approach emphasizes the idea of nation as a communal bond that could occur in preindustrial society. The historical-culturalists argue that nation and state are two separate entities. Although preindustrial society may have lacked a highly centralized political structure comparable to that in the modern state, preindustrial peoples did not lack a communal bond.

29. In taking *zhong* to mean "finding the middle ground," Liu Yizheng follows the reading of Zhu Xi (1130-1200) in his commentary on the Confucian classic *Zhongyong* (*Centrality and Commonality*)—a discussion of humanity's moral mission to gain unity with Nature by balancing the competing claims of the individual, the family, the community, and the universe (Tu, 1989). According to Zhu Xi, *zhong* means "what is not one-sided" (Chan, 1963: 97). In an article "Zhongguo yu zhongdao" ("The Idea of Golden Mean as the Basis of Chinese Character and Civilization"), Zhang Qiyun suggested that Liu was one of the first scholars in modern China to argue for this understanding of *zhong* (*Xueheng* 41 [1925] 1971: 5591-6541).

30. The phrase "ruling the world by allowing the upper and lower garments to hang down" is from part 2 of the *Great Treatise* (*Xici*) of the *Yijing* (Wilhelm, 1950: 332). It refers to the ruling style of the Yellow Emperors, Yao and Shun, all of whom created a stable social system by giving each member a specific role to play. They relied on social distinctions rather than coercion to keep people in line. For a discussion of the rule by social distinctions in imperial China, see Ebrey (1991: 14-101).

31. Although the context was different, one can argue that Mao Zedong's essay "On the Ten Great Relationships" (1956) embodied a vision of China similar to Liu's "nation of moderation." Mao called for a balanced development in China that would pay equal attention to heavy industry and light industry, coastal development and the development of the hinterland, growth of the economy and military defense, national growth and the growth of individual producers, the authority of the central government and the authority of local government, the Han ethnic group and the non-Han ethnic groups, and so on (Mao Zedong, 1977: 267-88). To be sure, Mao linked this balanced development to the Chinese socialist revolution rather than to the essential character of the Chinese nation, but it is intriguing that such balance in China's development remained a subject of concern in the post-1949 debate on modernization.

32. Throughout, I use the English translations provided by *Xueheng*'s editors for the titles of the articles published in every issue.

33. In effect, Liu stressed the transformative process of ritualization. In *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Catherine Bell argues that ritual is never "a matter of routine" but is a transformative process that makes a person into a member of a group. She calls this process "ritualization" (Bell, 1992: 88-93). Its effects include investing a person's behavior with social meaning (Bell calls it "ritual body") and enabling the person to negotiate his or her interests within the group (Bell, 1992: 94-117). Similarly, in her study of family rites in imperial China, Patricia Ebrey focuses on this transformative process of ritualization. She highlights its social function: "Ritual action, thus, helps reproduce culture, especially the realm of culture that seldom enters into conscious choice, the realm taken for granted, left outside the limits of debate. The principles conveyed in this way frequently serve to legitimate the social and political structure, making social distinctions part of what is taken to be in the nature of things" (Ebrey, 1991: 4).

34. The late Qing discourse on local self-government was closely linked to two chapters of the *Rites of Zhou*, "Da Shitu" and "Suiren," which include brief discussions of the "village-district" system (*Zhouli zhushu*, 1990: 10.158, 15.231).

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