

The Appropriation of Cultural Capital

China's
May Fourth
Project

Milena Doleželová-Velingerová
and Oldřich Král, editors

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Preface

This volume contains a collection of papers originally presented at the conference "The Burdens of the May Fourth Movement," held at Charles University in Prague from August 29 to September 1, 1994. For Czech sinology this international meeting of prominent scholars was a milestone because, after two extremely unpropitious decades, it was once again possible to revive the legacy of its founder, the late Professor Jaroslav Průšek. As much as he extended the horizons of European sinology—in his day much centered on classical Chinese culture—by establishing the studies of modern Chinese literature at the Oriental Institute and at Charles University, so, too, our conference aimed at embarking contemporary studies of Chinese culture and literature on less traveled paths. The organizers of the Prague conference were convinced that with the knowledge gained during the preceding three decades, we could afford to open new vistas through studies that confront the principal tenets of the May Fourth cultural project, which has profoundly shaped the present understanding of Chinese culture and modern culture as a whole.

It is fair to say that the idea of the conference was Milena Doleželová's. The project was, however, not born overnight. It had been afloat for several years before the Prague conference was possible and was kept alive for an extended period thanks to the encouragement of her friends and colleagues. Special recognition should go to Merle Goldman, who so generously offered support to organize the workshop "The Burdens of the May Fourth Movement" on May 11, 1991, at the John King Fairbank Center for East Asian Research, Harvard University. This is, then, the occasion to express to her our heartfelt thanks.

The new and large-scale conference in August 1994 could not have been realized without the extended assistance of two broadminded benefactors

who were, after 1989, intensively engaged in the rapid renaissance of Chinese studies at Prague. Charles University generously hosted the conference and let us use the Carolinum, the oldest, fourteenth-century quarters of the school, for this auspicious occasion. Meanwhile, the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange provided an ample grant to organize the conference and devoted extraordinary attention to its preparation and realization. We thus hope that this volume expresses our sincere gratitude to both institutions for securing a befitting ambiance for ardent debates among scholars concerned with a further revitalization of studies of modern Chinese literature. Our thanks also go to all staff members and students of the Institute of East Asian Studies at Charles University, who enthusiastically assisted in the preparation of the conference and prepared a cordial and inspiring milieu during the days of our gatherings.

Yet the fact that a confrontation between May Fourth doctrines and today's research resulted in revelations of novel aspects of the May Fourth project is to the credit of the participants of the conference themselves. It is to them—the leading scholars from Europe, the United States, Canada, Taiwan, and Hong Kong—that we owe our most profound thanks for their willingness to participate in this Prague venture. Our special thanks go to those participants whose papers are not, for one reason or another, included in this volume. These include Chang Han-liang, Christoph Harbsmeier, Oldřich Král, and David Pollard. Our thanks go to those participants invited without papers, including Martin Hála, Zdenka Heřmanová-Novotná, Dana Kalvodová, Olga Lomová, Helmut Martin, Lucie Olivová, Augustin Palát, and Hua Laura Wu. We wish to express a special word of gratitude to Professor Ying-shih Yü for his inspiring closing statement at the conference and his generous consent to add his post-conference essay to this volume.

In conclusion, we wish to acknowledge those scholars whose professional skills, wisdom, and striving for perfection contributed to the implementation of this volume. Milena Doleželová has shouldered the heaviest burden as its editor. Graham Sanders, assistant editor of this volume, used his mastery of computer intricacies to match the content of the book with a higher order of technical execution, while his scholarly erudition enabled him to keep a watchful eye over matters stylistic and sinological. We are much indebted to Dr. Henri M. Day, whose profound understanding of the text and good humor served him in good stead to tame the misbehaving English of some of

the contributions and other writings connected with this project. To John R. Ziemer, the Executive Editor of Harvard University's Asia Center Publications, we owe deep gratitude for his continual encouragement in bringing this volume to a proper end and for professional advice that greatly enhanced the clarity and precision of ideas formulated in this volume.

Finally, on behalf of both editors, we wish to express thanks most heartily to our families. Without their tolerance, support, and understanding the conference would not have been realized and this book would not have been finished.

Oldřich Král

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"The Life-Style of Four *Wenren* in Late Qing Shanghai," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* (1997); and a book manuscript "City, Courtesan, and Intellectual: The Rise of Shanghai Entertainment Culture 1850–1910."

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Introduction

Milena Doleželová-Velingerová

and David Der-wei Wang

The May Fourth era (1910s to 1930s), together with the last thirteen years (1898–1911) of the Qing dynasty, constitutes the crucial period for the formation of a Chinese discourse of modernity. During this period, the Chinese intelligentsia imported Western culture and institutions with great zeal, critiqued their own legacies, and reassessed their positions vis-à-vis the national crisis. Thus they laid the ground for China's initiation into the global period called the Modern Age. To understand modernity in a Chinese context, it is necessary to understand the Chinese discourse on modernism, the historical conditions under which it was formed, and the aims and ideas that guided its formation.

Studies of the May Fourth era appeared as early as the 1930s, and by the early 1960s one could speak of a "tradition" of May Fourth scholarship. This discourse was undertaken primarily by scholars who were contemporary with the New Culture movement (later known as the May Fourth movement) or even direct participants in it. Although they provided a picture of the movement based on ample first-hand evidence, they were generally unable to view the period from a perspective that differed from that of its proponents. For these first-generation scholars, the May Fourth movement remained unquestioned as the awakening moment of radical iconoclasm, revolution, humanism, science and democracy, progress, individualism, and nationalism—a Chinese Enlightenment or Renaissance. A good example is Chow Tse-tsung's *May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (1960). A monumental work that continues to inspire scholars, the book nevertheless takes for granted all the assumptions of the May Fourth

leaders and unreservedly endorses the consequences of their actions. The reluctance of this earlier generation of scholars to rethink the legacies of the May Fourth movement was perhaps due as much to the awe-inspiring scholarship of the May Fourth leaders as to their political charisma. These early scholars still had, like their May Fourth objects, an emotional investment in the success of the movement. By writing affirmatively of the May Fourth movement, they, too, were bolstering China's continued march toward modernization.

One finds a similar tendency to canonize the May Fourth movement in scholars' accounts of the rise and development of modern Chinese literature. Despite their differing ideological and methodological positions, these critics rarely call into question any of the basic May Fourth tenets. Studies written at the height of the Cold War by Chinese, Japanese, and Western scholars (e.g., Wang Yao 王 瑤 [1951, 1953], translated into Japanese by Sanetō Keishū 實 籐 惠 秀 [1955–56]; Shimada Masao 島 田 政 雄 [1952]; Ding Yi 丁 易 [1955]; Jaroslav Průšek [1955, 1964]; C. T. Hsia [1961]) were of course not as single-minded in their ideological evaluations as the studies of the 1930s and 1940s (e.g., Chen Bingkun 陳 炳 坤 [1930]; Wang Zhefu 王 哲 傳 [1933]; Fu Donghua 傅 東 華 [1937]; Henri van Boven [1946]; O. Brière [1948]; Joseph Schyns et al. [1948]). Yet, as in the case of Chow Tse-tsung, these literary historians tend to accept the protagonists' views of the May Fourth period. In their accounts, the ideas outlined in a series of essays and letters written in the late 1910s by several young, Western-educated Chinese intellectuals, most notably Hu Shi 胡 適 (1891–1962) and Chen Duxiu 陳 獨 秀 (1879–1942), are deemed most influential. The views of Hu Shi, Chen Duxiu, and a few others on Chinese literary history became indisputable.

Thus, modern Chinese literature was presented as arising in consequence of a rapid and radical renunciation of the Chinese heritage. The enlightened literati is said to have replaced a worn-out tradition with a new one, one that had abandoned dysfunctional Chinese linguistic and aesthetic norms, one based on values, ideas, and forms appropriated from occidental literature and culture. In "On Literary Revolution" ("Wenxue geming lun" 文學革命論, 1917), Chen Duxiu propagated the concept of a nation breaking from its past, so as to make way for the "new civilization" (*xin wenming* 新文明). Hu Shi advocated similar views. Because of Chen's and Hu's prestige, this powerful fiction was imposed on the realities of Chinese literary modernization. Since the 1920s, literary historians have tended to treat Hu's and

Chen's conceptualizations as dogma and created a historiographical paradigm that duplicates the May Fourth claim of radical anti-traditionalism. This paradigm was so powerful that it obscured alternative views, particularly the argument that modern Chinese literature resulted less from a Western-inspired revolution than from a tortuous evolution from China's own tradition. Representative moments of these more sophisticated views of "evolution" can be found in works by Zhou Zuoren (1932) 周作人 (1885–1967) and Jaroslav Průšek (1957 [1980]); his views in this study differ remarkably from those expressed in the works of 1955 and 1964 mentioned above).

However, new scholarly initiatives have brought changes in our view of a subject once thought to be satisfactorily understood. These initiatives returned to the May Fourth cultural project and re-examined its anti-traditional claims, and they arrived at conclusions radically opposed to certain fundamental May Fourth tenets. These new directions of research are traceable to two scholars based in Prague. As early as 1957, Jaroslav Průšek suggested in his well-known essay "Subjectivism and Individualism in Modern Chinese Literature" (1957 [1980]) that subjectivism and individualism, the most innovative trends in Qing fiction, were the prime driving forces behind the modernization of Chinese fiction. Meanwhile, in 1964 Oldřich Král, in his studies of the artistic devices of the classic Chinese novel, argued that *The Scholars* (*Rulin waishi* 儒林外史) represented a new, sophisticated type of Chinese narrative created by literati.

Both Průšek's and Král's researches pioneered a new approach to the relations between modern and premodern Chinese literary conventions. In 1981, Patrick Hanan demonstrated in *The Chinese Vernacular Story* how short-story writers in the early Qing played deftly with both the classical and the vernacular languages in relation to genre and subject matter; he thus challenged, perhaps inadvertently, the antagonistic dichotomy between the classical and vernacular Chinese discourses held by the May Fourth practitioners of literature. In 1987, Andrew H. Plaks argued persuasively that the four masterworks of the Ming novel—*Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo zhi yanyi* 三國之演義), *Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳), *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji* 西遊記), and *The Plum in the Golden Vase* (*Jin Ping Mei cihua* 金瓶梅詞話)—represent the literati's sophisticated modulation of the popular genre of prose fiction, an undertaking that predates the May Fourth intellectuals' promotion of "popular literature" (*tongsu wenxue* 通俗文學) by almost three centuries.

New research in modern literature also began to rethink the validity of May Fourth canons from thematics to stylistics, from authorial intention to ideological concerns. A volume edited by Merle Goldman, *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era* (1977), though focusing on the achievements of the May Fourth, shows no less concern about the multiple paths through which modern Chinese literati have negotiated their claims to nationalism or womanhood. In the same spirit, the volume edited by Ellen Widmer and David Wang, *From May Fourth to June Fourth* (1993), challenged the May Fourth canon by examining how writers of later generations rewrote the May Fourth legacies. In *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period* (1990), Marston Anderson reassessed the May Fourth literati's reception of European realism and concluded that writers such as Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936), Ye Shaojun 葉紹鈞 (1894–1988), Ba Jin 巴金 (1904–), and Mao Dun 茅盾 (1896–1981) started out with a realist project based on national restoration (*jiuguo* 救國) and enlightenment (*qimeng* 啓蒙) only to end up with works that contradicted their premises.

David Wang's *Fictional Realism in Twentieth Century China* (1992) takes up the polemic of realism by arguing that, for all its claims to be an unmediated, authoritative representation of reality and truth, Chinese realism from the outset spoke in various voices in response to the fractured realities of China. Meanwhile, the achievements of late Qing and pre-May Fourth Republican literature have received increasing attention, starting with the articles in Milena Doleželová's pathbreaking *The Chinese Novel at The Turn of the Century* (1980) and Theodore Hutters's articles (see, e.g., Hutters 1988) on the formation of the modern discourse of literature in the nineteenth century, Chen Pingyuan's 陳平原 voluminous treatments of the changing narrative formats of late Qing fiction (1989), and David Wang's *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849–1911* (1997). Equally notable is the scholarly attention given to the popular or middle-brow vein of modern Chinese literature, such as Perry Link's *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies* (1981) and Ts'un-yuan Liu's (ed.) *Chinese Middle-brow Fiction* (1984).

The desire to probe the discrepancies between received views concerning the May Fourth era and actual results was further fueled by a number of more recent studies. These studies, though not focused solely on the May Fourth, have questioned the movement's claims to be the voice of enlightenment, progress, science, nation, feminism, and the like. Prasenjit Duara (1995) alerts us to the fact that modern Chinese historiography has been

overshadowed by the obsession with nationalism, and Wang Hui (1995) highlights the ideological and political motivations of such sanctioned notions as science, justice, democracy, and individualism. Both Lydia Liu (1995) and Ying Hu (2000) look into the complex “translingual practice” behind the rendition of foreign thoughts and discourses into Chinese society. Xiaobing Tang (1996) ventures a remapping of the late Qing political and intellectual configuration in his study of Liang Qichao 梁啟超, and Joan Judge (1997) uses *The Eastern Times* (Shibao 時報) to study the rise of journalism and the media industry at the turn of the century. John Fitzgerald (1996) examines the dynamics of politics, culture, and class that constitute the backdrop of the May Fourth era, and Mau-sang Ng (1988) traces a genealogy of Russian models in the Chinese imagination of national identity.

Finally, increasing attention has been paid to the counterdiscourse in Chinese modernity, thanks to the publication of books on arguably “conservative” scholars such as Wang Guowei (1877–1927) 王國維 (Bonner 1986) and those of the National Essence school (Guocui xuepai 國粹學派), and to the unearthing of such thought-provoking historical materials as *Discourses on New Knowledge and National Heritage* (Guogu xinzhi lun 國故新知論, 1995), which clarify the views of the members of the Nanjing literary journal (and society of the same name) *Critical Review* (Xueheng 學衡). Until recently these voices had been silenced merely because they sounded radically contradictory to mainstream May Fourth discourse.

The current volume is inspired by, but not limited to, these recent efforts to re-examine the origins of Chinese literary and cultural modernity. By approaching the May Fourth problematic from hitherto little-studied perspectives, this volume seeks to play a part in the ongoing critique of the movement. Unlike studies that probe the topics of May Fourth discourse—realism, selfhood, revolution, enlightenment—on their own terms, the present volume is centered on the intellectual and cultural/historical motivations and practices through which such a discourse became possible. In other words, it highlights issues such as the strategies of discourse formation, scholarly methodologies, rhetorical disposition, manipulation of historical sources, and, above all, the construction of modernity by means of the reification of China’s literary past. By analyzing these practices, this volume intends to disclose elements of modern Chinese literature and culture long hidden from view.

The volume consists of four parts, each revolving around a particular topic prevailing at one or another stage in the evolution of the Chinese dis-

course of modernity. Part I discusses the formation of the May Fourth movement both as a discourse and as a practice. It touches on the contested notion of *public sphere*, treating it not only as a rhetorical locus in which plural voices and opinions are brought into play but also as a physical arena in which organizational forces are mobilized to substantiate cultural and political agency. Part II, the central part of the volume, furthers the discussion in Part I by focusing on an extremely polemical issue—the *rewriting of literary history*—in the period. It stresses the motivations behind the canonization of a certain type of Chinese literature at the expense of others and dissects the fundamental aspects of New Culture—language, rhetoric, and literature—by examining the circulation of the “symbolic capital” of the May Fourth and its ideological bearings. By trying to clarify how certain components of Chinese modernity were effaced by the May Fourth, it seeks to demonstrate the impact of this “act of erasure” on contemporary Chinese acquisition of the literary past. Part III compares the New Culture movement with literary and cultural production in the wake of the Cultural Revolution. It ponders the similarities and differences between these two periods in terms of cultural dynamics, ideological debates, and the imperatives of rewriting literary (and national) history. The volume concludes with Ying-shih Yü’s essay “Neither Renaissance Nor Enlightenment: A Historian’s Reflections on the May Fourth Movement,” in which Yü argues that the way in which the May Fourth movement itself became reified was a ground on which competing factions carried out incompatible projects.



Part I of the volume challenges the common wisdom that the May Fourth was an era of intellectual emancipation and social polyphony. It features a dialogue between two veteran scholars, Leo Ou-fan Lee and Rudolf Wagner. The May Fourth opened up a multitude of new possibilities for Chinese intellectuals, relieving them from traditional epistemological and behavioral shackles. Looking back from the beginning of a new century, one nevertheless finds numerous gaps between what the May Fourth advocates professed and what they truly achieved. From very different perspectives, Lee and Wagner deconstruct the “mythology” of the May Fourth. Whereas Lee focuses on the rhetorical constructs that facilitated May Fourth as a *discourse* (i.e., a communicational circuit informed by a distinct *episteme*), Wagner reveals the institutional maneuvering that gave rise to May Fourth as a *movement* (i.e., an organized mass action masterminded and mobilized by a