
Babbitt in China

'Which West Are You Talking About?'
**Critical Review: A Unique Model
of Conservatism in Modern China**

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Conservatism as an "ism," as Karl Mannheim maintains, only emerged in the West in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and was an inseparable component of the triad conservatism/liberalism/radicalism.¹ As a result, conservatism is often seen as a direct opponent of liberalism and radicalism. In modern China, especially during the May Fourth period, intellectual leaders whom we may classify as liberal, such as Hu Shih (1891-1962), and radical, such as Chen Tu-hsiu (1879-1942), were commonly engaged, in their pursuit of modernity, in a project that combined Westernization with opposition to tradition.² To them, a modern

"May Fourth" intellectuals combined pursuit of Westernization with opposition to Chinese tradition.

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¹ Karl Mannheim, "Conservative Thought," in Paul Kecskemeti, ed., *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul Ltd., 1966), 98-99.

² According to Chow Tse-tsung, the May Fourth Movement covered a period from about 1917 through 1921. Students and intellectual leaders (hence designated as the "New Intellectuals"), supported by the rising patriotic and anti-Great Power sentiments of the public, promoted an anti-Japanese campaign and a vast modernization movement that aimed to build a new China through intellectual and social reform. See Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1964), 1-2. It is important to note that the May Fourth Incident, though related, is different from the May Fourth Movement. The former refers to the students' demonstration in Beijing on May 4, 1919.

Critical
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China was to a certain extent a “Western” China, whatever the term “Western” might mean.³ Therefore, right from the beginning, conservatives who opposed the proposals of the New Intellectuals usually were viewed by others as a group that attacked Western culture and values.

But nowadays, it is commonly accepted by scholars of modern China that the historical evidence does not support the classification of the conservatives as monolithically anti-Western. In fact, many conservatives showed great interest in Western learning. Among them, the *Critical Review* (CR hereafter) school warrants in-depth study. CR, a monthly journal first published in 1922 by some members of the faculty of the Southeastern University in Nanjing, lasted for eleven years. Major figures of this school were Wu Mi (1894-1978), Mei Kuang-ti (1880-1945), Hu Hsien-hsu (b1894), and Liu I-chen (1880-1936), among others.⁴ They were in direct opposition to the New Culture Movement led by the New Intellectuals, and it is in this sense that I consider them conservatives.⁵

In most studies of conservatism in modern China, the conservatives are regarded as standing against the New Intellectuals. While it is true that they often rejected proposals of the New Intellectuals, they also frequently disagreed among themselves. Although many scholars have noticed that controversies existed among different groups of conservatives, they tend to focus narrowly on how the conservatives dealt with the problem of mod-

³ Scholars disagree on whether the New Intellectuals were totally anti-tradition or approved of some aspects of the tradition. But scholars do agree that, for this group of intellectuals, a new China must be essentially a “Western” one, building on values which they thought were absent in the Chinese tradition, namely, science and democracy.

⁴ Another person worth mentioning is Liang Shih-chiu (1903-1987) who was also a student of Babbitt. Although he never contributed any article to CR, he was considered by CR members such as Wu Mi as an ally.

⁵ It is almost impossible to construct an incontrovertible definition of the word “conservatism.” However, as Charlotte Furth points out, “even given a variety of interpretations, the concept has maintained its usefulness as a common denominator, because—as over and against “traditionalism—it has suggested we are dealing with a group of *modern* Chinese alternatives; and because it has facilitated comparison within the framework of the worldwide triad, conservatism/liberalism/radicalism, inherited essentially from the Enlightenment.” See Charlotte Furth, “Preface,” in Charlotte Furth ed., *The Limits of Change: Essays on Conservative Alternatives in Republican China* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1976), vi.

ernization and Westernization, and on the way in which they presented themselves as opponents of the New Intellectuals. For example, in his brilliant study on Liang Shu-ming (1893-1988)—an original thinker widely acknowledged as among the forerunners of the New Confucian movement which is now gaining more and more attention—Guy Alitto points out that Liang shared few, if any, similarities with some other conservatives, such as the National Essence (*kuo-t'sui*) group. Alitto also has convincingly shown that what was valuable to Liang Shu-ming was not necessarily valuable to other conservatives.⁶ Put another way, conservatives disagreed with one another concerning the “true” essence of Chinese culture. But, since Alitto’s main concern is how Liang coped with the question of modernization, he does not elaborate further on his observation about the differences between Liang and other conservatives.

Conservatives differed concerning “true” essence of Chinese culture.

The same is true of studies produced on the CR. The only two books on the CR that I have come across, both written in Chinese, focus mainly on its critique of the New Culture Movement, while providing only passing remarks on its uniqueness as a conservative school.⁷ Yet without a substantial understanding of the differences between the CR school and other conservatives, it is impossible fully to appreciate the former’s contribution to the conservative movement.

In this article I will examine the “West” in the discourse of the CR, to see how the “West” fit into their mode of conservatism. In particular, I will highlight the influence on CR contributors of Irving Babbitt’s (1865-1933) New Humanism, and how they made use of this Western and American but original way of viewing the world to set themselves apart not only from the New Intellectuals but also from other Chinese conservatives.

⁶ Guy Alitto, *The Last Confucian: Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1986), 8.

⁷ These two books are: Shen Sung-chiao, *The Critical Review Group: A Conservative Alternative to the New Culture Movement in the May Fourth Era* (Hsueh-heng-pai yu Wu-ssu shih-chi te fan-hsin-wen-hua yun-tung) (Taipei: National Taiwan University, 1984); Shen Wei-wei, *A Second Glance at the Critical Review School: The Modern Fate of Cultural Conservatism* (Hui-mou Hsueh-heng-pai: wen-hua pao-shou chu-i te hsien-tai ming-yun) (Beijing: Jen-min wen-sueh chu-pan-she, 1999).

Babbitt as a "sage"

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dichotomy.

A well-known aphorism that was formulated in the mid-nineteenth century and persisted into the May Fourth period was "Chinese learning as the essence, Western learning as the function" (*chung-hsueh wei ti, hsi-hsueh wei yung*, or simply *chung-ti hsi-yung*). The essence-function, or *ti-yung* dichotomy, would persist as a way of responding to the challenge posed by the West for generations, and arguably to the present day. Since its emergence, it has developed into different forms. The one that has been most well-received is the "spiritual China–material West" dichotomy. According to its promoters in the May Fourth period, China was a civilization that emphasized spiritual achievement; the Chinese were not obsessed with material well-being. From this it followed that China was relatively slow in scientific discovery and technological advancement, but it was able to achieve a high degree of spirituality. On the other hand, the West was viewed as emphasizing material well-being but lacking concern for spiritual achievement. Because of this, science and technology were able to develop rapidly, but the civilization lacked the spiritual force to keep such development under control. The predictable result was an eventual destruction of civilization itself, and World War I was seen as an undeniable proof of the shortcomings of this civilization. Therefore, if China were to follow the path of the West, it would necessarily lead to self-destruction. The only sensible path, according to this view, was to uphold Chinese values while importing only the "material" aspects of Western culture, such as science and political systems. In this way, China could achieve modernity while simultaneously avoiding the shortcomings of Western civilization.

In this kind of discourse, the West is perceived as a civilization of a lower level, and only Chinese culture can promise a brighter future for mankind. Some prominent intellectuals of conservative inclination at that time went so far as to urge the Chinese to revitalize the teachings of ancient sages to "save the West."⁸ This mode of thinking was so dominant among Chinese conservatives that some scholars have assumed that it was shared by all of them. In

⁸ For example, Liang Ch'i-chao (1873-1929), a leading intellectual who consistently introduced Western learning to the Chinese since the end of the nineteenth century, was shocked to learn when he visited Europe in 1919 that Westerners were becoming very pessimistic about their own civilization after World War I. He then declared that Western civilization was on the verge of bankruptcy

his study on Hu Shih and Liang Shu-ming, for example, Cheng Ta-hua writes that all cultural conservatives share some common characteristics: (1) Although they would admit that there are areas where the Western culture is superior, on the whole, the Chinese “spiritual” culture is still superior to the Western “material” culture. (2) Although they would criticize traditional culture, this critique is predicated on their intention to protect the culture. (3) Although they were not against the introduction of Western culture, they insisted that it must be done with the Chinese culture as the main body, and they hoped to achieve a kind of *chung-ti hsi-yung* mixture.⁹

But if members of the CR school are legitimately categorized as among the conservatives, characteristics (1) and (3) clearly do not apply to all Chinese conservatives of the period. Not only did the CR scholars not consider Chinese culture superior to the West’s, but they did not, in the first place, base their cultural enquiry on the assumption of a fundamental difference between East and West. In the preface written for the first issue, the editor listed four missions of the CR:

CR scholars assumed no fundamental difference between East and West.

1. To recite the refined words of ancient sages from both East and West, so as to encourage learning.
2. To elucidate the commonality of great works from around the world, so as to transmit thought.
3. All writings must be written in classical style, so as to uphold the culture.
4. All opinions must be expressed objectively and without engaging in rude scolding, so as to cultivate the custom.¹⁰

The two missions that top the list clearly expressed CR’s attitude towards different cultures. They would not entertain the idea of one culture having superiority over another. A culture, they maintained, is not an indivisible whole but is something with many facets, so it is nonsensical to claim that “a” culture is supe-

and urged the youth of China to help the West escape from this predicament, using the aid from “ancient resources” left behind by “our” ancestors. See Liang Ch’i-chao, Excerpts from *Reflections on a European Journey* (Ou-yu hsin-ying lu chieh-lu) (Shanghai: Chung-hua shu-chu, 1941).

⁹ See Cheng Ta-hua, *Liang Shu-ming and Hu Shih: A Comparison of Cultural Conservatism and the Intellectual Current of Westernization* (Liang Shu-ming yu Hu Shih: wen-hua pao-shou chu-i yu hsi-hua ssu-chao te pi-chiao) (Beijing: Chung-hua shu-chu, 1994), 3.

¹⁰ “Preface” (pian-yen), CR, No. 1 (January 1922), 1.

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rior to “another.” When the New Intellectuals asserted that the Chinese should accept Western culture wholeheartedly because it had proven to be more advanced than Chinese culture, CR asked, “Which West are you talking about?” Wu Mi, for example, insisted that the West promoted by the New Intellectuals was only naturalism, and naturalism was just a small segment of the rich Western culture. The New Intellectuals were wrong to regard naturalism as the whole truth about Western civilization. Even worse, according to Wu Mi, was that the New Culture Movement’s one-sided promotion of naturalism was introducing into China a system of thought that Babbitt and other distinguished Western thinkers had already shown to have brought calamities to the West.¹¹

It is also precisely this understanding of culture that led CR to avoid perceiving the West as primarily materialistic, as other conservatives had been doing. In fact, they were so “impartial” that they could regard Babbitt, a modern Western philosopher, as a synthesizer of the teachings of Eastern and Western sages. In his introduction to his own partial translation of Babbitt’s *Democracy and Leadership*, Wu Mi said,

[What makes Mr. Babbitt] differ from Christ and Confucius is that, although he emphasizes action (*hsing*), he does not neglect intellect (*chih*); what makes him differ from the humanists of the West is that he uses imagination to complete the intellect, and he does not regard intellect as all powerful. Given his equal emphasis on action and intellect, it seems that his teaching is closest to that of Buddha. [His idea about] the contrast of reality and illusion is also influenced by Buddhism. However, Mr. Babbitt does not involve himself with religion, does not establish precepts, does not obtain [anything from] mythology, does not concern himself with metaphysical theories, all these have made his ideas different from those of Buddhism. All in all, Mr. Babbitt actually adopts concurrently the teachings of these four sages, namely Buddha, Christ, Confucius and Aristotle, and achieves an embodiment of their great consummation. We can also say that he, with the heart of Buddha and Christ, is doing what Confucius and Aristotle were doing. Will those who hear my words think that these are flattering remarks by a disciple?¹²

¹¹ Wu Mi, “On the New Culture Movement” (lun hsin-wen-hua yun-tung), CR, No. 4 (April 1922), 19.

¹² Wu Mi, “Irving Babbitt on Democracy and Leadership” (Pai-pi-te lun min-chih yu ling-hsiu), CR, No. 8 (August 1924), 3. *Chih* and *hsing* as a pair of concepts.

Ironically, Babbitt, in comparing the philosophy of East and West, was actually searching for a prescription for the West.¹³ Yet Wu Mi, in reverse, viewed Babbitt's New Humanism as an antidote for the chaos caused by the New Culture Movement. For Wu Mi, the sages of history all had had their strengths and limitations, and Babbitt, from his perspective, was the only person with the ability to combine their strengths and avoid their weaknesses. As such a person, Babbitt assumed the role of a "sage" who stood at the peak of the civilization of mankind, and the "West" as represented by Babbitt was viewed as the highest achievement of mankind. Of course this "West," having encompassed the wisdom of the East, was different from the other "West" that was propagated by the New Intellectuals. Mei Kuang-ti, too, besides praising Babbitt as a "teacher of men" following the Chinese tradition, claimed that if Babbitt had been born in China not later than the seventeenth century, he would merit the extraordinary honor of being elevated to membership in the most exclusive of Chinese national institutions, the Temple of Confucius: an honor conferred on only a limited number of great men throughout Chinese history who were believed to have truly transmitted the Confucian Way.¹⁴ The conferring of membership in the Temple of Confucius was a means previously used by the state to confirm a person's orthodoxy in the Confucian tradition. Babbitt, a foreigner, was thus given "orthodox" status in Mei's writing. By comparison, though many Chinese conservatives did have Westerners as their teachers, none of them had given their teachers as prestigious a status as the CR had given Babbitt.

The "West" as represented by Babbitt viewed as highest achievement of mankind.

were of great importance in traditional Chinese philosophy. *Chih* is usually translated as "knowledge," but I think "intellect" better renders the actual meaning here.

¹³ Babbitt made this clear when he said, "In any case the problem for the individualist who believes that it is not enough to be self-reliant, but that one should also be humble, is to discover some equivalent for grace. It is here that we may find it profitable to take into account the total experience of Asia. While no sensible person would claim for the Far East a general ethical superiority over the West, the Far East had at least enjoyed a comparative immunity from that great disease of Occidental culture—the warfare between reason and faith." See Irving Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership*, introduction by Russell Kirk (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1979), 209.

¹⁴ Mei Kuang-ti's entry in Frederick Manchester and Odell Shepard, ed., *Irving Babbitt: Man and Teacher* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1941), 126-27.

Irving Babbitt versus Henri Bergson

CR school
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conservatives'
enthusiasm
for Bergson.

Besides its disagreement concerning the alleged inferiority of the West, CR also differed with other Chinese conservatives concerning some Western ideas that the latter group had introduced to China. A Western philosopher often cited by conservatives like Liang Shu-ming and other New Confucianists such as Carsun Chang (1887-1969) and Hsiung Shih-li (1885-1968) was the renowned French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941). Bergson caught the attention of these Chinese conservatives with his preference for instinct (or intuition) over intellect.¹⁵ Alitto notices that Liang Shu-ming in his influential and much debated book *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies* (Tung-hsi wen-hua chi ch'i tse-hsueh), first published in 1922, "in effect, fashioned his own theory of the Chinese mind and of Confucianism with this and other Bergsonian concepts,"¹⁶ and that

Liang ignored entirely many of Bergson's fundamental ideas, such as his distinction between "mechanical time" and "duration," or his ideas on memory and self. But Liang seemed to have grasped thoroughly *L'Evolution creatrice's* exegesis of intuition, intellect, and language.¹⁷

What fascinated Liang in Bergson's ideas was also what fascinated Chang and Hsiung. When Chang delivered his lecture en-

¹⁵ Bergson said, "We see that the intellect, so skilful in dealing with the inert, is awkward the moment it touches the living. Whether it wants to treat the life of the body or the life of the mind, it proceeds with the rigor, the stiffness and the brutality of an instrument not designed for such use. . . . Instinct, on the contrary, is molded on the very form of life. While intelligence treats everything mechanically, instinct proceeds, so to speak, organically. If the consciousness that slumbers in it should awake, if it were wound up into knowledge instead of being wound off into action, if we could ask and it could reply, it would give up to us the most intimate secrets of life." See Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, translated by Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911), 165. Now, it seems that Bergson himself had two different opinions about the relationship between instinct (intuition) and intellect. On the one hand, he seemed to think that the two are in sharp contrast with each other and are irreconcilable; on the other hand, he seems to suggest that they can complement each other. Gustavus Cunningham thought that "the first view he (Bergson) constantly and explicitly emphasizes; the second he seemingly unconsciously and implicitly holds." See Gustavus Cunningham, *A Study in the Philosophy of Bergson* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1916), 41. What Chinese conservatives constantly underscored, however, was the first view.

¹⁶ Alitto, *The Last Confucian*, 96.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 97n41.

titled "View of Life" at Tsing-hua University in 1923, he told the students that one of the five characteristics of "view of life" that makes it different from science is that it is "intuitive," whereas science is "logical." Therefore science is unable to solve the problems posed by "view of life." This was a direct attack on the popular belief during the May Fourth period that science is all-powerful, and it ignited the famous "Science and Metaphysics Debate."¹⁸ In response to his good friend and critic Ting Wen-ch'iang (1887-1936), a well-known geologist, Chang cited several Western "metaphysicians" to argue that metaphysics as an antithesis of science was gaining popularity in the West. One of the "metaphysicians" cited by Chang was Bergson, and, not surprisingly, it was Bergson's contempt of "intellect" that was highlighted. Also highlighted was Bergson's idea of vitalism and its compatibility with Confucianism.¹⁹

Whether Bergson had any direct influence on Hsiung, as he so clearly did on Chang, remains a question. As Tu Wei-ming notes, Hsiung's emphasis on *jen* (a key concept in Confucius's thought, often translated as "humanity," "benevolence," etc.) as a life-force had caused his contemporaries and later scholars to think that he drew his inspiration from Bergson. Hsiung maintained, however, that his ontological awareness was fundamentally different from Bergson's philosophical assumptions, which he believed were based on a biological model. Also, Hsiung denied that his own ontological awareness had anything to do with Bergson's "intuition," or instinct, which he said really functioned at the level of the perfumed (or polluted) mind (*hsi-hsin*) rather than that of the original mind (*pen-hsin*).²⁰

¹⁸ The other four characteristics of "view of life" are that it is "subjective," "synthetic," "free-will," and "unique." See Carsun Chang, "View of Life" (Jen-sheng-kuan), in Ya-tung Library (Ya-tung tu-shu-kuan) ed., *Science and "View of Life"* (ke-hsueh yu jen-sheng-kuan), 3rd edition (Shanghai: Ya-tung tu-shu-kuan, 1925). This is a collection of the articles, published in various newspapers and journals, surrounding this debate, which lasted for over a year. Participants in this debate were all prominent intellectuals of the time, including Hu Shih, Chen Tu-hsiu, and Liang Chi-ch'ao.

¹⁹ Carsun Chang, "A Second Discussion on Science and 'View of Life': A Response to the critique of Ting Wen-ch'iang" (Tsai lun jen-sheng-kuan yu ke-hsueh ping ta Ting Tsai-jun), in *Science and "View of Life."* Ting Tsai-jun is the courtesy name of Ting Wen-ch'iang.

²⁰ Tu Wei-ming, "Hsiung Shih-li's Quest for Authentic Existence," in Furth, ed., *The Limits of Chang*, 272.

Still, these New Confucian conservatives all seemed to be rather enthusiastic about what Bergson's philosophy had to offer. The CR, on the other hand, agreed with the New Confucianists concerning the limitations of science and intellect, but they did not agree with them on the "compatibility" of Bergsonism and Confucianism. Babbitt himself was rather critical of Bergson. In fact, Babbitt saw Bergson as a contemporary advocate of the whole movement of "Romantic morality" which had begun with Rousseau:

The whole movement from Rousseau to Bergson is . . . filled with the glorification of instinct. To become spiritual the beautiful soul needs only to expand along the lines of temperament and with this process the cult of pity or sympathy does not interfere. The romantic moralist tends to favor expansion on the ground that it is vital, creative, infinite, and to dismiss whatever seems to set bounds to expansion as something inert, mechanical, finite.²¹

According to Babbitt, Rousseau held a monist view which sees human nature as constituted by goodness alone, while evil is seen as rooted solely in institutions. Babbitt, on the other hand, adhered to the old tradition of dualism that "affirms a struggle between good and evil in the heart of the individual," rather than transferring the struggle outward to society, in the manner of a Rousseau.²² By drawing a parallel between Rousseau and Bergson, Babbitt was accusing Bergson of neglecting the existence of evil in human nature. For Babbitt, to allow the soul to expand with temperament, as advocated by Rousseau and Bergson, is to invite evil to dominate.

Sharing Babbitt's view of human nature, the CR attacked the New Intellectuals for promoting the ideas of Rousseau as well as for their quest for absolute rights. Wu Mi believed that the New Intellectuals, in urging man to act according to his natural emotions, were strongly against any form of restriction or "artificial" rules.²³ He warned that the absence of temperance would lead to

²¹ Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism*, with a new introduction by Claes G. Ryn (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 147.

²² Irving Babbitt, "What I Believe: Rousseau and Religion," *Character and Culture: Essays on East and West*, with a new introduction by Claes G. Ryn (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1995), 234.

²³ Wu Mi, "Irving Babbitt's Humanism" (Pai-pi-te chih jen-wen chu-i), CR, No. 19 (July 1923), 5.

the loss of loyalty and forbearance, and would cause China eventually to disintegrate.²⁴

Highly critical of Rousseau, CR was equally unimpressed by Bergson's ideas. A number of articles discussing Bergson's thought appeared in the seventy-fourth issue published in March 1931. In these articles, CR tried to provide an objective account of Bergson's philosophy, but the general tendency was to depict it as the antithesis of the "correct" view, represented by Babbitt and his comrades.²⁵

CR's view regarding the incompatibility of Bergson's and Babbitt's ideas, and therefore the incompatibility of Bergsonian and Confucian ideas, is best summarized by Liang Shih-chiu as follows:

The often celebrated idea of *élan vital* (vital impulse) in Bergson's philosophy is, according to Babbitt, not worth mentioning. *Élan vital* should give way to *frein vital* (vital control). To do a thing would require strength, but to refrain oneself from doing something would require greater strength. This kind of attitude seems very compatible with what we Confucians called "Refrain oneself and return to the ritual" (*ke-chi fu-li*).²⁶

It is not my intention here to discuss whether the New Confucianists' or the CR's understanding of Confucianism is more "correct." In fact, "Confucianism" is a highly ambiguous term, often meaning different things in different circumstances. But at least we can distinguish what the two groups meant when referring to Confucianism. When responding to the New Intellectuals' zeal for

²⁴ Wu Mi, "My View of Life" (Wo chih jen-sheng-kuan), CR, No. 16 (April 1923), 18-19.

²⁵ Most of these articles were written, or "translated" (I put this word in inverted commas because they are interpretation rather than translation, with extensive commentary by the translator) by Wu Mi himself, with the exception of one entitled "Irving Babbitt on Julien Benda and French Thought" (Pai-pi-te lun Pan-ta yu Fa-kuo ssu-hsiang), written by Chang Yin-lin (1905-1942). These articles tend to "expose" the "negative" side of Bergson's ideas to the readers. The only one that is sympathetic towards Bergson is entitled "Pierre Lassere on Bergson's Philosophy" (La-tsai-erh lun Po-ke-sen chih che-hsueh), where Lassere is shown to have blamed Bergson's followers for distorting his thought. Yet, Lassere is quoted to have said that Bergson himself was partly to blame for encouraging wild and outrageous actions while causing damage to knowledge and rationality.

²⁶ Liang Shih-chiu, "About Mr. Babbitt and His Thought" (kuan-yu Pai-pi-te hsien-sheng chi-ch'i ssu-hsiang), *Jen-sheng*, No. 148 (January 1957).

material existence and scientific analysis, the New Confucianists focused their attention not so much on the evilness of mankind (though this is not to say that they ignored it totally) as on how man, by means of intuition, can transcend material restriction and biological form to establish unity with ultimate goodness. This idea was not clearly spelled out during the initial phase of the New Confucian Movement in the 1920s but was later perfected by Carsun Chang, Hsiung Shih-li and their students.²⁷ In this respect, the New Confucianists distanced themselves from Bergson, whom they believed to have a purely biological concept of "intuition." Still, in the early stages of development of their thought, the New Confucianists did find Bergson's ideas, most notably the creative force of intuition, useful in presenting what they thought to be the essence of Confucian values to a modern public. Thus, the New Confucianism focused more on the ability of man's internal spirit to form unity with Heaven by means of intuition than on the curbing of the human tendency toward evil or arbitrariness.

For CR school, the "real essence" of Chinese culture was its traditional emphasis on self-restraint.

In comparison, members of the CR school held steadfastly to their dualistic view of human nature and remained ever wary of the tendency toward evil in man. Bergson's idea of "intuition" fails, according to them, precisely at the point where it underestimates or downplays the human propensity toward evil. With its recurring emphasis on the "inner check," a term formulated by Babbitt, the CR group thought of Confucianism primarily as a teaching that emphasizes the ordering or restraint of selfish desire by means of the "higher will" or "ethical imagination." To the CR school, this was the "real essence" of Chinese culture, and it was the only "correct" way to counter the adverse effect of the New Culture Movement.

²⁷ Mou Tsung-san (1899-1995), one of the best students of Hsiung Shih-li, developed this idea to the fullest. He borrowed the term "intellectual intuition" (which Kant reserved for God) from the West, and applied it to explain the moral instinct of man. It is precisely this kind of instinct that enables man to form unity with Heaven, which is the manifestation of ultimate goodness. In his view, the ideas of Confucianism best illustrate the "intellectual intuition." See Mou Tsung-san, *Intellectual Intuition and Chinese Philosophy* (Chih te chih-chueh yu Chung-kuo che-hsueh) (Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 1971).

Conclusion

CR's conservatism, as indicated above, is unique first of all in its refusal to establish a primary contrast between East and West and to identify the former as superior to the latter. Also, while the CR school fully recognized the intellect's limitations, they did not regard "intuition" in the Bergsonian sense as an effective response to the New Intellectuals' claim of the intellect's supremacy.

While such other conservatives as the New Confucianists, perceiving the idolization of intellect and science as the New Culture Movement's main defect, believed that an answer could be found in searching for the meaning of human existence beyond science and the material world, the CR group saw such an answer as inadequate. For them, the problem could not be solved by employing Bergson's naturalistic notion of "intuition," as the New Confucianists had done, because Bergson's philosophy actually shared the same origin as the ideology promoted by the New Intellectuals, that is, Rousseau's Romanticism. From the CR's perspective, both the New Intellectuals *and* the New Confucianists were excessively optimistic about the goodness of human nature, and both neglected the crucial role of the "inner check." In this sense, the dispute between the CR and the New Intellectuals, commonly denoted as "conservatism versus 'progressivism,'" is essentially similar to the dispute between the CR and the New Confucianists, though the latter group represented another aspect of modern Chinese conservatism. Given the impact that the West inevitably was going to have on China, the latter's future, from the CR's perspective, would depend not only on whether the Chinese could preserve their tradition but also on which "West"—Babbitt's or Rousseau's—the Chinese would choose to emulate. Thus, in order fully to understand the characteristics of the CR's particular brand of Chinese conservatism, we should not confine ourselves to the conventional analysis of "East versus West" or "tradition versus modernity," but should also examine exactly which "West" the CR and its various opponents had in mind.

Finally, a few words can be said about the significance of the CR's stress on the evil within man. In his study of the "consciousness of sin" in both the Confucian tradition and the liberal tradition of the West, Chang Hao points out that the Western liberals' strong sense of human fallibility had led them to be very alert to the corruption that often accompanies the accession to power.

*Future of
China
dependent on
which West—
Babbitt's or
Rousseau's—
it would
choose to
emulate.*

Hence, in their constitutional theories and practice, Westerners devoted much attention to ways of preventing those in power from abusing their positions, and this partly contributed to the emergence in the West of political institutions that could ensure the proper functioning of a democratic system. The Confucian tradition, on the other hand, though not entirely lacking the “consciousness of sin,” was unable to develop this consciousness to the degree that it had developed in the West because the Confucian tradition favors a more optimistic view of human nature. And this might be the reason why limited constitutional government as a political system did not materialize in China despite the acceptance in the Confucian tradition of a role for dissent and protest.²⁸ If Chang Hao’s observation is correct, then the CR’s emphasis on the moral fallibility of man just might be the missing link in China’s quest for a less authoritarian future. Of course, much work remains to be done before we can arrive definitively at such a conclusion.

²⁸ Chang Hao, “The ‘Consciousness of Sin’ and Democratic Tradition” (Yu-an i-shih yu min-chu chuan-tung, in Chang Hao, *The “Consciousness of Sin” and Democratic Tradition*, second edition (Taipei: Lien-ching chu-pan shih-ye kung-ssu, 1990), 3-32.