

Introduction

A photograph of about seventy young Chinese men, presumably taken right after they passed the selection examination for the Boxer Indemnity Scholarship Program in August 1910, shows almost all of them wearing long gowns, their queues having only recently been cut. Less than a month later, as they prepared to embark on the voyage to America, their looks had changed entirely: they wore Western hairstyles and all were dressed in Western suits made by tailors in Shanghai.¹

F. L. Chang, a Chinese student in America at about this time, recounts in the *Chinese Students' Monthly*² just how traumatic it was to undergo the transformations typical for the America-bound Chinese male student (presumably based on his own personal experiences). First, he had to lose his queue, “up to now a life-long friend”; next went his “soft silk garments and comfortable shoes,” which were replaced by a “much less satisfactory” straw hat, a double-breasted suit, and a pair of heavy leather shoes. The shift from chopsticks to knife and fork impeded his “manual dexterity”; changing his

diet from “small bits of seasoned pork” to “a large piece of raw steak” often resulted in “indigestion”; and switching from a cup of tea to a dish of ice cream required “a strong constitution.” When all these changes occurred in rapid succession, Chang observed, an “Oriental” person became very much bewildered.³

People such as Chang, who ultimately became modern Chinese by coming to America to study in the early twentieth century, stood at the forefront of the nation’s encounter with the West. They experienced a more dramatic, perhaps more thorough, and in many cases more conflict-ridden transformation into modern ways than did their peers in China. Their sojourn in America, which for the majority of them took place at a formative period in their lives, had a substantial impact on their political, professional, emotional, and even physical development. A fascinating yet until recently little-studied group,⁴ this generation of American-educated Chinese, whose importance to China is just beginning to be fully recognized, produced some of China’s most prominent leaders in diplomacy, industry, and finance, as well as China’s first career women. From this group also came many of China’s major modern educators and scholars, individuals who would set the tone and style of university and intellectual life in the first half of twentieth-century China.⁵ The foundations these people laid in republican China, particularly in the areas of higher education, research, and, to a lesser degree, industry,⁶ eventually provided the institutional base of the People’s Republic of China. Still more pertinent for this study is the fact that they introduced new social customs, new kinds of interpersonal relationships, and new ways of associating in groups—in brief, they initiated a new way of life that contained key aspects of Chinese modernity. This is why our understanding of twentieth-century China and the process of cross-cultural social change can be greatly enhanced by a careful examination of their experience.

MODERNITY AS LIVED EXPERIENCE

The best known among this remarkable group was Hu Shi (Hu Shih), China’s preeminent liberal in the Dewey tradition. Hu attended Cornell and Columbia universities and emerged as a chief spokesperson for the May Fourth New Culture Movement that began around the mid 1910s.⁷ Yet Hu

Shi was only one among many of comparable talent.⁸ In the same cohort that arrived in America with Hu Shi in 1910 (the group whose photograph I mentioned above) were the following, eventually influential men: Zhu Kezhen (Chu K'o-chen, known in the West as Coching Chu), a Harvard-trained meteorologist who would serve as vice president of the Academy of Natural Sciences in the People's Republic (and whose story after returning to China will be told in the Epilogue); Zhao Yuanren (Yuen Ren Chao), a pioneer in China in the fields of linguistics and musicology, whose Chinese-language textbooks are still being used by universities across America; and Zhang Pengchun (P. C. Chang), a Columbia-trained educator who contributed significantly to the development of both Qinghua and Nankai, two highly acclaimed universities in twentieth-century China, and who also helped introduce modern theater to China by enthusiastically promoting student drama at Nankai Middle School.⁹

Many others of equal brilliance came to America during this period, later bringing about a wide range of changes in modern China. For a long time, these people were marginalized and negated by the dominant school of "revolution-centered" modern Chinese historiography in the People's Republic. Their foreign educational background put them in the category of "bourgeois intellectuals," a political label that often led to their denunciation and persecution during much of the Mao era. This bleak situation has changed a great deal since the 1980s, when the "four modernizations" became official policy and a new wave of foreign study began in China. A rehabilitation of foreign-educated Chinese has taken place and a number of books have been published in China on the subject of the Chinese foreign-study movement.¹⁰

None of these books, however, focuses specifically on American-educated Chinese in the early twentieth century; nor do they adequately examine these people's multiple contributions to modern China. Fei Xiaotong, one of China's most revered social scientists and himself a student of the American-trained educators studied in this book, compares his recent efforts to introduce his teachers to contemporary readers to the "white-haired palace maid's" futile attempt to recount a past few people cared to listen to (an allusion to a poem written by the famous Tang dynasty poet Bai Juyi).¹¹ Fei's remark generates a question; namely, have the foreign-educated Chinese from the first half of the twentieth century been truly understood, now that they have been rescued from obscurity and political condemnation in the PRC?

Western-educated Chinese have not received adequate attention in Western scholarship either. Charlotte Furth, the author of a well-received book on the British-trained geologist Ding Wenjiang (Ting Wen-chiang),¹² contends that while the new intellectual class of the early twentieth century helped usher in an urbane and Western-oriented modern culture, “it was also threatened by a new estrangement from the rest of the Chinese society” because of its elitist Western education and its distance from the center of political power.¹³ Y. C. Wang and Jerome Chen, each the author of an authoritative work on the foreign-educated Chinese, agree with Furth’s formulation.¹⁴

While it is true that the elite foreign-educated class was relatively ineffective in twentieth-century Chinese politics, I believe that the politically oriented approach to their impact is overly narrow. The American-educated Chinese studied in this book belonged to the same generation that produced Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, and Chiang Kai-shek—twentieth-century larger-than-life figures whose presence overshadowed their politically less prominent peers, even though the latter were significant historical actors in their own right. Born between the 1880s and the 1900s, theirs was a “special generation” in modern Chinese history, men who were “the last to have the world of Confucian learning etched into their memories as schoolboys, yet the first as a group to confront the intrusive Western world forcing itself into Chinese territory and Chinese minds.”¹⁵ To understand the historical roles played by this generation of American-educated Chinese, it is important to trace their intellectual genealogy and to compare them with people of the previous generation.

Several prominent thinkers in that earlier generation served as intellectual mentors for the people examined in the present study. As the first representatives of the “Chinese intelligentsia,” those individuals in the older generation (who henceforth will be referred to as the “pioneer thinkers”) emerged as a “visible group of new social types” toward the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁶ Among those who fully embraced a recognizably “modern” mode of consciousness,¹⁷ Liang Qichao and Yan Fu stood out as the most influential. Liang’s acceptance of the nation-state as the “terminal community”¹⁸ and Yan Fu’s rational-technological approach, as well as his search for a “wealthy and strong” Chinese nation, exerted a profound impact on the younger generation.¹⁹ Revolutionary as they were in their thinking, however, the pioneer

thinkers “largely abided with the traditional life styles.”²⁰ Furthermore, although the idea of a “modern man” as a “self-confident engineer, industrialist and professional” was first advocated by the pioneer thinkers,²¹ it remained for the next generation, precisely Liang Qichao’s own children and their peers,²² to undergo specialized training as professionals in Western countries, in Japan, and within China itself.

Both the American-educated students and their mentors can be regarded as “transitional,” but there were significant differences in the ways the two generations related to “modernity.” To begin with, the pioneer thinkers came under Western influences only after they had reached adulthood, whereas the student generation received a more systematic modern education in their younger years. Furthermore, the dismantling of the civil service examination system in the early twentieth century compelled the younger generation to search for new career paths. And lastly, everyday life also began to show signs of change; in coastal cities in particular, some Chinese were choosing a “modern” lifestyle as early as the first decade of the twentieth century.²³

If, as Myron Cohen perceptively argues, “being Chinese” for the elite classes in traditional China meant choosing particular lifestyles and ways of making a living,²⁴ then “being modern Chinese” similarly included aspects of both. The conventional approach to studying modern Chinese intellectuals, which often focuses only on their ideas and concepts, fails to capture their multidimensional experiences; for them, “modernity” was not just an intellectual issue, but an “existential” one as well. How one lived had become an increasingly important statement about who one was, since “the more post-traditional the settings in which an individual moves, the more lifestyle concerns the very core of self-identity, its making and remaking.”²⁵

It is my argument that although this contingent of American-educated Chinese were not the first generation of modern Chinese to begin to *think* differently, they were among the first for whom “modernity” became a *lived* experience. In terms of both lifestyle and livelihood, they made decisive strides toward a modern mode. Meanwhile, through reordering their own lives, they furthered the development of a Chinese modern identity, a historical project already begun by the pioneer thinkers. The study of the American-educated Chinese, therefore, challenges us to go beyond the conventional emphasis on political and intellectual history, and to embrace a

broader social and cultural perspective. Then we can understand more adequately the historical roles of these people, men and women who gave daily content to the modernity that they sought in China's name.²⁶

In this study, "modernity" is treated neither as a "pre-established socio-historic" scheme and a one-size-fits-all ideal, nor as a "completed or synthetic whole."²⁷ No single universal definition is adequate to convey what "the modern" has meant in different periods and in various cultural settings.²⁸ There are and have been, as Benjamin Schwartz emphasized, many varieties of modernity within the "modern West" itself, with all the conflicts and tensions that make modernity a complex and unresolved state of affairs.²⁹ Moreover, Western-derived notions of modernity may be unable to capture sufficiently the peculiar adaptation of the "modern" mode in non-Western cultural contexts. In Wang Hui's critical study of the Chinese quest for modern identity, Wang, a highly regarded scholar in China, not only points out the tensions and paradoxes embedded in modernity, but also asks, "Whose modernity scheme is it?" to stress the Western origin of the term and to caution its application to the Chinese context.³⁰ The process of constructing Chinese modern identity, Wang argues, not only implies borrowing ideas, attitudes, and behaviors from various sources in the modern West, but also requires both critical reexamination of and a creative and selective reconnection to China's own history and tradition.³¹

Modernization for the Chinese people has not been a "natural" development, but a turbulent and painful process that involves the search for a modern yet still Chinese identity. In this context, the question of cultural continuity and discontinuity always arises when modern Chinese intellectuals are studied. Joseph Levenson, for instance, saw little continuity with Chinese tradition, aside from emotional attachments, among modern Chinese intellectuals.³² More persuasive, in my view, is the notion that modern Chinese intellectuals favor a combination of continuity and discontinuity in their resolution of tradition and Western influence and their creation of new culture in China.³³ This is especially true about the generation studied here, a generation that was systematically educated in the West yet still sufficiently rooted in the cultural heritage of China.³⁴ Rather than being passive receivers of Western influence, the thoughtful people among this generation consciously searched for ways to regenerate Chinese culture by a careful selection and digestion of Western knowledge.³⁵ As Pan Guangdan, an unusually

perceptive man who studied in the U.S. from 1922 to 1926, contended in the *Chinese Students' Quarterly*,³⁶ the purpose of foreign study was not to make the Chinese depend on the West intellectually, but to enable the Chinese to stand on an equal footing with the West, and to create, along with countries all over the world, an "equal yet diverse common cultural life."³⁷

This study is largely focused on my subjects' years in the United States (although there are sections, such as the one in Chapter 2 about professional identity, where I discuss at length their activities after they went back to China). I explore what modernity meant to them and how they experimented in America with a modern mode of life. The vast majority of the students, it is important to keep in mind, returned to China after they finished their studies abroad.³⁸

For the Chinese, modernity by its very nature involves cross-cultural interchange.³⁹ What is most intriguing about the students' experience is precisely that it occurred in a cross-cultural setting and in the dual historical context of China and America. The challenge is to contextualize the experiences of the Chinese students within the political, social, and cultural environments of both countries. A number of major political events and social and cultural movements marked the histories of both countries in this period and underscored the modern transformation they were undergoing. While China was at the threshold of a modern age and in a particularly stressful transitional period from the late Qing to the early republic, America was encountering its own, different modernization problems, arising from rapid industrialization and urbanization. Ultimately, it was the students' perceptions of the conditions and needs of China that guided what they would do with the stimuli and influences of America. America of the early twentieth century offered the Chinese students a particular version of modernity, which, of course, left its mark on the students' adaptation to modern ways, a style that might not have been as evident to the Chinese who did not have prolonged experiences of American culture. The unique American imprint on the students' experiences notwithstanding, the issues the students dealt with in their lives and discussed in their writings—factors such as nationalism, democratic participation and voluntary association, professionalism, romantic love, new forms of leisure, as well as race—were universal issues in the making of a modern Chinese identity, and are still relevant to today's Chinese.

THE FIRST AND SECOND WAVES

It is important to place this generation of American-educated Chinese within the larger context of the foreign-study movement in modern China. For over one hundred years, driven by an urge for social and political change, the desire for new knowledge, and a longing for more personal freedom and a better life, generations of educated Chinese have left home to study in almost every major country in the world. There have been both active and inactive periods in the foreign-study movement, in response to the fluctuations in modern Chinese history. In recent times, since the reform era began in the People's Republic in the late 1970s, hundreds of thousands of Chinese have gone abroad to study.⁴⁰ A new wave of Chinese foreign study has clearly and forcefully arrived on the world scene.⁴¹

The first major wave of Chinese going abroad to study consisted of a number of Qing-government-sponsored overseas educational missions in the 1870s and 1880s, during the era of the "Self-Strengthening Movement."⁴² The best known were the one hundred or so Chinese youth of the "Yung Wing mission" to America (1872–81), referred to later as "China's first hundred."⁴³ This mission was terminated abruptly, in part because of the conservative Chinese officials' concern over the adoption of American lifestyles by the young students, and in part because of the rise of anti-Chinese sentiments and actions in America at that time, events that led the U.S. government to back off from its earlier agreement to let the Chinese students enter American military academies.⁴⁴

The foreign-study students of the early twentieth century, including the American-educated group examined in this study, comprised the second wave, a new movement stemming from a political crisis in China. In the wake of the Boxer incident of 1900, the Qing government, motivated by the need for self-preservation, made an earnest effort to readjust China's position in the world. Among a series of political and social reform measures taken by the Qing regime, the most significant and far-reaching was the abolition of the imperial civil service examinations in 1905.⁴⁵ Henceforth Chinese youth were to be educated in a new way consonant with China's need to survive in the modern world. Zhang Zhidong, a governor-general and reform leader at the turn of the century, saw foreign study as a solution, even though he insisted at the same time that Western learning could only serve as the means

(*yong*) while Chinese learning should remain the essence (*ti*).⁴⁶ His “means-essence” formula, proposed in the late 1890s, soon became outdated. Facing a crisis of “orientational order” as the Chinese intellectual world rapidly disintegrated,⁴⁷ people began to embrace not only Western technical knowledge, but Western learning in general, becoming, in fact, amazingly receptive to Western influences. It was in this generally open intellectual milieu in China that the second wave of the foreign-study movement began to rise. Compared with the Yung Wing mission’s short-term and narrowly defined educational project,⁴⁸ this new wave enjoyed a much stronger and more enduring momentum, was endorsed by both state and society, and was marked with a self-conscious willingness on the part of the students to acquire broad learning from the West. It also became understood and largely accepted by the people involved that going abroad to study would imply a departure from traditional ways of life, in contrast to the resistance to Western cultural influences by the conservative officials on the Yung Wing mission.

Not all Chinese students in the second wave chose to study in the West. To many people in the first decade of the 1900s, recently modernized Japan was a shortcut to Western knowledge. In the peak year of 1906, the number of Chinese students in Tokyo alone amounted to over eight thousand,⁴⁹ much larger than that of the students in America in any given year. While most people in Japan studied subjects like education, law, medicine, or military science, the best-known students there were not the degree-seeking scholars but political dissidents such as Sun Yat-sen and his colleagues.

With the launching of the “work-study” program in the mid 1910s, France became an important center of foreign study in Europe, attracting over sixteen hundred Chinese youths between 1919 and 1921, many of whom went to Paris and Lyon. What came out of this academically dubious program was the formation of some of the earliest Chinese communist groups.⁵⁰ A number of other European countries such as England, Germany, and Belgium also attracted students from China.⁵¹

In contrast to the drastic rise and fall of the numbers of students in Japan and France, the increase of students in America between 1900 and 1927 was gradual and steady: in 1906, about 300 Chinese students were in America; the number grew to roughly 650 in 1911; by 1915, the number had passed 1,000; three years later, about 1,200 students were in America; and between

1925 and 1926, the estimated figure was around 1,600.⁵² The Chinese tended to concentrate in schools in the East and Midwest, with a much smaller number of them in the West and the South.⁵³

The cost of study in America was far beyond the economic capacities of most Chinese families,⁵⁴ so people of lesser means had to depend on financial support from various sources. Government sponsorships of different kinds furnished most financial aid, with missionary patronage a distant second.⁵⁵ Occasionally, some individuals were also helped by wealthy philanthropists. Generally speaking, Chinese students in America, even those on government scholarships, came from families that were relatively affluent by Chinese standards.⁵⁶

A high percentage of the students came from just three provinces, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Guangdong.⁵⁷ The large number of students from the increasingly westernized seaport regions underscored the widened gap between the interior and the coast, a reality that had become noticeable since the mid nineteenth century. Elite missionary school graduates made up a considerable portion of the student body, a fact that was noted, with some alarm, as early as the 1910s.⁵⁸ Despite the Boxer Indemnity program and other government programs, the proportion of government fellowship students (*guanfei*) steadily declined over time; after 1910, self-supporting students clearly outnumbered government fellowship students.⁵⁹

The Boxer Indemnity Scholarship Program was the most important scheme for educating Chinese students in America and arguably the most consequential and successful in the entire foreign-study movement of twentieth-century China. It enjoyed a good reputation because of its competitive selection procedure and high academic standard, especially after the founding of a specially designed preparatory school in Beijing, Qinghua (Tsinghua) College.⁶⁰ From the approximately thirteen hundred individuals sent by the program from 1909 to 1929,⁶¹ there emerged some of modern China's best scholars and educators, as well as prominent leaders in other walks of life.⁶²

The story of the American remission of the Boxer Indemnity reveals a complex, and fundamentally unequal power relationship between China and America. Overall, as Michael Hunt convincingly argues, the remission of the Boxer Indemnity in the form of scholarship aid to Chinese students in America was an act on the part of the American government to promote

American-directed reform in China.⁶⁵ It should also be understood in the context of contemporary international geopolitics, especially Americans' concern over the rising military and political influence of Japan after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5, and the subsequent large influx of Chinese students to that rapidly modernizing Pacific rival.⁶⁴

For the Chinese, including those who benefited by the educational opportunity, the humiliating memory of the Boxer Incident remained a source of bitterness.⁶⁵ The West in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries represented to the Chinese intellectual class both the oppression of imperialism and the lure of modernity, and the American Boxer Indemnity program clearly embodied these paradoxical roles. An interesting footnote to the story of the American Boxer Indemnity remission is that two former students of the Yung Wing mission were highly instrumental in the development of the Indemnity program. Liang Cheng, the Chinese minister to the United States (1903–7), played a key role in pressing the American government to return the excess money to China;⁶⁶ meanwhile, Liang Tunyan, the Chinese minister of foreign affairs in 1909, was crucial in deciding what academic subjects should be emphasized in the program.⁶⁷ The connection between the first wave and the second wave of the Chinese foreign-study movement was nowhere more explicit.

SOURCES AND ORGANIZATION

This study intends to recapture and interpret Chinese students' daily life in America, and therefore draws extensively on voluminous publications by the students themselves both in English and in Chinese, as well as records in university archives, contemporary newspaper and magazine accounts, personal memoirs and diaries, oral histories, and interviews I conducted in China in the 1980s. In six topical chapters, the book explores various aspects of the students' experiences in their years in America, and in some sections, their activities after they returned to China.

A major conceptual adjustment many educated Chinese made at the turn of the century was to begin to see themselves as Chinese nationals, a primary marker of their modern identity. As such, they sought new ways of grouping with other Chinese nationals; Chapter 1 looks at the associational life of

the Chinese students in America in these terms. Special attention is given to one particular organization, the Chinese Students' Alliance, the largest and most elaborately organized among all the Chinese student organizations in America at this time. In the late 1900s, when a vigorous constitutional movement was being launched in China, which upheld the ideas of self-government and political participation, the Chinese Students' Alliance embarked on its own comparable democratic venture.

The eventual waning of the democratic spirit among the students after the founding of the republic, accompanied by the decline of the Alliance, illustrates tellingly the political dilemmas China faced in her desperate struggle to survive as a new modern nation-state. Students' political attitudes and behaviors during the stressful transitional period from late Qing to the early republic provide important clues regarding the meaning of democracy to the Chinese in the early twentieth century and the changing political roles of the educated class. Despite the decline of the Alliance, the associational drive survived. Among other types of student organizations, Chapter 1 also looks at the development of student fraternities, an elusive and seldom studied subject that can help shed light on politics and organizational behavior in the republican period.

Chapter 2 focuses on the professional life of the students. The evolution of educated Chinese at this time from civil servants of the state to independent modern professionals was a significant historical phenomenon. American-educated Chinese constituted the mainstay of the first generation of Chinese professionals, a new intellectual force that began to become visible in China in the second half of the 1920s. The development of professional societies, which the students experimented with while in America, played a crucial role in implanting professional consciousness of these individuals. The presence of these professional organizations, modeled after ones in America, was another important expression of the students' associational drive. Overall, the students acquired a primarily technical, gradualist approach to solving China's problems, as opposed to the political and revolutionary methods of the Chinese Communist Party. After they returned to China, efforts were made by them not only to transplant Western disciplines and professional societies to their home country, but also to sinicize them, as the case of the sociologist Wu Wenzao (and his students) demonstrates. To a large extent, the Chinese professionals succeeded both in establishing the

new authority of professionalism and in carving out a relatively autonomous space for themselves in the Nationalist period. The close connection between this subject matter and that of Chapter 1 was what led me to make it the second chapter, although the fact that it consists of the students' experiences after they returned to China could have been a rationale for placing it toward the end of the book.

Chapter 3 examines the question of race. Educated Chinese during the early twentieth century wrestled with Western-defined notions of race and constructed their own racial consciousness within the framework of Chinese nationalism. For the students in America, more than for their peers in China, the question of race was relevant and pressing since they found themselves in a country where Chinese immigration was banned. Through the students' ambivalent relationship with "backward" Chinese immigrant laborers in the United States, the difficult issues of race, class, and modernity all came to the fore. While limited efforts were made by some students to improve the conditions of the Chinese laborers through "general welfare" programs in the early 1910s, little concrete work was done in the 1920s by members of the May Fourth generation, even though these people were more ready to view the plight of the Chinese immigrants as a symbol of China's humiliating position in the world. From the May Fourth group, however, came individuals who began to study race and ethnicity as trained professionals in the social and natural sciences. As a whole, the students did not reject the Western-defined racial hierarchy, but rather sought to improve Chinese position in it.

The unique questions raised for female students in America is the subject of Chapter 4, which, covering the period from the 1880s to the 1920s, provides a fuller historical overview of the story of the *nü liuxuesheng* (female foreign-study students) since their first appearance.⁶⁸ Three rather distinct generational groups of women students can be identified in the four decades under review, each with its own share of problems and strategies for tackling them. Part of the general movement of students sent to study abroad, but also apart from them, the women students had perspectives and experiences which differed notably from those of their male counterparts. Modern meanings of domesticity and femininity, and the conflict between career and marriage—these were of special relevance to women students, and were wrestled with by the three generational groups in their respective historical contexts.

Chapter 5 probes the emotional world of the students, particularly the male students. Leaving behind a country whose social and cultural order was disintegrating, and coming to a sexually more permissive country with a different code of social behavior, many male students (a large percentage of them already betrothed in China) experienced initial shock and uncertainty about how to adjust to the new mores and, eventually, how to break away from the confines of traditional Chinese personal culture. Meanwhile, Confucian morality, while fading, had by no means lost all of its power. This culturally conflicted milieu was the setting for the students' new struggle with issues of gender relationships, love, sexuality, and interracial marriage.

Chapter 6 discusses the students' recreational activities, particularly athletics and theater, two important cultural arenas of modernity for students in the early twentieth century. Through participation in sports, the students developed an appreciation for physical fitness and nurtured a more rounded personality ideal. In particular, the male students embraced new notions of masculinity that emphasized action, competitiveness, and physical prowess. The theater, on the other hand, provided the students with a new way to relax and entertain, a convenient means for imparting positive images of China to the American audience, and an important medium for exploring issues of common concern. A number of individuals who first participated in theater while in America went on to play pioneering roles in China's modern theater.

My study's focus is the first quarter of the twentieth century, up to 1927, a period in which critical cultural shifts and political transformations took place in China. The year 1927 marked the beginning of a new Nationalist era. By then, most of the members of the generation examined in this study had completed their overseas sojourn and returned to China. The source materials about students during this twenty-seven-year period are abundant, interesting, and highly informative.⁶⁹

A PERSONAL NOTE

I became curious about an earlier generation of American-educated Chinese after living a few years as a Chinese student in America myself. Having grown up in the PRC during a time when history books seldom mentioned

Western-educated Chinese, I knew nothing about my predecessors when I arrived in America in the early 1980s. Gradually, my own experience as a Chinese person studying in America made me wonder about them. In the winter of 1985 I went back to China to do research on the generation of the American-educated Chinese in the first decades of the twentieth century. I was able to meet a few survivors, all in their eighties and nineties.⁷⁰ The most valuable thing I gained from these interviews was not factual information, but a “feel” for this remarkable group.

I was especially drawn to Li Jinghan (Franklin C. H. Lee), who studied sociology at Columbia University in the early 1920s and returned to China to become an advocate of statistical research and an authority on the study of rural China. The old man had poor hearing and could not quite follow the questions I had prepared. His mind was still clear, though, and I let him wander in his own reminiscing. Twice I saw light shining in his ninety-one-year-old eyes: first, when he talked about how he had won first prizes for a tennis tournament and for a speech contest at a Chinese students’ summer conference in America;⁷¹ and second, when he told me that some of his works, out of print since after 1949, were to be reprinted soon by a Chinese university press. The sweet smile on his face was almost childlike. Li’s story will appear in the Epilogue.

After I left Li’s modest apartment in eastern Beijing and came out onto the busy street, I felt sad for Li Jinghan and sad for China’s discipline of sociology. I was certain that few people in this undistinguished neighborhood knew that there lived amongst them one of China’s most eminent sociologists in the twentieth century.⁷² The ground work laid by Li and his colleagues decades ago had been undermined after sociology was denounced as “pseudoscience” in the early 1950s. As a result, a young generation of Chinese students had to go abroad again to “reinaugurate” sociology, instead of learning from their Chinese teachers at home.

Now that the twentieth century is past, a rethinking of twentieth-century Chinese history is inconspicuously but firmly under way both in China and in the West. Notable in this effort is an endeavor to rediscover and reevaluate those people and events that have been obscured by the “revolution-centered” modern Chinese historiography. Almost all of a sudden, Chinese history of the past one hundred years has started to be revealed in all its dazzling multiple colors and facets. This study was conducted within this historical

current. It is a tribute to members of an earlier generation of American-educated Chinese from a person who followed in their footsteps more than half a century later, and who, until I started digging up long-buried materials, was totally ignorant of a vital group of intellectuals in modern Chinese history. It is my intention to trace the paths taken by this memorable group of people, to examine and reflect upon, in a comprehensive and critical manner, the making of Chinese modern identity in the course of the twentieth century, and to connect my own generation to our predecessors.