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Science in Context **30**(3), 213–217 (2017). © Cambridge University Press 2017
doi:10.1017/S0269889717000151

Introduction: Paving the Old-New Way from Qing to China

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The funeral procession of Sheng Xuanhuai (盛宣懷, 1844–1916) – the renowned Qing scholar-official, financier, and "father of Chinese industrialism" – meandered through the streets of Shanghai on 18 November 1917. The funeral was a grand event, one that was purportedly documented in film, later to be distributed as the first "news short-film" (新聞短片) in China.[1] The *North China Herald* reported on the event in some detail, at times in rather florid language, and suggested that "the cortege was splendid and impressive, bringing back the days of the Manchu emperors. The ceremonial costumes, the musical instruments and much more of the accoutrements dated back to the days of the Empire" ("Sheng Kung-pao's Funeral," 1917, 467–68). And indeed, the procession included a variety of ritual customs and insignia from Qing (1644-1911) times: imperial banners, ancestral tablets, Buddhist and Daoist priests, paper artifacts, and much more. Simultaneously, nonetheless, other kinds of participants and objects – new and not of imperial pedigree – were part of and intermixed with the older materials: certificates of rank were carried on cars; boy scouts and college students marched alongside the priests; many of the participants arrived by train (mainly from Sheng's hometown, Suzhou); and as the Shanghai portion of the procession ended, it continued by steamer to Suzhou. The conclusion of the *North China Herald* account, however, seems to have emphasized a dichotomy of old and new rather than a joyful mix of the two:

> Hundreds of men, dressed in the ancient costume of the old dynasties, bore a strong contrast to the eight behind them, sons of intimate friends of the deceased. They were on horseback and wore high silk hats, frock coats and white breeches tucked in riding boots. *Truly the passing of the old and the entering of the new.* (Ibid.; emphasis added)

This view – the old giving way to the new – was not just an off-hand (Western) journalistic analysis; it was part of a larger discourse about the nature of modernity, about

[1]The title was: "Sheng Xingsun [Xuanhuai] da chusang" 盛杏蓀大出喪 ["The Great Funeral Procession of Sheng Xingsun (Xuanhuai)"] (see Cheng Jihua 程季華, Li Shaobai 李少白, and Xing Zuwen 邢祖文, 1963, vol. 1, 31).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0269889717000151 Published online by Cambridge University Press

progress, and about the relationship between East and West. By the early twentieth century, China was often perceived by most Westerners and Chinese alike as traditional, backward, and weak. It was, thus, commonly stated that the old was giving way to the new (descriptive), should be giving way to the new (prescriptive), or was bound to give way to the new (quasi-fatalistic), if China was to survive. This kind of discourse was put forward by both Western and Chinese writers, who embraced this linear, progressive, view of the relationship between the old and the new, well before Sheng's funeral or the Qing's demise. In the aftermath of that demise, the New (not "Modern") Culture Movement began to grow and seek solutions for the old-new nation's crisis. The Movement's rhetoric in particular advanced the need for the triumph of the new, and journals, such as New People, New Tide, or New Youth (新民, 新潮, 新青年) served as media for extending such views.

In the first issue of the latter journal, published in 1915, Chen Duxiu (陳獨秀, 1879-1942) – one of the leading intellectuals and revolutionaries of the time who in 1921 co-founded the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) – called on China's youth to discard the old and embrace the new, and another article in that issue was titled "Xinjiu wenti" (新舊問題, "The Problem of New and Old"). In it, the author claimed that "[these days] nothing does not follow discussions of new and old ... nothing does not depend on discussions of new and old ... from the upper reaches of the nation and down to society, there is no affair nor any thing that does not assume the two shapes of new and old" (無在不由新舊之說 [。。。]無不緣新舊之說[。。。]上自國家。下及社會。無事無物。不呈新舊之二象。). It further argued that the two – new and old – were completely incompatible and urged for the triumph of the new over the old (see Wang Shuqian 汪叔潛 1915, 1–4). In the 1920s, the notion of the new defeating the old gained more currency with both the CCP and Kuomintang (KMT) advancing their cause through this idiom. The Chinese translation of line 5 of the first stanza of "The Internationale" (used by both the CCP and KMT) serves as a good example. In French the line reads "Du passé, faisons table rase" ("of the past let us make a clean slate"); Qu Qiubai (瞿秋白, 1899-1935) translated it as "the old world [we] shall smash to the ground" (舊世界打個落花流水), thus not just a "past" but an "old world" had to be much more violently destroyed (see also Calhoun 1994, 237–238, 301 n.5). Other, perhaps more imposing (and vague), idioms were also used to express the bifurcated notion of old and new: tradition stood for the old, while modernity substituted for the new. Knowledge, belief, practices, and behavior, inhered in these idioms as did strong judgmental connotations, positive with modernity, negative with tradition. And it was with these idioms that the academic discourse about China developed. Furthermore, modernity was directly associated with the West, where influential thinkers such as Marx and Weber claimed that the modern "had swept away the rubbish of previous epochs" (Turner 1992, 16). Modernity was juxtaposed with tradition, and the added values of secularization and rationalism were attached to modernity reinforcing the binary of the two. Science was often associated with the modern and modernity, and the rhetoric of science accompanied many of the

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discussions about the positive aspects of modernity. Self-questioning of China's past interest in science, along with indigenous declarations that "China never had science," became a part of disassociating the old China from the new one. With roots going back at least to the late eighteenth century, the Western notion of China's "stagnation" or "stationariness" was tightly linked to tradition, and opposed the very possibility of progress in China and of China developing modernity on its own. This "stagnation" or "failure" narrative was accepted by many Chinese intellectuals as well after China's defeat at the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95).

The New Culture Movement thus sought to untie what they perceived as the Gordian Knot between China and its tradition, the main culprit in China's perceived failure, and its participants wrote about China in this light. The general historiographical narratives that followed, more often than not, accepted the inherent dichotomy of tradition versus modernity that the early twentieth century had generated, along with the notion that tradition was overcome by modernity. In many ways post-WWII scholars such as Joseph Levenson were direct heirs to Hegel, Ranke, and Mill, as well as to New Culture protagonists, and continued to present the dichotomous view, along with the negative judgments of Chinese tradition, even if here and there they could find remnants of the tradition lingering in modern China.

In 1972, however, the late scholar Benjamin Schwartz suggested that the terms tradition and modernity, when juxtaposed and treated as "mutually exclusive entities," with the first leading to the second through a clear-cut process of "development," were highly problematic. Schwartz argued that a better understanding of China, not only its past century but also its future, depended on allowing complex views of what the terms tradition and modernity meant and of the flexible, not necessarily exclusive or linear, relationship between them (Schwartz 1972). Paul Cohen has reiterated this line of thinking, and further claimed that the two terms are problematic, not only because they are asymmetrical, but also because each of them is inherently flawed: tradition lacking "conceptual congruity," and modernity embodying a "tightly unilinear and highly teleological" process, which reflects Western parochial experience (Cohen 2003, esp. 48–84).

In this topical issue we try to take a further step in moving "beyond tradition and modernity," as Cohen put it. But rather than recycle the terms once more – a process that almost unavoidably means retaining all of the associations they have possessed and staying within the same discursive arena – we aim to discard them as conceptual tools, except for those instances in which they were used by the historical actors. We problematize the terms, along with the narratives that stressed their irreconcilability in China, and focus rather on the interplay between old and new, not as dichotomous and mutually exclusive realities but as heuristic devices, ideas or planes of reference in constant dialogue and convergence. Thus, instead of assuming and so focusing on a transition from one distinct phase or concrete situation (tradition) to another phase or situation (modernity), separated by a great divide or rupture, we focus on the historicized *interaction* between what the historical protagonists themselves thought of

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as traditional and modern, and what we can understand as old and new. Moreover, at times the interaction of old and new blurred the differences between the two, and they became completely subsumed, thereby blending into newer-still constructs wherein both played active roles. With this in mind we also examine, when relevant, discrepancies and inconsistencies between the rhetoric of the new or the modern and the way it was put into practice.

Let us return to Sheng Xuanhuai's funeral procession: the very occasion suggested not the "passing of the old and the entering of the new" but rather the opposite, that is, the dance, as it were, of old and new together. Indeed the *North China Herald* described at one point how "the strange, weird and exotic music of the early days" was "mingling with the modern strains of the Occident." The dance of old and new thus created a still newer phenomenon that was neither old nor new but an amalgam of the two. In the case of Sheng's funeral this was a successful dance, one that the participants enjoyed and appreciated; not all such dances were as well received. Yuan Shikai's coronation, for example, which took place not too long before Sheng's funeral, was more of a farce than anything else.

We are interested in this kind of dance especially in the realm of knowledge, broadly conceived. We examine ways in which practices and concepts derived from older knowledge systems, changed rather than disappeared, and how older traits contributed to, interacted with, and affected newer traits, without ignoring – or taking for granted – the fact that at times the new did overwhelm the old. We also try to understand how such new traits were instrumental in shaping later knowledge of and attitudes towards China's past, and the ways in which the past was recast and used according to new needs, hopes, and anxieties. The vehicles that carried with them the old and new knowledge, the information technologies and infrastructure, were also transformed in the process, and the rise of journals and newspapers (such as the *North China Herald*) bespeak this transformation while the continued use of old technologies (woodblock printing for example) indicate the sustained practices of the past. These old and new information technologies are part of the dance that all papers discuss, explicitly or implicitly, along with the related nexus of knowledge and power. We therefore do not assume a one-way, linear, and unavoidable or natural path that led from one obsolete point to a categorically different point.

In chronological terms, our discussion, therefore, does not begin after, or right before, the Qing fall, and does not end immediately after the May Fourth moment, nor do we take anything prior to the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95 as irrelevant to twentieth-century changes. Most of us begin, instead, with the second half of the nineteenth century, when the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864) and the Anglo-French march on Beijing (1860) not only brought havoc to the country, consumed much of the budget, and directly affected the lives of most of the population, but also drove some of the decision-making elite (Manchu or Chinese) and many scholars to actively embrace the urgent need for change (with science also at the center). We end the discussion around 1949, as different modes of interaction between old and new took

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place with the major political shifts that followed the founding of the PRC. We begin with the late Qing and end with China, seeing the shift "from Qing to China" not as an instant in time when the Qing abdicated (the abdication edict itself being an amalgam of old and new), or when Sun Yat-sen announced the Republic, or Mao Zedong delivered a speech atop Tiananmen Square, but rather as a long process that is still in motion. Moreover, the "Qing to China" theme is not just about the political entity, but even more so about the sense of identity the historical actors felt, an identity that turned from subjects of a dynastic empire to citizens of a nation-state, from parts of a culture (universal or otherwise) to parts of a nation (even if the state was not yet whole or viable). We therefore also see 1949 not as an ending *per se*, but as one step in a longer process.

This periodization does not mean that we see a direct line leading causally from 1860 to 1949, but it does mean that we emphasize the turn from an older political entity – the Qing Empire – to a new political entity – the nation-state, China – as significant for various other historical fields, as well as to later developments in China. Moreover, the questions we ask in this special issue attempt to provide a broad staging ground for exploring the historical formations that both enabled and constrained the rise of China as a nation state.

Acknowledgments

This topical issue is the result of a conference, "From Qing to China," held at Tel Aviv University in May 2012. I am grateful to the participants of the conference, to the contributors for this issue, and to the editors at *Science in Context* for their comments and corrections. I am also thankful to the institutions that funded the conference, in particular to the The Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation, The Israel Science Foundation, and The Minerva Humanities Center at Tel Aviv University. This research was supported by the Israeli Science Foundation grant 55/12.

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