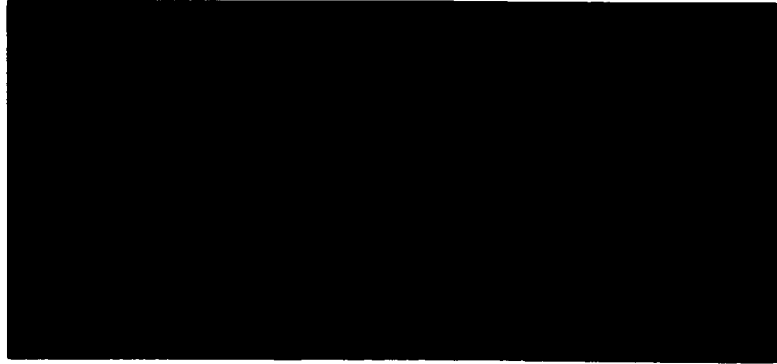




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EVOLUTIONARY CHANGES  
IN CHINESE CULTURE

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## EVOLUTIONARY CHANGES IN CHINESE CULTURE

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Does China need a uniform set of values and cultural practices in order to remain unified as a nation, develop, and prosper? If so, what combination of traditional Chinese customs and values, Marxist-Leninist (or Maoist) practices, and Western influences should be used to form Chinese culture in the reform era? Is it even possible, in fact, to forge a new cultural consensus out of such disparate elements? Should any such cultural consensus be allowed to emerge naturally out of the competition among different ideas and cultural systems, or should the central authorities strictly control what cultural elements are allowed and attempt to define and impose their vision of a cultural orthodoxy on the population? Many countries in Asia and elsewhere have grappled with the problem of how to combine native and foreign cultural elements into a cohesive whole. But in China both the fact that not two but three distinct cultural alternatives are under contention (traditional Chinese, Marxist-Leninist/socialist, and Western/modern), and that there have been such erratic swings in governmental preference and suppression among these alternatives in the past, makes the problem of defining and developing such a cultural consensus in reform-era China particularly difficult.

The general problem is hardly new, however. Throughout Chinese history the issue of how to maintain cultural cohesion has occupied the attentions of rulers and thinkers alike, for Chineseness was defined more in cultural terms than in relation to things like territory or citizenship. The challenges involved in confronting external influences such as Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity; in occupying lands inhabited by non-Chinese populations; and in being ruled by non-Chinese ruling houses (e.g., the Mongols in the 13th and 14th centuries and the Manchus from the 17th to the 20th) continuously put the cultural cohesion of China to a test.

For the past two millenia most thinking Chinese would have answered the first question posed above, at least, with a strong affirmative: China did require an enforced cultural unity to

survive. At the root of such a judgment lies a very different set of assumptions than those that have held sway recently in the West, and within Western societies perhaps the United States is the closest to being at the "opposite pole" from China.

### **The Quest for Cultural Cohesion prior to 1949**

In the dominant philosophy of China over these last two millennia, influenced by Confucianism and its later variants and interpretations, society was conceived of ideally as a giant hierarchy of human relationships and interdependencies. Culture and values were concerned centrally with how individuals should behave in regard to their parents, their children, their older and younger siblings, their teachers, their employers or employees, their local officials, and all the other relationships in which they were enmeshed within this hierarchy. Only if each individual followed the proper ways would there be social harmony, and if the entire population could be taught and made to obey in the proper ways, there would be societal unity, strength, and prosperity. The role of political leaders, even up to and including the emperor, in this frankly utopian vision was more as moral guardians and preachers than simply as administrators. If political authorities did not maintain cultural uniformity, by propounding orthodoxy and screening out alien values and practices, and if they did not live up to their obligations to set a positive moral example, to teach the correct ways, and to enforce compliance on their subjects, then the result could only be chaos.

In this sort of vision there was obviously not much place for autonomous subcultures, free competition between groups and ideas, individual privacy and freedom of conscience, and other ideas cherished in the modern West. The American assumption, nourished by a multi-ethnic heritage, that competition between groups, ideas, and values leads, in an almost Adam Smithian manner, to national strength and even eventually, perhaps, to some sort of naturally evolved cultural consensus, is quite alien to most Chinese. Indeed, many Chinese wonder how it can be that American society has not yet been torn apart by its cultural diversity and freedom.

Throughout the imperial era, then, most Chinese accepted on faith the idea that, even though the specific content of Chinese culture and values might be modified and added to over time, still it was necessary at any point in time for the central authorities to define the orthodoxy of the moment and forcibly impose it throughout the realm. But in the final years of imperial China the quest for cultural cohesion was sorely tested, both by internal disintegration and by the growing impact on China of the Western powers. In the late 19th century a struggle emerged between conservatives and modernizers around the court, with the conservatives determined to defend traditional Chinese ways and fend off Western influences. But even the modernizers did not propose accepting Western assumptions about culture, as briefly sketched above. Rather, they argued that China faced yet another instance in which elements of a new, alien set of cultural influences had to be selectively added, while still maintaining strict official control over the process. For that purpose they popularized the slogan, "Chinese learning as the foundation, Western learning for its practical applications" (*zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong*).

One can debate whether various Western techniques of science, armaments, medicine, law, and so forth really could have been extracted from their Western context and used in China without giving rise to conflicts with traditional Chinese culture and values, as this slogan implied, but the issue was never put to a true test. What happened instead was that the weakness of the Qing state and the forceful imposition of Western influence by foreign traders, diplomats, missionaries, and others prevented the imperial authorities from maintaining the control over cultural life that they sought. The results only confirmed the beliefs of most Chinese that an imposed cultural orthodoxy is vital to national unity. Much of the century prior to 1949, and particularly following the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, was characterized by cultural diversity and competition accompanied by disunity and social chaos.

In the period between 1911 and 1949 a variety of efforts were made to define a new cultural orthodoxy and to use this to restore national political unity. China's students and intellectuals, in particular, flirted with a wide variety of beliefs and philosophies, and in those

years one could find advocates of liberalism, pragmatism, socialism, Christianity, pacifism, sexual liberation, Esperanto, rural literacy campaigns, "scientism," general Westernization--indeed, almost any new faith or set of ideas found eager adherents in China. Figures like John Dewey, Bertrand Russell, and George Bernard Shaw paid visits to China and met eager crowds of disciples.

In the years known as the "May Fourth Period" (following 1919), many searchers for a new faith mounted caustic attacks on traditional Chinese culture and values, which were described as the root causes of fatalism, conservatism, individual unhappiness, and the inability of China to stand up to her foreign tormentors. But in spite of the considerable cultural diversity and competition of those years, for most of those involved the issue was not a search for personal and group solace and fulfillment in the midst of chaos. Instead, this was a contest to determine what the content of a new and modern Chinese culture might be, with the final goal still one of finding the set of ideas and values which could be used to unite the Chinese people and make the nation strong again.

When Chiang Kai-shek established shaky political unity after 1927, he and other leaders of his Nationalist regime attempted to define a new cultural orthodoxy that was an amalgam of Western and traditional Chinese ideas, but with "backward" and "superstitious" elements of the tradition excluded. However, the Nationalist regime's efforts to formulate this new cultural orthodoxy, as in the "New Life Movement" in the mid-1930s, were extremely vague, and in any case the Nanking government never had sufficient power to effectively impose any set of values throughout the land.

During the century prior to 1949, China's neighbor to the east, Japan, was forging an accommodation between traditional and Western cultural elements, so that each new foreign practice was not seen as a threat to fundamental "Japaneseness." But in China during the same period the debate over how to accomplish this transition remained unresolved. Indeed, as we shall see, it remains unresolved even today.

## Mao's Revolution and Chinese Culture

At first glance, it might appear that the victory of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1949 marked a fundamental victory of alien Western culture over traditional Chinese culture. After all, the CCP itself was a product of the May Fourth Era, when Mao Zedong and other founders of the CCP vigorously denounced the evils of traditional Confucian ways, eagerly read recently translated Marxist texts, and tried to follow events in the newly established Soviet Union. When the CCP came to power in 1949, Marxism-Leninism (or Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought) was proclaimed as the new orthodoxy, with Confucianism and a whole range of traditional customs and values denounced and suppressed.

The hostility of the CCP to traditional Chinese culture only reached its zenith, though, during the last ten years of Mao's life. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-69) red guards, inspired by Mao, ransacked private homes and vandalized temples and monuments in an effort to eliminate the "four olds" (old ideas, culture, customs, and habits). Large quantities of traditional scrolls, porcelain, musical instruments, and other priceless objects were destroyed or confiscated by the red guards, or in some cases were tearfully destroyed by their owners in the hopes of warding off red guard wrath. Ancestral tablets and shrines were ransacked and destroyed as well, and monasteries were closed and monks and nuns were forced to devote themselves to "socially useful labor" in fields, mines, and factories. Traditional opera performances were banned and were replaced by a limited number of new "revolutionary operas" developed under the personal supervision of Mao's wife, Jiang Qing. And a few years after the reigning in of the red guards, a campaign was launched (in 1973) against Confucianism in an effort to eliminate the lingering influence of the ideas of China's greatest philosopher.

Yet it would be oversimplifying things to see the period of Mao's rule as an overall assault on traditional Chinese culture, and the reform era since as involving primarily a revival of this long-suppressed traditional culture. The reality is much more complex. Even though the CCP espoused a Western ideology, Marxism-Leninism, 1949 in no way constituted a victory for

wholesale Westernization and a repudiation of traditional Chinese values. In certain very basic respects, in fact, Maoist rule emphasized very fundamental Chinese traditions and defended these against rival Western ideas. Indeed, it may not be too far-fetched to argue that Maoism in power represented a last ditch, and now abandoned (at least for the moment), Chinese defense against Western cultural influence.

To be sure, the CCP was not simply a traditional dynasty disguised in Marxist-Leninist slogans. A variety of far-reaching institutional changes were made in Chinese society, many traditional customs and cultural practices (such as arranged marriages, burials, spirit mediums, kowtowing to elders, and so forth) were discouraged or banned, and new ideas, concepts, and cultural forms were forcefully introduced, in some cases in the face of popular resistance or incomprehension. Spoken dramas with factory workers as heroes, an emphasis on struggle and social class unity rather than on harmony and kinship solidarity, suppression of mercantile instincts, pronouncements that man was descended from apes, encouragement to call non-kin "comrade" and one's spouse "beloved"--these and many other new things about CCP rule took some getting used to by many if not most Chinese. China became, as a result, a very different kind of social order. Lest we forget, there really was a CCP-led revolution in China.

Yet in certain very basic respects Maoist rule was not really so iconoclastic, and in fact had deep roots in Chinese tradition. Ancient Chinese assumptions about social order were built upon and reinforced, even though they began to be interpreted in Marxist-Leninist, rather than in Confucian, terms. Society was conceived of as a vast bureaucratic hierarchy, a hierarchy in which every individual was to have a place and had to be subordinated to the social group (now termed a "collective") in which he or she was enmeshed. National unity was to be fostered by developing a coherent set of values (to which we would now give the specifically modern term, "ideology") that would tell the population how to behave, rather than by, say, promulgating a national code of laws and administrative procedures. Primary duties of political leaders at every level, as in imperial China, were to maintain the coherence of the official ideology, to indoctrinate



the population, and to enforce compliance. Any conception of autonomous subgroups, independent cultural creation, or a free-wheeling competition of ideas was directly contrary to the Maoist ethos, as it was to the traditional imperial doctrines of rule.

So the content of the culture in Maoist China was in many ways new, but ideas that China required a uniform culture to survive as a nation, and that the authorities should be centrally concerned with enforcing orthodoxy in order to maintain cultural, and thus political, cohesion, were very old. This was not old wine in new bottles, but rather new wine in old bottles. However, the vigor with which Mao and those around them imposed their new orthodoxy stemmed in part from the fact that in this case their Marxist-Leninist convictions reinforced traditional Chinese assumptions. Socialism entails central planning and regulation not only of economic production, but of all of social life, including cultural life, values, and popular customs. The prevailing image in Marxism-Leninism is of society as a single, well regulated factory, rather than as a hierarchical chain of human relationships, but the implications are much the same. There is one correct way for society to be organized, and cultural unity and officially imposed ideology play central roles in maintaining societal cohesion. Allowing alternative values and cultural practices would hinder the pursuit of socialism and communism even as it would foster political disunity.

In spite of the considerable overlap between traditional Chinese assumptions about cultural unity and Marxist-Leninist ones, there is also a very basic difference in practice. The CCP, using modern technology, a huge central bureaucracy, and organizational practices learned from the Soviet Union, has had the wherewithall to put these ideas into practice much more thoroughly than their imperial predecessors ever could have dreamed. The result has been much tighter central control over schooling, the mass media, literature, the performing arts, associational life, and even styles of dress and leisure activities. Even prior to the Cultural Revolution, these increased powers were used with considerable effect to change traditional Chinese culture. From suppressing secret societies to campaigning against mah-jongg, from reforming Chinese opera plots to purging and standardizing school textbooks--all corners of Chinese cultural life witnessed

the activist efforts of China's communist revolutionaries. Still the goal, it must be stressed again, was to forge a Chinese society that would be united around a common set of values and ideas--a very traditional goal.

The power of the state was also used vigorously in the Maoist era to exclude Western cultural influences--initially all except those emanating from the Soviet Union, but after 1960 even Soviet influence as well. What was involved was not simply a matter of expelling foreigners in the 1950s and taking over the factories, schools, churches, hospitals, newspapers, and other things foreigners had owned or controlled. Efforts were also made to restrict and control foreign cultural influences that might come in from the outside in such forms as movies, magazines, and foreign travellers. In addition, Western ideas and values that had gained some foothold in China in the previous century, such as enthusiasm for rule of law, an autonomous press, and competing political parties, were campaigned against, and the process of "creeping Westernization" was thrown into reverse.

This was not a case of excluding all foreign influences entirely (although during the Cultural Revolution things came close to that). Instead, the CCP's efforts aimed to see that foreign influences penetrated into China only in the forms that the government chose, and on the government's terms. So touring Western orchestras and Western exchange students were all right, while listening to foreign radio broadcasts and travel abroad at one's own initiative were not. Special hotels, stores, and travel arrangements were developed in the 1950s which, while ostensibly aimed at shielding foreign visitors from the hardships of Chinese life, had a more powerful purpose in protecting most of Chinese society from possible "contamination" by foreign guests. The desire of China's 19th century modernizing elite to carefully screen foreign influences and selectively admit only those elements deemed of practical use had eluded them, but came much closer to being realized by their successors in post-1949 China.

So in Mao's China the power of the state was used in an effort to forge a new cultural orthodoxy that would leave out large parts of both the traditional inheritance and Western culture.

And as already indicated, the CCP had much more ability to impose this new orthodoxy down to the lowest urban alleys and village lanes, and over the vast Chinese landscape, than any of their imperial predecessors had had. Yet for all of the vigor with which this effort was pursued, it is now clear that it was only partially successful. Many values and practices that were the object of attack in Maoist China were only driven underground, or behind closed doors, but did not disappear. And after Mao's death, as controls have been relaxed, both traditional and Western heterodox (in the Maoist view) influences have sprung back to the surface.

### **Cultural Dilemmas of Reform-Era China**

The death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and the implementation of the reform program by his successors have produced a rethinking of all aspects of the Maoist social order. As part of that rethinking there has been a reaction against the rigid and impoverished cultural straight-jacket that characterized China during Mao's last decade in power. In most respects the reformers have allowed and encouraged a very broad cultural liberalization. Writers have been permitted to explore the dark side of society and to depict themes, such as romantic love and distaste for politics, that Mao's stalwarts had tried to ban during the Cultural Revolution era. Artists are similarly allowed to revive traditional styles and to experiment with a variety of Western forms, including abstract and surrealistic art. Freedom of religious belief and practice have been reinstated, and Buddhist temples, Islamic mosques, and Christian churches have been revived and refurbished with official approval, to be staffed by both "rehabilitated" religious leaders and new graduates of reopened monasteries and seminaries. School curricula have been revamped, fostering not only a renewed emphasis on "pure" academics, but also the establishment of formerly proscribed or neglected fields, such as law, sociology, political science, and business management. The mass media have witnessed an explosion, with a few tightly controlled and highly politicized publications replaced by a bewildering variety of new and specialized journals, catering to those interested in calligraphy, classical Western music, the martial arts, weightlifting, and a wide variety of other decidedly non-political realms. The effort to impose a uniform

"proletarian drab" style of dress has been repudiated, and a variety of clothing styles are now available, ranging from traditional Chinese slit-sided dresses to miniskirts and from "Mao jackets" to Western suits and ties. Formerly suppressed or discouraged hobbies and leisure pursuits ranging from tropical fish raising to stamp collecting to playing mah-jongg have been allowed to revive, and specialized markets in birds, fish, spirit incense, funeral supplies, and other products are now widely visible.

Official tolerance in the ideological realm has also increased. Ideas that would have been risky to express a few years ago, such as that officials should be bound by laws, that interest groups should be recognized and allowed to compete in the political arena, or that divorce should be made easier, can now be raised in the reform era. And controls over the communications technologies by which ideas and cultural products can be transmitted independently of the state have been relaxed. Computers and printers, cassette recorders, mimeograph machines, xerox machines, videotape recorders and other devices, are not, to be sure, yet appearing in every Chinese peasant home, but still increasing numbers of them are in the hands of private individuals and local organizations who can use them in a variety of ways, not all of them pleasing to the authorities.

Of course, there are clear limits to this reform era liberalization. Perhaps most important, the ideas and cultural products of the late Mao era are for the most part proscribed, and there is political risk in advocating them. So one won't see people quoting from their "little red books" of Mao's sayings or performing Jiang Qing's model revolutionary operas, nor publicly advocating mounting new class struggle campaigns. Also, periodically the authorities fulminate against "harmful" cultural influences that have arisen in the reform era and purge writers, arrest alleged disseminators of pornography, and publish new regulations against unauthorized publications. Still, the growing diversity and liveliness of cultural life in the post-Mao era are indisputable.

The traditional cultural legacy has been a major beneficiary of the post-Mao liberalization. Everywhere one looks in China today one sees signs of a revival of a variety of traditional Chinese

practices. A vast amount of new research and publication on ancient and imperial China have been undertaken, and no longer does the past all have to be portrayed as revolving around a simple conflict between heroic but oppressed peasants and evil and cruel landowners and officials. Traditional operas, music, and dance have been revived, and along with them performance troupes and associations dedicated to the preservation of these arts. Traditional-style painting, calligraphy, and other fine arts have enjoyed a renaissance as well, and one sees a new pride emerging in China's artistic heritage. A wide variety of tombs, monuments, and temples have been renovated and reopened, and again they are less likely now to be accompanied by signs describing how much exploitation and misery of the common people went into their construction.

Confucius has also, one could say, been "rehabilitated." His ancestral temple and adjacent facilities have been refurbished, new journals and associations devoted to the study of his writings have been established, and international symposia have been convened on the lessons of Confucius's ideas for the modern world. Underlying themes in this "neo-neo-Confucianism" are that the great philosopher's values must play a role in explaining the economic successes of the other East Asian Confucian societies (Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore), and that the PRC could benefit as well from renewed respect for his legacy. In addition to the possible material benefits, it is argued that some greater stress on Confucian values like moderation, benevolence, harmony, and filial piety will help to overcome the social conflicts and frayed nerves that were legacies of the Mao era.

Of course, not all forms of traditional Chinese culture that are reviving are ones the authorities look upon positively. Lavish spending on weddings and funerals, siting of graves in arable fields, investment by peasants in constructing new lineage halls instead of schools, a revival of secret societies and Daoist sects, and an apparent resurgence of fortune tellers, spirit mediums, traffickers in women, and female infanticide are just some of the traditional practices in whose reappearance the authorities take no pleasure. At least some forms of corruption that appear to be widespread in the reform era, involving demands for bribes and manipulation of

personal connections, are also seen as reflecting harmful traditional influences. (The code word used here is "feudalism.")

At the same time, and in many ways even more striking, one can see that the relaxation of official controls and the "open door policy" have fostered a major new infusion of Western cultural influences. The reform policies have produced major increases in foreigners operating in China as diplomats, businessmen, teachers, and tourists, and they have also produced an exodus of tens of thousands of Chinese travelling to the West, either on short business trips or for extended periods of foreign study. Contacts have also intensified with Chinese living abroad who have already made their accommodations with Western cultural practices, and particularly with Chinese from Hong Kong and Macao and, in a rising flood starting in 1987, with those returning for visits from Taiwan. In some parts of China, and particularly in coastal areas of Guangdong and Fujian provinces, the primary bearers of Western cultural influence are such overseas Chinese, rather than non-Chinese foreigners.

Most foreign broadcasts are no longer banned or jammed, and in fact listening to them is an approved way to help develop valuable foreign language skills. Foreign movies are now regularly shown in China, as are foreign television serials, although the selection principles are obscure. (Movies range from "The Sound of Music" to a violent American trucker film, "Convoy;" television shows range from "Little House on the Prairie" to "The Man from Atlantis," a long-since cancelled series detailing the efforts of a web-footed fellow to adapt to life on land in America. Football Super Bowls and baseball World Series now appear on Chinese television, to the evident puzzlement of many Chinese viewers. Japanese, European, Latin American, and recently even Soviet films and television shows are now shown in China as well.) Stories about movie and music stars from the West and from Hong Kong and Taiwan now compete in popular magazines for space with stories about China's own rising performing celebrities.

Almost forty years after the CCP railed against the seditious poison spread by Hollywood movies, their return to the Chinese scene produces an impact in some surprising places. Recent

visitors to Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, have been startled to see, at the foot of the Potala Palace (the former home of the exiled Dalai Lama), an establishment known as the "Rambo Bar." Customers are enticed in by a mural of Sylvester Stallone in character on the front wall, wrapped in bandoleers of bullets and presumably destroying communist (but non-Chinese) enemies.

Numerous other signs of foreign culture influence are everywhere at hand in China's cities, and occasionally even in rural backwaters. A very partial listing would include video parlors, pool halls, amusement parks (complete with "bumper cars" and "corkscrew" roller coasters), disco and ballroom dancing, jazz, the battle between Pepsi and Coke, cosmetic surgery, Kentucky Fried Chicken, white wedding gowns, body building and beauty contests, commercial advertising, rock bands, tennis, golf, wind-surfing, and motorcross racing. And an increasing variety of translated foreign writings is also available to Chinese readers, ranging from classic works available earlier but suppressed during the Cultural Revolution, such as those by Shakespeare, Dickens, and Victor Hugo, to works by currently popular fiction writers from a variety of countries, James Bond stories, non-fiction works by the likes of Lee Iacocca, Dale Carnegie, Freud, Malinowski, and Gorbachev, and various Western popular writers on business management and futurology.

Along with these forms of Western cultural influence, there are also officially sanctioned efforts to gain a new appreciation for Western institutions and values. Simplistic analyses of America run by a Wall Street conspiracy have been replaced by efforts to understand how the American electoral system works, how Congress does its business, the role of "think tanks" and foundations, the influence of religious organizations, and other long-neglected topics. "American studies" has become a booming field in Chinese academe, and the study of other foreign countries has also enjoyed a renaissance. Of particular interest are Western ideas about business management, and one now sees Chinese studying abroad in economics departments and business schools and Westerners coming to China to give courses on Keynesian economics, cost accounting, public relations, and other capitalist secrets. It is hard not to imagine Mao Zedong turning over in his sarcophagus at the thought of Western capitalists telling Chinese industrial managers how to

get more out of their workers. With this increased learning from the West have come efforts by some to gain acceptance for alternative ideas and values--for the pursuit of individual happiness, for independence of young people from their elders, for risk-taking and competition, not to mention for the advantages of private enterprise and market-based distribution of goods and services.

Not all of the Western influences in China today have new and external sources, however. In the reform era, Chinese who were trained in the West or were influenced by Western culture and ideas prior to 1949 have resurfaced, just as have champions of China's traditional culture. There is a surprising Rip Van Winkle sort of air about the return of such people to public life and prominence. Not only do they show little sign of having been affected by decades of "thought reform," but in some cases they enthusiastically take up where they were so rudely interrupted by the revolution. Proposals and manifestoes drafted forty or more years ago are dusted off and aired for public discussion, friendship contacts overseas are reestablished, and writings that such people were disowning in the Mao era as tainted by bourgeois values are hastily prepared for republication. Similarly, communities that appeared earlier to have renounced their Christian faith have now resumed a vibrant level of religious activity, with few apparent losses from the flock in spite of the long years of official persecution. And musicians trained in Western classical styles before 1949 have hurried to retrieve their discarded repertoires and display their fondness for Mozart, Beethoven, and Bach once again. Thus the reform era has revealed that an important domestic constituency for Western culture has survived the Mao era and is anxious to lend its support to the new openness toward Western influence.

As in the case of the revival of traditional Chinese culture, the authorities are by no means pleased with all of the new forms of Western cultural influence. Considerable debate has surrounded the appearance in China of such things as body building and beauty contests, and critics cite a long list of harmful influences that have erupted in China at least partly as a result of the open door policy. Foreign influences are blamed, for instance, for increases in premarital sex, divorce, venereal disease, prostitution, pornography, drug addiction, and even for general



rises in crime and delinquency rates. Of equal or even greater official concern is the alleged foreign effect on popular values, particularly among the young. The open door, it is argued by critics, has fostered doubt about the virtues of socialism, the institutions of China, and the leadership of the CCP, and has fostered perceptions that the institutions and values of foreign societies are superior. One can hear once again a theme sounded in the early 1950s--Chinese must be dissuaded from the notion that "the American moon shines brighter than the Chinese moon."

Even though there have been persistent efforts to monitor and control foreign contacts and to prevent harmful ideas and practices from coming in, the increase in foreign influence has been so rapid, and its forms so massive and diverse, that it has proved impossible for the authorities to effectively monitor and control everything. To some extent this inability is inherent in the reform process itself, for the granting of local autonomy that is vital to the economic reforms inevitably leads to activities and influences that are outside of the range of central controls.

Given the increased liveliness and diversity in the cultural realm in recent years, one must still ask how much the basic rules of the system have changed. Does the increased "blooming and contending," involving traditional Chinese and Western alongside of socialist cultural practices and symbols, indicate that efforts to impose cultural uniformity from above have ceased? This is far from being the case, although the issue is still subject to contention. There are, to be sure, some intellectuals and some reformers who come close to adopting a Western "marketplace of ideas" argument--that the open door and other current policies are good because they introduce lots of new ideas and cultural practices, that the competition among ideas and practices will be a healthy way to weed out bad or outmoded elements, and that as a result a modified and stronger and more dynamic new Chinese culture will emerge.

Two things should be noted, though, about this sort of argument. First, it seems to be a minority view, with most participants in the cultural debate being uncomfortable with the sort of unbridled cultural competition being advocated. Second, even in this minority view, competition

and variety in the cultural realm are seen as necessary but temporary. The necessity arises from the need to allow China to recover from the isolation and cultural impoverishment that Mao led her into in his final years. However, once the elements of a modified and revitalized Chinese culture have been identified, the competition should subside, with a new and improved cultural orthodoxy dominant. In other words, even in this minority and apparently proto-Western view, permanent cultural competition of the sort that appears to reign in the West is rejected as too chaotic for China.

Many if not most participants in the debate on the future of Chinese culture are not even willing to go as far as this minority position. Even temporary free competition of ideas and values is seen as threatening to the social order. To those who hold this view, Chinese culture needs to be modified and changed, but this should be done in a careful and controlled manner. Individuals, groups, organizations, and localities should not have that much autonomy to experiment with new ideas and practices. Rather, the authorities should identify those new elements which are suitable to modern life under Chinese conditions and foster experimentation and innovation in those areas; other elements which are not deemed so suitable (by the authorities) should continue to be proscribed. This is a formula which should sound familiar. It is very much a continuation of the "Chinese learning as the foundation, Western learning for its practical applications" slogan advocated by China's 19th century modernizing elite.

Critics of recent cultural trends differ on whether the resurgence of traditional practices or the influx of Western influences is more problematic and potentially harmful. Some argue that China's most serious problems stem from the way centralized state socialism reinforced the worst, "feudal" tendencies of the traditional legacy, producing "little emperors" ruling over factories, offices, and schools throughout China. For such critics the revival of traditional cultural forms and the new respect given to Confucian ideas is particularly worrisome, since these can only make the effort to eliminate "feudal remnants" from contemporary China more difficult.

Others argue, however, that Western influences pose more of a threat than the revived traditional practices. In addition to the greater familiarity of the traditional heritage, there is also the comfortable (but probably mistaken) view that "harmful" traditional practices are the products of backwardness and ignorance, so that with time, modernization, and rising educational levels, these will gradually disappear from the scene. No such assumption can be made about foreign influences. In addition to their being more alien to begin with, they are found in societies that are more modern and well educated than China. The dilemma for those who would be screeners of such foreign influences, then, is how to identify which elements of Western culture are required by any modern society and thus have to be allowed to develop in China, and which elements are unnecessary for China's modernization effort. Where do neckties, rock music, premarital sex, or for that matter electoral democracy and competitive individualism fit?

As the central authorities have struggled with these problems they have been unable to come to a consensus. Clearly, the more radical among the reformers feel that China benefits from most of the new Western cultural infusions, and that the resulting changes in Chinese practices to date have been too slow. In other words, the new influences have still only had a partial and superficial effect, mostly among the young and among urban intellectuals, and they have not yet had much impact on the deep recesses of Chinese organizations, families, and individual psyches. But even the infusions of Western influence to date are seen as excessive and undesirable by more conservative leaders. As noted, the latter see both a rising tide of social problems and a loss of national pride and faith in the system as stemming from the open door. These conservatives argue that the loss of control by the center over cultural innovation and transmission is even more dangerous than the specific kinds of harmful phenomena fostered, for it spells the doom of any serious attempt to forge cultural unity, and will thus lead to political fragmentation and social chaos.

Twice in the 1980s these conservatives have managed to launch campaigns designed to gain greater control over Chinese cultural life and punish those involved in spreading "unhealthy"

Western influences--in the "Anti-Spiritual Pollution" campaign of 1983-4 and the "Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization" campaign of 1987. The fact that each of these conservative initiatives was watered down and petered out after a few months, after claiming a few prominent victims and intimidating many others, does not mean that the debate is now over. It merely indicates that for the moment, at least, the conservatives have not managed to gain sufficient support within the elite for a more thorough cultural crackdown.

Meanwhile, if we descend from the elite level down to the ordinary population, we find not so much debate but confusion and uncertainty. The Chinese man and woman in the street (and rural lane), while generally appreciative of improved consumption standards and less oppressive political controls, often find the lack of clear consensus on values and cultural forms unsettling. For people who have grown up in a highly didactic and moralistic society, in which right and wrong practices were constantly drummed into their heads, the situation of being faced with options and no clear standards for selection is unfamiliar. Should they cultivate an interest in Western classical music, rock, traditional operas, Chinese folk tunes, or perhaps favorite martial tunes from the socialist tradition (or all of the above)? Should they wear the latest Western fashions or retain the proletarian drab of the Mao era? Should they push their children to follow the "white road" (to academic learning and expertise), the "yellow road" (to business success and financial wealth), or the "red road" (toward political activism and Party membership)? How should they celebrate a family wedding or a funeral? How would they react if a son came home and announced he wanted to leave a state job to go into private business, live together with his girlfriend without benefit of marriage, or go into training to become a Buddhist monk?

This uneasiness of the general population has several sources. It is not simply that people are unfamiliar with being faced by such choices. Nor is it solely a matter of being nervous in the face of the uncharacteristic restraint of the CCP, and worried that in the future, if this restraint is abandoned and a forceful imposition of cultural uniformity is resumed, they may be criticized for having made the wrong choices. As much as anything else, this popular uneasiness can be

attributed to the fact that both in imperial times and in the Maoist era, Chinese have become accustomed to living in a society in which habits and cultural forms are infused with political and moral meanings that flow from the cultural orthodoxy. Even though the PRC is an avowedly atheistic state, in a certain sense until the reform era China was a minimally secularized society. The sort of secularized, pragmatic societies in which Westerners have grown up, in which most spheres of daily life and culture are seen as detached from higher moral battles, has not been part of Chinese experience heretofore. For this reason many Chinese have the gnawing feeling that they are sailing into uncharted seas without a clear moral rudder. The current situation may then be interpreted not so much in terms of new freedoms and choices, but as a moral vacuum in which, for example, individuals are encouraged to get rich without experiencing the restraints of either socialist, traditional Confucian, or Western moral values.

The efforts of the reformers to alleviate these concerns by formulating a revised ideological and moral framework to guide China in the new era have so far not been very convincing or satisfying to the population. The Chinese people are told that various ideas and practices are good or bad, but they are given no clear set of principles explaining why, or which would allow them to tell the difference. The concept of China being in the "primary stage of socialism," popularized by the reformers in 1987, does not seem to provide the needed moral guidance. This concept mainly justifies allowing traditional Chinese and Western capitalist, as well as socialist, practices to coexist for some time to come, as long as they contribute to modernization. Many Chinese are skeptical of the idea that their society can be guided by a moral framework that says simply that whatever works economically is good and whatever doesn't is bad. Some Chinese thinkers are attempting to fill the moral void by adapting portions of Confucianism, the writings of the "young Marx," and Western doctrines of individual rights and dignity to form a new amalgam they call Chinese "humanism." However, these efforts are still at an early stage, and what guidance these new humanist ideas might provide for meeting a variety of problems in life is still not very clear. So as yet no coherent set of moral standards has emerged to replace those discredited by the excesses of the Cultural Revolution. The worry the reformers face is that their conservative

opponents may be able to play on public unease about the moral vacuum and cultural confusion to engineer a return to a more closed-door society with an imposed and anti-Western cultural orthodoxy.

China has struggled for more than a century to cope with the problems involved in adapting Chinese culture to the modern world. The fact that Chineseness has been seen in cultural terms, and that for most Chinese, whether elites or masses, forging a unitary cultural orthodoxy has been seen as vital, has meant that cultural debates have constantly spilled over into the political realm. By the same token, political leaders in imperial, Republican, Maoist, and reform-era China have all had devising and implementing the proper cultural policy high on their political agenda. But in spite of this century of efforts, the debate, particularly in terms of how Chinese culture will be accommodated to Western influence, is still unresolved, and arguments in this realm remain volatile. Whether a clear cultural orthodoxy will emerge from the new round of debates on these issues in Deng Xiaoping's China, and if so what form that orthodoxy might take, are matters still very unclear.

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